

Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

Week 27, 2026 (Monday 29 June 2026)

Teams, leadership and behavior at the turn of summer 2026: AI is quietly rewriting who does the work

Companion read to the podcast. Written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. Every claim links to its source so you can dig in.

The big picture

For the last few weeks we have looked at the human layer of work — the self-improving team, the friction inside it, the leader's own wellbeing, and most recently recognition and delegation. This week the lens widens to a structural shift now showing up in the data: **AI is changing who does the work, where people learn, and what leaders are actually for.**

The backdrop is unchanged but sobering. [Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026](#) still puts global employee engagement at **20% in 2025, a five-year low**, at an estimated **\$10 trillion** a year in lost productivity. But beneath the engagement number sits a quieter one: **22% of employees report daily loneliness**, rising to **26% among younger workers**. And [McKinsey's State of Organizations 2026](#) reports that **fewer than 20% of organizations deploying AI are seeing meaningful results** — proof that the bottleneck is design and people, not the model. Denmark's trust-based, flat tradition is a genuine advantage here, but it is not immunity. Four themes shape the week.

Theme 1 — The entry-level squeeze and the leadership-pipeline clog

The most under-discussed organizational story of 2026 is happening at the bottom of the org chart. AI isn't just automating tasks; it is **hollowing out the rung where people used to learn to lead.**

The evidence. According to [World Economic Forum reporting \(June 2026\)](#), Revelio Labs data shows US entry-level job postings have fallen roughly **35% in the last 18 months**, in large part because of AI. Harvard research cited in the same piece finds **junior employment down 9%**, with entry-level hiring dropping sharply at firms adopting generative AI, and the entry-level *share* of jobs falling to **38.6% in early 2026, down from over 44% three years ago**. [PwC's 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer](#) adds the twist: AI-exposed junior roles are now far more likely to demand traditionally senior skills — leadership, judgment, strategic thinking — a "seniorization" of work that asks beginners to start as veterans.

The warning. The WEF's framing is the one to repeat to clients: if organizations don't treat this as **a design flaw now, they will hit a "leadership wall" within five years**. [MIT Sloan Management Review's Summer 2026 issue](#) puts it bluntly: companies that defer entry-level roles to AI are **losing their**

leadership pipelines. And the training gap compounds it — WEF reports **38% of Gen Z workers say AI has fundamentally changed what their job requires, yet 59% of those using AI at work say their organization has never given them formal training.**

A concrete case. The aggregate is the case: across genAI-adopting firms, the bottom rung is thinning faster than anyone planned, while the work that used to live there gets pushed upward — creating strain in the layers above and a clog in the pipeline that won't be visible until the current senior cohort retires.

The Danish angle. Denmark has a structural asset here: a deep tradition of *lærlinge*, *elever* and *praktik* — learning by doing inside real work. The risk is automating away exactly those developmental reps. This is also where **Dennis Nørmark's** *pseudoarbejde* lens helps in reverse: don't simply automate junior busywork into oblivion; ask which of those tasks were actually how people learned the trade, and protect those.

What to do Monday. Audit one team: list the tasks juniors used to cut their teeth on, mark which AI now does, and deliberately protect two or three "learning reps" from automation. Treat early-career development as a design requirement, not a nice-to-have.

Theme 2 — Connection is the new engagement

Engagement has been flat-to-falling for five years. The fresher, more actionable signal in the 2026 data is **loneliness** — and as AI mediates more of the working day, human connection is becoming the scarce advantage.

The evidence. **Gallup 2026** finds **22% of employees worldwide experience daily loneliness**, climbing to **26% among younger workers**, alongside 40% reporting daily stress. And it is not only an individual-contributor problem: **leaders are about 10 percentage points lonelier** than the people they manage (roughly 31% report daily loneliness). The thread connects to last week's recognition work — being seen and valued is the antidote, and it is cheap.

The hopeful counter-data. Connection is a designable condition, not a personality trait. Gallup's broader finding holds: where organizations invest in role-specific manager support, manager wellbeing roughly doubles. The same logic applies to belonging — it responds to structure, ritual and leadership attention.

A concrete case / Danish angle. Denmark's notion of *arbejdsfællesskab* — the working community — is a genuine head start, but it has to be led. **Væksthus for Ledelse / lederweb.dk** argued in early 2026 that **psychological safety inside the leadership group itself matters for the whole organization** — connection has to be modeled at the top before it cascades. Their companion piece on **mentaliserer** (mentalizing — holding your own reactions and others' perspectives in mind at the same time) is the practical skill underneath real connection.

What to do Monday. Build one recurring, low-stakes human touchpoint into the week that is explicitly *not* about tasks or status — a check-in, a walk, a shared coffee with no agenda. In an AI-mediated workflow, the unprogrammed human moment is the one you have to schedule on purpose.

Theme 3 — Humble leadership and what AI can't replace

As AI absorbs more execution, the question "what is a leader actually *for*?" gets sharper. The convergent answer this season: the distinctly human capabilities — and humility sits near the center of them.

The evidence. A feature in [Harvard Business Review's May/June 2026 issue](#) points to **humility as a trait that helps leaders provide calm during disruption**: employees who viewed their leader as humble — someone who acknowledges limits, stays open to learning, seeks input, and values others' contributions — were **significantly less likely to think about leaving**. (In the interest of honesty: the underlying finding draws on two studies of 658 US employees conducted in spring 2021, around the return to in-person work; it is being revisited now because the AI-disruption moment rhymes with that earlier upheaval — so treat it as a well-evidenced principle, not brand-new fieldwork.) [London Business School](#) frames the bigger bet plainly: *does the future belong to humble leaders?*

The corroboration. [MIT Sloan's Summer 2026 issue](#) devotes space to the leadership capabilities AI *can't* replace, and [McKinsey 2026](#) argues that as AI handles execution, the human dimensions — judgment, empathy, psychological safety, purpose — become the primary drivers of resilience and advantage. The same report notes **75% of organizations struggle to build high-performance cultures**, which is precisely the human, not technical, work.

The Danish angle. This is home turf for [tillidsbaseret ledelse](#) (trust-based leadership) and for [Morten Münster's](#) *adfærdsdesign*: don't preach humility — design for it. A standing prompt ("what am I missing here?") engineers humble behavior into the room far more reliably than a values poster does.

What to do Monday. Close your next decision meeting with one question — "What might I be wrong about?" — and sit in the silence until someone answers. It is the cheapest humility intervention there is, and it doubles as a psychological-safety probe.

Theme 4 — Behavioral science you can use Monday: redesign the work, not the worker

If fewer than 20% of AI deployments are paying off, the lesson is not "buy more AI." It is that **bolting AI onto unredesigned work mostly accelerates the waste**.

The evidence. In *Want AI-Driven Productivity? Redesign Work* (MIT Sloan Management Review), Ravin Jesuthasan argues organizations must stop treating AI as a straight swap for human labor and instead **start with the work itself** — breaking roles into tasks and deciding which to substitute, augment or transform — then **make work design a core leadership capability**. The payoff is real: a global financial-services firm that overhauled its customer-order process this way cut the associated **workload by 59%**.

The Danish angle. This is behavioral design at the level of process. [Morten Münster's](#) core move — change the environment so the right behavior is easy, rather than exhorting people to try harder — applies directly: redesign the workflow, don't lecture the worker. And [Dennis Nørmark's](#) *pseudoarbejde* gives the order of operations: **strip the busywork out of a process before you automate it**, or you'll simply produce waste faster and call it productivity.

What to do Monday. Before adding any AI tool, map one process into its component tasks, delete the pseudo-work, and only then decide what to automate. Design first, automate second.

Books & tools to watch

- **MIT Sloan Management Review, Summer 2026 issue** — the "AI spine," what leaders can't delegate to AI, and the leadership-pipeline warning, all in one place.
 - **PwC 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer** — a free, citable dataset on how AI is reshaping skills and entry-level work.
 - **Dennis Nørmark** — *Tilbage til arbejdet*, the practical successor to *Pseudoarbejde*, is the right companion for the "redesign before you automate" theme.
 - **Morten Münster** — his Børsen column and books remain the best Danish-language entry to behavioral design applied to work.
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The three things to remember

1. **Protect the bottom rung.** AI is thinning entry-level work and, with it, the place people learn to lead — design early-career development deliberately or hit a leadership wall in five years.
2. **Connection is the scarce advantage.** Loneliness, not just disengagement, is the 2026 signal; build human touchpoints on purpose, and model psychological safety from the leadership group down.
3. **Redesign the work before you automate it — and lead with humility.** Fewer than 20% of AI rollouts pay off because the work, not the tech, is the problem; the human capabilities AI can't replace, starting with humility, are now the core of the job.

Where in your organization do people still learn by doing — and who, exactly, is protecting that rung from automation?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Gallup — [State of the Global Workplace 2026](#) - McKinsey — [The State of Organizations 2026](#); high-performance-culture read via [HRZone](#) - World Economic Forum — [The AI-related leadership that's only five years away](#) - PwC — [2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer](#) - MIT Sloan Management Review — [Our Guide to the Summer 2026 Issue](#); Jesuthasan, [Want AI-Driven Productivity? Redesign Work](#) - Harvard Business Review — [May/June 2026 issue](#) (humility & disruption) - London Business School — [Does the future belong to humble leaders?](#)

Danish sources & voices - Væksthus for Ledelse / lederweb.dk — [Psykologisk tryghed i ledergruppen](#); [Mentalisering](#); [Tillidsbaseret ledelse i praksis](#) - Morten Münster — [mortenmunster.com](#) - Dennis Nørmark — [Pseudoarbejde](#)