Global Leadership Forecast 2025

A VentureBean Industry Analysis

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This analysis distils key findings from the source report and frames them through VentureBean's lens — helping scaling Indian enterprises (₹10Cr–100Cr) translate macro insights into leadership and growth strategy.

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VentureBean's Perspective

The recent DDI Global Leadership Forecast 2025 paints a sobering picture of a leadership ecosystem under immense strain, a reality we at VentureBean see daily among scaling Indian enterprises. The data reveals a staggering collapse in workplace confidence, with trust in immediate managers plummeting to a mere 29%, all while 71% of leaders report severe increases in stress and burnout. For mid-market Indian companies in the ₹10Cr-100Cr revenue band, this convergence of eroding trust and rising executive fatigue is a massive operational vulnerability. Founders and C-suite executives are driving aggressive growth agendas, yet the very managers tasked with executing these strategies are overwhelmed, time-starved, and losing credibility with their teams. This is not merely an employee engagement issue; it is a fundamental threat to organizational resilience that can easily derail ambitious scaling plans.

Compounding this crisis of burnout is the severe fragility of the leadership bench. The forecast highlights that 80% of organizations lack confidence in their leadership pipelines, a statistic that perfectly mirrors the struggle of the growing businesses we advise. When founders attempt to step back from daily operations to focus on strategy, they frequently discover a hollowed-out middle management layer. High-potential talent is increasingly flight-prone because they are not receiving the targeted development, purposeful work, or clear advancement pathways they need to stay. Developing these second-line leaders into future-focused strategic thinkers who can manage change and build trust is no longer optional. Without a robust, highly capable bench ready to shoulder operational execution, scaling businesses will inevitably hit a growth ceiling, paralyzed by a lack of succession readiness.

Overcoming this leadership deficit requires a deliberate shift from reactive firefighting to systemic talent investment—the core of our mission at VentureBean. We partner with growing enterprises to build authentic leadership depth through targeted executive coaching, continuous skill mapping, and personalized development journeys that move far beyond generic training. By equipping frontline and mid-level managers with critical coaching capabilities and strategic foresight, we help them rebuild trust and navigate high-stress environments effectively. For Indian SMBs aiming for their next major revenue milestone, prioritizing succession readiness and robust second-line leadership is the ultimate competitive advantage. It ensures they have the resilient, capable leaders required to turn an ambitious vision into a sustainable reality.

Significance of the Report

Published by DDI, the Global Leadership Forecast 2025 is a comprehensive study examining current and future leadership best practices amidst a landscape of rising expectations and profound workplace disruptions. As the longest-running research series of its kind, the study features an immense scale, capturing insights from over 10,000 leaders and 2,000 human resource professionals spanning more than 50 countries and 24 major industries. The report matters deeply because it uncovers systemic vulnerabilities in the modern workforce, exposing issues such as a severe leadership credibility crisis, surging burnout, and an alarming deficit in future-focused capabilities. Globally, these findings provide a crucial blueprint for organizations to transition from reactive crisis management to proactive, human-centered talent development that can successfully integrate technologies like artificial intelligence while retaining high-potential talent. Furthermore, while the provided text focuses on macro-level global trends rather than isolated country metrics, its strategic pathways are highly significant for Indian enterprises seeking to overcome these universal challenges and cultivate resilient, adaptable leadership pipelines in an increasingly volatile business environment.

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Findings

A severe decline in leadership trust reveals significant generational divides.

Between 2022 and 2024, trust in immediate managers plummeted from 46% to just 29%, though younger employees ages 25–34 maintain higher trust levels in managers (36%) than older employees ages 50–64 (26%). This growing credibility crisis matters because trust is a prerequisite for talent development; employees with supportive, coaching managers are nine times more likely to trust their leadership.

AI adoption success is heavily dependent on frontline trust in senior executives.

Frontline leaders are three times more likely to be concerned about AI implementation than their senior counterparts, with only 58% expressing enthusiasm compared to 74% of CEOs. Because frontline managers carry the operational burden of integrating these technologies and workflow changes, organizations where senior leaders actively build trust are 2.8 times less likely to face AI resistance from their teams.

Surging leader stress and burnout threaten to trigger a leadership exodus.

Currently, 71% of leaders report a significant increase in stress due to time scarcity, leading 54% to worry about burnout and 40% to consider abandoning their leadership roles entirely. This matters because it exposes a structural vulnerability in the leadership pipeline, highlighting that leaders urgently need better time management support and resources to prevent strategic continuity failures.

A widening purpose gap is leaving frontline leaders feeling disconnected.

While 67% of C-suite executives report a strong sense of purpose in their roles, frontline leaders have experienced a 20% decline since 2020, dropping to just 35%. This divergence is critical because purpose-driven leaders are highly engaged; failing to connect frontline managers to the broader mission risks team morale, retention, and the execution of core business strategies.

Confidence in leadership pipeline quality remains alarmingly low despite a modest recovery.

Although HR professionals' confidence in their leadership bench increased from 11% in 2020 to 20% in 2024, a staggering 80% of organizations still lack trust in their leadership pipelines. Improving bench strength is a strategic imperative, as organizations with robust pipelines are 2.9 times more likely to be top financial performers and 3.5 times more likely to be highly admired in their industries.

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A lack of development is accelerating the departure of high-potential talent.

The intention to leave among high-potential individual contributors has surged from 13% in 2020 to 21% in 2024, driven heavily by unmet growth needs. This flight risk matters profoundly because high-potential talent is 3.7 times more likely to leave without continuous development opportunities and 4.8 times more likely to depart if they lack a sense of purpose in their role.

Critical future-focused skills like strategy and change management are profoundly underdeveloped.

While 83% of HR organizations anticipate a surge in new leadership capability needs, massive training gaps exist: 64% of leaders view setting strategy as essential but only 37% received training, and 61% cite managing change as critical while only 36% are trained for it. Closing these skill gaps is vital, as organizations that invest in developing these specific capabilities are far more likely to innovate, adapt to uncertainty, and sustain long-term growth.

Effective coaching and diverse development ecosystems drive real leadership growth.

Organizations that utilize five or more development approaches—such as internal coaching, assessments, and AI practice simulations—are 4.9 times more likely to report improved leadership capabilities. This multi-faceted approach is essential because when managers act as effective coaches, employees are nine times more likely to trust them, creating a culture of continuous, personalized feedback that combats turnover.

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Thought Triggers

Here are 6 thought-provoking questions and provocations tailored for a CEO or founder of a scaling Indian business, connecting global leadership trends directly to your strategic talent decisions:

1. The Trust Deficit is Throttling Your Scale: Trust in immediate managers has plummeted to an abysmal 29% globally, falling even below the trust employees have in senior executives. As you rapidly scale your workforce, are you actively measuring and repairing the credibility of your frontline managers, or are you risking a mass exodus of talent simply because your employees no longer trust the people directly managing them?

2. Your AI Strategy is Terrifying Your Frontline: You might be thrilled about driving AI efficiency and digital transformation from the boardroom, but frontline managers are three times more likely to be anxious about the impacts of AI than senior leaders. Have you equipped your second-line leaders to actually manage the human side of this technological shift, or are you just mandating change without cultivating the trust required to execute it?

3. Growth at the Cost of Sanity Will Break Your Pipeline: A staggering 71% of leaders report surging stress driven by time scarcity, and 40% are considering walking away from leadership roles entirely just to save their well-being. If your hyper-growth strategy relies on perpetually overloading your most capable leaders to meet aggressive targets, what is your practical plan for business continuity when your best people inevitably burn out and leave?

4. Your Succession Plan is Likely an Illusion: 80% of organizations globally confess they lack confidence in their leadership bench. If your top three executives or critical business unit heads resigned tomorrow, do you possess a battle-tested, "ready-now" second line of leaders? Or is your succession plan just a theoretical spreadsheet full of "potential" that hasn't been actively pressure-tested through real-world developmental assignments?

5. The Staggering Cost of Developing No One: Your rising stars know their worth in a competitive market, and high-potential talent is nearly four times more likely to quit if they aren’t receiving active, targeted development. While you obsess over customer acquisition and capital allocation, are you starving your future leaders of the coaching they crave? If you aren't investing in their future-focused skills today, you are effectively training your competitors' next executives.

6. The "Purpose Gap" is Derailing Execution: While C-suite executives report feeling more purpose-driven than ever, frontline leaders are experiencing a severe 20% decline in their sense of meaning and connection to the mission. You may have a crystal-clear, inspiring vision for the company's future, but how are you ensuring that vision actually translates into daily, meaningful impact for the middle managers who carry the heaviest operational burdens of your growth?

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Ready to Apply These Insights?

If this report resonated with you, let's explore how VentureBean can help your organisation navigate these challenges.

Book a Discovery Call — Schedule a Call