



The Leadership Journey:

Insights into Effective Leadership Progression

Executive Summary



Are your leaders prepared to move into your most critical roles?

Enabling and supporting leaders as they progress through your organization is critical when facing tight labor markets and increased reliance on leaders to deliver results.

Our previous global leadership research, [Leading in the future world of work](#), uncovered that the challenges of the evolving workplace have redefined the criteria for effective leadership – emphasizing the need for more human-centered, humble leaders who can operate effectively in dynamic working contexts and drive sustainable success for both their organization and the people they lead.

What does effective leadership and success look like at each level in this changed landscape?

In this latest international research, [The leadership journey: Insights into effective leadership progression](#), we advance our understanding of modern leadership by exploring the perspectives of employees, leaders, organizations, and scientific literature on what challenges leaders face at different levels of leadership, what behaviors are important, and how leaders can prepare for the next step in their journey.

We examine:

- The direct impact of leaders on their people at each level
- What leadership behaviors and attributes are important at each level
- The leadership challenges leaders face as they transition to the next level and their degree of preparedness
- How organizations can best prepare leaders to transition successfully and be effective in their future leadership role

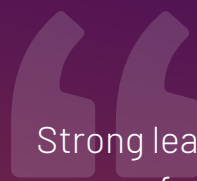
These findings offer practical and actionable insights to help build effective leaders for strong leadership pipelines.

Key findings

Employee perception of leadership effectiveness is related to how leaders make them feel.

Over 75% of the time, leaders make employees feel positive emotions, such as **trusted**, **respected**, and **safe**.

Leaders who made employees feel more positive emotions were also rated as more effective leaders by them. Yet one in five employees are still experiencing stress and frustration on a very frequent basis. Leaders need to recognize the behaviors they display that causes these negative feelings within employees. Employees whose leaders display negative behaviors reported a decrease in their own work performance, engagement, and overall wellbeing. This reinforces the need for leadership development to focus on a human-centered approach and places emphasis on emotional intelligence (EI) as an important leadership attribute – how a leader makes an employee feel cannot be underestimated.



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.

Senior leader
Manufacturing sector



Enabling effective leadership progression:

Cultivate and develop leaders who are in tune with the emotions of those they lead – enabling them to foster genuine connections with their teams.

A positive, **human-centered** approach is critical for success at all leadership levels.

Employees identified **being supportive, providing constructive feedback, giving autonomy, and communicating well** as leadership behaviors that most enhance their work performance.

Authentic connection and empowering approach were ranked by employees as two of the most essential leadership qualities for leaders to hold at every level – suggesting there is alignment on the critical importance of connecting with, and valuing people. Overall, leaders tended to rate themselves slightly better at demonstrating leadership qualities than other employees did, revealing a potential gap in their self-awareness of how effective they are in certain areas.



Enabling effective leadership progression:

Enhance leadership effectiveness by building human-centered leadership skills, integrating self-awareness to prevent overestimation of capabilities.



Only 38% of leaders feel extremely or very prepared to move to the next level of leadership.

Transitioning to the next leadership level brings common challenges to all leaders including navigating relationship dynamics, leading effective teams, and shifting to a **strategic mindset**.

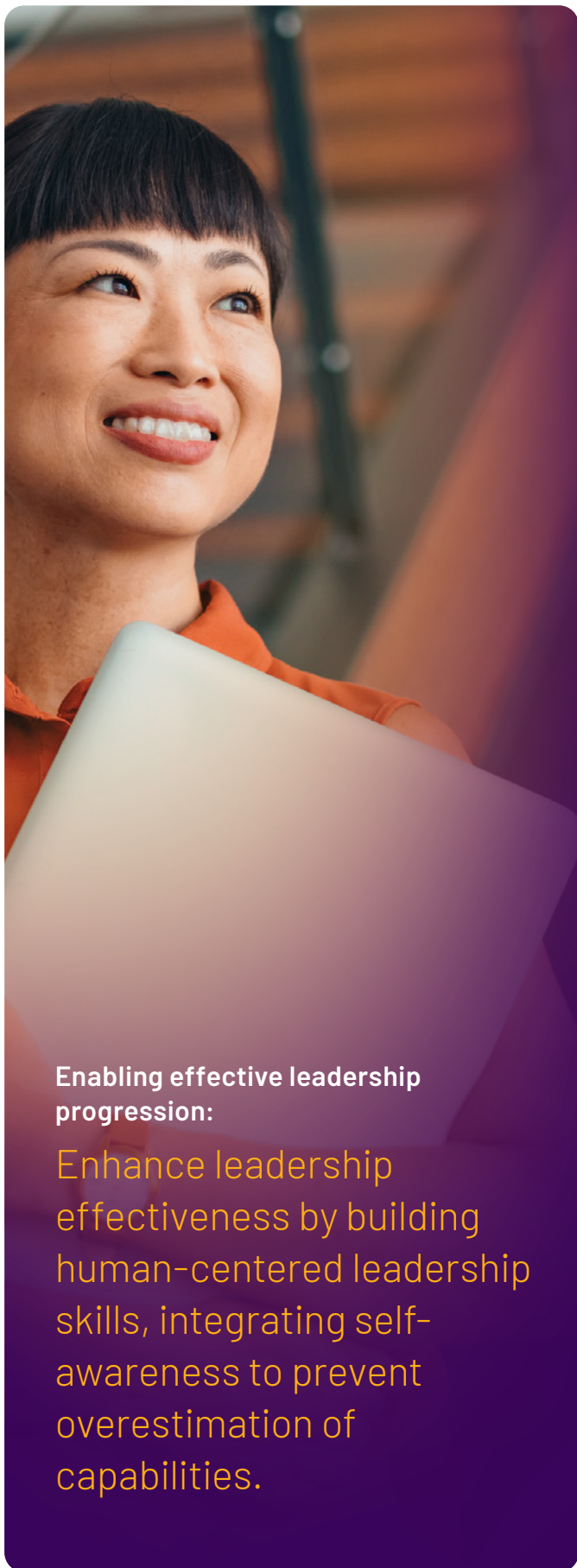
As leaders progress to a more senior level, challenges build upon each other – broadening in focus and increasing in scope and complexity. For example, mid-level leaders identified **lack of respect, misunderstandings, and underperformance** as negative consequences when failing to modify their leadership approach after moving to their current leadership level. This stresses the importance of ensuring that leaders understand the primary challenges when moving between levels of the organization and how they differ – requiring different behaviors to be effective.

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

Enabling effective leadership progression:

Equip leaders across all levels of the organization by addressing the mindset shift and behavior changes required as they progress to more senior levels of leadership.



Enabling effective leadership progression:

Enhance leadership effectiveness by building human-centered leadership skills, integrating self-awareness to prevent overestimation of capabilities.

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

Although organizations acknowledge the importance of providing appropriate support across all leadership levels, some levels often receive more support than others.

For example, senior leaders tend to be more likely to receive leadership programs and support such as 360 feedback and coaching which is tailored to their leadership level compared to first line leaders. Yet leaders of all levels feel that **mentoring programs and individual coaching were in the top three most useful development opportunities**, highlighting the value of interventions which are personalized to the leader's specific context and challenges. With 74% of the leaders who experienced development interventions rating them as Extremely or Very useful, broadening leadership development methods across the organization will support leaders as they transition to new levels.

Navigating the leadership journey:

Challenges, behaviors, and supporting strategies

Although all levels of leadership require many similar attributes for success and face many of the same challenges, there are still differences in what is required of leaders at each level.

These variations are of particular importance for leaders and organizations when considering future leadership transitions.

First-level: Leading self vs leading others Laying foundations

An initial mindset change is required as individual contributors move into leadership – focusing on delegation and empowering others, appreciating individuals and communicating task expectations. First-level leaders also face complexity in managing their relationships with former peers and new colleagues.

Mid-level: Leading others vs leading leaders Introducing strategy

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.

Senior level: Leading the organization Creating the vision

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.

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.

Progressing to more senior levels requires a shift in how leaders need to behave as they adapt to new demands at each level.

Taking a closer look at employee, leader, and organizational views at each level offers clarity for leaders around what is required from them, and an enhanced understanding for organizations about how to best develop their leaders and guide them through their leadership journey.

First-level leader

Creating an open and trusting environment where team members can grow individually but also collaborate with one another is vital for first-level leaders.

Roles must be clearly defined, and responsibilities clearly assigned, as leaders are now responsible for accomplishing work through others, rather than on their own. Ensuring their team feels engaged and valued is important – a supportive team will enable a leader to be successful at this level.

Biggest challenges leaders face when transitioning to this level

- Relationship boundaries
- Delegating and empowering
- New responsibilities
- Managing diversity
- Communication

Behaviors leaders need to focus on for success at this level

- Improving communication style
- Building trust
- Delegating activities
- Making tough decisions
- Managing larger workloads and increased pressure

The most important change leaders feel is required at this level

- Adopting a new approach to communication, to provide clarity and direction for the team
- Trusting others to take on the role of technical expert and step away from independent working

Problems caused by failing to change behaviors

- Missed deadlines
- Others underperforming
- Damaged relationships

Advice for future leaders from experienced leaders at this level

- Have confidence and courage
- Build trust in others
- Communicate effectively
- Listen to others
- Build relationships

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



Mid-level leader

Leaders transitioning to mid-level leadership must be willing to learn and grow as leaders and adapt to having additional responsibilities.

Moving to leading managers from leading individual contributors is a notably different role. Leaders must understand that the application of their time will change, and a greater strategic focus is needed. However, the foundations of effective leadership needed at a first-level are still required but need to be built upon and adapted for a mid-level leader to succeed.

Biggest challenges leaders face when transitioning to this level

- Relationship boundaries
- Acceptance and respect
- Managing diversity
- Increased responsibilities
- Delegating and empowering

Behaviors leaders need to focus on for success at this level

- Improving my communication style
- Building trust
- Delegating activities and responsibilities
- Empowering others to make decisions
- Making tough decisions

The most important change leaders feel is required at this level

- Empowering the team, allowing them autonomy to make their own decisions. Move away from the detail of tasks to free up space for other priorities

- Communicating regularly and clearly with teams and senior stakeholders, tailoring messaging to suit a more diverse audience

Problems caused by failing to change behaviors

- Lack of respect
- Misunderstandings
- Underperformance

Advice for future leaders from experienced leaders at this level

- Listen to others
- Communicate effectively
- Build your network
- Delegate
- Have a growth mindset

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 leader

Leaders progressing to a senior level must be willing to make a large mindset shift, thinking much more strategically with long-term organizational vision.

Leaders should recognize the conflicting demands of organizational results and employee engagement and wellbeing and employ a human-centered approach to manage relationships in all directions successfully.

Biggest challenges leaders face when transitioning to this level

- Relationship management
- Effective communication
- Driving organizational results
- Operational and strategic balance
- Broadening perspectives

Behaviors leaders need to focus on for success at this level

- Thinking more strategically
- Improving communication style
- Making tough decisions
- Empowering others to make decisions
- Building trust

The most important change leaders feel is required at this level

- Effectively conveying their vision and communicate clear, relevant information at the correct level, to the whole organization
- Learning to lean on their team and trust them to help deliver on strategic goals

Problems caused by failing to change behaviors

- Confusion
- Stakeholder conflict

Advice for future leaders from experienced leaders at this level

- Build trust with others
- Listen to others
- Have confidence in yourself
- Think strategically
- Be open minded

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



Talogy InView Leadership™

Developed utilizing the latest research and insights, the Talogy InView Leadership approach redefines the attitudes, skills, and behaviors needed for successful leadership in the constantly evolving world of work.

Supporting you with ready-to-use assessment and development solutions that help you to hire, identify, and develop:

- Emotionally intelligent leaders who **lead with awareness** of themselves and of those around them
- Leaders empowered with the **ability to balance** people interests with organizational objectives
- Resilient and agile leaders who embrace, adapt to, and **drive change** while delivering results for today
- Organizational leaders with the skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to **move to the next leadership level**.

Deliver authentic, people-focused, and high-performing leaders who are ready for what comes next.





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