THE CHANGING NATURE OF LEADERSHIP IN AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WORLD

Results of the 2025 HR@Moore Survey of Chief HR Officers

PATRICK M. WRIGHT
ANTHONY J. NYBERG
DONALD J. SCHEPKER
ADAM STEINBACH

Darla Moore School of Business
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CENTER FOR EXECUTIVE SUCCESSION

2025 ADVISORY BOARD

Christy Pambianchi - Chair
Caterpillar
Chief Human Resources Officer

Pam Kimmet - Executive Director
Manulife (Retired)
Chief Human Resources Officer

Melissa Anderson
Albemarle Corporation
Executive Vice President, Chief People & Transformation Officer

Sheri Bronstein
Bank of America
Chief People Officer

Darrell Ford
UPS
Executive Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Ashley Goldsmith
Workday
Chief People Officer

Anita Graham
Labcorp
Chief Human Resources Officer

Monique Herena
American Express
Chief Colleague Experience (Human Resources) Officer

Katie O'Connell Jones
Fannie Mae
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Melissa Kremer
Target
Executive Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Nickle LaMoreaux
IBM
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Mairead Magner
Trane Technologies
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Ernest Marshall
Eaton
Executive Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer

Tim Massa
Kroger
Executive Vice President, Chief Associate Experience Officer

Christian Meisner
GE Aerospace
Chief Human Resources Officer

Thomas Plath
Health Transformation Alliance
Global Chief Human Resources Officer

Paige Ross
Blackstone
Sr. Managing Director, Global Head of Human Resources

Ola Snow
Cardinal Health
Chief Human Resources Officer

Carol Surface
HP
Chief People Officer

Holly Tyson
Cushman & Wakefield
Chief People Officer

Matt Walter
Medtronic
Chief Human Resources Officer

SENIOR STRATEGIC ADVISORS:

Marcia Avedon*
Trane Technologies
Executive Vice President & Chief Human Resources, Marketing and Communications Officer

Lucien Alziari*
Prudential Financial, Inc.
Executive Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer

Dennis Berger*
Suffolk Construction
Chief Culture Officer

Ken Carrig*
SunTrust Bank
Chief Human Resources Officer

Kevin Cox*
GE and GE Aerospace
Chief Administrative Officer

Mike D'Ambrose*
The Boeing Company
Executive Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer

Rich Floersch*
McDonald's
Chief Human Resources Officer

Mirian Graddick-Weir*
Merck & Co.
Executive Vice President of Human Resources

Tim Hourigan*
Home Depot
Executive Vice President of Human Resources

Tim Richmond*
AbbVie
Executive Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer

**Retired*

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA FACULTY ADVISORS:

Anthony J. Nyberg
J. Henry Fellers Professor
Director, Center for Executive Succession

Robert Ployhart
Carolina Distinguished Professor
Bank of America Professor of Business Administration
Director, Talent Leaders Network, Center for Executive Succession

Donald J. Schepker
Associate Professor
Moore Research Fellow
Research Director, Center for Executive Succession

Adam Steinbach
Associate Professor
Academic Research Director, Center for Executive Succession

Patrick M. Wright
Associate Dean for Corporate Relations
Thomas C. Vandiver Bicentennial Chair
Director Emeritus, Center for Executive Succession

Many thanks to the Center for Executive Succession partner CHROs for their support of our research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 HR@Moore Survey of Chief Human Resource Officers examined how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is impacting leaders.

Using the Moore Leadership Framework developed by Darla Moore School of Business faculty, we asked CHROs to evaluate their company's leaders on 12 critical leadership competencies. They reported their leaders are generally very effective in their Personal Ethics, Ethical Decision-making, and Customer Focus and Results Orientation. However, they rated their leaders weakest in terms of Continuous Learning, People Development and Team Building, Innovation and Change Management, Strategic Thinking and Visionary Leadership, and Digital and Technological Dexterity.

Many of these lower-rated competencies present challenges specifically around the implementation and use of AI. CHROs described the changing nature of leaders' roles as requiring greater strategic focus and reduced administrative burden, developing AI and technology literacy, managing AI-augmented and hybrid workforces, and adapting teams and transforming team member skills to use AI.

These changes to leadership roles will increasingly require leaders to develop competencies in strategic thinking and decision-making, change management and adaptability, technology and AI literacy, emotional intelligence and empathy, critical thinking and problem solving, mentoring and talent development, and curiosity and growth mindset.

Finally, little consensus exists regarding approaches to developing these competencies. Some companies seem to be using formal training, workshops, task forces, pilot programs, and external learning to develop these skills, whereas others have not yet begun to implement programs or processes to help their leaders gain the competencies necessary to thrive in an AI-driven context.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption has been as fast, if not faster, than any other technological innovation in history. While the foundations of AI have existed for years, applications have exploded over the past few years transforming business processes and work.

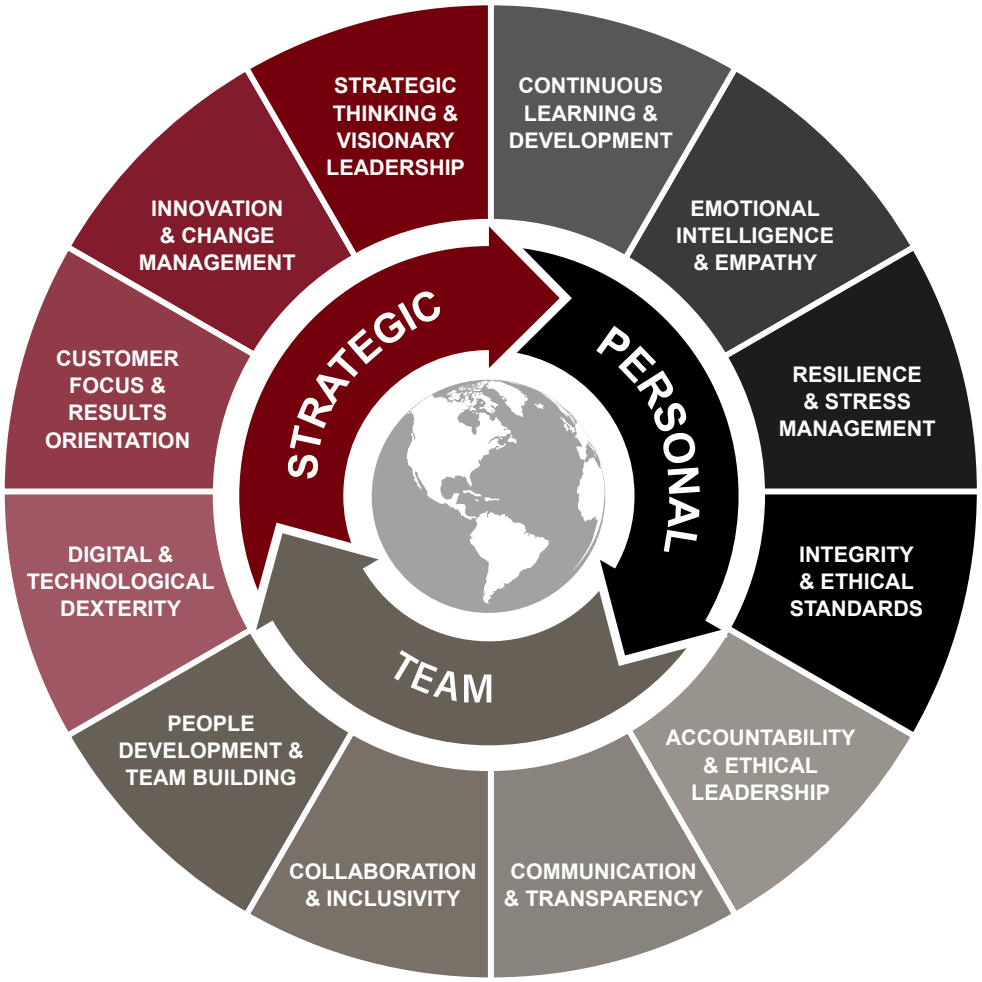
As AI has transformed business processes and work, it has also transformed the role of leaders. The 2025 HR@Moore Survey of Chief Human Resource Officers in conjunction with the HR Policy Association sought to explore the impact of AI on the roles and required competencies of leaders. The survey was sent to almost 400 CHROs, and we received 176 responses. We sought to address three foundational issues: (a) how AI impacts the role of leaders, (b) how it affects the competencies needed by leaders, and (c) how companies seek to develop those new competencies.

The Moore Leadership Competency Framework

Leadership Competency Models have become ubiquitous within corporations. These models seek to identify the most important competencies, or behavioral patterns, necessary for effective leadership. Such models provide the basis for performance management, career planning, and individual development.

As part of several Moore School initiatives, we obtained the competency models of nine large multinational corporations to explore similarities across models. Using the competency models from all nine companies as well as one developed and validated by Moore School faculty, we identified (with the help of AI, of course!) four individual competencies (i.e., those related to how an individual manages him/herself), four team competencies (i.e., those necessary to lead a team), and four strategic competencies (i.e., those integral to leading and making decisions for an organization). The output from that analysis we now refer to as the "Moore Leadership Framework." This framework is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 | **Moore Leadership Framework**

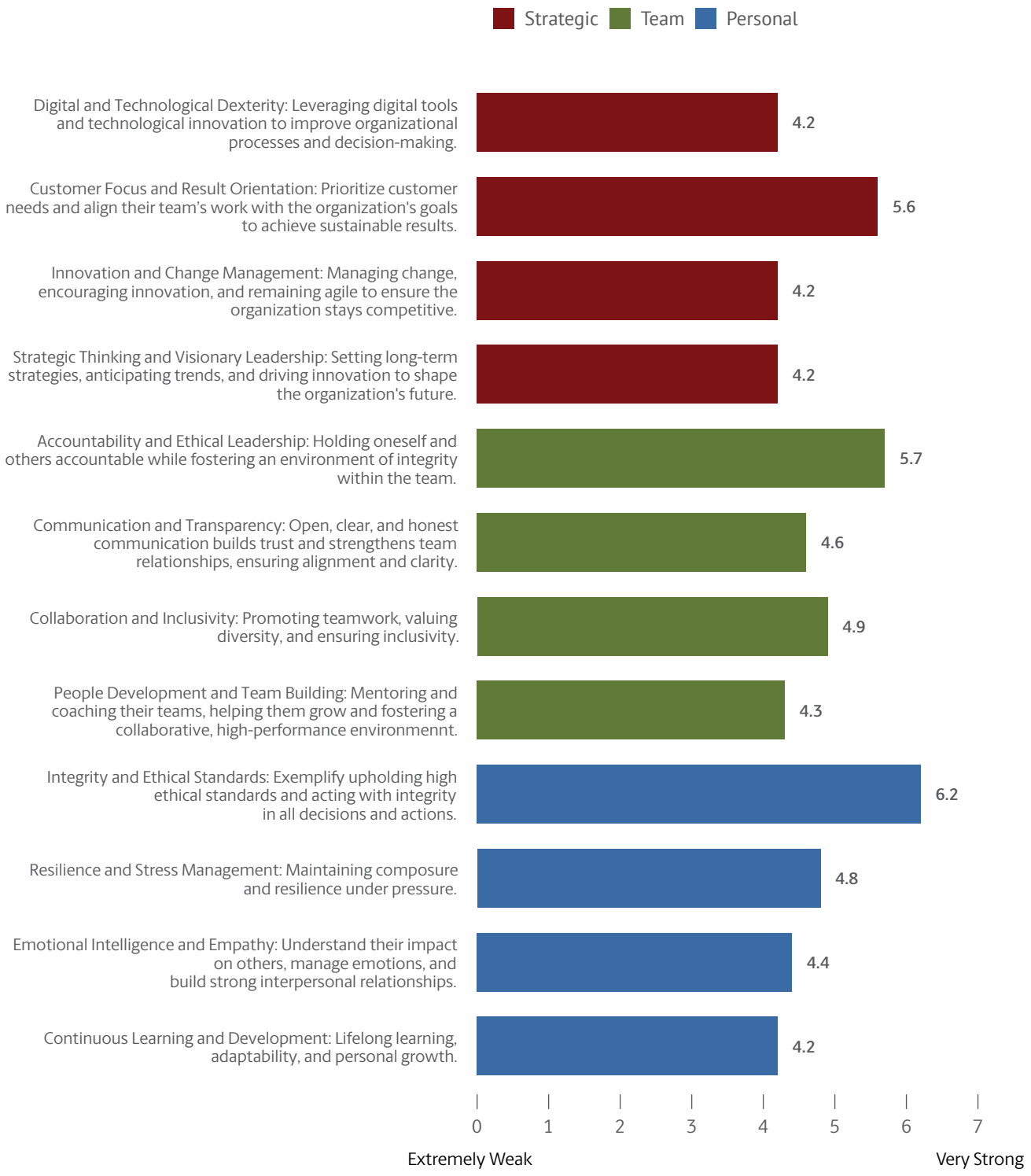


We then asked CHROs to assess the extent to which the "bulk" of leaders in their organizations (both middle- and upper-level leaders) possessed each of the framework's 12 competencies, from "Extremely Weak" (1) to "Very Strong" (7). Interestingly, as can be seen in **Figure 2**, CHROs rated leaders in their organizations highest on Integrity and Ethical Standards (Personal Competency), Accountability and Ethical Leadership (Team Competency), and Customer Focus and Results Orientation (Strategic Competency), all scoring an average above 5.5 on our 7-point scale. In fact, 80% of CHROs rated their leaders a 6 ("Strong") or 7 ("Very Strong") on Integrity and Ethical Standards, 58% did so for Accountability and Ethical Leadership, and 59% for Customer Focus and Results Orientation. These stand out as the next highest competency (Collaboration and Inclusivity) gained only 29% rating their leaders as a 6 or 7 and most of the rest were in the mid-teens or below. This certainly indicates that their leaders excel in terms of their personal and leadership ethics and that they focus on delivering for customers.

On the other hand, CHROs rated their leaders lowest on Continuous Learning (Personal), People Development and Team Building (Team), Innovation and Change Management (Strategic), Strategic Thinking and Visionary Leadership (Strategic), and Digital and Technological Dexterity (Strategic). Only slightly higher were Communication and Transparency (Team) and Resilience and Stress Management (Personal). All of these competencies had averages barely above the midpoint (4.0) of the scale.

In summary, it is hard to interpret these results as indicative of CHROs having great confidence in their leaders on many leadership competencies. Instead, they seem to view their leaders as having strengths in ethics, but lacking strength in areas related to their abilities to lead their teams and especially their organizations.

Figure 2 | **As you look at the capabilities of the bulk of leaders in your organization how would you assess the general level of their competencies in the following areas:**



AI's Impact on the Role of Leaders

Given these perceptions of their current leaders' competencies, we then asked two questions regarding how the development and implementation of AI will change the (a) role of leaders and (b) competencies of leaders over the next 2-5 years. The results showed significant overlap. Regarding the impact on the role of leaders, **Table 1** shows that CHROs most frequently described how AI would reduce administrative burden on leaders and enable them to increase their strategic focus. Relatedly, the fourth-most frequent response described how AI would enhance leaders' decision-making with timely, data-driven insights. That said, AI will also place new expectations on leaders, including requiring them to gain greater AI and Technology literacy (the second-most frequent response), manage AI-augmented and hybrid workforces (third-most), lead change within their teams to adapt to AI adoption while maintaining trust (fifth-most), and transform the skills of their team members to be able to function in this environment (sixth-most). Finally, some CHROs suggested that it was too early to accurately predict how AI will change the role of leaders.

Table 1 | As you look at how AI will develop and be implemented over the next 2 5 years, in what way(s) do you think it will impact the ROLE of leaders in your organization?

Increased Strategic Focus & Reduced Administrative Burden (Most Common - 25 responses)

- AI will automate routine tasks such as email synthesis, data analysis, and administrative work, freeing leaders to focus on strategy, decision-making, and people leadership.
- Examples:
  - "AI should elevate the strategic/critical thinking aspects of a leader's role."
  - "Less time managing tasks, more time leading and coaching."
  - "Leaders should be able to focus more on leadership versus managing activities."

Need for AI & Tech Literacy (High - 20 responses)

- Leaders will be required to understand AI and its applications, including data-driven decision-making, workflow automation, and ethical considerations.
- Examples:
  - "Leaders will need to understand where AI can improve processes and where it does not."
  - "Leaders lacking technological acumen will be greatly challenged."
  - "They must stay abreast of trends, ethics, and misuse."

Managing AI-Augmented & Hybrid Workforces (High - 18 responses)

- Leaders must learn to manage both human employees and AI-driven processes/agents, requiring new leadership skills in digital-first workplaces.
- Examples:
  - "Will require leaders to manage a multi-modal workforce."
  - "Leaders must develop talent that increasingly uses AI."
  - "Leaders must learn to balance human and non-human workers effectively."

Continued

Table 1 | As you look at how AI will develop and be implemented over the next 2 5 years, in what way(s) do you think it will impact the ROLE of leaders in your organization?

Enhancing Decision-Making with AI (Moderate - 15 responses)

- AI will provide real-time insights and support better, faster data-driven decisions.
- Examples:
  - "Better decision-making, enhanced insights, improved time management."
  - "AI should drive enhanced focus on data-driven decisions."
  - "It will increase reliance on analytics and continuous improvement."

Change Management & Workforce Adaptation (Moderate - 12 responses)

- Leaders will need to guide their teams through AI adoption while maintaining employee trust and engagement.
- Examples:
  - "Leaders must navigate change management associated with AI deployment."
  - "They will need to communicate AI's benefits and risks to employees."
  - "Must ensure AI is used fairly and ethically."

Developing Future Skills & Talent Strategy (Lower Frequency - 10 responses)

- AI will disrupt traditional talent development, requiring leaders to rethink skill-building and career growth.
- Examples:
  - "Leaders must redefine roles and workflows as automation increases."
  - "They need to rethink how teams develop expertise in AI-driven environments."
  - "Must help employees upskill to remain relevant."

Uncertainty About AI's Full Impact (Lower Frequency - 7 responses))

- Some leaders believe it's too early to predict AI's full impact.
- Examples:
  - "It is not quite relevant for us yet."
  - "Too early to tell... but AI will improve reporting and analysis."

Taken together, CHROs suggest that AI will result in a shift in leadership roles toward strategy, decision-making, and coaching, with AI handling administrative and transactional tasks. Leaders must develop AI fluency to guide adoption, manage hybrid workforces, and leverage AI insights for better decision-making. Change management will be critical, as AI will demand new skills of leaders and employees, such as managing automation's impact on career development and workforce structure, and foster resistance as a result.

Emerging Leader Competencies in an AI World

Table 2 displays CHROs' responses to AI's effect on the competencies of leaders and touches on many of the same themes seen above regarding its effect on their roles. CHROs most often emphasized the increasing importance of competencies related to strategic thinking and adaptability as leaders shift toward managing AI-driven transformations. Naturally, AI fluency and data literacy will be essential, but emotional intelligence and coaching skills will differentiate human leadership from AI capabilities and better allow leaders to navigate change management, redefine talent development, and foster a culture of curiosity and continuous learning.

Table 2 | Given your answer above regarding the changing ROLE of leaders, what COMPETENCIES do you think will become more important?

Strategic Thinking & Decision-Making (Most Common - 25 responses)

- Leaders will need systems thinking, decision-making agility, and strategic foresight to navigate AI-driven changes in business models and workforce structures.
- Examples:
  - "Strategic thinking, enterprise leadership, navigating geopolitical landscapes."
  - "Decision quality, collaboration, drives results."
  - "Strategic/systems thinking, digital agility, delegation."

Change Management & Adaptability (High - 22 responses)

- Leaders must manage AI-driven transformations and help their organizations adapt to rapid change.
- Examples:
  - "Agility, learning agility, change management, communications."
  - "Leading in ambiguity, leading change, change agility."
  - "Managing change, transformation, innovation."

Technology & AI Literacy (High - 20 responses)

- AI fluency, data literacy, prompt engineering, and understanding AI's limitations will be essential skills.
- Examples:
  - "AI literacy, adaptability, innovation, strategic thinking."
  - "Data analysis, understanding AI technologies, technical acumen."
  - "AI prompting skills, process mapping for automation."

Emotional Intelligence (Moderate - 18 responses)

- As AI automates technical tasks, EQ, empathy, and people-centric leadership will become more valuable.
- Examples:
  - "Human-centric leadership, leading with empathy, building trust."
  - "Leaders will need to lean on EQ because AI lacks people components."
  - "Empathetic leadership, resilience, coaching, mentoring."

Continued

Table 2 | Given your answer above regarding the changing ROLE of leaders, what COMPETENCIES do you think will become more important?

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving (Moderate - 15 responses)

- Leaders must develop critical thinking skills to assess AI-driven insights, ensure data integrity, and challenge assumptions.
- Examples:
  - "Critical thinking, judgment, external perspective, leadership development."
  - "More analytical skills—how to interpret data and tell a story around that data."
  - "Assessing and verifying AI-generated outputs."

Coaching, Mentoring & Talent Development (Lower Frequency - 12 responses)

- With AI automating knowledge work, leaders must focus on coaching employees and developing human skills.
- Examples:
  - "Coaching, feedback, and building high-performing teams."
  - "Developing and empowering teams."
  - "Leaders must redefine how employees learn and grow in an AI-driven world."

Curiosity & Growth Mindset (Lower Frequency - 10 responses)

- Leaders must stay open to new technologies and continuously upskill to stay relevant.
- Examples:
  - "Growth mindset, curiosity, continuous learning."
  - "They must be open to jumping in to understand and embrace AI."
  - "Challenging thinking, being bolder in driving change."

Building Competencies for the AI World

Finally, given the rapid acceptance and implementation of AI, we asked CHROs to report what they are doing to build the competencies they had identified as being important in this new AI-driven world. As can be seen in **Table 3**, creating new leadership training and development programs comprised the most frequently cited approach. That said, many other responses suggested companies were early or otherwise experimenting with external resources in their approaches, such as with AI-specific workshops and summits (second-most), AI pilot programs (third-most), and AI governance committees and task forces (fourth-most). Finally, ten CHROs also noted that they have not taken any significant steps yet.

Table 3 | Are you doing anything interesting or unique to build these skills in your leaders, and if so, what are they?

Leadership Training & Development Programs (Most Common - 25 responses)

- Many organizations are investing in leadership training programs to help leaders develop AI fluency, change management skills, and digital literacy.
- Examples:
  - "We have a robust AI training program required of all employees."
  - "Training all directors and above on the fundamentals of AI."
  - "Developing leadership courses on AI strategy, culture, and change management."

AI-Specific Workshops & Summits (High - 18 responses)

- Some companies are hosting dedicated AI sessions, summits, or immersive experiences for leaders.
- Examples:
  - "3-day Tech Summit for our Top 30 and then the next 100."
  - "Executive team spending dedicated time on this subject (full-day AI session at Microsoft)."
  - "5-day AI online summit for the entire organization."

AI Pilot Programs & Experimentation (Moderate - 15 responses)

- A subset of companies is testing AI leadership in controlled environments to see how leaders handle AI integration.
- Examples:
  - "Pilot with small group of leaders managing AI teams."
  - "Experimenting with AI for coaching managers in simulated scenarios."
  - "Red teams learning AI together, creating a prompt library."

Continued

Table 3 | Are you doing anything interesting or unique to build these skills in your leaders, and if so, what are they?

Governance Committees & AI Task Forces (Moderate - 12 responses)

- Some companies have AI governance groups to oversee leadership development and ensure responsible AI adoption.
- Examples:
  - "AI steering committee with representation across the enterprise."
  - "Governance committee reviewing AI projects and learning programs."
  - "Supporting funding of machine learning and autonomous systems."

Redefining Leadership Models & Competency Frameworks (Lower Frequency - 10 responses)

- Some organizations are revisiting their leadership competency models to align with AI-driven changes.
- Examples:
  - "Introducing Enterprise Leadership Model to set new expectations."
  - "Revisiting leadership competencies for executive succession planning."
  - "Mapping out leadership development frameworks to incorporate AI skills."

Industry Collaboration & External Learning (Lower Frequency - 8 responses)

- A few companies are partnering with external organizations to provide AI learning experiences.
- Examples:
  - "Partnered with Harvard for a top-down Digital Mindset push."
  - "Using Korn Ferry competencies."
  - "Attending industry sessions, conferences, and knowledge-sharing events."

No Major Actions Yet (Lower Frequency - 10 responses)

- Some organizations are still in early awareness stages or haven't implemented AI-related leadership training.
- Examples:
  - "Nothing currently."
  - "We are in the awareness stage."
  - "Not at this time—starting soon."

It remains to be seen whether companies' early efforts in this area will give rise to continuous in-house training programs to upskill their leaders for the AI world, or whether external or one-off solutions will emerge as the go-to approach for AI. It is easy to imagine that companies' efforts to redefine their competency models, employment of task forces, and other approaches documented here will give rise to entirely new ways of thinking about leadership of AI and accelerate considerable changes in their approaches over the next few years.

Implications for PractiCES

These results show that AI will profoundly change the nature of leadership roles resulting in new requisite competencies to effectively perform those roles. The results suggest the following implications for practice.

AI Will Change the Way Leaders Lead...

Past technological changes impacted the roles of leaders, but mostly by requiring them to master the technology to better do the work they were already doing. However, AI will change what they are doing. It will take away administrative tasks from the leader's role as well as the roles of those they lead. This will require strategic thinking to understand how best to allocate their newfound time to create value for the company. Ideally, as our results indicate, leaders should be freed up to help their team adapt to the new work environment and to develop and coach individual team members. In short, the push from administrative tasks will lead individuals away from serving as managers and force a greater emphasis on serving as strategic leaders. Leaders also must build their capabilities in working with AI. In a way, the comprehensive use of this technology will require them to both immerse themselves in learning and using the technology while simultaneously expanding their responsibilities in engaging the human being with whom they work. Effective leadership in this new world will not be EITHER technology- OR human-focused but rather will accentuate the simultaneous importance of both.

...Which Will Require Different Leader Competencies...

Because AI changes the nature of a leader's role, it necessarily transforms the required competencies to effectively lead. As discussed above, leaders must develop a deep understanding of how best to leverage AI as part of their work. They may not need to understand the algorithms underlying AI but must profoundly comprehend both its potential to create value for their organization and its limitations in doing so. At the same time leaders must become more people-focused if they are to drive the transformation of work. To achieve the necessary change, they must model learning agility and adaptability, communicating their importance to the team and using vision and strategic thinking to help the team understand how their actions contribute to organizational success. They must also heighten their skills in coaching, feedback, and mentoring individual members of their teams. Simply put, leaders will need to embrace a dual mandate to enhance both their technological and personal competencies.

...Especially People Competencies...

Many current use cases for how AI can increase productivity point to the importance of people with no background in technology using AI to streamline their own work. Employees often best know where bottlenecks and time-consuming administrative work impedes both effectiveness and efficiency in work processes. AI can enable employees to identify these areas and either ask more tech-savvy colleagues to design AI solutions, or even for non-tech-savvy employees to use AI to create their own solutions. But this requires leaders who can delegate such responsibility to employees and encourage them to do so. Such leaders have to have sufficient technical competency to help guide the development of these solutions and possibly to help in their design and implementation. But more importantly, this must all be accomplished in an environment that elicits trust in leadership and engagement with the organization. Thus, the maximally productive adoption of AI technology requires leaders who effectively develop, collaborate, and communicate with their people.

...Necessitating Investments in Developing Leaders.

Two things are certain about AI: It is coming, and no one knows for sure what the end state will look like. This ambiguity creates challenges for companies in how they develop leaders to function in an AI world. The CHROs described formal training programs, but the programs ranged from digital literacy through change management. Thus, it appears to us that companies are a long way from achieving consensus regarding the most appropriate skills to develop or the best ways to develop them. In addition, the use of one-time events like workshops and summits may indicate that the focus of development is still emerging much like the AI applications themselves. Most disconcerting was the 10 CHROs who indicated that they have not yet started developing their leaders' competencies for the AI-driven future. Given the speed at which companies are adopting AI at massive scale, there is not much time to waste. Further, given that many of the competencies on which CHROs rated their organizations' leaders the lowest (continuous learning, people development/team building, innovation/change management, strategic thinking/visionary leadership, and digital/technological dexterity) are precisely those needed to effectively leverage and manage AI, companies who delay or minimize these investments may be unable to catch up with those who more aggressively prepared their leaders for the emerging AI world.

TEAM OF AUTHORS

PATRICK M. WRIGHT
Associate Dean for Corporate Relations
Thomas C. Vandiver Bicentennial Chair
Director Emeritus, Center for Executive Succession
patrick.wright@moore.sc.edu

DONALD J. SCHEPKER
Associate Professor
Moore Research Fellow
Research Director, Center for Executive Succession
donald.schepker@moore.sc.edu

ANTHONY J. NYBERG
J. Henry Fellers Professor
Director, Center for Executive Succession
anthony.nyberg@moore.sc.edu

ADAM STEINBACH
Associate Professor
Academic Research Director, Center for Executive Succession
adam.steinbach@moore.sc.edu

The Center for Executive Succession serves as an independent, objective source of knowledge regarding C-suite succession practices. The center provides a forum for corporate leaders to shape the future direction of succession practices, which are increasingly one of the board's top governance priorities. Our partners have the opportunity to contribute to cutting-edge research that challenges the status quo and is empirically driven to further success in C-suite succession planning. For more information or to inquire about potential membership, please visit our website or contact us at sc.edu/moore/ces.

This research was supported by the Center for Executive Succession, Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina. All conclusions and/or errors, however, are solely the responsibility of the authors.

The Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina is home to a world class faculty and 13 major research centers. It is committed to educating leaders in global business and to playing a central role in the economic growth of the state by bringing the world to South Carolina and South Carolina to the world.

Founded in 1919, the Moore School has a history of innovative educational leadership, blending academic preparation with real world experience through internships, consulting projects, study abroad programs and entrepreneurial opportunities. The Moore School has grown into a thriving site of academic excellence with an enrollment of more than 5,300 undergraduate students and more than 700 graduate students. The school offers a wide range of programs in nine undergraduate concentrations, seven master's degrees and two Ph.D. degrees as well as executive education programs and consulting services to the business community.

In 1998, the school was named for South Carolina native Darla Moore, making the University of South Carolina the first major university to name its business school after a woman.

BUILT @ DARLA MOORE

Darla Moore School of Business
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

sc.edu/moore

Center for Executive Succession
1014 Greene Street
Columbia, SC 29208

803-777-7819
ces@moore.sc.edu
sc.edu/moore/ces