

LEADERSHIP TRENDS 2026

SURVEY FEEDBACK REPORT

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YOU SPOKE. I LISTENED.

HERE'S WHAT LEADERS TOLD ME THEY ARE REALLY FACING RIGHT NOW.

Recently, I sent out a survey to leaders to find out what is on their mind.

I wanted to hear what was working well and what was keeping them up at night.

Well, what they shared was honest, thoughtful and in many cases deeply vulnerable.

After reviewing both the data and the open comments, one thing became very clear:

Leaders are struggling because the expectations placed on them have fundamentally changed.

They are being asked to do more, influence more, support more people and navigate more uncertainty...often with fewer resources and less time.

In this report, I'm breaking down the 7 key themes that emerged from the survey.

1

LEADERS ARE TRYING TO BE STRATEGIC WHILE DROWNING IN OPERATIONAL REALITY

The number one challenge leaders identified was: “Being more strategic in my role.”

Many described feeling pulled into constant firefighting, competing priorities and urgent demands that leave little space for long-term thinking.

One leader said, “How do I get my team to achieve outcomes when workload keeps increasing?”

Another said simply, “I just can’t get out of the weeds.”

Interestingly, this connects directly to the biggest barrier leaders identified:

36% SAID TOO MANY COMPETING PRIORITIES ARE PREVENTING THEIR GROWTH.

It’s not a motivation problem.

It’s a bandwidth problem.

Leaders want to think strategically but they don’t always have the systems, delegation practices, or organizational support to make that shift.





2

STRESS AND OVERWHELM ARE NOT SIDE ISSUES, THEY'RE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Managing stress and overwhelm ranked among the top concerns.

Leaders spoke about navigating constant change, unclear direction and growing expectations from both senior leadership and their teams.

Several described leading through integration efforts, organizational restructuring or ongoing uncertainty without clear communication from above.

One comment captured it perfectly:

“I feel like I am navigating change in the dark.”

Leadership today often means absorbing pressure from multiple directions while still being expected to project confidence and stability.

Resilience is no longer a “nice to have.”

It's becoming a core leadership capability.

3

PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS ARE STILL ONE OF THE HARDEST PARTS OF LEADERSHIP

Giving feedback and managing performance issues ranked among the top three challenges.

Many leaders talked about:

- Managing underperformance
- Addressing difficult behaviours
- Navigating passive-aggressive or toxic dynamics
- Holding accountability while preserving relationships

One leader wrote:

“I need to provide strong feedback so I can move away from day-to-day issues and focus on strategy.”

This stood out to me.

Performance management isn't just about correcting behaviour. It's often the gateway to freeing leaders' time and enabling strategic work.





4

MANY LEADERS FEEL THEY HAVE RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT AUTHORITY

A strong qualitative theme emerged around influence.

Leaders shared frustrations about:

- Giving feedback upward to defensive senior leaders
- Managing stakeholders they don't control
- Being accountable for outcomes without choosing their teams

One person said:

“How do you manage your superiors and not just your team?”

This reflects a modern leadership reality:

**INFLUENCE WITHOUT AUTHORITY IS NO
LONGER THE EXCEPTION. IT'S THE NORM.**

5

LEADERSHIP CAN FEEL SURPRISINGLY ISOLATING

Another common theme was isolation, particularly for remote or hybrid leaders.

Some are managing large teams across shifts or various locations.

Others meet their teams in person only once or twice a year.

Many described trying to retain talent without budget increases or traditional incentives.

They are carrying a lot of pressure and often alone.

Several respondents expressed a desire not just for learning content, but for connection with other leaders facing similar challenges.





6

LACK OF CONFIDENCE AND SELF-DOUBT ARE QUIETLY SHOWING UP

Perhaps the most human insight came from leaders questioning themselves.

Comments included:

- “I worry I’m not fulfilling the vision expected of me.”
- “I don’t know what I should be focusing on next.”
- “I want to feel more comfortable taking risks.”

Even highly capable leaders are asking:

**AM I DOING ENOUGH?
AM I STRATEGIC ENOUGH?
AM I ADDING VALUE?**

Behind many leadership challenges sits a deeper need for clarity and confidence.

7

HOW LEADERS WANT TO LEARN HAS CHANGED

When asked how they prefer to develop, the message was clear:

- 50% prefer live workshops
- 31% want peer learning groups
- Only a small percentage preferred self-paced courses alone

But what stood out most were two comments that perfectly captured the collective sentiment:

- “Leaders learning from leaders and meeting people where they are.”
- “Real case walk-throughs. No coaching theatre. No motivational fluff.”

Leaders don’t want theory disconnected from reality.

They want practical conversations about real situations with people who understand the pressure they’re under.





KEY TAKEAWAY

If there's one takeaway from this survey, it's this:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CAN'T BE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL ANYMORE.

Leaders are asking for:

- Practical tools they can apply immediately
- Space to think strategically
- Honest conversations about difficult situations
- Peer connection and support
- Flexible learning that fits into already full schedules

To be honest, I understand why leadership development has changed.

After more than two decades working alongside leaders and executive teams, I've never seen expectations higher and support systems shrink.



WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

If these insights resonate with you, you're not alone.

One of the strongest messages from this survey is that leaders need help navigating the complexity of the workplace today. They need practical tools to minimize their stress and build their confidence.

That's exactly the kind of work that I focus on.

Over the years, I've helped leaders:

- Move from constant firefighting to more strategic leadership
- Know how to have difficult conversations and manage performance issues
- Strengthen their influence and confidence across the organization
- Create high-trust, high-performing teams

If your leaders are facing some of the challenges described in this report, there are a few ways we could continue the conversation.

You might consider:

- Bringing these insights into a leadership team discussion
- Hosting a workshop or series of workshops focused on key themes in this report
- Creating a peer learning experience where leaders can work through real situations together

If you'd like to explore what that could look like in your organization, I'd be happy to talk.

Let's continue the conversation.

You can reach me at vanessa@mosaicpd.com.