



LEADERSHIP **REWIRED**

IMD PERSONALITY
GUIDANCE





CONTENTS

About CRF	3
About the Authors	3
Key Takeaways	4
Recommendations for Action	6
IMD Commentary	7
Personality Guidance Commentary	8
Introduction	9
What is the Changing Context for Leadership?	10
What Capabilities Do Leaders Need in the New Context?	13
How are Organisations Approaching Leadership Development?	20
Conclusion	30
References	31
Research Participants	31

ABOUT CRF

Corporate Research Forum (CRF) is a research-led learning network dedicated to building the capability of HR leaders and their teams to drive organisational performance.

Through more than 30 years of research and practical expertise, we have developed a deep understanding of the ways HR can contribute to business outcomes – what works, what doesn't and in what circumstances. We support our network of over 275 organisations through an evolving programme of evidence-based insights: delivering expert led events, facilitated peer exchange, personalised and timely answers through our AI research tool and impactful technology-enabled learning – all informed by research and shaped by practice. Our focus enables HR to become a more strategic, future-ready function delivering consistent and measurable value tailored to the needs of your organisation.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jonathan Crookall | Former Chief People Officer, Costa Coffee

Jonathan is a Non-Executive Director for Tandem Group plc and was until recently the Chief People Officer for Costa Coffee. Before Costa Jonathan was Group People Director at Halfords for over seven years and HR Director, Resourcing & Development at Specsavers. Prior to that he worked at Director level in HR for Lloyds TSB, Abbey, Zurich and BAE Systems.



Gillian Pillans | Research Director

Gillian has worked as a senior HR practitioner and OD specialist for several organisations including Swiss Re, Vodafone and BAA. Prior to her HR career, she was a management consultant with Deloitte Consulting and is also a qualified solicitor. As Research Director, Gillian has written various CRF reports on subjects including HR strategy, organisation design and development, leadership development, talent management, coaching and diversity.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Leadership is being rewired by the interaction of multiple external pressures. Leaders must navigate the convergence of economic, geopolitical, societal, technological and environmental forces, increasing both the complexity and pace of decision-making. The nature of this complexity is compounding, not additive. Their interaction creates effects that are hard to predict and manage, placing sustained strain on leaders' capacity to respond effectively.

The purpose of this research is to explore how the context for organisations is evolving, what changes are required in the capabilities of leaders in today's setting, and the implications for leadership development.

The world order, which defines the context for leadership, is changing. The United States is no longer able, or willing, to provide global public goods such as open markets, security, and stability. At the same time, China is returning to near parity with the US in economic output and influence. Organisations need to prepare for an era of "weaponised interdependence" by increasing the resilience of their leaders, supply chains and business models.

The three leadership capability themes identified in CRF's 2022 research around how leaders set direction, build the organisation infrastructure for rapid execution and develop the relational skillsets required, are still applicable, but expectations have intensified.

Three new dimensions have emerged within these themes:

- Creating focused clarity in a period of unprecedented complexity and change
- Demonstrating, measuring and communicating the impact of execution
- Understanding and implementing the dynamics of AI and human workflows and organisation design.

The 7 Tensions Leadership model articulated by Professor Jennifer Jordan identifies the elements leaders must balance to be successful in an increasingly challenging world. It emphasises the need for leaders to show cognitive and behavioural ambidexterity and situational judgment to switch between different modes.



AI is shifting leadership from managing people to designing systems of work. Beyond basic AI literacy, leaders need to understand how to organise work across human and AI contributors, including decisions about workflow design, delegation, data and governance.

Leaders need to keep customer centrality at the centre of their agenda, as it drives value creation. However, as businesses focus on efficiency, they risk losing market orientation. The remedy to destruction of value lies in developing and encouraging the right leadership behaviours. Five clear strategies are outlined, which create the conditions for leaders to learn, share and act in order to enable this capability.

Brain science can be applied practically in the organisational context to help leaders maintain resilience and avoid burnout. When creating leadership development strategies and interventions, practitioners should incorporate brain science, remembering that managing stress and sustaining performance should be understood as questions of physiological energy supply and demand, not psychological capacity.

The fundamentals of effective leadership development remain constant:

- The need for leadership development to be aligned with the business strategy
 - The importance of executive sponsorship
 - Having a clear learning philosophy that drives choices around how to develop leaders
 - Taking a systemic approach that integrates development activities into talent and succession processes and the wider employee lifecycle
 - Rigorous measurement and impact assessment.
-

Leadership development is increasingly characterised by a set of design choices. Three tensions in particular need to be balanced. These are individual vs. team-based development, content or theory-based vs. experiential learning, and human vs. AI delivery. The effectiveness of these choices depends on how well they are aligned to business context and factor in the capability needs of leaders.

Leadership will need to be continually rewired, not just upskilled. Simply repeating what was done in the past will not prepare leaders for the ever-increasing demands of the future context.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- ❖ **Take the opportunity to reflect on what “Leadership Rewired” means for your organisation and your leaders.** This research has highlighted the significant upheaval businesses are facing and the interrelatedness and compounding effect of external factors. As leadership development practitioners we need to make sense of these and articulate the implications for our organisations.
- ❖ **Use CRF’s New Paradigms for Leadership framework** and the emerging themes – creating focused clarity through complexity and change, demonstrating impact and leading both human and AI systems – to identify where your approaches to leadership development may need to be updated.
- ❖ **Use the 7 Tensions to diagnose where your leaders most need to build ambidexterity** and how to integrate them in your development activities for leaders. What specific requirements and priorities flow from your business strategy in relation to the tensions? Which are most critical for your leaders – can they prioritise three or four?
- ❖ **Review how the underpinning principles of your leadership development strategies address the three tensions of leadership development.** Consider how the three tensions identified in the research can be resolved. The solution is not all-or-nothing but balancing each tension in ways that align with your business strategy.
- ❖ **Focus on strengthening leaders’ ability to create focused clarity.** A consistent theme in the research is the need for leaders to provide direction despite incomplete information and a rapidly shifting context. Development efforts should therefore place greater emphasis on sense-making, situational judgment, emotional intelligence and decision-making under uncertainty.
- ❖ **Consider where development is best focused on intact teams or cross-functional groups,** particularly where shared understanding, coordination and decision-making are critical to performance.
- ❖ **Treat AI as a leadership and organisational challenge, not just a skills topic.** While building baseline AI literacy is important, the more significant shift lies in how leaders design work and make decisions in environments that combine human and non-human contributors. Development should therefore address questions of workflow design, delegation, judgment and governance, rather than focusing solely on tools or technical understanding.
- ❖ **Discuss the topic of customer centricity with your leaders** and how the pressures for efficiency can negatively impact this requirement. What leadership behaviours and actions can be adopted and encouraged to mitigate this?
- ❖ **In considering how leadership development needs to be rewired, start with the business problem, not the learning response.** It’s essential to begin with a clear diagnosis of what the organisation must get better at to deliver its strategy and to identify where leaders may be required to balance opposing requirements such as speed vs. rigour and control vs. empowerment. Learning priorities should flow directly from these capability requirements.

PARTNER COMMENTARY

IMD

When IMD last collaborated with CRF on leadership development in 2022, the world was emerging from a pandemic, and the central question was how leaders could rebuild after a period of acute, finite disruption. Three years on, the disruption is quite different but still here. And it has multiplied. Geopolitical realignment, economic volatility, environmental pressure, social fragmentation, and the rapid arrival of generative AI are no longer separate stories. They are intertwined. The result is a context for leadership that is not merely more difficult, but qualitatively different from what most of today's senior leaders were prepared for. This is why "rewired" is the right verb for this report. "Upskilling" assumes the underlying assumptions still apply and mere updates are needed. Rewiring assumes something more fundamental: that the connections themselves — between how leaders think, decide, relate, and act — need to be reconfigured for a context that will keep changing.

The findings in the pages that follow make a compelling case that the leadership challenge has shifted in three important ways: (1) Leaders are now expected to create focused clarity in conditions where clarity is genuinely scarce. They must sense-make in such conditions. (2) They are expected to demonstrate and communicate measurable impact at a pace that leaves little margin for error and little space to breathe and reflect. And (3) they are expected to design organisations in which humans and AI agents work alongside one another — a challenge related to organisational architecture that did not meaningfully exist a few years ago.

What strikes me most across the interviews and discussions captured in this white paper is the absence of a single right answer. The most effective leaders are not those who pick the "correct" approach from the menu of options (to put it in the words of the 7 Tensions) — visionary or tactician, listener or teller, intuitionist

or analyst, etc. They are those who can move fluently between approaches as the situation demands. This kind of cognitive and behavioral ambidexterity is hard. It cannot be downloaded, and it is rarely acquired through content alone. It is built through deliberate practice, candid feedback, and the kind of reflective space that genuine development requires.

Relatedly, the tensions explored in Section 4 — individual versus team, content versus experience, human versus AI — are not problems to be solved but choices to be made thoughtfully, in service of the leader and the context. There is no universal recipe, and any provider claiming otherwise should be approached with caution.

I want to thank the leaders and practitioners who contributed their time and candour to this research. And the CRF team for the rigour with which they have brought it together. As I shared during the conference, CRF and IMD have long shared the viewpoint that the best leadership development is based in solid, empirical research. The conversation about what leadership requires now is one of the most important conversations any organisation can have.



Jennifer Jordan

Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior
IMD Business School



PARTNER COMMENTARY

PERSONALITY GUIDANCE

In our work in the assessment and executive coaching space, we have rarely seen a time where leadership has been under such sustained pressure. What we are witnessing is not just another cycle of disruption. It is a fundamental shift we have never seen before.

The convergence of geopolitical instability, economic volatility, technological acceleration and societal expectations has created a level of complexity that traditional leadership models were simply not designed to handle.

Uncertainty is no longer episodic, it is permanent. Leaders are expected to operate in what I call corporate time travel: simultaneously managing short-term performance, mid-term transformation and long-term positioning. This requires a fundamentally different capability, the ability to create clarity without certainty.

In this context, self-awareness becomes the single most critical leadership capability. Not as a soft concept, but as a strategic tool. Leaders who understand their own decision patterns, biases and derailers are better equipped to act decisively, even when data is incomplete. High-quality assessment is the fastest and most objective way to build this awareness, but it remains significantly underutilised.

At the same time, leadership is no longer an individual role. The complexity we face today cannot be managed by heroic individuals. It requires high-performing leadership teams that can think systemically, challenge each other constructively and align around a shared direction. Any development approach that focuses purely on the individual, without considering team dynamics, is increasingly obsolete.

Another major shift we are seeing is the integration of AI into leadership and organisational design. This is not just a technological question, but a deeply human one too. Leaders now need to decide how work is distributed between humans and machines, how performance is

measured, and ultimately how meaning is created in a hybrid workforce.

The organisations that succeed will not be those that automate the most, but those that integrate AI in ways that enhance human judgement rather than displace it.

This has direct implications for how we design leadership development. The traditional model of content-heavy, theoretical and detached from business reality is no longer sufficient. What works today is an integrated, systemic approach that is tightly linked to business strategy, supported by executive sponsorship and embedded across the entire talent lifecycle.

Equally important is relevance. Leaders will only invest in development if they clearly understand why it matters. This means connecting learning directly to their current challenges, whether that is navigating ambiguity, leading transformation or managing AI-driven workflows.

Finally, we must rethink the balance between human and AI in coaching. AI can scale, structure and provide data-driven insights. But it cannot replace the depth, challenge and trust that comes from human interaction. The future is not either/or, but a thoughtful combination of both.

If there is one takeaway from the current environment, it is that leadership development must become more rigorous, measurable and aligned with real business impact. In a world defined by complexity, clarity is no longer a luxury, it is a competitive advantage.



Nicole Neubauer,
CEO, Personality Guidance AG



1. INTRODUCTION

Following our last research in this area, 2022's [Making a Paradigm Shift in Leadership Development](#), we return to the topic to understand how the themes identified in that research have played out, and what new developments have emerged. As we said at the time, *"The last two years have been among the most challenging for leaders who have had to lead through immense upheaval and uncertainty."* Arguably, the scale of that challenge has only expanded, and the level of complexity faced by today's leaders has also continued to increase. The upheaval is also being felt in a broader range of dimensions than before, whether that is political, economic, societal, technological or environmental. Should we continue to deploy established practices, or can we support leaders to become "rewired" in the face of this increasingly challenging context?

The purpose of this research is firstly to explore how the context for organisations has evolved in recent years, and therefore what changes are required in the capabilities of leaders in today's setting. Next, we will look at how leadership development is adapting to both contextual and capability shifts. We will look at the theme of technology and AI, and how the requirements for leaders and the development options deployed have both been impacted by this rapidly changing landscape. Finally, we will make recommendations on an agenda to pursue to "rewire" leadership.

This paper brings together research conducted by CRF in early 2026 and also summarises the event held at IMD Business School on 27-28 April, 2026.

The structure of the report will be in four main sections. Section 1 is an introduction to the research, outlining the structure of the report and the methodologies used to gather the data. In Section 2 we will reflect the landscape in which companies and organisations are operating. To what extent has the challenging environment we described in 2022 persisted and how has it intensified? What are the key elements that impact on businesses and determine the requirements for leaders? In Section 3 we will examine how leadership capability needs are developing. What are companies doing to take account of the changing context and what remains of the models that have been in place for describing leadership requirements? We will base this analysis on the model introduced in our paper, *Making a Paradigm Shift in Leadership Development* (see Figure 1), reviewing what still applies and what has changed in the intervening period. We will also summarise the 7 Tensions of Leadership model as formulated by Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade and Elizabeth Teracino. Then in Section 4, we will describe what organisations are delivering in the leadership development space. We will include current practice in learning philosophy, what choices organisations are making in which leaders they develop and what learning methodologies are being deployed. We will examine the overall learning ecosystem that is in place, how this is adapting to the different needs that are emerging and where it is falling short. Finally in Section 5, we will make recommendations on what leadership development practitioners can do to develop leaders not only for today's world, but also for the continually evolving context of the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This report is based on the following data sources:

INTERVIEWS

Interviews with over 20 academics, practitioners and subject matter experts in the leadership and human performance field from multiple sectors and geographies. Research participants are listed in the Appendix.

EVENT CONTENT

Content and discussion material from the CRF Leadership – Rewired event delivered in partnership with IMD in April 2026.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant academic and practitioner literature. See the Reference and Reading List in the Appendix.

2. WHAT IS THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR LEADERSHIP?

The context within which businesses operate continues to change and exhibit significant uncertainty.

The World Economic Forum produce an annual assessment of Global Risk based on the input of over 1300 experts world-wide. The headline from the recent World Economic Forum Global Risk report

"Uncertainty is the defining theme of the global risks outlook in 2026. GRPS respondents viewed both the short- and long-term global outlook negatively, with 50% of respondents anticipating either a turbulent or stormy outlook over the next two years, deteriorating to 57% of respondents over the next 10 years."

The World Economic Forum assesses risk across five key dimensions. Economic, Environmental, Geopolitical, Societal and Technological. All of these dimensions were reflected in the interviews we carried out as part of this research. For example, Mohsin Siddiqui, Global Head of Talent, Performance and Organisation Effectiveness at IHS Tower describes significant "economic uncertainty and regional volatility".

Dan Russell, Senior Partner, Global Head of Assessment at RHR International comments: "What we've seen is the bar is just raising, tremendously, in the past year, for organisations and so, because of the pace of change and of all the new things that are being introduced: AI, geopolitical disruption, economic forces, etc. The pace of those is so, so fast and like nothing we've ever seen before."

But it's not just the presence of these five factors, as David Astorino, Senior Partner, RHR International says, "they are converging and colliding in unprecedented ways". Or as the WEF report says, "global risks continue to spiral in scale, interconnectivity and velocity".

To make matters worse, as the WEF says, "The multilateral system is under pressure. Declining trust, diminishing transparency and respect for the rule of law, along with heightened protectionism, are threatening longstanding international relations, trade and investment and increasing the propensity for conflict."

As one of our interviewees says:

"Many leaders have been in a threat state for about five years with increasing pace, volatility and change, which I think is why decision making becomes linear and very short term."

Or, in the words of Nicolas Ceasar, Head of Learning & Talent Development, Pictet Asset Management says: "If you view leadership as being rooted in the context, understanding what that situation is now is a key requirement of leadership, but that's hard as the context changes on a day-to-day basis. It means the capacity for making sense of complexity is so important right now."

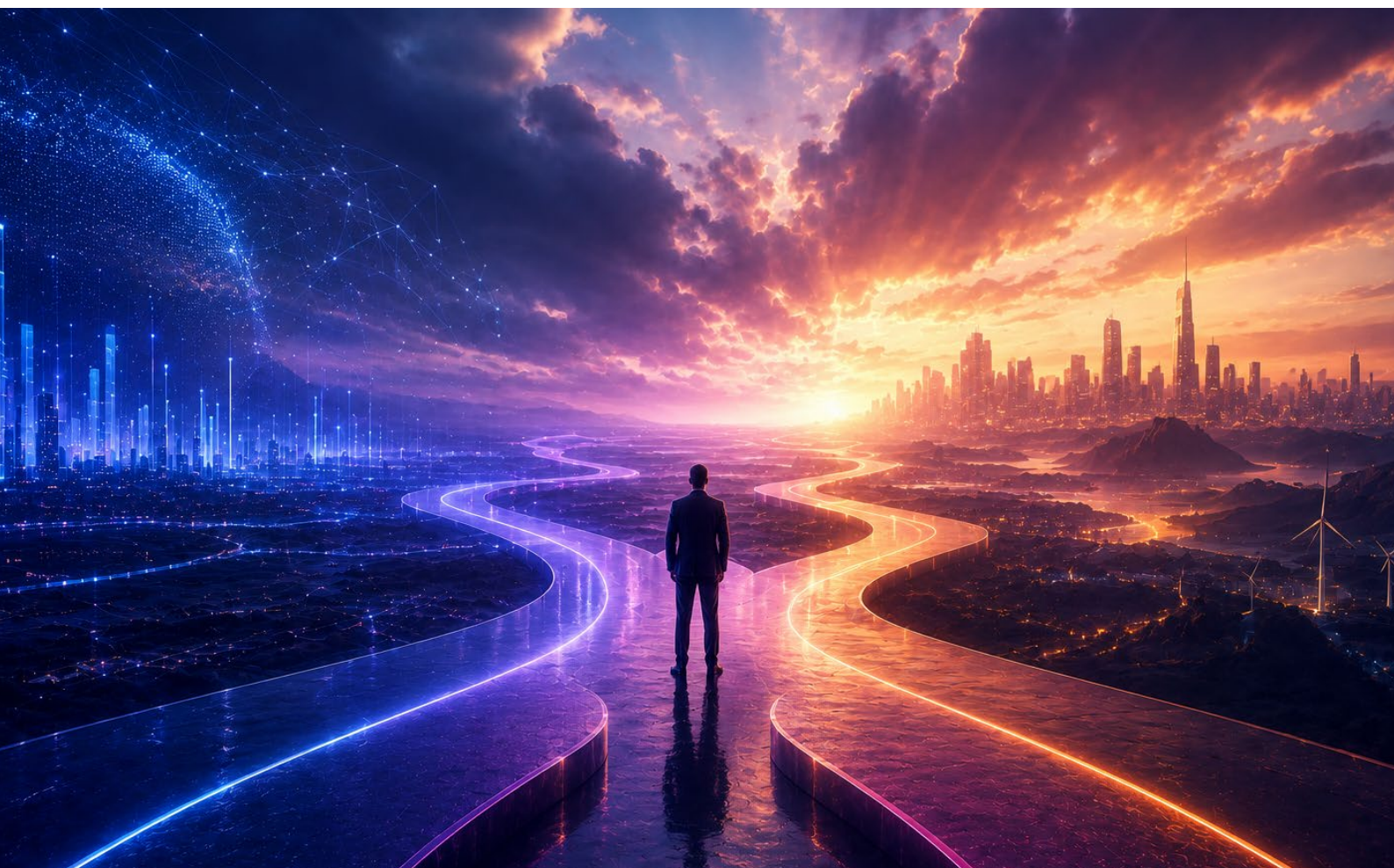
Through the eyes of global CEOs as reported in PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey:



"In the year ahead, CEOs see a world beset by challenges. They've grown significantly less confident about the short-term growth outlook for their companies and more worried about a range of threats, including macroeconomic volatility, cyber risk and geopolitical conflict. CEOs are forging ahead with investment in AI even though immediate returns are often elusive. They're prioritising innovation. And many are entering new sectors as they lean into a reconfiguration of industries that's reshaping the global economy."

So the context is not just impacted by significant change in the five dimensions; the dimensions fluctuate over time and their overlapping influence has a compound effect on leaders. As the PwC survey says: "In a role where forces such as urgency and legacy-crisis and custodianship-collide, CEOs are increasingly having to balance the 'corporate time travel' of simultaneously thinking and acting across multiple complex and potentially conflicting time horizons."

We will return to this notion of balancing across different forces or "tensions" at the end of Section 3.



GEOPOLITICS AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

David Bach, President and Nestlé Professor of Strategy and Political Economy, IMD

David Bach presented his latest thinking on the shifting geopolitical landscape.

His assessment is that we are in an era of “weaponised interdependence”. Economic interdependence has historically been seen as conducive for peace and stability. However, the networks and supply chains underpinning the modern global economy are often asymmetrical and they have critical hubs that can serve as chokepoints. Quoting Mark Carney, President of Canada at the World Economic Forum in 2026:

“You cannot live within the lie of mutual benefit through integration, when integration becomes the source of your subordination.”

David went on to say that China has risen as an economic powerhouse.

Since 1960, the US has declined from one third of global GDP to less than a quarter in 2023, while China has increased from 2% of Global GDP to near parity with the US. This trend returns China to the historical position of trading dominance it enjoyed in previous centuries.

Connected to this, America’s global leadership has eroded.

The US is no longer able, or willing, to provide global public goods such as open markets, security and stability. Whilst we associate this change in doctrine with the current Trump administration, the philosophy has been in place for the past decade. The tactics may have been different under Democrat vs. Republican governments, but the underpinning approach has been the same.

Despite this tendency towards isolationism, David suggests that globalisation is not over.

Businesses and investors will continue to pursue opportunities around the world. However, they will have to contend with the primacy of states, the implications of great power rivalry, weak institutions, shifting rules and uncertainty.

In an era of “weaponised interdependence, business is the battlefield.” Leaders therefore need to prepare for this new environment by:

- 🌸 Exploring what future-readiness means in this new global context
- 🌸 Understanding the power dynamics at play and global risks
- 🌸 Identifying critical challenges
- 🌸 Building a future-readiness roadmap to address them.

Above all this means strengthening resilience in our leaders, our organisations and our supply chains.

3. WHAT CAPABILITIES DO LEADERS NEED IN THE NEW CONTEXT?

In our 2022 research paper [Making a Paradigm Shift in Leadership Development](#) we explored how the expectations of leaders were changing across three dimensions:

- How leaders set direction
- The organisational infrastructure they need to build for rapid and adaptive strategy execution
- The new relational skillsets required.

We have adopted the same three dimensions to organise the themes that emerge from our 2026 research. Reviewing each element in turn, we will highlight three headline differences that we found compared to what leaders in the post-pandemic world were experiencing.

FIGURE 1: NEW PARADIGMS FOR LEADERSHIP



HOW LEADERS SET DIRECTION

In 2022, we organised the themes that underpinned how leaders set direction into four areas.

- Outside-in thinking
- Adaptive strategy anchored to purpose
- Making sense of complexity
- Leading in an age of activism.

Our 2026 research found the dominant developing theme within this dimension was the need to **"Create focused clarity in a period of unprecedented complexity and change"**.

As Nicole Neubauer, CEO of Personality Guidance AG, said:

"The requirement now is to be really clear and resilient as a leader in order to come up with decisions, even though you don't necessarily have all the data". In other words, leaders need to provide clarity of direction at pace, even when not all facts are known and circumstances are shifting.

Or in the words of Rob Kaiser, President, Kaiser Leadership Solutions:



"Over the last 30 years, it's become more and more important for leaders to constantly adapt their approach and respond to the moment, whether that's dealing with a wider variety of stakeholders or dealing with game-changing new technologies, unexpected competitive threats, shifting regulations and policies. With so much changing at once, versatility has become more decisive in determining which organisations thrive versus merely hang on or fall behind."

So, leaders need to apply judgement under uncertainty, show greater awareness of the geopolitical circumstances and provide adaptive strategies. They need to take significant levels of complexity and uncertainty and translate them into clarity and focus for their organisations and wider stakeholders. At the same time, leaders need to be adaptable and flexible in responding to the changing environment.

BUILDING THE ORGANISATION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RAPID EXECUTION

The key themes from the 2022 research were:

- Build capacity for agile execution
- Develop a culture of learning and experimentation.

In the intervening period a further theme has emerged in the research that builds on the need for executional capability, which is **“Demonstrating, measuring and communicating the impact of execution”**. As the pace of execution and the requirement for rapid results and performance management have increased, the need for leaders to show delivery across all business metrics, but above all in financial terms, has heightened in focus. With scarce resources and increased competition, leaders need to prioritise ruthlessly and communicate the impact of their strategic choices on performance.

As one of our interviewers said:



“It’s the Performance Management process, but it’s also how you are tracking performance and outcomes business-wise. We’re expecting all leaders to have eyes on metrics. What they are actually delivering, being very outcome focused, as well as managing their individual team members from a performance perspective.”

With the arrival of a new CEO at RS Components, Nicola Robinson, VP People, EMEA commented: “There’s much more focus on valuing commercial acumen, understanding how the business makes money, driving value margins. He wants everybody to understand what investors are looking at and how to make decisions from the commercial perspective, whereas previously, people were more in their own swim lanes.”

Therefore, financial literacy and enterprise thinking are part of this increased emphasis on performance and delivery.

This need for performance delivery has at times created a tension with a more supportive and empathetic leadership style. Richard Cleverly, MD Macquarie Group, describes the need to put support and “scaffolding” in place to support leaders due to the intense scrutiny on performance in portfolio businesses, which is highly consistent with the views of many of the participants in the research across all sectors.

NEW RELATIONAL SKILLSETS

Within this dimension the themes of the 2022 research were clustered around:

- Leading remote and hybrid teams
- Leaders as enablers of others
- Fostering inclusivity and wellbeing.





Arguably, this is the most significant change area in terms of new themes. With the rapid evolution of AI, all organisations are working through “**Understanding and implementing the dynamics of AI and human workflows and organisation design**”. Having a level of literacy about how AI can drive efficiency in daily tasks is one thing, but as the landscape changes, many organisations are starting to engage with AI in a more fundamental way. Leaders are looking to augment their organisations with AI agents and consider how to integrate AI into their workflows, business models and organisation structures. In 2022 this idea would have been seen as at the frontier of organisation design. In the next two to three years some would argue it will be the norm.

Included within this theme is the need for increased competence around the management of data and of course the requirements for ethical governance go alongside this. Governance authorities are struggling to keep pace with the developments in technology, which means that organisations are having to adapt rapidly as the capabilities of AI continue to expand.

In the words of Lesley Wilkinson, Chief Talent Officer at Experian, who we interviewed fresh from a visit to Silicon Valley:



“By the end of the quarter, we want 100% of our leaders to have gone through our leading with AI programme. That’s getting them to think about their workflows and what can be automated. How are they going to do performance management when they’ve got a machine and a human performing the same task? And finally, how are they going to develop the best tech talent, if they’re not tech experts themselves?”

Or as Roger Minton, Head of Leadership at IAG puts it:

“We will, as leaders, be leading these sort of combined teams of AI agents as well as humans, and trying to figure out what to delegate to which and how to get them working together.”

Nicolas Ceasar, Head of Learning & Talent Development, Pictet Asset Management, made a similar point:

“We’re moving into a world where we’ve got a combination of human and non-human workers. So how do we organise the work and how do we create meaning for people?”

To what extent this change is benefitting us is also up for debate. As Dan Russell at RHR International says:

“On one hand AI aids us, helping us make decisions more quickly, but it’s a paradox. AI is wonderful at pulling together massive swathes of information, organising it and summarising it for us. But all of that information is from the past. And we’re having to make a decision about what to do in the future. What’s so human is that we still need to project that out into the future and exercise wisdom and judgment using intuition about what’s going to happen, based on a world that nobody’s ever seen.”

Many of our interviewees described the need for a quantum shift in AI knowledge and experience for leaders, and against a rapidly changing technology landscape. In Section 4 we will look at how this is being planned for and accomplished. How can we rewire leaders to prepare for this seismic shift?

7 TENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Another insightful and provocative way of thinking about these often oppositional leadership capabilities is the work of Jennifer Jordan, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at IMD Business School. The model is articulated originally in the HBR article [Every Leader Needs to Navigate These 7 Tensions](#) co-authored with Michael Wade and Elizabeth Teracino, subsequently further developed in [Finding the Right Balance and Flexibility in Your Leadership Style](#) and [What it Takes to Lead Through Digital Disruption](#) (see References). Their thinking was informed by surveys and interviews with hundreds of leaders worldwide and points to the elements leaders must balance to be successful in an increasingly challenging world.

1. The Miner v the Prospector

Miners dive deeply into an idea or direction to extract the full value from it. Prospectors on the other hand look outside their immediate environment to identify potential opportunities and threats. This connects with the Outside-In Thinking dimension in the CRF leadership capability model.

2. The Constant v the Adaptor

Here the tension is between having decision-making conviction and consistency as opposed to adaptability and agility in the face of the rapidly changing context. This tension is clearly being felt by the organisations represented by our research as well. Hence, the need to “create focused clarity in a period of unprecedented complexity and change”.

3. The Tactician v the Visionary

The article describes the traditional approach of leadership as requiring “operational clarity and well-defined plans” whilst the emerging approach relies more on an overall vision for the future.

4. The Teller v the Listener

The traditional approach is described as leaders telling others “what to do and how to do it”. The emerging approach is more participative and involves “listening carefully to others before deciding”.

5. The Power Holder v the Power Sharer

With this tension the choices are between leading from the top and acting independently or “empowering others to achieve goals”. Clearly context and specificity of the subject matter are key here and both are right in the appropriate circumstances. This tension connects directly to the CRF model theme “New Relational Skillsets”.

6. The Intuitionist v the Analyst

One approach is that leaders rely on an “expert gut” to make intuitive decisions. The opposite is that “leaders should base their decisions largely on data”. Having a balanced or nuanced approach in this tension is arguably appropriate either as a leader or within a team.

7. The Perfectionist v the Accelerator

With this tension the traditional approach suggests that leaders “take the time to deliver a perfectly finished product”. The emerging approach is a more 80/20 one, delivering quick results and “failing fast” to achieve more. Again there are limitations on taking only one approach on every occasion rather than seeking an appropriate balance. This connects to the key theme from the CRF model of “Building the Organisation Infrastructure for Rapid Execution”.

The proposal from Jordan, Wade and Teracino is not that leaders choose one approach from the opposing aspects of the tension, rather that they develop a level of “cognitive and behavioural ambidexterity”, enabling leaders to apply a variety of approaches based on the context of the situation and their organisation. Specifically, this requires leaders to exercise curiosity and develop skills in situational awareness and emotional intelligence.

In the study on digital disruption it also became clear that there was a hierarchy of these tensions. The highest performing leaders and organisations excelled at the Prospector/Miner tension. The second most impactful tension was Power-sharer/Power-holder. Balancing the ability to operate at either end of these dimensions is the key. Jennifer Jordan maintains that being able to balance across three or four of the tensions is enough to be an effective leader, rather than aiming to cover all seven.

How leaders can develop this ambidexterity will form part of Section 4. What is clear is that the significant volatility and complexity of context described in Section 2 drives a requirement for agility, adaptability and versatility for leaders in today’s organisations.

CUSTOMER CENTRIC LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

Katharina Lange, Professor of Leadership, IMD

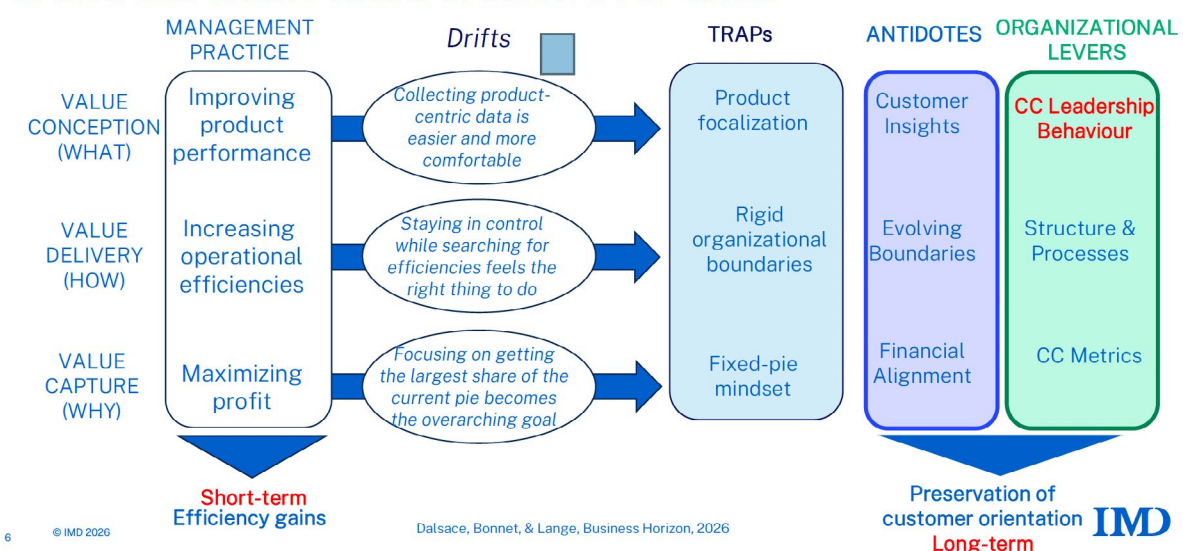
Katharina’s research shows that market orientation or customer centricity creates value, although over time, businesses lose market orientation as they drive for efficiency.

The remedy to this destruction of value lies in developing and encouraging the right leadership behaviours.

Her research breaks down the drivers of behaviour as shown in the model below:

The 3 sides of a business model

... and the silent value erosion over time.



THE SUGGESTION IS THAT LEADERS NEED TO

LEARN, SHARE AND ACT in order to develop the right organisational behaviours.

Practical actions include:

- Empathy immersion labs – running events and activities for leaders across all functions that bring them closer to the customer, thereby creating real customer insights.
- Cross-functional market intelligence rituals – for example, monthly 60-min structured forums where leaders bring customer data, discuss implications flowing from that, and generate ideas for experimentation. The goal is to encourage customer insight dissemination.
- Humble learning reviews – reviewing actions with a customer lens and asking: What did we assume about customer needs? What signals did we miss or ignore? What would we do differently? And through developing this practice, building and acting on customer insights.
- Courageous decision simulations – running real business-based simulations. For example, diagnosing a declining product category or customer segment, analysing real competitor encroachment using live data and making/defending a strategic recommendation to senior leadership. This proposed action helps by building responsiveness to customer signals.
- Use market-orientated leader profiles for all talent processes. This supports “learn, share and act” through being embedded in all talent, learning and succession activities.



4. HOW ARE ORGANISATIONS APPROACHING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

The third key area addressed by our research was to understand how the approach to leadership development is evolving. We examined how much has changed in this area following our previous research, where the response to the post-pandemic period was influencing the need for changes in approach.

Within our current research, there are three areas which are potential catalysts for change. First, the overall business context as described in Section 2 of this report. Second, the changing requirements of leaders from Section 3 above. Third, we specifically examined the impact of technology, and AI in particular, on approaches to leadership development. Not surprisingly, what also became apparent was that some of the key foundations of a systemic approach to leadership development continued to prevail.

Starting with this last point, we found five key elements of a model for leadership development were present and referred to by many, if not all, of our interviewees.

These elements were as follows:

- The need for leadership development strategy to be aligned with the overall business strategy
- The importance of executive leadership sponsoring the learning agenda and being aligned as a senior team on priorities
- A clear point of view on how leaders develop and the organisation's learning philosophy
- The integration of leadership development into talent and succession processes as well as the wider employee life cycle, including clarity of responsibility for learning between the individual and the organisation
- Effective measurement of impact and outcomes of leadership development.



1. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS STRATEGY

Many of our research participants articulated the continued importance of aligning leadership development with business strategy. If anything, this requirement has only increased given the scrutiny applied to all investments and especially people development investments in the current environment where many businesses are highly cost constrained. In such environments, drawing connections with business strategy and working on projects that are strategic as part of the leadership development agenda has become even more of a priority.

Katharine Sherwood, Director of Talent, Performance and Leadership at Sainsbury's, described an in-depth review of learning and leadership development strategy to present a more coherent offer for the business that aligns with the three-year strategy life cycle. This re-based the approach by defining the core skills and capabilities expected at each level of leadership in Sainsbury's and developing a clear learning and leadership proposition that will enable leaders to be their best and deliver business outcomes. Katharine further emphasised the need to see the leadership developed agenda continue to change as the strategy evolves, something the Executive team at Sainsbury's were about to embark upon at the time of interview.

2. EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP

Connected to the strategy point, participants also emphasised the need, not just for sponsorship of the leadership development agenda, but also active participation and role modelling. Leadership development is more impactful when the senior team show the self-awareness to focus on their own development as well as being developers of the next level of leaders in their organisations.

To quote Roger Minton, Head of Leadership at IAG:

"I've seen good programmes run without that sponsorship, but they never have anything close to the impact of programmes where that exists."

Or in the case of Claire Woegerbauer, Global Head of People and Organisation Development, Ferring Pharmaceuticals:

"When we launched, it took a few months for managers who went through the programme to start talking about it publicly. But once they did we started to receive enrolments much higher than we could accommodate based on the investment levels we had. This has encouraged the executive leadership and the senior leadership to continue to invest in the programmes."

3. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

Having a clear point of view on how development actually happens, and putting that into practice, is a fundamental pillar of an effective learning ecosystem. This applies even more so in the area of leadership development, and given the importance of executive sponsorship, sets the tone for learning in the wider organisation if managed effectively.

This research supports the findings of our recent research paper: [Creating an Effective Learning Ecosystem](#). Considering Adult Learning Theory (in particular as articulated by Malcolm Knowles), the key points to consider in designing learning for any leadership population are:

- **Be learner-led and flexible:** leaders in particular want control over their own learning journey
- **Connect theory to real-world application:** action-oriented and time poor leaders want to apply knowledge immediately to solve real challenges.
- **Respect and draw on lived experience:** leaders bring a rich reservoir of previous experience so it's important to build on and connect to what they already know.
- **Explain the purpose and relevance upfront:** leaders want to understand why they need to learn something before investing time and effort — the "what's in it for me?" factor.
- **Foster reflection and critical thinking:** leaders need to adapt to circumstances and situations they haven't yet experienced.

Roger Minton of IAG brought this to life as follows in talking about using deep immersive experiences to foster learning:

"By that I mean taking groups not just out of the classroom, but out of the company to different organisations and countries, sometimes even to communities that we influenced as a business. We had some great success with that. We visited technology companies which had little to do directly with our industry. And you get ideas, not just about what they're doing with technology, but their approach to values, behaviours and talent. So I think that's one way of making it more normal and seeing the benefits of looking outside."

Karen Ellis, Leadership Development Advisor, describes this approach having a real impact on the ability of leaders to thrive when under the pressure of significant complexity:

"What I notice is people who can shift perspective very easily and combine different perspectives into a way forward. They tend to lead people better because they're not just trying to influence others in their own point of view or getting completely caught up in what everybody else wants and being unable to mediate that. They tend to be able to hold themselves with more serenity, being less likely to get triggered by what's going on around them, and less likely to clamp down and hold themselves really tightly in a way that actually holds back their performance."

Underpinning this, as Suzanne Lee, Global Head of Senior Leadership Development at Straumann Group, says:

"Self-awareness is the foundation for all development. We are all a work in progress."

4. EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE INTEGRATION

Where leadership development is well integrated with other People processes, participants felt it was more likely to be effective. The strongest connections were into talent and succession management. Identifying talent to participate in leadership development and using robust assessment processes to select the right target audience was seen as key. Once identified, carrying out diagnosis to understand the specific development needs to fulfil was also important and connected to the measurement of the impact of the learning. Finally, linking back into succession and career management as high level outcomes helps to underpin the investment case and support the overall learning philosophy.

As one of our interviewers said:



"Whether it's performance, talent, leadership development, capability development, assessment, etc, we're saying these are all important things that we're looking for in our leaders, and the behaviours we are encouraging them to do, nurturing, spotting, developing, etc, all of it is pulling in the same direction."

The principle of shared accountability for learning within the leadership development journey was also seen as important. This means the organisation providing the programmes and resources to support development including linking to succession management, and the individual driving activity, reflection and the connection to career.

5. MEASURING IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

Finally, closing the loop back to the business strategy and the talent agenda, having clear measures of success and monitoring them was also seen as fundamental to a successful approach. Measurement can be at a personal level as described by Lesley Wilkinson, Chief Talent Officer at Experian:

"There is an expectation that wherever you are in the leadership journey, you will have done the training and that you're measured. Our Great Place to Work survey includes a stack of leadership questions so you get your own leadership results. You're expected to do 360 against our leadership characteristics regularly, which is self-started. So there is a clear expectation for leaders around measurement."

Or at the organisational level, as Nicola Robinson, VP People, EMEA at RS Group, commented:

"We are taking a more data driven approach. How are we targeting that investment? What impact is that investment having?"

For more input on this important topic, see our report: [Creating an Effective Learning Ecosystem](#), Section 4, Demonstrating Impact: Evaluation and data.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE WIRED IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

In this section, so far we have examined what continues to apply in leadership development. Given the changes in business context and leadership capability requirements, and the rapid rise of AI, what are organisations experiencing that is new?

We observed organisations experiencing a series of choices, or to use the language of Jordan, Wade and Teracino, "tensions" in the approach they take to leadership development. Three specific tensions emerged from our research:

-
- Individual vs. Team development
 - Content/theory based vs. Experiential learning
 - Human vs. AI delivered
-

INDIVIDUAL VS. TEAM BASED

To what extent is leadership development an individual or a collective activity? Warren Bennis, the eminent leadership thinker, likened developing as a leader to becoming a fully-formed human being. It takes many years to learn who you are, the strengths and weaknesses of how you lead and what to do about them. To develop as a leader requires working on your own identity and meaning making. Often individuals need support in their development, particularly if the needs of individual leaders are diverse, driven by the higher levels of complexity, pace and requirements for versatility. Then, a more personalised approach is likely to deliver greater impact and benefit to the individual leader as well as the wider organisation.





As Suzanne Lee, Global Head of Senior Leadership Development at Straumann Group, observes:

"Our programmes are designed to build self-awareness, because if we want leaders to lead change, they need to build that capacity from the inside out. We do this through lots of different lenses including experiential learning, peer coaching and layering content around topics such as psychological safety, because different things resonate with different people."

Natalie Thwaite, Director of Leadership Development at CSL emphasises the importance of balancing individual and organisational development:

"Our Cohort Leadership programmes are both a leadership and organisational development intervention – focusing on critical leadership roles where performance has the greatest enterprise impact. Leaders develop collectively in cohorts to create a shared language, mindset and ways of working that drive performance and also scale our culture. We don't follow a cookie cutter approach though – leaders follow personalised journeys shaped by assessment, coaching and application on-the-job, supported through peer action learning sets. At the core sits deep self-awareness – the deeply human foundational capability for effective leadership, enabling our leaders to successfully navigate through complexity, ambiguity and change."

As work becomes increasingly delivered through teams, however, many organisations are seeing benefits to developing intact teams together. The tension here is driven partly by the economic context facing organisations. Team-based development can be delivered to more participants in a more cost-effective way, especially if delivered online.

There is of course an additional potential benefit of team learning within natural work groups. Teams that experience learning programmes or activities together develop a shared understanding and language that they can utilise back in their organisational setting. This can be highly impactful and sustaining in terms of the return on investment.

Many organisations are choosing to apply a flexible or ambidextrous approach here, balancing team or group learning activities with individualised elements such as coaching and mentoring. By doing this they are recognising the financial constraints of their position whilst maximising the impact through personalised aspects of the development journey.

As Nicolas Ceasar, Head of Talent and Leadership at Pictet Asset Management, puts it:

"Thinking about leadership and leaders in the absence of thinking about leadership teams is a really dangerous thing to do. Leadership teams, if they operate well as a team, can deal with complexity much better than any individual."

This point is echoed by Claire Camara, People Director at Channel 4:

"It's not just about developing individual leaders now. It's about developing systemic leadership... bringing people together to deliver things that are more integrated than they've ever been before."



CONTENT/THEORY BASED VS. EXPERIENTIAL

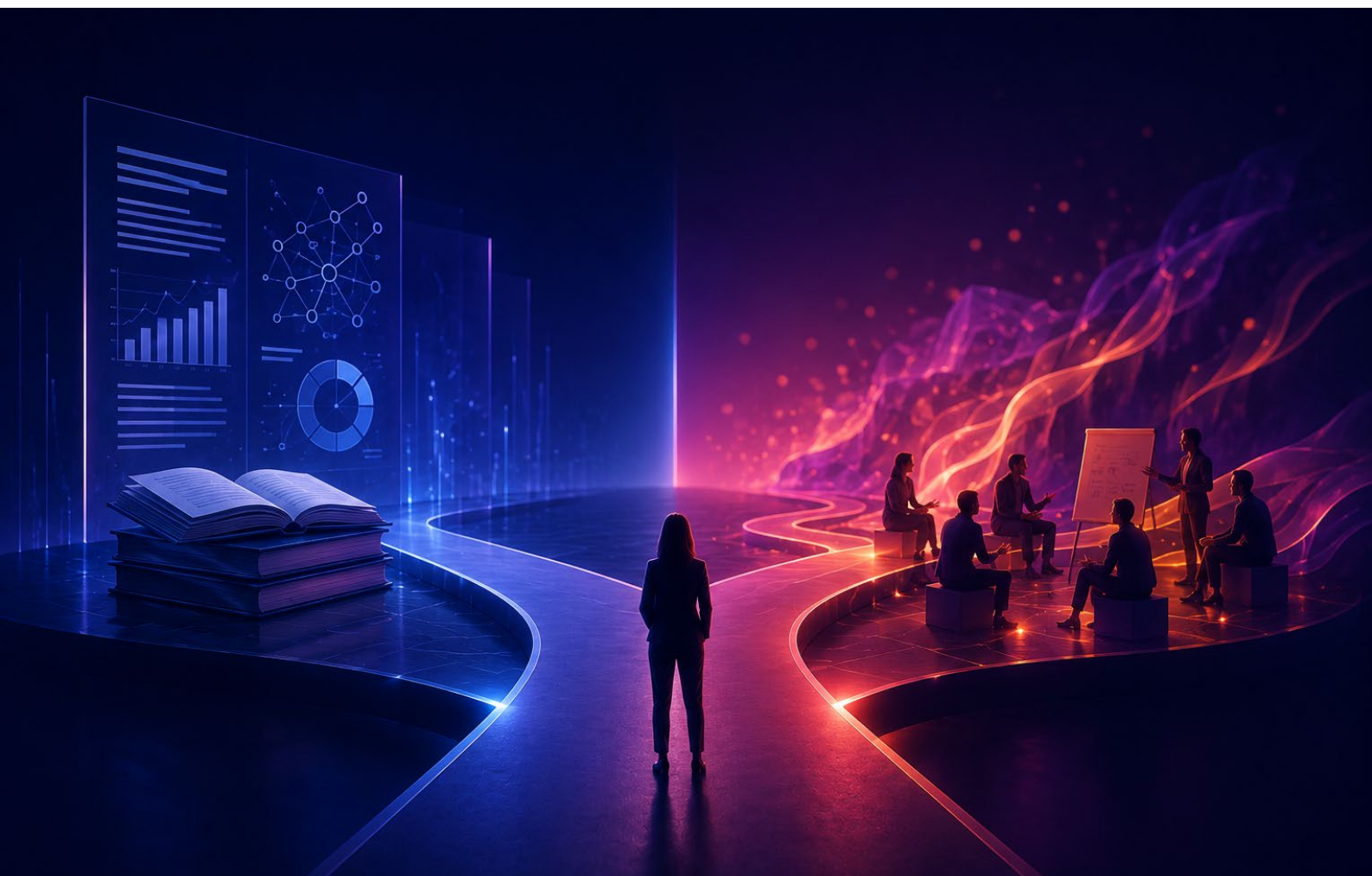
As discussed above, adult learning theory would point to real-world application and lived experience as being the most effective routes to develop leadership capability. However, the limitations of experiential learning are again economic in part. Designing experiences to suit specific learning needs is time-consuming. It is also more difficult to deliver for large groups. Arguably, theoretical and content-based learning has the potential advantage of being accessible in a variety of formats and can deliver high levels of consistency in understanding and application. Most organisations manage this tension by applying the approach that works best for the population being developed as well as the subject matter or capability required. More is covered on this topic in Section 3 of [Creating an Effective Learning Ecosystem](#).

Suzanne Lee puts it as follows:



"Content delivery does not equal meaning making which is required to develop as a leader. Leadership development needs to be about identity work as well as skill development. And leaders need a deliberate reflective space to develop their meaning."

How learning is delivered needs to balance the requirement for reflection and meaning making alongside pure content and theory.





HUMAN VS. AI

Arguably the biggest discontinuity in the leadership development space in the last 2-3 years has been the impact of technology, and AI in particular, on how we learn. The tension here is, can AI effectively deliver development better than a human?

Or should AI be used to augment development delivered by humans?

In our research there was a variety of views and experiences of the topic. For example, Natalie Thwaite, Director of Leadership Development at CSL said:

"We're experimenting with how AI can enhance leadership development across assessments, 360 feedback, skills gap analysis and development planning. We're seeing the value in greater personalisation, efficiency, immediate access and smarter use of our internal data. AI also has the potential to democratise access to structured feedback and coaching at scale. This isn't about rapid rollout though - it requires rigorous validation, strong governance, and safeguards around data privacy, bias and technology approval. In many use cases, a clear human in the loop model is needed, with AI augmenting rather than replacing human led interventions."

Dan Russell, Senior Partner at RHR International, has a nuanced view of the value of an AI coach, seeing it as potentially augmenting the human aspect of coaching:

"It is really good at allowing you to practice one thing or the other, but not both at the same time. For example, practicing negotiation skills using an AI coach. It's like you have the machine shooting tennis balls at you and it's repetitive and a safe environment."

Dan Russell also sees AI as potentially augmenting the human aspect of coaching:

"This is what your human coaches bring. You practice this and you've practiced that. Now, let's really get into how do you do both at the same time? How do you disentangle when to do X versus Y?"

In Nicolas Ceasar's view:



"AI coaching is not necessarily a direct replacement for executive coaching - it's more of an assistant to leaders that provides support in a coaching style. It's more tactical than developmental. It has a 'Just in time' quality. AI can also help with practice and accountability."

Karen Ellis is developing AI coaching tools to support development. Most traction has been made so far with businesses that have a high level of technology use already or are start-up businesses. AI-literate leaders are saying, "why can't I use this technology to help in my own development journey?"

Coaching is the area where AI has made its biggest impact on leadership development. The answer to the question, when should human interaction be used in coaching vs. AI is of course, "it depends."

The factors that influence how to choose are as follows:

	AI COACH	HUMAN COACH
Availability	Always on	Scheduled
Cost	Low	High
Accountability	Weak	Strong
Emotional depth	Limited	High
Personalisation	Pattern-based	Relational
Scalability	Unlimited	One-to-one
Realism	Moderate	Strong

In reality, the answer for most organisations in the future is likely to be both. AI for daily practice, reflection and quick support, a human coach for deeper, high impact work.

AI can also be used to identify the capabilities leaders need to develop to be effective in their context and to build the leadership model that underpins leadership development activities within the organisation. Nigel Guenole, Psychologist and Author of Psychometrics.ai, uses AI tools to help leadership teams think through the implications of their business strategy for leadership:.



"The model reads a huge range of data points, including company reports, strategy documents and leadership data. I then work with the CEO and leadership team to tune the model to create a leadership framework that encapsulates the specific capabilities leaders will need to execute that strategy. You can then use that to develop leadership assessments, diagnostics and development strategies to close the gaps."

In summary, the contextual changes facing organisations, the change in leadership requirements and the three leadership development tensions described above are creating a series of challenges and opportunities for leadership development practitioners. In Section 5 we will identify the key recommendations that have emerged from the research to maximise these opportunities.

THE JAGGED EDGE OF AI IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Panel discussion at IMD

The panel discussed how AI is rewiring leadership development – where are the opportunities, what impact are we seeing so far, and what risks do we need to attend to? Jennifer Jordan facilitated the discussion with Anand Chopra-McGowan, MD Valence, Jonathan Crookall, NED at Tandem Group and former CPO at Costa Coffee and Sarah Toms, Chief Innovation Officer, IMD



Anand Chopra-McGowan
MD Valence



Jonathan Crookall
panel at CRF and IMD's
April 2026 event



Sarah Toms
Chief Innovation
Officer, IMD

Q: We are all looking to technology as a partner in how we develop leaders for the current time. Can you give an example of where you have seen technology help leaders do their job better and drive measurable performance?

Jonathan: Store managers in Costa Coffee have achieved improvements in efficiency, measured in hours saved, as well as improvements in customer experience and NPS, driving both top-line and bottom-line performance. They attribute this to their AI coach.

Sarah: At IMD we have used AI to personalise the learning experience based on the needs of the individual learner. We are also providing the opportunity to assess questions and feedback to help the quality of our programmes. It also means our engagement with the client is over a much longer period.

Anand: Maersk have saved \$30 million by reducing the attrition of hi-po employees because they're more engaged. And Experian can point to \$31 million in savings because they showed that people who use an AI coach are more effective at their roles.

Q: Does bringing AI into the workplace contribute to performance culture or to human-centred leadership? Or something else?

Anand: CHROs want to deploy our AI coach for better interpersonal relationships, to improve cultural alignment, to sustain leadership behaviours, and yet they're anxious to get a big short term performance impact to justify the investments they are making. So it's both.

Q: What governance frameworks are in place to ensure ethical use of AI, and do they work?

Anand: Even though the European Union AI Act is not yet in place, many companies from around the globe are applying the standards and policies that are proposed to ensure they operate at the highest levels of ethics and controls. It is true to say, though, that governance authorities are struggling to keep up with the pace of change in AI.

Q: Isn't there a danger that AI coaches mean the line manager can opt out of managing their people?

Jonathan: It depends on the manager. I think great managers use it as a supplementary support mechanism that helps them to do more on the behavioural side. The not so great managers might use it as an alternative and say, "I can do something else with my time, and I don't have to talk to my people". So it's about how do you support that manager and help them to use the AI tool in the right way.

Q: When I think about the next 5 years within the space of technology and leadership development, what excites me most is...

Sarah: The potential to democratise access to learning by using the technology.

Jonathan: Getting development into the hands of frontline workers who have never had access to this kind of personalised development.

Anand: We are at a moment of transition, so for me it's the opportunity to develop the ways of working between people and AI to improve organisations and create those moments of pause and reflection.



BRAIN-BASED RESILIENCE – DR ESTIE ALESSANDRINI

Dr Estie Alessandrini is a medical doctor who specialises in helping leaders apply medical science to build resilience. In her session at IMD, Estie challenged the idea that resilience is primarily a mindset or behavioural capability. She argued that burnout and sustained performance should be understood as questions of physiological energy supply and demand. In her words, *“resilience is not a mindset we demand from our people; it is a metabolic capacity we protect for them.”*



Dr Estie Alessandrini
Brain Based Leadership
Development,
Ekanovate

Estie set out four shifts leaders can make to boost resilience and avoid burnout.

First, organisations need to move from seeing stress as a psychological or behavioural problem to understanding it as a biological energy supply-chain issue. Under acute stress, the brain can mobilise extra fuel and clear waste. Under chronic stress, this system breaks down: fuel delivery reduces, waste accumulates and the brain protects itself by shutting down. This means common advice such as “push through”, “manage your time better” or “find your passion” is inadequate. The practical implication is to design workflows that protect cognitive capacity, with recovery breaks and realistic limits on high-impact work.

Second, Estie argued that a “never stop learning” culture needs to be balanced with active consolidation. Without consolidation, continuous upskilling and learning in the flow of work creates change fatigue. Brains need time to “keep the good stuff and dump the bad”. Replaying learning after short breaks, sleep, and review cycles helps memory transfer into long-term storage. She suggested building strategic sprints with deliberate cool-down periods, so organisations can improve learning retention and adoption without burning people out. The 10-24-7 model is a practical tool, i.e. recapping learning after 10 minutes, 24 hours and 7 days helps embed in long-term memory.

Third, she challenged some familiar leadership development messages: be vulnerable, be empathetic, be candid. These are not wrong, but biologically they can overload people if applied without structure. Her suggested upgrades were: be regulated, be compassionate, be predictable. Leaders should process their own fear before communicating it; respond to others’ distress with supportive action rather than absorbing their pain; and make feedback predictable enough that it does not trigger a threat response. The wider lesson is that organisations need infrastructure that carries emotional load, rather than relying on individual managers to absorb it.

Fourth, Estie argued that abstract purpose is not enough to sustain motivation. A compelling mission may create an initial dopamine spike, but if the distance between aspiration and progress is too great, motivation crashes. The brain is sustained by concrete progress and repeated small wins. Organisations therefore need to break higher purpose into something more tangible, creating regular moments where people experience completion, progress and reward.



CONCLUSION

This research highlights the extent to which the expectations of leaders are being reshaped by the context. The challenge for organisations is not simply to update leadership capability models, but to reconsider more fundamentally what effective leadership looks like and how it is developed. As the title of this research suggests, to consider how leadership needs to be “rewired”.

While the core architecture of leadership capability remains relevant, the expectations placed on leaders have intensified. Creating clarity in uncertainty, demonstrating impact and leading in AI-enabled environments are no longer emerging requirements but central to leadership effectiveness.

For leadership development, this implies both continuity and change. The fundamentals - alignment to strategy, executive sponsorship, rooting development in adult learning theory, integrating development into talent and succession and rigorous measurement - remain essential. However, organisations also need to make more deliberate choices about how development is designed and delivered, balancing the tensions of individual vs. team-based learning, theory vs. experience, and human vs. AI-enabled approaches.

Ultimately, leadership will need to be continually rewired rather than incrementally improved. Organisations that are most effective will be those that align leadership development closely to business priorities and build the capability to adapt as those priorities evolve.

REFERENCES

Jordan J, Wade M, Tercino E, Every Leader Needs to Navigate These 7 Tensions, Harvard Business Review, 20 February 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/02/every-leader-needs-to-navigate-these-7-tensions>

Knowles M, The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species, 1973, Gulf Publishing Company, Houston

Global Risks Report 2026, World Economic Forum, January 2026, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/>

PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey: Leading through uncertainty in the age of AI, 19 January 2026, <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/c-suite-insights/ceo-survey.html>

Jordan J, Wade M, Yokoi T, Finding the Right Balance – and Flexibility – in Your Leadership Style, Harvard Business Review, January 11, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/01/finding-the-right-balance-and-flexibility-in-your-leadership-style>

Jordan J, Wade M, Huang S, What It Takes to Lead Through Digital Disruption, Harvard Business Review, September 11, 2025, <https://hbr.org/2025/09/what-it-takes-to-lead-through-digital-disruption>

CRF REPORTS

Creating an Effective Learning Ecosystem, Corporate Research Forum, 2026 <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-speed-read-creating-an-effective-learning-ecosystem/>

Making a Paradigm Shift in Leadership Development, Corporate Research Forum, 2022 <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-making-a-paradigm-shift-in-leadership-development/>



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Eiman Al Ali, Global Head of Learning & Talent, Ferring Pharmaceuticals

David Astorino, Senior Partner, RHR International
Claire Camara, People Director, Channel 4

Nicolas Ceasar, Head of Learning & Talent Development, Pictet Asset Management

Richard Cleverly, MD, Macquarie Group

Lizzie da Costa, Head of Talent & Leadership Systems, Rolls-Royce

Karen Ellis, Leadership Development Advisor

Svetla Ginev, Senior Manager, Leadership Development, CSL

Nigel Guenole, Psychologist and Founder, MeasureCo

Jennifer Jordan, Professor of Leadership, IMD Business School

Rob Kaiser, President, Kaiser Leadership Solutions

Suzanne Lee, Global Head of Senior Leadership Development, Straumann Group

Roger Minton, Head of Leadership, IAG

Nicole Neubauer, CEO, Personality Guidance AG

Nicola Robinson, VP People, EMEA, RS Group

Dan Russell, Senior Partner, Global Head of Assessment, RHR International

Katharine Sherwood, Director of Talent, Performance and Leadership, Sainsbury's

Mohsin Siddiqui, Global Head of Talent, Performance and Organisation Effectiveness, IHS Tower

Ameet Thakkar, VP Leadership and Culture, BP

Natalie Thwaite, Director of Leadership Development, CSL

Lesley Wilkinson, Chief Talent Officer, Experian

Jamie Ward, Head of Talent and Learning, Channel 4

Claire Woegerbauer, Global Head of People and Organisation Development, Ferring Pharmaceuticals