

TRENDS FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP:

C-Suite Insights on
What Comes Next



Contents

2	FOREWORD
3	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
5	OUR APPROACH
6	INTRODUCTION
8	5 TRENDS FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP
15	COMPANY SPOTLIGHT 1: ASTRAZENECA
28	COMPANY SPOTLIGHT 2: PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
30	THE WAY FORWARD
31	RESOURCES
32	RESEARCH TEAM

FOREWORD

2026 began with strong recognition that our world has moved beyond mere transition.

The growing use of the term *polycrisis* captures this environment well: Multiple, interconnected crises compounding each other and reshaping global dynamics. This is change without recognisable outcomes. Yet the practical implications for leadership remain poorly understood. Few organisations have fully adapted their strategies, decision-making structures, or leadership capabilities to operate in a world where instability is not an occasional shock but a constant backdrop.

The organisations that thrive will be those whose leaders are prepared to navigate uncertainty with purpose, accountability, and a renewed commitment to the common good.

This timely report, combining insights and conversations with C-suite leaders, provides latest trends and practical guidance for leaders.


The lessons seem clear: Global leaders must move beyond treating disruptions as discrete events. Instead, in a *polycrisis* world where risk is neither binary nor cyclical, we need to build operating models capable of continuous learning, rapid adaptation, and resilience.

The path forward requires rebuilding a sense of common purpose. As this report highlights, for leaders this means articulating not only what organisations do, but *why* they do it — and *how* their decisions contribute to societal resilience.

Warm regards,

Mike Hardy CMG OBE FRSA
Board Director & Chair,
International Leadership Association





“By 2050, if things turned out better than expected globally, what did we get right starting now — personally and as organizations?”

Committed to Long-Term Purpose

Leaders agreed that if 2050 is bright, it's because we invested in inclusive long-term strategies now (tackling climate change, inequality) and made decisions with future generations in mind, rather than chasing short-term wins.

Global Cooperation & Collective Action

Interviewees highlighted unprecedented collaboration — across industries and borders — as crucial. Getting it right meant breaking out of zero-sum mindsets and working together on shared global challenges.

Personal Leadership Transformation

Many noted that leaders “showed up” differently — with authenticity, humility, and courage. Personally, today's leaders would need to build trust by living their values and demonstrating empathy, creating a strong ethical foundation to shape the future.

THE 5 TRENDS



Maximizing the Human Advantage

Future leaders must lead with authenticity, empathy, and humanity. They must show up as real people who build trust, connect, and inspire, not just as strategists or authority figures.



Orchestrating Human-Machine Systems

Fluency in AI and digital technology is no longer optional. Leaders must leverage advanced tools, guide transformation, and partner with AI to enhance human judgment and creativity with strong ethical grounding.



Radical Collaboration Across Systems and Boundaries

Systems thinking is evolving for a more interconnected world. Leaders must think holistically across interconnected systems and collaborate across boundaries to address complex challenges.



Creating a Purposeful Future

Leaders with a long-term, purpose-driven mindset will differentiate themselves. They will embed values, vision, and societal impact into decisions, recognizing this as essential for sustained success.



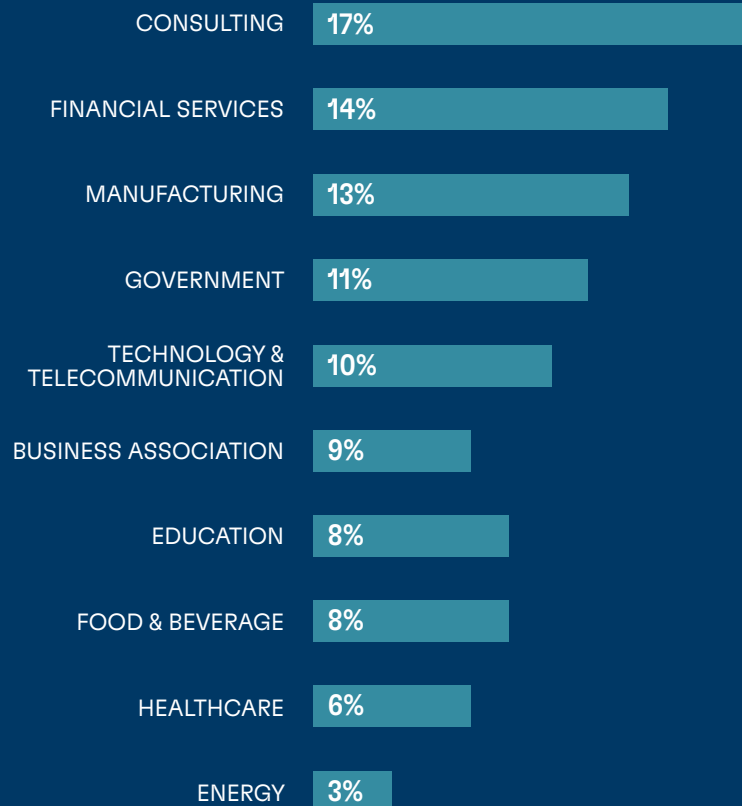
Cultivating Tomorrow's Leaders Today

Developing talent and future leaders is critical. Organizations must invest in growth, well-being, and energizing cultures to strengthen leadership pipelines.

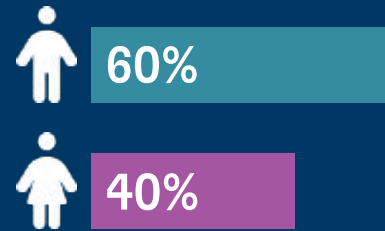
OUR APPROACH

Number of leaders who participated: **63**

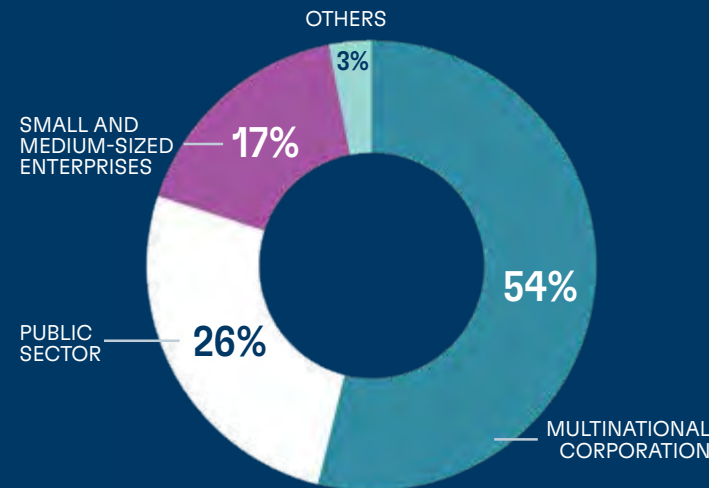
Industry:



Gender:



Organization Type:



The Trends in Global Leadership Project, conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in partnership with the International Leadership Association (ILA), is based on a series of roundtables and in-depth interviews with C-suite leaders across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Varied contexts and common themes emerged. While leaders spoke candidly about uncertainty and pressure, many also expressed optimism that this moment presents an opportunity to shape a better future.

A Call for Courageous Leadership: This report outlines the trends shaping global leadership and offers practical guidance for preparing today for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. This report is an invitation to lead with intention and courage so that, when we look back in 2050, we can be proud of what we got right.

Has globalization reached an inflection point? Is it in retreat? And what does this mean for global leadership?

In recent years, many observers have predicted a dramatic change to world economic relations — the emergence of borders, boundaries, and barriers and a retreat from globalization. Violent conflicts, rising geopolitical tensions, supply-chain disruptions, and increasing protectionism have fueled narratives of “de-globalization.” Yet the evidence suggests something more nuanced. This is no binary. Rather than disappearing, globalization is evolving and becoming more complex. After the sharp contractions during the COVID-19 pandemic, cross-border economic activity rebounded strongly. Global trade reached nearly \$33 trillion in 2024, an all-time high, driven particularly by rapid growth in services and digital trade. Supply chains are reorganizing, geopolitical blocs are reshaping investment patterns, and digital flows are increasingly central to global connectivity.

While some forms of cross-border investment have slowed or fragmented, the scale and speed of digital services, data flows, and knowledge exchange continue to expand.

At the same time, the world is experiencing what many scholars describe as a polycrisis — a condition in which multiple, interdependent crises unfold simultaneously and amplify one another. The word crisis comes from the Greek *krisis*, meaning a moment of decision or turning point; polycrisis combines *poly* (many) with *krisis*, underscoring how today’s challenges — ranging from health and climate shocks to geopolitical conflict and disruptive technological change — are deeply interconnected rather than isolated. These forces rarely respect national, sectoral, or organizational boundaries. Global leaders will need to meet this challenge with both imagination and navigation, no longer navigating a single disruption at a time, but making sense of overlapping crises whose interactions accelerate uncertainty, raise the stakes of decisions, and demand new forms of leadership, coordination, and judgment. As this report highlights, it’s a time for navigation with imagination.

Against this backdrop of evolving globalization and persistent polycrisis, our research surfaced 5 leadership trends that distinguish those who are merely reacting from those who are shaping what comes next.

WHY LEADERSHIP MUST EVOLVE NOW:

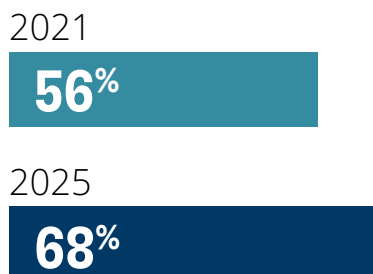
Traditional leadership approaches are no longer keeping pace with rapid change. Command-and-control and wait-and-see models fall short in a world that demands agility, real-time adaptation, and continuous learning. Interdependence means that global challenges shape local realities — for example, a virus emerging in one city can disrupt entire countries — and vice versa; effective leadership requires balancing big-picture thinking with on-the-ground nuances. Leaders who can integrate both these macro and micro perspectives are better equipped to navigate complexity and respond in ways that resonate across markets and communities.

THE NEW TRUST IMPERATIVE:

Meanwhile, trust in institutions and leaders is eroding. The [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) finds that a majority of people are not at ease with major institutions, with skepticism toward

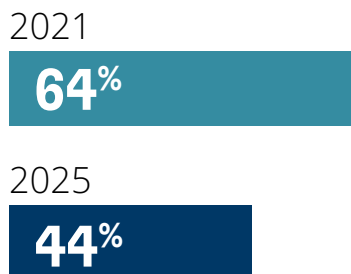
Eroding Trust in Leaders

[68% of global respondents in 2025 believe that business leaders purposely mislead people, a 12% increase from 2021.](#)



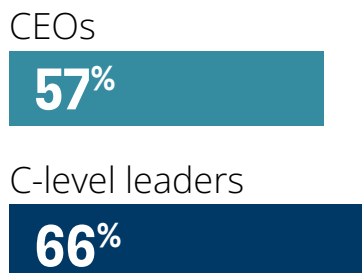
Struggling With Technological Change

[Only 44% of leaders feel prepared to address technological change — down from 64% in 2021 and the lowest level to date.](#)



Increasing Leader Flight Risk

[66% of C-level leaders say they're open to opportunities outside their current organization, compared with 57% of CEOs.](#)



government, business, media, and NGOs at elevated levels. This erosion of trust extends into organizations, impacting the leader–employee relationship. Authority alone is no longer the driver of respect or compliance. In this context, the future role of leadership is likely to be more about asking the right questions than having all the answers. Leading effectively now requires creating environments where challenging the status quo is encouraged and where leaders model a mindset of continuous learning and listening. It means discerning, through dialogue, which enduring practices to carry forward and which outdated assumptions to leave behind.

THE LEADERSHIP READINESS GAP:

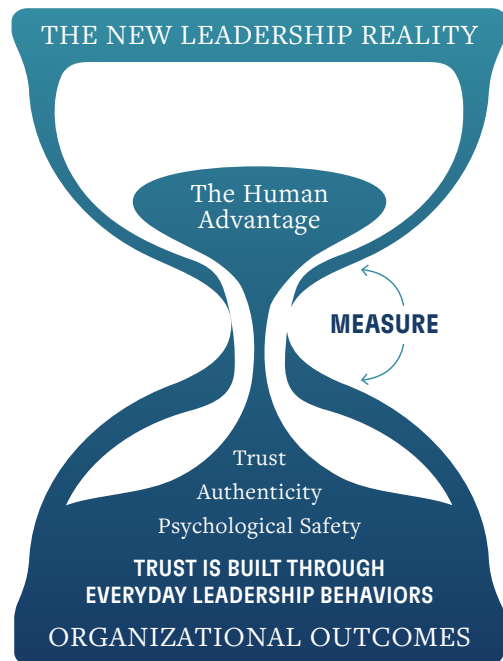
Many leaders also feel unprepared for the demands of this disruptive era. A [2025 global survey](#) shows that leaders' confidence in addressing economic, technological, and talent challenges is declining. The same survey also finds that 2/3 of leaders are open to opportunities beyond their current organization, raising concerns about their retention and the risk of a “leadership exodus.”

So, polycrisis may well be creating crisis for leadership, and a growing leadership gap. Supporting and nurturing the next generation of global leaders is therefore an urgent priority, as the skills and mindsets that worked in the past may not be as effective for the future.

TREND 1:

Maximizing the Human Advantage





People-first leadership does not weaken performance; it's the mechanism that enables it.

C-suite leaders across industries and leadership levels consistently returned to one foundational idea: The future of global leadership is deeply human.

In an era defined by geopolitical instability, technological acceleration, and societal transformation, leaders emphasized that longer-term effectiveness will not be driven by control or authority, but by [empathy, fairness, and authentic connection](#).

We see a clear shift away from traditional, authority-driven leadership models toward collective leadership models and relational influence.

“Leaders will move from being controllers to gardeners of the future — those who guide, motivate, nurture, and share a clear purpose with their people.” — Dr. Vishwas P R

This shift is not aspirational, it's necessary. Without trust, psychological safety, and a felt sense of equity, organizations will fail to sustain performance, especially during periods of change and rapid growth.

One leader described a complex organizational merger where emotional turbulence, uncertainty, and high turnover tested leadership assumptions. In this context, human-centered leadership became less about vision statements and more about daily behaviors of how leaders listened, communicated, and showed up for people.

“Humans are the same everywhere. They want to be treated equally and fairly. They want someone to support them and enable them. That, to me, is human-centered leadership.”

— Dana Ismail Al Husseini,
Chief Human Capital Officer

Empathy, humility, and fairness are non-negotiable traits for future leaders. These qualities are linked to trust-building, particularly in culturally diverse or rapidly transforming environments. The credibility of leaders in the future depends on alignment between a leader’s internal value system and their everyday decisions. [Trust and credibility are built when leaders consistently align their daily actions with their values](#), particularly in *complex and polycrisis environments*.

“Authentic leadership should reflect what’s inside you. Your value system should align with what you’re doing daily. Otherwise, you’re performing leadership, not living it.”

— Dr. Anan Shendy,
Learning Design Consultant

The human advantage is a protective force to move beyond the limitation of traditional

leadership models, particularly as organizations promote high performers into leadership roles without sufficient support. This underscores the importance of investing in middle managers and first-time leaders; these groups often experience the greatest pressure yet receive the least developmental attention.

Human-centered leadership does not contradict performance or accountability. Instead, it strengthens resilience and commitment, especially when organizations face difficult decisions. One interviewee summarized this sentiment clearly:

“Focusing on people should always be there. If people are not on board, you will not succeed — no matter how strong the strategy is.”

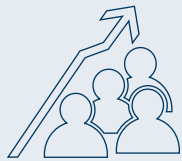
— Ahmed Taeer, Head of Commercial Effectiveness & Transformation

As technology and AI increasingly shape how work is done, it’s clear: The more digital leadership becomes, the more human it must remain. The future of global leadership will be defined not by perfection or certainty, but by leaders who model [vulnerability, ethical awareness, and genuine care for people](#) because without people, organizations cannot thrive.



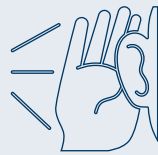
3 ACTIONS

Leaders spoke about the importance of personalizing leadership responses, recognizing that people experience uncertainty differently depending on context, role, and life circumstances.



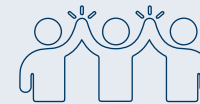
MAKE HUMAN CENTERED LEADERSHIP A MEASURABLE LEADERSHIP OUTCOME

by embedding psychological safety and trust metrics into engagement surveys and holding leaders accountable for team climate, not only business results.



OPERATIONALIZE HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP THROUGH DAILY BEHAVIORS

by establishing regular listening mechanisms (skip-level conversations, open forums, pulse check-ins) and modeling vulnerability and humility (admitting what's not yet known, acknowledging impact on people).



INVEST IN THE HUMAN LEADERSHIP LAYER (MIDDLE AND FIRST-TIME LEADERS)

by prioritizing development for middle managers and first-time leaders (coaching, emotional intelligence, leading through change) and providing tools for them to have difficult conversations, provide impactful feedback, and for managing uncertainty.

TREND 2:

Orchestrating Human-Machine Systems



AI and digital fluency are now foundational to the future of global leadership.

The rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence is reshaping business models and leadership itself. Leaders are racing to boldly shape a meaningful AI agenda that makes sense for their organizations, while also keeping up with their own AI fluency. Elevating what's uniquely human will provide the competitive edge and requires leaders to set a clear vision for how to not only stay ahead of, but to [collaborate with AI and at the same time maintain a human-centric culture](#).

AI fluency is a strategic imperative for the whole enterprise, not a technical niche. Programs that upskill early adopters and spread practices through coaching, gamification, and community (e.g., AI “champion” networks) are embedding capability at scale.

“AI will inevitably bring workforce redundancies; the key is learning how to upskill people and help them thrive in what comes next.”

— Raman C V

AI accelerates decisions, but only humans can accelerate understanding — and the organizations that win will be those that close the widening sensemaking gap. Speed without interpretation becomes chaos disguised as progress.

AI AS A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

Leaders shared concrete examples of [cross-functional teams using AI to improve outcomes](#) — whether in diagnostics, automation, or market responsiveness — while cultivating experimentation and adaptability.

“Governance and responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence to uplift and bring humanity together — rather than a force that divides and makes humanity dumb — is our biggest hope.” — Asha Gupta,

Amway, COO, Singapore

This ethical stance is not peripheral; it's central to trust, legitimacy, and long-term value creation.

BEYOND MANAGING PEOPLE

Leadership is no longer about managing people but orchestrating human-machine systems where judgment, ethics, and connection define success. The future leader is part conductor and part sense-maker.

“Before, you could be a very successful conductor, but now you need to be a jazz band leader — where there is no script. Even if there's no script, you can improvise and make good music out of it.” —

Tian Chong Ng, Singtel CEO, Singapore

That improvisational capacity — guided by clear guardrails — enables teams to harness AI's speed while preserving human insight.

THE AI COLLABORATION CYCLE



NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY WITH COLLABORATION

To orchestrate the human-machine, system leaders must become better at collaborating effectively with AI. The **AI Collaboration Cycle** provides a simple framework for doing just that and requires not only new skills, but more importantly the right mindset. Leaders highlighted many examples where the right approach for AI collaboration led to new solutions and breakthrough approaches. Trust in AI is fundamental and built through individual experience and oversight. Of equal importance is organizational authority that's bound by policy and ethical constraints.

- **Preferences**

Leaders must be intentional about what to collaborate on with AI and why. Setting clear objectives and success criteria is a must. Is the collaboration focused on augmentation, automation, or agency?

- **AI Tools**

Assessing AI tools and capabilities as well as limits relative to the task, while addressing any ethical or privacy concerns is essential to selecting the right tool for the job.

- **Task Communication**

Providing clarity of purpose and expected output has become a science as well as an art and improves through ongoing conversation rather than a question and answer.

- **Assess & Adjust**

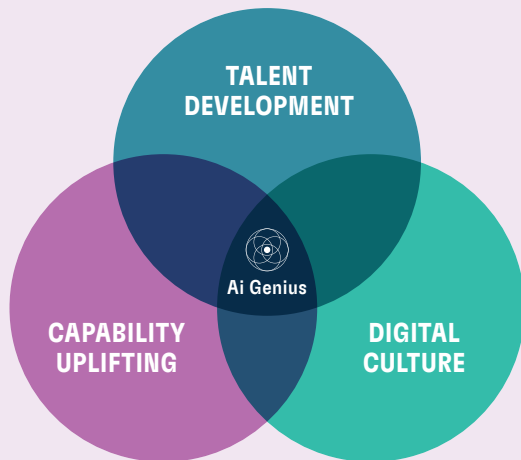
Critiquing AI's output against criteria and taking responsibility for the results is necessary to consolidate learning.

Leaders are well versed in related skills they've used over the year to collaborate effectively with peers and delegate with direct reports. [AI is most effective when leaders actively frame challenges, interpret outputs, and retain ownership of judgment.](#)

AI and digital fluency mark a profound shift in leadership mindset. Success depends on ethical stewardship, collective intelligence, and sensemaking at scale. AI adoption is not merely tool mastery — it's curiosity, adaptability, and conscious learning in motion. By embracing AI with judgment and humanity, global leaders can drive innovation while shaping a more inclusive, ethical, and resilient future.

COMPANY SPOTLIGHT:

AstraZeneca Fuels Systems Thinking and Collaboration With AI Genius



AstraZeneca’s “AI Genius” program stands out as a practical model for embedding digital fluency and AI capability across a global enterprise. Recognizing that digital transformation is not merely a technological shift but an organizational and leadership evolution, AstraZeneca designed the program to uplift capabilities, foster a digital mindset, and democratize innovation at scale.

The initiative began with a clear objective: To get the entire organization comfortable with AI and related technologies. Leadership teams convened in Cambridge to address pain points and set the purpose for the program — fully equipping leaders and employees to use AI in their daily work, and to create a digital culture that would serve as a talent development forum. Early adopters were identified and trained to become “AI Geniuses,” earning bronze, silver, or gold badges based on their proficiency and engagement. These champions then mentored colleagues, driving adoption through peer learning and hands-on experience.

AstraZeneca’s approach was intentionally inclusive and cross-functional. Talent was identified across markets and roles, with the program blueprint adapted for each country. Countries in Asia, for example, demonstrated high levels of AI adoption, sharing best practices with peers in Latin America and the Middle East. This network effect fostered healthy competition and motivation, with gamification elements such as leaderboards and co-pilot licenses for top performers. As Nick Passey described, **“If you demonstrate true interest and are selected as a Champion, then you are assigned a Microsoft 365 Copilot license to play with. One of the requirements is to share in the AI Genius Club how you used Copilot to help you. People found it was one of the**

most exciting programs they joined because it was hands-on to use new tools.”

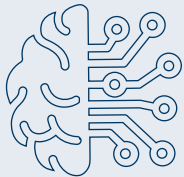
The program’s impact extended beyond technical skills. It encouraged systems thinking and collaborative problem-solving, empowering teams to custom-make solutions for their local markets. For example, AstraZeneca’s catalyst network prioritized lung cancer initiatives, enabling teams to use AI-powered x-ray diagnostics to identify early disease — scanning over 5 million x-rays globally in partnership with start-ups. The program also supported sustainability goals, with each country asked to embrace bold Net Zero milestones and integrate digital solutions into their carbon footprint strategies.

AstraZeneca tracked engagement and impact through usage metrics and annual employee surveys, noting rapid growth in AI tool adoption and increased confidence in digital transformation. The program’s design allowed for continuous refreshment of content and participants, ensuring ongoing relevance and upskilling. Importantly, the initiative addressed concerns about job displacement by fostering open dialogue and developing new programs focused on leadership in the AI era — balancing technological optimization with empathy and human connection.

In summary, AstraZeneca’s AI Genius program exemplifies how intentional investment in people, culture, and systems can accelerate digital fluency and innovation. By empowering leaders and employees to become meaning-makers and orchestrators of human-machine collaboration, AstraZeneca is shaping a future where AI is not just a tool for efficiency, but a catalyst for enduring value and human-centered progress.

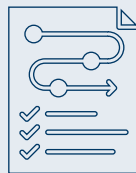
3 ACTIONS

Orchestrating Human-Machine Systems



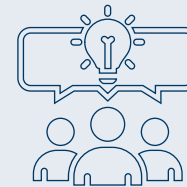
INSTITUTIONALIZE ENTERPRISE-WIDE AI FLUENCY.

Establish a structured AI capability — building agenda that moves beyond technical training to enterprise-wide fluency — combining executive education, AI champion networks, and cross-functional experimentation labs to embed responsible human-machine collaboration at scale.



EMBED ETHICAL GUARDRAILS INTO THE AI COLLABORATION CYCLE.

Codify clear governance principles, decision rights, and accountability frameworks that ensure AI collaboration is grounded in transparency, privacy, and ethical oversight — positioning trust as a strategic differentiator rather than a compliance requirement.



ELEVATE SENSEMAKING AS A CORE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY.

Integrate sensemaking, critical thinking, and human judgment into leadership development programs to close the widening interpretation gap — ensuring AI-driven speed is matched by collective understanding, contextual intelligence, and purposeful action.

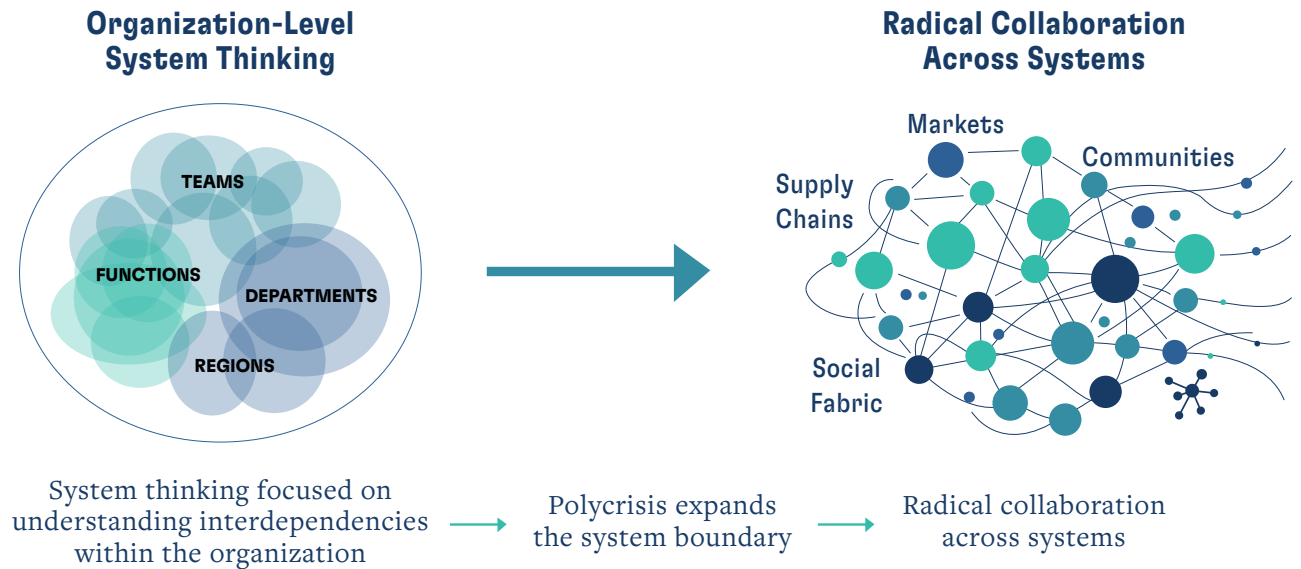
TREND 3:

Radical Collaboration
Across Systems
and Boundaries



Executives repeatedly pointed to systems thinking and radical collaboration as a defining capability for the future of global leadership to solve complex problems that no single organization or leader can tackle alone.

Rather than a diagnostic lens or analytical tool, systems thinking today has evolved (and will continue to evolve) into the ability to understand interdependencies, align incentives across institutions, and mobilize ecosystems toward shared outcomes. In an era of polycrisis, this mindset shifts leadership from “optimizing a single function” to stewarding whole systems: Markets, communities, supply chains, and the social fabric that enables long-term prosperity. Leaders described a world where the “unit of success” is increasingly the network, not the individual enterprise, making relationship-building, collaborative sensemaking, and cross-boundary orchestration core leadership work.



A key theme was the move away from zero-sum assumptions toward shared value creation. Global volatility is pulling organizations in competing directions, local, regional, and geopolitical, and yet the best outcomes emerge when leaders invest in stability through cooperation and a long-term view.

Importantly, radical collaboration isn't an abstract cognitive skill; it's tied to ecosystem action. Leaders play the role of bridge-builders between functions, sectors, and

even opposing perspectives, so that complex challenges can be met with aligned effort. That bridging role becomes central when crises expose fragmentation or erode trust. Many organizations remain trapped in siloed behaviors, with KPIs and incentives that unintentionally reinforce fragmentation. Shifting those system conditions to new ways of modeling, measuring, and rewarding radical collaboration is key to unlocking collective intelligence at scale.



Radical collaboration often appeared through the lens of multi-stakeholder problem-solving and “ecosystem mentality,” especially when leaders spoke about societal divides, inequality, and the need to mobilize partners rather than act alone.

“Having an ecosystem mentality — how do we build a bridge to create a bigger pie? How do we expand what we do to solve bigger problems, support a bigger group of constituents?” — Evelyn Kwek, Managing Director, ASEAN, ANZ

Systems thinking is the capability to integrate diverse actors, policy makers, academia, start-ups, and local delivery partners to close stubborn gaps such as health equity. This perspective treats outcomes as emergent properties of whole systems, where progress depends on aligning incentives, information, and capabilities across institutions, not merely executing within organizational boundaries.

Executives also reinforced this with a focus on pattern recognition and interdependence management: Seeing how decisions propagate through operations, workforce dynamics, and societal expectations. Leaders noted that complexity demands “listening,” creating space for reflection, and learning to navigate dilemmas rather than “fixing” isolated problems.

“It is important to keep listening and have the ability to see patterns, interdependencies, and balance short-term crisis and long-term perspectives.”

— Suzanne van Niekerk-de-Veld, CHRO, ABN AMRO

[Cultivating respect](#) is foundational to building trust, collaboration, and effective system-level leadership.

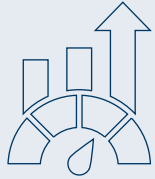
Finally, systems thinking is linked to the evolution of professional disciplines themselves, particularly project and transformation leadership. Interviewees warned that leaders and organizations can become “trapped in linear thinking” at exactly the moment conditions are becoming non-linear and chaotic. The implication is clear: Future-ready leaders must expand perspective, layer scenarios, and ask better questions, treating adaptation and learning as continuous, not episodic.

“We are trapped in linear thinking ... leaders need to enhance systems thinking and layering scenarios ... and ask better questions rather than having all the answers.” — David Garrett,

Senior Executive Advisor to CEO, Project Management Institute

3 ACTIONS

Radical Collaboration Across Systems and Boundaries



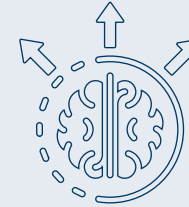
EMBED ECOSYSTEM AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCE METRICS

into strategy, governance, and incentives, so leaders are accountable not only for internal performance, but for strengthening the broader system they operate within.



INTENTIONALLY ORCHESTRATE CROSS-BOUNDARY ECOSYSTEMS

through proactively building and aligning coalitions across sectors, functions, and stakeholders to solve challenges no single organization can address alone.



INSTITUTIONALIZE SCENARIO-BASED, ADAPTIVE LEARNING

replacing linear planning with structured foresight, pattern recognition, and continuous listening practices that enable leaders to balance today's execution with tomorrow's uncertainty.

TREND 4:

Creating a Purposeful Future



Executive interviews revealed a clear consensus: Maintaining clarity of purpose and a long-term vision is essential for future success.

Leaders are shifting away from short-term, profit-driven priorities toward values-based leadership that balances immediate results with sustainable impact. Purpose acts as a stabilizing force, guiding decisions and inspiring teams amid complexity.

“The purpose of the organization gets stronger when the world around us gets more challenging.”

— Andreas Jorgensen, Managing Director, Organon

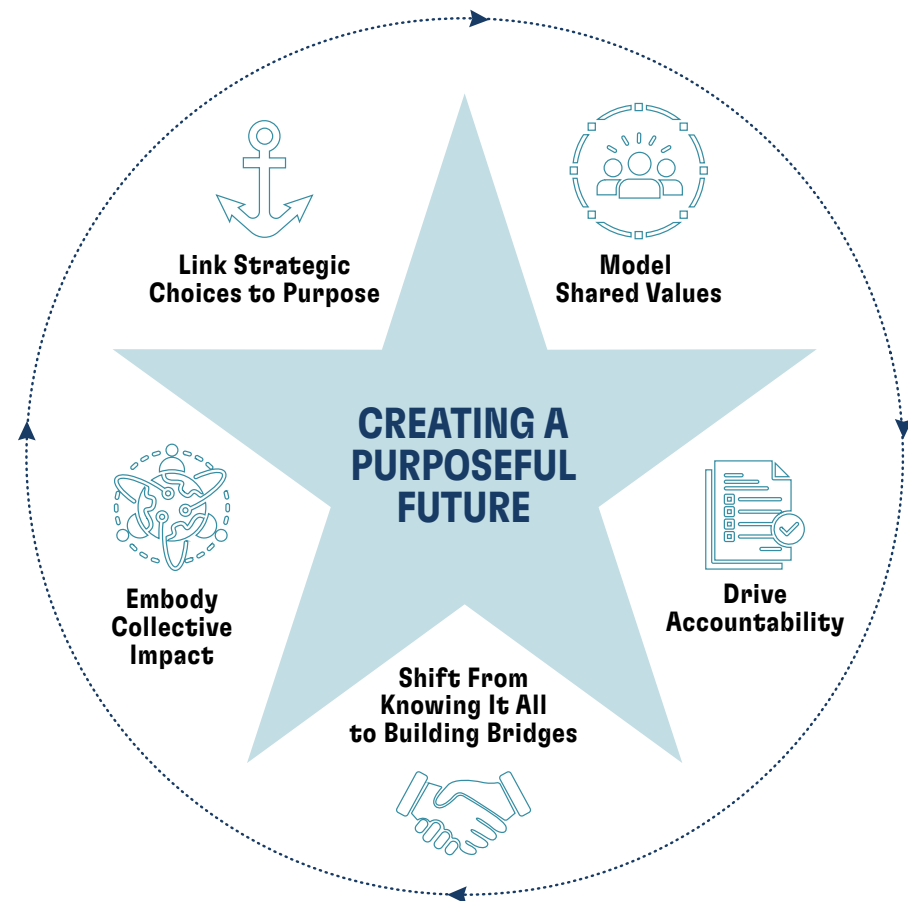
[A clear mission anchors organizations in times of chaos.](#)

A strong sense of purpose serves as a **“North Star,”** [orienting organizations through uncertainty](#). When leaders articulate and embody this purpose, they rally teams, inspire resilience, and build trust among employees, customers, and communities. Purpose-driven leadership fosters consistency and adaptability, enabling organizations to navigate interconnected crises that amplify each other’s impact — what many described as polycrisis.

An executive noted that purpose-driven leadership builds trust across boundaries.

“It’s about shifting from ‘knowing it all’ to becoming a leader that connects and builds bridges.”

— Suzanne van Niekerk-de-Veld, CHRO ABN AMRO



This perspective underscores the importance of flexible, values-based leadership in times of rapid change.

Managing short-termism emerged as a dominant theme. Critics point out that the prevailing focus on quarterly results at the expense of a longer-term vision can blind organizations to looming risks and opportunities. Leaders who prioritize societal and ethical goals tend to make decisions that endure.

“There is a need to act now for the long term and think about the right long-term values: Peace, human decency rather than maximizing short-term financial gain.”

— Anca Vasilescu, Managing Director, Accenture APAC

Integrity, sustainability, and broader human values must guide leadership decisions, building credibility and public trust — especially as stakeholders and younger generations expect businesses to contribute positively to society. Leaders from Europe highlighted [ethical leadership and long-term value creation](#) beyond shareholder returns, while Asia-Pacific leaders emphasized aligning decisions to a larger purpose for resilience amid rapid change.

Leaders also distinguished between **individual legacy and collective impact**, embracing a mindset that values long-term societal wellbeing as integral to business success.

“Preparing the next generation of leaders requires a shift toward greater accountability, collective thinking, and a long-term view of value creation across industries. Sustainable success depends on our ability to think beyond individual mandates and act in ways that serve the broader systems we are all part of.” — Lenka Pincot, Chief of Staff to the CEO, PMI

Purpose-driven efforts create a virtuous cycle: They boost engagement and trust, reinforcing long-term viability and positive legacy. Interviewees agreed that [inclusive](#), purpose-led approaches help balance short-term actions with long-term goals, ensuring that immediate actions do not derail the broader vision.

Insights from various events held by CCL and the ILA, where global leaders convened to discuss the future of global leadership, further reinforced these themes. Global experts argued that in an age of compounding crises, [clear purpose and strong values are non-negotiable](#).

“In polycrisis, decisions cannot be made based on one crisis. The only way out is to have a culture based on shared values and purpose.” — Sunil Puri, Stewardship Asia Centre

Purpose and vision are practical necessities for guiding organizations through complexity.

In summary, long-term purpose and vision represent a profound evolution in leadership mindset. Purpose anchors organizations on what truly matters amid turbulence. Leaders are redefining success in terms of lasting positive impact, ethical stewardship, and enduring mission. Clarity of purpose drives strategy, core values act as guardrails, and every decision is weighed against its long-term implications for stakeholders and society.

Leaders who act as stewards of systems rather than owners of outcomes will be best positioned to navigate uncertainty and create lasting impact. By upholding a long-term purpose and vision, today’s global leaders will not only weather current storms but steer their organizations — and perhaps our broader world — toward a more sustainable, equitable future.

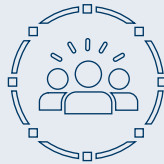
3 ACTIONS

Creating a Purposeful Future



EXPLICITLY ANCHOR STRATEGIC CHOICES AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO PURPOSE

, creating stability, coherence, and trust amid disruption.



CONSISTENTLY MODEL CORE VALUES

under pressure to strengthen resilience, credibility, and sustainable performance.



SHIFT FROM INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP LEGACY TO COLLECTIVE IMPACT

by co-creating a shared vision, aligning across ecosystems, distributing decision-making, empowering teams, and rewarding collaboration over individual achievement.

TREND 5:

Cultivating Tomorrow's Leaders Today



As global complexity accelerates, talent development is no longer a support function, it's a [strategic leadership responsibility](#).

Across the world, there's a growing recognition that organizations cannot navigate uncertainty, technological disruption, or talent scarcity without intentionally building future-ready capabilities.

Rather than focusing solely on formal training programs, we need to view [development as an ecosystem](#), one that blends learning, exposure, experience, and mindset. Considering the limitations of traditional, classroom-based development and a shift toward more flexible, embedded approaches that allow people to learn in the flow of work is the need of the hour.

In technology-forward and fast-changing environments, emphasis on upskilling and reskilling, particularly in areas such as digital fluency, AI literacy, and systems thinking is indispensable.

However, technical capability alone is insufficient. The future demands leaders who can learn continuously, adapt quickly, and integrate human judgment with data-driven insight.

“Right now there’s a significant focus on building AI capability — rolling out tools leaders can use internally and with customers. But it has to enhance human thinking, not replace it.”

— Andreas Jorgensen, Managing Director,
Asia Pacific, Organon

Across interviews, leaders described how crises such as COVID-19 fundamentally shifted mindsets around learning. Virtual learning, job rotations, and cross-functional exposure, once viewed with skepticism, became essential mechanisms for reaching broader audiences and accelerating development. These shifts reveal a deeper truth: Development works best when individuals own it.

“We can provide platforms and opportunities, but learning has to come from inside. Development is something leaders and employees must take ownership of.”

— Suha Isaaq,
Head of Training Department





[Talent development is a retention and engagement lever](#), particularly for younger generations who expect growth, flexibility, and purpose. Organizations that fail to invest in development risk losing talent not because of compensation, but because people no longer see a future for themselves.

Another recurring theme is the importance of exposure-based development. Practices such as executive shadowing, mentoring, and job rotations are powerful ways to accelerate readiness and broaden perspective.

“Executive shadowing and job rotations are helping top talent learn from leaders and prepare for the future — far more than formal programs alone.” —

Horng Shya Chua, Managing Director, Singapore, Oracle

Cautioning ourselves against treating talent development as episodic, we need to pivot to embed learning into organizational DNA, normalizing experimentation, reflection, and continuous improvement. In a polycrisis world, the ability to learn faster than the environment changes may be the [most critical leadership capability](#) of all.

The future of global leadership depends on how intentionally organizations develop their people today. Talent development is no longer about preparing individuals for the next role, it's about preparing organizations for an uncertain future.

COMPANY SPOTLIGHT:

Project Management Institute: Stepping Up To Deliver M.O.R.E.

M MANAGE PERCEPTIONS

O OWN PROJECT SUCCESS BEYOND PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

R RELENTLESSLY REASSESS PROJECT PARAMETERS

E EXPAND PERSPECTIVE

Fundamentally, M.O.R.E. is about challenging project professionals worldwide to raise standards, expand accountability, and increase their impact.

The future of global leadership will be defined by the strength of leaders who cultivate resilient systems and lead with human-centered purpose, capable of navigating complexity with clarity, accountability, and long-term vision.

The Project Management Institute (PMI) provides a compelling illustration of how a global organization can embody these emerging capabilities. Through deep inquiry into PMI's leadership practices — such as those captured in [M.O.R.E.](#), their vision for the project profession — it becomes clear that PMI is intentionally positioning itself to thrive in an era marked by disruption, interconnected risks, and rising societal expectations.

Through our research, CCL describes the current environment as one of polycrisis, characterized by “the overlapping of multiple crises that amplify each other's impact.” In such a landscape, traditional notions of stability no longer apply. **Lenka Pincot, PMI Chief of Staff to the CEO**, explained in a recent interview, “*future stability comes with purpose*,” emphasizing that clarity of intent has become the most reliable anchor for navigating uncertainty. PMI's investment in systems thinking reinforces this orientation. Pincot spoke about the need to maintain “system equilibrium,” shifting away from reactive firefighting and toward a broader ecosystem view that helps the organization — and its stakeholders — avoid oscillating with each disruption. This approach reflects a conscious move toward collective accountability, highlighting the necessity of a shift “from individual to collective responsibility,” particularly in meeting sustainability challenges that impact every part of the PMI community.

In parallel, PMI is redefining value creation. **Dave Garrett, PMI's Senior Advisor to the CEO**, described the organization's evolution as “shifting from an execution mindset to a value mindset” where decisions rely on research, continuous learning, and evidence rather than legacy assumptions. Garrett indicated that PMI's vision for the profession, [M.O.R.E.](#), operationalizes this shift: Where leaders must manage expectations, take ownership of outcomes, continually reassess value, and expand perspective to include social good. He notes, projects that include sustainability goals “*double the chances of perceived success.*” This point reinforces that impact and responsibility are now inseparable from leadership effectiveness.

Both executives also frame agility as a non-negotiable capability. According to Garrett organizations become “*most agile during crises*” when rules relax and reassessment accelerates. Pincot, similarly, emphasizes the need for leaders to “move at two speeds” — acting decisively in the short term while sustaining long-term vision. Their views converge on the idea that agility is not reactive improvisation, but disciplined responsiveness grounded in purpose, data, and continuous learning. PMI is intentionally building this capability into its culture, balancing immediate response with long-term vision and structural adaptation.

PMI's commitment to talent development positions the organization to meet the future head on. During the interviews, the executives highlighted the importance of systems literacy, technology fluency, generational adaptability, and ongoing skill renewal as essential for navigating emerging mega projects and sustainability demands. Through these integrated practices, PMI exemplifies a leadership model that is purpose-driven, anticipatory, ecosystem aware, digitally fluent, and rooted in human connection.

3 ACTIONS

Cultivating Tomorrow's Leaders Today



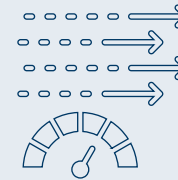
MAKE TALENT DEVELOPMENT A LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

Hold people leaders accountable for building future capability, not just delivering current results by tracking measures such as percentage of critical roles with ready successors, internal mobility / internal fill rate, bench strength for key positions, and percentage of employees with active development plans.



SHIFT FROM TRAINING PROGRAMS TO DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Systematically embed exposure and stretch into the flow of work by considering indices such as percentage of employees in stretch or cross-functional assignments, number of job rotations / project-based learning experiences, and participation in cross-functional or strategic initiatives.



BUILD WORKFORCE LEARNING VELOCITY

Track and accelerate how quickly the organization builds critical future skills by focusing on measures such as percentage of workforce upskilled in priority capabilities (AI, digital, systems thinking), learning platform engagement and completion rates, and time to skill proficiency for critical capabilities.

THE WAY FORWARD

1



Maximizing the Human Advantage

- Human-centered leadership is no longer optional; it's foundational for trust and resilience.
- Authenticity and fairness matter more than authority in times of uncertainty.
- Leaders who put people first enable performance, not compromise it.

2



Orchestrating Human-Machine Systems

- Leaders must turn AI-driven speed into clear understanding and better decisions — not just more information.
- Discernment, wisdom, and ethical foresight must outpace technological change.
- Leaders must actively orchestrate human-AI systems while designing cultures that protect empathy, inclusion, and human meaning.

3



Radical Collaboration Across Systems and Boundaries

- Success is defined at the system level — not just within a single team or organization — balancing short-term results with long-term impact.
- Strong leadership shows up in the ability to build bridges across teams, organizations, and sectors to solve shared challenges.
- In a polycrisis world, effectiveness depends on a learning mindset — using scenario thinking to stay flexible, think ahead, and adapt as things change.

4



Creating a Purposeful Future

- A clear, authentic purpose serves as a north star, anchoring direction amid uncertainty.
- Leaders must move beyond short-term gains toward values-based decisions that build trust, resilience, and long-term impact.
- A shared vision drives collective impact and aligns diverse stakeholders around common goals.

5



Cultivating Tomorrow's Leaders Today

- Talent development is a strategic leadership priority, not an HR initiative.
- Learning must be continuous, owned by individuals, and embedded in daily work.
- Exposure, experience, and adaptability matter as much as formal training.

BUILD WITH US

The trends outlined in this report are not emerging possibilities, but present realities reshaping what leadership requires.

Across regions, industries, and contexts, one message is clear: **The future of leadership will be defined by the ability to lead human, technological, and organizational systems through sustained uncertainty.**

What distinguishes impactful leadership now is not whether we acknowledge these shifts, but whether we act on them intentionally and at scale.

This means:

- 1. Elevating** human-centered leadership as a driver of performance, not a cultural aspiration.
- 2. Building** fluency in human-machine collaboration grounded in ethics and judgment.
- 3. Leading** beyond boundaries to shape systems, not just organizations.
- 4. Anchoring** decisions in purpose to navigate competing pressures.
- 5. Establishing** talent development as a core leadership responsibility, not a support function.

Together, these 5 trends represent a fundamental rewiring of leadership and a call for organizations to build something different.

This requires more than isolated programs or one-time coaching. It demands an integrated approach that connects leadership development to business strategy by aligning culture, systems, and expectations in a way that scales behavior change across boundaries.

The organizations that will lead the future will invest in leadership deliberately, systemically, and continuously.

START TODAY.

RELATED RESOURCES:

[Leadership in Polycrisis: Essential Capabilities for Navigating Global Challenges](#)

[Moving Beyond the Why: 4 Knowledge Shifts for Global Leaders](#)

[Reinvention Through Disruption: Moving from Perpetual Crisis to Collective Adaptability](#)

[Trust — The Invisible Infrastructure of AI Transformation](#)

[What AI Reveals About Being Human](#)

WEBINARS:

[Beyond Boundaries: Unlocking Collective Leadership](#)

[Building Leaders at Scale: Why Core Leadership Skills Come First](#)

[Leading Through Radical Uncertainty](#)

PODCASTS:

[4 Knowledge Shifts for Global Leaders with Elisa Mallis and Dr. Cynthia Cherney](#)

[Leading with Care and Purpose with Raj Sisodia and Sudhanshu Palsule](#)

RELATED SOLUTIONS:

[Organizational Leadership](#)

[Leadership & AI](#)

[Executive Coaching](#)

[CCL Passport](#)

RESEARCH TEAM



Lynn Collins BSc

Lynn Collins is the Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Center for Creative Leadership, within Research, Innovation and New Content Creation (RINCC). With more than 25 years of global leadership development experience, she builds strategic collaborations that advance innovation and extend the reach of CCL's research. Lynn specializes in cross-sector strategy, innovation, and future-focused leadership.



Anand Chandrasekar PhD

Anand Chandrasekar is a seasoned facilitator with deep expertise in leadership development, experiential learning, impact evaluation and leadership research. Over the years, Anand has designed and delivered high-impact programs across APAC in multiple sectors including telecom, manufacturing, banking, consulting, pharmaceuticals, and education. With a deep passion to assist people in their development journeys, Anand's facilitation, coaching, and research work lies at the intersection of 3 broad domains — leadership development, positive psychology, and Indian psychology.



Gihan Abuelela DBA

Gihan Abuelela is a Human Capital Development Architect and Applied Research Scientist with over 23 years of experience shaping leadership and talent development across the Middle East. Her work sits at the intersection of research and practice, driven by a deep passion for translating evidence-based insights into meaningful, real-world leadership solutions. She has partnered with senior leaders and executive teams across sectors to design transformative learning journeys that align with strategic priorities and future workforce needs. Gihan is committed to advancing human-centered leadership by bridging rigorous research with impactful solution design that moves organizations forward.



Sol Bukin MS

Sol Bukin is an Applied Research Associate at the Center for Creative Leadership. She supports the design, execution, and dissemination of applied research studies that inform strategic decisions, enhance client offerings, and strengthen thought leadership. She also contributes expertise in content creation, ensuring research activities are rigorous, relevant, and immediately usable by program, product, and client-facing teams.



Mike Hardy CMG OBE

Mike Hardy CMG OBE is a distinguished scholar and practitioner of public leadership and intercultural dialogue. He is the Professor and Chair of Intercultural Relations at Coventry University, where he was the founding Director of the Centre for Peace and Security and the Public Leadership Lab. In these roles, he has advanced research and practice in leadership, community cohesion, and peacebuilding. He was Board Chair of the International Leadership Association from 2018-26 and works to promote intercultural understanding, and responsible, impactful public leadership in times of polycrisis.



Elisa Mallis MA, MEd

With over 20 years of experience as a business leader with a focus on transformational change and human capital strategy, Elisa Mallis oversees CCL's Leadership Research, Innovation, and Knowledge Management Teams, fostering a culture of mission-focused innovation, experimentation, and dissemination of research. Elisa holds an MA in Organization Development and an MEd in Counselling Psychology from Columbia University. She also currently serves as Chair of the Board of Governors for the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore.

REFERENCES

- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *How AI Helps Leaders Clarify Their Key Leadership Challenge*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/ai-key-leadership-challenge-to-grow-learning-impact>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *The Power of Both: Integrating Human Expertise & AI in Leadership Development*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/ai-in-leadership-development-programs>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *What Is Authentic Leadership, and Why Does It Matter?* <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/authenticity-1-idea-3-facts-5-tips>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *Collective Sensemaking in an Environment of Constant Disruption*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/collective-problem-solving-sensemaking-steps-for-leadership-teams>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *Cultivate a Learning Culture Within Your Organization*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/cultivate-and-sustain-a-learning-culture-within-your-organization>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *Essential Soft Skills To Lead Through AI Transformation*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/essential-soft-skills-to-lead-through-ai-transformation>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *Windows for Transformation: Seizing Opportunity in Polycrisis*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/how-organizations-transform-during-polycrisis>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (n.d.). *Human-Centered Leadership in Times of Transformation* (Webinar). <https://www.ccl.org/webinars/human-centered-leadership-in-times-of-transformation>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2024). *How Leadership Development Benefits Organizations & Creates Competitive Advantage* (White paper). <https://www.ccl.org/articles/white-papers/leadership-development-powers-engagement-retention>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2024). *Leadership in Polycrisis: Essential Capabilities for Navigating Global Challenges*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/leadership-in-polycrisis>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (n.d.). *Why Leadership, Why Now*. <https://www.ccl.org/guides/ld-budgets>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *Reinvention Through Disruption*. <https://www.ccl.org/guides/perpetual-crisis-leadership-in-disruption>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *Purpose in Leadership: Why and How*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/purpose-in-leadership-why-how>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *Future-Proof Your Organization by Scaling Leadership Development*. (White paper). <https://www.ccl.org/articles/white-papers/scaling-leadership-development>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *The Power of Respect*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/the-power-of-respect>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2025). *Inclusive Leadership: Steps to Take to Get It Right*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/when-inclusive-leadership-goes-wrong-and-how-to-get-it-right>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (2026). *Why Leadership Is Important for Organizational AI Maturity*. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/why-dac-is-important-for-leveraging-ai>
- Center for Creative Leadership. (n.d.). *Why Organizations Should Encourage Leadership Purpose* (Webinar). <https://www.ccl.org/webinars/why-organizations-should-encourage-leadership-purpose>
- Edelman. (2025). *2025 Edelman Trust Barometer*. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2025/trust-barometer>
- Edelman. (2025). *2025 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report*. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2025-01/2025%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report_01.23.25.pdf
- Project Management Institute. (n.d.). *Delivering More: Insights for Project Leaders*. <https://www.pmi.org/learning/delivering-more>
- Russell Reynolds Associates. (2025). *Global Leadership Monitor*. <https://www.russellreynolds.com/en/insights/reports-surveys/global-leadership-monitor>
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2024). *Global Trade Update: December 2024*. <https://unctad.org/publication/global-trade-update-december-2024>



At the Center for Creative Leadership, our drive to create a ripple effect of positive change underpins everything we do. For 50+ years, we've pioneered leadership development solutions for everyone from frontline workers to global CEOs. Consistently ranked among the world's top providers of executive education, our research-based programs and solutions inspire individuals in organizations across the world — including ⅔ of the Fortune 1000 — to ignite remarkable transformations.

ccl.org



At the International Leadership Association (ILA), we are dedicated to advancing the study and practice of leadership for a better world. As a global network of scholars, practitioners, and organizations, we bring together diverse perspectives to generate meaningful dialogue, share cutting-edge research, and foster leadership that is ethical, inclusive, and impactful. Through our conferences, publications, and collaborative initiatives, we connect individuals and institutions across sectors and geographies to elevate leadership thinking and drive positive global change.

ilaglobalnetwork.org