

THIS QUARTER'S SIGNAL

The real story is not AI adoption. It is system strain.

AI ambition is high across the quarter. Scaled value remains uneven. The bottleneck has moved. It is now judgement quality, work redesign and governance architecture, not access to technology.

THE DATA THAT MATTERS

60% Of executives regularly use AI to support decisions	56% Of global CEOs have realised no revenue or cost benefit from AI
85% Say adaptability is critical. Only 7% say they lead on it	0.1% Women's leadership representation gain over the past year

THREE BOARD-LEVEL RISKS THIS QUARTER

RISK 01 Judgement drift in AI-augmented decisions AI has entered executive decision environments faster than oversight, explanation and challenge disciplines are being built. Across Q1, decision cycles continued to compress and human and AI interaction design remained weak. <i>This is not an AI skills problem. It is a leadership judgement and decision architecture problem.</i>	RISK 02 Succession confidence without real readiness Q1 evidence shows pipeline confidence persisting even as context volatility, role redesign and skill shifts raise the bar for real readiness. Systems continue to over-index on historic performance and informal sponsorship. <i>False confidence is the risk. Apparent depth masks fragility until transition pressure exposes it.</i>	RISK 03 Progression risk hidden in visibility and identity strain Women's advancement continued to slow across Q1 while the issue remains read through confidence narratives. Reduced flexibility, weaker sponsorship and uneven access to strategic work are compounding quietly. <i>This is about making system conditions of progression visible and governable. Not fixing individuals.</i>
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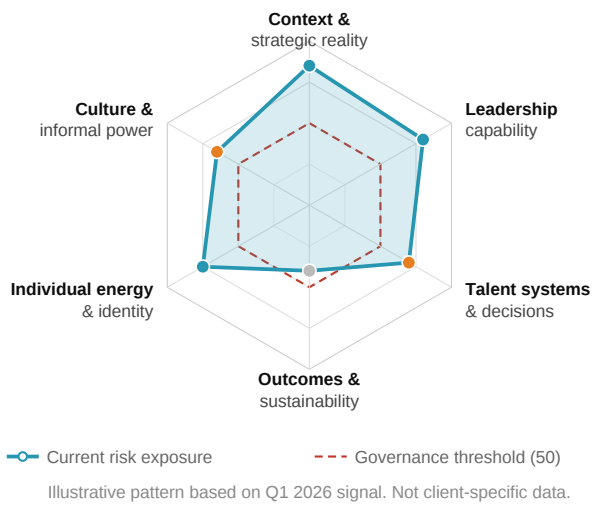
FOUR TRENDS SHAPING Q1

- **AI value is shifting from adoption to work redesign**
The dominant Q1 signal across McKinsey, Deloitte and PwC is consistent: the live questions are now role boundaries, accountability, workflow redesign and how value is captured. Not tool access.
- **Leadership load is moving toward defensible judgement**
Across Q1, inconsistency in judgement has emerged as a governance issue. Pressure is not just to decide faster, but to explain how decisions were reached and why they hold under scrutiny.
- **Women's progression risk is now structural and AI-relevant**
Q1 data from LinkedIn, Lean In and McKinsey shows pipeline weakness becoming easier to disguise. If access to AI-adjacent strategic work remains uneven, organisations will reinforce the same distortions under a new banner.
- **Brain capital is entering the resilience agenda**
Judgement quality, adaptability and cognitive load are operating conditions. Q1 reporting shows 35% of workers experiencing overwhelm at least weekly while organisations demand more adaptation.

NUDGE POINT OF VIEW

The market is asking architecture questions. Even when it speaks the language of capability.

- The dominant response across Q1 still leans too heavily toward enablement, skills and adoption. That is not enough.
- Three assumptions now look thin: that AI is mainly a technology agenda; that women's progression is primarily a confidence problem; and that development can compensate for



Context & strategic reality

AI-driven operating model disruption

Material

Leadership capability & capacity

Judgement under AI-augmented pressure

Material

Talent systems & decisions

Succession confidence vs actual readiness

Emerging

Culture & informal power

Sponsorship gaps and visibility deficits

Emerging

Individual energy, identity & trajectory

Overload and identity strain accumulating

Material

Outcomes, risk & sustainability

Consequences not yet fully visible

Signal

PATTERN NOTE

Risk is clustering across leadership capacity and individual strain simultaneously. A pattern that compounds quickly and is rarely visible without a structured diagnostic. Three domains breach the governance threshold across Q1.

ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

START DOING

Diagnosing where AI-related judgement strain and leadership load are clustering
Rebuilding sponsorship, visibility and progression infrastructure for overlooked talent
Tracking cognitive load, adaptability and trust as live operating conditions

STOP DOING

Treating adoption metrics as a proxy for transformation readiness
Assuming development alone will repair stalled progression
Normalising overload as the cost of reinvention

DO DIFFERENTLY

Design roles, decision rights and workflows for human and AI conditions
Treat progression data as governance information about system health
Treat brain health and cognitive capacity as part of the productivity case

Sources: McKinsey, Deloitte, PwC, LinkedIn Economic Graph, Lean In & McKinsey, Josh Bersin, Reuters · Q1 2026

Leadership & Talent Risk Heatmap™ · AI-Empowered Leadership™ · Rise & Thrive™

Start with Risk Heatmap™ →