

2026 Mid-Year Workplace Trends Report

How Workplace Complexity Is Reshaping Leadership, Communication, Focus, and AI Adoption



The workplace trends making leadership, collaboration, and execution harder to sustain.

Across organizations, employees and managers are navigating growing workplace complexity: fragmented communication, shifting priorities, unclear ownership, constant interruptions, and increasing pressure to respond quickly.

The result is a workplace where focus becomes harder to protect, collaboration requires more effort, managers absorb more pressure, and even simple work can feel unnecessarily complicated.

The effects show up across organizations:

⚡ **Fragmented focus**

⚡ **Collaboration friction**

⚡ **Reactive work**

⚡ **Feedback avoidance**

⚡ **Unclear ownership**

⚡ **Manager overload**

Throughout this report, we explore four workplace trends that reveal where organizational complexity is showing up, what's driving it, and where leaders can focus to create greater clarity, trust, and effectiveness.

Report research base

- ✓ Interactions and polling data from 15 live events with ~14,000 HR and People Operations professionals
- ✓ Anonymized insights from ~400 facilitated workshops with client organizations
- ✓ Newsletter polling data from over 2,400 reader responses
- ✓ 2026 to-date workshop demand and registration trends
- ✓ Organizational conversations with over 700 business and HR leaders



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Executive summary

Nathan Blain, CEO,
LifeLabs Learning



Most organizations already understand what effective leadership, communication, and collaboration look like.

The difficulty is sustaining those behaviors inside environments shaped by constant interruption, shifting priorities, fragmented communication, and growing organizational complexity.

Across our events, workshops, and conversations in the first half of 2026, we saw a consistent pattern: people are operating within environments where noise often overwhelms clarity, making effective leadership, collaboration, and execution harder to sustain.

In this report, we explore four workplace trends that reveal how increasing workplace complexity is affecting organizations and suggest practical ways leaders can create more focused, collaborative, and effective teams.

- 1 Manager effectiveness is strained by expanding responsibilities**
- 2 Focus is increasingly difficult to protect**
- 3 Collaboration depends on trust, capability, and role clarity**
- 4 AI adoption is often outpacing organizational readiness**

The insights in this report offer a closer look at where complexity is showing up, what it's costing organizations, and where leaders can reduce noise, create clarity, and improve organizational effectiveness.

Overview

The dominant workplace reality in H1 2026 was the **growing complexity of modern work.**

Across thousands of data points, employees and managers described environments shaped by competing priorities, constant interruption, uncertainty, and change.

Communication emerged as the connecting thread, influencing how expectations were set, decisions were shared, accountability was maintained, and work moved across teams.



What the data revealed

1 Manager effectiveness is strained

Managers were expected to drive execution, develop talent, navigate change, and create alignment simultaneously.

2 Focus is fragmented

Focus emerged as the most common productivity concern as interruptions, reactive work, and competing priorities increased.

3 Collaboration depends on trust and clarity

Many collaboration challenges stemmed from uncertainty around expectations, follow-through, role clarity, and capability.

4 AI adoption is moving faster than readiness

Organizations expanded AI experimentation rapidly while still developing the workflows, governance, and capabilities needed to support adoption at scale.



Key findings

56%

give manager coaching and feedback capability a rating of 5/10 or lower search

41%

identify focus as their biggest productivity issue

48%

say trust and capability concerns lie beneath workplace conflict

58%

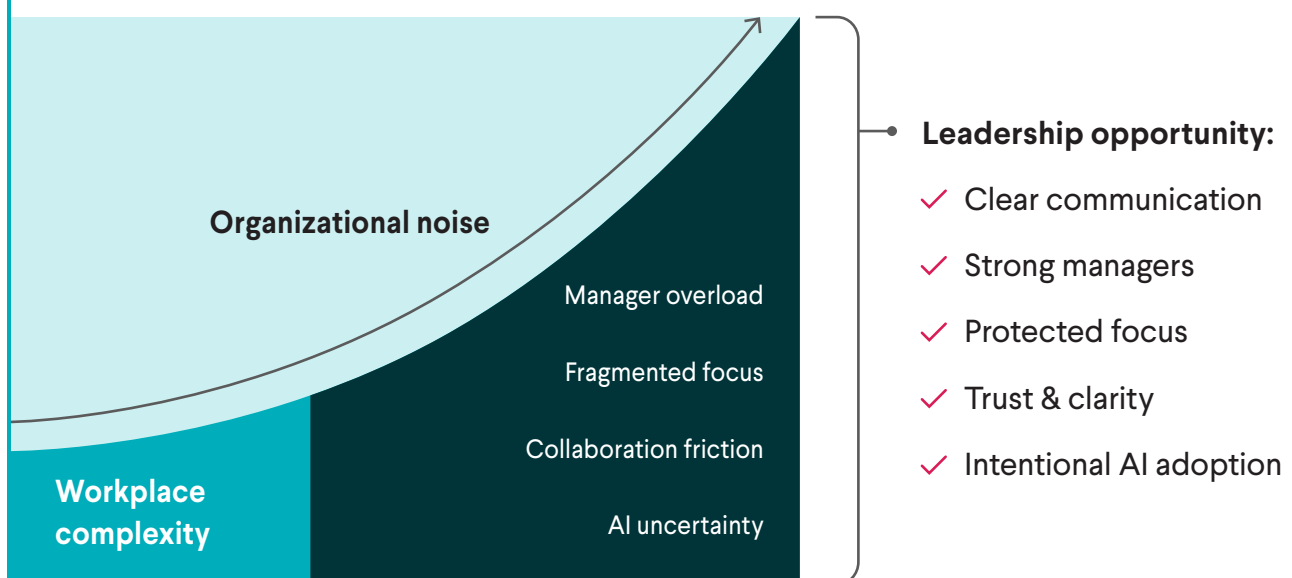
say AI adoption feels improvised

38%

associate workplace conflict with communication breakdowns

The findings point to a broader pattern:

The demands of modern work are compounding faster than many organizational systems, leadership practices, and operating norms were designed to support.



Communication: at the center of workplace complexity

Communication, from day-to-day interactions to systems and habits, sat at the center of the workplace complexity that surfaced in H1 2026. It showed up in how managers led, employees focused, teams collaborated, and organizations adopted AI.

As coordination and communication demands intensified, managers and teams struggled to maintain shared understanding around expectations, priorities, decisions, feedback, and accountability. The resulting noise showed up as unclear norms, misunderstandings, inconsistent follow-through, and misalignment across teams.

38%

associate workplace conflict with communication breakdowns

Communication breakdowns were the most commonly cited source of workplace conflict, ahead of role clarity issues, power dynamics, personality differences, and unresolved tension.

LifeLabs Learning facilitators consistently observed communication friction beneath many of the workplace challenges participants described. Alignment drift, urgency culture, feedback avoidance, information overload, and coordination fatigue surfaced repeatedly.

“

During one workshop, a manager expressed frustration that a direct report ‘responded more slowly than I expected.’ Through discussion, the manager realized she had never communicated her expectations around response times.

Donald Coleman, Jr., EdD
Managing Distributed
Employees,
March 2026

The following workplace trends show where communication-driven complexity is creating pressure and where leaders have the greatest opportunity to create clarity.





Workplace trend #1

Manager effectiveness is strained by expanding responsibilities

One theme appeared consistently across the data: managers were carrying an increasingly broad set of responsibilities.

Beyond delivering results, they were expected to coach employees, manage performance, lead change, maintain engagement, resolve conflict, and keep teams aligned amid constant change. For many managers, competing priorities left little time for the work that drives long-term effectiveness.

As responsibilities expanded, activities such as delegation, coaching, talent development, and strategic thinking were often crowded out by immediate operational demands, making it harder for managers to create sustainable impact over time.

56%

gave manager coaching and feedback capability a rating of 5/10* or lower

Manager capability emerged as a significant concern, with more than half of respondents indicating substantial room for improvement in coaching, feedback, and people leadership.

“Because the business moves so quickly, [managers] struggle with coaching with questions rather than jumping right into problem-solving.” Senior Level Director, Coaching workshop May 2026

1 indicates it rarely happens or it's unproductive. 10 means it happens regularly, and managers execute coaching and feedback really effectively.. Source: Business Impact + People Performance webinar, February 2026

72%

said monitoring is the hardest part of the delegation process

Keeping delegated work on track often required significant ongoing attention, creating additional demands on already stretched managers.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents identified monitoring, follow-through, and check-ins as the most difficult stage of delegation, far ahead of goal-setting and empowerment.

“One of my struggles in delegation is... you have to constantly do reminders and follow-ups. It is like they only work and think in silos.”

HR Manager, Delegation workshop March 2026



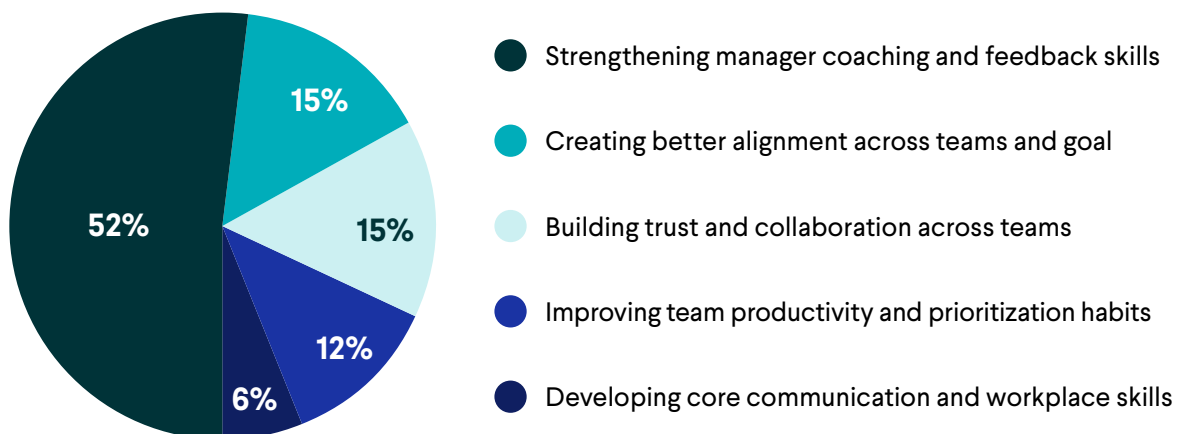
What we observed

Manager development is a top priority

Manager effectiveness emerged as the most important area to strengthen, with **52% identifying manager coaching and feedback skills as their highest priority** this year.

The topics below reflect demand for LifeLabs Learning workshops—facilitated learning programs delivered within organizations—and attendance at public webinars and virtual events.

Which of the following is the highest priority for your organization this year?



Most Requested Workshops

Learning sessions delivered to client organizations



Feedback



Productivity & Prioritization



Coaching

Most-Attended Events

Webinars and virtual discussions open to the public



Effective 1-1s



Delegation



Feedback

What we heard

Manager overload, reactive escalation, decision fatigue, emotional labor, and competing priorities

These themes emerged consistently across workshops and client conversations.

“We are just surviving; there is so little time to actually delegate anything.”

Senior Leader, Delegation workshop April 2026

“Fatigue is no longer an ‘oops’ or sampling error... Fatigue is a systematic mistake and cultural debt. If executives had the skills, incentives, and appetite to fix traffic jams, they would do it.” Founder & President, Your 2026 Strategy Is Only as Strong as Your Managers webinar, February 2026

What external research shows

Deloitte’s Human Capital Trends research highlights the growing demands of balancing execution with human-centered leadership.¹ Gallup’s 2026 State of the Global Workplace research continues to reinforce the outsized impact managers have on employee engagement, performance, and workplace experience.²



1. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/human-capital-trends.html>

2. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

The emotional load of management

Managers are often the first point of escalation, support, communication, and accountability. Many are expected to motivate teams, navigate change, and create clarity while managing uncertainty themselves.

“It’s hard to motivate others if you are not able to motivate yourself.”

Manager, [Your 2026 Strategy Is Only as Strong as Your Managers webinar](#), February 2026

Managers were described as the most overwhelmed and emotionally strained layer of the organization. High-performing, empathetic managers appeared particularly vulnerable to burnout because of how much responsibility they carry for supporting others.

What challenges are managers facing?

- Change fatigue and constant adaptation
- Difficulty motivating others while feeling depleted themselves
- Emotional burden of supporting teams
- Pressure to move faster without clarity
- Misalignment across teams and priorities
- Communication breakdowns and “traffic jams”
- Overemphasis on speed at the expense of quality and empathy

Source: Your 2026 Strategy Is Only as Strong as Your Managers webinar, February 2026





Key takeaway

Invest in manager capability as a force multiplier.

The organizations making the most progress recognize that growing complexity has expanded the demands placed on managers. They provide the systems, support, and skill development needed to help managers succeed. This includes building practical capabilities in coaching, feedback, delegation, prioritization, and leading through uncertainty so managers can create clarity, strengthen team effectiveness, and support employees more effectively.



Workplace trend #2

Focus is increasingly difficult to protect

Slack notifications, meetings, reactive requests, email volume, and a steady stream of interruptions shaped workdays. As communication demands expanded, focused work became harder to protect.

Productivity conversations often began with prioritization concerns. As discussions progressed, the real difficulty was often less about choosing what mattered and more about creating enough uninterrupted time to work on it.



41%

identified focus as their biggest productivity issue

Focus emerged as the most commonly cited productivity challenge, ahead of prioritization, organization, and time awareness. Qualitative data revealed this is often a byproduct of a system that rewards infinite activity over actual progress.

“When everything is a fire, it’s a hot mess.” - Director, Productivity & Prioritization workshop, April 2026

32%

said prioritization was a significant concern

Prioritization ranked as the second most common productivity challenge, reflecting the growing difficulty of determining what deserves attention amid competing demands.

“What gets sticky is if we are fundamentally misaligned on what is urgent and what is a priority.” - Chief Program Officer, Productivity & Prioritization Culture Club event, April 2026

20%

identified staying organized as a major focus challenge

Organization was the third most common productivity challenge, behind focus and prioritization, as employees struggled to manage growing volumes of information and work across multiple systems.

“Unnecessary urgency creates a lot of frustration and confusion.” - Customer Success Manager, Conflict & Collaboration workshop, May 2026



What we observed

Cognitive overload, meeting fatigue, fragmented workflows, and difficulty sustaining momentum

Across client workshops and conversations, these issues surfaced repeatedly. Facilitators also observed growing signs of cognitive and emotional overload affecting participation, learning, and engagement.

“Managers mentioned that they were pulled in so many different directions... navigating disruptions and constant ‘urgent’ asks. Many noted that protecting focus has to start from within, like not checking Slack first thing upon waking and not allowing meetings to run over, since it models a lack of time integrity.”

Facilitator Katya Davydova, Productivity & Prioritization workshop, May 2026

What external research shows

Microsoft's Work Trend Index found employees receive an interruption from a meeting, email, or message every two minutes on average during core work hours. The research also highlights growing fragmentation of attention as communication demands continue to expand.³



³<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/breaking-does-establishing-clearer-norms-around-urgencywn-infinite-workday>

Attention stealers: “quick questions” and “AI rabbit holes”

Data showed “quick questions” and digital notifications as the primary drivers of fragmented attention, leading to a state of constant interruption.

“I feel like I try to focus with my noise-cancelling headphones, but people still come and talk to me through the headphones.” VP, Productivity & Prioritization workshop, April 2026

Findings also revealed a new source of distraction, “AI rabbit holes.” While AI tools are intended to increase productivity, participants in H1 2026 learning sessions reported they can also act as powerful distractors. The delay in AI output triggers a context-switching loop that breaks focus flow. And a lack of proper training can turn the tool itself into a burden.

“While I’m waiting for AI to generate something, I look at something else and then get distracted.” Program Manager, Productivity & Prioritization workshop, April 2026

“If you don’t know how to prompt AI, it’s going to be a time suck!” – Human Resources Specialist, Productivity & Prioritization workshop, April 2026



Key takeaway

Protect focus by treating attention as a shared organizational resource.

In environments shaped by constant urgency, the organizations making the most progress treat focus as the most urgent priority. They equip employees with shared practices for prioritization, decision-making, workload management, and attention management. Rather than expecting individuals to solve overload on their own, they create team norms, workflows, and systems that make focused work easier to protect and sustain.



Workplace trend #3

Collaboration depends on trust, capability, and role clarity



Collaboration tension rarely stemmed from personality differences alone. More often, low trust, unclear ownership, and ineffective communication systems created environments where assumptions, frustration, and coordination failures compounded under pressure.

A recurring source of friction was uncertainty around expectations, ownership, and whether colleagues had the support needed to succeed.



48%

identified trust and capability concerns as the underlying issue beneath workplace conflict

Trust and capability concerns emerged as the most frequently cited root cause of workplace conflict, outweighing listening challenges, skill gaps, and role clarity issues.

“The work may be so complex that there is a skill or learning gap. Trust issue also.”

Director of Talent & DEI, Conflict & Collaboration Culture Club event, May 2026

28%

described collaboration breakdowns as ownership and accountability confusion

Ownership confusion was the most frequently cited collaboration challenge, ahead of communication issues, trust gaps, competing priorities, and unclear decision-making processes, highlighting the importance of clear roles, expectations, and accountability.

“Months into the role, still unsure who is responsible for what.” Manager, Conflict & Collaboration Culture Club event, May 2026



What we observed

Trust erosion, accountability concerns, role ambiguity, and collaboration fatigue

All of these factors contributing to effective collaboration surfaced consistently across workshops and client conversations.

“People don’t take risks with those they don’t trust.”

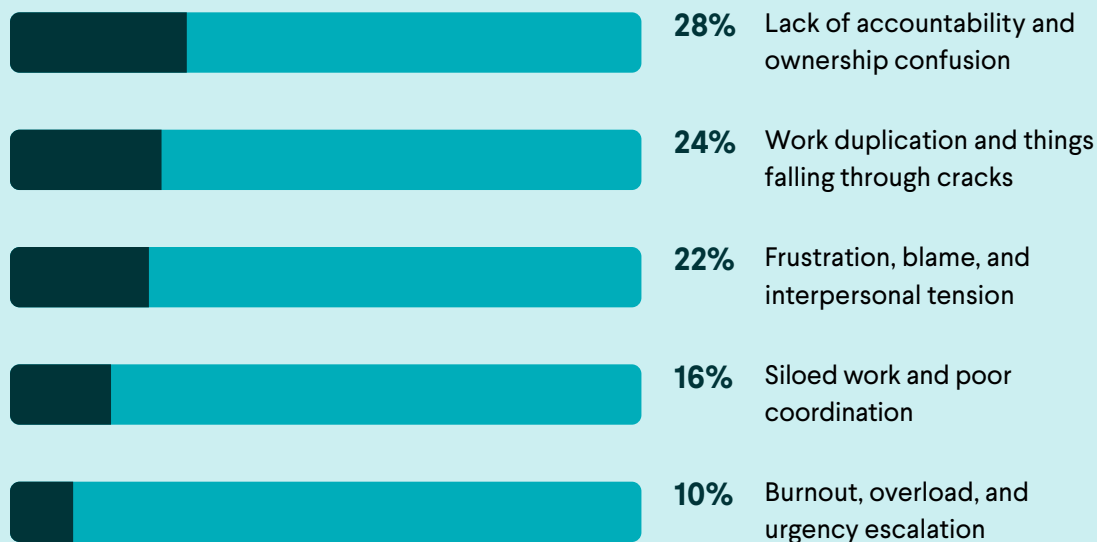
LifeLabs Facilitator KJ McConnell, Conflict & Collaboration Culture Club event, March 2026

What external research shows

McKinsey research highlights trust, role clarity, communication, feedback, and psychological safety as core drivers of team effectiveness. As organizations become more interconnected and work crosses teams and functions, the research points to trust and clarity as critical enablers of effective collaboration.⁴



What happens when collaboration breaks down?



Source: May 2026 Collab Lab

4. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/demystifying-top-team-performance-what-every-ceo-needs-to-know>



Key takeaway

Build trust, clarity, and accountability into the way work gets done.

The organizations making the most progress look beyond interpersonal friction to address the underlying causes of collaboration breakdowns. They invest in trust-building, role clarity, accountability, communication skills, and manager capability so teams can coordinate more effectively, make decisions faster, and navigate complexity with less friction.



Workplace trend #4

AI adoption often outpaces organizational readiness

AI appeared across nearly every H1 conversation regardless of topic. Participants described growing experimentation with prompting, workflow automation, meeting summaries, communication support, and task management tools. Adoption was widespread, but approaches varied significantly across teams and organizations.

Many organizations lacked the workflows, expectations, and capabilities needed to translate experimentation into consistent business value. As adoption accelerated, familiar challenges around communication, manager effectiveness, decision-making, accountability, and change readiness became more visible.



58% said AI adoption feels improvised across their organization

Improvised adoption emerged as the dominant AI experience, with most respondents reporting inconsistent practices, decentralized experimentation, and heavy reliance on individual initiative.

“The first challenge shared was about the pressure to use AI everywhere and how he doesn’t know how to do it or that it’s necessary.”

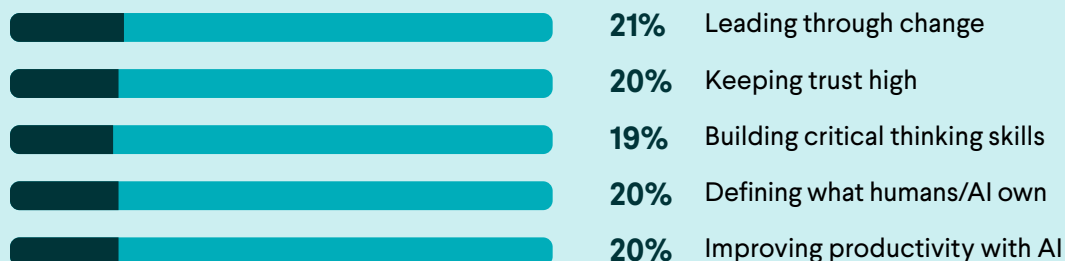
Facilitator Rebecca Poretsky, Coaching workshop, January 2026

14% described AI adoption as thoughtful and coordinated

Coordinated adoption remained relatively rare, with few organizations reporting established workflows, governance structures, training programs, or shared best practices.

“People are experiencing ‘AI brain fry’ and role ambiguity, which can cause fear, uncertainty, and burnout.” Director, Culture Club: Career Growth, June 2026

What’s the hardest part of leading your team through AI adoption?



Source: Lab Report newsletter poll, April 2026



What we observed

AI as a communication, governance, workflow, and change-management issue

Leaders saw AI this way rather than as a technology challenge alone. Many organizations were still defining what effective AI use should look like as well as how work should be divided between humans and AI.

The data revealed:

- High curiosity
- Low structure
- Moderate manager capability
- High uncertainty

What external research shows

Research from Microsoft⁵, Deloitte⁶, and McKinsey⁷ echoes the H1 data. While AI experimentation continues to accelerate, many organizations are still working to build the workforce capability, manager readiness, workflow integration, and operating norms needed to realize consistent value from adoption.



5. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>

6. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/about/press-room/deloitte-report-aims-to-help-leaders-navigate-complex-workplace-tensions.html>

7. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/tech-and-ai/our-insights/superagency-in-the-workplace-empowering-people-to-unlock-ais-full-potential-at-work>

The reality of improvised AI

When one company rolled out Claude, employees were encouraged to “jump in and learn together” before the tool had any organizational context.

“I connected my calendar, email, and Slack, then asked Claude questions about work and relationships. It was UNHINGED. It basically told me my boss hated me, said I should be making \$400K in a role far beyond my experience, and suggested I either call the CEO, confront my boss, or start job hunting. Then it started writing my résumé.”

What changed?

The team gave Claude a source of truth: company information, values, organizational structure, and key context.

When they asked the exact same questions again, the responses shifted dramatically.

“The advice was much more accurate about my role, the communication dynamics, and what was actually happening.”

Global Shared Services Director, Culture Club
Collab Lab, May 2026



The Takeaway

Strengthen the organizational capabilities that make AI adoption successful.

The organizations making the most progress recognize that AI is bringing long-standing challenges into sharper focus, particularly around communication, manager effectiveness, decision-making, accountability, and change readiness. They're investing in the systems, skills, and operating norms that help employees use AI effectively and consistently. This includes setting clear expectations, equipping managers to guide adoption, defining where AI adds value, and creating shared practices that support trust, sound judgment, and human connection as AI becomes part of everyday work.



The pattern across all four workplace trends

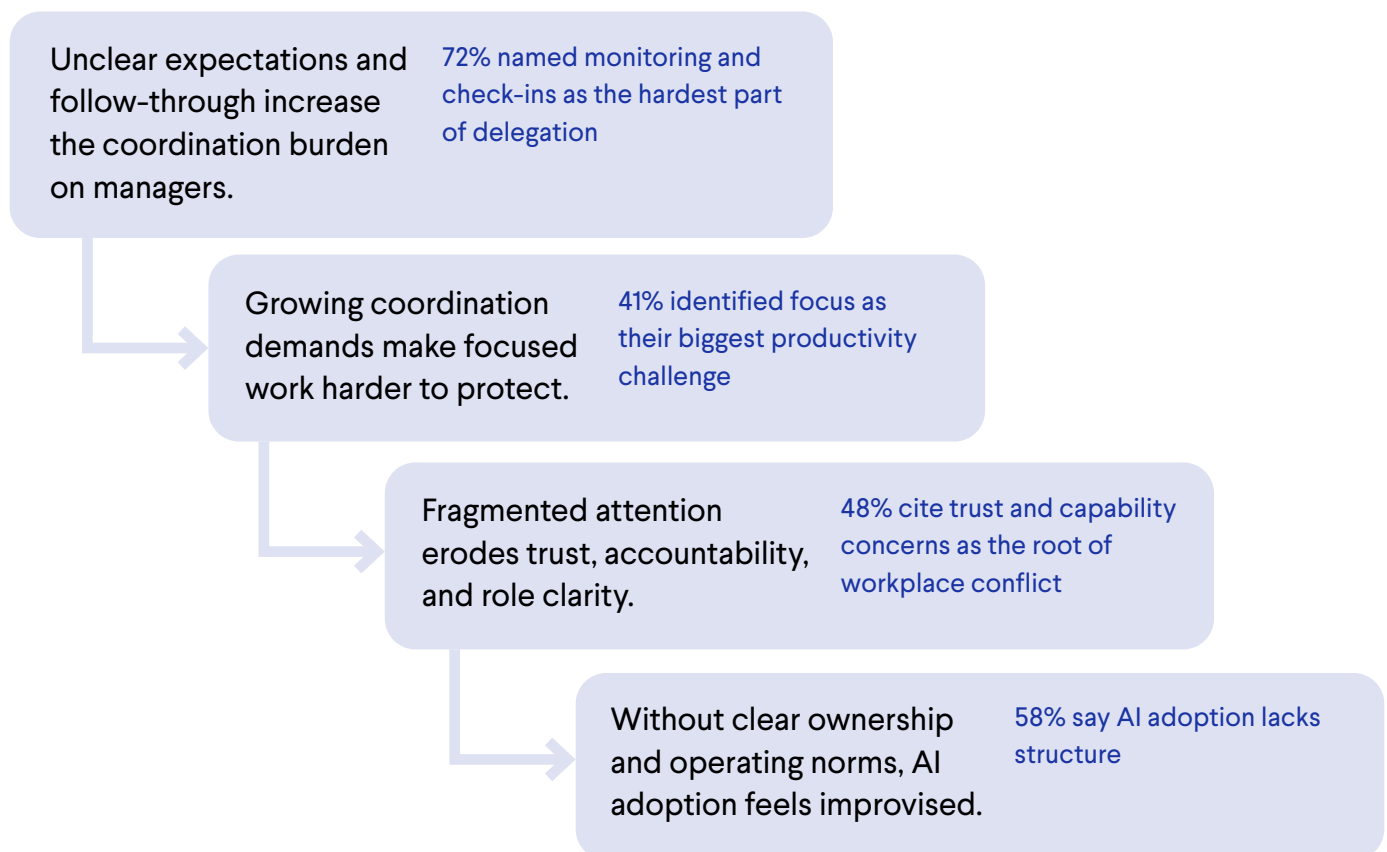
These workplace trends are not separate challenges. They are different expressions of the same underlying pressure: growing workplace complexity.

As communication and coordination demands increase, managers spend more time maintaining alignment, employees struggle to protect focused work, collaboration becomes harder to sustain, and new technologies introduce additional layers of change and uncertainty.

Viewed together, the findings suggest organizations aren't struggling with the work itself as much as the noise created by workplace complexity. Clarity, coordination, trust, and focus have become increasingly difficult to maintain amid constant change and competing demands.

The organizations making the most progress treat these challenges as connected. They establish clear communication norms, invest in manager effectiveness, create environments that support focused work, strengthen collaboration skills, and guide AI adoption with intention.

The complexity cascade



How workplace complexity is changing learning

The same forces reshaping leadership, productivity, collaboration, and adaptability are also changing how people learn.

LifeLabs Learning facilitators observed growing signs of cognitive overload among employees attending H1 workshops, as well as increasing demand for practical tools and greater hesitation in learning environments. Participants were often walking into sessions already navigating change, uncertainty, and competing priorities, which made it harder to absorb and apply anything new.



A few patterns emerged:

Practical application drove engagement

Participants responded most strongly to what they could use immediately: actionable tools, frameworks, scripts, real-world scenarios, and techniques they could apply to a real challenge the next day.

Hesitation reduced participation

Compared with previous years, facilitators observed more hesitancy to contribute, more passive participation, and a noticeable shift toward chat over speaking up.

Psychological safety remained critical

Participation and willingness to practice new skills increased when learning environments felt supportive, low-risk, and free from judgment.

What facilitators observed:

- Uneven participation
- Hesitancy to contribute
- Passive workshop behavior
- Chat-heavy interaction
- Low energy/uncertainty entering sessions

What participants responded to:

- ✓ Actionable tools
- ✓ Frameworks
- ✓ Scripts
- ✓ Real-world scenarios
- ✓ Immediately usable techniques

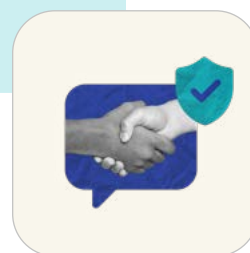
The new expectation in learning: “Can I use this tomorrow?”

Insight

Learning spaces as safe harbors

LifeLabs Learning facilitators observed that manager workshops increasingly need to create space for people to connect, reflect, and make sense of their current work realities before they can fully absorb new skills.

External research shows psychological safety supports the learning behaviors that drive performance, including seeking feedback, experimenting, asking for help, and speaking up.⁸ People are less likely to practice new skills when contribution feels risky. This helps explain why facilitators saw stronger participation in sessions that felt low-stakes, practical, and judgment-free.



Organizations seeing the strongest engagement are designing for both needs at once: learning experiences that give people room to process what they're navigating and tools they can use right away in the work they're actually doing.

What this means

Employees are looking for learning experiences that help them navigate workplace complexity in real time. They want practical tools, relevant scenarios, and clear ways to apply new skills immediately.

Research on training transfer has consistently shown that learning alone rarely changes behavior.⁸ Whether people apply new skills depends on opportunities to practice, manager support, reinforcement, and an environment where experimentation feels safe. The distance between a great workshop and meaningful behavior change is often what happens after the learning experience ends.

When participants ask “Can I use this tomorrow?” they’re pointing to what matters most: **immediate relevance and practical application.**

Organizations seeing the strongest engagement are creating learning experiences that are practical, psychologically safe, and closely connected to the challenges employees face every day.

8. [Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams,” Administrative Science Quarterly, 44\(2\), 350-383](#)

9. [Training transfer: Not the 10% solution” \(Burke & Hutchins, 2008\)](#)

What HR leaders should prioritize next

The strongest organizations in H2 2026 will focus on reducing complexity inside their existing systems. The greatest opportunities lie in creating clearer, more sustainable ways of working.



1. Invest in practical manager capability

Business impact:

Stronger managers improve team performance, increase engagement, and create the conditions for sustainable execution during periods of change.

Managers remain the operational pressure point inside many organizations. They are expected to drive execution, develop talent, navigate change, and create alignment simultaneously, often under significant time pressure. The most effective development efforts focus on practical capabilities that help managers create clarity, build accountability, develop talent, and lead effectively under pressure.

What this looks like:

- ✓ Protect manager calendars so coaching, delegation, and development conversations do not become the first things cut when the week gets full.
- ✓ Give managers a simple coaching-question default, such as “What have you tried so far?” to help them pause before jumping into problem-solving.
- ✓ Make delegation visible by asking each manager to name one responsibility they will hand off this quarter and how they will support follow-through.



2. Protect focus as an operational priority

Business impact:

Protecting focus increases capacity for strategic thinking, higher-quality work, and more consistent execution across teams.

Employees repeatedly described environments in which constant responsiveness made sustained focus difficult. Organizations making progress are treating attention as a shared organizational resource by clarifying urgency norms, reducing unnecessary coordination, and creating conditions that support focused execution.

What this looks like:

- ✓ Create organization-wide focus blocks so uninterrupted work is built into the workday rather than left to individual willpower.
- ✓ End meetings on time and establish clear norms around responsiveness to reduce unnecessary interruptions and protect attention.
- ✓ Separate “urgent” from “important” when assigning work so teams can make better decisions about where to direct their time and energy.



3. Strengthen collaboration and trust across teams

Business impact:

Stronger collaboration reduces friction, accelerates decision-making, and helps teams maintain momentum during periods of change and complexity.

As organizations become more cross-functional, collaboration often breaks down under pressure. Many teams struggle with low trust, conflict avoidance, unclear ownership, and inconsistent approaches to navigating tension. High-performing organizations are investing in practices that strengthen trust, improve accountability, and create more consistent ways of collaborating across teams.

What this looks like:

- ✓ Clarify ownership for work that spans teams by defining decision-makers, responsibilities, and follow-through expectations upfront.
- ✓ Create opportunities for low-stakes practice, feedback, and experimentation so employees can build confidence before high-stakes conversations or decisions.
- ✓ Address capability gaps directly through coaching, training, and support rather than assuming performance challenges stem from a lack of effort or commitment.



4. Build the human capabilities that make AI work

Business impact:

Stronger human capabilities accelerate adoption, improve decision quality, strengthen cross-functional alignment, and increase the likelihood that AI investments deliver lasting business value.

Many organizations are accelerating AI adoption, but technology alone rarely determines success. As AI becomes embedded in workflows, employees and managers need stronger communication, feedback, decision-making, collaboration, and adaptability skills to use it effectively. Organizations seeing the greatest value from AI are investing in the human capabilities that help new tools translate into meaningful behavior change.

What this looks like:

- ✓ Define where AI is expected, optional, and off-limits so employees can make decisions with greater confidence and consistency.
- ✓ Equip managers to lead AI-related change by helping teams navigate uncertainty, adapt workflows, and build new habits.
- ✓ Turn individual experimentation into shared learning through prompt libraries, playbooks, and team discussions about what is and isn't working.



5. Across the Board: Strengthen Communication Norms

Business impact:

Stronger communication norms improve alignment, reduce unnecessary coordination, accelerate decision-making, and create the clarity needed for managers, teams, and AI-enabled workflows to operate more effectively.

Communication shapes how work gets prioritized, delegated, coordinated, and completed.

Organizations making the most progress establish shared norms that create clarity, reduce coordination costs, and help teams make better decisions about when to align, when to respond, and when to focus.

What this looks like:

- ✓ Define response-time expectations so “urgent” has a shared meaning.
- ✓ Document where decisions live and who owns them.
- ✓ Create regular opportunities for teams to surface ambiguity before it turns into misalignment.

Additional Resources

[Manager Training Resource Hub](#)

[AI for HR Resource Hub](#)

[Productivity & Prioritization Toolbox](#)



[Leading Change in Uncertain Times Playbook](#)



Methodology & data sources

This report is based on insights gathered during the first half of 2026 across:

- Interactions and polling data from 15 live, facilitated LifeLabs Learning webinars attended by approximately 14,000 HR, L&D, People Operations, and business leaders
- Insights from approximately 400 live, leadership development training workshops delivered by LifeLabs Learning facilitators to client organizations
- LifeLabs Learning newsletter polling data
- Workshop demand and registration trends across LifeLabs Learning programs
- Conversations with more than 700 HR, L&D, and business leaders across client and prospect organizations about workforce challenges, leadership development priorities, and future skills needs

Unlike traditional workplace research, much of this data was gathered in real time through live discussion, facilitated reflection, workshop activities, and behavioral conversations. This approach provides a unique view into the workplace challenges employees and managers are actively navigating rather than relying solely on retrospective survey responses.

The findings in this report reflect directional patterns observed across H1 2026 and are intended to highlight emerging workplace themes rather than serve as a representative labor market study.

External research referenced throughout the report

Microsoft *Work Trend Index*

Gallup *State of the Global Workplace*

Deloitte *Human Capital Trends*

McKinsey research on AI adoption, workplace effectiveness, and team performance

Atlassian workplace collaboration and communication research

Axios HQ internal communications research

Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety and learning behavior

Burke & Hutchins' research on training transfer and behavior change





LifeLabs⁷
Learning

A Better Way to Work

