

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR 2026

Talengo report 2026

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 Introduction

02 Profile of participating companies

03 Talent priorities for 2026

04 Key moments to address talent challenges

05 Budget allocation for 2026

06 About Talengo

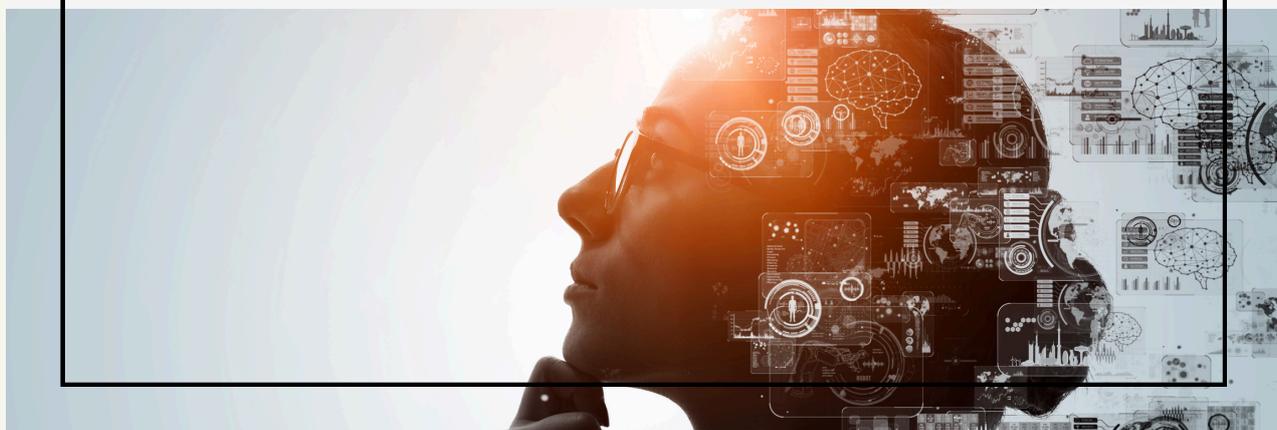
01. INTRODUCTION

Companies are entering 2026 with the need to reassess practices that for years were taken for granted as valid. Technology is, of course, a factor, but it is not the only one. New regulations also weigh heavily, as does the pressure to compete in more demanding markets and a way of working that no longer aligns with people's expectations or with what businesses require to move forward.

At Talengo, we observe a clear shift. **Talent decisions no longer follow business discussions; they now sit at the very core of the business itself.**

In our conversations with company leaders, a simple yet decisive question arises more frequently: *Do we have the people and the leaders prepared to sustain what we aim to achieve?*

This year, an additional challenge also comes into play across all companies: how to integrate artificial intelligence into day-to-day operations in a realistic and coherent way.





Artificial intelligence is entering companies unevenly. Within organizations, some areas move forward naturally, experimenting and quickly identifying practical applications, while others barely use it because leadership is more cautious, skeptical, or openly reluctant. This contrast is creating visible differences between teams: in pace of work, in efficiency, and in the sense of being — or not being — prepared for the immediate future. Enthusiasm, fear, pressure to become more agile, and questions about its real impact on people and roles now coexist.

All of this is unfolding while companies continue to deal with issues that do not disappear: attracting talent, developing it, retaining it, and building working models that do not exhaust teams.

This year's data reflects precisely that balance: the priorities that will shape day-to-day activity and those that will drive the evolution of talent in 2026.

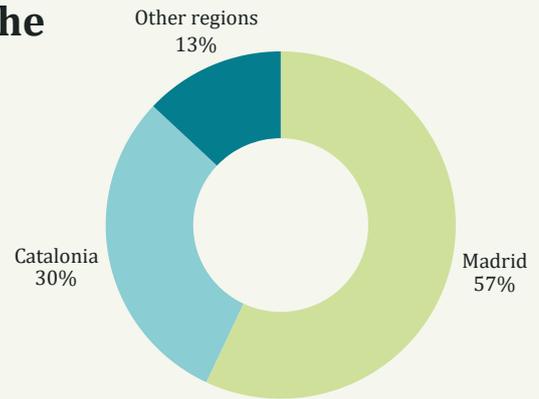
From our perspective as a firm, we see that the conversation is shifting: talent management is no longer measured by isolated initiatives, but by the real capacity to create environments where people can contribute value, learn, and adapt to the direction the company intends to take.

Pamela Parra, Partner at Talengo.

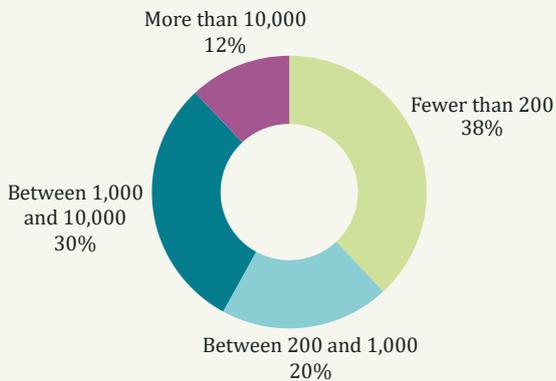
02. PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING COMPANIES

Nearly 70 companies participated in the survey.

87% of the companies are located in the Community of Madrid (57%) and Catalonia (30%). A minority operate in the Basque Country, Andalusia, Valencia, and other regions.



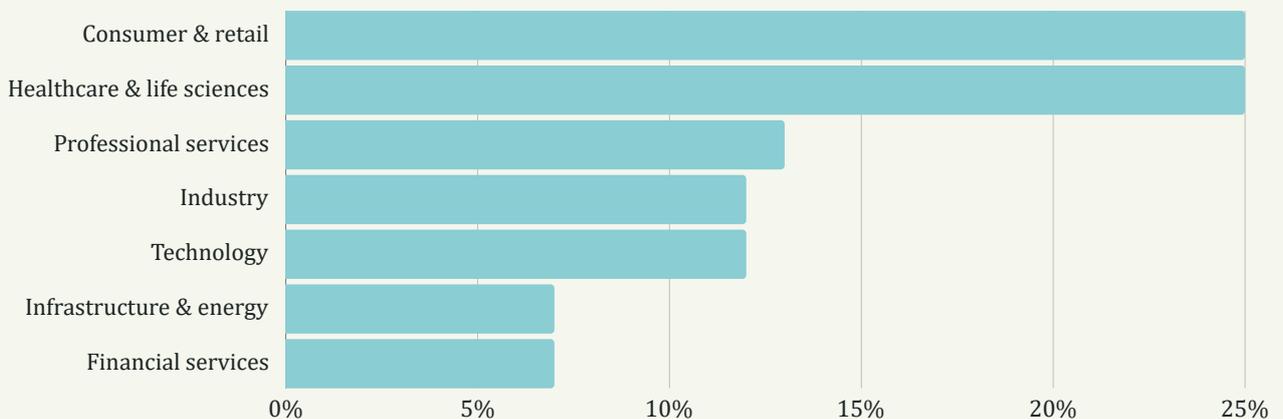
Number of employees



Revenue volume



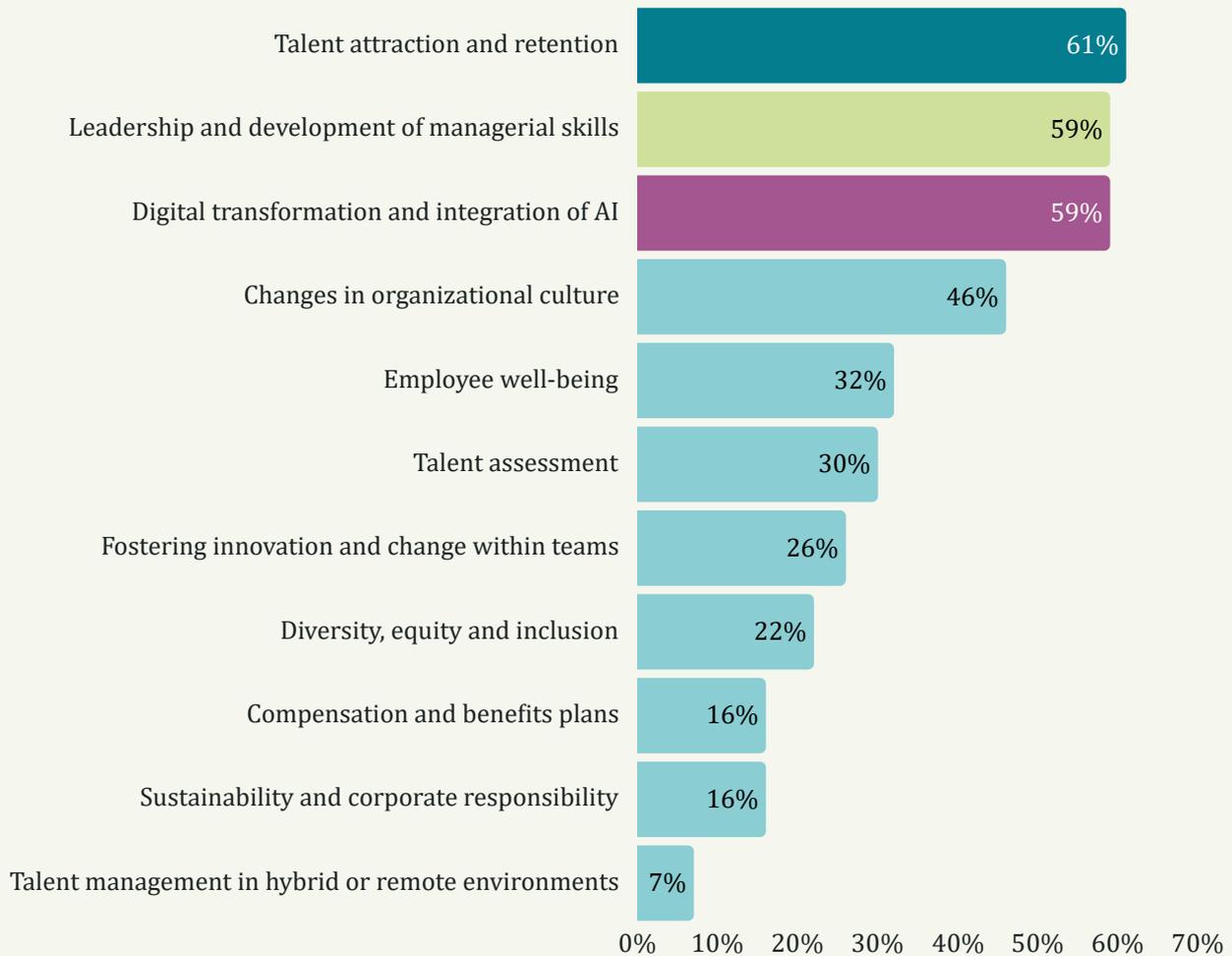
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03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

We analyze the key priorities that will shape companies' agendas for 2026.

61% of companies identify talent attraction and retention as their main priority, followed by leadership (59%) and the integration of AI (59%).



03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026



Talent attraction and retention: the priority defining 2026

Talent attraction and retention once again ranks as the top priority for 2026, but with a deeper reading than in 2025. We are no longer talking about a challenge linked to hiring specific profiles, but something more structural: companies need to become places where people want to build their professional journey.

What professionals are seeking today is to work in environments with a clear sense of **purpose**, **clarity** about where the company is heading, and **consistency** between what is communicated and what is actually experienced.

The arrival of AI is accelerating this trend. In teams where it is integrated with proper support and a clear framework for use, it creates a sense of future and growth. By contrast, when its use — or non-adoption — depends on each leader's personal style, an internal gap emerges, one that we are already seeing in many companies: some teams move forward while others fall behind. This difference is not merely operational; it affects how each professional envisions their future within the company.

Compared to 2025, the types of questions talent raises before joining a company have shifted. We increasingly hear: *"How is leadership exercised here?"*, *"How are decisions made?"*, *"What is it really like to work in this company?"*

Lived culture — not declared culture — has become a decisive factor in whether professionals choose to remain in a project or explore opportunities elsewhere. For this reason, in 2026, retention cannot be explained by benefits, compensation packages, or isolated programs; it connects directly to the coherence and consistency experienced in the company's culture.

03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

Leadership: clarity and stability in an environment that does not stand still

In 2025, we were already observing a shift: companies were beginning to require leaders who were more human and less focused solely on technical expertise. In 2026, that shift has consolidated; **what is now most valued is a leader's ability to provide direction, sound judgment, and stability** in a moment of total immediacy such as the one we are experiencing.

What people need, therefore, is not an idealized model of leadership, but role models who inspire trust. The consistency we previously identified as the primary trend for building a career here becomes the very core of leadership that provides credibility and direction.

It is within this context that **the managerial capabilities gaining the greatest relevance in 2026 emerge:** those that help teams navigate an environment changing at vertiginous speed. Maintaining a clear vision, distinguishing what is essential from what is secondary, and communicating decisions simply to avoid confusion are becoming critical competencies. The same applies to listening — not only to provide support, but to detect friction points, anticipate concerns, and adjust before problems escalate.

This is complemented by the ability to manage pressure without amplifying it for the team. The most effective leaders are those who introduce clarity, prioritize with practical judgment, and give teams the necessary space to move forward without overload.

In essence, we are not speaking about extraordinary leadership, but about leadership that is close, clear, and coherent — capable of providing guidance in a constantly evolving landscape and of creating environments where people choose to stay and continue growing.

03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

Integration of AI: a shift that compels us to reorganize how we work

AI is already part of companies' day-to-day operations, but not in a uniform or straightforward way. The technology is beginning to genuinely influence how work is carried out, how decisions are made, and how people feel within the organization. **With this comes a new challenge: integrating AI without unsettling teams or creating the perception that certain roles are losing value.**

Companies are increasingly required to answer questions such as: *"What will happen to our work once we incorporate AI?"*

This question is not technological; it is emotional and organizational. The companies managing this transition most effectively are those that do not assume everyone will move forward at the same pace or with the same level of confidence.

In 2025, the dominant phase was learning, experimenting, and understanding possibilities. In 2026, it is clear that the challenge is different: structuring AI integration so that it does not generate uncertainty, internal inequalities, or an additional burden for teams.



This requires revisiting expectations, clarifying which human contributions are irreplaceable, and providing a clear framework so that people can grow rather than compare themselves to technology.

AI is accelerating processes, certainly; but it is also forcing a redefinition of roles, decision criteria, usage guidelines, and ways of collaborating. **For this reason, the priority is not simply to “use AI,” but to “build with AI.”**

The companies that achieve this in 2026 will be those that turn technology into competitiveness rather than internal noise.

03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026



Culture, well-being and innovation: what truly sustains companies

Culture, well-being and innovation do not appear as the top priorities. Even so, from our perspective, in practice they operate as an interconnected whole. We see this constantly in our day-to-day work: when a company stagnates, it is rarely due to a lack of technology or investment; it is usually rooted in shortcomings in one of these three elements.

Culture defines how work is actually done. It is not about placing values on a presentation slide, but about very concrete matters: how decisions are made, how priorities are set, how communication flows, and which behaviors are allowed or discouraged.

This idea was already identified in last year's study, but in 2026 it becomes critical. For companies to effectively address the three main trends highlighted in this year's report, they need a culture that does not generate contradictions.

Well-being has also shifted in meaning. It is no longer associated with isolated initiatives, but with the basic conditions required to work effectively: clarity, autonomy, sustainable pace, and realistically sized teams.

When these conditions fail, the outcome is what we observe in many organizations: retention becomes difficult, leaders experience burnout, and any new development — including AI — creates more tension than progress.

Innovation, meanwhile, ceases to be a “project” and becomes a reflection of the teams' working environment. In 2026, innovating will mean that people have the space and permission to propose, question, and adjust what is not working.

In our experience, when that space exists, the company moves forward. When it does not, teams operate on autopilot and the organization loses its capacity to adapt.

03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

Talent assessment: the foundation for anticipating and deciding with rigor

In 2026, talent assessment ranks as the sixth priority, yet its impact is far greater than its position in the ranking suggests. Companies are realizing that in an environment where roles evolve, AI redistributes tasks, and structures are adjusted more frequently, lacking an objective and up-to-date assessment leaves the organization without the capacity to anticipate.

Assessment has regained its strategic relevance because it provides something that is now indispensable: **a real talent map, not an assumed one**. Knowing who can take on greater responsibility, who requires support, which capabilities are missing, and where the risks lie.

This is prompting many companies to review their systems and processes: they are seeking assessments that support decision-making, rather than formal procedures with no tangible impact. This translates into very concrete elements:

- Solid succession plans, grounded in data rather than perceptions
- More secure cross-functional moves, supported by a clearer understanding of each professional's potential, motivation, and level of maturity
- More realistic contingency plans, particularly in critical areas
- A nuanced reading of capabilities to advance AI integration without improvisation

This trend connects directly with all the previous ones. Retention is not possible without offering genuine development pathways. Leadership cannot be effective without clear criteria. And a company cannot be transformed — technologically or culturally — without a clear view of the talent available to manage change.

03. TALENT PRIORITIES FOR 2026

What is happening with DEI and sustainability?

In 2026, sustainability and diversity once again rank below other priorities. Pressure for short-term results, economic strain, geopolitical uncertainty, and a clearly polarized social climate have slowed the pace of both agendas. However, this slowdown does not imply regression. What we observe as a firm is **that companies are continuing forward, albeit with greater caution and less external visibility, but without reversing course.**

Even so, it is important to underscore one point: a lower position in the ranking does not mean these issues have ceased to be strategic. When they lose prominence on the agenda, their impact on culture, reputation, talent attraction, and internal cohesion remains decisive.

When an organization advances in DEI and sustainability, it transforms the way it works, makes decisions, and relates to people, society, and business. **These are not programs; they are ways of building the future.**

For this reason, these are not areas where organizations should step back, and the reasons are clear:

- Regulation in sustainability, transparency, and equity will continue to intensify, regardless of social or political noise
- Up to five generations with very different expectations now coexist within companies
- Reputation and competitiveness are at stake. Clients, talent, and investors view these issues as indicators of long-term vision
- Culture requires stable reference points. At a time when almost everything is changing, these commitments act as anchors: they sustain decisions, reduce tensions, and align priorities



In summary, although they do not top the list of urgent priorities, sustainability and DEI remain pillars that directly influence companies' trustworthiness, attractiveness, and capacity for adaptation.

04. KEY MOMENTS TO ADDRESS TALENT CHALLENGES

When we look at this year's results, one message stands out clearly: **most companies concentrate their key talent decisions in the first half of the year.**

In practice, what we observe is straightforward: if a company does not set the direction of its talent agenda in Q1 and Q2, the rest of the year becomes a race to keep up with events. Operations take precedence, pressure for results remains constant, AI requires continuous adjustments, and the opportunity to calmly review what is happening within teams becomes increasingly limited. As a result, many decisions that should be structural end up being made late, with little room for maneuver and greater strain on both leaders and teams.

This is why **Q1 has become the quarter in which priorities are structured:** which capabilities will be critical, which leaders require support, how AI will be integrated into teams, which cultural frictions must be addressed, and which projects need focused momentum from the outset.

Q2 then becomes the second opportunity to adjust. It is the moment to validate whether the direction set in Q1 is truly working: whether teams are keeping pace, whether role changes make sense, whether AI integration is progressing, or whether certain areas need reinforcement before day-to-day demands fully absorb the agenda.

From the summer onward, the dynamic shifts. Q3 and Q4 are not unfavorable quarters; they are simply different. They are more operational, with less mental space to rethink major issues and with a different level of energy. During this period, any talent-related matter that has not been addressed in the first half of the year is far more likely to be postponed to the following cycle.

This is why the data reflects what we have already been observing as a firm: companies are bringing forward to Q1 and Q2 everything that truly matters. Not only because there is more time, but because there is greater leadership availability, more capacity to align criteria, and more room for changes to gain traction within the same year.



05. BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR 2026

The fact that **nearly 90% of companies plan to maintain or increase their talent budgets in 2026**, despite the current context — economic pressure, persistent inflation, and clear margin constraints — says more than any formal statement about priorities. Talent is no longer an area to adjust when the economy tightens; today, it is one of the few domains where companies understand that cutting investment has a direct impact on future competitiveness.

This shift makes sense when connected to the trends analyzed throughout the study: attracting and retaining talent is becoming increasingly demanding; leaders play a decisive role in how work is structured and experienced; AI is forcing a reassessment of roles and dynamics that once seemed stable; and cultures that fail to support these changes ultimately generate fatigue and the departure of professionals. None of this can be developed without consistent investment.

The comparison with last year is also revealing. In 2025, we observed a more balanced split between increasing and maintaining budgets. **In 2026, although there are still companies increasing their investment (33%), the percentage of those protecting their budgets rises (55%).** From our perspective, this is not immobility; it is a way of saying, “we cannot afford to step back,” even when other budget lines are being adjusted. It is a more cautious stance, yet equally strategic.

In our conversations with leaders, the same idea consistently emerges: technological, cultural, or business transformation cannot be sustained unless the talent responsible for driving it is sustained first.

We therefore interpret these figures as a clear signal: investment in talent no longer depends on the economic cycle, but on the company’s strategic cycle. And now, more than ever, organizations need prepared leaders, teams capable of adapting, and structures that do not fall behind.

Ultimately, the fact that nearly 90% are maintaining or increasing their budgets is not optimism; it is awareness. It reflects a mature understanding that in 2026, protecting investment in talent means protecting the company’s capacity to continue moving forward.



07. ABOUT TALENGO

We are an independent firm of leadership experts.

We help our clients identify the professionals who will lead the transformation of their businesses and take on the challenges of a globalized world. We identify talent within organizations by building comprehensive talent and organizational risk maps. We prepare leaders to address current and future challenges, fostering cultural environments that enable the successful execution of strategy.

At Talengo, we combine professional rigor with a humanistic approach; deep expertise with an agile and bold start-up mindset; advisory grounded in sound judgment and unafraid of change. All of this guides organizations toward leadership that not only inspires, but also transforms.

This is the essence of Talengo: the perfect balance between wisdom and renewal, professionalism and closeness, expertise and innovation.



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