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Turning Uncertainty Into Opportunity:

2026 HR / L&D Discussion Guide

Based on our recent Trends Survey

Purpose of This Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed to help HR / L&D leaders facilitate meaningful conversations using insights from Blanchard's [2026 HR / L&D Trends Report](). The questions are intended to spark reflection, peer learning, and practical dialogue that connects the data to real-world challenges, opportunities, and actions within organizations.

Use this guide to:

- Reflect on how external trends are showing up internally

- Identify gaps between priorities and current practices

- Explore practical actions aligned to business strategy

- Share peer insights and best practices

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SECTION ONE:

Top Challenges: Leadership as the Multiplier

Leadership capability, change agility, talent development, culture, and resource constraints emerged as the most consistent challenges across organizations. Leadership is viewed as the lever that influences all other outcomes.

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the top organizational challenges identified in the report resonate most strongly in your organization today?

- To what degree is leadership viewed as a strategic multiplier of team member performance in your organization?

- In what ways are leaders being asked to model adaptability, empathy, and agility during ongoing change?

- Where do you see the biggest gaps between leadership expectations and leadership capability?

- What would it look like to treat leadership development as a system rather than a set of programs?

Reflection Prompt:

If leadership truly drives engagement, retention, and performance, where should your organization focus first to strengthen leadership impact?

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Hiring, Retention, and Engagement

Hiring and retention remain persistent challenges. Limited career growth, burnout, and dissatisfaction with leadership are key drivers of turnover, while morale is most strongly influenced by leadership communication, growth opportunities, and psychological safety.

Discussion Questions:

- Which hiring and retention challenges from the report are most visible in your organization today?

- How does leadership quality influence retention and engagement in your current environment?

- What signals are employees giving you about burnout, workload, or career growth?

- How effectively are leaders equipped to have meaningful career and development conversations?

- What role does transparency and communication play during periods of change?

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SECTION THREE:

Leadership Competencies Now and Future

Coaching, communication, adaptability, and leading change are top present-day competencies. Future leaders will also need strategic thinking, cultural intelligence, and a strong learning mindset.

Discussion Questions:

- Which leadership competencies are most critical for success in your organization right now?

- How well are current leaders equipped to coach, communicate, and develop others?

- Where do you see the greatest need to prepare leaders for future challenges such as AI, complexity, and continuous change?

- How are you helping leaders build empathy, inclusion, and psychological safety?

- What mindsets or behaviors may need to be unlearned to prepare leaders for the future?

Reflection Prompt:

If you fast-forward three years, what leadership capability would you most regret not developing today?

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SECTION FOUR:

Managing the Spend

Organizations anticipate modest increases in L&D spending for the coming year. There is an emphasis on aligning investments with measurable business outcomes and balancing buy vs. build approaches.

Discussion Questions:

- How confident are you that your learning investments are clearly tied to business priorities?

- What challenges do you face in demonstrating the value and impact of leadership development?

- How do you decide when to build internal solutions versus partnering externally?

- How do budget pressures influence decisions around customization, scale, and delivery?

- What data or success stories help you secure ongoing investment in L&D?

Reflection Prompt:

If budgets tighten further, which leadership or learning investments would you protect at all costs, and why?

SECTION FIVE:

Who and How to Train

Front-line, mid-level, and emerging leaders are top priorities for development, yet many organizations rate the quality of their leadership development as only medium. Learning delivery continues to be a blend of in-person, virtual, and self-paced options.

Discussion Questions:

- Which leadership populations are most critical for your organization's success right now?

- How would you honestly rate the quality of leadership development for these groups?

- Where does intent to develop leaders outpace execution?

- How effective is your current mix of in-person, virtual, and self-paced learning?

- How are microlearning and bite-sized content integrated into broader learning journeys?

Reflection Prompt:

What would it take to move your leadership development quality from "good enough" to "high impact"?

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SECTION SIX:

Application, Learning Transfer, and Measurement

Most organizations report only moderate application of learning, and struggle to measure true behavior change and business impact. Reinforcement and accountability remain key gaps.

Discussion Questions:

- To what extent do leaders actually apply new skills after training in your organization?

- What gets in the way of sustained behavior change?

- How do managers and senior leaders reinforce learning after training programs end?

- What metrics do you currently use to measure impact, participation, behavior change, and business outcomes?

- How could measurement be simplified while still demonstrating value?

Reflection Prompt:

If you could measure only one outcome to prove the value of leadership development, what would it be?

Closing Reflection:

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Group Discussion:

- Which insight from the 2026 report most challenged your current thinking?

- What is one practical action you can take in the next 90 days to strengthen leadership, learning, or culture?

- How can HR and L&D act as strategic partners in helping leaders turn uncertainty into opportunity?

Final Takeaway:

Leadership development is no longer optional or episodic. Organizations that invest in human-centered, future-ready leaders and reinforce learning through application and measurement will be best positioned to thrive amid ongoing change.

Share the full Trends Report with your team!

Download Report

Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 45 years, Blanchard has partnered with organizations to maximize individual achievement and organizational performance, bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

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Encourage deeper reflection by sharing the full report with your team.

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