# Future Ready Leadership

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Leadership expectations are evolving faster than most organisations can adapt. In conversations we are having with Chief People Officers, a consistent theme is the gap between the leaders they have today and the leaders they will need tomorrow. The real question is whether organisations have the resilience, agility, and breadth of skills to evolve and grow in an environment defined by disruption.

Independent research reinforces this: executives are being asked to balance cost discipline with investment, stability with transformation, and strategy with flawless execution. Leadership models designed for the past decade are increasingly misaligned with what is required today.

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**The Leadership Gap**

A recent Holmes Noble study found that only 12% of the leadership bench is seen as ready to step into a board role. If a senior leader leaves, many organisations are immediately exposed.

This is compounded by underinvestment in structured development. With budget pressures, businesses often neglect programmes that build the next generation, leaving them reliant on external hires. Diversity of thought is essential but so is maintaining cohesion and a sense of culture and stability. The most successful organisations strike a balance between growing their own and refreshing leadership from outside.

Another challenge is the lack of evidence-based tools to assess senior leadership. Many organisations still rely on instinct, yet there is growing recognition of the need for structured frameworks that bring clarity, support fair reward, ensure consistency, and answer critical capability questions. Without them, leadership evaluation is easily distorted.

Even when leadership teams believe they are aligned on future capability needs, disconnects are common. In pressured markets, the question of “what do we really need” is not always clear, and misalignment can remain hidden until performance falters.

Culturally, many organisations are shifting from decisions made exclusively at the very top to expecting senior leadership teams to contribute more directly. This raises questions of readiness. Have leaders been empowered to make these decisions, or have years of being told what to do eroded their confidence to step up?

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**The AI Imperative**

Artificial intelligence is reshaping leadership expectations. Research shows 64% of leaders expect AI and GenAI to transform their roles within five years, yet budgets are forecast to rise by only 1%. This misalignment highlights a deeper issue: leadership skills are evolving faster than investment strategies. Organisations that fail to bridge this gap risk falling behind, while those that rethink how they develop capability and allocate resources will be the ones to stay ahead of the curve.

CPOs are acutely aware of the challenge. A recent Holmes Noble survey found that participating CPOs rated their organisations, on average, only 4.3 out of 10 for AI readiness. This is about far more than technology; it demands a fundamental reimagining of skills, workforce design, and decision-making. Future-ready leaders will need fluency in technology, the confidence to act amid ambiguity, and the imagination to redesign how work is organised. Yet the track record is sobering: only 5% of GenAI transformation programmes have delivered measurable ROI. Navigating a tool still in the hype cycle requires maturity, focus, and leadership capable of separating long-term value from short-term noise.

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**How Leadership Has Changed**

Technical depth and operational expertise remain important, but they are no longer enough. Leadership effectiveness now depends on emotional intelligence, inclusivity, and the ability to engage dispersed teams. Studies show that organisations investing in leadership development deliver 25% stronger business outcomes, and those with gender-diverse leadership outperform peers by 21%.

At the same time, external pressures are intensifying. Holmes Noble's researched showed that over 80% of executives feel underprepared for overlapping crises ranging from supply chain disruption to geopolitical instability. Leaders must now balance societal scrutiny, shifting policy landscapes, and evolving approaches to DEI alongside commercial delivery.

The leaders who succeed combine clarity of direction with empathy, drive transformation while maintaining trust, and shift seamlessly between strategy and execution. These qualities were once peripheral but are now critical.

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**Building the Model**

Future-ready organisations share several traits:

- Strengthen bench depth through experiential development rather than relying solely on succession charts
- Use evidence-based assessments to create clarity on capability and align reward
- Invest in digital and AI fluency so leaders can make confident choices about adoption
- Foster inclusive, human-centred leadership because it drives performance, not just because it looks good on paper

The evidence is clear. 77% of organisations report insufficient leadership depth, 30% of leaders feel unprepared for their current roles, and trust in managers has fallen from 46% to 29% in just two years, according to a study by exec.com. Those who address these gaps are rewarded with more resilient organisations, stronger performance, and leadership teams ready to meet the unknowns of tomorrow.

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Cost pressures, demographic change, and technological disruption mean the expectations placed on leaders have never been greater. The need for resilient, diverse, and future-ready leadership is now urgent.

At Holmes Noble, we are spending more time with CPOs and senior teams to test assumptions, share insight, and shape leadership strategies. By drawing on what we see across the market and combining it with structured evaluation, we help organisations prepare for what comes next.

There has never been a greater need for resilient leadership. We would be delighted to continue the conversation about how your leadership team can be ready not just for today, but for the challenges ahead.

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