



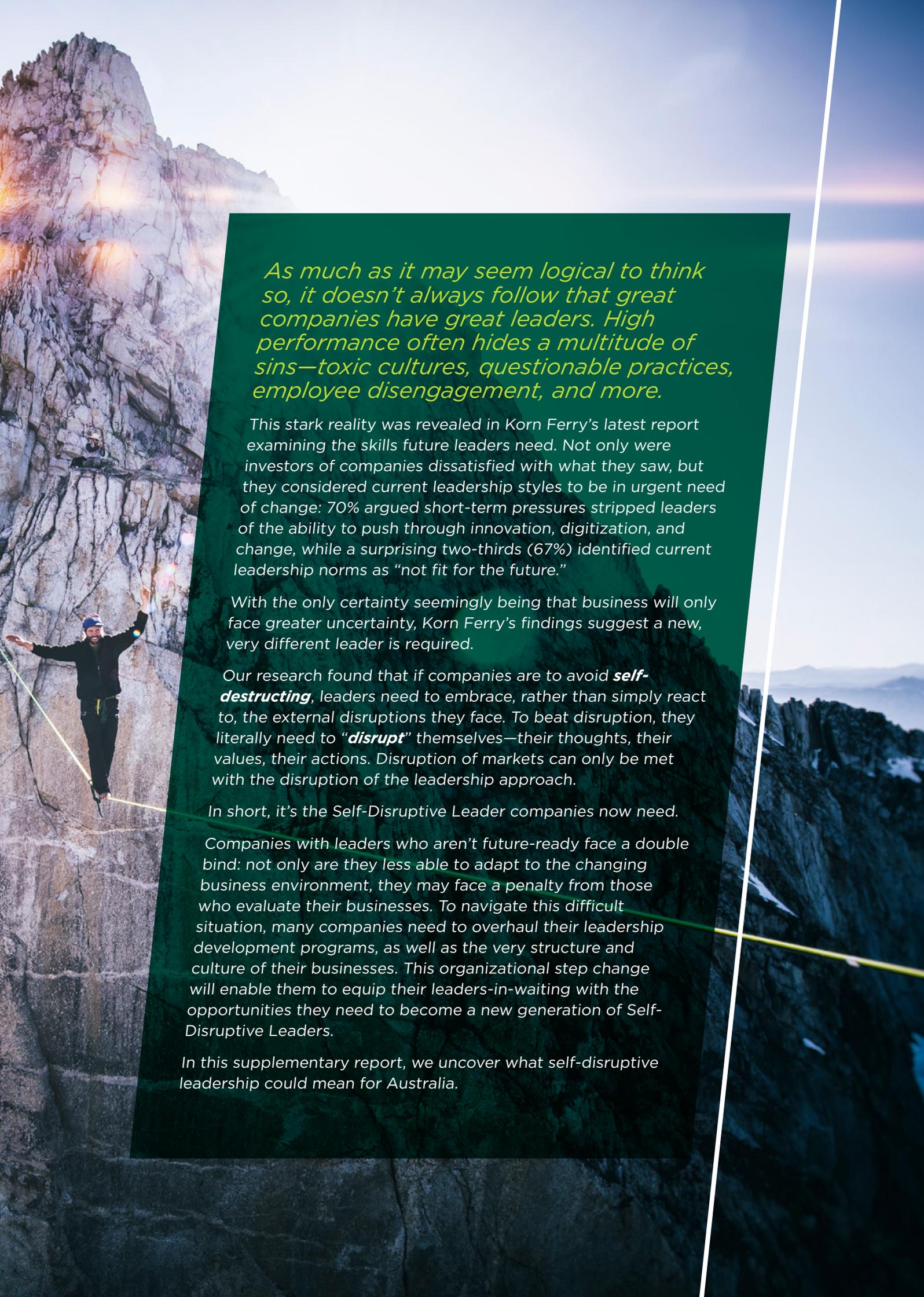
**THE SELF-  
DISRUPTIVE  
LEADER**  
**MARKET REPORT:  
AUSTRALIA**

The Self-Disruptive Leader is part of Korn Ferry's three-year examination of the transforming and disrupted Future of Work





***Leadership  
will make  
or break  
businesses.***



*As much as it may seem logical to think so, it doesn't always follow that great companies have great leaders. High performance often hides a multitude of sins—toxic cultures, questionable practices, employee disengagement, and more.*

This stark reality was revealed in Korn Ferry's latest report examining the skills future leaders need. Not only were investors of companies dissatisfied with what they saw, but they considered current leadership styles to be in urgent need of change: 70% argued short-term pressures stripped leaders of the ability to push through innovation, digitization, and change, while a surprising two-thirds (67%) identified current leadership norms as "not fit for the future."

With the only certainty seemingly being that business will only face greater uncertainty, Korn Ferry's findings suggest a new, very different leader is required.

Our research found that if companies are to avoid **self-destructing**, leaders need to embrace, rather than simply react to, the external disruptions they face. To beat disruption, they literally need to "**disrupt**" themselves—their thoughts, their values, their actions. Disruption of markets can only be met with the disruption of the leadership approach.

In short, it's the Self-Disruptive Leader companies now need.

Companies with leaders who aren't future-ready face a double bind: not only are they less able to adapt to the changing business environment, they may face a penalty from those who evaluate their businesses. To navigate this difficult situation, many companies need to overhaul their leadership development programs, as well as the very structure and culture of their businesses. This organizational step change will enable them to equip their leaders-in-waiting with the opportunities they need to become a new generation of Self-Disruptive Leaders.

In this supplementary report, we uncover what self-disruptive leadership could mean for Australia.

## Investors call for a new model of leadership.

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The combined impact of disruptive global megatrends has forced organizations to evolve rapidly—sometimes frantically—thereby making leadership crucial to their continued success. Competent leaders are even more vital in a complex and continually evolving ecosystem. Companies that fail to satisfy the market that they have the right people at the top risk dwindling investment.

And yet our research shows that only 15% of today's leaders can be considered self-disruptors.

There is an urgent need to develop a pipeline of future-ready leaders today. Investors and analysts in Australia rate talent as very important across enterprises, but especially at the top: 88% cite an exceptional CEO as critical to an organization's success. Meanwhile, 76% of investors say the need for transformation is going to make leadership more important to company performance within the next three years.

But the demand for this strong, innovative drive isn't confined to one individual at the top: investors want leadership strength across the C-suite and beyond. In Australia, 70% of respondents cited boards of directors as crucial to corporate performance, with 82% demanding top skills and capacities in the senior leadership team.

### No more business as usual.

Investors in Australia see the squeeze on the companies they rate and invest in: 86% believe these companies are confronting disruptive challenges, and 64% believe companies need to deliver some transformational change.

Technology is compounding organizations' stresses, as it allows changes in one industry to swamp others—new competitors now emerge from anywhere. Tech companies now constitute the six largest companies in the world, and the expansion of this sector's horizons seems boundless. Constant tech-related shake-ups make strategy planning a real challenge: 70% of Australian investors say it is harder to forecast threats when competition can come from anywhere. This has led 56% of investors to value future vision and orientation over past performance. In fact, globally, a company's financial performance and earnings growth is now the least compelling factor for those making investment decisions.

Instead, Australian investors want organizations to launch into a major reconsideration and transformation of their practices on talent and leadership.

But exactly how do organizations get from here to tomorrow, and how do they identify, attract, develop, retain, promote, and expand the number of leaders they must have to succeed in the future of work?



# The market context for the Self-Disruptive Leader.

**64%**

Australian investors who believe that traditional and legacy leadership will not be fit for the future.

**62%**

Australian investors who said they'd give leaders increased financial scope to make the changes necessary to bring their businesses in line with the future.

**64%**

Australian investors who said the pressure for short-term performance works against leaders' ability to deliver innovation, digitization, and change.

**60%**

Australian investors who said they would give leaders more time to effect major change.

## Introducing the “Self-Disruptive Leader.”

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Models of good leadership are often based on replicating the characteristics and capabilities that have succeeded in the past. But while many of these qualities are important, this approach neglects the importance of the future. In a world characterized by rapid change, yesterday’s paradigms risk becoming redundant, or even harmful. Predicting exactly what the future will require is an impossible task, so leaders instead must equip themselves with a strong portfolio of future-oriented and change-ready skills in order to keep responding to fluctuating market demands with dynamism and insight.

We call these adaptive change-makers “Self-Disruptive Leaders.” Today’s business environment is characterized by rapidly changing strategies, business model innovation, and operational transformation. While leaders trapped in yesterday’s mindset often struggle to find their place and voice in this new business world, Self-Disruptive Leaders are highly learning agile, self-aware, emotionally and socially intelligent, purpose-driven, and assured but humble. They proactively modify their own methods and attitudes, enabling them to keep pace with the rapidly transforming environments that threaten slower-moving peers. Flexible mindsets at the top permeate throughout these businesses and enable every individual to navigate change and succeed in a shifting landscape. Leaders who make their teams dependent block growth; rather, those who can get organizations behind their vision and then empower others to execute on it are well-positioned to achieve.





The qualities that differentiate the Self-Disruptive Leader can be summarized by the ADAPT dimensions:

# A

**Anticipate:** Demonstrate contextual intelligence to make quick judgments and create opportunities; focus on the societal needs that the organization wants to serve; provide a direction to unify collective efforts even among disoriented environments.

# D

**Drive:** Energize people by fostering a sense of purpose; manage the mental and physical energy of themselves and others; nurture a positive environment to keep people hopeful, optimistic, and intrinsically motivated.

# A

**Accelerate:** Manage the flow of knowledge to produce constant innovation and desired business outcomes; use agile processes, quick prototyping, and iterative approaches to rapidly implement and commercialize ideas.

# P

**Partner:** Connect and form partnerships across increasingly permeable functional and organizational boundaries; enable the exchange of ideas; combine complementary capabilities to enable high performance.

# T

**Trust:** Form a new relationship between the organization and the individual that centers on mutual growth; integrate diverse perspectives and values; help individuals to uncover their sense of purpose and facilitate them in providing their maximum contribution.

## How we uncovered the Self-Disruptive Leader.

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By analyzing the leadership profiles of 150,000 leaders from the Korn Ferry Institute's proprietary data, the study uncovered the five ADAPT qualities of effective, future-focused leadership—qualities which correlate with a country's ability to innovate, according to the Global Innovation Index, as well as with a company's likelihood of being an acclaimed brand. Additionally, the study uses opinion research from 795 investors and analysts to model the gap (in 18 key global markets) between the current supply of these high-performance qualities and the market's demand for them, to reveal just how wide leadership skills shortages are globally and by market. (For more information on the methodology or to download the full Self-Disruptive Leader global report, please visit: [kornferry.com/self-disrupt](https://kornferry.com/self-disrupt).)



An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Sydney, Australia, featuring several tall skyscrapers and a dense urban area. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green rectangle that contains the text. The background image is slightly blurred and has a dark, moody color palette.

## What does self-disruptive leadership mean for Australia?

*Like their counterparts in other countries, Australian organizations are now operating in a highly disrupted and ambiguous environment. However, Australia's proximity to and connectedness with fast-growing, hyper-innovative markets like China and Southeast Asia mean that many industries are being disrupted at an incredible pace. In addition, Australia often serves as a test market where global organizations try new and innovative ideas and solutions in a relatively small and controlled environment. The recent Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation, and Financial Services Industry has also shone a spotlight on the need for Australian organizations—even outside the sector—to disrupt their governance, culture, and leadership to respond to rapidly changing investor and customer expectations.*

**Stephen Johnston, Senior Client Partner, Australia, Korn Ferry**

## The current state in Australia.

In Australia, investors on average believe that only 26% of all leaders in the country are equipped to lead future businesses. This number is not surprising, as many Australian organizations are starting to realize that the traditional leadership model of consistency, control, and closure, which has served us well for the last few decades, will not support the agile teams and organizations needed for future success. Some of the more progressive organizations are starting to use a very different lens when looking at leadership development, with much more focus on what's really needed from an attitude and mindset perspective as opposed to the more traditional focus on track record.

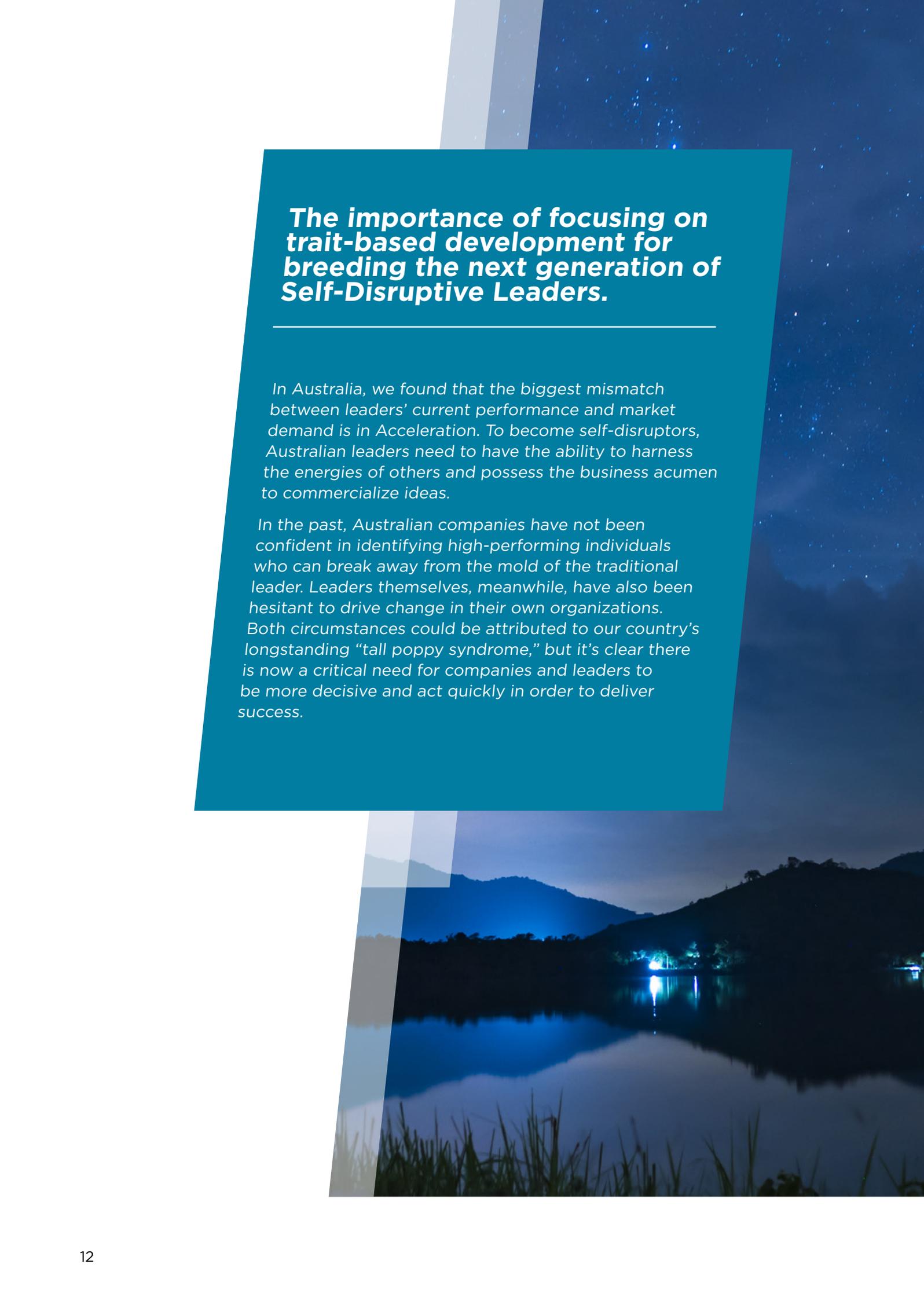
## What Australia has, what Australia wants.

Although there is global demand for all aspects of self-disruptive behavior in leaders, each market has different strengths and weaknesses in its current stock. What's more, investors in different markets have distinctive priorities when it comes to what they want most from leaders. As a result, the greatest skill shortfall varies in different places, and leaders in each economy need to focus on a different ADAPT dimension to satisfy market demand.

There's a significant mismatch between what investors want most and what leaders are good at. Investors in Australia perceive the urgency and recognize the need for **Acceleration**. But this is the area where current leaders are relatively weak. The area where investors and leaders are most aligned, though, is on **Drive**. Australian investors highlight the importance of employee motivation and energy. Generally, leaders are able to meet this expectation.

## The gap between leaders' abilities and market expectations.





## **The importance of focusing on trait-based development for breeding the next generation of Self-Disruptive Leaders.**

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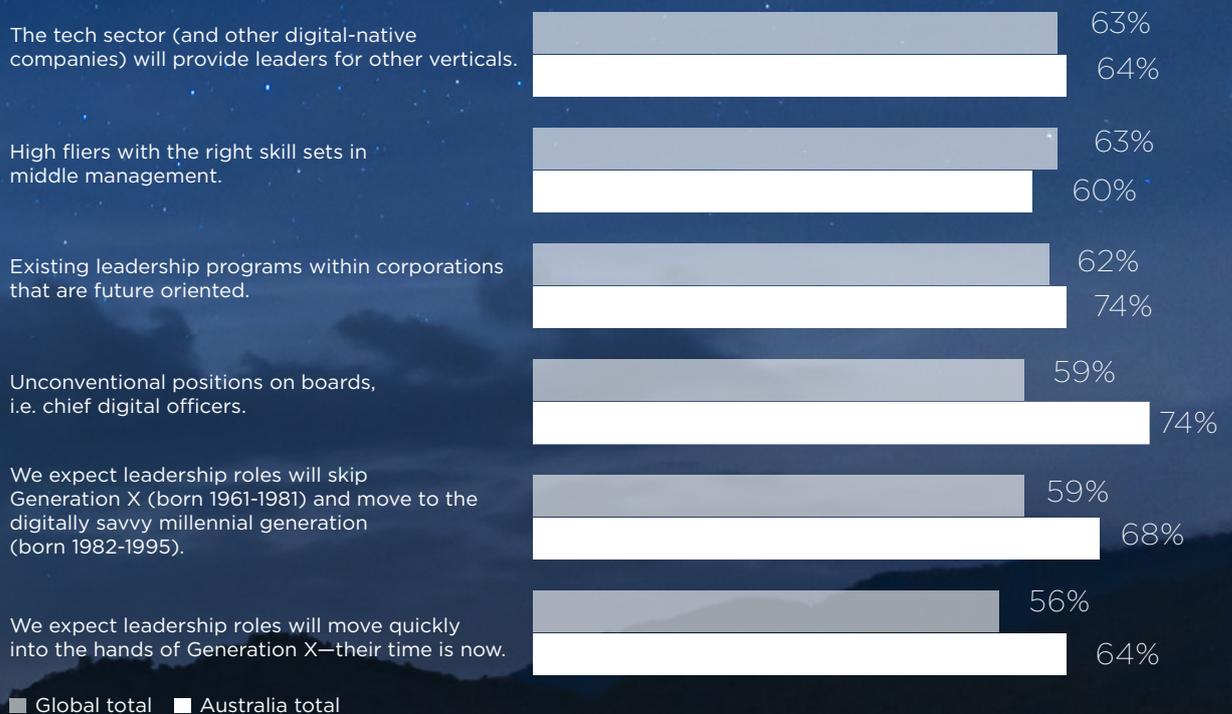
*In Australia, we found that the biggest mismatch between leaders' current performance and market demand is in Acceleration. To become self-disruptors, Australian leaders need to have the ability to harness the energies of others and possess the business acumen to commercialize ideas.*

*In the past, Australian companies have not been confident in identifying high-performing individuals who can break away from the mold of the traditional leader. Leaders themselves, meanwhile, have also been hesitant to drive change in their own organizations. Both circumstances could be attributed to our country's longstanding "tall poppy syndrome," but it's clear there is now a critical need for companies and leaders to be more decisive and act quickly in order to deliver success.*

# Where will Self-Disruptive Leaders come from in the future?

Many already occupy lower-level roles in their companies. To make the most of this talent pool, any individuals with potential must be allowed to test their aptitude at a higher leadership role. They need exposure and guidance in dealing with executive job functions such as enterprise value, profit and loss, balance sheets, and external stakeholders. To become leaders, they must circulate throughout an organization to stimulate their minds, learn new skills, experience different ways of working, and build important relationships with colleagues of many different backgrounds, experiences, and capacities.

## Investors view on where Self-Disruptive Leaders will come from:



*In Australia, an overwhelming number of investors—74% to be exact—believe Self-Disruptive Leaders are in unconventional positions on boards (think chief digital officers).*

## Rediscovering existing potential.

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Self-Disruptive Leaders won't be found using well-worn practices. Instead, organizations will need to think about talent as a system if they want to tackle this complex and multilateral issue. Recruitment, compensation, training, development, and succession planning may need a full revamp to ensure that organizations widen and maintain a flow of diverse talent, especially of hard-to-find Self-Disruptive Leaders. In beginning to develop this system, businesses should focus on three key points:

- **Develop new mindsets.** Traditional leadership development focuses on skills and behaviors, but this needs to be supplemented with mindset development to successfully advance new Self-Disruptive Leaders.
- **Open up leadership development opportunities.** Leadership development must become available to more people. In the past, it often has been elitist and focused on certain individuals; it needs to move toward a collective model that empowers everyone in a company to develop their leadership capabilities.
- **Foster always-on development.** Organizations need to facilitate always-on development not only by providing learning opportunities, but by helping busy employees navigate training easily and rewarding them for learning. Simultaneously, individuals at all levels need to take ownership of their own development. Together, this will build an employment contract built on mutual growth.

Although these changes may seem daunting to current executives and directors, companies must act with urgency to put these structures in place. This evolution matters: the market already knows that companies need to do more to help tomorrow's Self-Disruptive Leaders climb up through the business, with 63% of investors and analysts globally saying high fliers with the right skills and capacities in middle management will be vital in the future of work.





## The final word.

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Traditional training routes aren't equipped to solve the leadership crisis, often producing outmoded mindsets that can't keep up with the rate of change. Instead, a revolution in how companies develop leaders is vital for closing the leadership pipeline gap.

To capitalize on an increasingly disruptive world, companies must accelerate their identification, recruitment, retention, development, and promotion of leaders with self-disruptive potential at all levels of the business. Organizations must develop a culture that empowers everyone within them to challenge their own thinking and disrupt themselves.

This final point underpins the solution to the leadership crisis: leadership can no longer be isolated and inscrutable. By cascading ADAPT proficiencies throughout the organization, companies will develop a self-perpetuating ecosystem of leaders, ready for whatever the future of work brings.

For more information on self-disruptive leadership in Australia and how to prepare for it, contact:

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To download a full copy of the global Self-Disruptive Leader report please visit: [kornferry.com/self-disrupt](http://kornferry.com/self-disrupt).



## About Korn Ferry

*Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We help clients synchronize strategy and talent to drive superior performance. We work with organizations to design their structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people to bring their strategy to life. And we advise them on how to reward, develop, and motivate their people.*