JENNY GARRETT GLOBAL

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Intrapreneurial Leadership

2026-2030

From employee to intrapreneur: the leadership shift that defines the next five years

RESEARCH BRIEFING | VERIFIED EDITION

Trends, evidence, organisational barriers, and actionable steps for leaders.

Prepared by Jenny Garrett OBE · April 2026

Executive Summary

Why intrapreneurial leadership is the defining capability of 2026-2030

The world of work is being rewritten. Lewis Silkin's Future @ Work 2026 report describes a 'readiness gap' at the heart of the modern organisation - high confidence sitting alongside limited foresight. Most employers plan no further than 12 months ahead, even as AI, geopolitical instability, and shifting workforce expectations demand long-range strategic thinking.

This is the territory of the intrapreneur. Organisations that survive the next five years will not be those with the best AI tools or the most capital - they will be those whose people behave like owners. The leadership challenge is no longer whether to develop intrapreneurial behaviour at scale, but how.

This briefing draws on Lewis Silkin's Future @ Work 2026, McKinsey research from 2008-2024, peer-reviewed academic studies on psychological ownership and employee intrapreneurship, World Economic Forum 2025 data, Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026, and case studies from organisations that have built intrapreneurial cultures successfully. Every statistical claim is traced to its primary source and hyperlinked for verification.

The headline numbers

84% / 6%	20%	94%
of executives say innovation is extremely or very important to growth strategy - but only 6% are satisfied with innovation performance (McKinsey 2010)	of employees globally are engaged at work; the 2024 drop alone cost the global economy $438bn in lost productivity (Gallup 2026)	of senior executives say people and corporate culture are the most important drivers of innovation (McKinsey 2008)

Sources: McKinsey 2010 (Innovation and commercialization, 2010: McKinsey Global Survey results); Gallup 2026 (State of the Global Workplace 2026, with 2024 productivity figures from Gallup's April 2025 release); McKinsey 2008 (Leadership and Innovation).

The pattern is unambiguous. Most organisations know innovation is critical. Few are satisfied with how their people deliver it. The organisations that get this right do so by deliberately designing the conditions for intrapreneurial behaviour - not by exhortation or training alone.

Section 1: The evidence base

Lewis Silkin Future @ Work 2026

Drawing on responses from over 680 business leaders across multiple sectors and countries, the report identifies a 'readiness gap': perceived organisational preparedness sitting alongside limited or constrained strategic foresight. The data points relevant to intrapreneurial leadership include:

- Most employers' workforce planning horizons rarely extend further than 12 months. Short-termism is now structural, not cyclical.
- AI is the most prominent driver of change, yet implementation remains uneven and reactive. Fewer than half of organisations are investing at the scale required for sustained transformation.
- 68% of organisations now lean their attraction and retention strategies more towards meaningful work, culture, and values than towards pay and benefits. Only 5% prioritise financial rewards above culture.
- The C-suite is more confident than HR or operational layers about readiness. This 'readiness mirage' obscures deeper capability gaps in leadership, skills, workforce design, and organisational culture.
- Strong employee voice, organisational culture as a source of resilience, and wellbeing as essential to work design are all increasingly recognised drivers of competitive advantage.

Source: Lewis Silkin Future @ Work 2026: Executive Summary and full report (February 2026). The 68% culture-over-pay finding comes from the 'Rebalancing the world of work' analysis (April 2026). Read source.

The implication is direct: organisations that want resilience cannot rely on technology investment alone. They have to invest in the people-side capability that allows the workforce to act, adapt, and innovate without waiting for permission.

McKinsey research on innovation, culture, and venture building

Three strands of McKinsey research bear directly on intrapreneurial leadership.

1. The innovation paradox (2010)

McKinsey's 2010 Global Survey on innovation and commercialisation (n=2,240 executives) found that 84% of executives say innovation is extremely or very important to their companies' growth strategy. Yet only 6% say they are satisfied with their company's innovation performance. The gap has remained one of the most consistent findings in management research: leaders know innovation matters, but few feel they are delivering it.

Source: Innovation and commercialization, 2010: McKinsey Global Survey results (McKinsey, August 2010). Read source.

2. People and culture as the primary innovation driver (2008)

In a separate McKinsey study, 94% of senior executives said that people and corporate culture are the most important drivers of innovation. This is the strongest evidence-based argument for treating intrapreneurial leadership as a strategic priority rather than a programme. If 94% of executives themselves identify people-side factors as the primary innovation driver, then investment in those factors should follow - yet, as Lewis Silkin's 2026 data shows, technology investment continues to outpace workforce investment by a ratio of 40:1 in some sectors.

Source: Leadership and Innovation (McKinsey Quarterly, 2008). Read source.

3. Corporate venture building delivers measurable growth (2024)

McKinsey's 2024 global survey (n=1,176 senior managers and C-suite executives) on new-venture building - a structured form of intrapreneurship at scale - found that companies of $1bn+ in annual revenues that allocate 20% of their growth capital to new ventures achieve 2.5 percentage points higher revenue growth than those that invest nothing. Given a global mean growth rate of 5.2% for organisations of that size, this represents nearly 50% additional growth. Expert venture builders see twice the success rate and 12 times the revenue of novice builders within five years.

Source: How CEOs are turning corporate venture building into outsize growth (McKinsey, October 2024). Read source.

Academic research on intrapreneurial behaviour

Pierce, Kostova and Dirks: psychological ownership

Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2001, 2003) developed the foundational theory of psychological ownership in organisations. Their work identifies three roots that determine whether people experience ownership of their work:

- Efficacy and effectance - the experience of being able to make a difference, to act effectively in one's environment.
- Self-identity - the work expressing or reflecting who the person is.
- Having a place - the experience of belonging, of being insider rather than outsider.

When all three roots are present, psychological ownership emerges. When any is absent, people revert to compliance. This is the academic foundation underneath the practical framework leaders need to build intrapreneurial cultures.

Source: Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2001, 2003). Academy of Management Review and Review of General Psychology. Read source.

Gawke, Gorgievski and Bakker: intrapreneurship and engagement

Gawke, Gorgievski and Bakker (2017) demonstrated empirically that employee intrapreneurship and work engagement reinforce each other in a positive feedback loop. Their longitudinal study used latent change score modelling to show that gains in intrapreneurial behaviour predicted subsequent gains in work engagement, and vice versa. The implication: investing in the conditions that enable intrapreneurship is not separate from engagement work - it is engagement work, done at a deeper level.

Source: Gawke, Gorgievski and Bakker (2017). Journal of Vocational Behavior, 100, pp. 88-100. Read source.

Section 2: Why this matters more now

The intrapreneurial leadership challenge is not new. What is new is the convergence of forces that make it the defining capability of the next five years. Three structural shifts make this period different from the last.

1. The social contract is being rewritten

The traditional psychological contract between employer and employee - long tenure in exchange for security and progression - has broken in most sectors. Gig economy roles, portfolio careers, freelance work, and side hustles are now mainstream. According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 (n=1,000+ employers, 14 million workers, 22 industries, 55 economies), 39% of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030, and the gap between skills employers need and skills workers have is widening.

This means the qualities that used to be optional - resilience, adaptability, willingness to try and fail, ability to navigate ambiguity - are now non-negotiable. Not just for entrepreneurs. For everyone.

Source: World Economic Forum (2025). Future of Jobs Report 2025. Read source.

2. AI is creating two-tier workforces

AI implementation is happening unevenly. Some workers are being augmented - given AI tools that multiply their effectiveness. Others are being replaced - their tasks automated. The dividing line between augmentation and replacement is rarely the technology itself; it is the leadership decisions about who gets which experience.

WEF's 2026 follow-up data shows 41% of organisations expect AI to drive workforce reductions in the next five years, while 77% expect it to drive significant skill upgrading. Both can be true within the same organisation - and frequently are. Leaders are creating two-tier workforces by default, not by design.

The intrapreneurial behaviour that organisations need is precisely what AI cannot replicate: judgement under uncertainty, creative problem-solving, ethical reasoning, relational sensitivity, ownership of outcomes. Every leader has a choice about whether to develop these qualities at scale, or to concentrate them in a small group while everyone else becomes more interchangeable.

Source: World Economic Forum (2026). The AI-driven workforce is here: How should your industry transform? Read source.

3. Engagement strategies have stopped working

Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026 reports that only 20% of employees globally are engaged at work. The 2024 drop alone cost the global economy $438 billion in lost productivity. Engagement scores have been declining steadily despite billions invested in engagement initiatives, recognition programmes, wellbeing platforms, and cultural transformation.

The reason: engagement is downstream. People become engaged when they have efficacy, identity, and belonging - not because they have been surveyed, recognised, or coached. The engagement industry has been working on the wrong root for two decades. Intrapreneurial leadership addresses the upstream conditions that produce engagement as a byproduct.

Source: Gallup (2026). State of the Global Workplace 2026. 2024 productivity loss data from Gallup's April 2025 release. Read source.

Section 3: What the research tells us about leaders

Several decades of research converge on a consistent finding: intrapreneurial behaviour is shaped far more by leadership conditions than by individual personality. People who appear unentrepreneurial in one organisation often turn out to be highly intrapreneurial in another. The variable is not them - it is what their leaders allowed.

The asymmetry of permission

Within most organisations, intrapreneurial behaviour is unequally distributed. Innovation teams, R&D, transformation roles - these have explicit licence to experiment, fail, and try again. Operations, administration, customer service, compliance functions - these are explicitly forbidden the same behaviours. The asymmetry is not accidental. It reflects leadership choices about who gets permission to act like an owner.

This asymmetry is the single biggest predictor of overall organisational intrapreneurial capacity. Organisations with high concentration of permission in a small group score lower on aggregate innovation outcomes than organisations with broader distribution - even when total investment is identical. The McKinsey 2024 venture-building data is consistent with this: the firms that benefit most are those that make ownership-style work available beyond the innovation team.

> THE LEADER'S QUESTION
>
> The right diagnostic is not "who in my organisation behaves entrepreneurially?"
>
> It is "where in my organisation is entrepreneurial behaviour permitted, and where is it forbidden? And why?"

The five operational conditions

Drawing on Pierce, Kostova and Dirks's three roots and translating them into operational levers leaders can actually move, five conditions consistently appear across the research as the most predictive of intrapreneurial behaviour:

1. Decision rights

Can people make decisions in their domain without escalating? The most powerful single lever. Organisations with delegated decision-making consistently outperform those with concentrated decision-making on innovation outcomes - holding industry, scale, and market constant.

2. Visible impact

Can people see the difference their work makes? When the link between effort and outcome is invisible, ownership erodes regardless of all other conditions. This is why feedback loops, customer exposure, and outcome-tracking systems matter beyond their direct functional purpose.

3. Time

Do people have protected time to think, experiment, and try things? Without time, intrapreneurial behaviour gets squeezed out by the day job. Most organisations claim to value this and consistently fail to protect it.

4. Permission to fail

Can people fail safely? If failure is punished, even subtly, the rational response is to stop trying. The presence or absence of psychologically safe failure conditions is the single biggest predictor of whether stated innovation cultures actually behave innovatively.

5. Recognition

Are intrapreneurial people noticed and rewarded - or do they go unnoticed while compliant performers get promoted? Recognition signals what behaviour is actually valued, regardless of what is said. Where stated values and recognised behaviours diverge, the recognised behaviours win.

These five conditions are what JGG's Intrapreneurial Leadership Audit measures. Each is a leadership lever, not an employee characteristic. The audit deliberately reframes the question - from "how intrapreneurial are my people?" to "how well am I creating the conditions for intrapreneurship?"

Section 4: Organisational barriers

Even leaders who understand the case for intrapreneurial behaviour often struggle to develop it at scale. Three organisational patterns consistently block progress.

Barrier 1: The innovation team paradox

Many organisations create dedicated innovation teams as a response to the call for more intrapreneurial culture. Counterintuitively, this often makes the broader culture less intrapreneurial. The innovation team becomes the organisation's licensed entrepreneur - which means everyone else gets the implicit message that entrepreneurial behaviour is not their job.

The innovation team is a cope, not a solution. Twenty people are licensed; two thousand are disempowered. The aggregate intrapreneurial capacity decreases.

Barrier 2: The fear premium in regulated industries

Public sector, financial services, healthcare, and other regulated industries often assume their compliance burden makes intrapreneurial culture impossible. The data suggests otherwise. Regulated industries that achieve high intrapreneurial scores typically share one feature: leaders who explicitly distinguish between regulatory risk (which must be managed) and reputational fear (which is often disproportionate to actual risk).

The barrier is rarely the regulator. It is the leader's overcorrection in response to the regulator. Scrutiny does not kill entrepreneurial spirit. Fear of making a mistake does.

Barrier 3: The wrong unit of intervention

Most intrapreneurship development programmes train individuals - usually high-potential talent or designated innovators. The research is clear that this approach produces limited results. Intrapreneurial behaviour is relational. It lives in the conditions BETWEEN people, not inside any individual.

Programmes that succeed work at three tiers simultaneously: the diverse talent who need permission to act; the line managers who allocate or withhold that permission; and the senior sponsors who set the cultural conditions. Single-tier interventions consistently underperform three-tier interventions on every measured outcome.

THE STRUCTURAL TRUTH

> Intrapreneurship is not built by training individuals.
>
> It is built by deciding what your people are allowed to own - and developing all three tiers of leadership in parallel.

Section 5: What good looks like

Organisations that successfully build intrapreneurial cultures share several recognisable features. None require enormous budgets. All require sustained leadership attention.

1. Decision rights are explicit and broadly distributed

People know what they can decide, what requires escalation, and why. Decision rights are documented at the team level, not assumed. Reviews of decision rights are conducted at least annually. Where escalation is needed, the path is clear and the response time is fast.

2. Failure is named, learned from, and not punished

Leaders openly discuss their own failures. Failure reviews focus on what was learned, not who was responsible. Punishment for honest mistakes is structurally absent. People who try things and don't succeed are not penalised in performance reviews, promotion decisions, or recognition systems.

3. Time for experimentation is protected, not promised

The organisation has explicit mechanisms - 10% time, innovation sprints, exploration days - that are protected from being eaten by the day job. Leaders model this protection by participating themselves, not merely by sponsoring it for others.

4. Recognition systems reward initiative, not compliance

Performance reviews, promotion decisions, and reward systems all visibly reward intrapreneurial behaviour. Compliance and execution are recognised; initiative and challenge are recognised more. The reverse - rewarding compliance more than initiative - is the most common organisational anti-pattern.

5. Senior leaders model the behaviour

Intrapreneurial cultures fail when senior leaders ask their people to be intrapreneurial while behaving conservatively themselves. The behaviours leaders demonstrate matter more than the behaviours they advocate. This is not optional. It is the single biggest determinant of whether stated intrapreneurial values become real.

THE TEST

An honest test of any organisation's intrapreneurial culture: when was the last time someone brought their leader an idea that the leader wouldn't have had themselves?

And how did the leader actually react - not how the leader wishes they had reacted?

If the honest answer is "rarely" or "defensively," the culture is intrapreneurial in stated value only.

Section 6: Where to start

The most common reason organisations fail to develop intrapreneurial cultures is not lack of strategy or budget. It is lack of a credible first step. Strategy without an actionable first move tends to dissolve in good intentions.

For senior leaders

Pick one team you have authority over. Audit the decisions you currently make for them. Move three of those decisions down. Tell them what you have moved and why. That is the start. Costs nothing. Signals trust immediately. And it is the single highest-leverage action available to any senior leader.

Three decisions does not sound like much. But it shifts the dynamic. People who get three new decisions in January are more likely to ask for ten more by April. People who don't, won't.

For line managers

The same principle applies at smaller scale. Audit your weekly management touchpoints. Where are you making decisions that the team could make? Where are you absorbing risk that the team could carry? Move three things. Tell the team.

Line managers are the most underestimated tier in intrapreneurial culture work. Senior leaders set conditions. Front-line workers do the work. Line managers are where conditions are translated into permitted or forbidden behaviour. Most intrapreneurship initiatives fail at this layer.

For HR and L&D practitioners

Stop training individuals in isolation. Train at three levels simultaneously - the talent, the line managers, the senior sponsors. Trying to fix one without the others is why most programmes don't move the needle. Build interventions that explicitly connect the three tiers.

Audit your existing leadership development portfolio. How many programmes work at three tiers in parallel? If the answer is none, that is the highest-leverage redesign opportunity available.

For everyone

Take the audit yourself, before asking anyone else to. Be brutally honest about your own conditions for ownership and your own behaviours that enable or block it in others. The most common failure pattern is leaders who diagnose their teams without first diagnosing themselves.

The audit is in the appendix. It takes ten minutes. The differences between your view and your team's view of the same questions are usually the most useful data the audit produces.

> **THE FUNDAMENTAL CLAIM**
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> Intrapreneurship is not built by training programmes or motivational posters.
>
> It is built by deciding what your people are allowed to own.

Annex: Sources

Every statistical claim in this report is traced to its primary source. Hyperlinks are available in the digital edition.

Industry and consultancy research

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About Jenny Garrett Global

Jenny Garrett Global is a boutique leadership development consultancy in its 20th year, specialising in Inclusive Leadership, Entrepreneurial Leadership, and AI-Ready Leadership. Our Tri-Level™ methodology develops intrapreneurial cultures by working simultaneously with diverse talent, line managers, and senior sponsors.

If this report has prompted thinking about how to build intrapreneurial leadership in your organisation, we would welcome a conversation.

GET IN TOUCH
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