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Leading the Future: Human-Centred Leadership and Skills for a World in Transition

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“The future isn’t something we step into — it’s something we help create.”

- We’re living through the fastest workplace transformation in modern history.
- AI acceleration, workforce expectations, demographic shifts, and global uncertainty are converging at once.
- CIPD suggests UK is facing a “demographic time bomb” as 30% of workforce retires BY 2035
- In 2026, leadership is no longer defined by hierarchy or experience — but by **our capacity to stay deeply human in a world shaped by intelligent machines.**
- This moment calls for leaders who are bold, curious, humble, and ready to redesign how “work” works.

The World of Work in 2026: A Landscape in Motion

AI moves from experiment to infrastructure

- AI is now the *backbone* of productivity, embedded in daily workflows, augmenting human capabilities from decision-making to creativity (*Future of Work 2026 Top Workplace Trends*)
- That gap — between AI's promise and its current performance — is exactly where leadership matters.

Rising worker expectations

- In the US, 72% of HR professionals report that workers' expectations are higher than ever. People want **purpose, flexibility, wellbeing, autonomy, and a meaningful connection** with their organisation. (*Society of Human Resource Management –What will Work Look like in 2026 Research Report*)



Image from: [World-of-Work-2026-WORKTECH_Academy.pdf](#)

The World of Work in 2026: A Landscape in Motion

Employee well-being as a business priority

- Wellbeing has shifted from a “perk” to a core productivity driver.
- Workplaces that prioritise **psychological safety** and cultural inclusivity will enjoy higher innovation and stronger retention (*Future of Work 2026 Top Workplace Trends*)
- Developing a **coaching culture** organisation to support learning, innovation, growth and engagement and reduce blame culture (*Bull and Stokes, 2020*)



Psychological Safety

Edmondson, C.A., 2019, *The Fearless Organization* Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley

- Psychological safety is broadly defined as “a climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves and they feel comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution”
- Psychological safety should be a strategy to promote learning, innovation and employee engagement



No trade off between high standards and psychological safety



The Four Enablers of Engagement



Strategic Narrative that is authentic and compelling



Engaging Managers who focus their people, give them scope, treat them as individuals and coach and stretch them



Employee Voice: involved, listened to, and invited to contribute their experience, expertise and ideas



Organisational Integrity: the values on the wall are reflected in day-to-day behaviours. There is no 'say-do' gap. Promises made are promises kept, or an explanation given as to why not

Employee Engagement: How things have changed!

When engaging employees, leaders need to know a key fact about today's workplace: It has evolved.

Gallup research reveals that to perform at their highest, employees need something different from their work than they used to. (Gallup, 2025)

THE PAST	OUR FUTURE
My Paycheck	My Purpose
My Satisfaction	My Development
My Boss	My Coach
My Annual Review	My Ongoing Conversations
My Weaknesses	My Strengths
My Job	My Life

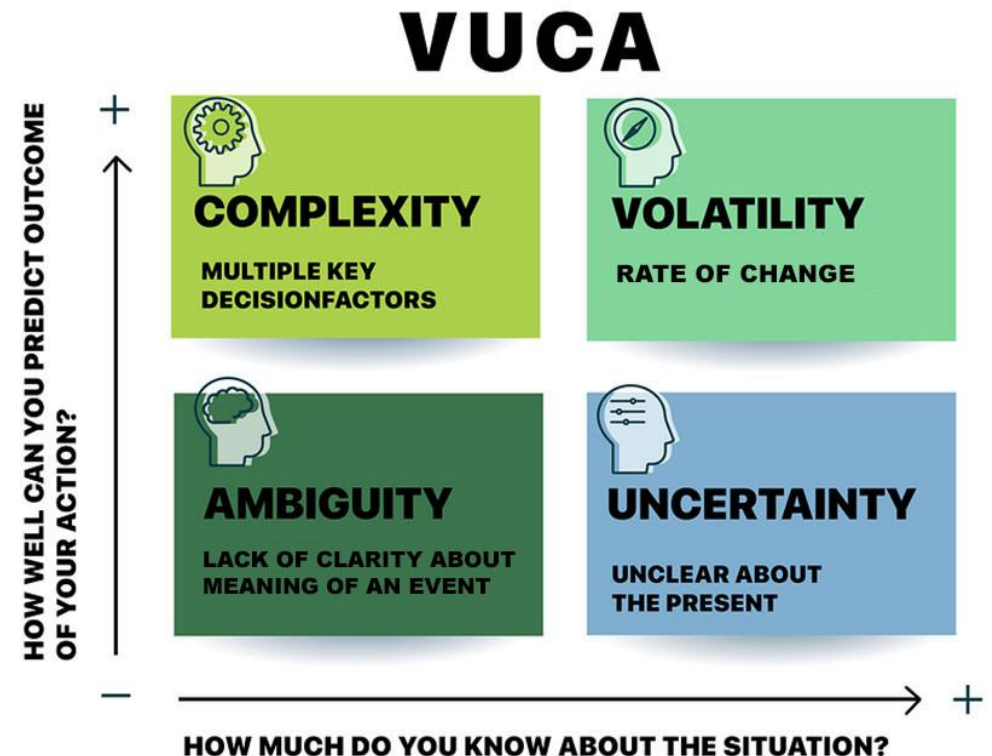
Forbes Article on “13 Employee Retention Strategies”: July 17th, 2025

- **Give Employees Opportunities for Personal and Professional Growth**
- Companies invest time and resources to develop strategies, but **strategies are worthless without execution, and execution requires trained, knowledgeable and motivated people**. By investing in your employees, you benefit in two important ways that have a direct impact on your company’s performance: **greater skills and higher retention**.
- Effective approaches to employee growth **include personalized learning paths, mentorship programs, cross-department projects and external learning and certificate programs**. However, simple opportunities for personal and career development can be just as effective, such as **microlearning** that delivers targeted instruction on narrow topics and **peer coaching** that allows co-workers to share skills in small circles.



Leading into the Future: VUCA World!

- We will have 5 generations in the workforce
- What are you doing to develop the leaders who are going to take us through the next 20 years?
- What skills will those leaders need?



The Skills We Need for a Human–Machine Era

Human Skills as Competitive Advantage

- Emotional intelligence
- Empathy and relationship-building
- AI can generate options — but humans provide meaning.

The Skill of *Adaptive Leadership*

- We need leaders who can operate amid uncertainty
- Leadership development remains one of the top organisational priorities.
- Always be prepared to learn and see your role as a leader being key to developing others



So, What Does it Mean for FM?

Leadership Gap Challenge

- Experienced FM professionals are retiring, creating a critical leadership gap and a weak talent pipeline.

Structured Leadership Development

- A deliberate approach with curated learning, real experience, and knowledge transfer is essential for future FM leaders.

Mentorship as Core Strategy

- Mentorship pairing experienced leaders with early-career professionals boosts retention, competency, and identity.



Leadership Reimagined: So, what does the future leader look like?

A leader who creates a climate in which people:

- are comfortable expressing and being themselves
- are comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes without fear or retribution
- are empowered
- are confident they can speak up and won't be humiliated, ignored and blamed
- can ask questions when they are unsure
- can try something new and innovate
- are in an environment of trust and respect

A Call to Action: The future belongs to those who stay HUMAN!

As we move into an AI-enabled era:

- Technology will accelerate.
- Complexity will increase.
- Expectations will rise.
- Transformation will never be 'finished'.

But this is our opportunity...

- An opportunity to lead differently.
- Not with certainty, but with curiosity.
- Not with control, but with connection.
- Not by predicting the future, but by preparing people for it.

The future of work isn't about machines replacing people – it's about elevating what makes us human!

- Our role as leaders is not to manage the future — but to shape it.
- If we lead with imagination, integrity, and humanity, the workplaces of 2026 and beyond won't just be more productive — they'll be more human, more resilient, and more hopeful!
(hopefully 😊)





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Thank you!

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