

# A YEAR THAT REDEFINED LEADERSHIP



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This year marked a significant milestone for Holmes Noble as we celebrated 20 years in business. Two decades of partnering with organisations through economic cycles, leadership transitions, and global change have given us a unique vantage point on what drives leadership success.

2025 has been another dynamic and challenging year. Economic caution, geopolitical tension, technological acceleration, and shifting workforce expectations have altered the leadership landscape. Boards are under pressure to secure leaders who can navigate volatility while delivering long-term, sustainable value.

Across our work with clients globally, including a year where 52% of our assignments were delivered outside the UK, across the Americas, Europe, and the UAE, several clear themes have emerged that will shape the talent market in 2026.

## HOW FUTURE-FOCUSED ORGANISATIONS ARE ADAPTING

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### 1. LEADERSHIP AGILITY HAS BECOME THE DEFINING EXECUTIVE CAPABILITY

The premium on agility, strategic clarity, and change leadership continues to intensify. Organisations want leaders who can:

- Make decisive choices under uncertainty
- Balance operational discipline with innovation
- Create stability without slowing momentum
- Lead transformation while maintaining cultural cohesion

Leaders who demonstrate both resilience and adaptability have been the most sought-after and the most difficult to find.



## **2. BOARDS AND INVESTORS ARE DEMANDING TRANSFORMATION-CAPABLE LEADERS**

Many of the appointments this year were driven by transformation imperatives:

- Digital acceleration
- Supply chain redesign
- Sustainability commitments
- International expansion
- Operational restructuring

Leadership searches this year for Holmes Noble increasingly centred around CFO, COO, Technology & Digital and transformation-focussed roles, with a strong appetite for executives who have “done it before” at scale.

This shift is reshaping the succession pipelines across multiple sectors.

## **3. THE GLOBALISATION OF EXECUTIVE TALENT CONTINUES TO ACCELERATE**

Having delivered international appointments for many years, this year’s shift to a predominantly cross-border portfolio reflects the growing global nature of our clients’ leadership needs.

Leadership is now global by default.

Organisations want talent with international perspective, cross-cultural fluency, and experience operating across geographically complex environments.

High-growth firms are deliberately searching beyond their domestic markets to access wider, more diverse leadership pools.



#### 4. ESG, CULTURE, AND PURPOSE ARE NOW BOARDROOM-LEVEL LEADERSHIP CRITERIA

Although ESG is under pressure in a changing political landscape, it is still shaping leadership expectations:

- Leaders must demonstrate stewardship beyond financial metrics
- Operating models must be sustainable, transparent, and values-aligned
- Cultural leadership is becoming a core performance criterion

Candidates who blend commercial acumen with ethical judgement and people-centred leadership have been in the highest demand.

#### 5. CANDIDATES ARE MORE SELECTIVE AND PURPOSE MATTERS MORE

In an environment of continued instability and risk, senior leaders are making measured decisions. They want to know the:

- Clarity of the organisation's purpose
- Stability of the leadership team
- Credibility of the growth plan
- Commitment to development and culture
- Flexibility offered in working patterns

This has made the leadership market both more competitive and more nuanced.



## **HOLMES NOBLE PERFORMANCE & PERSPECTIVE IN CONTEXT**

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Despite the complexity in the market, Holmes Noble delivered a successful year:

### **STRONG CLIENT TRUST & GROWTH**

- 88% repeat business reflects the strength of our long-term partnerships
- 60% increase in customer acquisition shows strong market demand
- Major growth in leadership advisory and transformation-focussed mandates

### **INTERNATIONAL REACH**

Our global footprint expanded significantly, with work spanning multiple continents. This mirrors the leadership demand patterns we expect to see continue into 2026.

### **20 YEARS OF PERSPECTIVE**

Our 20-year anniversary provided a moment to reflect on the evolution of leadership. The organisations that succeed are those that invest early in capability, both for the present and for the future.



## WHAT ORGANISATIONS NEED TO PRIORITISE IN 2026

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### 1. BUILD LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE AND TRANSFORMATION CAPABILITY

The pace of change will not slow. Organisations must prioritise leadership that can deliver beyond short-term cycles.

### 2. STRENGTHEN SUCCESSION PIPELINES

Many organisations lack clear succession in mission-critical roles. Future leadership development must become a board-level priority.

### 3. THINK INTERNATIONALLY, EVEN IF YOU DON'T OPERATE INTERNATIONALLY

Some of the best leadership talent now comes from outside domestic markets. Accessing global talent pools is becoming a competitive advantage.

### 4. INVEST IN FUTURE LEADERS NOW

Next year, Holmes Noble will launch a number of initiatives targeted at emerging leadership capability, an area that is strategically critical for clients across industries.



## HOLMES NOBLE'S FOCUS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

### LAUNCHING A NEW LEADERSHIP ADVISORY PARTNERSHIP

Early next year, we will introduce a major partnership that enhances our leadership assessment, development, and succession services, giving clients deeper insight and clarity in decision-making.

### EXPANDING MARKET INSIGHT & SECTOR EXPERTISE

We will deliver more market intelligence, leadership insight, and sector-specific perspectives to help clients make smarter, faster talent decisions.

### STRATEGIC TEAM GROWTH

Targeted growth will be a priority to support our evolving advisory offering and international demand.

### FUTURE LEADER DEVELOPMENT

Supporting the next generation of business leaders will be a defining focus, with new programmes and platforms launching throughout the year.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

As we enter our 21st year, the leadership landscape is more complex and more opportunity-rich than ever. Organisations need partners who not only execute but offer clarity, insight, and perspective.

Holmes Noble will continue to provide that. Thank you to our clients, candidates, colleagues, and our wider network for being part of our journey.

The challenges ahead are significant but so is the potential. We look forward to supporting you through both.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Amy Speake is the CEO of a global talent advisory firm, specialising in leadership strategy and board advisory. With over 20 years of experience partnering with FTSE 100 and international organisations, she leads transformative change and delivers strategic insights that shape the future of leadership

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