

REAL  
LEADERS

# The Unvarnished Truth

First-hand insight from leaders  
dealing with the reality of  
leadership in 2026

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& associates



## Foreword

**REAL LEADERS 2026: The Unvarnished Truth Leadership has never been more visible. Or more misunderstood.**

On the surface, leadership is still described in familiar terms: clarity, strategy, and execution backed up by confident decision-making. But behind the title, the reality is shifting.

Each year, through our Real Leaders programme, I speak directly with senior leaders operating across multiple sectors and contexts. The intention is to understand what leadership actually feels like now - not in theory, but in practice.

The 2026 conversations have been designed to explore the pressures leaders are currently experiencing.

- How decisions are made when clarity is limited.
- What it really means to lead when “it’s all about the people” – recruiting for the vision, retaining for the future and inspiring others to deliver on expectations and aspirations.
- How leaders are managing increasingly complex, intergenerational workforces.
- Where, and how, do they access both personal and professional support, and what still feels out of reach?
- And what are the expectations of leadership that feel unrealistic, but are rarely said out loud?

By evolving the questions each year, this work is designed to generate fresh insights rather than repeat familiar observations. Because the context in which leaders operate is not static.

It has grown markedly more complex, with an expanding legislative and regulatory burden, intensifying commercial pressures driven by geopolitical instability, and a landscape increasingly defined by uncertainty, ambiguity, and competing stakeholder expectations.

What emerged from these conversations in 2026 is a pattern that shows leadership demands more interpersonal awareness, greater anticipation of interdependencies within the system and second-order consequences, and much more from the individual behind the role, both personally and professionally.

This report brings together those lived experiences honestly and directly. It creates a clearer understanding of what leadership now demands, and what is needed to sustain it. Because if we don’t properly understand what leadership actually feels like, we cannot meaningfully support the people responsible for delivering it.

And that is where this work matters.

It is intended to offer insights that resonate with leaders themselves and to provide a more grounded perspective for those responsible for supporting them, particularly HR and organisational leaders who develop and sustain their senior teams.

Ultimately, **Real Leaders: The Unvarnished Truth** is about creating more honest conversations. Because when we listen to the lived experience of leaders, we move beyond expectations and assumptions and get closer to understanding what truly enables leadership to work.

And in that space, between expectation and reality, support becomes critical by creating the conditions for leaders to think independently, navigate complexity with confidence, and make better, more informed decisions. That is where this work becomes critical. As a strategic space for leadership to work well and to sustain itself within the demands of today’s environment.



## About Sara

Sara Barrie is an award-winning, master-credentialed coach with more than a decade of global coaching experience, following a successful executive career working with some of the world’s foremost organisations. She now partners with C-suite leaders, boards and senior teams across FTSE and Fortune-listed companies, entrepreneurial businesses and in the third sector. Known for her commercial edge and insight-driven approach, she coaches leaders to elevate performance and deliver real, sustained impact.



## About this survey

This survey was conducted in early 2026 with a group of senior leaders working across a range of sectors and disciplines in the UK, including professional services, financial services, housing and property development, manufacturing, logistics and consumer goods organisations. Participants hold executive and leadership roles with responsibility for strategy, people and organisational performance. The insights shared reflect their lived experience of leading in complex, high-pressure environments, offering a current and grounded perspective on the realities of leadership today.



## The current conditions of leadership

Leadership in 2026 is operating against a backdrop of continuous disruption. Economic instability, geopolitical conflict, rapid technological acceleration, regulatory scrutiny, reputational exposure and shifting workforce expectations are no longer isolated pressures. They are overlapping realities shaping leadership every day.

As one leader states:

***“Change is even more constant and at times relentless.”***

Leaders are now expected to deliver commercial performance in conditions that are often volatile, uncertain and emotionally demanding.

At the same time, the social contract around work itself is changing.

Hybrid and remote working have altered connection, culture and how organisations experience leadership day to day. Multi-generational workforces bring fundamentally different expectations around communication, progression, flexibility, wellbeing and boundaries. The relationship many people now have with work is different from what it was even five years ago.

Artificial intelligence is simultaneously creating opportunity, uncertainty and pressure to adapt at an unprecedented pace. Leaders are expected to understand, adopt and respond to rapidly evolving technologies whilst also managing the human impact of that change across their organisations.

Public scrutiny is higher, and organisational transparency is unavoidable. The pace of external change continues to accelerate. And the expectation that leaders remain resilient, responsive, and emotionally intelligent has not diminished.

It has intensified.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of the 2026 Real Leaders insight was not simply to explore leadership theory, but to understand the lived experience of leadership now. Not the idealised version but the reality in unvarnished truth.


What emerged was not a picture of leadership becoming harder in a traditional sense, but a role becoming heavier, more continuous and more psychologically demanding. The challenge for many leaders is no longer capability alone. It is the capacity to deploy that capability consistently and the sustainability to do so over time, without cost to themselves or those around them.

## Section 1: The shift in leadership and what the wider data is telling us

Across global research, there is a growing consensus that the role of leadership is becoming more complex, more demanding, and more difficult to sustain.

Large-scale studies point to a shift not just in the volume of work leaders are managing but in the nature of the role itself.

According to Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace, leaders are significantly more likely than those they lead to experience negative day-to-day emotions:

 +7 points more likely to experience **stress**

 +12 points **anger**

 +11 points **sadness**

 +10 points **loneliness**

Historically, leaders have reported higher engagement levels than non-managers.

However, recent Gallup<sup>1</sup> data suggests that manager engagement is now declining sharply, reflecting the growing pressure and complexity of modern leadership.

Research also highlights increasing pressure around sustainability.

Deloitte<sup>2</sup> research highlights growing concern around leadership sustainability, with many C-suite leaders reporting they are considering roles that better support their well-being.

This raises an important question around the long-term viability of leadership as it is currently defined.

At the same time, the way leaders spend their time has shifted.

McKinsey<sup>3</sup> research, as well as others, indicates that senior leaders now spend over 70% of their time in meetings. This directly impacts a critical aspect of leadership: the ability to think independently away from echo chambers and groupthink, and having the opportunity:

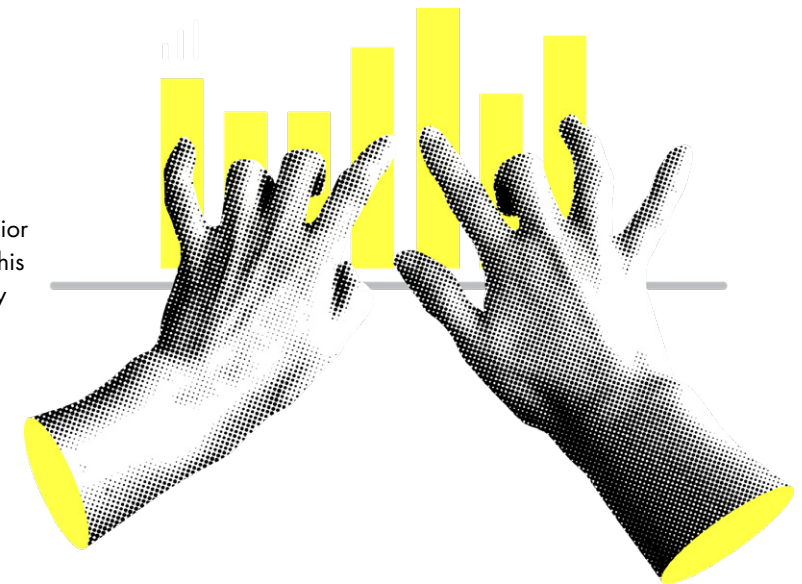
- To step back.
- To interpret.
- To make considered decisions.

Within the UK context, similar patterns are emerging.

CIPD data highlights increasing work intensity, alongside expanding expectations placed on leaders to deliver across:

- Performance
- Culture
- Well-being.

Often simultaneously.



1. Gallup: State of the Global Workplace report 2026

2. Deloitte: Work Wellbeing Survey / C-Suite Wellbeing Research. Deloitte Insights, 2025.

3. McKinsey & Company: The State of Organisations 2023 / The new leadership equation McKinsey & Company, 2023–2025.

## A changing role

Taken together, this points to a broader shift in the role:

- More continuous, with fewer natural breaks or recovery points
- More complex, with competing and often conflicting demands
- More personally demanding, as well as professionally accountable.

Leadership is increasingly taking place in environments where certainty is limited, expectations are expanding, and the pace of change often outstrips the ability to fully process it.

What leaders are being asked to absorb today would previously have been experienced as multiple separate organisational challenges. Now they exist simultaneously.

The expectation is no longer simply to deliver results.

Leaders are now dealing with:

- geopolitical instability and economic uncertainty
- rapidly changing trading conditions
- increasing regulatory and governance demands
- changing societal expectations
- heightened reputational risk and public scrutiny
- workforce fatigue and burnout
- rising mental health pressures
- and shifting expectations from a multi-generational workforce with fundamentally different relationships to work, authority and progression.

At the same time, the acceleration of AI and automation is reshaping both operational delivery and leadership expectations.

For many organisations, AI presents an enormous opportunity. But it also creates uncertainty, pressure to adapt quickly, and questions around capability, trust, ethics and workforce impact.

The result is a role that is not only more operationally complex but psychologically heavier.

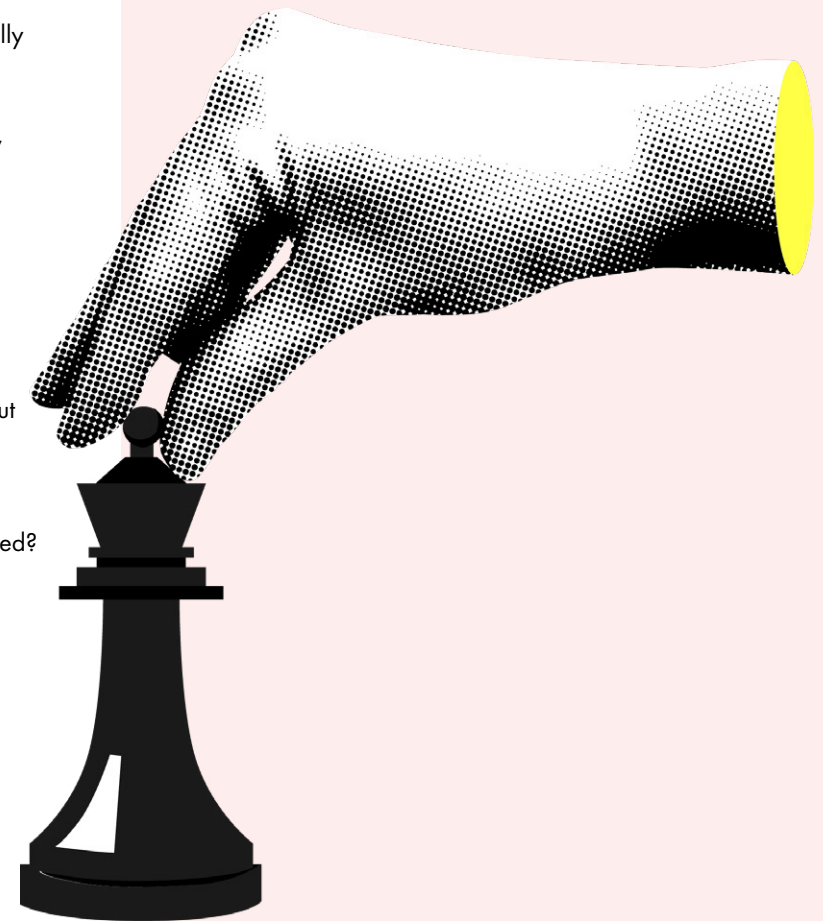
It is about dealing with ambiguity, leading people, delivering performance, and remaining resilient, often at the same time.

## The question this raises

This external data provides a clear direction of travel. But it also raises an important question about how leadership is actually experienced by those doing the role day to day.

What does that mean for how leaders are supported?

And if leadership is changing at this level, then understanding the lived experience of leaders becomes critical.



## Section 2: The reality of leadership in 2026

### 1. Pressure & control

*“There is a constant tension between what I want to do and what I can do. That gap is where the pressure lives.”*

Leadership pressure is no longer just about volume. It sits in the tension between intent and constraint.

Across the 2026 responses, leaders consistently describe operating in environments where expectations continue to rise, their sense-making and meaning-making skills are stretched, and their ability to influence outcomes remains, at times, scarce.

As the same leader goes on to explain, *“Demand continues to grow, resources are finite, and expectations...are rightly high.”*

And as another leader details:

*“None of it is within my control and all myself and my team can do is continue to provide a good service... in uncertain times.”*

This is the reality many leaders are navigating.

They are making decisions knowing:

- they cannot meet every expectation
- they do not control every variable
- and yet they remain accountable for the outcome.

This creates a different kind of pressure which is more complex, more persistent and harder to resolve.

The pressure leaders describe is not simply operational. It is psychological.

It sits between accountability and control. Between commercial expectation and human reality. Between delivering short-term performance whilst trying to protect long-term sustainability for people, culture and the organisation.

As one leader reflects:

*“The time to manage well-being, ensure a good team culture and give each direct report the time that they need individually is a real challenge”.*

This is not pressure that resolves once a project is complete or a target is met. It is pressure embedded within the role itself.

Because the pressure is no longer just about what needs to be done. It is about what can be done within the constraints of the system, context and control.

#### What's changed?

Previously, pressure was often linked to workload, delivery, or performance targets. Something that could, at least in theory, be managed, prioritised, or resolved. What emerges from the 2026 insight is a shift in where that pressure sits.

It is increasingly shaped by:

- competing stakeholder expectations
- external volatility and uncertainty
- systemic constraints beyond the leader's direct influence.

As one leader reflects:

*“The economic balance within the world...none of it is within my control.”*

And another highlights the structural nature of the challenge:

*“Expectations...from residents, regulators, boards, and government—are high.”*

This reflects a broader movement away from contained, organisational pressure towards something more diffused, interconnected, and externally driven.

The result is a role that feels less predictable, and the unknown becomes ever more demanding.

#### What this means for leadership

Leadership has shifted from control to navigation. We're light-years away from the role of existing to remove pressure or resolve every constraint.

It is to operate effectively within the existing context, however fleeting that may be:

- To make long-term decisions without control in the short term.
- To balance competing demands with imperfect outcomes.
- To hold accountability in increasingly complex environments.

This requires a different risk orientation, with less certainty, increasingly nuanced judgement, and greater resilience in the face of imperfection.

And, perhaps most importantly, a recognition that constant pressure is no longer something to eliminate but something to lead through and an inevitable part of leadership.

## 2. Constant change

*“The reality is in our organisation we have changes continually made and the constant stage of change is now the new normal.”*

Change is no longer something leaders move through. It is a constant they operate within.

Across the 2026 responses, leaders consistently describe environments where transformation is not defined by programmes or phases, but by continuity.

As one leader reflects:

*“There is constant change in our organisation...to be constantly in a state of flux has become more and more challenging.”*

And another highlights how this is reshaping the role itself:

*“What’s harder now: sustained and accelerating pace and complexity...Day-to-day, I’m more deliberate about focus, clarity of priorities, and communicating the ‘why’ repeatedly.”*

Leaders describe a reality defined by overlapping demands, shifting priorities, and ongoing adaptation.

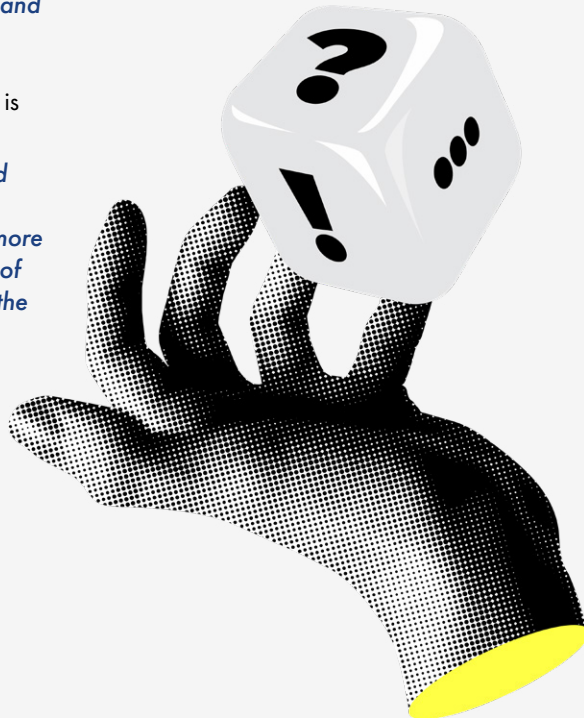
Where:

- change is continuous rather than contained
- priorities evolve before previous ones are embedded
- and stability is measured in days and weeks not months.

This creates a different kind of challenge, which is less about leading change and more about sustaining momentum within it.

As another leader frames it:

*“Our ability to plan isn’t lasting much longer than three weeks, never mind three months.”*



### What’s changed?

Historically, organisations moved through cycles. Periods of transformation followed by periods of consolidation. Change had a beginning, a middle, and an end.

What emerges from the 2026 insight is a breakdown of that pattern.

Leaders describe:

- continuous transformation
- external pressures
- and a sustained level of organisational flux.

As one leader explains:

*“Planning also feels harder when there seems to be a new crisis outside of our control every few months...Everything also feels so fragmented now.”*

And another reflects the cumulative effect:

*“Ongoing geopolitical tensions...increase uncertainty, which can quickly impact supply chains, pricing, and investment decisions.”*

This reflects a broader shift toward environments that are:

- less predictable
- more externally influenced
- and more difficult to stabilise.

The idea of organisational stability now feels increasingly temporary.

In many sectors, leaders are no longer navigating periods of change. They are leading inside permanent transition.

### What this means for leadership

Leadership is shifting from driving change to creating stability within it.

The role is no longer defined by the successful delivery of a change programme.

It is defined by the ability to:

- provide clarity when direction is still evolving
- maintain focus when priorities are competing
- and create a sense of stability when the environment itself is unstable.

This requires a different kind of leadership with less reliance on plans, more emphasis on judgement and greater attention to communication, alignment and pace.

Because when change becomes constant, certainty is no longer the anchor.

Leadership is.

And the role of the leader becomes not just to move the organisation forward but to create the conditions in which others can continue to operate effectively, despite the rapidly changing environment around them.

### 3. Always-on leadership

*“There is an expectation to be constantly available, highly responsive, and still deliver meaningful strategic value.”*

Leadership today is defined by a dual expectation - to be present and also to provide perspective.

Across the 2026 responses, leaders consistently describe a role that demands both immediate responsiveness and longer-term thinking. Often at the same time.

As one leader explains:

*“The volume of reporting, meetings and ‘noise’ can pull leaders away from the work that truly matters—thinking, leading, and supporting people.”*

And another reflects the practical impact of this shift:

*“There’s pressure to be everywhere all at once...as a result, I have to ruthlessly prioritise more often.”*

Leaders describe operating in a role where:

- responsiveness is expected in real time
- visibility is constant
- and the demand for strategic contribution has not reduced.

This creates a structural tension. Because the conditions that drive responsiveness are the same conditions that limit reflection.

There is an awareness that the always-on nature of the role has a clear link to morale and performance:

*“The day-to-day work experience for many people is massively shaped by the character, motivation, and actions of the CEO.”*

Digital connectivity has fundamentally altered the rhythm of leadership.

Leaders report operating across multiple channels, multiple stakeholder groups and often multiple crises simultaneously. The expectation to remain visible, responsive and emotionally available has increased significantly.

#### What’s changed?

In previous times, leadership roles allowed for a clearer distinction between operational activity and strategic thinking. Between work and home life. Time could be protected, and focus could be managed.

What emerges from the 2026 insight is a collapse of those boundaries. Leaders are now operating in environments where:

- digital connectivity creates continuous access
- decision cycles are shorter
- and expectations of availability are significantly higher.

As one leader highlights:

*“The assumption of 24/7 availability... creates a sense that leaders are never truly away.”*

And another reinforces the personal impact:

*“If I don’t manage my energy well...my team pick up on that...which impacts their performance and morale.”*

This reflects a broader shift toward leadership that is:

- more visible
- more immediate
- and more continuously observed.

The role is no longer bounded by time or space in the same way.

At the same time, the volume of information leaders are expected to absorb has accelerated.

Communication has become continuous.

And whilst technology has increased speed, it has not necessarily created more clarity.

#### What this means for leadership

Leadership is shifting from presence to discernment. The expectation is no longer simply to be available. It is to know where to direct focus and attention.

- What requires an immediate response that only I can do?
- What requires more considered thinking for the short term or the longer term?
- And what can—and should—be left or delegated?

This requires a different discipline. Not just managing time but managing focus.

Because in an always-on environment, the risk is not just burnout and overload. It is a dilution of energy, and without energy, very little can be achieved.

The ability to step back, prioritise and protect attention is no longer a preference.

It is a core leadership capability.



## 4. Loss of thinking space

*“The pace is relentless, but the real value now comes from stepping back, lifting the view, and focusing on the right issues rather than the most urgent ones.”*

Leadership has always required judgement and the ability to step back, to interpret and to decide what matters.

But across the 2026 responses, leaders consistently describe a growing tension between where they add value and how they are required to spend their time.

As the same leader goes on to explain:  
*“Protecting that thinking space is harder than ever, however it’s essential.”*

Time that would traditionally be used for reflection and strategic thinking is increasingly absorbed by:

- stepping down into the operational demands
- continuous, competing channels of communication
- and reactive decision-making.

The result is not simply less time. It is less space. And protecting that space has become vital.

*“I need to protect thinking time and be more intentional about energy – my own and my teams.”*



### What’s changed?

Strong leadership was previously predicated upon allowing for periods of perspective. Time to review, reflect and consider the direction of approach.

The 2026 insight shows a compression of that space.

Leaders describe:

- shorter decision cycles
- multiple channels of information and disinformation
- and limited opportunity to step back.

As one leader reflects on the structural nature of this shift:

*“Trying to get ahead... of the ever-evolving needs of our organisation.”*

This reflects a broader movement toward environments where urgency dominates attention, priorities shift quickly, and the space required for deeper thinking is radically reduced.

The challenge is no longer knowing what good leadership looks like. It is creating the conditions to practise it.

Leaders increasingly lack uninterrupted cognitive space to think independently. Space to process complexity before responding and space to move beyond operational

immediacy and focus on longer-term consequences, direction and risk.

Without that space, leadership can gradually become reactive rather than intentional.

And over time, that changes the quality of leadership itself.

### What this means for leadership

Leadership is shifting from time management to space creation. The role is no longer simply about allocating time effectively. It is about intentionally creating the capacity to think despite the demands of the environment.

- To step back from immediacy
- To focus on what matters, not just what is urgent
- To make decisions that are considered responses, not reactions.

Because without that time and space, leadership becomes increasingly driven by activity rather than judgement. And over time, that has a direct impact on clarity, decision quality and organisational direction

The ability to protect thinking space is not a luxury. It is a defining condition of effective leadership.

## 5. Emotional & personal cost

*“Yes, it can be lonely. Leadership creates distance... there’s also an unspoken expectation to stay strong for others, even when things are difficult.”*

Beyond the operational and strategic demands, leadership carries a personal weight that is less visible but no less significant.

Across the 2026 responses, leaders speak openly about the emotional dimension of the role. Not as an isolated experience, but as something embedded within it.

As one leader reflects:

*“Yes I do feel lonely at times. I lean on my close peers... it doesn’t fix anything but it is nice to feel understood.”*

And another highlights the tension more directly: *“There’s an unspoken expectation to stay strong for others, even when things are difficult.”*

Many leaders describe a role that requires:

- steadiness in the face of uncertainty
- visibility under pressure
- and consistency, regardless of personal impact.

Where:

- distance can be created by position
- support is not always easily accessible
- and vulnerability is often carefully managed.



### What’s changed?

The emotional component of leadership has always existed.

What emerges from the 2026 insight is a shift in both its intensity and its visibility.

Leaders are now expected to:

- support the well-being of others
- manage increasingly complex team dynamics
- and remain composed in environments defined by pressure, risk and uncertainty.

At the same time, the space for their own reflection, well-being and support has not expanded at the same pace.

As one leader describes:

*“When I’m depleted, my decision-making suffers, my patience shortens, and my ability to lead with empathy diminishes.”*

This reflects a growing tension between:

- the expectation to support others
- and the capacity to sustain oneself.

At the same time, many leaders are carrying pressures that extend beyond the organisation itself.

Financial uncertainty, wider societal anxiety, global instability and the emotional demands of modern life do not disappear when leaders enter work. Yet leadership often requires individuals to absorb complexity personally whilst remaining composed professionally.

The result is that many leaders are functioning in a near continuous state of responsibility without sufficient recovery, reflection or release.

*“It’s more important than ever to have boundaries from work so that you can look after your health and have the ability to be present and perform when you are at work.”*

### What this means for leadership

Leadership capability is increasingly assumed. The differentiator now is leadership capacity.

The ability to sustain judgement, energy and perspective over time, despite continuous pressure and complexity.

Because in today’s environment, leadership is no longer tested occasionally. It is tested continuously.

The question is no longer just whether leaders can perform. It is whether they can sustain that performance over time.

- To remain effective under continuous pressure
- To maintain clarity while carrying accountability
- To lead others without becoming depleted themselves.

Because the cost of leadership is no longer just measured in output. It is experienced in energy, resilience, and personal sustainability.

And without the conditions to manage that effectively, even the most capable and seasoned of leaders will begin to feel the impact and the cost.

## Section 3: Leadership sustainability

Across our 2026 Real Leaders insight, a consistent picture has emerged. Leadership is becoming:

 more continuous

 more complex

 more demanding of the individual behind the role

Pressure is no longer episodic. Change is no longer contained. Time to think is no longer protected. And the personal cost of leadership is increasingly visible.

Taken together, this points to a fundamental shift. The question is no longer how leaders are performing, but how they sustain performance over time without cost to themselves, their teams, or the organisation.

The role is stretching faster than it is being supported. The expectations placed on leaders have expanded significantly.

As one leader says:

*"I've learned that sustaining my energy is not optional; it's essential."*

At the same time, the conditions required to sustain that level of performance have not evolved at the same pace. This results in a growing imbalance.

The sustainability of leadership itself is becoming a strategic organisational risk.

Because when leadership becomes defined by continuous pressure, constant adaptation, emotional labour and reduced recovery time, the issue is no longer individual resilience alone. It becomes organisational capability.

And where leadership sustainability is not considered intentionally, organisations risk reduced decision quality, leadership fatigue, disengagement, cultural instability and ultimately the loss of experienced leaders altogether.

The issue is rarely leaders' capability. Many are highly capable of leading through complexity when given the right conditions in which to flourish. But the question is whether the system in which they operate enables them to remain effective over time.

### Why this matters for organisations

For organisations, this is not an individual issue. It is a leadership risk.

Because when leaders are required to operate continuously without sufficient space to think, reflect and reset:

- decision quality is affected
- clarity of direction reduces
- and the ability to lead others consistently becomes harder to sustain.

Over time, this has a direct impact on performance, culture and retention. And in an environment where leadership capability is critical, the ability to sustain that capability becomes a strategic priority.

### A different way of thinking about leadership support

If the nature of leadership has changed, then the way organisations support leaders must change with it.

Support can no longer be reactive or focused only on performance outcomes. It needs to reflect the reality of the role.

Leaders require:

- time to think and process complexity
- perspective beyond the immediate demands of the organisation
- challenge that sharpens decision-making
- and a consistent place to step back, reflect and reset.

### The human dimension of leadership

At the same time, as organisations become more digital, more data-driven and more complex, the human dimension of leadership becomes more, not less, important.

Sustaining these capabilities requires intention and it requires space.

### What this means now

Leadership is no longer just a role to be performed. It is a responsibility that must be sustained. And sustaining it requires a shift from focusing solely on what leaders deliver to also considering what enables them to deliver it well.

Because in today's environment, performance without sustainability is short-lived. And leadership without support is increasingly exposed.

## Section 4: The role of coaching in modern leadership

The insight from the Real Leaders survey is clear.

Leadership today is being carried out in conditions that are more complex, more demanding and less predictable than before.

Leaders are expected to operate continuously, make decisions with incomplete control, and sustain performance over time.

What is less visible but increasingly critical is how they do that well. Because the challenge is no longer capability alone. It is capacity, and the capacity to sustain it is increasingly scarce.

Across the data, one theme emerges consistently. Leaders are lacking the room to think clearly, process the complexity at pace, step back from immediacy and make considered decisions

Whilst there's no single intervention to solve the sustainability challenge, the right support depends on the individual, their context, and the organisation's maturity in executive development.

### Coaching as a strategic intervention

This is where Leaders report that coaching can play a critical role. Not as a corrective measure and not as a reactive support mechanism. But as a strategic resource within the wider leadership support system.

A space where leaders can:

- step out of the immediacy of the role
- test thinking and assumptions
- challenge perspective
- and reconnect with what matters.

In environments where complexity is high and clarity is limited, this becomes essential. Because leadership is not improved by doing more. It is strengthened by being better, relating better, and thinking better.

### Being in a leader's corner

Leadership, by its nature, creates distance. Expectations are high, and visibility is constant. Opportunities for open, unfiltered conversation can be limited.

Coaching provides something different. A space that sits outside the organisation but is directly connected to the challenges within it. A place where leaders can speak openly, explore uncertainty and work through decisions without bias and dependency.

In that sense, coaching is not simply development. It is support which is consistent, confidential and focused on enabling the leader to lead well.

As one leader shared:

*"If you're building something meaningful, don't underestimate the value of having someone in your corner who helps you reflect, grow and lead more intentionally."*

### Ensuring human leadership in a digital world

As organisations become more digital, more data-led and more complex, with artificial intelligence increasingly taking on the role of managing tasks, the human dimension of leadership and leading people becomes more important. Judgement, empathy and connection are not soft skills. As technology increasingly takes on transactional and operational tasks, the distinctly human dimensions of leadership become more valuable, not less.

- The ability to connect and build trust.
- To manage the ambiguity in rapidly changing contexts.
- To lead within emotion, tension and complexity.
- To make sense and meaning with ethical and nuanced decisions where there is no obvious answer.

These are the capabilities that increasingly define effective leadership in modern organisations.

And they require deliberate reflection, self-awareness and space to develop. They are the human and ethical capabilities that enable leaders to engage people and make decisions that hold over time.

Coaching, as well as mentoring for contextual intelligence and access to peer networks sharing experiences, all support the development of these capabilities, not through theory, but through application and expertise.

### Sustaining leadership over time

The role of coaching, ultimately, is not to provide answers. It is to create the conditions in which better answers can be found. To support leaders in:

- Retaining contextual intelligence
- Reframing for clarity
- Leading with confidence through complexity
- And sustaining performance.

Because in today's environment, leadership cannot rely on instinct alone. It requires space, perspective, nuance and ongoing reflection. And where those conditions are intentionally created, leadership is not only more effective and sustainable, but performance risk is also mitigated.

# REAL LEADERS

Thank you to all the Real Leaders for sharing their insights with radical candour.

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