

Research grounded in results from
thousands of leadership assessments.

2025 State of Leadership Report

A deep dive into the behaviors,
skills, and mindsets shaping
tomorrow's leaders.



Research overview

Based on insights from over 17,000 assessments across leadership levels and major industries, this report highlights natural behavioral prevalence, uncovers critical gaps, and offers expert recommendations for 2025 and beyond.

As leadership roles become more complex, organizations set up for long-term success must recalibrate how they identify, develop, and empower their leaders. The findings reveal not only the skills most in demand for today's leaders but also the gaps that persist and the strategies organizations must adopt to bridge them.

Why leadership is changing?

Gartner reports that 71% of middle managers experience feelings of overwhelm, stress, or burnout at work, with the rate climbing to around 75% among younger managers, those in large organizations (1,001+ employees), and those working in hybrid environments.¹

The landscape of leadership is undergoing a period of accelerated transformation, with new challenges, expectations, and opportunities emerging for organizations across every sector. The demands placed on leaders today are fundamentally different from even a few years ago. Three macro trends are mainly responsible for this shift:

Tech acceleration

Artificial intelligence, automation, and digital tools are reshaping the core skillsets required at every leadership level. Leaders must now demonstrate comfort with data, an understanding of digital ecosystems, and the ability to foster their adoption and innovation.

Economic uncertainty

Volatile market conditions necessitate faster and more strategic decision-making, often under ambiguous circumstances. Leaders need strong analytical thinking, a high tolerance for ambiguity, and the vision to balance short-term pressures with long-term priorities.

Human-centric leadership

Employees expect more than direction—they seek purpose, empathy, and growth. Leaders must now be stewards of well-being, capable of building inclusive teams, nurturing emotional safety, and inspiring engagement across dispersed and diverse groups.

These trends underscore a fundamental truth: **what drove leadership success yesterday may no longer suffice tomorrow.**

¹ Source: Capterra, *How HR Can Help the Overworked, Underappreciated Middle Manager*, February 13, 2024

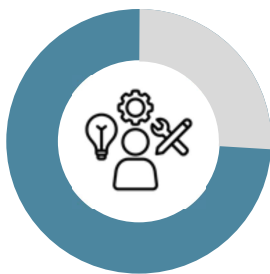
Most in-demand leadership skills

Drawing from diverse success profiles created for client organizations over the past 12 months, the analysis shows that companies are seeking a new breed of leader—one who is as skilled at mobilizing teams as they are at navigating complexity. The top traits cited by organizations as critical for leadership success in 2025 are as follows:

Traits	Prevalence (%)
Leadership	96%
Flexibility	74%
Empathy	65%
Fraternity	65%
Self-Expression	65%
Analysis	61%
Determination	61%
Efficiency	61%
Stress Tolerance	61%
Common Sense	57%
Delegation	57%
Service	57%

Traits	Prevalence (%)
Cooperation	52%
Linguistics	52%
Seeking Responsibility	52%
Being Open to Criticism	48%
Innovation	48%
Theoretical Reasoning	48%
Decisiveness	43%
Goal-Setting	43%
Initiative	43%
Profit Awareness	43%
Negotiation	39%
Perfectionism	39%

Other notable traits include Common Sense, Delegation, Service, Cooperation, and Linguistics, each with prevalence over 50%.



Conversely, Negotiation and Perfectionism are less emphasized, indicating a shift away from traditional command-and-control leadership.

This new leadership profile reflects a balance between adaptability/human connection (Flexibility, Empathy, Fraternity, Self-Expression) and operations/execution (Analysis, Determination, Efficiency, Stress Tolerance). Traits like empathy are now considered strategic skills, driving innovation, inclusivity, and retention.

Source: SuccessFinder

Prevalence of critical traits

While organizations aspire to develop leaders with these qualities, the data reveals that high scores for traits such as Fraternity, Analysis, and Leadership are common and easier to find among potential leaders. However, Flexibility and—most notably—Stress Tolerance are in short supply. Only 18% of the sample scored highly in Stress Tolerance, while 39% scored low, signaling a risk for burnout and rigidity. Similarly, Flexibility is a high-preference trait for only 1 in 4 leaders.

Most common traits (more high scores)

76%

Fraternity: Promote teamwork, camaraderie, and the pursuit of common goals in a spirit of loyalty and collaboration.

68%

Analysis: Anticipate problems, systematically structure information, and identify key trends to inform decision-making.

65%

Leadership: Inspire, influence, and develop others by guiding processes with clarity and commitment.

56%

Cooperation: Preference for being a democratic participant and accommodating accordingly.

55%

Linguistics: Preference for articulating problems using accurate, clear and precise language.

Less common traits (fewer high scores)

42%

Innovation: Generate fresh ideas, challenge conventional thinking, and find creative ways to turn possibilities into practical solutions.

41%

Profit awareness: Naturally attuned to financial consequences or profitability of actions and decisions.

39%

Stress tolerance: Maintain their performance even under pressure, handling unexpected events with calm and resilience.

31%

Flexibility: Open to change, adapt their style and approaches according to circumstances, people, and objectives.

29%

Delegation: Preference for challenging others to take on new duties that allow them to grow their skills.

Source: SuccessFinder

Leadership trends by level

An analysis by management level (first-level, mid-level, senior, C-suite) uncovers distinct patterns:



Empathy and Determination decrease at higher levels, implying a shift from consensus-building to results-orientation and perhaps a tendency for senior leaders to delegate rather than persevere through obstacles alone.



Flexibility and Self-Expression increase as one rises in the hierarchy, suggesting that adaptability and influential communication become more important in complex, high-stakes environments.

	First level	Mid-level	Senior level	C-level
Leadership	++++			
Fraternity	++++			
Analysis	++++			
Flexibility	+	++	+++	+++
Self-Expression	+	++	+++	++++
Empathy	+++	++	+	+
Determination	+++	++	+	+
Stress tolerance	-			

This underlines that a one-size-fits-all leadership model is outdated. **Organizations must tailor development priorities according to a leader’s current role and their trajectory within the company.**

Source: SuccessFinder



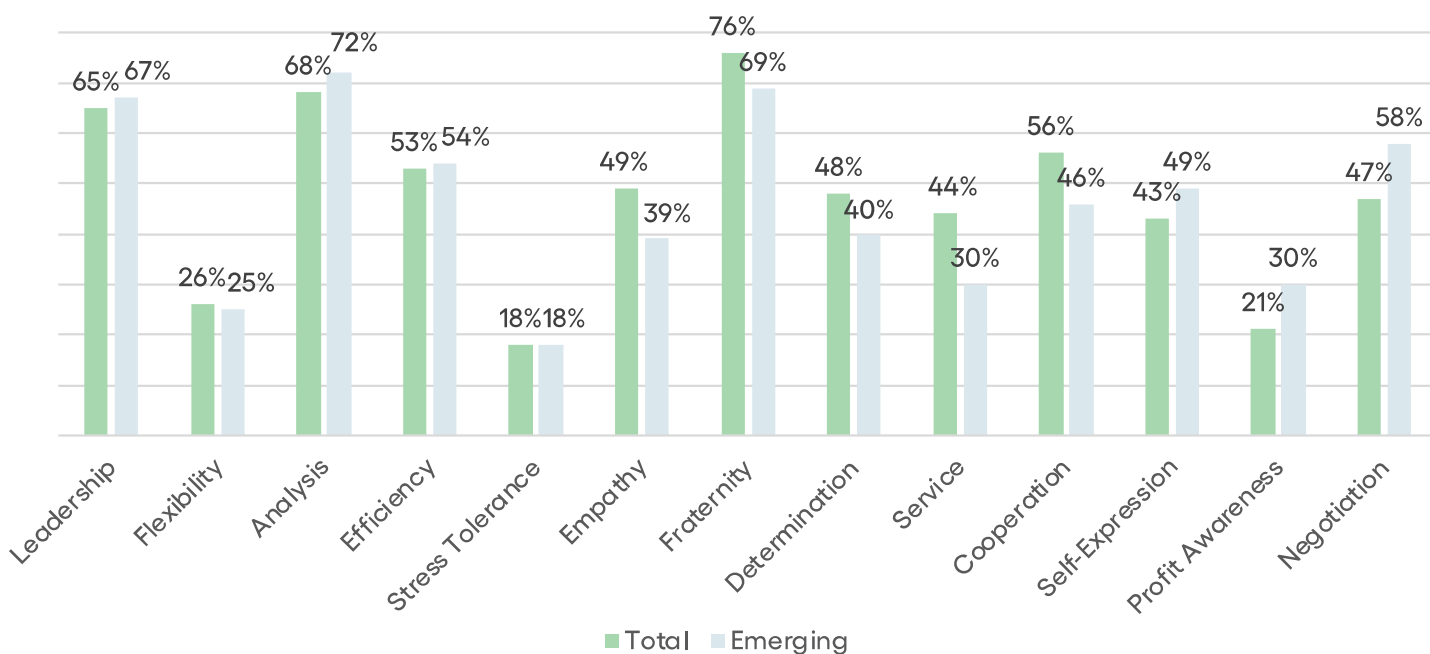
Spotlight on emerging leaders

A comparison of emerging leaders (individual contributors expressing interest in management) with current leaders highlights important variations (>5% difference):

- Emerging leaders are more comfortable with self-expression and have slightly stronger analytical skills.
- They are less inclined towards empathy, camaraderie, and determination, suggesting a preference for autonomy and quick efficiency over team-oriented perseverance.

This raises concerns about the future leadership pipeline’s readiness for human-centric leadership. Without targeted development, these gaps may widen as new generations move into management.

No difference between Emerging & Leader sample	Leader sample > Emerging	Emerging > Leader sample
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership ▪ Flexibility ▪ Analysis ▪ Efficiency ▪ Stress tolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Empathy ▪ Fraternity ▪ Determination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-Expression
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service ▪ Cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Profit Awareness ▪ Negotiation











Source: SuccessFinder

Leadership insights by industry

The data reveals distinct strengths and differences in leadership traits across sectors:

- **Leadership** is especially strong in HR (85%), Health (79%), and Marketing (78%).
- **Fraternity** is high in HR (83%), Health (81%), and Marketing (82%), indicating strong collaborative cultures.
- **Analysis** is a top trait in Finance (80%), Engineering (80%), and Technology (80%), reflecting a data-driven approach.
- **Stress Tolerance** is highest in Engineering (73%), important for complex environments.
- **Empathy** peaks in Health (57%) and HR (53%), highlighting their people-focused orientation.
- **Flexibility** is most notable in Technology (42%), suggesting adaptability in fast-evolving fields.
- **Innovation** is highest in Marketing (59%) and **Theoretical Reasoning** is strong in Health (62%) and HR (63%).

These differences demonstrate the importance of adapting your assessment and development strategies to fit your organization’s unique context and industry. A tailored approach ensures that talent strategies resonate with daily realities, maximizing growth and engagement for both individuals and teams.

	Fraternity	Leadership	Analysis	Stress Tolerance	Empathy
 HR	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Healthcare	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Marketing	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Technology	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Finance	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Engineering	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
 Retail	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
 Manufacturing	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue

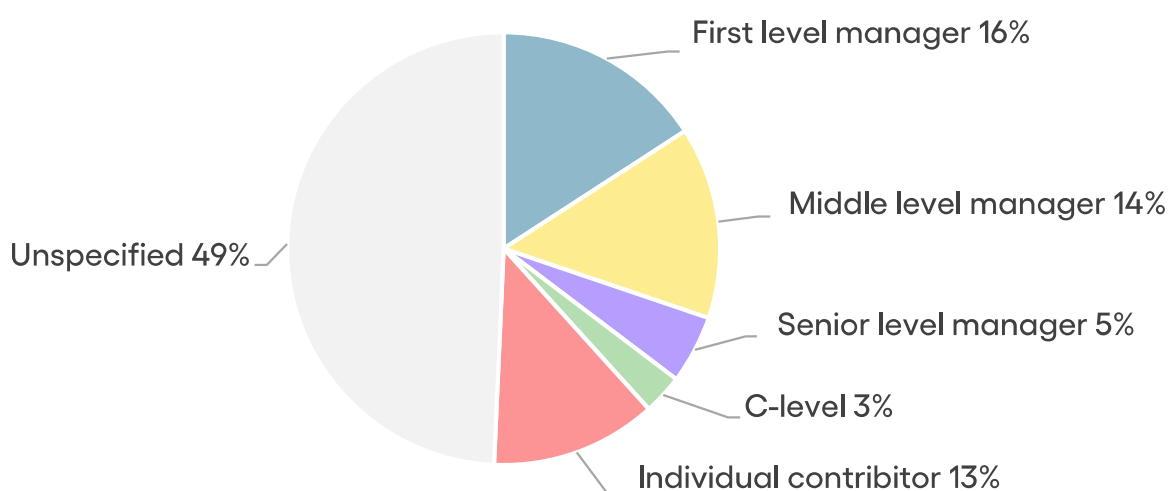
Source: SuccessFinder

Research methodology

This report synthesizes data collected over 12-month period, from June 2024 to June 2025. The sample comprises 17,052 individuals spanning all major industries and leadership levels.

The SuccessFinder assessment, rooted in over 50 years of research, was used to capture 100+ behavioral datapoints for each participant, offering an unparalleled lens into naturally preferred styles, career themes, and the competencies most relevant for current organizational challenges.

Leadership levels

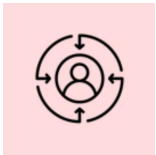


Industries	Sample
Financial Services	1,687
Engineering	1,450
Administration	1,228
Business Management	1,043
Human Resources	881
Corporate finance	643
Technology & software	628
Marketing & Communications	560
Health Science	549
Other	8,383

Source: SuccessFinder

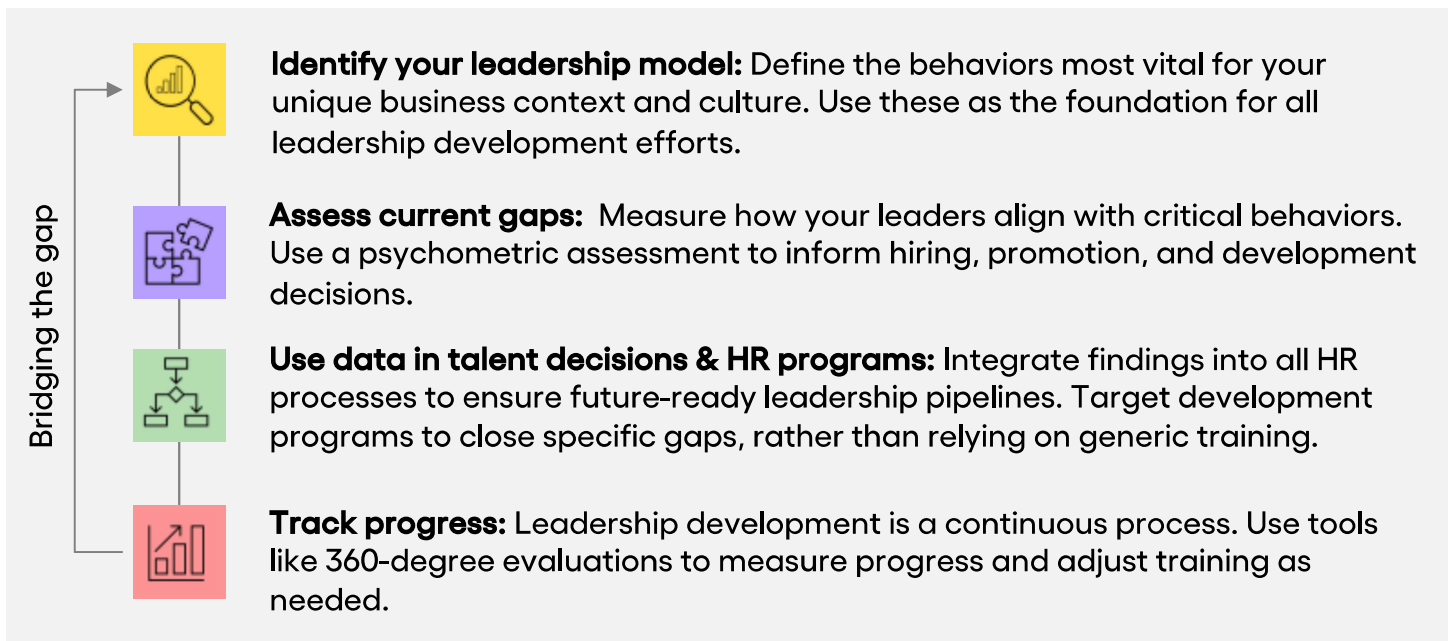
From insight to action: strategic recommendations

The data reveals a mismatch between what managers naturally bring and what organizations now need to meet the new expectations created by the macro trends mentioned earlier: **human-centric leadership demands, AI transformation, and economic uncertainty.**



While current leaders demonstrate natural preferences for Fraternity and Cooperation (team harmony), they may experience blind spots in critical areas such as Innovation, Profit Awareness, Stress Tolerance, Flexibility, and Delegation. **This mismatch intensifies burnout risks and can undermine effectiveness.**

Leadership gaps are likely to intensify as emerging leaders advance and leadership demands continue to evolve. Here are four strategic steps organization can take to stay ahead:



Effective leadership behaviors are not just about employee satisfaction; they directly translate into measurable business outcomes. By grounding talent decisions in data, investing in targeted development, and committing to continuous measurement, organizations can close the gap between aspiration and reality.

Business impact = High performance + Retention of skilled leaders + Sustainable growth

Connect with us

See how SuccessFinder can help close leadership gaps and strengthen your organization's strategy. Gain objective, actionable talent insights to drive smarter HR decisions and accelerate progress on business-critical goals. Contact us to book a demo:

Phone: +1 844-932-3231

Let's talk!

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