

# The Deep Dive | February 2026

By Deepsky Leaders

*Clarity under pressure. Performance that lasts.*



## Welcome to The Deep Dive

If January focused on recognising the new standard facing leaders, February turns attention to how that standard is sustained in practice.

Across organisations, a consistent tension is emerging. Leaders are expected to move faster, decide with less certainty, and carry broader responsibility, often without stronger systems, information, or additional capacity. The question is no longer how leadership should look, but how it holds under pressure over time.

This month's Deep Dive explores what allows performance to hold under sustained pressure and remain repeatable rather than reactive: sound judgement, team coherence, adaptable leadership mindsets, and assessment that supports better decisions. Grounded in lived practice inside complex environments.

## Leadership Performance

### Why leadership depends on regulation, not reassurance

#### Insight

*"How to Lead When Things Feel Increasingly Out of Control" - Harvard Business Review, Nov 2025*

Leadership today often feels like sprinting through fog. Volatility, rapid technological change, and geopolitical uncertainty are converging, leaving leaders under pressure to project confidence while privately navigating doubt.

Neuroscientific research shows that unregulated fear narrows thinking. Leaders become reactive. Control replaces trust. Activity increases, but decision quality weakens.

The issue is how leaders relate to fear and what it shapes in their decisions.

#### Deepsky View

Leadership performance improves when leaders can think clearly without needing certainty.

Those who regulate their responses, prioritise effectively, and communicate with intent become stabilising forces for others. Direction holds, even when answers do not. This is where leadership development delivers its greatest return: not in frameworks, but in judgement under sustained pressure.



🎧 Watch Chris Whipp, Deepsky Partner, in conversation with Performance Coach Will Foden on reframing pressure as a privilege:



## High-Performing Teams

### Why teams - not individuals - drive results

*From the Field: Insight from CEO Andrew Stoneham Knott*

Promotions are important. In my view, they can represent great health in an organisation. But there is a flip side: promotions reward past performance, not future capability.

**Ask yourself:** How many of your managers or leaders were promoted for skill, not leadership ability?

If you have ignored the leadership component, it is highly likely that you are baking in future performance and retention issues.

Below is a simple checklist that you can follow if you want to check your managers are ready to lead people. This will also help you to isolate where you need to put your energy into making this promotion the success that you hope for the organisation.”

### Promotion Checklist: “Are Our Managers Actually Ready to Lead People?”

Use this as a **promotion and performance reality check**.

If more than two answers are “no” or “unclear,” leadership risk is already embedded.

#### 1. Promotion Decisions

- Were managers promoted primarily for results, not leadership behaviour?
- Did we assess leadership capability before promotion?
- Were expectations of leadership clearly communicated at promotion?



## 2. Leadership Readiness

- Do managers know they are accountable for developing people, not just delivering output?
- Are they equipped to coach, give feedback, and manage performance?
- Do they understand how their behaviour directly affects engagement and retention?

## 3. Support & Development

- Do new managers receive structured support in their first year?
- Are leadership gaps addressed early, or tolerated until problems arise?
- Is development targeted to real behaviour gaps, not generic training?

## 4. Impact & Signals

- Do teams under certain managers show higher disengagement or turnover?
- Are performance issues recurring within the same teams?
- Do employees trust their manager to support their growth?

## 5. Insight & Accountability

- Can we clearly see which managers need support and why?
- Do we intervene early, or wait until attrition forces action?

### Takeaway:

Promotions create leadership risk unless readiness is actively considered and acted upon.

Use the link to activate **30 days of complimentary access to RISE** and unlock a full suite of Performance Tools:

**[Repeatable Diagnostic Framework: The “FIRST 90” Time-to-Impact](#)**

## Executive Coaching

### From answers to judgement

### Insight

*How to Make a Seemingly Impossible Leadership Decision - Harvard Business Review, Nov 2025*

Senior leaders are increasingly facing decisions with no clean solution. Trade-offs between values, people, performance, and risk are now routine. The challenge is the absence of space to think clearly.

HBR's research points to a shift. Leaders are not looking for advice. They are strengthening judgement: the ability to hold tension, tolerate ambiguity, and act with intent when certainty is unavailable.

## Deepsky View

Effective coaching improves how leaders engage with complexity.

When leaders have space to surface assumptions and regulate their thinking, decision quality improves. Coaching creates the space leaders need to move with confidence when the stakes are real.

This explains why executive coaching continues to grow. **Organisations typically see a five to seven times return on investment (ICF, iPEC).** More importantly, they develop leaders who can decide well when it matters most.

## Executive Assessment

### From measurement to decision support

#### Insight

*Employee Performance Management - Deloitte Insights, March 2025*

Executive assessment is shifting. Once focused on selection, it is now expected to inform succession, development, and cultural alignment.

Deloitte's research highlights a problem. Only 2% of CHROs believe their performance management systems work, and most managers and employees do not trust them. The issue is not data volume. It is purpose.

Academic research reinforces this gap. Many leadership assessment tools lack rigour or relevance to real leadership demands. Internally built tools often generate information without improving judgement.

## Deepsky View

Assessment only adds value when it sharpens decisions.

Starting with the tool rather than the question leads to noise, not insight. The most effective assessments illuminate leadership patterns in context and support clearer choices around selection, development, and succession. When assessment is designed with intent, it becomes a strategic asset rather than a report.

Read a Deepsky Executive Assessment Case Study: [Building Confidence in Executive Succession Through Experiential, Data-Led Assessment](#)





## In Closing

What stands out this month is the weight leaders are carrying. Decisions without precedent.

Pressure without pause. Responsibility without simple answers.

Sustained performance now depends on readiness, not reassurance. On honest teams, not silent ones. On judgement that holds when certainty does not.

Across promotion, coaching, and assessment, the pattern is consistent: *capability must be examined before it is assumed.*

This is the work we focus on at Deepsky. Strengthening leadership where it counts, in conditions that are real. If these themes resonate inside your organisation, the conversation is worth having.

Many of the themes in this edition; judgement under pressure, psychological safety, decision quality are explored live inside RISE.

RISE is Deepsky's high-performance platform for leaders who want practical tools, expert-led sessions, and space to think clearly away from the noise.

Connect with us to prepare for tomorrow



The RISE Platform | Powered by Deepsky  
<https://readytorise.global/>

[deepskyleaders.com](https://deepskyleaders.com) | +44 (0)203 034 0850  
[connect@deepskyleaders.com](mailto:connect@deepskyleaders.com)