



# Resilient Leadership in an Age of Permanent Pressure

*Insights from 24 Leaders on how they keep themselves  
and their teams resilient, energised and high performing*

**BY: MYRA CLARKE AND HELENA RODRIGUE**

# Executive Summary

This research explores challenges leaders are facing today and how they build resilience, motivation, and high performance in what many described as a “permanent state of pressure.”

Through interviews with 24 senior leaders from sectors including financial services, technology, healthcare, public sector, consulting, and consumer goods, change experts **Myra Clarke** and **Helena Rodrigue** identified a number of consistent themes about the challenge and what leadership now demands.

Whilst the context differed, ten clear workplace challenges emerged. AI & technology together with capacity and overload being the most cited; however, people’s wellbeing and inter-generational workforce expectations emerged close behind.

Leaders repeatedly highlighted the importance of clear purpose, honest communication, recognition, psychological safety, and helping teams focus on what they can control amid growing complexity and uncertainty amidst these challenges.

Many described their role as facilitators, coaches, and protectors of team energy, offering support, clarity and focus.

The research also emphasised the need for leaders to consider their own resilience before looking after their teams. Leaders were aware of what sustains them but many acknowledged they weren’t applying it consistently.

Creativity and thinking space proved the hardest question for leaders and most admitted they didn’t protect it enough.

However, leaders encouraged experimentation, curiosity, collaboration, and progress over perfection, while also recognising the need for recovery, reflection, and human connection.

The leaders stressed that they are not the ones with all the answers. They were the ones creating environments where:

- ⇒ **They created space for individuals and teams**
- ⇒ **People felt safe**
- ⇒ **Purpose remained clear**
- ⇒ **Curiosity was encouraged**
- ⇒ **Energy was protected – their own and team**
- ⇒ **Small habits were sustained over time**

Practical rituals such as visible leadership, frequent recognition, environment, reflection, walking meetings, and open conversations about wellbeing were repeatedly cited as essential to sustaining performance over time.

Resilient teams who develop a shared language around wellbeing, creativity, and performance, gave leaders and teams simple ways to reinforce behaviours, build connection, and navigate pressure together.

**Ultimately, the research points to a more human-centred model of leadership: one grounded in trust, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and the ability to sustain both performance, resilience and wellbeing in an age of constant change.**

In a world of constant pressure and change, resilient leadership is not about finding a single perfect solution - it's about intentionally experimenting with the habits, conversations, rituals, and ways of working that help you and your team sustain energy, connection, creativity, and performance over time.

Interestingly, the research process itself mattered to participants. Leaders left reconnecting with reflection time, important conversations and practices they knew worked.

Our encouragement to leaders is to reflect regularly, stay curious, adapt what no longer works, and recognise that building resilience is an ongoing practice, not a fixed formula.



# 1. Introduction

We are living through an era of constant disruption. Economic instability, geopolitical uncertainty, rapid advances in AI, climate pressures and shifting workforce expectations have created what many leaders described to us as a “permanent state of change.”

Against this backdrop, and as part of our [partnering experiment](#) where we are testing the benefit of collaboration on our own wellbeing, creativity and commercial growth, we decided to run a leadership research interview series.

We are **Myra Clarke** and **Helena Rodrigue** - both change experts who have helped leaders whilst delivering change and transformation over the last 25 years (each!).

Our goal was simple:

**To understand how leaders are keeping themselves and their teams resilient, energised and high performing during prolonged periods of pressure.**

Our approach was to talk to 24 business owners, leaders and senior managers across our network. Different sizes and industries including financial services, consulting, technology, public sector, healthcare, sustainability and non-profit organisations.

Each leader was asked the same five questions with a commitment that we would share the findings with them and publish our conclusions.

|                                         |                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>24</b><br>Senior Leaders Interviewed | <b>12+</b><br>Sectors Represented | <b>5</b><br>Questions Per Interview |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

We asked about:

1. current challenges
2. practical resilience strategies
3. creativity and innovation under pressure
4. advice to new leaders
5. personal habits and rituals

Bonus question: their own reflections from this study

The sectors represented in this research were:

|                                         |          |
|-----------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Financial Services/ Banking</b>      | <b>4</b> |
| <b>FMCG</b>                             | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Professional Services/Consulting</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Public Sector</b>                    | <b>4</b> |
| <b>Technology/ Data</b>                 | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Third sector (Charities)</b>         | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Other/ Cross Sector</b>              | <b>4</b> |

Any percentage figures shown in the report indicate the proportion of the 24 leaders who explicitly referenced each theme. Quotes are attributed where participants consented, anonymised where requested.

The list of participants can be found at the end of the report.

This paper summarises the major themes and our conclusions from the research.

Thank you to each person who contributed.





## 2. The Context: Leadership in the “Permanent Crisis”

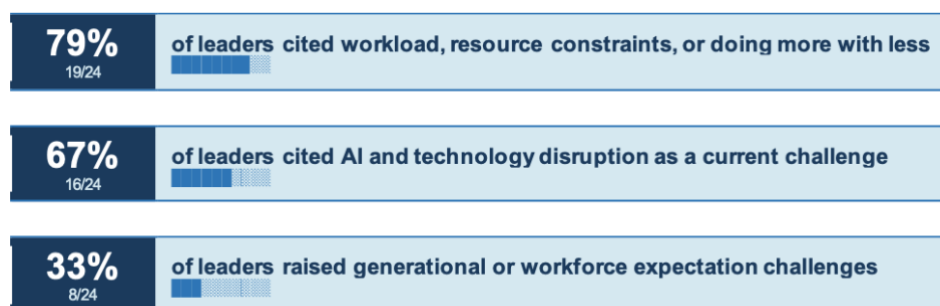
Leaders no longer see uncertainty as temporary. The old belief that “things will settle down soon and go back to normal” has disappeared regardless of industry and size. Leaders described operating in constant change, overlapping crises, rising complexity, accelerating expectations and a continuous pressure to deliver, with 79% of leaders highlighting challenges with workload, resource constraints, or doing more with less.

One executive leader explained it as: *“We have an unreasonable amount of work. We are poor at processes and even worse at prioritisation”.*

AI disruption and uncertainty was cited by 67% of leaders as a current challenge. Geopolitical instability, market conditions, financial threat, cost of living & inflation, regulation and legislation, government reform, workforce fatigue, talent and retention and generational shifts are all colliding simultaneously.

As Sally Pritchett, CEO of Something Big, described it:

*“There are challenges coming from all directions, at varying sizes and speed, we are describing it like trying to cross a road in Mumbai.”*



The generational differences were often mentioned to cause challenges together with a mismatch in expectations between generations.

With leaders who climbed their career ladders through grit and being the first to arrive and last to leave the office. Whilst the younger generation have expectations of shorter work hours and flexibility. Across generations, the risk of burnout was mentioned explicitly by several leaders.

Jo Hicks, Change Lead at Unilever particularly cited that engagement was not the issue. *"The risk is burnout, not motivation"*.

In the FMCG sector, some markets faring better than others are 'penalised' for success. Heather Cornell, Head of Category, Research and Insights at KP Snacks, remarked: *"If successful, you are asked to do more"*.

In the smaller start-ups or smaller established businesses, the increased competition, revenue and cash flow challenges were more prominent, as the impacts are more tangible and real – especially when layoffs had been necessary to some in recent years.

The adversities in the Public sector seem particularly acute. To Andy Mosley, Director of Estates and Facilities in the NHS, budget cuts, rising cost base alongside a national infrastructure backlog cause some of the challenges.

AI emerged as a pervasive and cross-sector challenge, although the nature of the threat varies significantly. For creative agencies, it directly erodes revenue and raises IP concerns.

For data and technology functions, a key challenge is the speed of AI adoption relative to workforce readiness. For regulated sectors, it arrives on top of existing compliance pressures.

Boards have high expectations regarding AI savings yet the research highlighted that AI creates different and sometimes even additional work given the necessary checking required.

Although Nick Winsor noted a contrarian view that AI should be seen as an opportunity, not purely a threat:

*"Look at your risk appetite and be clear on what you want to go after. Be intentional with your strategy. And spot the strength in the team and leverage this"*.

Another leader also emphasised that:

*"The challenge is not just AI itself - it's knowing what we don't know. Where are the pitfalls?"*

Several leaders spoke about agility, prioritisation, experimentation, adaptability and emotional resilience. Many pointed out the need for visible leadership.

It was evident that **Resilience** is no longer about surviving a short-term challenge. It is about sustaining performance over time.



### 3. What Keeps Teams Motivated Under Pressure?

When asked what practical strategies help sustain performance during difficult periods, several consistent themes emerged.

#### Purpose Matters

Leaders from mission-driven organisations spoke about the motivational power of purpose.

At Transport for London, Chief Data Officer Lauren Sager Weinstein described how meaningful public service creates strong commitment and energy.

But there was also a warning that purpose-driven cultures can increase burnout risk because everything feels important.

Kate Gibson, Senior Advisor in Corporate Strategy and Sustainability, told us that for people working in areas like sustainability and social impact, people care very deeply about the work they are doing. While this can be a great source of motivation, dealing with setbacks can sometimes go beyond what others might think of as work-related challenges. She described their frustrations with a lack of progress as “existential.”

This creates a leadership challenge to tap into the intrinsic motivations of their team members while helping teams prioritise realistically.

Irrespective of sector, leaders talked about the importance of purpose and linking individual contribution to the ‘why’ of their team and business.



#### Focus on What You Can Control

A recurring frustration was the cognitive overload created by too many competing priorities. Effective leaders found ways to dramatically reduce complexity for their teams.

John Revill at Universal Products & Experiences combined over 40 priorities into 3 core goals to aid clearer communication, focus and organisational understanding.

A leader in a Software company described keeping executives away so teams can focus and enter flow states.

Managing Director Dominic Simpson made sure to have a Project Manager in the team who holds the line and keeping teams on the right focus despite stakeholder pressure.

Commercial Director Peter Brook at North London Hospice also sees his responsibility to *“help teams focus on what they can influence.”*

Nick Winsor summarised it clearly:

*“If you focus on things you can’t control, you will fail.”*

Our leaders encouraged teams to break large problems into smaller steps, focus on progress over perfection, and avoid paralysis during uncertainty.

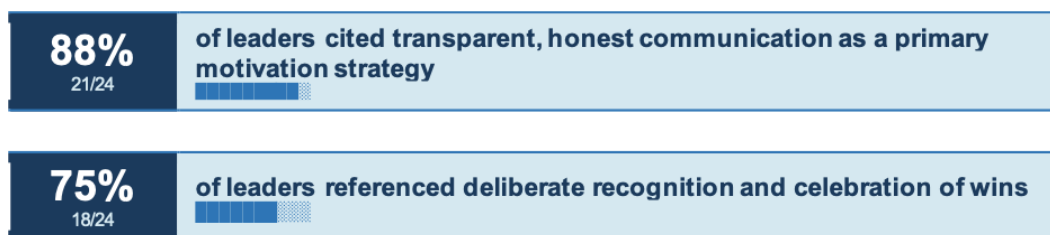
*“During challenging times, you may need to adjust your expectations, but still set expectations however small”,* was the advice of Barbara Van Der Heijden, Head of Group Leadership Talent at Capgemini Consulting.

## Authenticity and Transparency Build Trust

An impressive 88% of our leaders highlighted transparency and honesty as essential during challenging times. Many also mentioned vulnerability, authenticity and realistic communication as key.

Sally Pritchett had another wonderful analogy:

*“I don’t make mummy promises”. (Q: ‘Can we go to the park mummy’? A: ‘Maybe’) “We work together and there is no sugar coating.”*



An Executive leader in a major consumer company told us that *“authenticity and transparency is key”* especially in challenging times. *“We need to acknowledge when times are tough”* he claimed. *“but still continue, as the work doesn’t stop”.*

Leaders are instinctively prioritising communication, psychological safety and active listening which are the behaviours that complex and chaotic conditions demand.



## Recognition, Celebration and Spotting Wins

Many leaders stressed the importance of celebrating small wins, recognising effort and reframing success during difficult periods. They emphasised the motivational power of recognition particularly under sustained pressure. The consensus was that sporadic, specific, personalised recognition significantly outperforms structured reward programmes.

Kate Gibson recommended *“over - indexing on celebrations - celebrate the small wins explicitly and publicly”*.

Peter Brook makes a continuous effort to *“catch people doing things well”*.

Andy Mosley uses Star Awards that can escalate all the way up to NHS Trust level.

A leader from a leading software company told us that *“sporadic recognition is the best”*.

Research also shows that unexpected recognition tends to have a much stronger and more lasting positive impact because surprise increases emotional significance.



## Visible, Servant and Human Leadership

Leaders consistently described being present, accessible, and genuinely invested in individuals as people.

Leadership coach Mark Blatchford recommended to keep 1-to-1s without a fixed topic, and let the first question be:

*“Ask ‘How are you?’ or ‘How are things really going?’ and really mean it. Do it with authenticity.”*

Andy Mosley travels three times a week across 300 buildings to ‘press the flesh’ which means sitting in teams' environments and listening.

Senior Business Leader Hugh Baker stressed the importance of showing up at life events. Such as the time he supported a team member’s request for an international transfer when they fell in love with someone in Hong Kong and there was a vacancy in the team there.

Sally Pritchett favours adult-to-adult communication where team members working transparently together, not top-down instruction.

Ewan Barr, Chief Transformation Officer at Knight Frank LLP, warned: *“Don’t try to be a superhero. Leadership can be a lonely place. Talk about your own vulnerability”*.

Sarah Rochester, Transformation and Operations Leader in Financial Services stated simply: *“You have got to care”*.

Kate Gibson said it takes time to build trust, and you have to keep showing up. *“Make sure your team know you have their back. Consistently, over time.”*



Peter Brook practices visible leadership and active listening. He uses the 'what's on your mind?' question as a continuous practice.

Debbie Rossetti creates “mini huddles” to check in and see how the teams are feeling, particularly as they navigate a recent merger and acquisition.

*“You have got to care”*



## 4. Creativity and Innovation Under Pressure

The question which most leaders struggled to answer was the one on how they sustain creativity during periods of stress and overload. Many reflected that 'they don't do it enough', especially during times of high pressure.

### Reframing What Creativity Means

Most leaders did not separate creativity and innovation from day-to-day work.

Instead, they embedded fresh thinking into everyday conversations.

As Ewan Barr explained:

*"Everyone can be innovative and creative. It's not down to the innovation department. To evaluate problems, identify what went wrong and discuss what we can do differently, that's also being creative".*

Leaders described creativity as reflection, problem-solving, asking different questions, creating space for discussion.

Carina Kemp, Trustee and Chair and Transformation Director, has a similar perspective. *"90 % of solutions will come from people doing the job. Hence leaders need to tap into people's confidence (to be creative)."*

*"To attend a networking event can be feeding fresh thinking and creativity"* proposed Ian Hexter, an experienced Change Expert and Leadership Coach.

*"Change the context of the meeting"* was the advice from Mark Blatchford. *"Always do it somewhere else, go for a walk, different floor, different room, different building."*

Heather Cornell encourages her team to *"go and look at problems through eyes other than your own"*, she encourages fresh thinking by getting her team to explore unrelated environments.

*"Every leader has an obligation to provide inspiration to their team"*

The struggle to find time for creativity was a complaint many leaders shared. A leader in a Major Software company had a great approach to tackle this in terms of always allocating the right time for all time horizons.

*“I have a 70/20/10 split between the Now/Next/Later focus. I try to make sure we spend 70% of the time on the priorities right now, 20% on the short to medium term, and 10% of our time and effort on the longer term.”*

Hugh Baker went further than the others in his expectations of leaders when it comes to creativity: *“Every leader has an obligation to provide inspiration to their team”*.

## Psychological Safety a Prerequisite for Creativity

Several leaders stressed the importance of diverse thinking and psychological safety. Two thirds of leaders named psychological safety as a prerequisite for creativity to occur.

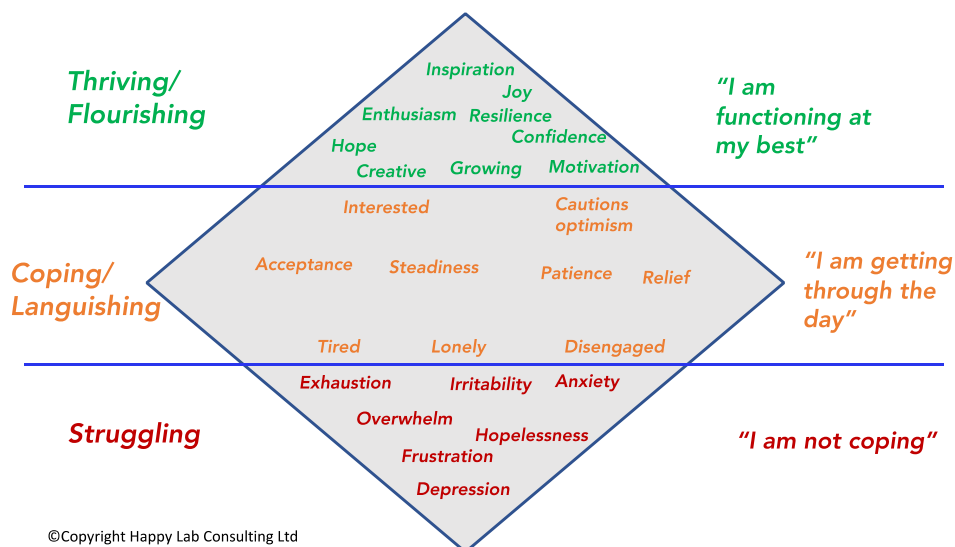
People are more likely to contribute ideas when they feel safe, curiosity is encouraged, mistakes are treated as learning opportunities.

We know this to be true from science, where psychologists often describe mental health as existing on a continuum, or a ‘Wellbeing spectrum’ (fig 2.) It is only in the ‘green’ top part of the spectrum that we can be truly creative and innovative.

The space to question, challenge, and fail without penalty. Several leaders distinguished sharply between nominal and real safety.

Fig 2. The Wellbeing Spectrum. Happylab Consulting

### The Wellbeing Spectrum



67%  
16/24

of leaders cited psychological safety as a prerequisite for creative thinking



Sally Pritchett made the distinction as *“Real safety is when people ask questions publicly, not just in private”*.

Ewan Barr expressed it as *“Meeting silence, corridor violence”* to describe the risk of surface compliance masking real resistance.

Ian Hexter emphasised that *“No idea is a bad idea”* as well as the need to create the structural conditions that make this true, not just a slogan.

Nigel Bainsfair, Delivery VP at Noventiq, made sure to ask *“are they safe enough to make a mistake?”* thereby framing safety in terms of error tolerance.

One leader pointed out that psychological safety is a leadership responsibility, not an HR programme.

Ewan Barr also pointed out the need for neurodiversity awareness *“different people process safety differently; what feels safe to one person may feel exposing to another”*. He added that this is important from the start of forming the team. *“We often recruit people who think like us, whereas we need to recruit people who ask different questions to the ones we ask.”*

## Experimentation

When it comes to finding the mechanisms, conditions or ways of working for high performance, experimentation is the most effective approach. Our leaders agreed.

*“Don’t be afraid to experiment”* was the advice of one leader in Financial Services. *“Find the people who are wizzes of particular things, let them come together in smaller groups.”*



Ian Hexter stated the importance of creating a culture of continuous improvement – quoting Jonathan Smart: *“You are never finished improving.”*

Themes from other leaders included ‘test and learn’, ‘fail fast’, and that creativity can be a way to energise the team, even if it didn’t necessarily solve business problems.

One leader stated: *“Take risks and try stuff”*.

John Revill asks his team *“What happens when you don’t succeed - do you learn from that”?*

## Small Shifts Over Big Solutions & Change of Scene

Breaking challenges into manageable pieces helped teams reduce overwhelm, maintain momentum, and importantly, build confidence.

Peter Brook stated the increased effectiveness of small improvements over big. *“Best change comes from small shifts rather than big programmes.”*

Some leaders deliberately changed the environment to encourage fresh thinking. They used walking meetings, external speakers or experts, inspirational visits, social conversation and cross functional problem-solving.

Heather Cornell would encourage her team to do ‘store safaris’, to get inspiration from places where their products are displayed and sold.

Hugh Baker would take his leadership team on quarterly walks across the South Downs followed by ‘strategy conversations’ in a local pub.

Sarah Dackham from Dorset Council described her informal meeting as ‘holding space’ for things to surface organically.

*“The minute you get them outside of county hall, people become human again.”*

She described these meetings as not a nice-to-have, but a genuine driver of collaboration, empowerment, and shared thinking.

Many leaders agreed that the role of the leader is not to be the one with all the ideas, rather be there to create the conditions and the right environment for creative ideas to emerge.

## 5. Advice for New Leaders on How to Keep Their Teams Fresh and High Performing

### Know Thyself First

The most frequently recurring piece of advice concerned self-awareness. The importance of values, and working style before attempting to lead others.

With 88% of leaders giving advice centred on self- knowledge, self- awareness and personal resilience, this was the closest the group came to a universal consensus.

Kate Gibson recommended to *“Start with self. The environment (and your team) will take as much as you give. You need to find ways to fill up your own bucket somehow.”*

Ewan Barr stressed how important it is to *“Be vulnerable. Make it safe for people to ask for help including yourself.”*

Barbara Van Der Heijden’s reflection was: *“When I feel I can’t take a break is when I most need one”.*

Reminding us that self-knowledge includes recognising your own warning signals.

And Sarah Dackham advised: *“Get a coach!”*

**88%**  
21/24

of leaders gave advice centred on self-knowledge, self-awareness, or personal resilience

### Stay Curious and Listen Well

Curiosity emerged repeatedly as one of the most important leadership qualities.

Leaders encouraged active listening, asking better questions, challenging assumptions and the importance of always staying open to learning.

Several leaders also highlighted vulnerability, and the ability to admit uncertainty, ask for help and create psychological safety.

Sarah Rochester described it perfectly:

*“You are always a new leader. None of us have led through these exact circumstances before.”*



*“You are always a new leader. None of us have led through these exact circumstances before.”*



## Progress Before Perfection & Trust Your Team

Another theme was letting go of perfectionism. 82% of the leaders advised new leaders to trust their team and resist the urge to micro manage and control. Leaders encouraged delegation, prioritisation, accepting 'good enough' and focusing on momentum. One leader reflected: *"I started performing better when I started caring less about perfection."*

Hugh Baker encouraged leaders to put the trust in their teams: *"Lead, don't manage. Trust that team members know their job. Support them with what they need. Be a servant leader"*.

Several leaders also advised leaders to let their team members be exposed to tricky situations sometimes since that is how we all learn. Mark Blatchford stated: *"Don't say no and get in the way of their growth"*.

Dominic Simpson went even further: *"Make yourself redundant as a leader. The success of a leader is when they are no longer needed."*

Sally Pritchett equally encouraged new leaders to *"Stop taking all the weight on your own shoulders"*.

Peter Brook told us that *"It's fine not to have all the answers. Create the right environment for the people who work with you"*.

An executive leader in a major consumer company reminded new leaders that *"a 40-year career is a marathon, not a sprint. Keep your mindset on the long game."*

Nick Winsor offered a very helpful perspective on how leaders can balance the responsibility they have as part of their role, particularly when things go wrong, with the encouragement for team members to succeed. This is critical to building the trust necessary for people to take risks. *"If things go wrong, it's down to you. If things go right, it's all down to the team member."*

He summarised it beautifully as:

*"Take the blame for failure and spread the credit for success."*

*"Take the blame for failure and spread the credit for success."*

## 6. The Small Habits That Sustain Resilience

### Power of Rituals

When leaders were asked about their own habits or rituals to maintain energy and build resilience, some admitted that they had not always put enough focus on this throughout their career. Some even questioned whether they would be fit to give advice to others. We found that those were sometimes the ones who gave us the most valuable insights!

Leaders across industries confirmed that resilience is rarely built through dramatic interventions. It is built through small, consistent habits.

We heard of a wide range of personal rituals, including walking, yoga, journaling, gratitude practices, reflection time, learning, connecting with others and protecting personal boundaries.

Mark Blatchford was appreciative of the support from loved ones. *"My wife knows me so well, she treats me as if I were a dog needing exercise. 'Go out for a run.' She knows I'll be better for it."*

### Get Moving

And on the topic of going for a walk, physical movement was the most cited personal strategy for coping, mentioned by 75% of leaders as core to their wellbeing and performance.

**75%**  
18/24

of leaders cited physical movement or exercise as a core personal ritual



Leaders described it not only as exercise for health, but as a cognitive and emotional processing tool. Several had built physical movement into their leadership practice, not just their personal routine.



Andy Mosley takes his team for walks together as a leadership practice.

To Nigel Bainsfair, walking an hour every day is a non-negotiable.

While Ewan Barr does pilates during office hour, Kate Gibson starts every day with yoga and Carina Kemp does something physical every morning before the working day.

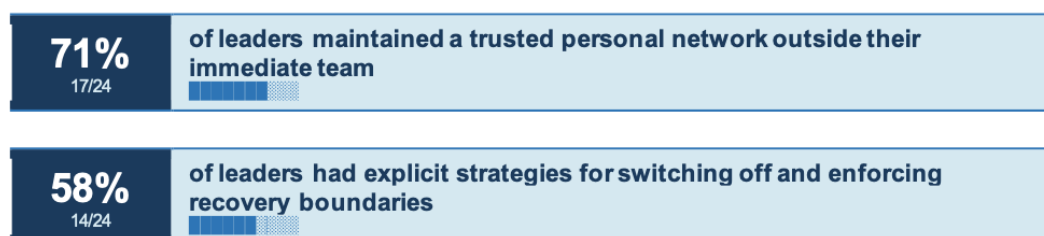
## Build Relationships

The importance of strong relationships came out as a strong theme, with 64% of leaders particularly citing the personal habit of maintaining a trusted personal network outside their immediate team, as critical to their own resilience.

Founder of Walpole Partnership, Andy Pieroux's approach was to *"Build a network of sage, wise counsellors - make it wide and diverse"*.

Jo Hicks favours external network of mentors with different perspectives. *"you can speak more openly outside of work"*

Many leaders particularly called out the need for human connection such as the power of 'coffee and chocolate with someone.'



Andy Pieroux had 15 mins informal 'no work talk' social calls, such as G&T on a Friday afternoon.

Debbie Rossetti, Revenue Operations Lead at Western Europe, stated that bouncing off trusted colleagues informally was like having your own safety net.

Nigel Bainsfair appreciated talking things out with his wife and his personal network outside the industry.

## Switch Off and Recover

Some leaders scheduled 'thinking time'. Others deliberately stepped away from work when needed to regain perspective.

Many stressed the importance of switching off, recovery, maintaining routines, creating space for reflection. These habits helped leaders sustain energy not just productivity.

*"Look after your own energy otherwise your team will notice",* was the advice from Peter Brook.

Their habits included no emails at night; keeping weekends free from work, and having meeting free zones during the day.

Debbie Rossetti missed her commute and found ways to replicate the transitional thinking time by blocking diary.

Barbara Van der Heijden had found the benefit of stillness. *"Don't fill every moment with doing stuff. Just sit sometimes."*



## Find Flow

The term **Flow** was coined by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934–2021). When we engage in a task that stretches us at the right level of challenge while fully utilising our skills, we create the conditions to enter a state of flow.

Several of our leaders were using this as a method to help with their own productivity, but importantly also as a strategy to support their own wellbeing, energy and resilience.

Dominic Simpson used meeting free zones to *"protect cognitive capacity for deep work"*

Andy Pieroux told us about a time when the business had been in trouble and he had started to panic. Yet when he spent time getting lost in excel spreadsheets, he noticed that his heart rate dropped.

Entering a state of flow had clearly calmed him down, and the evidence of a lower heart rate together with the emotions he experienced when realising this, will have helped his brain recall this positive approach for the future.

## Summary of Personal Habits and Rituals Cited by Leaders

As the incredible tips and insights from leaders on the personal habits and rituals they use to achieve balance between productivity, inspiration and recovery were too many to mention, here is a summary for your inspiration.

| <i>Exercise – non-negotiable</i> | <i>Give personal thank yous</i>                         | <i>Maintain a routine</i>             | <i>Get external mentors/perspectives</i>                  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Enjoy your work</i>           | <i>Step away moments</i>                                | <i>Find flow</i>                      | <i>Get coaching</i>                                       |
| <i>Try and do less</i>           | <i>Walk the dog</i>                                     | <i>Carve out time to think</i>        | <i>Connect with people</i>                                |
| <i>Monday work from home</i>     | <i>Talk things out</i>                                  | <i>Have 1-1s in the diary</i>         | <i>Do your own Learning</i>                               |
| <i>Write down your worries</i>   | <i>Book holiday and stick to it</i>                     | <i>Do a jigsaw puzzle</i>             | <i>Don't answer emails at night</i>                       |
| <i>Gratitude journal</i>         | <i>Go outside</i>                                       | <i>Bible study in the morning</i>     | <i>Have goals and stick to them (year/month/week/day)</i> |
| <i>Do yoga every day</i>         | <i>Pop into a museum for 10 mins</i>                    | <i>Plan my week on a Sunday</i>       | <i>Breathing exercises on the tube/commute</i>            |
| <i>Keep appreciation diary</i>   | <i>Keep collection of quotes and pick for each week</i> | <i>Do pilates during office hours</i> | <i>Listen to podcasts</i>                                 |



## 7. Conclusion: Resilient Leadership

### Room to 'Play'

If one question stopped leaders in their tracks, it was the one about creativity and space. More than any other, it surfaced some hesitation and honest admission.

Creativity emerged in two distinct forms both as a genuine creative practice and as the simpler need for thinking time and space to step back. Both were acknowledged as increasingly hard to protect and, for many, difficult to embed consistently into their day-to-day reality.

Interestingly, across hours of rich conversation, levity rarely surfaced as a conscious strategy and yet the moments that came closest were entertaining: Elvis tunes in a monthly meeting where no idea is a bad idea, a G&T social call on a Friday afternoon, an AI hackathon where people created something just for the joy of it. Or, getting outside the office and watching people become human again over coffee and cake.

The investment in creativity and time together seemed to be more forthcoming from the leaders who had their own businesses.

### Linking to Theory and Neuroscience

The challenges leaders described across every sector point to organisations operating increasingly in the Chaotic and Complex domains of the Cynefin framework (environments where best practice doesn't hold as well and where the ability to experiment, adapt and respond in real time is the defining leadership capability.)

Leaders are instinctively prioritising communication, psychological safety and active listening which are the behaviours that complex and chaotic conditions demand.

Where leaders did reach for strategy and prioritisation, it was about simplification and triage. Cutting from over 40 priorities to three, deciding what to stop, protecting focus in conditions of relentless demand. As well as returning where they could to a clear why and a line of sight back to purpose.

What this research reveals is a leadership population already finding their way through extraordinarily difficult terrain, often without the language to describe what they are doing.

Having a common language to anchor the desired behaviours is significant when it comes to building resilience in teams.

### Own Oxygen Masks on First

Neuroscience tells us what this high pressure costs our leaders on a personal level, operating at the edge of chaos is not a sustainable steady state, it is exhausting being in survival mode. This has important implications for both the leaders and their businesses.

The personal strategies of exercise, sleep, regular breaks, reflection and connection, all rebuild the cognitive capacity that sustained pressure depletes. Many reflected that they knew what they needed but weren't consistently doing it.

That gap between knowing and doing was noticeable in the research.

## Human Leadership

The leadership model emerging from these conversations is deeply human.

Leaders who are sustaining high performance today are not necessarily the most knowledgeable, the strongest, the most controlling or the ones with all the answers.

Instead, they are leaders who:

*Remain curious*

*Protect energy*

*Create trust*

*Embrace experimentation*

*Enable others*

*Focus on progress over perfection*

They understand that resilience is no longer a short-term capability. It is a long-term practice.

Leaders will need to be intentional about the mechanisms they leverage to foster collaboration, creativity and human connection.

They can benefit from experimentation and being intentionally reflective, as the circumstances constantly change and resilience strategies and habits need to be adjusted.

As Sarah Dackham delightfully summarised the leadership required in these turbulent times:

*“Keep it simple and be human”.*



What struck us at the end was how much the research process itself mattered. Leaders left having put protected time back in their diaries, planning conversations with their teams they hadn't yet had, and reconnecting with practices they knew worked.

Sometimes being asked the right questions is enough to make a difference.

# Thank you!

We'd like to give an enormous thank you to all the leaders who took part in this research. Everyone was given an option of the level of anonymity they preferred, hence some of the names are not included. Your contributions are invaluable to us, and we hope that the readers will find their insights a helpful reminder and perhaps a prompt to take this conversation back to their own teams.

| Name                   | Title                                                                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Peter Brook</b>     | North London Hospice, previously Diageo                                             |
| <b>Sally Pritchett</b> | CEO/Founder, Something Big Marketing Agency                                         |
| <b>Nigel Bainsfair</b> | Chief Information Officer and VP Global Delivery, Noventiq                          |
| <b>Jo Hicks</b>        | HR Director, Unilever                                                               |
| <b>Anonymous</b>       | Director of Employee Experience & HR Transformation                                 |
| <b>Debbie Rossetti</b> | Revenue Operations Lead, Western Europe, Xerox                                      |
| <b>Andy Pieroux</b>    | Founder and Managing Director, Walpole Partnership                                  |
| <b>Mark Blatchford</b> | Coach, Mentor, Facilitator (previously Unilever Global Leadership Development Lead) |
| <b>John Revill</b>     | Regional Managing Director, EMEA, Universal                                         |
| <b>Dominic Simpson</b> | Managing Director, Accenture/Goldman Sachs/JP Morgan)                               |
| <b>Andy Mosley</b>     | Director of Estates, Facilities and Capital Projects, NHS (Hampshire & IoW)         |

| Name                           | Title                                                             |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Hugh Baker</b>              | Senior Business Leader, Portfolio career                          |
| <b>Ewan Barr</b>               | Chief Transformation Officer, Knight Frank LLP                    |
| <b>Anonymous</b>               | Managing Director                                                 |
| <b>Sarah Rochester</b>         | Transformation and Operations Leader, Financial Services          |
| <b>Nick Winsor</b>             | Non-Executive Director, Cross Industry                            |
| <b>Carina Kemp</b>             | Mentor, Trustee & Chair, Cross Industry                           |
| <b>Ian Hexter</b>              | Change Leader, (previously HSBC), Cross Industry                  |
| <b>Anonymous</b>               | Senior Executive, Major Consumer Company                          |
| <b>Kate Gibson</b>             | Senior Advisor, Board Member, Corporate Strategy & Sustainability |
| <b>Lauren Sager Weinstein</b>  | Chief Data Officer, Transport for London                          |
| <b>Barbara Van Der Heijden</b> | Head of Group Leadership & Talent, Capgemini                      |
| <b>Sarah Dackham</b>           | Digital and Change Business Partner, Dorset Council               |
| <b>Heather Cornell</b>         | Head of Category, Research and Insights, KP Snacks                |

# Get in Touch!

If you would like to discuss these findings or explore resilience strategies for your team, please get in touch. We help organisations create the conditions for creativity, energy and high performance through workshops, lunch-and-learns, coaching and longer-term collaborations. We are passionate about helping leaders build resilient teams and positive workplace cultures.

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## Reflection Questions

To close, we would like to leave you with a few questions to reflect on:

- 1. What pressures are currently affecting your team?***
- 2. Where could you create more space for reflection, energy and creativity?***
- 3. What small habit could make the biggest difference for your team right now?***

**Topics:** Leadership | Resilience | High Performing Teams | Change Management | Future of Work | Happiness at work | Coaching

