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CLOSING THE LEADERSHIP EXECUTION GAP.

2026 LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES
& PRIORITIES RESEARCH



PRESENTED BY
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ALCHEMIST



ESTABLISHED
1993

**GLOBAL
REACH**

**20 DIFFERENT
LEARNING MODALITIES**

BLENDED LEARNING
JOURNEYS **SUPPORTED
BY TECHNOLOGY**



**AWARD-WINNING,
ACCREDITED APPROACH**



LEADERSHIP HAS CHANGED.

Constant **Change**

Compressed
Timelines

Increased **Uncertainty**

Leaders need to **lead**
people and deliver
operational results

AI transformation
is a high priority, with
little direction

Are organisations building leadership capability in a way that:

Improves performance



Supports change



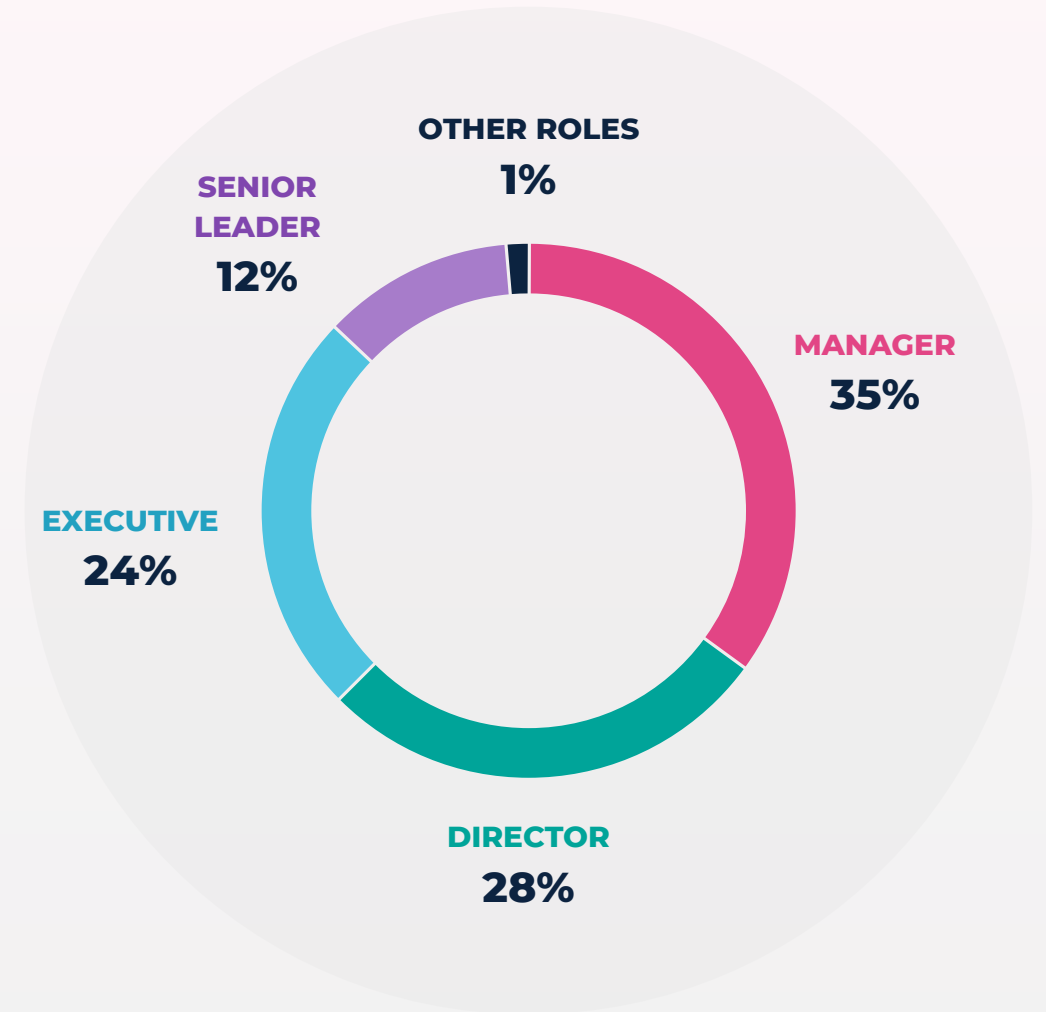
Accelerates execution





2026 SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS.

- **281 leaders**
across HR, L&D, and
Organisational Development
- **20+ industries**
- **Located across** the UK, Europe,
and North America
- **SMB to enterprise**





THE ANSWER IS MIXED.

1.
Substantial
Operating
Pressure

2.
Manager
Performance
Is Improving
for Some

3.
Performance
& Change
Leadership
Are Connected

4.
Leadership
Frameworks
Improve
Outcomes

5.
Expectations
Need to
Be Clear



TODAY WE'LL FOCUS ON.

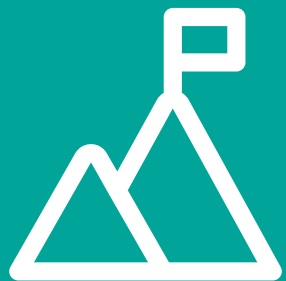
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POLL: BIGGEST CHALLENGES.

TOP ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES.

CHALLENGES Most Widespread

77%

Recruiting and hiring
strong leaders

76%

Building leadership
bench strength /
succession depth

71%

Building first-time
manager capability

71%

Building cross-
functional alignment
and collaboration

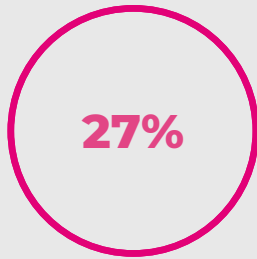
71%

Leaders' ability to
operate effectively in
uncertain environments

% very / somewhat challenging

TOP ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES.

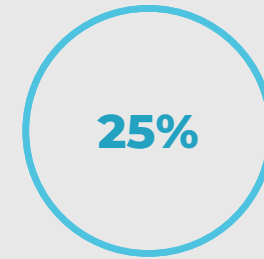
CHALLENGES Most Acute



Recruiting and hiring
strong leaders



Equipping leaders for
an AI-enabled
workplace



Retaining strong
leaders or high
potential talent

% very challenging



CHALLENGES Most Acute

35%

Making decisions with
incomplete information

28%

Leading AI-related
change and adoption

26%

Delivering results with
limited resources

25%

Leading difficult
conversations

24%

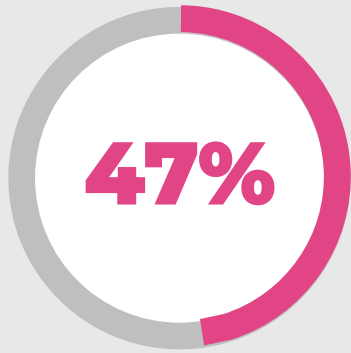
Staying resilient amid
uncertainty and change

% very challenging

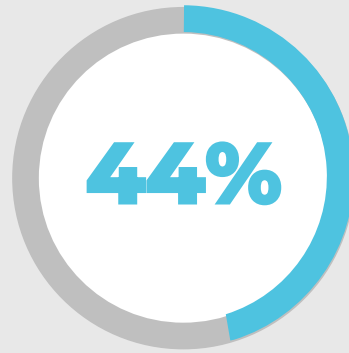
TOP IN-ROLE CHALLENGES.



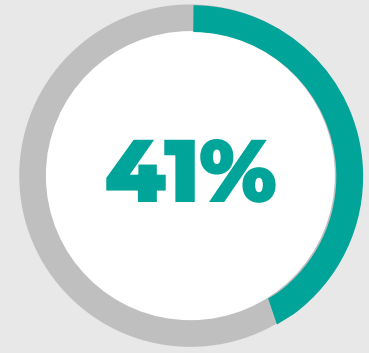
TOP PRIORITIES.



Equip leaders to lead effectively
in an AI-enabled workplace



Improve leadership practices that
support engagement and retention

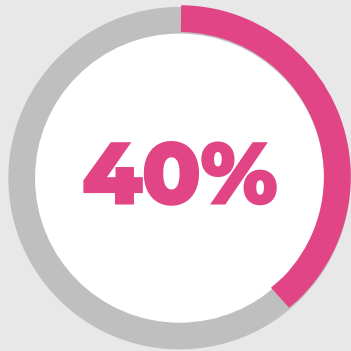


Improve decision-making
speed and quality

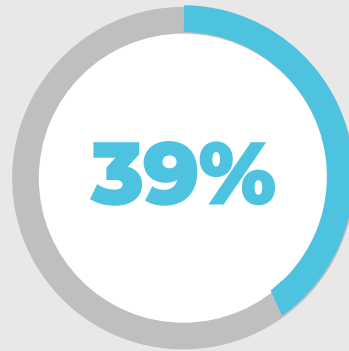
% selected



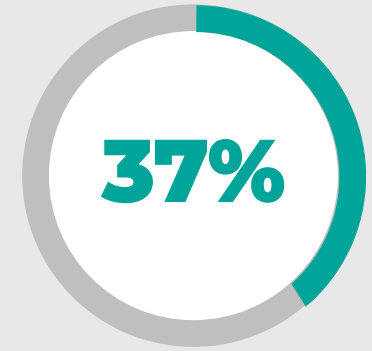
TOP PRIORITIES.



Improve coaching and
employee-development
capabilities



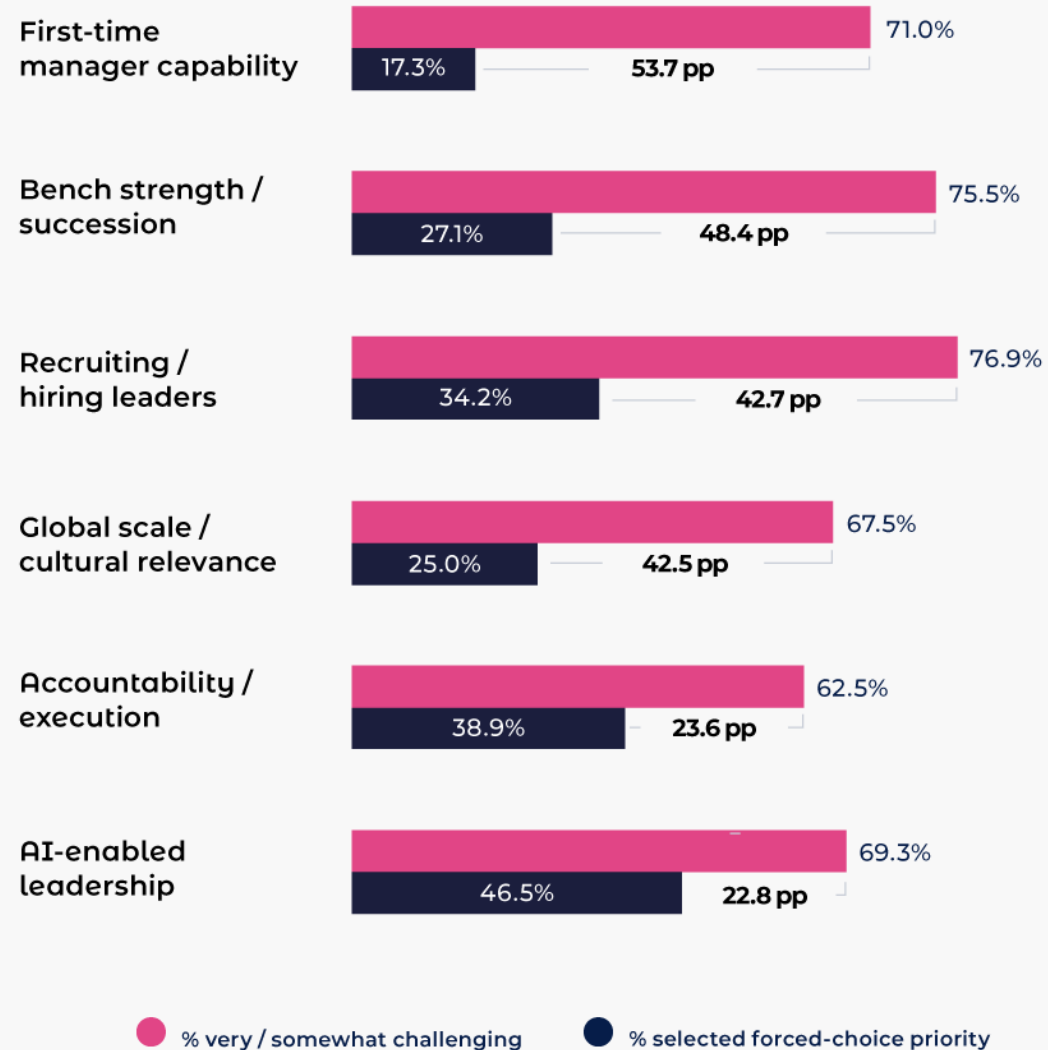
Improve accountability
and execution



Improve ability to lead change and
operate amid uncertainty

% selected

Comparison of Challenges to Forced-Choice Priorities





QUESTION:

Why do you think these challenges aren't prioritised?

WHY THE TENSION MATTERS.

WHERE WE ARE

Tension in challenges
vs priorities

Focus on immediate issues

Less priority on foundational
leadership challenges

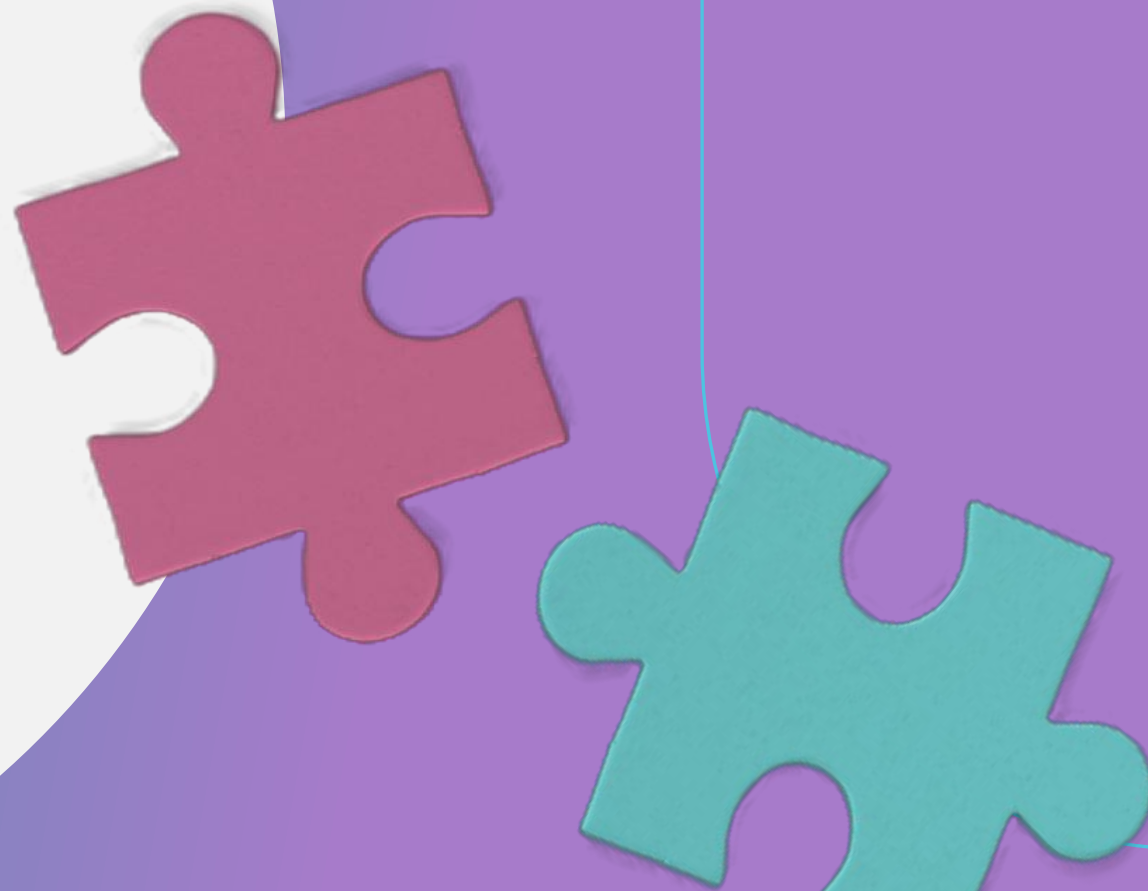
WHERE WE NEED TO BE

L&D Leaders need to protect foundational work to build:

- Manager capability
- Succession depth
- Leader selection & development
- Scalable development across the organisation

BRIDGING THE GAP.

Let's look at how you can put
these ideas into practice together



DIAGNOSE THE LEADERSHIP EXECUTION GAP.

- 1 What pressure is the organisation facing?
- 2 Where is leadership performance breaking down?
- 3 Which behaviours or capabilities need to change?
- 4 What will reinforce those changes in daily work?
- 5 How will behaviour changes and impact be measured?

SIX OPERATING DISCIPLINES.

1

..... Leadership Expectations

2

..... Priority Leadership Behaviours

3

..... Practice & Application

4

..... Manager Reinforcement

5

..... Measurement

6

..... AI Enablement



LEADERSHIP EXPECTATIONS.



WHY IT MATTERS

Creates a **common** standard for **effective** leadership



ASK

Are expectations defined in **observable terms** and used **consistently**?



NEXT STEPS.

- Make behaviours observable
- Connect desired behaviours to both leading themselves and their teams
- Use an evidence-based framework



PRIORITY LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS.



WHY IT MATTERS

Focuses development on the **behaviours** that matter most



ASK

Which leadership behaviours are **most critical** to your current **business priorities**?



NEXT STEPS.

- Identify key business objectives
- Diagnose which behaviours are needed to meet these objectives
- Focus on specific behaviours over generic improvements



PRACTICE AND APPLICATION.



WHY IT MATTERS

Moves development **beyond** content and traditional approaches



ASK

Are practice and application tied to the **situations** your leaders actually face?



NEXT STEPS.

- Build an understanding of situations and challenges faced
- Take an honest assessment of individual skills
- Tailor the practice to meet your organisation's needs and skills gaps



MANAGER REINFORCEMENT.



WHY IT MATTERS

Sustains **behaviour** change



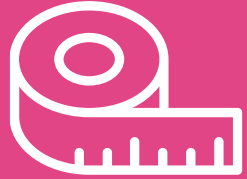
ASK

Are managers **coaching**, **observing**, and **reinforcing** the behaviours that matter?



NEXT STEPS.

- Equip line managers with the skills and tools to coach
- Define the coaching cadence



MEASUREMENT.



WHY IT MATTERS

Connects development
to **outcomes**



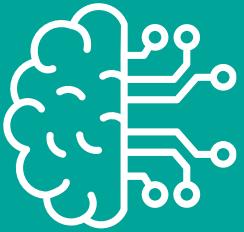
ASK

Are behaviour, people, talent,
and business indicators
reviewed together?



NEXT STEPS.

- Build in evaluation from the start
- Connect learning to behaviour change to business results
- Use multiple data sources



AI ENABLEMENT.



WHY IT MATTERS

Extends leadership capability



ASK

Is AI **embedded** into manager workflows, coaching, communication, and decision support?



NEXT STEPS.

- Focus on the human skills that support AI implementation for leaders
- Set a clear standard for how AI should be approached in practice



There's a key tension revealed in the research between what organisations find challenging and what they're prioritising



Start with diagnosis of the business priority before designing leadership development to maximise impact



To sustain behaviour change, leadership development needs to be practiced and reinforced

WE EXPLORED.



BRINGING IT BACK TO WORK.

Are your top priorities and challenges aligned?

**Take a moment to write down one challenge you
will diagnose in the next two weeks**



WORK WITH ALCHEMIST.

PRACTICE-LED LEARNING

Research-backed, multi-modal learning journeys

End-to-end systems to drive lasting behaviour change for measurable business results





LEARNINGTRANSFORMED

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