

What Is the External Environment Asking of Your Leaders?



**PRIORITIZING
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT**



BELL
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

BUILDING LEADERS SINCE 1972

5 External Factors Impacting Leadership Today

Several converging forces are impacting leaders today across sectors and industries. None of these conditions are entirely new in isolation. What feels different in 2026 is their intensity and the way they interact with one another.



SUSTAINED UNCERTAINTY

The external environment continues as a volatile influence across all aspects of business. Strategic planning, which once operated on clearer assumptions, now requires ongoing recalibration.

When uncertainty persists, it subtly influences leadership behavior.

- Decision-making can become more cautious, and decision fatigue leads to reactive choices.
- Communication may narrow to immediate operational concerns, and gaps in communication magnify uncertainty.

Left unexamined, sustained uncertainty can gradually weaken organizational alignment and, over time, erode confidence in leadership direction.



ACCELERATED CHANGE

Closely connected to uncertainty is the pace of required adaptation. Organizations must adjust strategy, structure, and expectations more frequently than in previous cycles.

Change itself is not new to leaders. What is more demanding is the absence of recovery time between changes. When the time needed to recalibrate and integrate change is limited, even capable teams can experience fatigue. Without consistent and highly effective leadership, change begins to feel more cumulative and less purposeful.

In such conditions, steadiness and trustworthiness become stabilizing forces.



SHIFTING WORKFORCE EXPECTATIONS

Expectations around work continue to evolve. Hybrid work arrangements, generational differences, and changing perspectives on career development and flexibility are reshaping how employees experience the workplace.

Leaders must navigate how to balance these evolving expectations with the need for performance, accountability, and cohesive team culture.

In such conditions, leadership requires clear expectations, thoughtful communication, and the ability to build shared understanding about how work gets done and why it matters.



CAPACITY STRAIN AND BURNOUT

Many organizations currently operate with constrained resources while simultaneously asking leaders and their teams to accomplish more with limited margin for error.

High-potential leaders, in particular, often step into expanded responsibility at an accelerated pace. Without intentional development and support, sustained overload can affect judgement, patience, and relational effectiveness.

Potential burnout for high-impact leaders emerges gradually through accumulated strain, often diminishing faith in their own capacity and in the broader system.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence represents both promise and disruption. It introduces efficiency and expanded capability while simultaneously raising questions about roles, skillsets, and long-term workforce implications.

For many leaders, the conversation is not only about implementation. It is about discernment. How do we adopt wisely without overreacting? How do we preserve humanity while embracing innovation?

In this respect, the AI moment ultimately becomes a leadership moment—one that will shape the level of trust employees place in both decisions and direction.



Taken together, these dynamics place significant demands on leaders at every level. The questions that follow are designed to help quickly identify where leadership capability may need to be strengthened most.

We welcome a focused conversation to clarify where leadership development will have the greatest impact for you and your team.

BUILDING YOUR LEADERSHIP ADVANTAGE: WHERE TO FOCUS NOW

When you reflect on the external environment, what do you think places the greatest strain on your leaders today? Use the 6 questions below to clarify where focused leadership development may create the greatest impact.



1. Where does uncertainty and change most affect leadership performance right now?

Which roles or teams across your organization are feeling it most?

2. Which leaders carry more leadership responsibility than they've been prepared for?

Where will focused development make the greatest difference?

3. At what level would leadership development make the most meaningful difference right now?

Senior leaders, mid-level managers, or emerging talent?

4. What leadership skills would most improve clarity, alignment, or decision-making across your organization in the next 90 days?

5. What form of development would best build these capabilities?

Foundational programs, coaching, team-based development, or targeted skill intensives?

6. Thinking about your own leadership, if you focused on one development priority this year, what would deliver the greatest return?

SCHEDULE A CONVERSATION

