

Unlocking team potential: Human-centered leadership enabled with AI

Artificial intelligence dominates the headlines in what may be the biggest revolution to occur in human history. We're living through a time of enormous opportunity and risk as organizations re-invent business models, talent models, and technology stacks to harness the power of AI. In this era of enormous change, how does AI have a role to play in leadership development?

New research from Truist Leadership Institute (TLI) explores the leadership challenges that impact a team's potential to achieve their business objectives. The challenges that emerged were quintessentially human leadership challenges, like communicating strategic direction, developing trusting relationships, aligning teams to do excellent work, and creating engaging environment. Leaders must develop these capacities to manage the enterprise, and that requires a two-pronged approach: Identifying and prioritizing the challenges and using AI as a leadership development tool.

This research brief summarizes TLI's research on the leadership challenges experienced by executive teams and then highlights ways in which we are experimenting with AI to develop leadership capacities.



Research Overview

The research focuses on data collected from 21 executive teams and 239 respondents across multiple industries. Teams participated in TLI's **Leadership Challenges Assessment (LCA)**—a research-based diagnostic tool that asks three questions:

1. What is the team's top business objective?
2. What leadership challenges limit the team's potential from achieving that objectives?
3. What are the team's strengths that could be leveraged to achieve those objectives?

What our analysis reveals

Leadership challenges act as headwinds and tailwinds

The challenges surfaced by the assessment represent the headwinds and tailwinds leaders create through their decisions, behaviors, and operating norms. Some leadership conditions accelerate execution, trust, and adaptability. Others—often unintentionally—slow decision-making, diffuse accountability, and undermine alignment.

Importantly, these challenges are not evenly distributed across teams. How leaders manage the same challenges can mean the difference between sustained performance and chronic friction.

Not all challenges are the same

The research distinguishes **three distinct profiles of leadership challenges**, each requiring a different leadership response. These profiles were created by looking at perceptions of how much the challenge limited the team's ability to achieve the business objective using the median score the range of variability across teams.

- **Performance differentiators: Highly limiting factors, high variability**

Experienced by many teams but managed very differently. These challenges—including prioritization, accountability, cross-functional collaboration, and change agility—separate consistently high-performing teams from the rest.

- **Systemic constraints: Medium limiting factor, lower variability**

Widely felt and consistent across teams, such as decision-making velocity, enterprise alignment, and balancing innovation with risk. These often reflect structural or governance conditions rather than individual capability.

- **Red flags (excellence vs. risk): Lower limiting factor, high range**

Experienced by few teams but characterized by high variability, signaling the difference between exemplars and teams at risk. Trust, empowerment, delegation, conflict management, and strategic communication fall squarely in this category and represent issues with developing engaging and inspiring cultures.

Recognizing which challenges a team face is essential; treating all challenges as performance issues leads to misdiagnosis and ineffective intervention.

Notably, AI itself was mentioned very infrequently as a leadership challenge. It's recognized as a potential opportunity—but the leadership challenges themselves relate to how humans interact and communicate with one another.

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How AI plays a role

TLI has begun experimenting with AI as a leadership development tool using focused prompts to respond to the challenges surfaced in the LCA:

- **Strategic clarity:** Leaders struggle to clearly articulate the business goal and the top initiatives to reach that goal. AI prompts can help craft a multi-media strategy that clearly conveys the message while using the leader's voice and conveying empathy. In TLI's leadership development programs, leaders are using prompts to help craft strategic placemats, video scripts, and preparation for key meetings. The prompts help leaders clarify both the what and the how.
- **Testing assumptions:** Our fast-changing world creates uncertainty—and enterprise leaders must be equipped to evaluate their assumptions about emerging scenarios. In our executive change agility program, leaders use AI to summarize and prioritize evolving trends and implications for their businesses. This proactive anticipatory intelligence forces leaders to assess their assumptions and be more agile in their responses.
- **Reflection and development:** We also encourage leaders to use AI to explore results from leadership assessments like the LCA, 360 feedback, or leadership profile inventories. A sequence of reflective prompts can help leaders identify behaviors that create friction or limit their own potential. For example, exploring why a leader finds it difficult to delegate responsibility can pinpoint issues with trust and the high cost of not letting a team grow and develop.

The emerging research and AI applications for developing enterprise leaders is exciting. Human-centered leadership, enabled with AI, can accelerate leaders' ability to unite and ignite their teams. The possibilities seem limitless as we unlock human potential.