



Future
Institute of
Australia

2025

FINDINGS REPORT

*Exploring the Leadership
needs of the future.*

7th Executive Round Table

1300 329 300

info@futureinstitute.edu.au

www.futureinstitute.edu.au

Introduction

Anticipating the future is no longer a luxury, it's a leadership imperative. As we edge closer to 2030, business leaders face a shifting landscape shaped by accelerating technologies, evolving workforce expectations, and rising global uncertainty. The challenge lies not just in responding to change, but in having the foresight to prepare for what's next.

At the same time, the pace of day-to-day operations leaves little room for strategic reflection. Many leaders are aware of the signals of disruption (whether emerging technologies, demographic shifts, or changing social norms) but rarely have the opportunity to explore these issues in depth, or in the company of peers.

Future Institute of Australia hosted its 7th Executive Round Table on 1 October 2025 to bridge this gap. Bringing together a select group of senior executives / leaders from across industries, this invitation-only session was designed to explore the external trends, leadership challenges, and future leadership capabilities likely to define the next four years.

Through structured discussions and facilitated group activities, participants shared their perspectives on what lies beyond the horizon, and what today's leaders must do to prepare. The insights captured in this report are both a reflection of the conversations held on the day and a foundation for shaping future leadership development, coaching, and mentoring initiatives.



Three Step Process

During the Executive Round Table session, Future Institute led participants through a three-step process to explore future leadership requirements.

The insights gathered were reviewed and organised to identify common themes, forming the basis of the key findings outlined in the following sections.



Environmental Analysis



Scenario Analysis



Capabilities Analysis

Methodology

1

Environmental Analysis

Participants identified and prioritised the most pressing external forces, disruptors, and trends likely to impact their industries and organisations in the years ahead.

2

Scenario Analysis

Building on the environmental scan, participants envisioned potential future workplaces and described the key challenges leaders may face within these emerging contexts.

3

Capabilities Analysis

Drawing from the first two activities, participants collaboratively explored the knowledge, skills, and attributes leaders will need to navigate uncertainty, drive progress, and remain resilient in an increasingly complex environment.

Key Findings

Activity 1 – Environmental Analysis

Participants were asked to identify key external forces and disruptors likely to impact business in the next 4 years. A wide range of insights were captured, reflecting the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of the business environment. Several dominant themes emerged:



Key Insights

1

Workforce Disruption and Demographic Shifts

Changing workforce expectations around flexibility, purpose, and personalised career pathways will challenge traditional employment models. Generational change, early retirements, ageing populations, and shifting tenure norms are expected to create talent gaps and test leadership adaptability.



2

Technological Disruption

The rapid advancement of AI, automation, and emerging technologies will continue to reshape business operations. Leaders will need to address the ethical use of technology, data security, and the upskilling of teams to remain competitive and future-ready.

3

Regulatory, Political and Governance Disruption

Evolving compliance requirements, shifting governance expectations, and increasing political volatility (both locally and globally) will require leaders to manage greater external complexity and regulatory scrutiny.

4

Social and Cultural Shifts

External social pressures, including climate change, mental health awareness, immigration, and cost of living concerns, will influence employee values, consumer expectations, and organisational responsibilities.

5

Education, Skills and Capability Gaps

Current education and training systems are not keeping pace with the needs of a changing workforce. There is a growing urgency to address future capability needs, support diverse learning styles, and foster continuous development.

6

Trust, Identity and Leadership Expectations

Leaders are facing increased expectations to communicate transparently, demonstrate ethical behaviour, and create meaningful connections. Trust, clarity of purpose, and alignment with organisational values will be essential to effective leadership. This also includes fostering environments that support psychological safety and overall wellbeing.



Key Findings

Activity 2 – Scenario Analysis

This activity asked participants to visualise what the workplace might look like in the coming years and identify the leadership challenges likely to arise as a result. Across all groups, a clear shift toward more flexible, tech-driven, and employee-driven environments was evident, accompanied by growing complexity in leadership expectations.



Key Insights

1

Employee Expectations, Attraction and Retention

A marked shift toward employee-centric workplaces is expected, employees will ask: “Why should I work for you?” with talent choosing employers based on values alignment, flexibility, wellbeing, and personalised development. Organisations will need to evolve traditional attraction and retention strategies to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly empowered workforce.

2

Evolving Leadership Capabilities and Accountability

Leaders will face growing pressure to balance business outcomes with empathy, transparency, and fairness. Managing performance, accountability, and emotional demands in a diverse, values-driven environment will require adaptive skillsets and authentic leadership.

3

Workplace Flexibility and Structures

Workplace models will become more fluid and decentralised, hybrid models, remote work, and non-traditional hours are no longer optional, they're becoming baseline expectations. The workplace will need to accommodate mobile careers and varying definitions of where and when work happens.

4

Technology and AI Integration

AI and fully integrated digital systems will increasingly shape workflows, decision-making, and strategic planning. Leaders must understand these technologies not only technically, but also in terms of their implications for people, productivity, and ethical governance.

5

Purpose, Meaning and Cultural Alignment

Employees will seek work that aligns with personal values and provides a sense of meaning. Organisations that clearly articulate and embed purpose, inclusivity, and social responsibility will gain a competitive advantage in attracting, engaging, and retaining talent.

6

Learning, Upskilling and Knowledge Retention

Continuous learning and proactive upskilling will be essential to navigate rapid change and mitigate knowledge loss from turnover or career mobility. Organisations that foster learning agility will be better positioned to respond to evolving business and workforce demands.

7

External Pressures and Global Forces

Leaders will need to respond to a range of external pressures, from climate change and sustainability, to globalisation, shareholder expectations, and competitive market forces, while maintaining internal engagement, performance, and resilience.



Key Findings

Activity 3 – Capability Analysis

In this final activity, participants reflected on the capabilities leaders will need to not just manage, but thrive in the rapidly evolving business landscape in the next 4 years. The responses reveal a strong shift toward human-centred leadership, underpinned by strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.



Key Insights

1

Communication, Influence and Presence

Leaders will need exceptional communication skills, including storytelling, impactful conversations, and constructive feedback. The ability to influence, inspire, and connect with teams will be critical in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

2

Strategic Thinking and Business Acumen

Future leaders must demonstrate strategic foresight, business savvy, and alignment with organisational mission and vision. They will need to make decisions that balance short-term operational demands with long-term organisational goals.



3

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

Empathy and emotional intelligence will be essential for navigating diverse teams, fostering inclusion, and understanding employee perspectives. Leaders who model fairness, respect, and inclusivity will build trust and engagement.

4

Adaptability and Resilience

The ability to adapt to change, remain resilient under pressure, and make courageous decisions will be vital as organisations face rapid technological, workforce, and market transformations.

5

Values-Led and Ethical Leadership

Authenticity, integrity, and alignment to personal and organisational values will underpin successful leadership. Leaders must model ethical behaviour and maintain credibility while guiding teams through complex challenges.

6

Coaching, Development and Collaboration

Developing others, fostering collaboration, and creating positive team environments will support organisational capability. Leaders who prioritise learning, fun, and growth will cultivate engagement, retention, and high performance.

7

Data-Informed Decision Making

Making informed, evidence-based decisions will be increasingly important. Leaders will need to combine data insights with human judgement to ensure accountability, performance, and impact.

8

Accountability and Receptiveness

Leaders must take ownership of outcomes while remaining open to feedback and continuous improvement. This balance will be critical for driving results and sustaining trust across the organisation.



Key Issues and Disruptors Unpacked

The insights from the Environmental and Scenario Analyses reveal a rapidly evolving business landscape characterised by complexity, uncertainty, and accelerating change.

Several key issues and disruptors emerged consistently across groups:

1 Workforce Dynamics and Employee Expectations

- Employees are increasingly empowered to select workplaces based on alignment with personal values, flexibility, wellbeing, and career development opportunities.
- Organisations face pressure to redesign attraction, retention, and engagement strategies to remain competitive.
- Generational turnover, early retirement, and shifts in tenure patterns are creating capability gaps that require proactive workforce planning.

2 Rapid Technological Change

- AI, automation, and integrated digital systems are reshaping work, decision-making, and productivity expectations.
- Leaders must balance the adoption of technology with ethical oversight, human engagement, and organisational alignment.
- Technological disruption also increases the demand for continuous upskilling and learning agility within teams.

3 Evolving Leadership Expectations

- Leaders are expected to navigate higher complexity, balancing business outcomes with empathy, fairness, and ethical conduct.
- Traditional management approaches may not suffice; leaders must adapt to behavioural shifts, generational differences, and the need for authenticity.
- Accountability, influence, and the ability to drive performance in flexible, values-driven workplaces are critical.



4

Organisational Flexibility and Structure

- Hybrid, mobile, and contract-based workplace models are becoming standard.
- Organisations will need policies, structures, and leadership practices that support flexible working while maintaining cohesion, performance, and culture.

5

External Pressures and Societal Expectations

- Globalisation, climate change, and geopolitical uncertainty are influencing organisational resilience and strategic decision-making.
- Societal expectations around inclusion, diversity, human rights, and sustainability are increasing, impacting employer branding, culture, and stakeholder relations.
- Compliance, regulatory complexity, and political shifts require proactive monitoring and strategic planning by leaders.

6

Learning, Capability, and Knowledge Management

- Rapid change is creating capability gaps, both in technical skills and leadership competencies.
- Continuous learning, upskilling, and knowledge retention are essential to maintain organisational agility and resilience.
- Supporting diverse learning needs, including neurodiverse and non-traditional learners, will be critical in ensuring workforce readiness.



Key skills, knowledge and attributes for leaders in the future

The rapidly evolving business environment demands leaders who are not only capable of managing operational challenges but can thrive amid complexity, technological change, and shifting workforce expectations. Based on the Capability Analysis, the following skills, knowledge, and attributes have emerged as critical:

1

Communication, Influence, and Presence

- Leaders must be exceptional communicators, able to tell compelling stories, deliver impactful conversations, and provide constructive feedback.
- The ability to influence and inspire teams, build trust, and connect authentically across diverse groups is essential.
- Strong presence and credibility enable leaders to guide their organisations through uncertainty and change effectively.

2

Strategic Thinking and Business Acumen

- Leaders require the ability to think strategically and make informed decisions that balance short-term operational demands with long-term organisational goals.
- Understanding business fundamentals, market dynamics, and emerging technologies enables leaders to anticipate disruptions and identify opportunities.

3

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

- High levels of empathy and emotional intelligence allow leaders to understand, motivate, and support employees effectively.
- Leaders who demonstrate fairness, inclusivity, and respect foster trust, engagement, and psychological safety across teams.

4

Adaptability and Resilience

- The pace of change, technological disruption, and evolving workforce expectations require leaders who can adapt quickly, remain resilient under pressure, and make courageous decisions.
- Resilience and flexibility are critical for navigating uncertainty and guiding teams through transformation.

5

Values-Led and Ethical Leadership

- Authenticity, integrity, and alignment with organisational and personal values are foundational.
- Ethical decision-making and principled leadership ensure credibility, reinforce culture, and support sustainable organisational performance.

6

Coaching, Development, and Collaboration

- Developing people, fostering collaboration, and building high-performing teams will be essential.
- Leaders who prioritise continuous learning, engagement, and growth will strengthen organisational capability by cultivating talent and retaining staff.

7

Data-Informed Decision Making

- Leaders must combine data insights with human judgement to make informed, evidence-based decisions.
- Understanding how to interpret and apply information strategically helps leaders measure impact, drive performance, and remain accountable.

8

Accountability and Receptiveness

- Taking ownership of outcomes while remaining open to feedback and continuous improvement will be critical for sustaining trust and driving results.
- Leaders must balance responsibility with humility and adaptability, reinforcing culture and modelling desired behaviours.



Summary

Looking ahead over the next four years, one thing is clear: leadership will require more than managing processes and driving performance. Leaders will need to act differently, guiding with empathy, embracing change confidently, and aligning strategic decision-making with evolving workforce and societal expectations.

Insights from Future Institute's Executive Round Table, drawn from the experience of senior / executive leaders across diverse industries, highlight the forces shaping the future of work and the capabilities needed to lead through complexity. Key findings include:

- Technology, changing workforce expectations, and social responsibility pressures will increasingly shape the business environment.
- Workplaces will need to be flexible, inclusive, and purpose-driven, with a strong focus on wellbeing.
- Leaders will need a balanced mix of strategic insight, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and values-driven decision-making to succeed.

This report provides a foundation for Future Institute's ongoing leadership development, coaching, and mentoring initiatives — designed to equip leaders with the skills, mindsets, and support needed to navigate complexity and drive positive outcomes for people, organisations, and communities.





Phone Number

1300 329 300



Email Address

info@futureinstitute.edu.au



Website

www.futureinstitute.edu.au