

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

# Leadership

## STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING

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# Executive summary

Explore the interactive version online

Leadership Intelligence Map - insights and perspectives curated by Digoshen via World Economic Forum Strategic insights and contextual intelligence.

The key issues shaping and influencing Leadership are as follows:

**Gender Equality and Diversity**
Progress has stagnated on action, measurement, and disclosure

**Behaviour and Governance**
Behavioural insights are informing policy-making and encouraging civic participation

**Human Development**
Behavioural insights can potentially improve the quality of life for everyone

**AI-Enhanced Counselling**
Providing support even during a shortage of available mental health professionals

**Neuroscience**
Many pressing questions raised by advances in the field have yet to be answered

**Changing Behaviour for Sustainability**
The behavioural sciences can help people and companies behave in more environmentally-sustainable ways

**Mental Health in the Workplace**
Employees who are more susceptible to mental health problems are more likely to see their work suffer

**Impacts on Behaviour and Decision-Making**
Public education about the plusses and minuses of cognitive constructs should be actively promoted

**Business and Behaviour**
Behavioural insights can play a role in promoting productivity and fairness

**Culture, Integrity and Reputation**
Successfully nurturing a culture of integrity and corporate reputation requires going beyond compliance

**Core Soft Skills**
Education programmes should teach relevant soft skills to increase adaptability

Below is an excerpt from the transformation map for Leadership, with key issues shown at the centre and related topics around the perimeter. You can find the full map later in this briefing.




In the following sections, we give a comprehensive summary of the latest **Insights and Trends** shaping the topic, a look at potential **Forecasts and Scenarios** based on current and emerging trends, and an overview of the **Strategic Context**.

# 1 Insights and trends

A synthesis of the most recent expert analysis.

## 1.1 Current perspectives

LSE Business Review

### Ending modern slavery will take more than corporate reporting

16 October 2026

Modern slavery arises where global commercial pressures intersect with vulnerable local labor markets. Although UK companies have increased oversight and reporting on modern slavery, limitations remain in addressing abuses occurring deeper in complex supply chains, such as through intermediaries and subcontractors. The UK government's proposed mandatory reporting reforms improve transparency and extend duties to public authorities, signaling a shared responsibility. However, effective prevention requires stronger collaboration and information sharing between corporate supply-chain governance and local public bodies, which currently operate mostly in parallel. Coordinated efforts are essential to identify and address labor exploitation at both corporate and community levels.

RAND Corporation

### Helping people stay in work

14 October 2026

Early, tailored caseworker support can prevent health-related job loss and often yields economic benefits exceeding costs. Effective support should begin within days of emerging health issues, addressing health, psychological, and workplace factors. Skilled caseworkers work with employers to enable adjustments and phased returns, providing continued follow-up to reduce relapse risk. Current UK provision is fragmented, requiring a more integrated system with clearer roles, stronger referral pathways, sustained funding, and workforce development. Recommendations include establishing national standards, strengthening local coordination, enhancing employer engagement, and aligning insurance and public services to scale sustainable early-intervention support.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

### Rise in poverty is 'a wake-up call for the world', UN development chief says

12 October 2026

Multidimensional poverty has risen for the first time in 15 years, with 1.2 billion people–over half of them children–now facing overlapping hardships in health, education, and living standards. The 2026 global Multidimensional Poverty Index update by UNDP and Oxford University shows that population growth and uneven progress, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, have fueled this increase. While some countries like Egypt and Nepal have reduced poverty rates, overall numbers grew due to demographic changes. Despite setbacks, progress is achievable; 33 countries have halved poverty in under 15 years, demonstrating that determined, collective action can significantly reduce multidimensional poverty.

World Economic Forum

### What the screen time debate in schools gets wrong about EdTech

13 October 2026

Global approaches to educational technology (EdTech) in schools reveal a shift from EdTech 1.0, which prioritized engagement without solid learning evidence, to EdTech 2.0, emphasizing evidence-based use, and now toward EdTech 3.0, harnessing AI for personalized learning. Countries like France and Sweden restrict screen use, reacting against ineffective EdTech 1.0 models, while Malawi and Colombia invest in evidence-backed digital initiatives aimed at

improving learning outcomes. Effective EdTech deployment depends on independent research, transparent procurement, and building local capacities to evaluate impact. However, the uneven development of evidence frameworks and market complexities challenge the consistent adoption of beneficial EdTech tools worldwide.

GovLab - Living Library

### Professionalizing deliberation: a Social Network Analysis of UK climate mini-publics

14 October 2026

Deliberative mini-publics have become key in UK climate governance, leading to a professional field comprising facilitators, recruitment agencies, advisory bodies, experts, and networks. Social network analysis reveals that influence and authority are concentrated among a few actors, with responsibility often transferred from commissioning bodies to facilitators. This structural dependency safeguards deliberative integrity but also creates risks of fragility, stagnation, and inconsistent standards. Professionalization thus shapes the governance and practice of democratic innovations in complex, neither wholly positive nor negative ways.

The Conversation

### Here's how to find the learning strategy that makes AI work for you

13 October 2026

Generative AI offers vast learning opportunities by quickly explaining concepts and solving problems, but effective learning requires deliberate strategies beyond just obtaining answers. Successful use of AI involves metacognition–monitoring and regulating one's learning process–and choosing how to engage with AI tools, such as attempting problems first or seeking feedback instead of passively accepting answers. Studies show AI designed as a tutor promoting active learning prevents skill decline, unlike AI that simply supplies answers. Enhancing AI literacy alongside learning literacy–understanding how to learn effectively–is crucial. Educators and developers must design learning experiences and AI systems that encourage reflection, retrieval practice, and active problem-solving to maximize AI's educational benefits.

The Conversation (French)

### Santé mentale des adolescents et mobilisations lycéennes, des causes communes ?

14 October 2026

Les mobilisations lycéennes de 2026 révèlent un malaise lié aux conditions scolaires, notamment la pression, l'impact de Parcoursup et les classes surchargées. Les enquêtes montrent une dégradation significative de la santé mentale des adolescents, avec 45 % des collégiens souffrant régulièrement de troubles psychologiques et 19 % des lycéens à risque élevé de dépression. Les filles sont plus touchées que les garçons, et les jeunes de 18 à 29 ans présentent les taux les plus élevés d'épisodes dépressifs, d'anxiété et de pensées suicidaires. Ces données soulignent un lien fort entre conditions d'apprentissage difficiles et dégradation du bien-être psychologique.

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Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)

### Commitments into action: Women, Peace, and Security in defence budgeting

16 October 2026

Global military spending has nearly doubled over the last decade, while official development assistance is expected to drop by 31% from 2024 to 2029. Despite many countries adopting Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policies, only 29 of 113 with WPS National Action Plans included budgets at adoption. Integrating WPS commitments into defence budgets involves embedding gender analysis throughout all budgeting phases rather than creating separate budget lines. Practical measures include involving gender advisers, conducting gender impact assessments, using gender-disaggregated data, and gender-responsive audits. Risks include isolating WPS funding or overly securitizing the agenda. Recommendations urge linking WPS to budget processes, enhancing gender expertise, and combined scrutiny of military and social spending to ensure defence growth does not undermine development funding.

Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

### Behind the factory walls: accountability failures in the global textile industry

11 October 2026

The global textile industry, valued at $1.3 trillion and employing over 300 million workers, faces persistent accountability failures regarding labor rights and environmental impacts. Driven by fast fashion, the sector exhibits systemic discrimination against mostly South-East Asian women, limited supply-chain transparency, and weak enforcement of national and international standards. Despite voluntary corporate commitments to human rights and transparency, abuses such as exploitative labor conditions and environmental degradation remain widespread, often hidden in complex multi-tiered supply chains. Efforts to enhance traceability and compliance exist but fall short, while legal actions challenge misleading sustainability claims and inadequate monitoring, highlighting the need for binding regulations and stronger corporate accountability.

GovLab - Living Library

### The Promise and Peril of "AI for Democracy"

14 October 2026

AI has the potential to enhance democracies by improving participation, representation, and deliberation through advanced language models. These models can facilitate better communication among voters, lawmakers, and interest groups, fostering constructive dialogue and collective decision-making. Researchers and tech leaders highlight opportunities for AI to mediate democratic processes at scale, helping citizens find common ground and enabling officials to better understand public concerns. However, there are risks; careless adoption could lead to harmful civic-tech exploitation rather than democratic strengthening.

The Conversation (French)

### Quand les machines apprennent à lire nos émotions, ou l'essor de l'« informatique affective »

14 October 2026

L'informatique affective vise à créer des systèmes capables de détecter et interpréter en temps réel les émotions humaines via l'analyse des expressions faciales, du ton de voix, du rythme cardiaque ou d'autres signaux physiologiques. Basée sur des algorithmes d'apprentissage automatique, cette technologie ne ressent pas les émotions mais calcule leur probabilité afin d'adapter les interactions. Elle est déjà intégrée dans des outils courants comme les visioconférences, assistants vocaux, systèmes de détection de somnolence dans les voitures, ou encore des installations muséales interactives. L'informatique affective ouvre ainsi de nouvelles perspectives dans divers domaines, notamment la formation, la sécurité routière, la culture et la santé.

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Stockholm Environment Institute

### EU sustainability reporting rules and municipal governance

13 October 2026

Recent changes to EU corporate sustainability reporting rules indirectly impact municipal governments by influencing the sustainability data obtained from municipal companies, banks, suppliers, and climate investment programs. Although municipalities are not directly required to report under EU law, these rules affect their reporting practices and decision-making processes. Municipalities can take practical steps to enhance the quality of sustainability information for better governance and planning.

The Conversation

### Messy, risky outdoor play is important for children, but adults can stop them enjoying it

13 October 2026

Children today have fewer opportunities for independent, adventurous outdoor play, with outdoor playtime declining 50% in a generation. Research with 3- to 5-year-olds showed that children often avoid risky play not due to lack of confidence but because of the subtle cautious messages they receive from adults about safety and mess. When schools adjusted their approach–reorganized outdoor equipment, changed adult language to express trust, and allowed messiness–children became more willing to take risks, explore, and engage in sensory-rich play. Supporting risk-taking involves reframing risk as learning, pausing before intervening, permitting mess, using trusting language, and offering meaningful choices, helping children build confidence, problem-solving skills, and resilience.

World Economic Forum

### Why an ageing world is a question for young people

13 October 2026

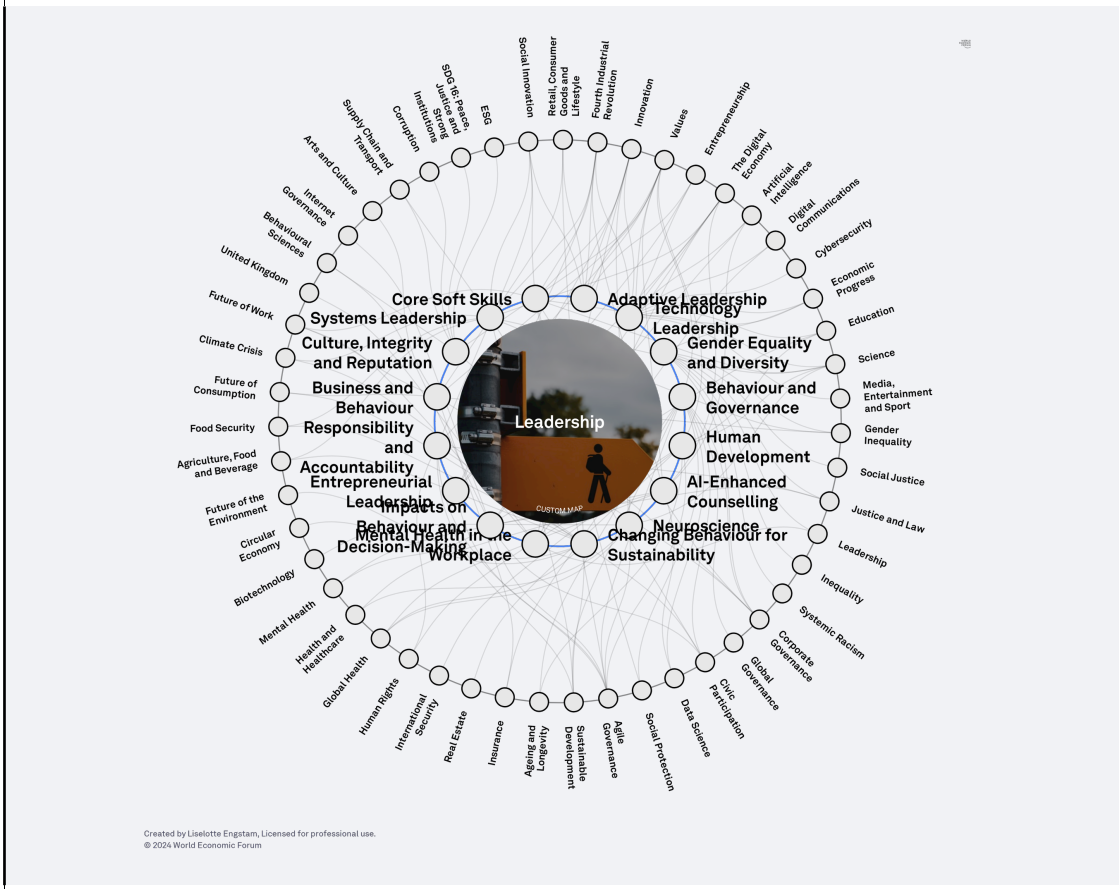
Young people will live longer in a world with aging populations and declining birthrates, facing challenges like financial insecurity, healthcare access, and social isolation. Current systems, designed for younger demographics, must adapt to support non-linear life paths involving lifelong learning, caregiving, and phased retirement. The World Economic Forum's Longevity Economy Playbook empowers youth to identify local gaps and create solutions for longevity preparedness, emphasizing prevention, intergenerational solidarity, and social connection. Employers and policymakers play key roles by promoting flexible careers, preventive health, and coordinated policies to build inclusive, resilient societies suited to longer, more diverse lifespans.

# 2 Strategic context

## The key issues shaping Leadership.

The following key issues represent the most strategic trends shaping the topic of Leadership. These key issues are also influenced by the other topics depicted on the outer ring of the transformation map.

FIGURE 1 **Transformation map for Leadership**




## 2.1 Gender Equality and Diversity

*Progress has stagnated on action, measurement, and disclosure*

We are six years away from 2030, and well behind on achieving all of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes the targets for SDG 5 - which relates to gender equality and women's empowerment. Similar to many parts of the world, In the Chinese workspace gender equality needs to be enhanced; in terms of career development, female candidates are three times more likely to be asked about marital and childbearing status during job interviews, and nearly one in four women in a recent survey said they have lost out on promotion opportunities due to this status. In terms of leadership, women account for only about 10% of senior management positions and boardroom seats. And in terms of income,

for every dollar male workers earn, female workers earn only 87 cents. UN Global Compact and UN Women have launched the Women's Empowerment Principles (or WEPs); research from the WEPs Tool shows that global businesses are active on commitments, but progress has stagnated on action, measurement, and disclosure. Only about 20% to 30% of businesses around the world set goals or strategies for gender equality. We should be aware that gender equality is not just a women's issue; it is a development topic that concerns every one of us. On International Women's Day in 2024, the UN Secretary-General said that, "Gender equality is the strong foundation of the entire 2030 Agenda - from ending poverty to securing peace." International commitments to this cause have yielded positive results: increased female labour force participation, expanded employment opportunities for women driven by the growth of the digital economy, and enhanced awareness of gender equality have been prompted by evolving Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) disclosure requirements and investor concerns. Global businesses are encouraged to establish concrete targets for investing gender equality and DEI.

Related topics: Corporate Governance, Inequality, Justice and Law, Global Gender Gap, Future of Leadership, Social Justice, Systemic Racism, Economic Growth

## 2.2 Behaviour and Governance

*Behavioural insights are informing policy-making and encouraging civic participation*

The design of health, safety, financial, and education-related public systems and services can benefit from taking into account the psychological traits of the people meant to benefit from them. Past approaches to policy-making often relied too much on simple financial rewards and punishments. Now, the behavioural-science toolkit has expanded significantly; it includes social incentives like "nudges," or subtle changes in the environment that gently push people to make better decisions while retaining their freedom of choice. These behavioural tools take into account the fact that decisions do not always result from a purely rational weighing of cost versus benefit, but instead are often influenced by simplistic reasoning, intuition, and social motives. Behavioural designs are often more effective, and less costly, than traditional approaches that rely on financial incentives or persuasion. For example, millions of people in the United Kingdom and the US have increased their retirement savings in response to a simple change in the way certain pension plans are being presented to them. These new "Save More TomorrowTM" plans have people commit to allocating a portion of future salary increases towards their retirement savings. The sting of these paycheck reductions is dulled by the fact that they only kick in after raises, making people much more willing to agree to them.

Behavioural science can also help increase civic participation, by motivating people to volunteer, donate, sign petitions, participate in rallies, interact with their government representatives, and vote. Leveraging people's sense of identity can increase voter turnout, for example; in a study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2011, researchers demonstrated that when items in a pre-election survey were phrased to invoke the respondent's identity (by asking, "How important is it to you to be a voter in the upcoming election?" as opposed to, "How important is it to you to vote in the upcoming election?"), respondents were in fact more likely to vote, according to records associated with two state-wide elections in the US. Another study on increasing voter turnout, published in 2010 in Psychological Science, was based on the 2008 US presidential election; it showed that if calls made to potential voters not only encouraged them to vote but also prompted them to make a specific plan for casting their ballot, turnout increased among single-eligible-voter households by 9%. Other ways that the behavioural sciences can inform the design of better-functioning societies include motivating people to pay their taxes, preventing people from dropping out of college, increasing vaccination rates, and promoting recycling and the consumption of healthier food. Further collaboration between behavioural science researchers, governments, and civil society institutions could ultimately foster a more successful journey through the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Related topics: Longevity Economy, Civic Participation, Corporate Governance, Agile Governance, Global Governance, Social Protection, Sustainable Development

## 2.3 Human Development

*Behavioural insights can potentially improve the quality of life for everyone*

Gross domestic product per capita may be a good way of indicating a nation's well-being, but material conditions are not everything. As acknowledged by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a true measure of well-being should include quality-of-life aspects, like one's sense of personal

security, social connections, happiness, skills and education. The behavioural sciences can help us study how to best pursue these outcomes. Small inputs and changes in narrative can be effective in determining how people react to adversity, and whether they see it as a challenge they can overcome. For example, behavioural scientists have shed light on the conditions under which students at schools and universities can better flourish. The Behavioural Insights Team, a publicly owned, UK-based company, found that fewer students with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds apply to university than students from higher income families, even when these students have the same grades and abilities; however, if such students from lower income families received letters of encouragement from enrolled students with the same socioeconomic background, their application rates increased by 3%. A study by Stanford University researchers published in Science in 2011 demonstrated that simply teaching students that all newcomers to college worry about fitting in, but that over time, everyone feels more at home, both halved the racial-achievement gap and improved the health of African American students.

Behaviourally-informed interventions have also effectively improved outcomes for children in the developing world. One example: early childhood development interventions that increase psychosocial stimulation in children from very poor families. One report about an early childhood intervention that took place in 1986 and 1987 in low-income neighborhoods in Kingston, Jamaica, showed that twenty years later, stunted children who had received psychosocial stimulation earned, on average, 25% more than stunted children who did not receive stimulation, and had eventually caught up with other children who had not been classified as stunted before the intervention. Other research has examined the boundaries that prevent children from regularly attending school in remote or conflict-affected areas of the world. One factor shown to have a strong impact on attendance is a student's travel time to school. For example, the installment of village-based schools in remote areas of Afghanistan has been shown to increase school enrollment rates from 27% to 68%. The effect was also stronger for girls, reducing the gender gap in school enrollment. Human development faces myriad other challenges. For example, how can ageing societies in Europe, the US and Japan maintain inclusiveness for the elderly? Identifying and removing barriers that keep older adults from staying actively engaged is crucial, in this regard. For example, residential areas need to be built to enable older adults to stay social and mobile, despite their limited movement - by adding more easily accessible public spaces with ample seating, or providing hand rails.

Related topics: Longevity Economy, Drivers of War, Science, Human Rights, Agile Governance, Education and Skills

## 2.4 AI-Enhanced Counselling

*Providing support even during a shortage of available mental health professionals*

Artificial intelligence-enhanced personal counselling can take the form of chatbots, virtual assistants, or mobile apps - and can provide services ranging from screening, to intervention, to ongoing support. A key advantage of AI-enhanced personal counselling is its ability to quickly analyse large amounts of data about a client's medical and mental health history, symptoms, and behaviours - and to generate personalized interventions based on that information. Large language models, particularly those that are clinically specialized, enable the creation of therapist avatars that can maintain relatively sophisticated discussions with millions of users simultaneously. That can be particularly helpful in situations where there is a shortage of available mental health professionals. By providing anonymous, non-judgmental support, AI-enhanced counselling may particularly appeal to people who might not otherwise seek out such services. To treat patients safely and effectively, however, the underlying AI must be thoroughly trained to accurately identify mental health issues and provide appropriate support. With robust guardrails and regulations in place, AI-enhanced counselling can help address a growing mental health crisis, particularly in traditionally underserved areas and among traditionally wary populations.

Related topics: Global Health, Mental Health, Artificial Intelligence, The Digital Economy

## 2.5 Neuroscience

*Many pressing questions raised by advances in the field have yet to be answered*

Breakthroughs in molecular biology, electrophysiology, and computing have boosted interest in neuroscience - reflected in the growing amounts being invested in related research and technology by governments, academic institutions, and the private sector. The human brain and its 86 billion neurons can be analysed in

myriad ways, and the field is correspondingly vast. It draws on disciplines as diverse as cellular biology and the philosophy of mind, as it seeks to answer fundamental questions about how billions of component parts can come together to establish behaviour, what changes can lead to disease, how far we should go beyond fixing problems to enhancing ourselves, and what the ethical and legal implications are of investigating - and possibly altering - peoples' thoughts. Foundational techniques such as "polymerase chain reaction" (used to quickly produce DNA samples in the billions) and genomic sequencing are being advanced through optogenetics and chemogenetics - which enable a more precise mapping of the cells present in the brain, and a deeper, more accurate understanding of how genes affect the structure and function of these cells in relation to neurological disorders such as dementia.

Our understanding of the ways cells talk to one other and form neuronal circuits has benefitted from similar breakthroughs, courtesy of initiatives like the Human Connectome Project - which is attempting to construct a complete map of the brain's structural and functional connections. While a fuller picture of these connections (supported by other multi-modal maps) will improve our collective understanding of the brain, related breakthroughs are forcing ethicists and legal scholars to confront new questions; these include how to make the best use of algorithms that can translate neural activity into images, and whether thoughts read by a machine should be considered self-incrimination if used in a legal proceeding. In addition, companies may be crossing a line by attempting to use "neuromarketing" to more precisely target advertisements, and there are serious ethical issued related to creating "cerebral organoids" (mini-brains grown in labs with human tissue) and human-animal chimeras (mixtures of animal and human brain cells) for research purposes. Ultimately, contemporary neuroscience is a dynamic field that mixes cutting-edge science with pressing philosophical questions - many of which have yet to be fully answered.

Related topics: Biotechnology, Agile Governance, Global Health, Innovation, Science

## 2.6 Changing Behaviour for Sustainability

*The behavioural sciences can help people and companies behave in more environmentally-sustainable ways*

The climate crisis has created a need for more sustainable use of natural resources and a longer-term, more global perspective. Humanity often struggles to act in its own future best interests. People may aspire to consume less, save more energy and water, and purchase more sustainable products, but they nonetheless often fall back on bad habits and preferences. Traditional approaches to tackling this "intention-behaviour gap" often fail. Simply informing people about the importance of sustainability is often not enough to affect their behaviour, as decision-making is often guided by more ephemeral influences like mood, short-term desire, or habit. More often than not, people are also lazy - in the sense that they do not consider all available information when making decisions, or prefer convenient and accessible options over rational ones. To circumvent this, behavioural scientists investigate not only how persuasion can be more effective, but also how subtle changes to one's environment, or so-called "nudges," can make it easier for people to act in line with their aspirations.

Such nudges should always allow for the retention of consumers' freedom of choice. For example, the Flemish government in Belgium was able to increase sales of local regional and seasonal foods by up to 30% simply by placing them at eye level for shoppers. Defaults can also work as powerful nudges; a 2008 study by researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology showed that the proportion of people choosing a green, sustainable energy source over a less expensive, less sustainable source like coal can be substantially increased by simply making the green option the default on a registration form. People do not like deviating from what is displayed as the default - possibly because they think it indicates a recommendation, or prevailing norm. Information about established norms is also effective in nudging people to behave more sustainably. A 2008 study published in the Journal of Consumer Research described guests at a US hotel re-using their towels more frequently if a sign informed them that the majority of guests in the same room had re-used their towels. And a 2011 study published in the Journal of Public Economics showed that providing US citizens with monthly reports about their energy consumption, alongside comparisons to that of their neighbours, reduced their energy consumption by about 2% relative to a baseline. Even small, behaviourally-informed changes to the environments in which we make our decisions, or to the narratives we use to make sense of the world around us, can help us better act in accordance with the planet's best interests.

Related topics: Future of the Environment, Climate Crisis, Future of Consumption, Sustainable Development, Circular Economy, Global Health, Food Security

## 2.7 Mental Health in the Workplace

*Employees who are more susceptible to mental health problems are more likely to see their work suffer*

At any point, nearly one in five members of the working-age population in the UK has a mental health problem, according to a report prepared for the UK government by the RAND Corporation in 2014, and more than 40% of sickness benefit claims in the country cite a mental or behavioural disorder as a primary condition. However, a subsequent RAND Corporation report published in 2018 identified a number of potential wellbeing interventions related to mental health in the workplace, based on standards developed by the innovation and social-policy-intervention foundation Nesta (ranging from a "1" for articulating a clear logic, to a "5" for showing evidence of consistent, reliable results). For example, Be Mindful, a four-week online course that involves mindfulness meditation audio and video-led sessions aimed at reducing stress, depression and anxiety (and received a rating of "3"), had been implemented in 17 organizations for about 11,000 people annually, and showed statistically significant beneficial effects. In general, however, the tools and practices in place for occupational mental health, as well as the degree of access to mental health support in the workplace, remain insufficient.

In response, in 2017 the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Mental Health published a set of seven steps that people can take to foster a healthier workplace. These include exploring ways to modify existing workplace practices in a way that could promote better mental health (keeping in mind that every workplace is unique), taking the time to learn from leaders and employees who have been successful in promoting better mental health in the past, borrowing successful models from other firms (the council provided case studies from companies including Bell Canada and British Telecom Group), making an effort to better understand the opportunities and mental health needs of your colleagues, building the internal and external partnerships needed to provide educational material and training necessary for successful mental health initiatives, and creating a culture where colleagues will not hesitate to ask for help (and will know exactly where to direct their questions).

Related topics: The Digital Economy, Digital Communications, Innovation, Future of Work, Future of Leadership

## 2.8 Impacts on Behaviour and Decision-Making

*Public education about the plusses and minuses of cognitive constructs should be actively promoted*

Generative artificial intelligence and neurotechnology can create and manipulate cognitive constructs - images, sounds, text, or emotions - that can affect our perception, attention span, memory, and judgment. These constructs can be designed to exploit our cognitive biases and vulnerabilities, and induce addictive or compulsive behaviour. Public awareness and education about the positive potential and possible pitfalls of cognitive constructs and addictive design should be actively promoted. Meanwhile ethical and legal norms and standards should be developed and enforced, coupled with incentives to nudge legacy tech companies towards design that enhances cognitive liberty - as an element of public-private partnerships designed to protect the integrity and autonomy of human thinking and behaviour.

Related topics: The Digital Economy, Behavioural Sciences, Artificial Intelligence, Agile Governance, Education and Skills, Civic Participation, Mental Health, Justice and Law

## 2.9 Business and Behaviour

*Behavioural insights can play a role in promoting productivity and fairness*

The output of any organization is ultimately the sum of individuals working together - and behavioural insights can help clarify how best to improve cooperation, boost motivation and productivity, and engender team spirit. For businesses in particular, culture, work climate, financial incentive structures, styles of leadership, management, and communication should always be in focus. Behavioural science can augment fair hiring practices, for example, and help facilitate unbiased promotions and job assignments for employees. In order to help them avoid discrimination in hiring, some organizations have adopted blind evaluation procedures. Orchestras, for example, have managed to substantially reduce the discriminatory hiring that has affected female musicians by having job applicants audition behind a curtain, as reported in the American Economic

Review.

Another study published in Management Science in 2014 demonstrated that an "evaluation nudge" could help overcome gender bias in recruitment - researchers compared hiring committee evaluations done separately and jointly and, as expected, joint evaluation helped facilitate hiring recommendations based on individual performance rather than gender. In contrast, evaluations made separately led to the more likely selection of men for jobs requiring math, and women for jobs requiring verbal skills - regardless of these candidates' previous performance levels in both areas. Behavioural insights can extend beyond the internal operations of organizations and businesses. They have implications for marketing and sales strategies - to discern how effectively advertising influences attitudes towards a brand, for example, or to determine the factors accounting for the popularity of a product. While classic economic models suggest that consumers should benefit from having many choices, it has been shown that under certain conditions having too many options can decrease consumer motivation to buy a product - and subsequent satisfaction with it. In addition to private businesses, policy-makers, too, should consider behavioural insights like these - for example when presenting people with options for pension plans or health insurance.

Related topics: Future of Consumption, Global Gender Gap, Future of Work, Corporate Governance

## 2.10 Culture, Integrity and Reputation

*Successfully nurturing a culture of integrity and corporate reputation requires going beyond compliance*

Culture, integrity, and reputation are fundamental to corporate governance; they have extended beyond traditional boundaries, and are increasingly vital for companies aiming to implement a cohesive global integrity agenda. This agenda should encapsulate core values, regulatory mandates, and voluntary commitments to societal and environmental stewardship - while being adaptable to an evolving external context. Any transition to more robust governance requires a shift from rhetoric to action, and an emphasis on the role of leadership in shaping employee behaviour and establishing a corporate ethos firmly rooted in integrity. Eliminating corporate duplicity and "greenwashing" requires breaking down silos, and fostering alignment across critical functions like ethics, compliance, risk management, ESG and sustainability, and public affairs. Companies face unprecedented expectations to take clear stances on pressing issues - and without tangible, measurable action to back up their words, accusations of duplicity are likely.

Successful integrity efforts require more than just stringent oversight to prevent regulatory inadequacies, or the appointment of a single individual to helm these efforts; it calls for cultivating an organizational purpose and value system that is authentic and consistently upheld. A true commitment to integrity is reflected in every action a company takes to strengthen its culture, enhance its reputation, and affirm its dedication to ethical conduct and governance. Creating a corporate culture that encourages employees to voice concerns without fear of reprisal is fundamental for maintaining a healthy working environment. It is vital that organizations put in place robust mechanisms for reporting issues, guaranteeing complete anonymity, and educating employees about their responsibility to identify and report such concerns. This can be accomplished by incorporating whistleblowing and incident management protocols into core employee ethics-training programmes. In every case, leadership can play a key role in helping raise awareness by proactively addressing these issues, and fostering an atmosphere of open communication.

Related topics: Corruption, Sustainability Reporting, Behavioural Sciences, Logistics, Corporate Governance, SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

## 2.11 Core Soft Skills

*Education programmes should teach relevant soft skills to increase adaptability*

Educational curricula that impart the relevant knowledge and soft skills for the modern workplace are essential to help build early learner identities, develop local and global citizenship values, and nourish core non-cognitive skills. Curricula cannot remain fixed, as career paths are now changing faster, and are less linear, than ever before. There is wide-ranging consensus that no single skill set or area of expertise is likely to be able to sustain a long-term career in the economies of the future. By developing a foundation of core skills, however, education can create a basis for future re-skilling, self-actualization and civic identity. Educational institutions need to provide both in-depth subject knowledge and an ability to make inter-disciplinary connections through future-ready curricula. The Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 noted that the core soft skills of the 21st century – such as analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility and agility, as well

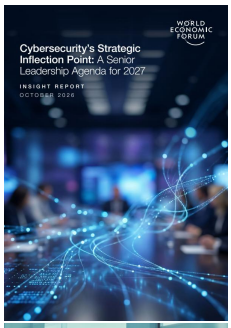
as leadership and social influence – are important for enabling people to adapt to the changing needs of the job market. These skills are ideally developed early, in basic education, and then refined at colleges and universities as well as during lifelong learning. By providing a strong base of soft skills, the educational system can act as a catalyst for people's increased readiness for future jobs.

However, shifting demand for skills across industries will require that curricula are updated and adapted on a regular basis, as they are informed by the evolution of labour markets. Upgrades to curricula should be built into the system incrementally, thereby avoiding the excessive disruption and implementation time-lag associated with major, infrequent overhauls. One single organization cannot provide these skills alone, let alone for the duration of a person's life. Therefore, the creation of these learning systems requires inclusion of stakeholders from both public and private institutions. In order to ensure that education remains relevant to job opportunities, it is critical that more emphasis is placed on collating insights from government, businesses and civil society in the curriculum design process. Such collaboration must prioritize equity, ensuring that learners from all backgrounds gain access to a high quality, future-oriented education. As technology disrupts labour markets, curricula need to help students navigate the digital transformation, including its impact and its ethical dilemmas. Developing such skills will strengthen employability, social cohesion and citizen participation, positioning education as a cornerstone of resilient societies.

Related topics: Civic Participation, Future of Work, Economic Growth, Innovation, Behavioural Sciences, Social Innovation, Social Protection

# 3 Further exploration

Explore the latest World Economic Forum reports related to Leadership.



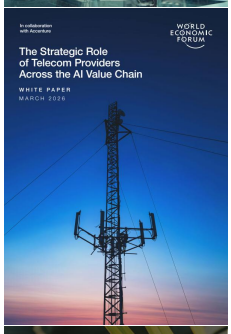

**06 October 2026**

Cybersecurity's Strategic Inflection Point: A Senior Leadership Agenda for 2027



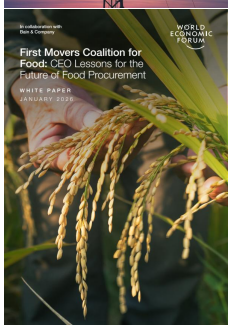

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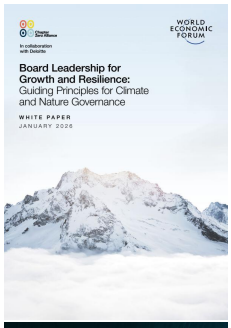

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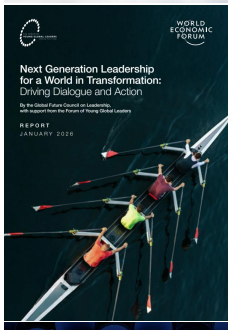

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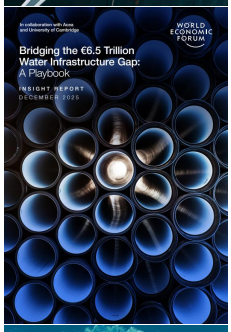

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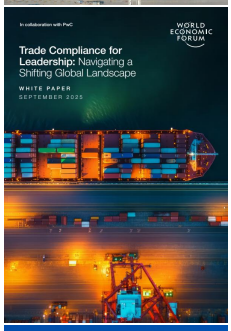

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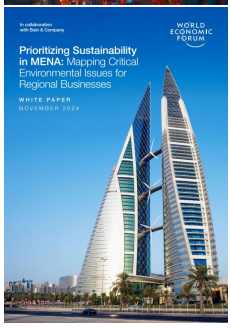

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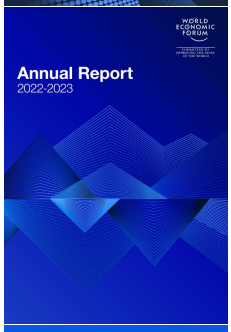

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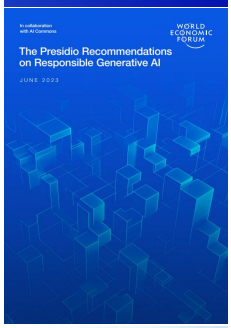

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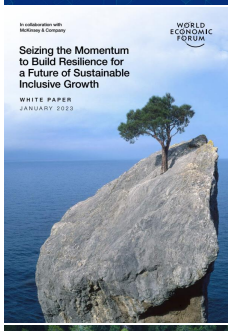

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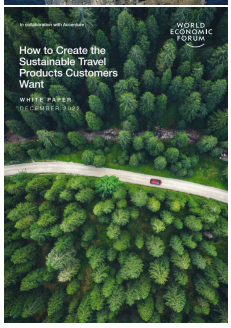

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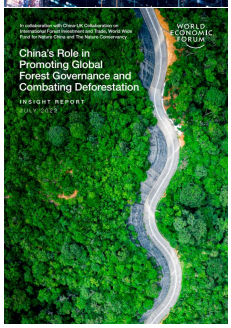

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# About Strategic Intelligence

## Our approach

In today's world, it can be difficult to keep up with the latest trends or to make sense of the countless transformations taking place. How can you decipher the potential impact of rapidly unfolding changes when you're flooded with information - some of it misleading or unreliable? How do you continuously adapt your vision and strategy within a fast-evolving global context? We need new tools to help us make better strategic decisions in an increasingly complex and uncertain environment.

This live briefing on Leadership, harnesses the World Economic Forum's Strategic Intelligence platform to bring you the very latest knowledge, data and context from our 300+ high quality knowledge sources. Its aim is to help you understand the global forces at play in relation to Leadership and make more informed decisions in the future.

Each day, our Strategic Intelligence platform aggregates, distills and synthesizes thousands of articles from around the world. We blend the best of human curation with the power of machine learning to surface high-quality content on over two hundred global issues to our one million users globally. Our hand-picked network of content partners from around the world means that we automatically exclude much of the noisy clickbait, fake news, and poor quality content that plague the Internet at large. We work with hundreds of think tanks, universities, research institutions and independent publishers in all major regions of the world to provide a truly global perspective and we are confident that our data are well positioned when it comes to the intrinsic biases inherent to open text analysis on uncurated content from the Internet. For further context on our approach, you may be interested to read Strategic trend forecasting: anticipating the future with artificial intelligence and These Are The 3 Ways Knowledge Can Provide Strategic Advantage.

↓ A leading expert presenting a transformation map at our Davos Annual Meeting



# Overview of methodology

Our Transformation Maps are dynamic knowledge visualisations. They help users to explore and make sense of the complex and interlinked forces that are transforming economies, industries and global issues. The maps present insights written by experts along with machine-curated content. Together, this allows users to visualise and understand more than 250 topics and the connections and inter-dependencies between them, helping in turn to support more informed decision-making by leaders.

The maps harness the Forum network's collective intelligence as well as the knowledge and insights generated through our activities, communities and events. And because the Transformation Maps are interlinked, they provide a single place for users to understand each topic from multiple perspectives. Each of the maps has a feed with the latest research and analysis drawn from leading research institutions and media outlets around the world.

At the centre of each map is the topic itself. This is surrounded by its "key issues", the forces which are driving transformation in relation to the topic. Surrounding the key issues are the related topics which are also affected by them. By surfacing these connections, the map facilitates exploration of the topic and the landscape within which it sits.

The framework extends beyond mapping current trends by incorporating forecasts and scenarios to project potential future states of the system. Forecasts are based on observable patterns, while scenarios explore broader possibilities, including low-probability but high-impact events. These elements contextualize key issues and related topics within potential future trajectories, enhancing strategic thinking and decision-making.

Harnessing collective intelligence from the Forum network and leading research institutions, the maps synthesize diverse insights into a cohesive view. By integrating these insights with the latest research and analysis, the framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how transformations unfold and interrelate, empowering users to navigate the evolving landscape effectively.

## Scenarios

In-line with best practice on the use of artificial intelligence in products and systems, in this section we provide full transparency on how artificial intelligence is used in our scenario generation automation.

In complex and fast-moving environments, it is difficult to maintain a clear view of what may change next, and which uncertainties deserve attention. Scenario planning helps by offering a structured way to explore alternative futures, test assumptions and clarify decisions under uncertainty.

We generate scenario packs using artificial intelligence within a defined methodology and on which we have been guided by our Global Strategic Foresight Community. The process follows the same broad logic used in scenario workshops: move from issue framing, to key uncertainties, to a 2×2 matrix, and then to four distinct scenario narratives. In an automated setting, each step includes validation to avoid weak axes and indistinct scenarios.

Each scenario pack included in our briefings includes a 2×2 scenario matrix defined by two critical uncertainties (axes), four scenario narratives and a *throughline* that connects each scenario back to the matrix.

Our process is as follows:

**1. Topic framing and inputs.** First, we ground our scenario design in our high-quality, expert curated content. Our topic summaries, key issues and related knowledge are used to anchor scenarios in the topic space.

**2. Abstraction of underlying forces.** Topic issues are often technical and uneven in granularity. Our AI agents abstract them into a small set of cross-cutting forces and tensions that can support scenario work across domains. This creates a conceptual frame that is usable for uncertainty and axis generation.

**3. Identification of drivers and uncertainties.** From that conceptual frame, an AI agent identifies drivers that could shape outcomes and that carry genuine uncertainty. Drivers are defined with directional poles so that they can support different regime logics rather than incremental variation.

**4. Axis generation and validation.** An AI agent then proposes multiple candidate axes of uncertainty and

another agent then evaluates them against criteria commonly used in facilitated scenario work: strength of the tension between poles, relevance to the topic and its drivers, and decision utility, meaning whether different positions would change strategic choices. Candidate axes are then combined into matrix pairs and tested for distinctiveness. This step is designed to avoid quadrant ”collapse”, where scenarios converge in practice despite different labels. Candidate pairs that do not yield clearly differentiated quadrants are rejected and alternatives are tried.

**5. Quadrant blueprints using STEEPLE.** Once an axis pair is selected, our AI develops a structured blueprint for each quadrant. Blueprints define the internal logic of that world and describe how the system behaves across STEEPLE domains (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal and Ethical), with attention focused on the domains that are most consequential for that quadrant. This stage is designed to establish coherence and contrast before narrative writing begins.

**6. Grounding and counter-grounds.** Our AI then builds an evidence set from the Strategic Intelligence knowledge base, drawing on our curated network of trusted content partners. Evidence is used to strengthen and challenge the emerging interpretation of each quadrant. In practice, our AI compiles supporting evidence for key mechanisms implied by the blueprint, as well as counter-evidence and constraints that suggest limits, failure modes or alternative dynamics. This step functions as a stress test. It identifies claims that are too thin, overly linear, or inconsistent with available knowledge, and it provides material used to refine the narrative direction before writing begins.

**7. Narrative development within a constrained world.** Once a narrative direction has been selected for a quadrant, our AI produces the scenario narrative within a constrained ”world”, mirroring workshop practice where participants explore a defined quadrant logic and then build out a coherent future state. At this stage, our models are instructed to remain consistent with the quadrant blueprint, incorporate supporting evidence where it adds credibility and specificity, reflect counter-evidence as tensions, constraints, trade-offs or contested dynamics, and describe a plausible future state rather than a transition story, prediction or recommendation. The result is a scenario that remains anchored to a defined structure while allowing creative exploration of how that structure could plausibly play out. Our AI also generates a short throughline for each scenario explaining how it expresses its position on the axes, as well as a matrix summary describing the uncertainty space and what differentiates the four futures.

**8. Quality checks and transparency.** Finally, an AI agent performs quality checks intended to prevent common failure modes in automated scenario generation: axes that lack meaningful tension or strategic relevance, quadrant ”collapse” where scenarios become minor variations of the same future, internally inconsistent causal logic across STEEPLE domains, and narratives that drift away from the quadrant blueprint. Intermediate artefacts (candidate axes, evaluations, quadrant blueprints, and grounding materials) are retained so results can be reviewed, compared over time, and improved.

We welcome feedback on our approach as we continue to refine and evolve our use of artificial intelligence in strategic foresight.

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# Acknowledgements

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World Economic Forum
91–93 route de la Capite
CH-1223 Cologny/Geneva
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 (0) 22 869 1212
Fax: +41 (0) 22 786 2744
contact@weforum.org
www.weforum.org