



THE
LEADERSHIP
JOURNEY:
INSIGHTS
INTO
EFFECTIVE
LEADERSHIP
PROGRESSION

An international
research report

Steph Noble, Managing R&D Consultant
Emily Goldsack, Research Consultant
Poppy Boothroyd, Senior R&D Consultant

Foreword

In 2021, Talogy conducted a large-scale international research study to understand how expectations about leadership were evolving and what effective leadership should look like in the future world of work.

Our analysis of data in this study drew on three different perspectives (organizations, leaders, and employees). Research themes that emerged were strongly aligned across the three perspectives. These themes highlighted how leadership expectations were shifting, emphasizing the need for more human-centered, humble leaders who can operate effectively in hybrid working contexts and drive sustainable success for both their organization and the people they lead.

This international study and our ongoing research program, as well as our extensive experience partnering with organizations to deliver leadership selection, development, and coaching, have informed the development of Talogy's InView Leadership framework (see [Appendix 2](#)). The framework highlights six key leadership qualities that leaders need to navigate according to the contextual demands they face. Building on the results from our 2021 research, it also acknowledges the fundamental importance of a leader's identity, in terms of why and how they want to lead, and their emotional intelligence, required for effective leadership.

Enabling and supporting effective leadership progression is a core concern for many organizations and necessary for continuity of strategy and operational effectiveness. While we know that individuals at different levels of leadership face different demands, we found only limited academic research on this topic. Having developed our leadership framework, we wanted to explore in more depth what leadership behaviors, challenges, and impact looks like and how it differs across leadership levels. We also wanted to understand how organizations are currently supporting their leaders to transition between levels and gather insights into how to best prepare leaders to be effective in their current and subsequent leadership roles.

//

Enabling and supporting effective leadership progression is a core concern for many organizations and necessary for continuity of strategy and operational effectiveness.

//

This latest international research report is intended to explore these questions in detail, drawing again on multiple perspectives to provide a broad view. Our aim is to provide insights that will help organizations and individual leaders to prepare for and navigate leadership transitions effectively. Strengthening leadership pipelines will benefit organizations as well as improve employee experience, and we hope this research points the way forward.



Dan Hughes
Senior Director of R&D

Introduction

In this research report, we set out to explore the important topic of leadership transitions – from that first step into leadership, to progression into more senior leadership roles.

All organizations need to have a healthy leadership pipeline, and ensuring their leaders successfully transition across levels plays a critical role.

Following a review of existing literature, it was evident that leaders at different levels face unique challenges that require distinct approaches to resolve them¹. If we can understand what is required of leaders at each leadership level, this will provide valuable insight into how organizations can best prepare and support leaders on their journey through the leadership pipeline. Supporting leaders to develop and prepare for leadership transitions will increase overall leadership effectiveness and enhance organizational performance².

Our research focused on three broad and distinct levels of leadership: **First-level**, **mid-level**, and **senior leaders**. Participants involved in the research were provided with the following definitions.

How we define leadership levels

First-level leader

Typically managing a team within a business function or department; responsible for tactical delivery of team and business objectives.

Mid-level leader

Generally, a ‘leader of leaders’ with direct reports who are managing their own teams; typically managing a function within a business division; responsible for functional strategy and delivery.

Senior leader

Generally leading a major division, geographical region, or part of the business, and/or a member of the executive leadership team; typically leads a sizable team spanning a range of business functions or departments; responsible for overall organizational strategy and success.



Moving to higher levels of responsibility can be challenging for leaders and many find it hard to adapt. Success at one level does not always predict success at the next. Understanding the particular challenges associated with leadership transitions enables organizations to provide support so leaders maintain performance as they progress.



Jill Pennington
Senior Director
Talent Consulting Solutions



Research themes

1 The foundations of effective leadership page 9

- How effective are leaders currently?
- What impact do leaders have?
- How important is human-centered leadership?

2 Leadership attributes across levels page 17

- What behaviors should leaders demonstrate at each level?
- How important are the Talogy InView Leadership™ qualities at each level?
- How effective are leaders at demonstrating these qualities at each level?

3 Navigating leadership transitions page 33

- What challenges do leaders face at each level?
- How can leaders transition successfully?
- How prepared are leaders for their next leadership transition?

4 Enhancing the leadership pipeline – ensuring future success page 53

- How do organizations currently develop their leaders at each level?
- How useful are different development interventions for leaders at each level?
- What can organizations do to ensure a strong leadership pipeline?

Research perspectives

We collected data from four perspectives: Employees, leaders, the organization, and existing scientific research.

We took a mixed-methods approach collecting qualitative and quantitative data to allow for both summary statistics and rich contextual information.



We collected the perspectives of employees across three leadership levels: First-level, mid-level and senior, via an online survey. **The employee sample** was taken from different organizations across 47 countries, spanning a variety of jobs, sectors, and organization sizes.

N=1412

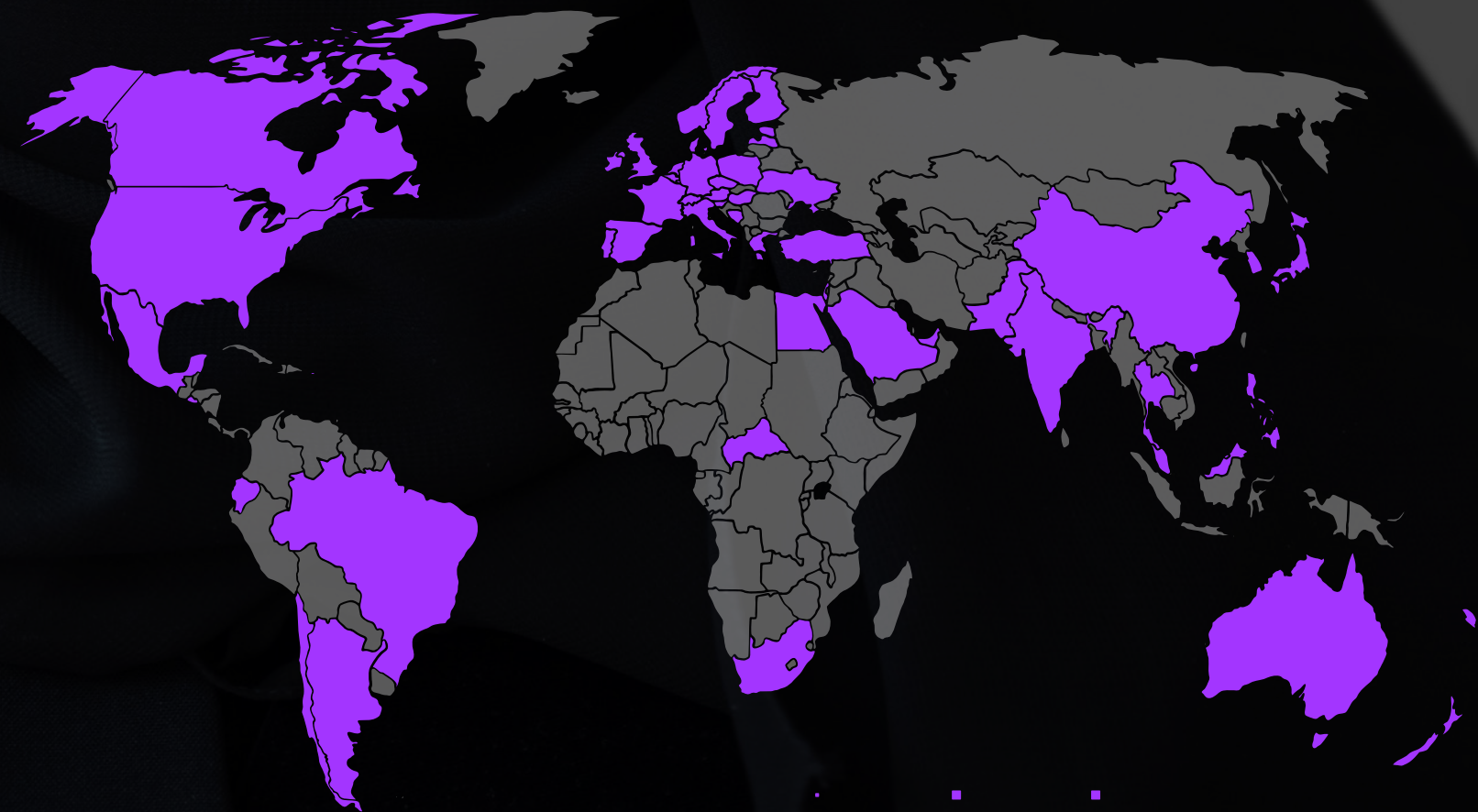
We conducted structured, in-depth interviews with senior representatives from people operations departments within various international organizations. **The organization sample** was from 19 countries and spanned a variety of sectors and organizational sizes.

N=40

We collected the perspectives of leaders across three leadership levels: First-level, mid-level and senior, via an online survey. **The leader sample** was taken from different organizations across 42 countries, spanning a variety of jobs, sectors, and organization sizes.

N=821

We conducted an in-depth review of the latest **scientific research** on leadership transitions and behaviors across different leadership levels.



Key insights

Human-centered leadership is essential for success at all leadership levels.

Whilst effective leadership has always been associated with the ability to engage employees and make them feel trusted and appreciated, our research indicates that human-centered leadership is even more important. It is becoming more desired by employees, is being encouraged by organizations, and has received significant recognition from the leaders we have surveyed internationally. When leaders effectively implement this approach employee performance, engagement, and wellbeing are improved, and these outcomes can all be closely linked to overall organizational performance.

Leadership at each level brings new challenges which require a shift in mindset and behavior.

Organizations must consider the challenges leaders face at each leadership level and recognize the importance of leaders developing new behaviors to overcome these challenges.

Taking the first step into leadership requires an initial mindset shift, learning to balance personal productivity with leadership responsibilities. Many leaders at this level receive generic leadership training and may be unaware of the specific behavioral changes needed.

The transition between first and mid-level leadership attracts the least organizational attention. However, the range of demands facing mid-level leaders is extensive, requiring both strategic and operational capabilities.

Following this, the transition to senior leadership requires a fundamental mindset shift, learning new skills, and building upon behavior developed at previous leadership levels to enable strategic thinking and successful organizational leadership.

Our research provides organizations with an understanding of the challenges typically faced by leaders as they progress, to enable them to consider how best to support the leadership journey.

The top leadership behaviors that enhance employee performance, as reported by employees themselves, are:

- 1 Supportive
- 2 Gives autonomy
- 3 Communicates well
- 4 Provides constructive feedback
- 5 Trusts people

80% of leaders at all levels felt that they had to change their behavior when transitioning to their current level.



The right content must be pitched at the right level.

Given each leadership level brings new challenges, this emphasizes the need for leadership development to be tailored to help leaders navigate the specific demands they will face at their particular level. Therefore, we explored the importance and effectiveness of leadership qualities at each level to ensure organizations are supporting leaders to develop the right behaviors and attributes. All levels of leaders were aligned on the view that connecting with and valuing people are essential to successful leadership. Certain qualities such as 'Inspiring purpose', although still important, were seen as slightly less of a priority in comparison, especially across lower leadership levels. However, 'Inspiring purpose' was highlighted by senior leaders as the most essential quality. The balance of focus for existing leadership development programs may need to shift accordingly, and our research can guide organizations when reviewing their current development content to ensure it reflects expectations of leadership today.

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

Leaders face challenges and responsibilities with increasing complexity as they progress through the leadership pipeline. Supporting and preparing leaders for their new role is crucial, especially with senior level transitions. This was highlighted as the most difficult transition by two-thirds of the organizations that we interviewed. At a senior level, challenges are broader in focus and more strategic, but center on the same general themes of communication, delegation, and relationship management that are also critical at the first and mid-level. When transitioning to the next leadership level, leaders must be willing to prepare for and grow into their new role and organizations must be willing to provide guidance and support them in this journey.

More leadership development should be made available.

From all perspectives (the organization, leaders themselves, and employees), leadership development was recognized as important. The need for additional development interventions was visible across all leadership levels. A combination of methods is recommended to support leaders in their development, with different focus and content required based on leadership level. Organizations acknowledged the value of providing appropriate guidance and support across all leadership levels. However, this is not always achievable due to resource constraints. Organizations are not setting leaders up for success if they are not providing them opportunities to build the additional skills and develop the mindset needed at each level.

58% of senior leaders felt Inspiring purpose is *essential* for their leadership level compared to **33% of mid-level leaders**, and **29% first-level**.

Only 38% of leaders feel fully prepared to move to the next level of leadership.

Only 36% of leaders surveyed received formal leadership development when they moved to their current leadership level.

1 The foundations of effective leadership

Firstly, we explored how employees perceive the effectiveness of leadership at each leadership level, as well as the influence that leadership behavior can have on them.

It is important for organizations to recognize how their leaders are currently performing and the impact they are having on employees to determine the level of input or intervention required from them. This section aims to build a broad awareness of leaders' current performance and support organizations in understanding the need for leaders to demonstrate positive behaviors at all leadership levels.

We asked employees to provide us with their perspective to help us explore the following questions:

- How effective are leaders currently?
- What impact do leaders have?
- How important is human-centered leadership?

Current leadership effectiveness

Employees were asked to rate the effectiveness of their direct leader, either at the first, mid, or senior level.

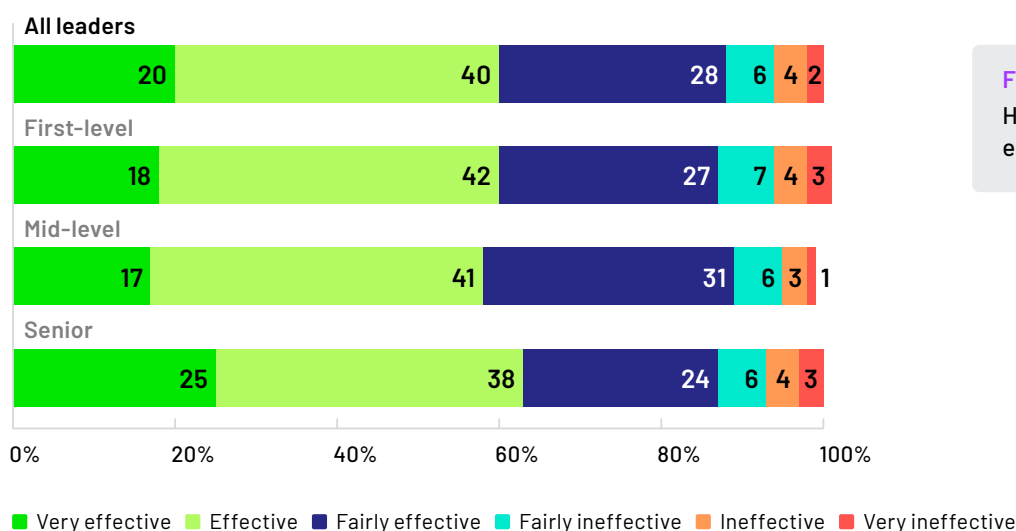


Figure 1.1

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your leader?

The results identified just over half of all leadership groups were viewed by employees as *Very effective* or *Effective*. Levels of effectiveness were rated similarly across all leadership levels.

This is a starting point for organizations to understand how their leaders are currently performing from the employee perspective and demonstrates that there is an opportunity for leadership effectiveness to be improved across all levels. This is a very important insight when considering the extent to which a leader’s effectiveness can impact employee outcomes.

Understanding leadership impact

Employees were asked to determine the extent to which their leader has a direct effect on their performance, engagement, and wellbeing.

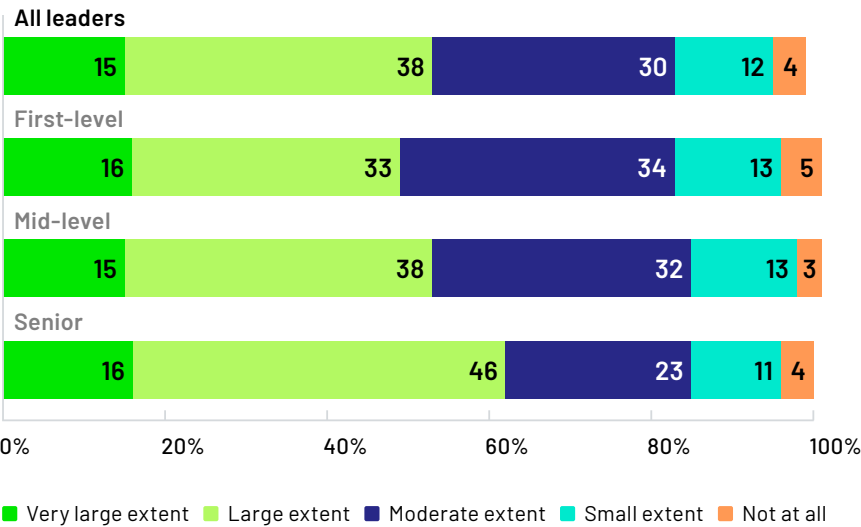


Figure 1.2
To what extent does your leader’s behavior positively affect your work performance?

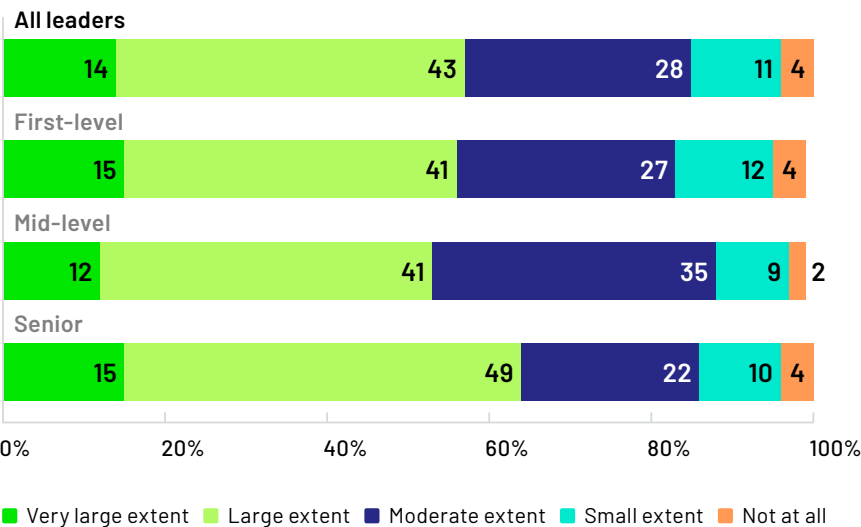


Figure 1.3
To what extent does your leader’s behavior positively affect your work engagement?

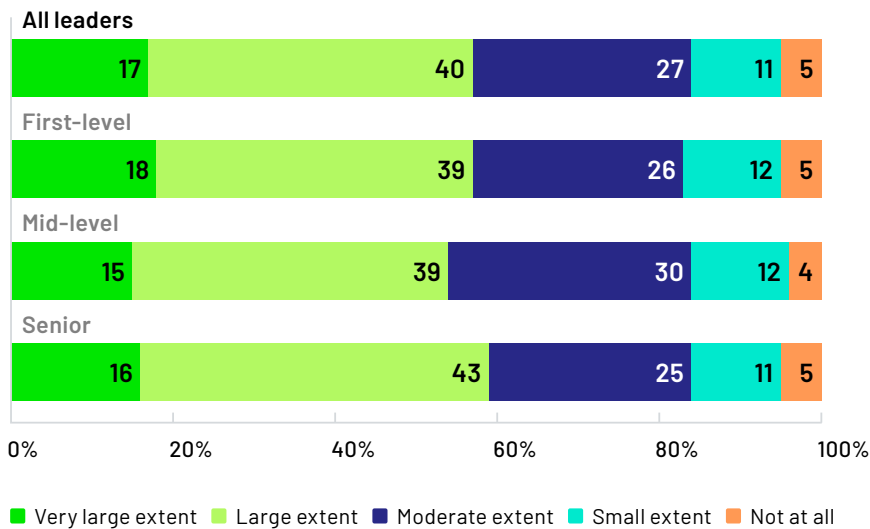


Figure 1.4

To what extent does your leader's behavior positively affect your wellbeing at work?

Across all leadership levels, employees indicated their leaders positively affected their own performance, engagement, and wellbeing to some extent. This is perhaps not a surprise, but it serves to underline the direct impact that leaders have on employees.

In addition, results indicate that senior leaders positively affect their direct employees' work performance, engagement, and wellbeing to a slightly larger extent than leaders at other levels. This suggests they may have more direct influence on these aspects of employee outcomes.

Human-centered leadership

To engage employees and maximize performance, leaders must value the unique talents and contributions of each individual. This human-centered leadership style requires a leader to demonstrate behaviors that make each employee feel trusted, appreciated, and heard¹. It requires authenticity and openness and works together with the principles of emotional intelligence (EI) and fundamentals of identity. Leaders should understand and live by their own values while also managing their personality and behavior through EI.

In our 2021 research, *Leading in the Future World of Work*², we explored **how employees need to feel** to perform at their best. To expand on this further, in this research we investigated **how leaders make employees feel**. We know what is required of our leaders but are they creating the best possible climate for employees to perform and thrive at work?

Employees were presented with preset lists of positive and negative feeling descriptors. They were asked to indicate the extent to which their direct leader made them feel that way.

Across all leadership levels to a *Very large* or *Large* extent:

53% of employees felt that what their leader does positively affects their work performance.

57% of employees felt that their leader's behavior positively affects their work engagement.

57% of employees felt that their leader's behavior positively affects their wellbeing at work.



We need leaders with a more humanistic approach.



Employee reporting to first-level leader
Education sector

Results showed that, the most common positive feelings (i.e. responses of *Always, Usually, or Often*), were as follows:

Employees reporting to first-level leaders feel:

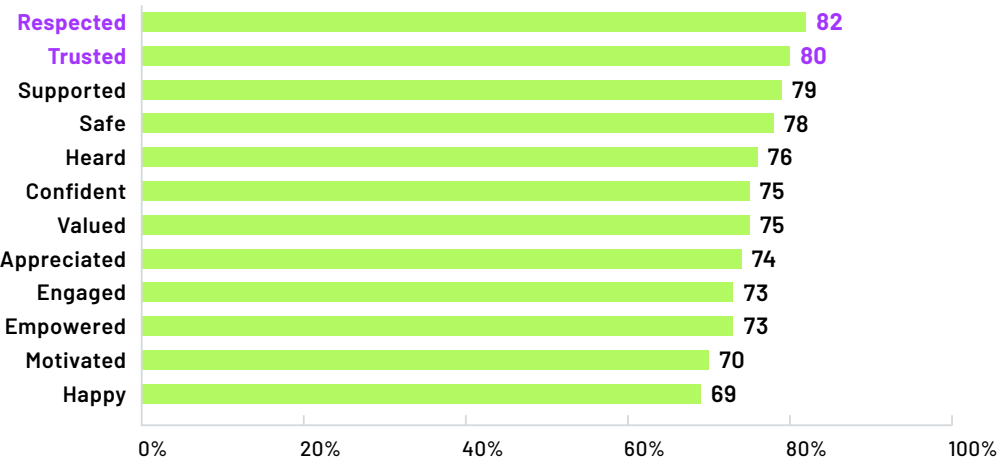
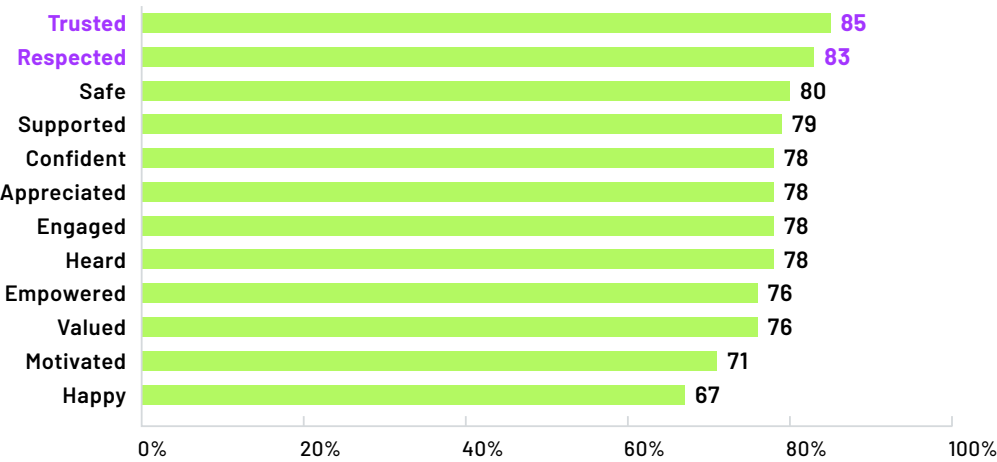
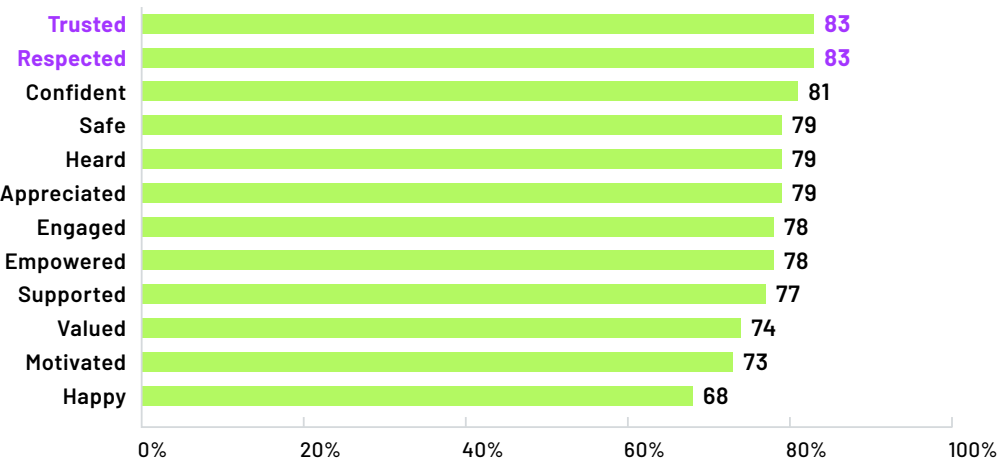


Figure 1.5
To what extent does your leader’s behavior make you feel...

Employees reporting to mid-level leaders feel:



Employees reporting to senior leaders feel:



On average across these positive feelings, most employees reported experiencing them frequently at work. The most commonly regarded feelings were quite similar across all three leadership levels, with respondents on the whole feeling **Trusted** and **Respected**. This is a strong and positive finding. It suggests that leaders do indeed treat employees as valued coworkers and recognize their unique talents, contributions, and needs. It also suggests that leaders can, and do, generate trust, loyalty, and commitment, and build emotional capital which can be drawn on to sustain performance and maintain resilience in the face of pressure.

At all levels, **Motivated** and **Happy** were the least frequently felt positive feelings. This is an important finding given our 2021 research, where Motivated and Happy were the **top two** feelings employees stated they needed to perform at their best. Furthermore, employees who feel happy at work tend to have a better sense of wellbeing and reduced turnover intention³. Moving forward, leaders across all levels could focus more on understanding what motivates employees and what makes them happy.

The most common negative feelings (again using responses of *Always, Usually, or Often*), in rank order, were:

Employees reporting to first-level leaders feel:

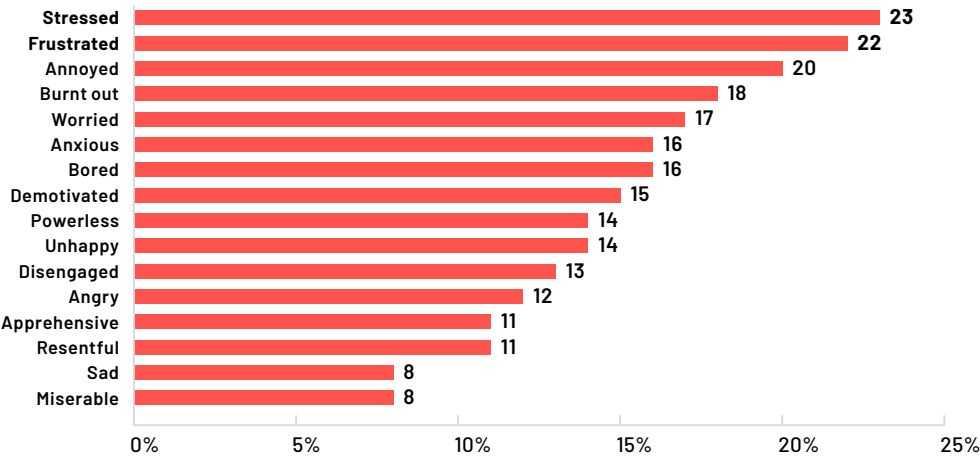
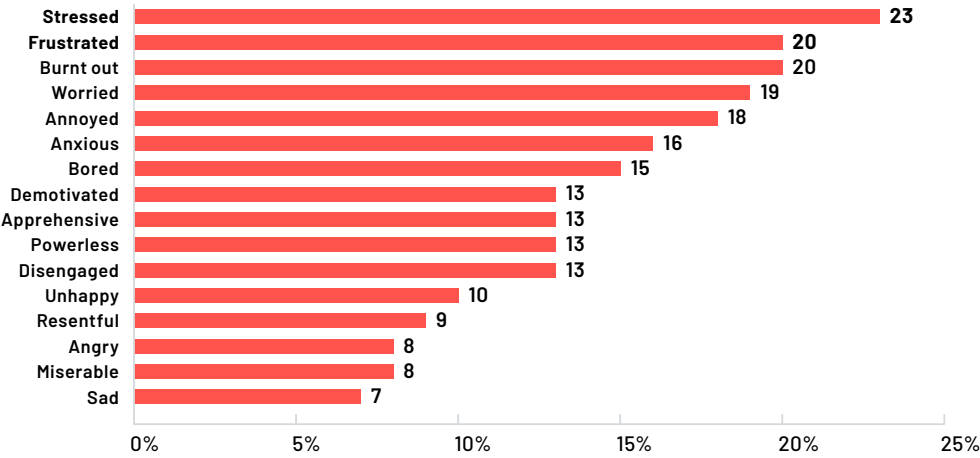
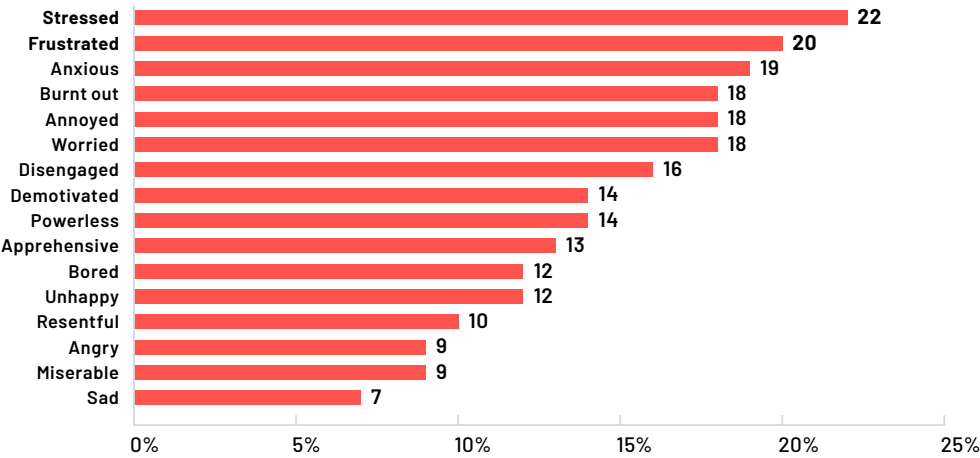


Figure 1.6
To what extent does your leader’s behavior make you feel...

Employees reporting to mid-level leaders feel:



Employees reporting to senior leaders feel:



Although the frequency of negative feelings was much lower, these findings were still noteworthy. Over **20%** of employees reported that they were *Always, Usually, or Often* made to feel **Stressed** and/or **Frustrated** by their leader across all levels. This suggests that one in five employees are experiencing stress and frustration frequently, which is not conducive to effective or sustainable performance. While some stress (in the form of challenge and stretch goals) can be beneficial for work performance, over long periods this is likely to lead to deterioration in performance, wellbeing, and potentially burnout.

In relation to how effective leaders make their employees feel, we found a positive relationship with all positive feelings across the three leadership levels and employee-rated leadership effectiveness. The stronger the positive feelings experienced by the employee, the more effective they felt their leader was.

In addition, we found direct negative correlations between employee-rated leader effectiveness, and negative employee feelings. The more frequently the employee experienced negative feelings caused by their leader the less effective they felt their leader was. This again places human-centered leadership in the limelight and solidifies the importance of how leaders make their employees feel.

Based on these results, leaders should clearly consider how they make others around them feel and look to minimize the causes of negative feelings where possible, while striving to improve employee experience through generating positive emotion and feelings within their employees. This is in line with current literature which suggests that leaders' influence and impact on employees ultimately depends on their ability to connect emotionally with them⁴, through demonstrating inspiring and inclusive behaviors⁵.

Feelings are important and how a leader makes their followers feel is important. It is therefore critical for organizations to enable and develop leaders who are attuned to the feelings of the people they lead, so they can create an authentic connection with their teams.

One in five employees are experiencing stress and frustration frequently.

// Strong leaders bring a sense of care and kindness to their people so they can show up authentically at work despite what's going on in their personal life. They have high emotional intelligence and care for wellness and culture.

//
Organizational representative
Manufacturing sector



Key points

- Just over half of all leadership groups (first-level, mid-level, senior leader) were viewed by employees as *Very effective* or *Effective*. Although this is a relatively positive statistic, it demonstrates that there is an opportunity for leadership effectiveness to be improved across all leadership levels.
- Most employees, rating their direct leader, indicated that their own performance, engagement, and wellbeing was affected by the leadership they experience from a *Moderate* to *Very large* extent. This demonstrates how leaders of all levels have a direct impact on the employee experience at work.
- In general, leaders across all levels make employees feel **Trusted** and **Respected** most frequently. This suggests that current leaders are demonstrating some human-centered behaviors, e.g. valuing and appreciating employees as individuals.
- In our 2021 research we identified **Motivated** and **Happy** as the top two feelings employees stated they needed to perform at their best. In contrast with our current research, when employees were asked how leaders across all levels make them feel, **Motivated** and **Happy** were the least frequently felt positive feelings.
- However, results indicated that one in five employees were **Stressed** and **Frustrated** frequently as a direct result of their leader's behavior. While some stress may be beneficial for short-term gains, this is potentially not sustainable and is likely to lead to deterioration in employee performance, engagement, and wellbeing. Organizations should support leaders to minimize behaviors that cause negative employee feelings.

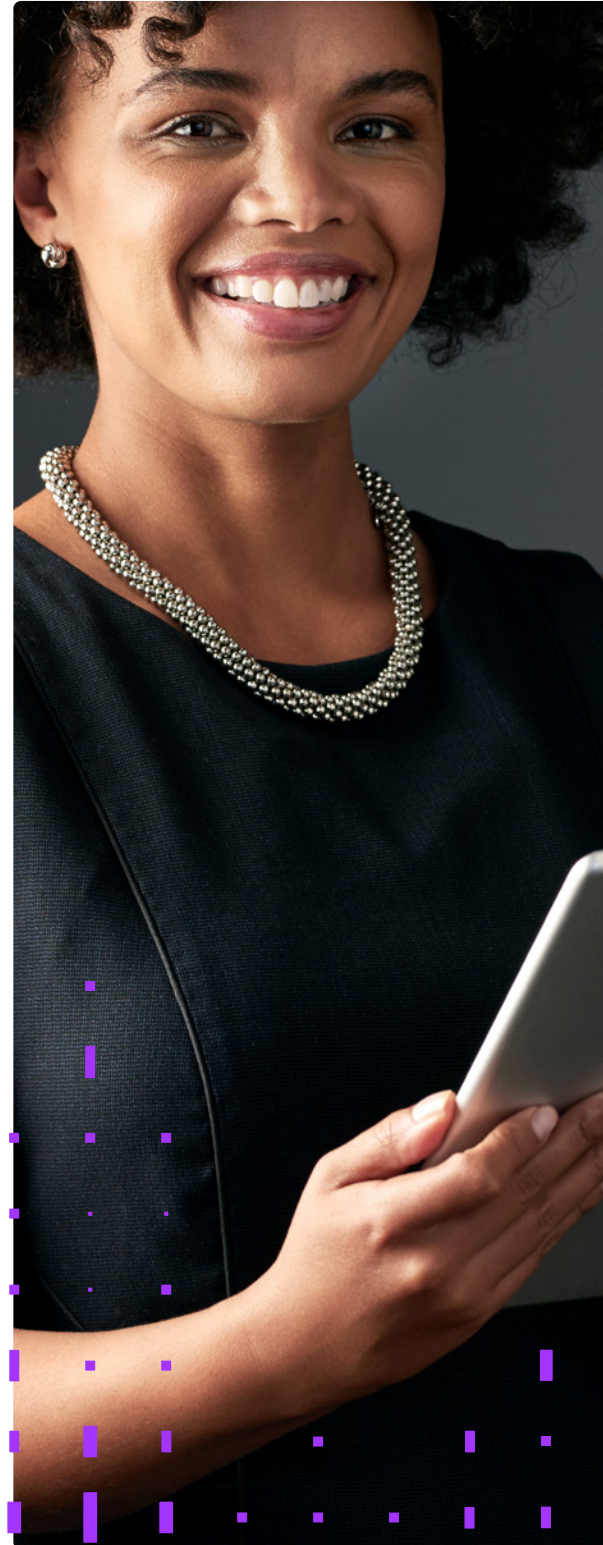
2 Essential attributes across leadership levels

At each level of leadership, we explored what behaviors are required of leaders, the importance of Talogy's research-based leadership qualities, and how effective leaders are at demonstrating these qualities.

More specifically, we collected the perspectives of employees, leaders, and the organization, and reviewed available literature to address the following questions:

- What behaviors should leaders demonstrate at each level?
- How important are the Talogy InView Leadership™ qualities at each level?
- How effective are leaders at demonstrating these qualities at each level?

Existing research suggests that behaviors expected from leaders at each level are not always well-defined and leaders are not always clear about what success looks like in their leadership role¹. Leaders are generally expected to deliver organizational objectives and effectively address important workforce challenges, such as enhancing employee engagement, reducing turnover, and preventing burnout. They must adapt to emerging technological advancements, successfully navigate ambiguous political and economic landscapes, and guide employees through unprecedented and macroeconomic events. But there appears to be a lack of guidance in the literature around what leaders at different levels need to do to achieve these objectives and navigate challenges effectively.



What behaviors should leaders demonstrate at each leadership level?

Employees perspective

Employees were provided with a preset list of important leadership behaviors. The employees were asked to review the list and rate the importance of each behavior in enabling their effective performance. The top five behaviors most important for leaders to demonstrate, by leadership level, are listed in rank order of frequency below:

Figure 2.1
Which of the following behaviors are the most important for your leader to display for you to perform at your best?

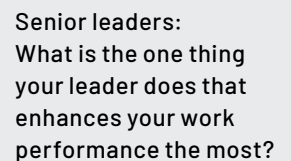
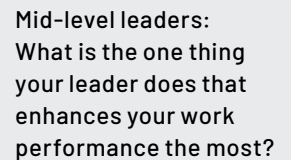
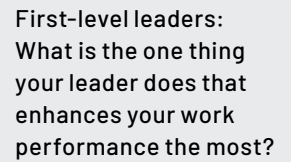
	FIRST-LEVEL LEADERS	%	MID-LEVEL LEADERS	%	SENIOR LEADERS	%
1	Shares meaningful information	37	Considers possibilities with an open mind	36	Shares meaningful information	37
2	Inspires, motivates, and engages people	33	Shares meaningful information	35	Considers possibilities with an open mind	34
3	Sets clear, realistic goals and holds people to account	32	Inspires, motivates, and engages people	33	Inspires, motivates, and engages people	34
4	Is authentic, genuine, and ethical	31	Is open to learning and new ideas	32	Provides a clear plan and priorities	34
5	Shows empathy and compassion	31	Provides a clear plan and priorities	30	Is authentic, genuine, and ethical	31

Note: A full list of behaviors is available in [Appendix 2](#).

At each level, the top five behaviors selected were similar but with subtle differences. Perhaps most notably **Shares meaningful information** was among the top two most important behaviors across all leadership levels, demonstrating the need for leaders to communicate effectively with employees.

Effectively supporting employee performance does, however, vary by level to some extent, based on responses by employees. For example:

- **First-level leaders** should focus on being motivating and engaging, setting realistic goals and expectations, demonstrating authentic and ethical behavior, and showing empathy and compassion.
- **Mid-level leaders** should have an open mind, be motivating and engaging, show willingness to learn and innovate, and provide clarity and clear direction.
- **Senior leaders** should demonstrate a combination of behaviors expected from both first-level and mid-level leaders. They should have an open mind, be motivating and engaging, provide clarity and clear direction, and demonstrate authentic and ethical behaviors.



There are many behaviors leaders display that employees feel enhance their work performance. The most common themes that were found across all leadership levels include the need for leaders to be **supportive**, **provide constructive feedback**, and **communicate well with employees**. These behaviors all highlight elements of a human-centered leadership style.

What was particularly prominent in the data was the development of the theme **Gives autonomy** across levels. Results implied that, as a leader moves to mid-level leadership and then to senior leadership, employees want their leaders to be more empowering. Giving employees more freedom to work in a way that suits them and their teams, more involvement in planning and prioritizing, and generally having more control over their own work, is likely to enhance employee work performance. This makes sense given that, typically, leaders become less operational and more strategically focused as they progress. To be overly involved in the day to day could prevent employees from working effectively.

There is also an increase in **Trust** needed as leaders move up the pipeline. Employees felt that if leaders can trust them to do their job this will enhance their performance. If employees are trusted they feel able to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from these experiences to become more successful².

Also of interest is the fact that, within the data, no themes that were deemed important to enhance employee performance at first-level leadership drop away to be less important as leaders move up the pipeline. This demonstrates the need for leaders to build on the basic foundations of leadership to become successful at every level.





Figure 2.5

First-level leaders:
What is the one thing
your leader does that
inhibits your work
performance the most?



Figure 2.6

Mid-level leaders:
What is the one thing
your leader does that
inhibits your work
performance the most?



Figure 2.7

Senior leaders:
What is the one thing
your leader does that
inhibits your work
performance the most?

Results suggest that there are many behaviors that inhibit employees work performance. The most common theme that became apparent across all levels was the need for leaders to avoid **Micromanaging**. The data suggested that this theme is centered on leaders feeling the need to control their teams and employee's workloads more than is necessary. It moves past supporting, organizing, and prioritizing to become controlling, territorial, and interfering. Micromanaging can have a significant detrimental impact on employees feeling empowered, which is at conflict with their call for more autonomy (in Figures 2.2-2.4).

Of note, is the increase in importance of communication at mid-level leadership, specifically that **Poor communication** or a **Lack of communication** could inhibit employees who

report to a mid-level leader. This suggests that employees feel this is a common problem for leaders at this level. It could demonstrate the challenges faced by leaders at this level, centered around successfully managing teams and effectively communicating messages they are given from senior leaders in the organization.

In addition, other frequent inhibiting behaviors across all levels include leaders holding unrealistic expectations, providing poor quality communication or a lack of communication altogether, and being unavailable. These behaviors demonstrate a lack of trust, authenticity and clarity in communication and direction, not conducive with a positive or productive climate.

The organizational perspective

In the organizational interviews, we asked representatives to describe what behaviors they expect from first-level, mid-level, and senior leaders within their organizations. From the data collected, it was clear that a lot of expected behaviors are applicable to all levels, with nuances and additions to these behaviors as leaders get more senior.

Organizational representatives were asked to specify what behaviors are important for leaders to display at each leadership level. Our findings are as follows:

Leaders across all levels

Representatives specified that there are several behaviors that are important across all leadership levels. These should be built upon as leaders progress through the pipeline and involve the following points:

- **Mindset** – Most notably, leaders need to show adaptability, courage, and learning agility to cope with the uncertainty and changing demands that face leaders today.
- **Interpersonal skills** – There is a strong focus on interpersonal skills, with leaders needing to be effective communicators, build positive relationships, empower others, and motivate their employees.
- **Organizational and business skills** – These include decision making, planning and prioritizing, and developing team members.
- **Strategic perspective** – Finally, strategic skills are required, as well as the ability to handle many of the complex challenges associated with leading a global and diverse workforce.

Representatives specified that there are several behaviors that are important across all leadership levels.

First-level leaders

From the organizational perspective, the core focus for first-level leaders is to engage with team members and support their development. First-level leaders need to get to know their people, develop emotional connections, and build trust to foster a supportive work environment.



We need first-level leaders to understand their team and each team member's strengths and weaknesses. The role is no longer about supervising but is about being a very engaged leader.

At the same time, first-level leaders also need to organize resources and hold people to account to ensure that targets are met. Overall, at this level, there is an emphasis on operational effectiveness and managing performance, to ensure their team's success in line with the broader goals of the organization.

Organizational representative, Finance sector

Mid-level leaders

At the next level, there is the need for effective delegation and empowering team members to deliver. As demands increase and a leader's breadth of responsibility increases, mid-level leaders need to step away from the detail, provide broad direction, and start practicing a more strategic mindset.



The strong leaders at this level are able to step up and step out of the doing and get out of the way of their direct reports.

Organizational representative
Finance sector



The ones that stand out here are the ones who are able to work cross-functionally and collaborate with other leaders in the organization.

Organizational representative
Entertainment sector

Senior leaders

At this top-level, leaders must fully embrace a strategic mindset. Senior leaders need to create a vision, set long term plans, and align teams across the organization to the wider goals and objectives. They must also focus on change leadership and inspire others in line with the purpose, mission, and vision, particularly during times of change.

Political skills such as influencing and networking become increasingly important for this level. Senior leaders need to have presence and communicate effectively with stakeholders both within and outside the organization.



They role model the organization's behaviors and values and also role model good leadership, so they are inspirational to other leaders.

Organizational representative
Finance sector



They need to develop curiosity, strategic thinking, and have a growth mindset so they see setbacks as learning opportunities. They also need to have a strong understanding of the market and the organization.

Organizational representative, Entertainment sector

The importance of Talogy InView Leadership qualities at each leadership level

To explore this area in more depth, we used Talogy's research based InView Leadership framework, which contains six key leadership qualities. The framework and associated qualities were largely informed by our 2021 international research study that sought to understand the future world of work and implications for leadership. As part of the present study, we researched how important it is for leaders to display each of the six qualities at different leadership levels, from the perspective of both leaders themselves, and their employees.

The six key leadership qualities are:

Agile mind – Look ahead and always be ready to adjust course

Keeping abreast of what is happening outside the organization and thinking about new possibilities with an open mind. Asking the right questions and assimilating complex data quickly. Recognizing how disparate things fit together and exploring innovative ideas. All underpinned by curiosity and a willingness to learn and adapt.

Inspiring purpose – Give people a 'why'

Providing meaning and purpose for people by setting an engaging vision for the future. Something that provides them with a clear line of sight between what they do and an overall purpose. Communicating this in a way that makes sense to everybody and engaging them in the change process.

Empowering approach – You don't need to have all the answers

Showing humility as a leader and focusing on getting the best out of others. Bringing people together and encouraging them to find clever solutions. Focusing on how you can support them to liberate and maximize their talents. Offering constructive coaching that helps people develop and thrive.

Focus on momentum – Keep people moving in the right direction

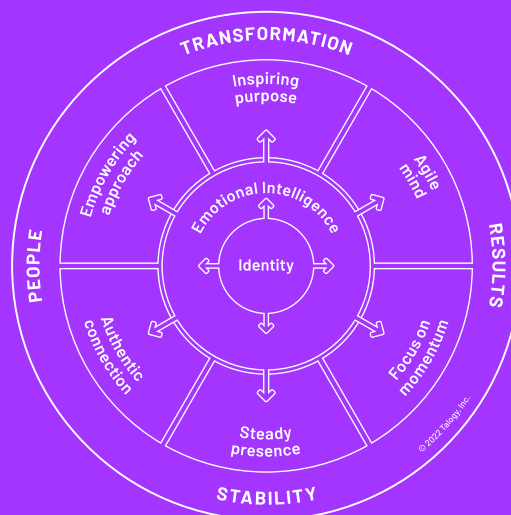
Setting clear, realistic goals and holding people to account. Encouraging them to move quickly to deliver results. Giving constructive feedback when things go off track and upholding standards. Tackling barriers that get in the way of success and supporting people to achieve excellence.

Authentic connection – Results matter, but so do people

Connecting with people and valuing them as individuals, to support wellbeing and create sustainable success. Showing empathy and compassion when people experience difficulties. Building trust by being open, authentic, and ethical in how you behave. Promoting inclusion and fairness in everything you do.

Steady presence – Be the leader that others can rely on

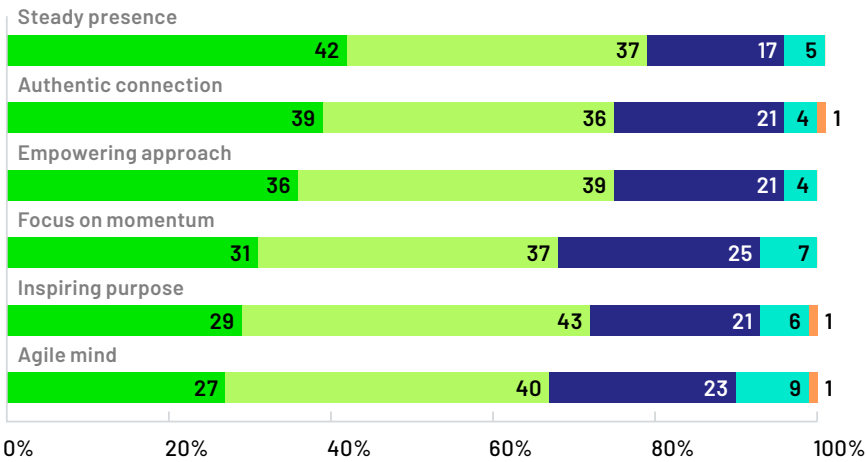
Staying calm and being intentional about how you react under pressure. Providing a stable, dependable, and visible presence for others. Showing resilience and optimism when times are tough, with a focus on positive action. Having the courage to act in line with your principles even in difficult circumstances and a personal desire to continually learn and improve from experience.



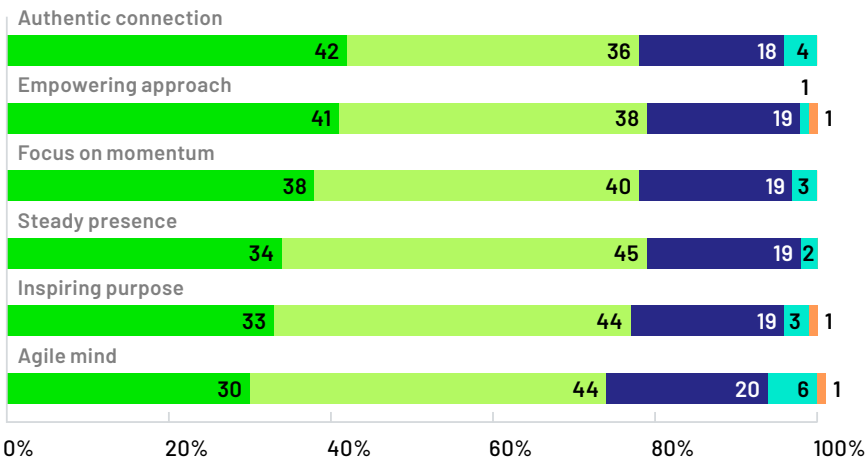
Talogy InView
Leadership™
framework

We asked leaders to rate how important they felt it was for them to demonstrate each quality at their current leadership level. For comparison, we also asked employees to rate the importance of their direct leader demonstrating these leadership qualities. We then compared these results across each of the three levels.

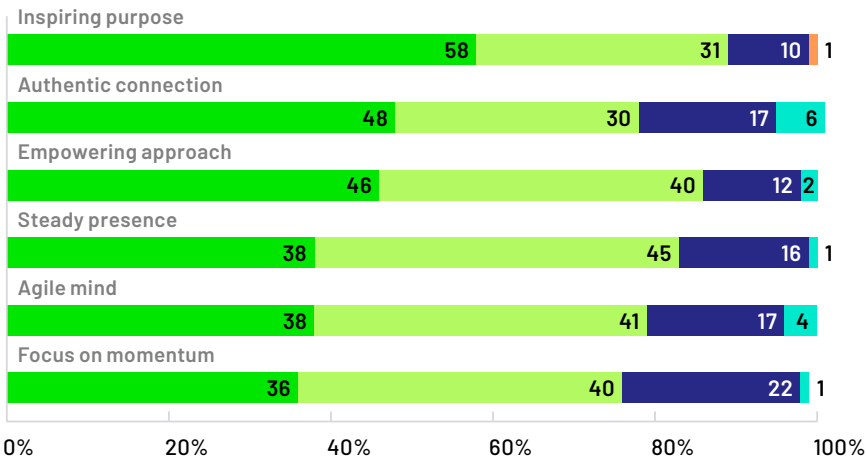
First-level leaders



Mid-level leaders



Senior leaders



■ Essential ■ Very important ■ Important ■ Fairly important ■ Not important

Figure 2.8
Leader perspective:
How important are the following
leadership qualities to your current
leadership level?

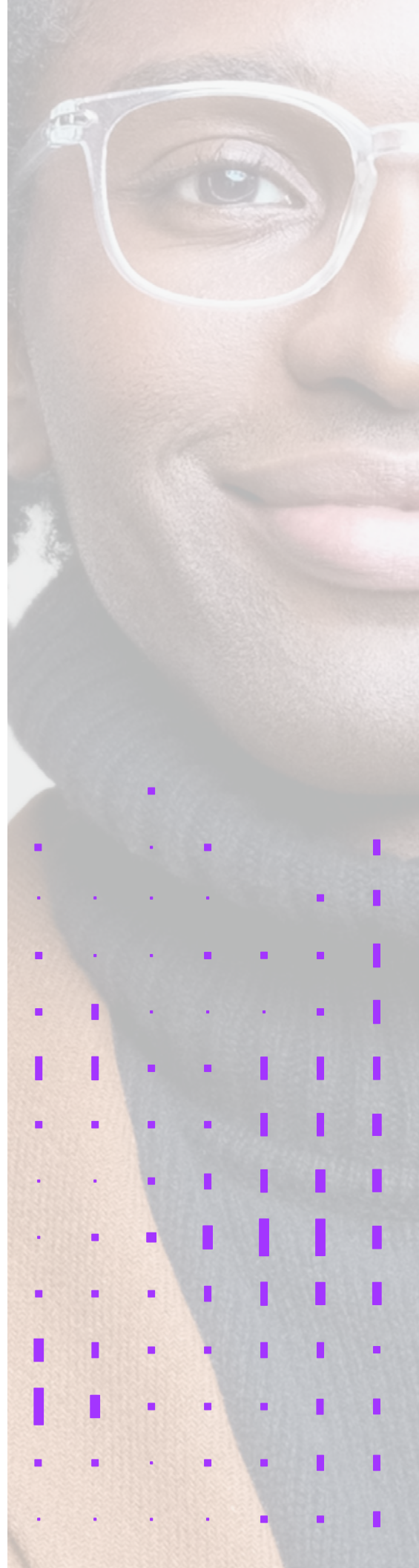
When asked how important each of the leadership qualities were to their current leadership level, it is unsurprising but reassuring that at least 90% of respondents rated all the qualities as *Essential*, *Very important*, or *Important*.

The quality 'Authentic connection' consistently ranked in the top two behaviors for all three levels, which suggests there is alignment on the critical importance of connecting with and valuing people. This also further adds to previous arguments made that human-centered leadership styles are considered integral to successful leadership.

In contrast, 'Agile mind' was ranked in the bottom two behaviors across all three levels. As agility has been a topic at the forefront of leadership development conversations for the past decade, this further indicates a subtle shift in opinion on what leaders feel they should focus on. It perhaps also emphasizes the role of the leader in entrusting and empowering team members to solve problems creatively, rather than needing to know all the answers and provide solutions themselves.

Nevertheless, there was some variation in what was deemed the most important quality for each of the leadership levels. For first-level leaders, having a 'Steady presence' was considered most important, while subsequent levels rated it slightly less important. In line with further results explored later in this report, this could be more indicative of how a leader feels at the early stage of their leadership journey. Staying calm and managing emotional reactions under the demands of supervising others, while having the courage and confidence to take on more responsibility, is likely to be new territory for many first-level leaders.

What is perhaps most interesting is the view of the leadership quality, 'Inspiring purpose'. Results from our 2021 research identified 'Inspiring, motivating, and engaging people' as the number one behavior for achieving results and for a positive employee experience from both the leader and employee perspective. However, the results from the present study indicate that, while 'Inspiring purpose' came out on top as the most important leadership quality for senior leaders (58%) it was considered notably less important to first-level (29%) and mid-level leaders (33%).



First-level leaders

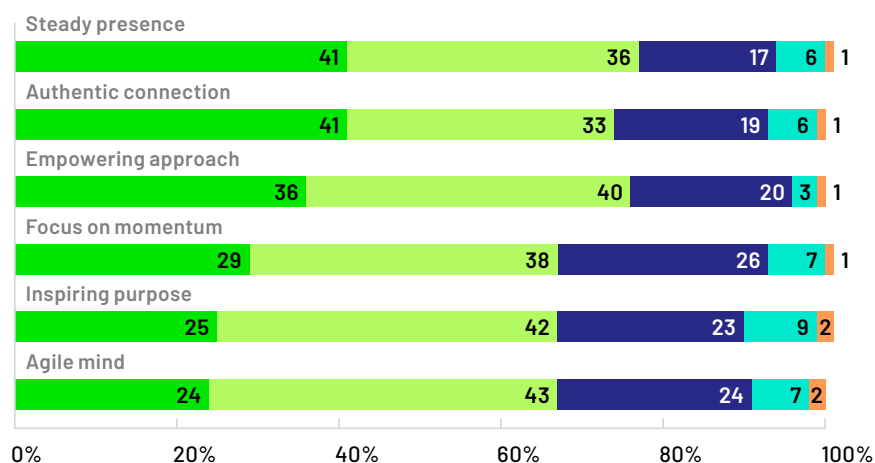
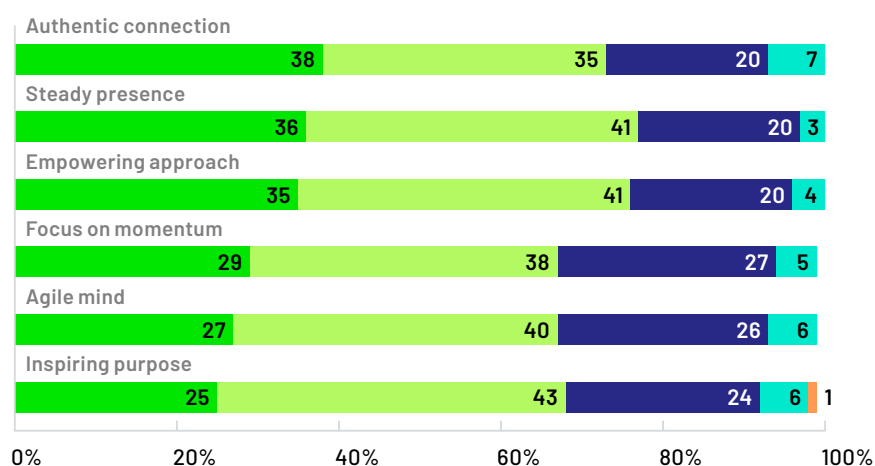


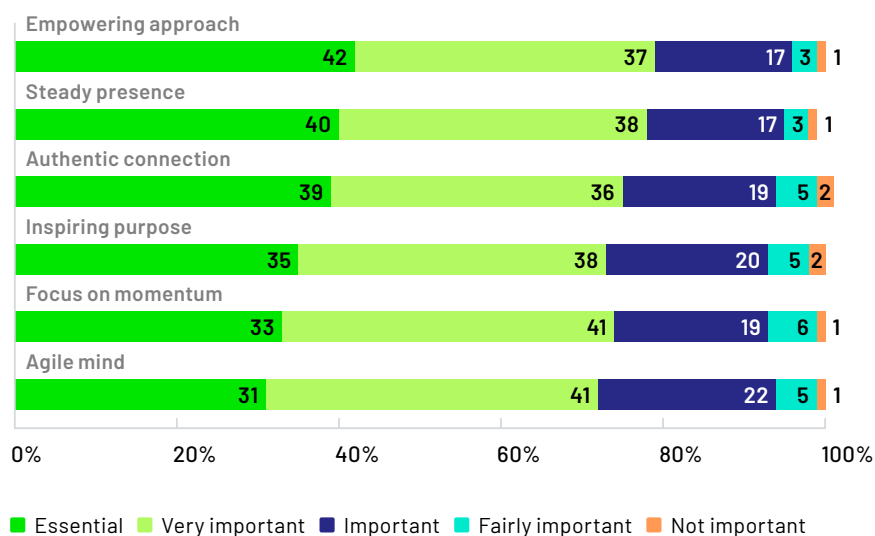
Figure 2.9

Employee perspective:
How important is it to you that your leader displays the following leadership qualities?

Mid-level leaders



Senior leaders



■ Essential ■ Very important ■ Important ■ Fairly important ■ Not important

From the employee perspective, the importance of having a 'Steady presence' was rated similarly across all leadership levels and suggests that this is a key quality for leaders to maintain as they transition into higher leadership roles. Maintaining a calm, composed, and consistent approach will support employees' own reactions and responses to pressure, challenge, and change. 'Authentic connection' and 'Empowering approach' were also deemed by employees to be two of the most *Essential* qualities for leaders to hold at every level.

Of interest was the employee importance rating for 'Inspiring purpose'. This did not make it into the top three qualities at any leadership level. In combination with the leader's perspective, we can conclude that while leaders should continue to inspire purpose through understanding employee expectations and encouraging involvement, this should not be at the expense of other leadership qualities. For example, being a leader that is composed, resilient, and reliable (Steady presence), who connects with others in a meaningful way (Authentic connection) and focus' on supporting employees (Empowering approach), may be more important for determining a leader's future success.

The effectiveness of InView Leadership qualities at each leadership level

In addition to indicating how important the leadership qualities were to their current leadership level, leaders were asked how effective they felt they were at demonstrating them. For comparison, employees were also asked for their views on their leader's effectiveness in relation to these qualities.



First-level leaders

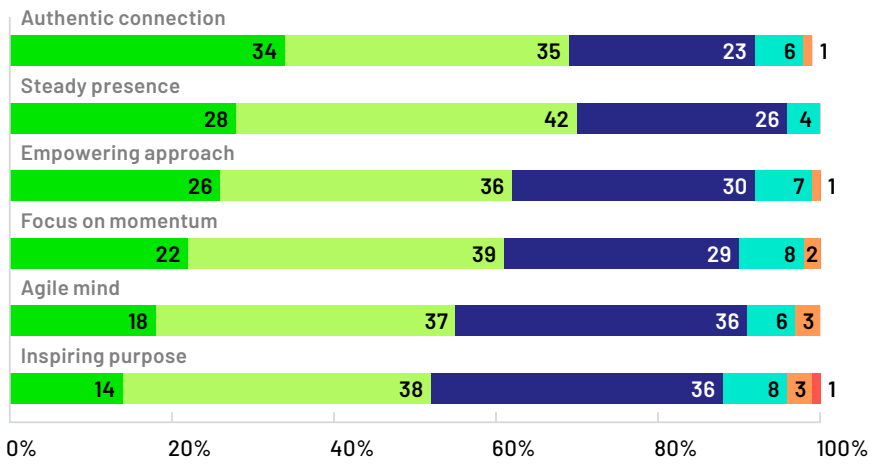
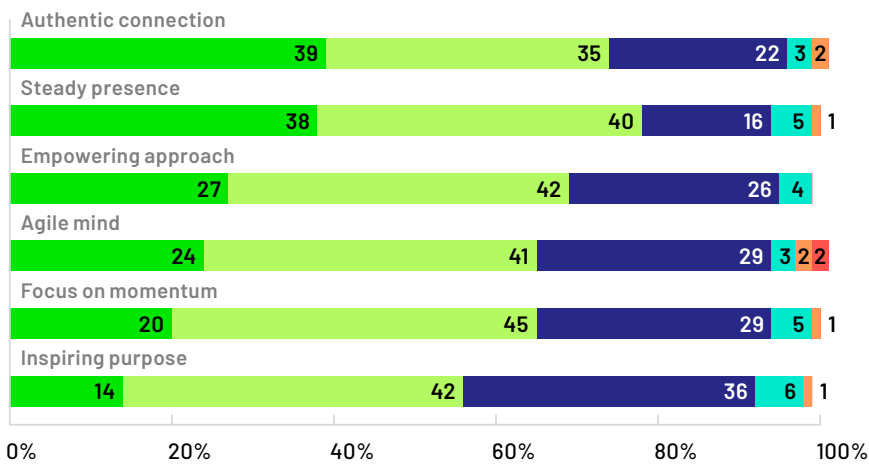
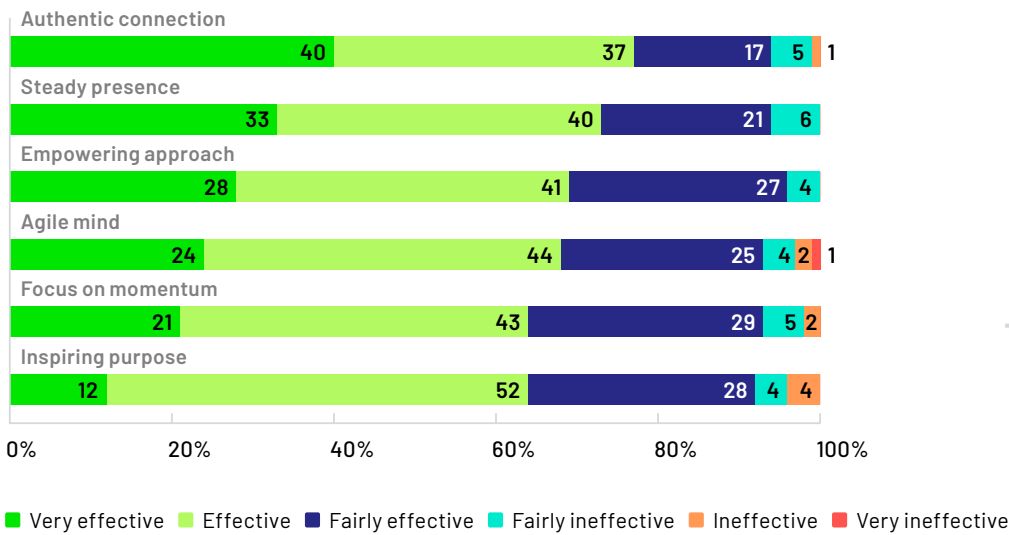


Figure 2.10
Leader perspective:
How effective are you at demonstrating
each of the following leadership qualities?

Mid-level leaders



Senior leaders



First-level leaders

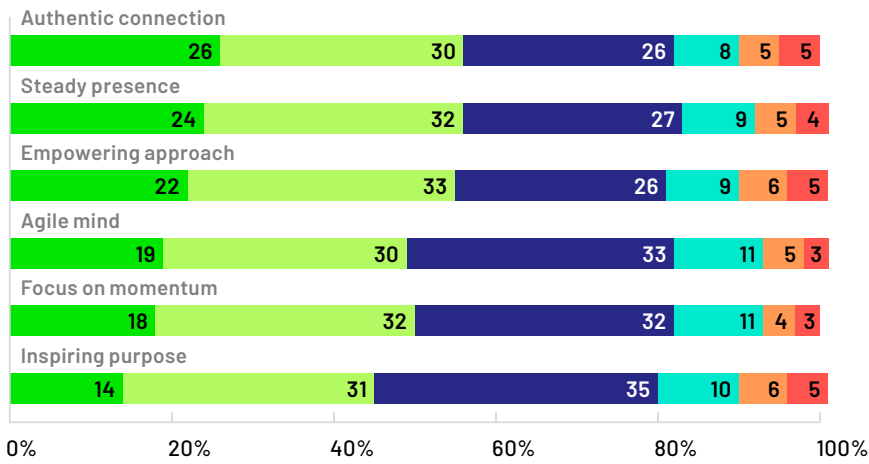
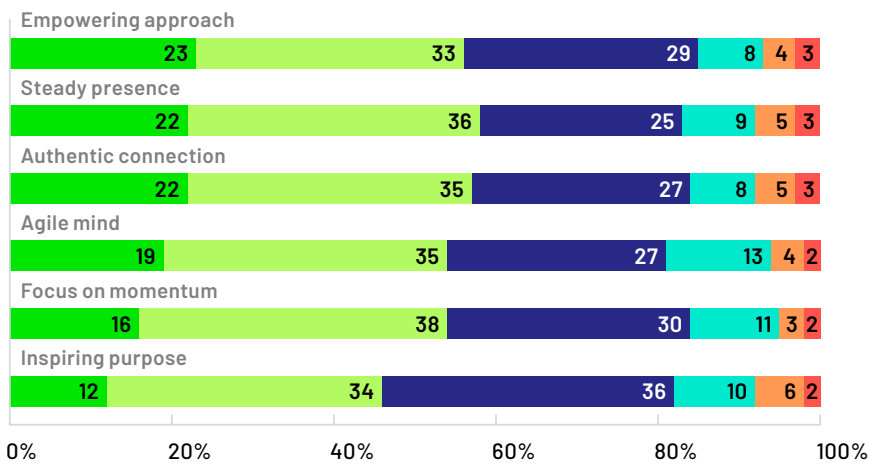
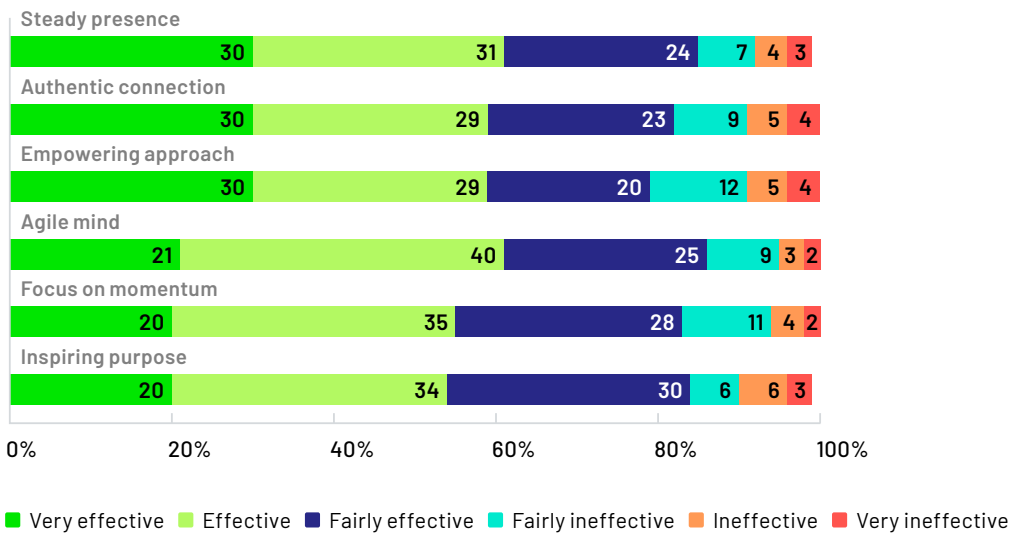


Figure 2.11
Employee perspective:
How effective is your manager at
demonstrating each of the following
leadership qualities?

Mid-level leaders



Senior leaders





Results suggest that all levels of leaders felt they were most effective at having a ‘Steady presence’ and ‘Authentic connection’. This is consistent with the qualities employees rated as the most effective and shows promise that the call for more human-centered leadership is being heard.

In contrast, leaders at all levels felt they were least effective at ‘Inspiring purpose’. This is particularly interesting at the senior leader level, because this group felt it was the most important leadership quality. Given that employees also felt their leaders were least effective at ‘Inspiring purpose’, this could be a key area of development for leaders.

Another interesting observation was identified for the leadership quality, ‘Agile mind’. Although leaders at all levels felt they were generally less effective at this quality than others, employees of senior leaders felt it was the quality in which they were the most effective, with the highest percentage responding *Very effective*, *Effective*, or *Fairly effective*. As leaders progress, the organizational requirement and employee expectations for them to be more strategic heightens. While results suggest leaders are doing just that, it is possibly an area to reflect on for senior leaders who felt they were more effective at people-oriented qualities.

It is worth noting that, although largely consistent in terms of ranking, employees rated leadership effectiveness across the qualities lower than leaders rated themselves. This suggests a need for leaders to continually monitor and reflect on their own performance to avoid overestimating their capability.

Above all, what is perhaps most intriguing about how both leaders and employees perceive effectiveness of leadership qualities, is the consistency across leadership levels. Whether someone is new to a leadership role or extremely experienced, the perception of what they are most effective and least effective in appears to be largely the same. This is an important finding for organizations to consider when they develop their leadership pipeline and support leaders to navigate leadership transitions; some qualities more than others may be consistently more challenging for leaders to improve.



Key points

- When asked what the one most important thing was that leaders do to *enhance* their performance, employees highlighted being supportive, providing constructive feedback, giving autonomy, and communicating well as core themes. This highlights the importance of human-centered leadership. In contrast, when asked the most important thing leaders do that *inhibits* their performance, employees particularly called out micromanaging and poor communication as key areas.
- The quality 'Authentic connection' consistently ranked in the top two most important qualities across all levels. Overall, leaders also felt they were most effective at this quality. This suggests leaders of all levels are aligned on the view that connecting with and valuing people is imperative to successful leadership.
- The need for leaders to demonstrate an 'Inspiring purpose' increased in importance with each leadership level, with **58%** of senior leaders having rated it Essential for their leadership level compared to **29%** and **33%** at first-level and mid-level respectively. In contrast, although still important, employees consistently rated this leadership quality as less important than others. Moving forward it may be something for senior leaders to reflect on. It suggests that other routes to motivating and engaging people may be more valued by employees, such as empowering individuals and building trusting connections with them.
- Both leaders and employees across all leadership levels identified 'Inspiring purpose' as the quality leaders were least effective at. This, in combination with the above point, suggests a rethink of what 'Inspiring purpose' means for modern leadership, how it is prioritized, and how organizations can support leaders to demonstrate this quality more effectively.
- Leaders at all levels tended to rate themselves as slightly more effective at demonstrating the six leadership qualities than employees did. This suggests there could be a gap in leaders' self-awareness about how effective they actually are in certain areas.

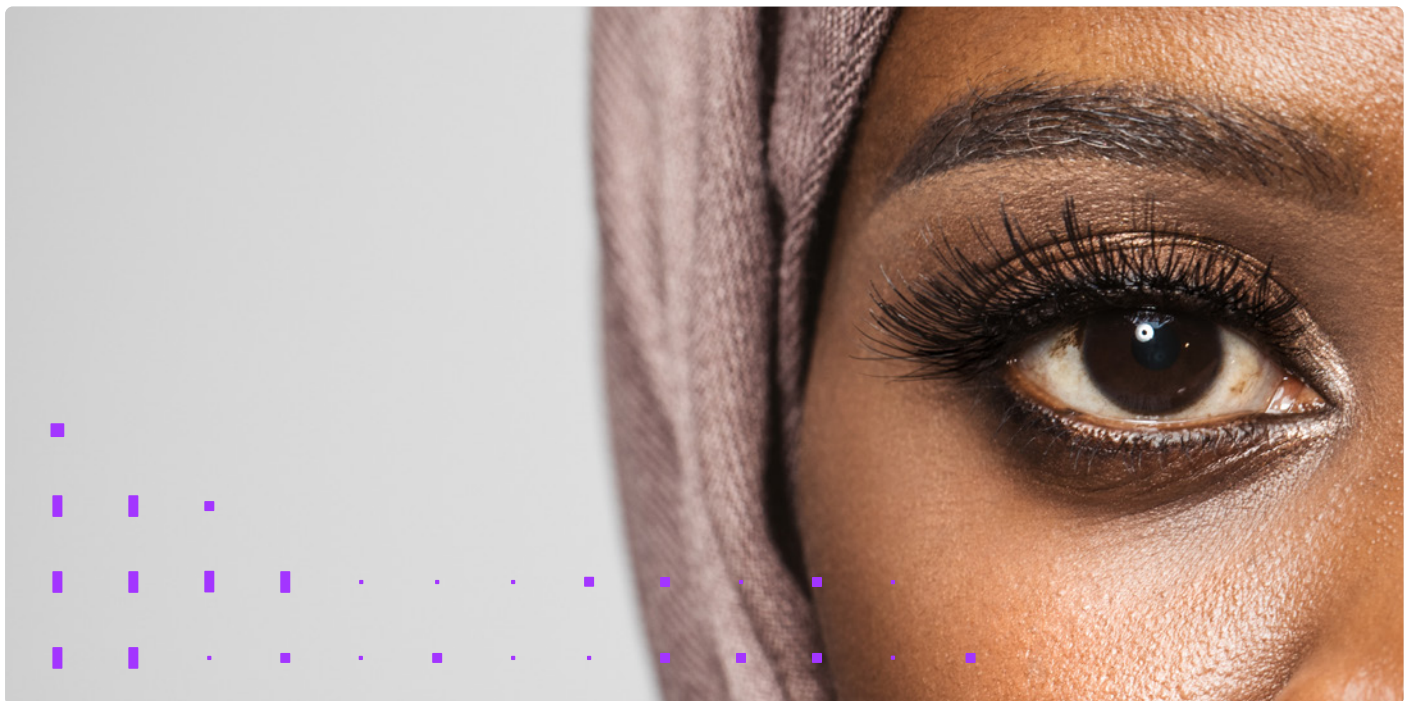
3 Navigating leadership transitions

In this section, we will explore what support leaders need to navigate their way through leadership transitions and what organizations can do to ensure they develop a strong leadership pipeline.

Specifically, we focused on the following research themes:

- What challenges do leaders face at each level?
- How can leaders transition successfully?
- How prepared are leaders for their next leadership transition?

We have discussed essential leadership qualities needed at different leadership levels, but it is also important to consider challenges that may be faced by leaders as they progress through the pipeline and how prepared they are to make future transitions. We have collected valuable reflections and advice from organizations and leaders to support others who may be embarking on a similar journey.



Transitions from the organizational perspective – what are the challenges?

We asked organizational representatives what leaders in their organization find the most challenging when they move to a new leadership level. We found that there are several challenges common to all leadership transitions which include:

- Shifting their mindset from doing to leading.
- Adjusting to the new role and change in responsibilities, which often includes increased scope and volume of work, especially as leaders become more senior.
- Feeling unprepared due to a lack of training, support, or clarity around what is expected of them at their new leadership level.
- Managing relationships with new direct reports, peers, and other leaders.

This suggests that flexibility and adaptability are important for all leaders, along with focusing on how best to build and manage new relationships. The shift in power dynamics between individuals when leaders move between levels can be hard to navigate within organizations.

It was also apparent from our interviews that organizations are aware leaders sometimes feel they are not fully prepared to move to the next level, reaffirming the importance of understanding, for both organizations and leaders, what each leadership role requires and how to best prepare for those requirements.

Which leadership level transition is the hardest to make?

We also asked the organizational representatives to identify which leadership transition, from their perspective, is the hardest to make. From the responses, it was clear that transitioning to a leadership position at any level is challenging and depends on an individual's talents and skills, level of experience, support received, and organizational context and culture.

That said, almost two-thirds of the organizational representatives asked said that they consider making the transition from mid-level leader to senior leader to be the most challenging. Most notably, the need for leaders to employ a more strategic, holistic perspective, to deal with the sheer scale of demands at this level, and to manage a greater breadth of relationships.



Senior management [is the most challenging transition] because you have a lot more direct reports – you can't rely on natural tendencies to lead so much to get you through.



Organizational representative
Manufacturing sector

Are leaders aware of the need to change behaviors across levels?

Leaders were asked to consider the extent to which they anticipated needing to change their behavior upon moving to a new higher level leadership role. They were then also asked the extent to which they actively changed their behaviors in practice when they made the transition.

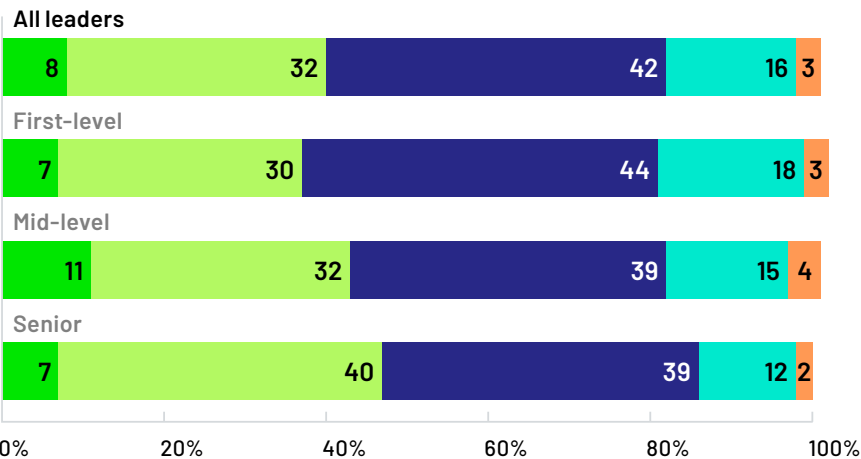
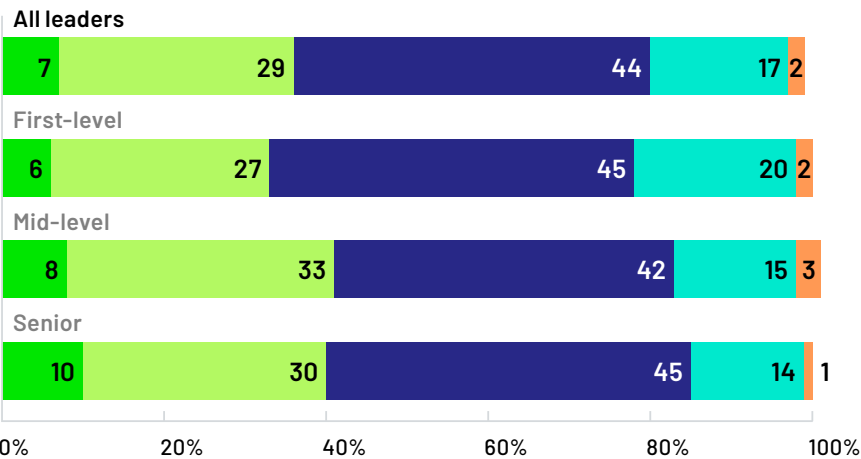


Figure 3.1
To what extent did you reflect on how your behaviors may need to change before you transitioned to your current leadership level?



Very large extent Large extent Moderate extent Small extent Not at all

Figure 3.2
To what extent did you actually change your behavior when you transitioned to your current leadership level?





On average, leaders generally reflect to at least a *Moderate* extent when asked to consider what behaviors they may need to change before they transitioned to their current leadership level. Reflection facilitates personal growth and tends to be applied most frequently by those who are engaged, take their own development seriously, and lead by example. By encouraging leaders to reflect, organizations can support them to become more aware of themselves, such as understanding their own strengths and development areas, what helps them to perform at their best, and what hinders their performance. This could be vital in developing leaders across all leadership levels.

When compared to other levels, senior leaders spent the most time reflecting on how their behaviors needed to change when moving to their current leadership level, with 47% spending time reflecting to a *Very large* or *Large* extent. It could be that the higher up the pipeline leaders move, the more experience they have with transitions and the more awareness they have of the need for behavior change.

Overall, **80%** of leaders felt that they did change their behavior when transitioning to their current level to a *Very large*, *Large*, or *Moderate* extent. This is encouraging to see. However, based on our earlier findings, it is important to note that different behaviors are required at different leadership levels, e.g. ‘Inspiring purpose’ is more important for senior leaders to display than first-level leaders. Perhaps leaders who reported they did not change their behavior are unaware of what is required from them as they embark on their leadership journey. To build upon and develop more successful leadership pipelines, organizations should ensure they provide leaders clarity on what is expected of them at each level.

To support organizations in raising awareness of what is required of their leaders and better preparing them for the next stage of their journey, we have explored each of the three leadership levels in more depth.



First-level

Leading self vs leading others – laying foundations

Becoming a first-level leader has its own specific challenges, moving from an individual contributor focused on managing themselves, to a leadership position focused on managing, directing, and engaging others.

When asked what specific challenges individual contributors have when moving to first-level leadership roles, organizations identified the following to be most prevalent:

- Managing people for the first time
- Managing former peers

In their first leadership role, individuals are no longer solely responsible for their own workload and performance. They must learn to balance their personal productivity with leadership responsibilities, ensuring they delegate, drive team performance, and support the development of others.

This initial transition can be difficult as individuals are often moving to a leadership position where they are managing former peers who may also be friends. It can be challenging to step into a position of authority, earn their respect, handle conflicts, and have difficult conversations, while still building trust and maintaining positive relationships.

To further investigate the challenges at this level, first-level leaders were asked to share their own perspective on what they felt was the most challenging when they moved into their current leadership position. The top five themes we collected from the data are presented in rank order below.

1	Relationship boundaries	Adapting to the changes in responsibilities and relationships associated with transitioning into a leadership role, especially when leading former peers.
2	Delegating and empowering	Letting go of certain tasks and delegating work to team members, providing guidance without micromanaging, and trusting them to deliver.
3	New responsibilities	Managing the increased workload that comes from overseeing the work of others and being responsible for team members.
4	Managing diversity	Learning to effectively manage different team members personalities, skills, and abilities to ensure the successful functioning of the team.
5	Communication	Improving communication skills to ensure clear, frequent communication that is appropriate to the needs of each team member.



A key challenge for first-level leaders is being able to broaden their span of influence; being less focused on self, to being focused on others.



Organizational representative
Government sector

Figure 3.3
What was the biggest challenge you experienced when moving to your current leadership role?



The most frequent challenge indicated by leaders was managing **Relationship boundaries**. This encompassed shifting relationship dynamics, e.g. from peer to manager, and learning to lead others for the first time. In addition, most other common themes focused on relationship management and the challenges associated with being responsible for employees. This is clearly an important consideration for organizations when supporting leaders through their first transitions and an area individual contributors need to understand when considering taking their first step onto the leadership ladder.

Aware of the challenges first-level leaders may face, next we focused on what leaders need to do to overcome them.

1	Improving my communication style	58%
2	Building trust	44%
3	Delegating activities and responsibilities	38%
4	Making tough decisions	35%
5	Managing larger workloads and increased pressure	26%

Note: The list of preset behaviors are available in [Appendix 2](#).

Leaders were asked to select the top five behaviors they had to focus on to ensure a successful transition to first-level leadership from a preset list of behaviors. We discovered that the top two most common behaviors reported by leaders centered around relationships and how they interact with their employees.

58% of first-level leaders reported that they had to improve their communication style. Communication is central to many aspects of leadership: Delegation, successful relationship management, and role modeling positive organizational behavior. As a result, it is clear that this is a great starting point for organizations developing individuals at this leadership level.



Figure 3.4

Which of the following behaviors did you focus on the most to try to ensure a successful transition to your current level of leadership?

“ Sometimes there is conflict with employees after promotion. They deal with you as your old position, and you cannot make a decision clearly or people don’t listen to you. ”

Organizational representative
Government sector

First-level leaders were also asked to provide information on the most important change they made once they were in this leadership role. Two main themes appeared within the data:

	MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Communication style and skills	<p>"I had to adopt a very different approach to communication in order to help create the right kind of rapport and relationship with my new team."</p> <p>"Be more communicative about what I was thinking and doing, and what I expected from others."</p> <p>"Improving my communication, articulating myself clearly, and listening effectively."</p>
2	Delegating and empowering	<p>"This change required me to let go of the need to personally perform every task and instead empower team members to take ownership and responsibility for their work."</p> <p>"I had to become much better at delegating tasks to others, because previously I would try to achieve everything on my own."</p> <p>"To recognize that I must be able to teach and trust my colleagues instead of just doing the task myself."</p>

This demonstrates that not only is communication important during the transition, but it also continues to be important throughout a leader’s tenure at this level. It also appears that leaders do move away from the initial hurdles surrounding relationship management and move to considering how they develop their leadership skills to enable and empower employees, delegating to the right level.

If leaders at this level fail to adapt their approach to the role, productivity and effectiveness drops and there are significant negative effects on relationships between individuals, within teams and across the organization.

Figure 3.5
When you first moved to your current leadership level, what was the most important change you had to make to how you lead?

We asked leaders to report any negative consequences caused by failing to modify their leadership approach after moving to their current leadership level. The most prominent themes were: Missed deadlines, Others underperforming, and Damaged relationships.



Finally, we asked first-level leaders to provide us with the one most important piece of advice they would give to someone transitioning to this leadership level. The most common main themes we discovered in this data were as follows:

Figure 3.6
 What is the one most important piece of advice you would give to someone transitioning to your current leadership level?

	ADVICE FOR TRANSITION TO FIRST-LEVEL LEADERSHIP	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Have confidence and courage	"Trust yourself, you made it here for a reason." "You need to have confidence in yourself and your decisions." "Stay focused, believe in yourself, and have confidence."
2	Build trust with others	"Trust your coworkers' abilities, you don't need to be in control of their every action." "If you can build trust in your staff, you will succeed. Their success is your success." "I would tell them the importance of building trust with your team. A team that trusts you as a leader will be more motivated to perform and communicate well."
3	Communicate effectively	"Clear communication is essential in leadership because it enables you to connect with your team, address issues promptly, and lead by example." "Learning how to communicate clearly is key." "Establish an open line of communication between you and the people you manage."
4	Listen to others	"Listen more, talk less." "Listen carefully to everyone around you." "Be present, actually listen to your employees."
5	Build relationships	"Build relationships with staff and take an interest in their professional and personal goals." "Create real bonds with your team." "Build authentic connections with the people you work with."

In other words, first-level leaders strongly encourage others transitioning to this level to believe in themselves. They should be confident in their decisions and remember they were chosen for this position. Trusting themselves but also building trust with others was indicated as important and finally communicating clearly and regularly, listening to their team and spending time to build relationships with team members.

Transitioning leaders must be aware of how their behaviors need to change and the challenges they may face when moving from a leader of self to a leader of others. Recognizing the need for creating an open and trusting environment where team members can grow individually but also collaborate with one another is important. Also, as a leader, they must remember that roles must be clearly defined and responsibilities clearly assigned as they are now responsible for getting work done through others, rather than on their own¹. This highlights the importance of ensuring their team feels engaged and valued, a supportive team will enable a leader to be successful at this level.

Recognizing and understanding how your context changes when you become a leader will allow you to grow and really thrive, in your new role.

First-level leader
 Hospitality sector

Mid-level

Leading self vs leading others – introducing strategy

The shift from leading individual contributors to leading leaders appears to be the transition which attracts the least organizational attention. When moving into mid-level leadership positions, organizations believe that the main challenges leaders face are:

- **Balancing operational and strategic demands**
- **Coping with increased pressure**

It was made clear in the interviews that this transition involves a shift from leading individual contributors to leading leaders. Mid-level leaders need to oversee rather than be involved in the detail, empower their teams, and develop a more strategic focus. However, it can be challenging to engage in longer-term thinking and provide direction to first-level leaders, while still managing operational demands.

The range of demands facing mid-level leaders is extensive and diverse, encompassing the need for both strategic and operational capabilities, with interpersonal and stakeholder management skills being crucial aspects of successful leadership at this level.

In line with existing research, we found that mid-level leaders face increased pressures from the organization, senior leaders above them, and from the leaders who report to them directly². They need to support and advocate for their teams while also navigating and championing the expectations and requests of senior leadership.

To further investigate the challenges at this level, mid-level leaders were asked to share their own perspective on what they felt was the most challenging when they moved into their current leadership position. The top five themes reported are presented in rank order below.

1	Relationship boundaries	Adapting to changing relationships with direct reports, peers, and organizational stakeholders and managing these different levels of relationships.
2	Acceptance and respect	Gaining acceptance and respect from peers and teams, earning trust, and demonstrating competence.
3	Managing diversity	Managing teams with different preferences and ways of working, often in a culturally and geographically diverse workforce.
4	Increased responsibilities	Learning to understand new areas of responsibility, dealing with new management pressures, and increased operational and strategic demands.
5	Delegating and empowering	Delegating effectively to supervisors and managers reporting to them and empowering direct reports through giving autonomy and trust.



Moving out of a tactical space into a strategic space is the hardest thing to do. They want to stay in the weeds tactically, when they might be needing to move to a more strategic level.



Organizational representative

Hospitality sector

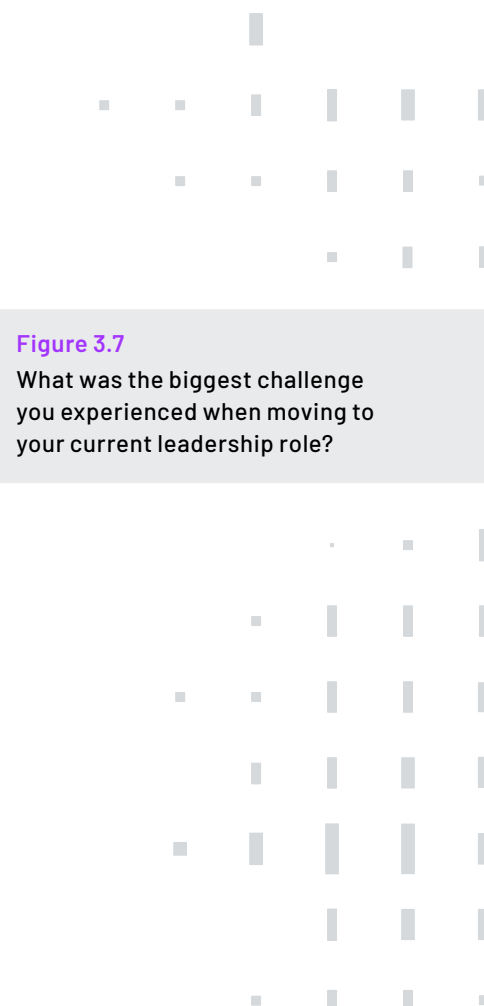


Figure 3.7

What was the biggest challenge you experienced when moving to your current leadership role?

A number of these themes were also apparent among first-level leaders. However, although the overall themes were similar the context is slightly different. The theme of **Relationship boundaries** tends to focus on leader-to-leader, peer relationships and the intricacies of age anxiety, being promoted above older colleagues and learning to establish clear boundaries with peers. In relation to this, a strong theme appeared around feeling accepted by other peers and the need to gain the respect of colleagues.

As people responsibility increases in scope at this level, there tends to be challenges around managing diversity within the team. Mid-level leaders have increased responsibility and with this comes less available time to really get to know the full team as individuals, but it is important leaders try. Becoming a leader of leaders, especially for international organizations, may mean they are leading teams who are far away geographically and from different cultures. Therefore, it is the role of the leader to establish how each team should be managed appropriately.

We next focused on how leaders can adapt to overcome these reported challenges.

1	Improving my communication style	53%
2	Building trust	39%
3	Delegating activities and responsibilities	35%
4	Empowering others to make decisions	32%
5	Making tough decisions	27%

Note: The list of preset behaviors are available in [Appendix 2](#).

Mid-level leaders felt that learning to communicate effectively with different levels of stakeholders and working collectively across boundaries may help to address many challenges. They felt it was important to build trust and respect with new peers and direct reports and grow their networks.

At this level there is also an even bigger shift in how a leader works with regards to delegating tasks to others and empowering other leaders to make the decisions needed. With increased responsibilities at this level, a leader's time is stretched and to be successful they must trust the leaders they lead to make decisions and work effectively, moving out of the detail and towards a bigger strategic picture.

The need to support direct reports in decision making and be responsible for making tough decisions was also deemed important to ensure a successful transition. At this mid-level, leaders are well placed to understand what the organization needs and expects as well as what their teams need and expect, therefore an assertive, confident decision-making style is required.



Figure 3.8

Which of the following behaviors did you focus on the most to try to ensure a successful transition to your current level of leadership?



Change and strategic leadership becomes more important, the ability to translate strategy into action short to mid-term, understanding co-dependencies and systemic effects, and managing stakeholders.



Organizational representative
Energy sector

Leaders were also asked to provide information on the most important change they made once they were in their mid-level leadership role. Two main themes appeared within the data:

	MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Delegating and empowering	<p>“Empowering my team members and fostering a culture of autonomy and innovation.”</p> <p>“I had to give my team members more autonomy. I took a step back and allowed them to make decisions without my input.”</p> <p>“I needed to provide more opportunities to my team to learn, grow, and be involved.”</p>
2	Communication style and skills	<p>“I had to learn to communicate well so that I can be heard.”</p> <p>“Regular and clear communication with my team.”</p> <p>“I had to change how I communicate with others, especially in different departments and staff in different regions.”</p>

Figure 3.9
When you first moved to your current leadership level, what was the most important change you had to make to how you lead?

At this level, results most prominently indicated the need for leaders to delegate and empower. Not only to remove themselves from the detail of tasks and free up space but to ensure their teams were provided opportunities to learn and grow. These behaviors help team members to feel accountable and responsible for their own work, fostering an open and productive team environment.

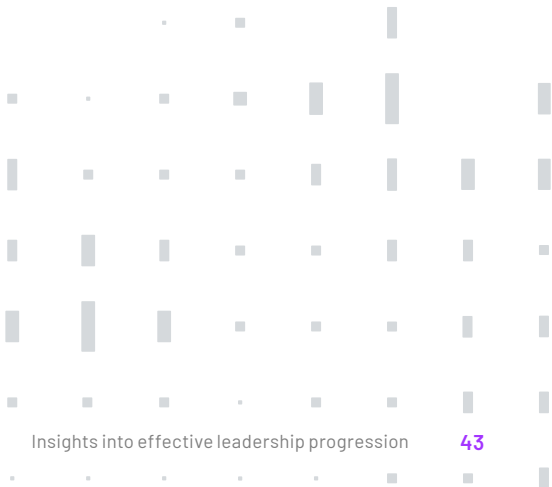
If leaders at this level failed to adapt their approach to leadership, they felt that they were perceived negatively by their superiors, they were not taken seriously in their role and lost the respect of their teams. Not adapting behaviors also causes problems with communication and confusion across teams and ultimately this can result in employees becoming disengaged, underperforming, and leaving the business.

//

You are stuck between the two, you have to make sure the people are great but also manage the politics of an organization that is also above you. //

Organizational representative, Energy sector

We asked leaders to report any negative consequences caused by failing to modify their leadership approach after moving to their current leadership level. The most prominent themes were: **Lack of respect, Misunderstandings, and Underperformance.**



Finally, we asked leaders to provide us with the one most important piece of advice they would give to someone transitioning to this leadership level. The most common main themes were as follows:

Figure 3.10
What is the one most important piece of advice you would give to someone transitioning to your current leadership level?

	ADVICE FOR TRANSITION TO MID-LEVEL LEADERSHIP	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Listen to others	"Listen to those below you and don't think that just because you are the leader that you know better." "Be open and listen to what people have to say." "Listen to your people as they can help you grow."
2	Communicate effectively	"Lead with heart. Communicate and be transparent with those you lead." "I would stress the need of prioritizing excellent communication above all else. Effective communication that is transparent, honest, and open is the cornerstone of good leadership." "Learn to communicate honestly and with authenticity."
3	Build your network	"Put in the time and effort to build networks and learn from peers actively from day one." "Learn from more experienced colleagues and grow your network." "Make sure you make time for relationships at work. It is hard to get them back if you lose them due to not managing time."
4	Delegate	"Do not micromanage people. Learn to delegate work so that you can multiply your time." "Learn to let go and not be a control freak. You have to trust your team and allow them to do the work they are hired to do." Respect people and the positions they hold and do not be afraid to delegate responsibilities."
5	Have a growth mindset	"Never stop learning and acquiring more information about leadership, be open-minded, and lead with love and humanity." "Be ready to unlearn old habits and be open to learn more about the role you are transitioning into." "Like anything else in life, you can learn how to be a good leader. Lean towards it and decide what type of leader you want to be."

In summary, mid-level leaders advise others transitioning to this level to really listen to their team, peers, and those around them. Understand what is being asked of them and what they can do to support and guide others. Effective communication is key to success and is important to enable successful delegation. Mid-level leaders should also build their connections to establish a wider support network and become visible within the organization.

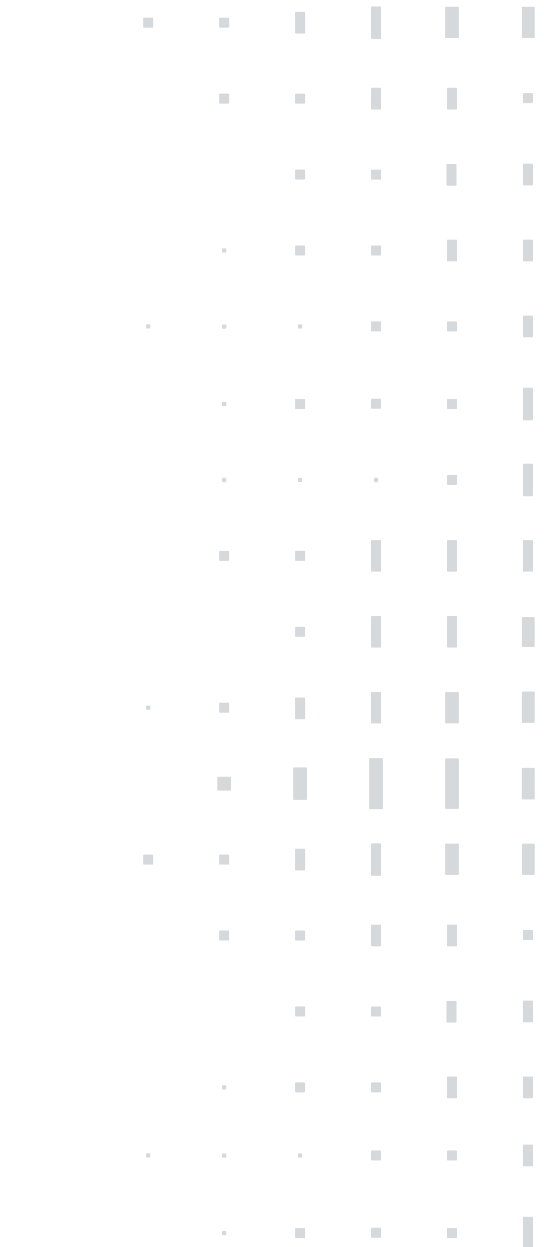
Transitioning leaders must be willing to learn, grow as leaders, and adapt to additional responsibilities. Moving to leading leaders from leading individual contributors is a very different role³. Leaders must understand that the application of their time will change, and a greater strategic focus is needed. However, the foundations developed as a first-level leader are still required but need to be built upon and adapted for a mid-level leader to succeed.



Prioritize effective communication. Establish clear expectations, actively listen to your team, and foster open dialogue. Building strong communication channels fosters trust, ensures alignment with organizational goals, and helps navigate the challenges of leadership more smoothly.



Mid-level leader, IT sector



Senior level

Leading the organization – creating the vision

As mentioned previously, it is this leadership transition that most organizations we interviewed believe is the most difficult. Based on the results of the interviews, transitioning to senior leadership positions is associated with the following challenges:

- Strategic thinking
- Navigating complexity
- Heightened expectations

For senior leaders, respondents indicated that many challenges are like those experienced by mid-level leaders but amplified. To set them apart at this next level, it is crucial that they take a strategic view and build a long-term vision. They need to transition to a broader business perspective, considering the entire organization and external factors. It can also be a significant adjustment for leaders to learn to communicate effectively and inspire others at an organizational level.

They must manage strategic priorities with increasing complexity, and it can be a challenge to find the right balance between people and results. They need to execute difficult decisions, accept the risk and responsibility, and navigate organizational politics.

Additionally, senior leaders face heightened pressure, as they are directly responsible for important outcomes such as financial results, quality, and compliance. Organizational representatives highlighted that this often leads to challenges related to imposter syndrome, where leaders may doubt their competence despite their accomplishments and capabilities.

To further investigate the challenges at this level, senior leaders were asked to share their own perspective on what they felt was the most challenging when they moved into their current leadership position. The top five themes are presented in rank order below.

1	Relationship management	Forming genuine connections with teams while not getting involved in day-to-day management and holding people to account.
2	Effective communication	Adapting communication to be appropriate to a range of stakeholders, from lower-level employees to very senior managers, ensuring a common language that keeps everyone informed.
3	Driving organizational results	Taking responsibility for ensuring that the organization is operating efficiently and meeting financial targets.
4	Operational and strategic balance	Navigating between setting the strategy and direction while managing the operational activities and daily challenges of the organization.
5	Broadening perspective	Considering the bigger picture, thinking strategically about a wide range of internal and external factors, while also addressing the opinions of stakeholders and employees.



As you move up, understanding politics becomes important, for example how you navigate through existing relationships when you're promoted within a team and up to the top.



Organizational representative

Energy sector



Figure 3.11

What was the biggest challenge you experienced when moving to your current leadership role?



Senior leaders reported that **Relationship management** was the main challenge for them when transitioning to their current leadership role. At this level their peers become fewer and the relationships they hold with them increasingly important and higher level. There is also a shift needed in how they hold relationships with others in the organization, often senior leaders can feel removed from the teams on the ground and find it difficult to maintain strong relationships with employees and other leadership levels when they make this transition.

Communicating effectively was another of the top challenges. At this level leaders are no longer only communicating and guiding individual contributors or leaders of others, but their communication often needs to be organization wide, clear, and direct, and positioned at a level all employees and leaders can understand. Leaders at this level also reported challenges around the need for them to drive results and ensure all functions within the organization are successful and productive, ultimately resulting in positive organizational outcomes. This is all while managing operational and strategic functions simultaneously with increased scope.

Finally, as was true for other transitions, leaders at this level may find it challenging to become 'less hands on', delegating tasks to others and removing themselves completely from the detailed day-to-day running of the organization. It is important they trust their employees and clearly communicate their expectations to overcome this challenge. These themes all indicate the need for leaders to recognize a big shift in mindset may be required when transitioning to this level.

We next focused on how leaders needed to adapt to overcome these reported challenges.

1	Thinking more strategically	44%
2	Improving my communication style	42%
3	Making tough decisions	34%
4	Empowering others to make decisions	34%
5	Building trust	33%

Note: The list of preset behaviors are available in [Appendix 2](#).

Thinking more strategically was selected most frequently as the behavior senior leaders needed to focus on to ensure a successful transition. When considering this with previous results, it is clear this behavior will be important in overcoming several indicated challenges.

There were a number of human-centered behaviors reported, that have been recognized across all levels, focused on empowering others and building trust. For senior leaders, it is worth noting that it is no longer only the trust of their direct reports or their teams they require, it is the trust of the whole organization. This can be accomplished over time through creating a positive leadership climate within the organization. This should be an open and honest environment where senior leaders are accountable and lead by example.



The transition to this level is a 'whole new ballgame'. A lot of the challenge is to do with confidence as we see a lot of people struggling with imposter syndrome... This happens particularly at the senior level because of the level of exposure they have. And there are high expectations of you at this level.



Organizational representative
Finance sector

Figure 3.12

Which of the following behaviors did you focus on the most to try to ensure a successful transition to your current level of leadership?



Leaders were also asked to provide information on the most important change they made once they were in their senior leadership role. Two main themes appeared within the data:

	MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Communication style and skills	<p>“Communicating more frequently.”</p> <p>“Communicating more strongly my own vision and direction and getting others on board.”</p> <p>“My communication style and setting the tone. How do I ensure we remain on strategy and on point with culture and ways of working when teams are being managed by others.”</p>
2	Delegating and empowering	<p>“The most important change I had to make was shifting from a hands-on approach to delegating and empowering my team to take more ownership of their tasks.”</p> <p>“Learn to delegate and have trust in team’s capabilities and competencies.”</p> <p>“Delegate new responsibilities to employees depending on their skills.”</p>

At a senior level, as mentioned previously, the level of communication required is very different to that needed by lower leadership levels. What is communicated, when this is communicated, and how the information is communicated are all important questions for leaders to ask themselves. Communicating with the entire organization requires not only clarity but strategy as well. In addition, clearly delegating what the business requires, empowering leaders through giving them autonomy in decision making, and trusting them and their teams to deliver the best solutions as experts in their field is also a large step away from leading further down the pipeline.

When senior leaders fail to adapt their behaviors when transitioning to this level, the organization may not be provided with a clear vision or direction. Leaders may not understand what they are responsible for and/or what is expected from their teams and in turn this results in a lack of role clarity, confusion, disengagement, and inefficiencies. When clarity through delegation and communication is not provided by senior leaders and they do not allow autonomy among their mid-level leaders, it results in siloed and competitive working styles, disharmony between functions, and a loss of purpose and meaning at work.

Figure 3.13
When you first moved to your current leadership level, what was the most important change you had to make to how you lead?



We asked leaders to report any negative consequences caused by failing to modify their leadership approach after moving to their current leadership level. The underlying themes were **Confusion** and **Stakeholder conflict**.



Finally, we asked leaders to provide us with the one most important piece of advice they would give to someone transitioning to this leadership level. The most common themes we discovered in this data were as follows:

Figure 3.14
What is the one most important piece of advice you would give to someone transitioning to your current leadership level?

	ADVICE FOR TRANSITION TO SENIOR LEADERSHIP	SAMPLE QUOTES
1	Build trust with others	"Connect with your team on a human level. Take the time to put yourself in their shoes, listen to their concerns, and you'll create an inclusive work environment that fosters trust and loyalty." "Building trust is essential." "Build trust and empower people."
2	Listen to others	"Listen carefully to your organization." "Listen to others around you so you can make informed decisions." "Focus on your soft skills; listen and communicate a lot."
3	Have confidence in yourself	"Be confident in yourself and trust your instincts." "Always be sure of yourself and your decisions. Be sure that you will achieve what you set out to accomplish." "Believe in yourself. Once you start doubting yourself, skills and abilities, everyone around you does the same."
4	Think strategically	"Think big, think strategically, think long-term and share your vision to inspire those within your organization." "Focus on big picture, strategic thinking." "Be prepared to delegate and not get stuck on the tiny details while missing the whole picture."
5	Be open minded	"Be open to others and take a long-term perspective. Listen to the experts." "Be open minded; get to listen to feedback from the people you lead." "Be open to different views on what is the best for the company."

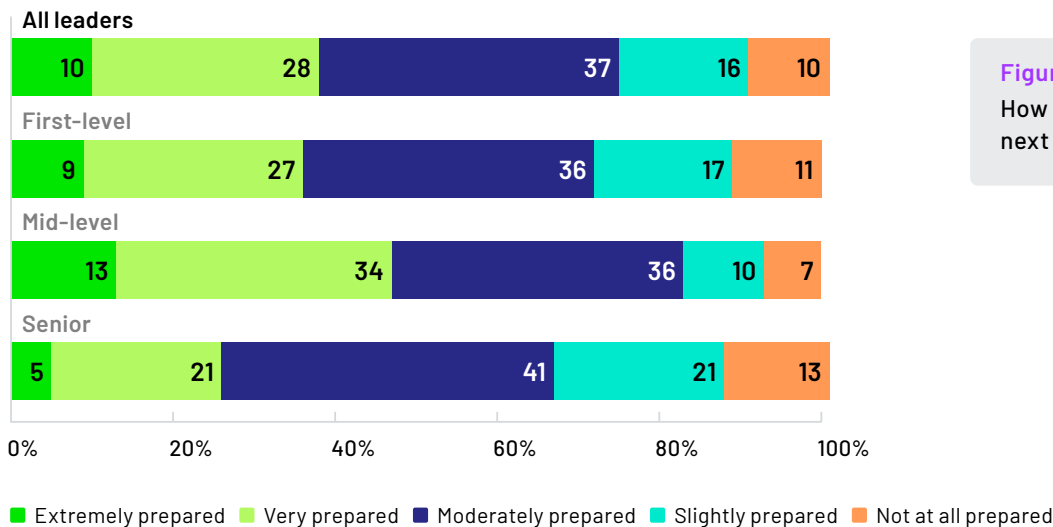


In summary, senior leaders advise others transitioning to this level to be open minded. There are many intricacies and dependencies they may not be aware of across each function, location, or department. Listen to the views of diverse leaders and employees; the problems and decisions typical in the world of work today are complex and broad and require the input and perspectives of many for effective resolution. Leaders must think strategically and be confident in collecting information and making decisions. Finally, taking a human-centered approach, helping others understand who they are as a leader, and recognizing and valuing their employees will go a long way towards success.

Transitioning leaders must be willing to adapt to a large mindset shift, strategic thinking and long-term goals of the organization are important. Leaders should recognize the conflicting demands of organizational priority with employee engagement and wellbeing. They will need to learn how to employ a human-focus to successfully manage relationships in all directions.

Advancing to the next level of leadership

For organizations to support leaders through navigating transitions to the right degree it is important to understand how prepared leaders are to move to the next level of leadership.



Overall, only **38% of leaders** indicated that they felt well prepared (*Extremely or Very prepared*) to advance to the next level of leadership. This indicates that almost two-thirds of the group may have required more support to be prepared for their next leadership transition.

47% of mid-level leaders felt *Extremely or Very prepared* for this transition, compared to **36% of first-level leaders** and **26% of senior leaders**.

Although organizations reported that transitions to the senior leadership level are the most difficult, it appears leaders at the mid-level felt the most prepared to take on this new challenge.

Authentic leadership with people and strategic vision are two fundamental skills.

Senior leader, Energy sector



Figure 3.15
How prepared are leaders for the next level of leadership?

The table below summarizes the leaders' own perspectives and experiences of progressing through the leadership pipeline. At each leadership level, it explores the challenges leaders may face, the behaviors required, important changes they will need to make, and the consequences of failing to make these changes. It contains advice for future leaders embarking on their leadership journey and provides an overview of important considerations for organizations.

Figure 3.16

Guidance from leaders: A summary of the difference between levels

	FIRST-LEVEL LEADER Leading self vs leading others – laying foundations	MID-LEVEL LEADER Leading others vs leading leaders – introducing strategy	SENIOR LEADER Leading the organization – creating the vision
Biggest challenges leaders face when transitioning to this level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship boundaries Delegating and empowering New responsibilities Managing diversity Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship boundaries Acceptance and respect Managing diversity Increased responsibilities Delegating and empowering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship management Effective communication Driving organizational results Operational and strategic balance Broadening perspectives
Behaviors leaders need to focus on for success at this level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving communication style Building trust Delegating activities Making tough decisions Managing larger workloads and increased pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving communication style Building trust Delegating activities and responsibilities Empowering others to make decisions Making tough decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinking more strategically Improving communication style Making tough decisions Empowering others to make decisions Building trust
The most important change required at this level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a new approach to communication, to provide clarity and direction for the team Trust others to take on the role of technical expert and step away from independent working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower the team, allowing them autonomy to make their own decisions. Move away from the detail of tasks to free up space for other priorities Communicate regularly and clearly with teams and senior stakeholders, tailoring messaging to suit a more diverse audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively convey their vision and communicate clear, relevant information at the correct level, to the whole organization Learn to lean on their team and trust them to help deliver on strategic goals
Problems caused by failing to change behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missed deadlines Others underperforming Damaged relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of respect Misunderstandings Underperformance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion Stakeholder conflict
Advice for future leaders from individuals who have experienced this leadership transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have confidence and courage Build trust in others Communicate effectively Listen to others Build relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to others Communicate effectively Build your network Delegate Have a growth mindset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build trust with others Listen to others Have confidence in yourself Think strategically Be open minded

To ensure leaders are more prepared for future transitions, we will now move on to explore how organizations can support leaders in their progression through the pipeline.

Key points

- Overall, **80% of leaders** felt they had to change their behavior to a *Moderate, Large, or Very large* extent when they transitioned to their current leadership level. This highlights that progressing to more senior levels does require a shift in how leaders need to behave as they adapt to new demands at each level.
- At all levels, when transitioning to the next leadership level, organizations believe it is important for leaders to be flexible and adaptable, focusing heavily on building and managing new relationships with colleagues, direct reports, and their wider network.
- To be successful in transitioning between leadership levels the underlying principles required, focused on a human-centered approach, are relevant at every level. For example, building trust and improving communication style emerged consistently as themes. However, the requirements and application of these principles change and are elevated at each leadership level.
- When moving from individual contributor to first-level leader the shift to managing peers and in fact managing people for the first time can be the most challenging. The position of first-line leader is often given due to technical expertise and not necessarily people management skills⁴. Therefore, it is necessary for leaders at this level to focus on altering their communication style, learning how to delegate to others, and trusting those they are managing to do the job of the technical expert.
- Transitions between first-level and mid-level leadership attracted the least attention in the organizational interviews. However, when considered fully, we determined that the range of demands facing mid-level leaders is extensive and diverse. At this level, leaders need to possess both strategic and operational capabilities and often feel like they are 'stuck in the middle', facing pressures from senior leaders but also from the leaders who report to them. To be successful, leaders at this level must understand that the way they spend their time needs to change, and a greater strategic focus is required.
- The transition from mid-level to senior leader is believed to be the most difficult for leaders, according to organizations interviewed. This requires a fundamental mindset shift from focusing on tasks and direct people management to big-picture strategic thinking, leading the organization, and managing a greater breadth of relationships.
- Only **38% of leaders** reported they were well prepared to advance to the next level of leadership. This suggests organizations need to do more to support their leaders to strengthen their leadership pipeline and ensure successful transitions.

4 Enhancing the leadership pipeline – ensuring future success

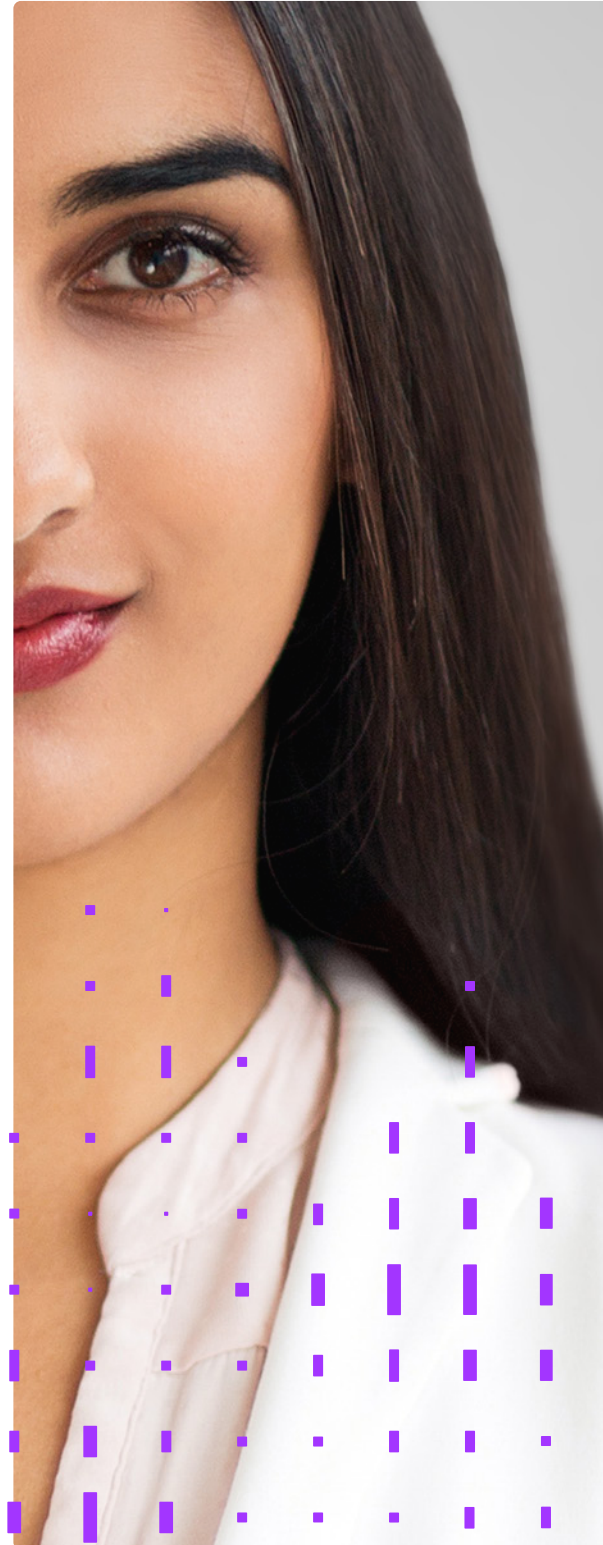
In this final section of the report, we explored how organizations can better enable leaders to transition successfully between leadership levels.

We focused, in depth, on the following research themes:

- How do organizations currently develop their leaders at each level?
- How useful are different development interventions for leaders at each level?
- What can organizations do to ensure a strong leadership pipeline?

Before this, it is important to note that there is likely to be variation in how leaders are assessed and developed across the world. As part of conducting this research, we found that some countries have set rules around who must be placed in leadership positions, especially when considering senior leadership levels. This will undoubtedly affect how organizations develop their leaders and the level of support and guidance they need to provide.

We recognize that there are many proven methods of developing leaders, both in terms of personal and interpersonal skills, encompassing emotional intelligence, personal values, leadership attributes, and technical skills, typically linked to job-related knowledge and abilities. Scientific literature in this area suggests that applying a combination of methods may enable more effective development, for example by focusing on a leader's occupational level, technical management skills, **and** relevant behavioral indicators¹.



How do organizations currently develop leaders?

To fully understand what is currently provided for leaders in terms of development opportunities, we spoke to several organizational representatives internationally. They were asked to discuss their existing offerings in relation to leadership frameworks or competencies they use for talent management within their organization.

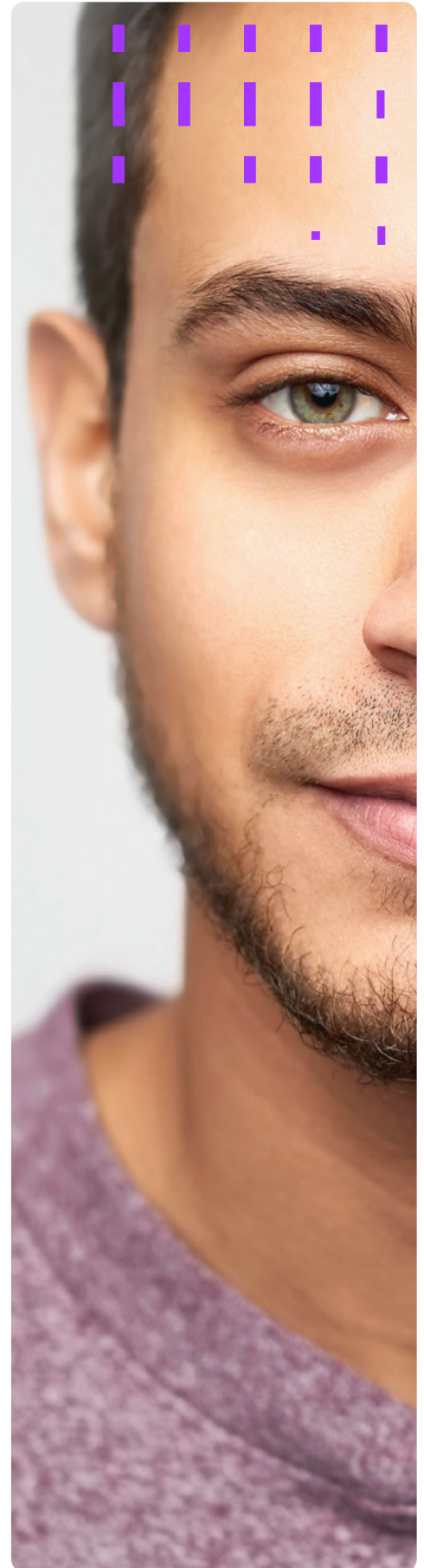
What did we find?

- Around one quarter of organizations we interviewed did not have a specific leadership framework but did differentiate between leadership levels within their general competency frameworks.
- The remaining organizations did report having a specific leadership framework or competencies that outline the expectations of leaders at different levels.
- While there is significant variation in the structure and terminology of the leadership competencies and frameworks used, the core aspects being measured across organizations appear to be consistent. These tend to be grouped into behaviors relating to self, others, and the business. Some organizations also included technical capabilities.

Competencies commonly mentioned in the leadership frameworks of organizations we interviewed were:

Innovation, decision making, accountability, building relationships, strategic thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving, resilience, drive for results, agility, inspiring, influencing, empowering, courage.

- In most cases the competencies are leveled, building in complexity and scope as the leader becomes more senior. The number of leadership levels varies among organizations; therefore, some organizations identify three or four different levels of competencies, whilst others only make a distinction at the senior level.
- Competencies for lower levels of leadership are more technical, focused on the detail and directing and guiding others, while senior levels are more strategic and focused on 'leading the business'.
- In a small number of organizations, it was reported that competency frameworks have no formal differentiation between leadership levels. Providing additional guidance of what is required across each leadership level could establish more targeted and effective leadership development within these organizations.



Leaders' experiences

In our research survey, we asked leaders themselves about their development experiences when transitioning to their current leadership level.

During this transition, on average, **only 36% of all leaders** surveyed received formal leadership development.

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
First-level	37%	62%	1%
Mid-level	39%	59%	2%
Senior	33%	67%	0%

There may be several reasons for this. According to other industry experts, often leaders turn down opportunities for development due to their large workloads and the perceived lack of value in the training being offered^{2,3}. This is of course assuming organizations are providing opportunities for development. Many take a one size fits all approach and do not provide specific development at each leadership level.

Previously we have identified that behaviors and skills needed to succeed at various leadership levels may differ. Based on this, it is likely that organizations are not setting leaders up to succeed if they are not providing them opportunities to build the additional skills and mindset needed at each level.

What development did leaders undertake?

The **36% of leaders** that reported they had been involved in leadership development were asked what development they received. They were presented with a preset list of 15 interventions as well as the option to provide other development interventions they had been involved in that weren't listed. The top three most frequent interventions at each leadership level are displayed in rank order below:

	FIRST-LEVEL LEADERS	MID-LEVEL LEADERS	SENIOR LEADERS
1	Leadership workshops	Leadership workshops	Leadership workshops
2	Individual coaching	Individual coaching	Individual coaching
3	Team building activities	Mentoring programs	Group coaching

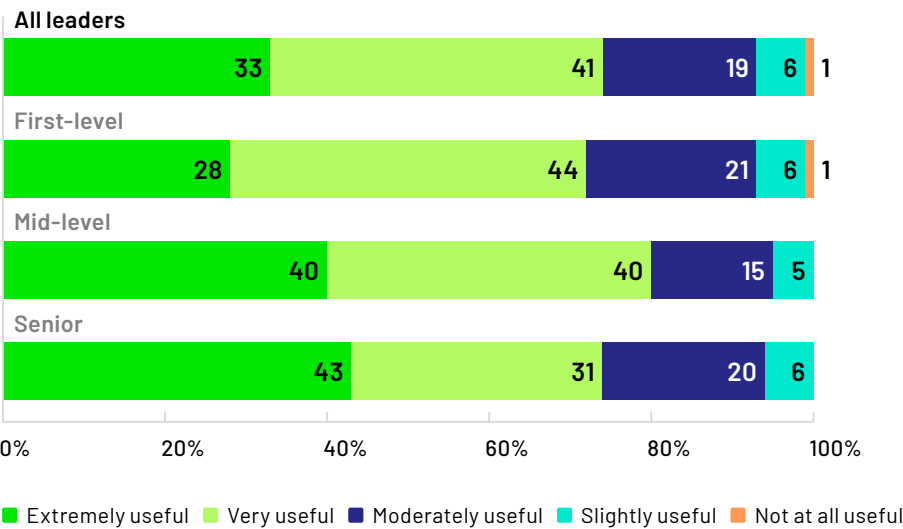
Note: For the full list of interventions please see [Appendix 2](#).

Figure 4.1
When you moved to your current leadership level, did you receive any formal leadership training or development?



Figure 4.2
What type of leadership development did you receive?

Notably leadership workshops and individual coaching were the two most frequent development interventions across all leadership levels. This perhaps indicates that currently there is a standard approach taken by organizations to leadership development. For organizations without set development interventions introducing leadership workshops and individual coaching could be a good place to start.



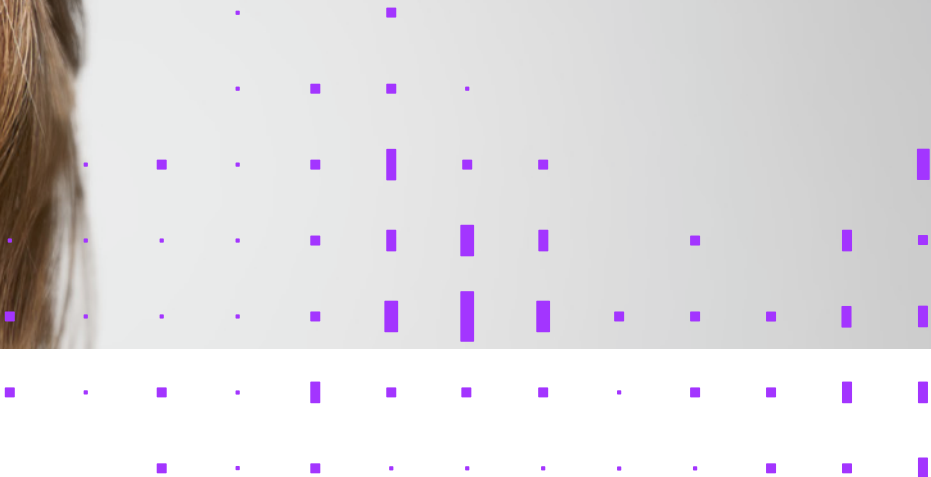
On average, **74% of the leaders** who went through development interventions reported them to be *Extremely* or *Very useful*. This illustrates that when development does occur it is almost always useful for leaders to some extent, and this amplifies the importance of organizations advocating their interventions across the business.

Mid-level and senior leaders tended to find the development slightly more useful than first-level leaders. This could suggest organizations tend to put more effort into developing leaders higher up the pipeline.

Figure 4.3
How useful did you find the development you received?



On average, **74% of the leaders** who went through development interventions reported them to be *Extremely* or *Very useful*.



Leaders were then asked the extent to which the leadership development they received was specific to their leadership level.

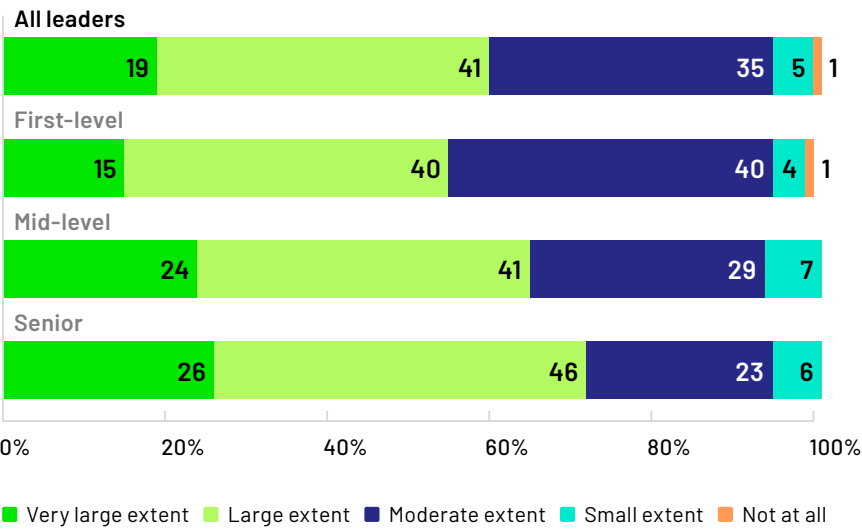
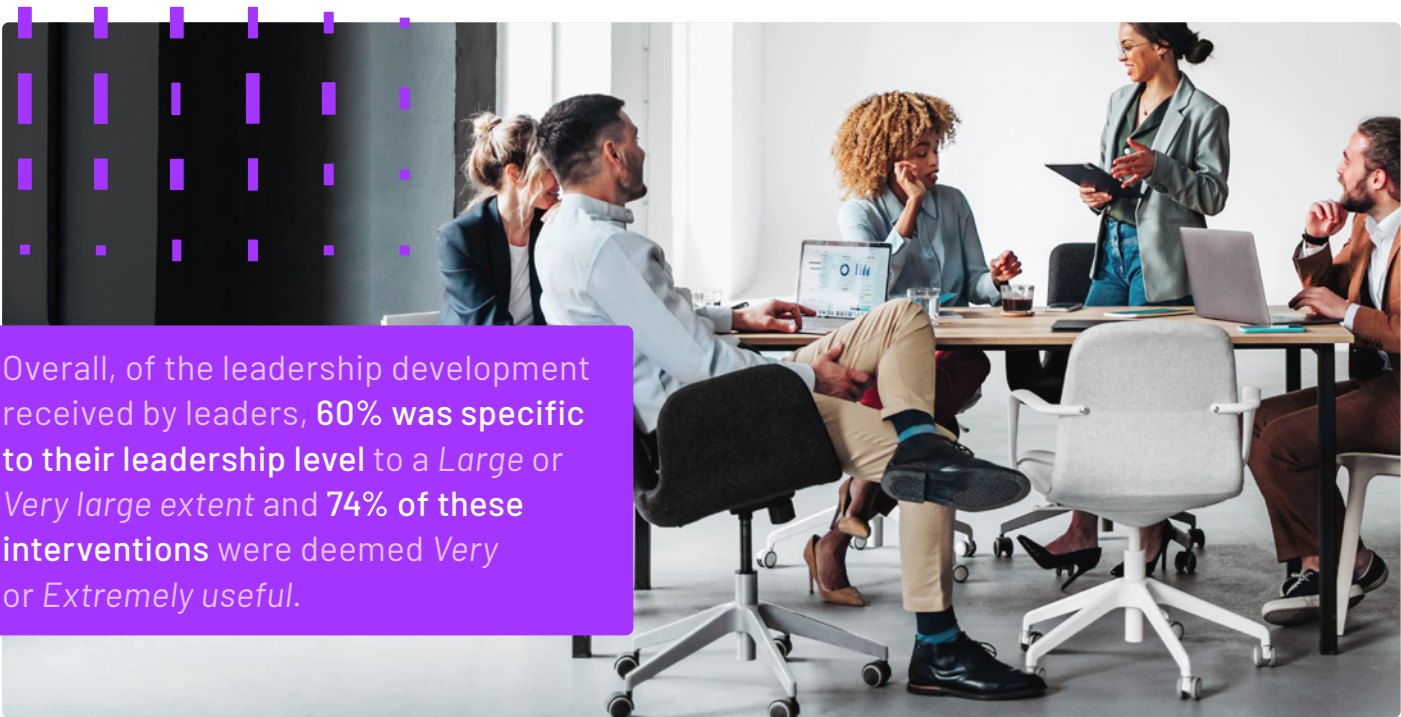


Figure 4.4
To what extent was the development you received specific to your leadership level?

Although over half of all leaders reported the development they received was specific to their level to a *Large* or *Very large* extent, results suggest organizations tailor development more as leaders move up through the pipeline.

Overall, of the leadership development received by leaders, **60%** was specific to their leadership level to a *Large* or *Very large* extent and **74%** of these interventions were deemed *Very* or *Extremely* useful. This adds to the justification for tailored development, dependent on leadership level¹ and suggests that the interventions made available by organizations are typically useful.



Overall, of the leadership development received by leaders, **60% was specific to their leadership level** to a *Large* or *Very large* extent and **74% of these interventions** were deemed *Very* or *Extremely* useful.

What should organizations do to support leaders through transitions?

To help organizations consider how they will develop their own leadership pipeline and present practical ways forward from this research, we collected the perspectives of employees, leaders, and organizational representatives.

We asked leaders what they felt would be the most useful interventions for their leadership level. We established what organizations are providing for leaders and we gained valuable insight from employees around how they believe organizations can support their leaders.

What do employees think?

The employee's perspective in this instance is of particular interest. When asked to provide information on what the organization could do to support their leaders overall, their responses could clearly be categorized into three qualitative themes:

- 1 Leadership training
- 2 Task-focused actions
- 3 People-focused behaviors

Exploring these themes in depth has provided the following important insights for organizations. The five most frequent sub-themes for each category are provided in context below:

Leadership training

- Employees most frequently suggested the following specific ways to develop leaders: Insightful **leadership development programs, coaching, and mentoring**.
- They felt regular **targeted training** should be provided, focusing on both soft (human focus) and hard skills (technical expertise).
- Leaders should be held accountable and be provided with feedback on their performance through structured and frequent **performance reviews**.

Sub-themes:

Leadership development programs, coaching, mentoring, targeted training, performance reviews

//

Implement a regular evaluation method for managers.

They should provide a mentorship program where leaders can learn from role models.

//

Task-focused actions

- **Providing resources**, both physical and people-resources were mentioned often. Employees felt organizations must ensure leaders have the resources they need to develop and become more effective leaders.
- **Making space** was a common theme relating to task-focused actions organizations can take. Organizations focusing on allowing leaders time to be leaders and enabling them to prioritize leadership development was deemed very important by employees.
- **Ensuring fairness in remuneration packages** was also a common theme. This is notable as it demonstrates the employees' understanding of the difficulty and intricacies of a leadership position and provides recognition of the leaders' efforts.
- **Providing clarity** with regards to strategy, objectives, and goals. Organizations should ensure leaders understand their responsibilities and what is expected of them and their team.
- **Providing clear communication** throughout the organization. Producing more effective communication channels and improving the quality of what and when information is communicated.



Give them the necessary space and time to allow them to focus on developmental activities.

Provide more clarity about the organization's direction and priorities.



Sub-themes:

Providing resources, making space, ensuring fairness in remuneration packages, providing clarity, providing clear communication

People-focused behaviors

- Organizations should ensure leaders are always provided with **guidance and support** – for challenges, change, and everyday tasks.
- **Give autonomy** was a common theme in relation to how the organization treats their leaders. Employees believe organizations must grant leaders more independence to enable them to be more effective and efficient.
- It is important for the organization to **foster emotional intelligence** in everything they do, enabling a positive leadership climate with a top-down approach.
- Employees also want organizations to **listen**. This was a common theme and centered on the need for organizations to listen to recommendations from leaders and employees and do so with an open mind.
- Organizations should recognize people as individuals and consider how they treat leaders, as well as ensuring leaders embrace a **human-centered** leadership style.



Be unconditionally supportive in all aspects of work.

Be more human and less robotic.



Sub-themes:

Guidance and support, give autonomy, foster emotional intelligence, listen, embrace a human-centered leadership style

These themes have provided us with an understanding of what employees feel organizations can do to support leaders. This enables us to consider leadership development from another lens. What is clear is that leadership development is not just the responsibility of the leader. It is also about how organizations enable them to do this by creating an environment conducive to learning and growth.

What methods of development would leaders find useful?

Leaders were asked to select the top five development opportunities that they perceive to be the most useful for their leadership level. The most frequently selected are shown in rank order below.

Figure 4.5
In your opinion, what are the top five most useful development opportunities that could be provided for your current leadership level?

	FIRST-LEVEL LEADERS	%	MID-LEVEL LEADERS	%	SENIOR LEADERS	%
1	Individual coaching	62	Mentoring programs	54	Mentoring programs	52
2	Mentoring programs	54	Individual coaching	53	Leadership development programs	50
3	Leadership workshops	50	Leadership workshops	45	Individual coaching	50
4	Leadership development programs	49	Team building activities	44	Executive coaching	50
5	Team building activities	41	Leadership development programs	43	Leadership workshops	47

Note: For the full list of interventions please see [Appendix 2](#).

Across all levels, mentoring programs and individual coaching appeared in the top three most useful interventions. This is interesting given earlier findings which suggest mentoring programs are not a typical development intervention that organizations currently provide for first-level and senior leaders. As individual coaching is already highlighted as a common intervention provided by organizations, including mentoring programs in their offering could be a valuable addition.

The only difference between leadership levels is that ‘Team building activities’ has been selected as one of the most useful development opportunities within the first-level and mid-level leader responses. This is also apparent within our qualitative survey results, where it became clear that leaders, particularly at lower leadership levels, felt a need for peer-peer interaction, support, and connection to guide them in their development.

How are organizations currently supporting leaders?

We asked organizational representatives to describe their typical approach to supporting leadership development in their organization. The range of leadership development options is vast, and we were interested to see what interventions are most popular with talent management experts.

The responses show that organizations offer a range of development opportunities available for leaders. The most common were:

Leadership development programs, coaching, leadership training, mentoring

The most common initiatives are examples of structured programs, which are designed to develop specific leadership skills and qualities. This is perhaps not surprising given that this is said to be one of the core routes to effective leadership development⁴.

Contextually, representatives spoke about the opportunities in the following ways:

- **Leadership development programs** are holistic, cohort-based interventions that take place over a longer time scale (e.g. several months) than leadership training initiatives.
- **Leadership training** is focused on developing specific skills and is delivered both in person and online.
- **Coaching** is a series of sessions where the leader meets one-on-one with a coach to identify and enhance their specific strengths and development areas. It is usually delivered by external providers or internal stakeholders such as HR business partners.
- **Mentoring** focuses on a leader meeting regularly with an individual who has experience or knowledge in a specific area that they would like to develop. They provide guidance and support, typically in a less specific and structured format to coaching. Leaders could be assigned an external mentor, or they may have a mentor within their organization from a different level or department.

In the organizations we interviewed, we found that training is less commonly used with senior leaders, but that organizations offer a range of courses, allowing leaders to customize their development journey according to their specific needs.

The importance of developmental experiences in the form of experiential learning was also called out by organizational representatives. This was particularly relevant in some regions, like the Middle East, where development interventions can often be less structured. Many said that leaders in their organizations receive informal guidance from superiors and learn on the job through projects or experience shadowing.

“There’s lots of learning offered on diversity and inclusion, coaching generally, and anything leaders would need to know technically for their roles and the regulations that are relevant for our industry.”

Organizational representative
Manufacturing sector

Organizational support at different leadership levels

We asked organizational representatives if they break down their support by leadership level and, if so, how they do this.

Most representatives we interviewed stated that their organizations offer some degree of tailored support to different leadership levels, or they follow a more personalized approach where development is guided by the individual leader's development needs and current organizational goals.

Key differences across levels

Different focus for leadership training and development programs:

- **First-level** – Heavily focused on people and performance management skills and how to form effective teams.
- **Senior levels** – Programs build on first-level development foundations by adding a focus on business-level outcomes and developing strategic and financial skills. Communication and affective skills also appear to get more attention at higher levels, with specific references made to emotional awareness training and mindset development.

More personalized support for senior leaders over other leadership levels:

- Additional interventions such as 360 feedback and coaching are more likely to be incorporated at more senior levels. This is often related to the costs and resources involved in providing more individualized support.

However, in the results of our survey, individual coaching was rated as the most useful intervention by first-level leaders. This highlights a potential area of opportunity for organizations who may be looking to provide more targeted support at this level. Organizations should consider whether they can democratize coaching by providing it to all leadership levels and not restrict it solely to their more senior leaders.

Previous research highlighted a growing recognition that leadership development should not be restricted to senior leadership levels. As organizational dynamics shift to rely less on hierarchies and more on collaboration and cross-functional teams, leaders at all levels need to be equipped with the relevant technical and relational skills⁵.

Although organizational representatives interviewed acknowledged the importance of providing appropriate support across all leadership levels, the reality is that often some levels receive more support and others are overlooked, due to resource constraints. This sentiment seems to echo the results of the survey, showing that on average, **only 36% of leaders** received formal leadership development when they moved to their current leadership level.

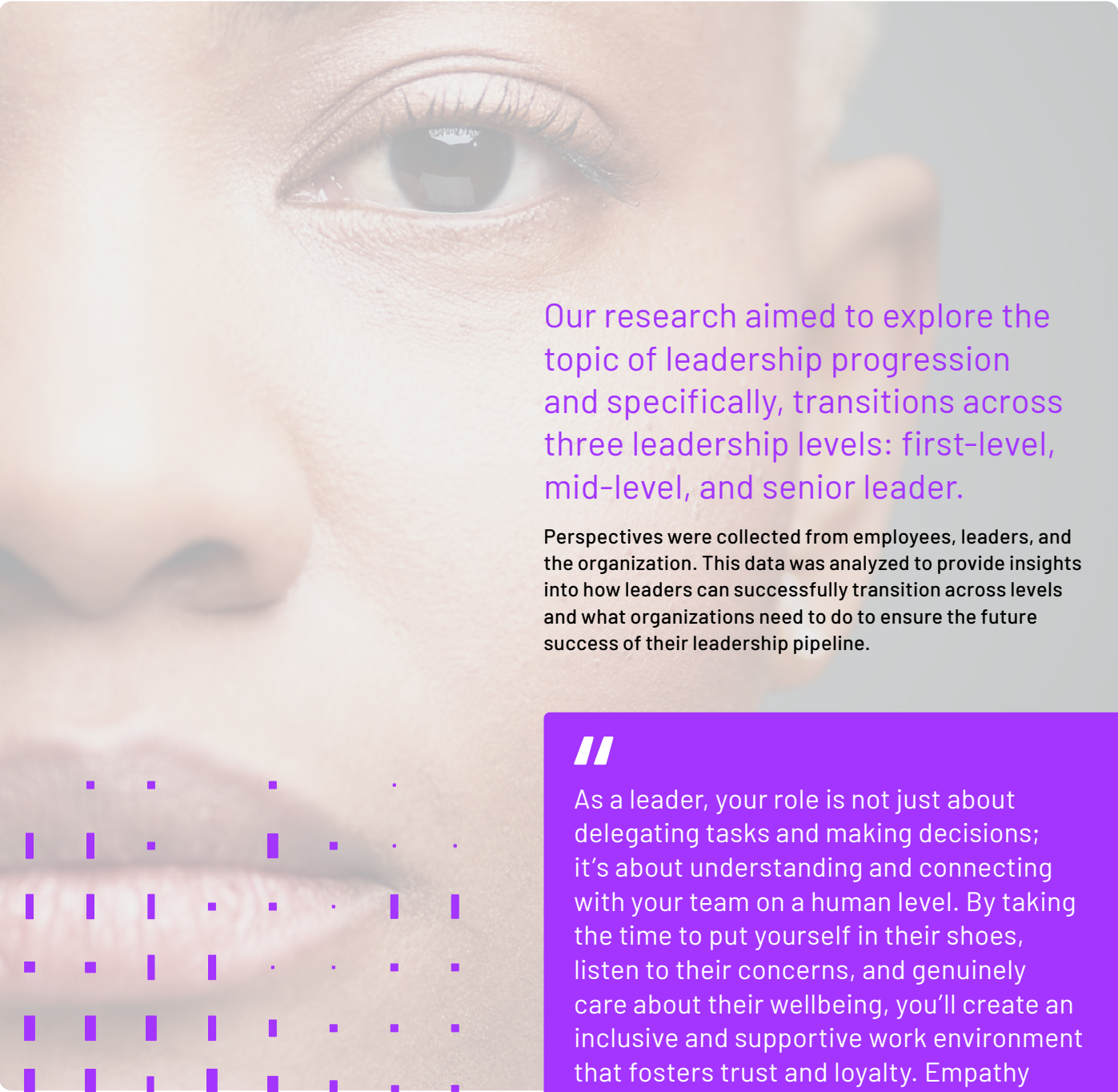
On average, only 36% of leaders received formal leadership development when they moved to their current leadership level.

In general, organizations spoke about leveled development quite broadly. They acknowledge that there is more they would like to do to build on what they currently offer and provide more targeted support to leaders. It is encouraging that organizations are motivated to address the need to support leadership development at all levels of the organization.

Key points

- **Only 36% of all leaders** surveyed received formal leadership development. There may be several reasons for this. However, to summarize, organizations are not setting leaders up to succeed if they are not providing them opportunities to build the additional skills and mindset needed at each leadership level.
- Leaders across all levels, who have received development, indicated this was most frequently through leadership workshops and individual coaching. Encouragingly, on average **74% of leaders** reported the development they experienced was extremely or very useful. This amplifies the importance of organizations providing development and encouraging their leaders to participate.
- Organizations reported that existing development interventions for leaders tend to focus on leveled content, building in complexity and scope as the leader becomes more senior. From the leader's perspective, only **60% of the development** they received was specific to leadership level.
- Employees provided their opinion on how organizations can support their leaders to develop. The themes discovered spanned three main categories: *Leadership training*, *Task-focused actions*, and *People-focused behaviors* and demonstrated the need for organizations to create a positive and encouraging environment for leaders' learning and growth.
- Leaders of all levels felt that mentoring programs and individual coaching were in the top three most useful development opportunities that could be offered to them by their organizations. However, from the perspective of organizations, we discovered that they often do not provide individual or more personalized opportunities due to lack of resource and financial implications.
- Organizations acknowledge that there is more they would like to do to build on their current leadership development offerings and provide more targeted support to leaders at different levels. This will improve the quality of leadership and ensure the strength of their future leadership pipeline.

Final reflections



Our research aimed to explore the topic of leadership progression and specifically, transitions across three leadership levels: first-level, mid-level, and senior leader.

Perspectives were collected from employees, leaders, and the organization. This data was analyzed to provide insights into how leaders can successfully transition across levels and what organizations need to do to ensure the future success of their leadership pipeline.



As a leader, your role is not just about delegating tasks and making decisions; it's about understanding and connecting with your team on a human level. By taking the time to put yourself in their shoes, listen to their concerns, and genuinely care about their wellbeing, you'll create an inclusive and supportive work environment that fosters trust and loyalty. Empathy allows you to effectively communicate with different personalities, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and motivate individuals towards a shared goal.



Senior leader, Telecommunications sector

From our exploration, it became clear that **a main predictor of success, across all leadership levels, comes from taking a positive, human-centered leadership approach.** The importance of leaders demonstrating behaviors that make each employee feel trusted, appreciated, and respected should not be underestimated. How a leader makes their employees feel has a direct impact on employee performance, engagement, and wellbeing, which can all be closely linked to overall organizational performance.

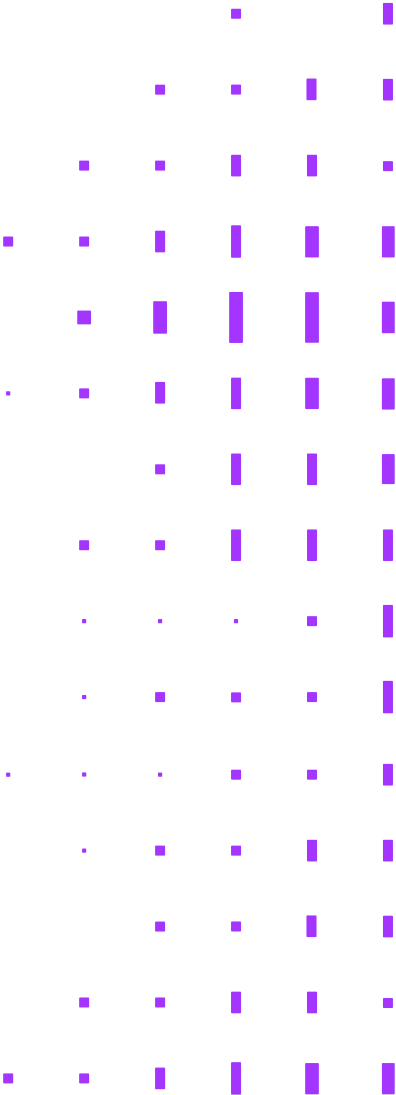
The need for additional leadership development was visible across all levels. Our data revealed that **there is an opportunity for leadership effectiveness to be improved and to reduce levels of stress and frustration felt by employees because of their direct leader’s behavior.** As a starting point, we recommend leaders further develop a human-centered leadership style and focus on behaviors that respond to the call from employees to provide better communication, more autonomy, and be more supportive leaders.

All levels of leaders were aligned on the view that connecting with and valuing people is imperative to successful leadership. However, certain qualities such as ‘Inspiring purpose’, although still important, are perhaps seen as slightly less of a priority in comparison to behaviors related to empowering and connecting with people. This may mean that the balance of focus for existing leadership development programs may need to shift accordingly. Our research findings can therefore provide some useful input for organizations who want to review their current development content to ensure it reflects expectations of leadership today.

When transitioning to the next leadership level, leaders must be willing to prepare for and grow into their new role, to overcome different and elevated leadership challenges. At a more senior level, challenges a leader will face are broader in focus, increasing in scope and complexity, but center on the same general themes of communication, delegation, and management style that are critical at the first and mid-level.

Of interest for leaders is that, when understanding how to overcome these challenges and make successful transitions, most responses directly focused on the leader’s own behavior in some way, describing elements of leadership they are directly able to influence and develop. For example, building self-confidence, listening to others, and treating others with respect. This firmly places the leader at the forefront of their own success. If they recognize the need for changing behaviors and can adapt, with additional support and guidance from organizations, this will make it more likely that their progression to a more senior level will be successful.

A main predictor of success, across all leadership levels, comes from taking a **positive, human-centered leadership approach**



Although all levels of leadership appear to share many attributes needed for success and come across many of the same challenges, there are still differences in what is required of leaders at each level. These differences are of particular importance for leaders and organizations when considering future leadership transitions:

Transition 1

Moving into leadership from being an individual contributor. There is an initial mindset change required to focus on delegation and empowering others, appreciating individuals, and communicating expectations. First-level leaders also face complexity in managing their relationships, particularly with former peers and new colleagues.

Transition 2

Moving to mid-level leadership requires a further shift in mindset. There is a need to demonstrate and balance both strategic and operational capabilities, and leaders at this level have many audiences to communicate with. They must recognize the need to move out of the detail and have a broader strategic focus.

Transition 3

At a senior leader level, a final mindset shift is required, often recognized as the most difficult by organizations. Building and maintaining trust and providing clarity in communication are essential at this level. Leading the organization involves a step away from day-to-day management and a move towards big-picture strategic thinking, managing a greater breadth of relationships and empowering managers and teams.

With all these requirements for leaders at each level, it is perhaps not surprising that **many of the leaders surveyed did not feel fully prepared to advance to the next level of leadership.** This is a key learning for organizations. If they want leaders to make successful transitions and ensure a strong leadership pipeline, they must take this on board and consider the best way to support and develop their leaders at all levels.

Our results indicated that **the attention organizations place on development is not always equal across leadership levels**, which is not conducive to successful leadership transitions across the whole leadership pipeline. Positively, organizations acknowledged their existing offerings must be refined and expanded to ensure suitability for leaders at different levels and we encourage them to lean on this research to support the advancement of their programs.

With the insights provided in this report, we hope that employees feel their perspectives on leadership have been heard. That leaders have more clarity on what is required from them at each leadership level. And, that organizations have an enhanced understanding of how best to develop their leaders and guide them through their leadership journey.

Many of the leaders surveyed did not feel fully prepared to advance to the next level of leadership.

References

Introduction

- 1 De Meuse, K. P., Dai, G., & Wu, J. (2011). Leadership Skills across Organizational Levels: A Closer Examination. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 14, 120-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10887156.2011.570143>
- 2 Charan, R., Drotter, S., Noel, J. L., & Jonasen, K. (2024). *The Leadership Pipeline: Developing Leaders in the Digital Age* (3rd ed.). Wiley.

Section 1

- 1 Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning. (2024) *Leadership Fitness: The Path to Developing Human-Centered Leaders Who Drive Employee Fulfillment*. Harvard Business School Publishing. www.harvardbusiness.org/insight/leadership-fitness-the-path-to-developing-human-centered-leaders-who-drive-employee-fulfillment
- 2 Hughes, D., Boothroyd, P., Pennington, J. & Goldsack E. (2021) *Leading in the future world of work: An international research report*. Talogy. <https://info.talogy.com/en-us/leading-in-future-world-of-work>
- 3 Charles-Leija, H., Castro, C. G., Toledo, M., & Ballesteros-Valdés, R. (2023). Meaningful Work, Happiness at Work, and Turnover Intentions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 20(4), 3565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043565>
- 4 Osborne, S., & Hammoud, M. S. (2017). Effective Employee Engagement in the Workplace. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology*, 16(1), 50-67. <https://doi.org/10.5590/IJAMT.2017.16.1.04>
- 5 Maddocks, J. (2018). *Emotional Intelligence at Work. How to Make Change Stick* (2nd ed.). Spa House Publishing.

Section 2

- 1 Charan, R., Drotter, S., Noel, J. L., & Jonasen, K. (2024). *The Leadership Pipeline: Developing Leaders in the Digital Age* (3rd ed.). Wiley.
- 2 Garcia, M. (2023, December 30). Importance of Leadership Trust for Empowering Employees. *Industry Leaders*. www.industryleadersmagazine.com/importance-of-leadership-trust-for-empowering-employees

Section 3

- 1 Crane, B. (2022). Leadership mindsets: Why new managers fail and what to do about it. *Business Horizons*. 65(4), 447-455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.05.005>
- 2 Brower, T. (2023, March 26). Middle Managers Have It Bad: 5 Things They Need Most. *Forbes*. www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/03/26/middle-managers-have-it-bad-5-things-they-need-most
- 3 Charan, R., Drotter, S., Noel, J. L., & Jonasen, K. (2024). *The Leadership Pipeline: Developing Leaders in the Digital Age* (3rd ed.). Wiley.
- 4 Griffith, J.A., Baur, J.E., & Buckley, M.R. (2019). Creating comprehensive leadership pipelines: Applying the real options approach to organizational leadership development. *Human Resource Management Review*. 29(3), 305-315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.07.001>

Section 4

- 1 Pereira, L., Pires, R., Roble, G., Lopes, F., & Rosini, A. (2021). Career Transition and The Leadership Pipeline of Ram Charan. *Journal on Innovation and Sustainability RISUS*, 12(4), 133-143. <https://doi.org/10.23925/2179-3565.2021v12i4p133-143%20>
- 2 Kruse, K. (2022, March 29). Why 'I Don't Have Time For Training' Is A Lie. *Forbes*. www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2022/03/29/why-i-dont-have-time-for-training-is-a-lie/?sh=2098c59e4e99
- 3 Kruse, K. (2020, January 7). Top 6 Reasons Your Leadership Development Program Is Failing. *Forbes*. www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2020/01/07/top-6-reasons-your-leadership-development-program-is-failing/?sh=1f86a93074fc
- 4 Day, D. V., Riggio, R. E., Tan, S. J., & Conger, J. A. (2021). Advancing the science of 21st-century leadership development: Theory, research, and practice. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32(5), 101557. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101557>
- 5 Moldoveanu, M., & Narayandas, D. (2019). The future of leadership development. *Harvard Business Review*, 97(2), 40-48. www.researchgate.net/profile/Mihnea-Moldoveanu/publication/331480385_The_Future_of_Leadership_Development/links/5c7beaf5299bf1268d362dfb/The-Future-of-Leadership-Development.pdf

1 Appendix

Sample demographics

Leaders sample

LEADER JOB LEVEL	
First-level	58%
Mid-level	29%
Senior	13%

ORGANIZATION SIZE	
1-10	9%
11-50	15%
51-200	18%
201-500	13%
501-1000	13%
1001-5000	13%
5001-10000	5%
10001+	13%
Don't know	2%

ORGANIZATION SECTOR	
Agriculture and fishing	1%
Banking and finance	4%
Business services	10%
Government and public services	9%
Information technology	12%
Manufacturing	10%
Media	3%
Oil, gas and mining	2%
Other (please specify)	25%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	7%
Prefer not to say	2%
Retail and leisure	7%
Telecommunication	2%
Transport and distribution	4%
Utilities	1%

AGE OF LEADER	
20-29 years	30%
30-39 years	34%
40-49 years	21%
50-59 years	12%
60+ years	3%

GENDER OF LEADER	
Female	44%
Male	55%
Prefer not to say	1%

REGION	
APAC (Asia Pacific)	19%
EU (Europe)	24%
MEA (Middle East & Africa)	24%
NA (North America & Canada)	22%
Nordics	4%
SA (South America)	7%

ALL LEADERS	N=821
-------------	-------

Note: Occasionally percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Samples of <1% are not reported

Leaders sample (continued)

JOB FUNCTION	
Administrative, clerical and secretarial	7%
Customer service	8%
Engineering/technical	8%
Finance	5%
Human resources	6%
Information technology	11%
Logistics and distribution	2%
Management and operations	19%
Marketing	4%
Other (please specify)	11%
Prefer not to say	1%
Production	3%
Purchasing	1%
Quality	2%
Research and development	5%
Sales	6%
Security	1%
Utilities	1%

TEAM SIZE	
1 - 5 employees	42%
6 - 10 employees	24%
11 - 20 employees	14%
21 - 50 employees	10%
51 - 100 employees	5%
101 - 250 employees	3%
251 - 1000 employees	1%
Prefer not to say	1%

TENURE IN CURRENT ROLE	
<1 year	25%
1-2 years	34%
3-4 years	20%
5-9 years	15%
10+ years	7%

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE	
<1 year	4%
1-5 years	55%
6-10 years	22%
11-15 years	8%
16-20 years	6%
21+	5%

ALL LEADERS	N=821
-------------	-------



Employee sample

LEADER JOB LEVEL	
Entry level	17%
Individual contributor	24%
First-level	34%
Mid-level	17%
Senior	8%

ORGANIZATION SIZE	
1-10	10%
11-50	15%
51-200	17%
201-500	12%
501-1000	12%
1001-5000	13%
5001-10000	5%
10001+	12%
Don't know	3%

ORGANIZATION SECTOR	
Agriculture and fishing	1%
Banking and finance	5%
Business services	11%
Government and public services	10%
Information technology	12%
Manufacturing	8%
Media	2%
Oil, gas and mining	2%
Other (please specify)	25%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	7%
Prefer not to say	2%
Retail and leisure	7%
Telecommunication	2%
Transport and distribution	3%
Utilities	1%

AGE OF EMPLOYEE	
16-19 years	1%
20-29 years	36%
30-39 years	32%
40-49 years	19%
50-59 years	9%
60+ years	3%

GENDER OF EMPLOYEE	
Female	49%
Male	50%
Prefer not to say	1%

REGION	
APAC (Asia Pacific)	20%
EU (Europe)	25%
MEA (Middle East & Africa)	23%
NA (North America & Canada)	23%
Nordics	3%
SA (South America)	6%

ALL EMPLOYEES	N=1412
---------------	--------

Note: Occasionally percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Samples of <1% are not reported



Employee sample (continued)

JOB FUNCTION	
Administrative, clerical and secretarial	9%
Consultancy	1%
Customer service	11%
Education	4%
Engineering/technical	8%
Finance	5%
Healthcare	2%
Human resources	6%
Information technology	10%
Legal and Compliance	2%
Logistics and distribution	2%
Management and operations	14%
Marketing	4%
Prefer not to say	1%
Production	3%
Project management	1%
Purchasing	1%
Quality	2%
Research and development	6%
Sales	6%
Security	1%

EMPLOYEE'S DIRECT LEADER LEVEL	
First-level	41%
Mid-level	32%
Senior	27%

TENURE UNDER CURRENT LEADER	
<1 year	25%
1-2 years	35%
3-4 years	21%
5-9 years	14%
10+ years	6%

ALL EMPLOYEES	N=1412
---------------	--------



Interview sample

COUNTRY LOCATION	
Australia	5%
Canada	3%
Denmark	3%
Finland	15%
France	10%
Germany	5%
Hong Kong	3%
Italy	3%
Netherlands	3%
New Zealand	10%
Saudi Arabia	5%
Spain	3%
Switzerland	3%
Turkey	5%
UAE	3%
UK	10%
Ukraine	3%
US	12%

ORGANIZATION SECTOR	
Banking and finance	13%
Business services	20%
Government and public services	5%
Information technology	3%
Manufacturing	18%
Media	3%
Other (please specify)	18%
Pharmaceuticals and healthcare	5%
Retail and leisure	5%
Transport and distribution	3%
Utilities	10%

ORGANIZATION SIZE	
Not stated	8%
11-50	8%
201-500	3%
501-1000	10%
1001-5000	25%
5001-10000	18%
10001+	30%

ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES	N=40
--------------------------------	------

Note: Occasionally percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Samples of <1% are not reported

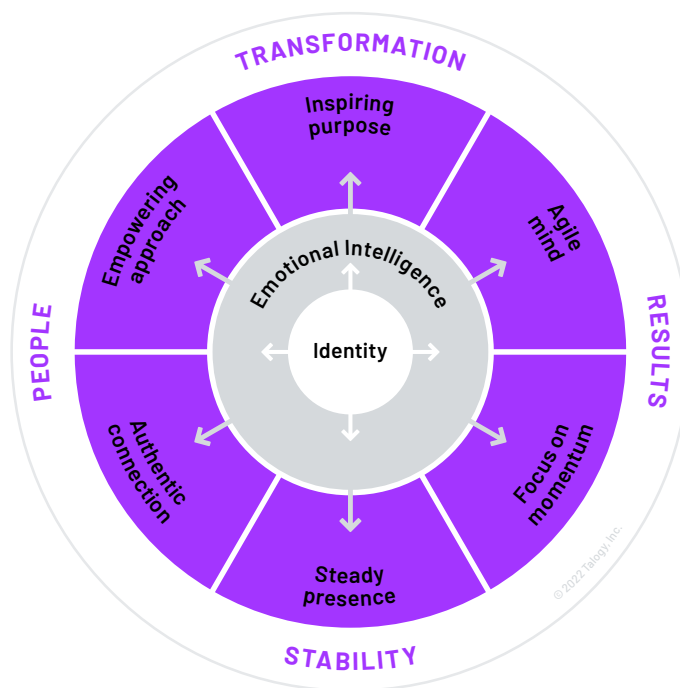
2 Appendix

Leadership behavior options relating to Figure 2.1

Which of the following behaviors are the most important for your leader to display for you to perform at your best?

- Considers possibilities with an open mind
- Defines effective strategies to achieve goals
- Displays practical business acumen
- Is open to learning and new ideas
- Creates a vision for change
- Shares meaningful information
- Persuades others effectively
- Inspires, motivates, and engages people
- Fosters collaboration, trust, and respect
- Empowers people to deliver
- Coaches and develops people
- Resolves conflict quickly
- Encourages fast paced working to deliver results
- Provides a clear plan and priorities
- Sets clear, realistic goals and holds people to account
- Makes firm and timely decisions
- Nurtures meaningful connections with people
- Shows empathy and compassion
- Creates an inclusive climate and sense of fairness
- Is authentic, genuine, and ethical
- Demonstrates a calm and composed demeanor
- Shows resilience in challenging circumstances
- Leads with courage during times of adversity
- Focuses on self-growth and improvement
- Other

Talogy's InView Leadership™ framework



Leadership behavior options relating to Figure 3.4, 3.6, and 3.8

Which of the following behaviors did you focus on the most to try to ensure a successful transition to your current leadership level?

- Improving my communication style
- Making tough decisions
- Trusting others
- Building trust
- Gathering input and feedback from others
- Sharing thoughts and perspectives with coworkers and colleagues
- Identifying innovative and creative ways of working
- Empowering others to make decisions
- Setting an inspiring vision
- Adjusting my focus from short term to long term
- Thinking more strategically
- Delegating activities and responsibilities
- Providing greater clarity about organizational purpose
- Holding myself accountable to new standards
- Changing how I solve complex problems
- Managing larger workloads and increased pressure
- Building personal connections with coworkers and colleagues
- Building a wider network
- Taking a broader perspective in problem solving and action planning
- Learning how to influence more senior colleagues
- Maintaining authenticity whilst managing more people
- Providing leadership instead of expertise
- Working cross-functionally
- Other

Leadership development options relating to Figure 4.2 and 4.5.

What type of leadership development did you receive?

In your opinion, what are the top five most useful development opportunities that could be provided for your current leadership level?

- Individual coaching
- Group coaching
- Team building activities
- 360 feedback interventions
- Executive coaching
- Leadership workshops
- Mentoring programs
- Psychometric questionnaires for self-development
- Leadership retreats
- Action learning groups
- Leadership simulations
- Cross-functional rotations
- Peer learning groups
- Women in leadership
- Self-led eLearning content
- Leadership development programs
- Other



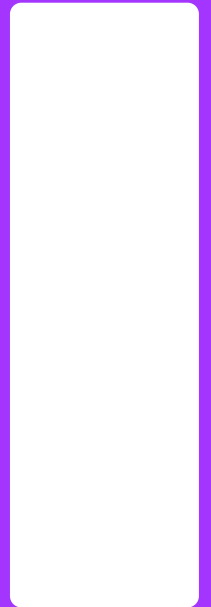
Acknowledgments



Many people were involved in this research project without which it would not have been possible.

We would like to thank Dan Hughes and Jill Pennington for their consistent support and guidance during the running of this project, and Susan Stang, Paul Glatzhofer, and Melissa Ross for their detailed comments on the research findings and this report.

We would also like to thank our many colleagues who were involved in the data collection and analysis, design, and delivery of this research. Finally, we are grateful to all the organizations, leaders, and employees who participated in the research interviews and surveys.



Talogy.com

