

APL2026 - Exploring Rigour with Compassion

Advanced Programme for Leaders 2026: Preparing Assessment Leaders for Rigour and Credibility in TBEM Assessments

The Advanced Programme for Leaders (APL2026) brought together Team Leaders, Deputy Team Leaders, Process Consultants and senior TBExG leaders from across the Tata group to prepare for the upcoming TBEM (Tata Business Excellence Model) assessment cycle. Held from January 21–23, 2026, at Taj Ganga Kutir, Raichak, the programme focused on strengthening assessment rigour, judgement and leadership capability, while reflecting on the role of behaviour and compassion in enhancing assessment credibility.

Grounding the Programme

The programme opened with a welcome address by Sanjeev Singh, Vice President and Head, TBExG, who underlined the role of TBEM as a catalyst for stronger organisations. He emphasised that assessment credibility rests on integrity, discipline, and the ability to engage leaders with clarity and respect. Highlighting areas such as safety, customer experience, data, and digital leadership, Sanjeev reminded participants of their responsibility as custodians of the Tata ethos. Well-conducted assessments, he noted, create value by guiding leaders toward stronger priorities and better decisions.

Leading with Emotional Intelligence

Dr Mahesh Deshmukh, PhD, MCC, led a session on the interplay between rational analysis and emotional awareness. Through discussion and demonstration, he illustrated how emotionally intelligent assessors make sharper judgments, stay centered amid ambiguity, and build trust with leaders, assessee company colleagues and team members during TBEM assessments. His session emphasised awareness, composure, and empathy as essential capabilities for assessors, especially when teams are working through complex conversations and high-stakes evidence. It was a strong reminder that the quality of questioning is inseparable from the quality of listening.

Strengthening Leadership Cohorts

Loveleen Mishra, Head – Competency Development, TBExG, welcomed and guided the new APL participants, echoing how leadership disciplines such as clarity, listening, self-regulation, and presence are foundational to assessment credibility. Her remarks reinforced one important truth: our behaviour often speaks louder than our frameworks.

The evening closed with warm interpersonal exchanges, setting the stage for two days of immersive learning at APL2026.

Reflections from the 2025 Assessment Cycle

Sayantana Roy, General Manager, TBExG presented TBEM Assessments 2025—Reflections and Imperatives. He connected learning from the previous cycle to the broader leadership direction seen across recent Group forums. He also spoke about the realities of the 2025 Assessment season: increasing complexity in company contexts, changing expectations, and the need for assessment teams to continue to sharpen business orientation and insight quality.

The reflections reminded attendees that rigour is a journey, not a milestone.

Evolving TBEM 2.0

Devraj Chatteraj, General Manager, TBExG, and Tanya Rego, Deputy General Manager, TBExG, outlined how TBEM 2.0 is being strengthened through deeper, context-specific questions across B2B and B2C customer contexts, manufacturing and service operations, and values-led people and culture dimensions. Importantly, the emphasis was not 'more questions', but 'deeper questions' designed to enhance understanding, reduce variability, and enable a more progressive evaluation approach. Tanya also walked the group through how NERDs are becoming sharper and more specific, especially in customer-related insights and complaint management.

MentorSpeak: 'Rigour with Compassion'

In one of the most impactful sessions of APL2026, Koushik Chatterjee, Executive Director and CFO, Tata Steel, spoke about maintaining uncompromising standards while bringing empathy, curiosity, and respect into assessment conversations. He described assessments as a

reflective process, not an audit, and not a test. He cautioned against 'light-touch' approaches that can create complacency and urged teams to strengthen evidence-based conversations. A powerful thread in his session was the importance of risk orientation, how organisations manage risk, how maturity shows up in interlocks between enterprise risk radar and ground-level action, and how assessors can bring an outside-in view that adds real value.

Calibrating Key Themes with Scores

A high-impact working segment followed, where Abhijit Nanoti, Managing Director, JCAPCPL, Jayakrishnan Nair, DGM - Strategy and Business Transformation, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, and Siddharth Bhatt, General Manager, TBExG, led a session on calibrating key-theme-led feedback with the final score. The session reinforced that key themes should be written as meaningful statements (not labels), anchored in key results, and supported by clear stoppers backed by evidence. They emphasised the role of critical systems analysis to strengthen objectivity, and highlighted the discipline required to make narrative and scoring feel like a single, coherent story in TBEM Assessments.

From Dilemma to Direction

This interactive segment led by Deepak Deshpande, Vice President, TBExG, encouraged teams to debate real-world dilemmas: rigour vs empathy, unified team voice vs individual expertise, pre-site visits vs effort optimisation, and evolving roles of Deputy Leaders and External Assessment Champions. The breakout session teams led various discussions on topics which were practical, energetic, and grounded in assessment experience.

Data Privacy in TBEM Assessments

Sonie Saran, Head Corporate Business Excellence, TCS, Ankur Gupta, Head of Corporate Affairs & Growth, MENA, Tata Sons, and Deep Seth, General Manager, TBExG, addressed a critical ask of modern assessments: integrating privacy-by-design. They explained the contradictions companies face—data minimisation vs insight depth, access vs confidentiality—and introduced ways to protect sensitive information without weakening analysis.

Assessors' Guidelines

Tarun George, CEO, Tata Insights & Quants, Sudipta Marjit, Group CHRO, Head of Business Excellence and Office of Strategic Management, Chief Ethics Counsellor and Corporate Communications, Tata AutoComp Systems, and Remya Mudliar, Senior Manager, TBExG, introduced the proposed Assessors' Guidelines. The discussion covered essential behavioral expectations including integrity, cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, fairness, and professionalism, supported by examples on what to avoid and what to reinforce. The session helped participants reflect on how behaviour directly shapes the credibility of TBEM.

The day concluded with a heartfelt 'Beyond Business' tribute by Subhrajit Basu, Assistant Vice President, TBExG, celebrating the superannuating leaders', their relentless contributions over the years and the shared identity of the TBEM assessor community. A warm celebration of contribution and community reminded everyone that excellence is a shared legacy built by great people who choose to serve the TBEM movement year after year. Team Leaders K R Venkatadri, Ratul Neogi and Uttam Soni were felicitated in this edition of APL.

Deepening Inquiry and Insight

The final day opened with a recap by Namrata Basnet, Senior Manager, TBExG. An experiential session on key theme-led Lines of Inquiry (LoI) was presented by Vinod Kumar, Assistant Vice President, TBExG and Dhanalakshmi Kollipara, Deputy General Manager, TBExG. The session helped participants understand how high-quality LoIs shape the depth of an assessment. They demonstrated how questions must flow from result patterns, hypotheses, evidence gaps, and criteria expectations. The focus was on moving beyond broad questioning into structured enquiry so that site conversations become sharper, more contextual, and more revealing.

P. J. Nath, MD & CEO, NELCO, spoke candidly about what senior leaders look for in TBEM feedback, particularly during organisational inflection points. He highlighted how leaders can get 'blindsided' in day-to-day operations, and how assessments help reveal strategic blind spots through objective analysis and root-cause thinking. His core ask was clear: insights must be actionable and forward-looking, and assessments should help leaders understand not only what is happening, but why it is happening.

Sunil D'Souza, Managing Director and CEO, Tata Consumer Products, emphasised that TBEM is not merely an evaluation exercise, but a powerful transformational tool. He outlined eight clear expectations from TBEM assessments:

1. Provide an unbiased, outside-in view of organisational performance to surface blind spots.

2. Deliver clear, actionable insights, moving beyond diagnosis to prioritised actions.
3. Assess the translation of strategy into execution across levels of the organisation.
4. Evaluate future readiness, including AI, sustainability, and supply-chain resilience.
5. Engage with empathy and curiosity, while challenging constructively and objectively.
6. Create a positive and energising assessment experience through clear and focused feedback.
7. Build internal leadership capability and strengthen cross-functional collaboration and thinking.
8. Enable sharp prioritisation by clearly identifying the most critical strengths and performance blockers.

APL 2026 closed with a shared conviction that the next phase of TBEM assessments must continue to elevate rigour, anchored in compassion, credibility and value creation.