

What Separates Leadership Teams **That Perform Under Pressure**

Periods of intensified pressure do not just test leadership judgement - they expose the strength of organisational alignment, coordination, and execution beneath it.

Executive Perspectives **Under Pressure**

Drawing on insights from **50 senior executives and board-level leaders** across complex GCC organisations representing billions in enterprise value and hundreds of thousands of employees, this report examines how pressure reshapes **leadership behaviour, coordination, and performance.**



The Pressure Shift

For many leadership teams, intensified pressure is layering onto existing operational demands - reshaping decision-making, coordination, and execution in real time. This is not simply more pressure. It is a compressed operating environment where existing weaknesses in ownership, alignment, and execution **become more visible**.

The Operating Environment

The Reality

Operational demands are increasingly reshaping decision-making, coordination, and execution in real time - requiring leadership teams to respond with greater speed and consistency.

98%

of leaders report increased pressure, signalling that sustained intensity is now reshaping how leadership teams operate

51%

cite growth targets as the primary source of pressure, reinforcing performance as the dominant driver

This reflects a shift in operating intensity, as leaders navigate rising expectations and increasing external complexity.

The Response

Leadership teams are accelerating decisions and centralising control to maintain responsiveness - but coordination and decision ownership do not always keep pace

34%

report decision ownership becoming increasingly concentrated across senior leadership teams

28%

report faster decision-making, increasing responsiveness but not always improving clarity or coordination

In response, leadership teams are compressing decision cycles and tightening control to maintain performance under pressure.

The Risk

The result is execution that becomes increasingly fragmented and harder to sustain as alignment and coordination struggle to keep up.

32%

report execution breakdowns under pressure, highlighting growing gaps in coordination and follow-through

51%

identify alignment as critical to sustaining performance under pressure, highlighting where many organisations begin to fragment

Despite increased responsiveness, many organisations continue to experience breakdowns in alignment, coordination, and execution stability.

What Changes Under Sustained Pressure: Leaders are responding to heightened pressure with greater speed and control. However, these shifts are straining coordination, narrowing ownership, and weakening execution consistency across the organisation. **Under pressure, organisations rarely slow down - they narrow.**

The Leadership Operating Model

Organisational performance under pressure depends less on intensity and more on a leadership team's ability to maintain clarity, alignment, decision quality, and execution discipline as organisational complexity increases.

Across the findings, four interconnected leadership disciplines emerged as critical to sustaining organisational effectiveness during periods of intensified pressure.

DEFINING THE SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP MODEL: A PRACTICAL OPERATING FRAMEWORK FOR MAINTAINING CLARITY, ALIGNMENT, DECISION QUALITY, AND EXECUTION DISCIPLINE WHEN PRESSURE INTENSIFIES.

01

Strategic Clarity

Leadership teams that sustain performance under pressure maintain strategic focus, reduce organisational noise, and align around a clearly defined set of priorities.

02

Leadership Alignment

High-performing leadership teams maintain alignment through coordinated decision-making, clear accountability, and consistent leadership behaviour under pressure.

03

Decision Velocity

The ability to make timely, coordinated decisions while maintaining alignment, execution consistency, and organisational clarity as pressure and operational demands intensify.

04

Execution Discipline

Sustained execution depends on maintaining coordination, accountability, and operational discipline as pressure and organisational complexity increase.

ORGANISATIONS THAT MAINTAIN THESE DISCIPLINES ARE BETTER POSITIONED TO SUSTAIN COORDINATION, PRIORITISATION, AND DISCIPLINED EXECUTION AS PRESSURE INTENSIFIES.

Left unaddressed, weaknesses in one discipline can begin to **destabilise the wider leadership system**. Teams that maintain these disciplines are better positioned to sustain coordination, prioritisation, and disciplined execution.

The Emerging Leadership Pattern

The findings suggest organisational performance depends less on intensity and more on how effectively leadership teams maintain coordination, clarity, and execution as complexity increases.

Faster decisions can create the appearance of progress while organisational coherence quietly weakens beneath the surface.

In response, leadership teams often centralise decision-making to regain control and reduce ambiguity. The risk is that speed improves at the top while ownership weakens across the wider organisation.

The Defining Tension

The **coordination gap** emerges when organisational speed increases faster than alignment and execution discipline.

01 Pressure Is Compressing Decision Cycles

Decision cycles are compressing across organisations. While this can improve responsiveness in the short term, many organisations are finding coordination, alignment, and execution discipline harder to sustain at the same pace.

02 Confidence Can Mask Operational Strain

Many leadership teams remain confident in their strategic direction, even as signs of execution fatigue begin to emerge. Over time, the gap between leadership confidence and organisational consistency becomes increasingly difficult to ignore.

03 Centralised Leadership Is Creating Coordination Bottlenecks

The more organisations rely on senior leadership intervention to maintain alignment and execution consistency, the more distributed ownership weakens - creating coordination bottlenecks across the organisation.

04 High-Performing Teams Sustain Alignment Under Pressure

The organisations sustaining performance most effectively are not necessarily moving faster. They are maintaining clearer priorities, stronger alignment, and more consistent execution as operational complexity increases.

The Reality Gap

Leadership confidence remains high - but the operating system beneath it is already under strain.

Confidence vs Reality

72% of leaders report being very confident in their leadership team's ability to perform under intensified pressure.

Yet many organisations report that performance is only sustainable in the short term, or already showing signs of strain.

The Hidden Tension

This creates a disconnect: leadership teams remain confident in their ability to navigate pressure, even as strain begins to emerge across the broader operating model.

Performance is being maintained - but often through increased effort, tighter control, reduced margin for error, and growing strain on the teams responsible for sustaining execution.

Increasingly, leadership teams are recognising that this disconnect between confidence and organisational readiness can lead to overextension - where businesses continue operating at pace while coordination, ownership, and execution consistency begin to weaken.

What's Really Happening

As operating demands intensify, organisational fragility rarely appears all at once. It emerges gradually as coordination weakens, priorities compete, and consistent execution becomes harder to maintain. The strain is not just organisational - it is felt by the people responsible for sustaining execution day to day.

The Hidden Risk:

Confidence can mask underlying operational strain. Ultimately, the risk is not a lack of leadership intent - but the erosion of coherence, coordination, and execution consistency across the organisation.

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In periods of uncertainty, two things matter most: **clarity and appreciation**. Clear, consistent communication is essential to cut through speculation and stop the internal rumor mill, which can quickly undermine stability. At the same time, leaders must actively show appreciation to their teams, not necessarily through financial rewards, but through visible, thoughtful gestures. People are operating under pressure and uncertainty; **acknowledging their commitment builds trust**, strengthens loyalty, and ultimately holds the organisation together when it matters most.

Non-Executive Board Member
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