

The Deep Dive | March 2026

By Deepsky Leaders

Clarity under pressure. Performance that lasts.



Welcome to The Deep Dive

February focused on how leadership performance holds under pressure. In March, we turn our attention to how leaders build the internal capacity required to sustain it.

Leadership demands are multiplying - clarity, culture, technology, and constant adaptation are now expected at once. Yet many development systems still focus on external skills rather than the inner capacity needed to lead in complexity.

This month's Deep Dive looks at leadership from the inside out: self-awareness, psychological safety, behaviour-shifting coaching, and assessment that treats adaptability as core to future readiness.

Leadership Performance

Are we developing leaders for today's role or tomorrow's complexity?

Insight

The 'inside out' leadership journey: How personal growth creates the path to success - McKinsey, June 2024

McKinsey's research shows that while many executives master financial, strategic, and operational skills, sustained performance is rarely limited by technical competence.

Across 500+ CEOs, the differentiator is human capability, resilience, humility, empathy, and authenticity, which enables leaders to navigate complexity and competing demands. As AI and volatility make hard skills increasingly replicable, human leadership becomes the true source of advantage.

A McKinsey Global Institute study of 1,800 companies found those investing in human capital were 1.5x more likely to remain high performers and experienced roughly half the earnings volatility.

Deepsky View

Leadership development requires more than skills transfer.

Sustained performance depends on a leader's ability to examine their own conditioning, regulate their responses, and align behaviour with intent. This level of reflection directly influences decision quality, culture, and strategic execution.



A simple Deepsky practice to examine your own conditioning:

After a high-pressure decision, ask:

- What was I reacting to in that moment?
- What assumption did I make that may not be true?
- Did my response create clarity or noise for others?

Strong self-awareness has the power to improve decision quality without needing more information.

High-Performing Teams

Psychological Safety: The Operating Condition for High Performing Teams

Insight

Psychological Safety: A Leadership Guide to Team Innovation - Amy C. Edmondson, June 2025

Some teams consistently outperform others despite similar skill and experience. Research shows a counterintuitive pattern: high-performing teams report more issues, not fewer.

The difference is psychological safety. When people feel able to speak up without fear of blame, problems emerge early.

Learning accelerates. Performance follows.

Where psychological safety is absent, issues remain hidden. Teams stay busy, but effectiveness declines.

Deepsky View

Psychological safety is often misunderstood as comfort. In reality, it is a performance condition.

A psychologically safe team doesn't avoid pressure or challenge. It creates an environment where people can think clearly, challenge directly, and take ownership without fear of personal consequence.

Psychological safety without accountability leads to stagnation.

Accountability without psychological safety leads to self-censorship.

High-performing teams have both and leaders shape this through how they respond in moments that matter.

Curiosity over judgement keeps thinking open. Clarity of intent creates alignment. Consistent follow-through builds trust. In this environment, feedback is not personal. It is part of how the team improves.



Read more in this article from Deepsky Partner and Leadership Development Specialist, [Chris Whipp](#).

Executive Coaching

Insight

Leadership Effectiveness Through Coaching: Authentic and Change-Oriented Leadership - Peter R. Halliwell, Rebecca J. Mitchell, Brendan Boyle (Dec 2023)

A longitudinal study of organisational leaders found coaching improves leadership effectiveness through two internal shifts:

- Stronger authentic leadership behaviours
- Increased leadership self-efficacy

The most powerful driver was authenticity. Leaders who became more self-aware, transparent in their decisions, and clearer in their values were more likely to demonstrate change-oriented leadership: articulating direction, encouraging innovation, and guiding teams through uncertainty.

These behaviours were strongly associated with improved leadership effectiveness.

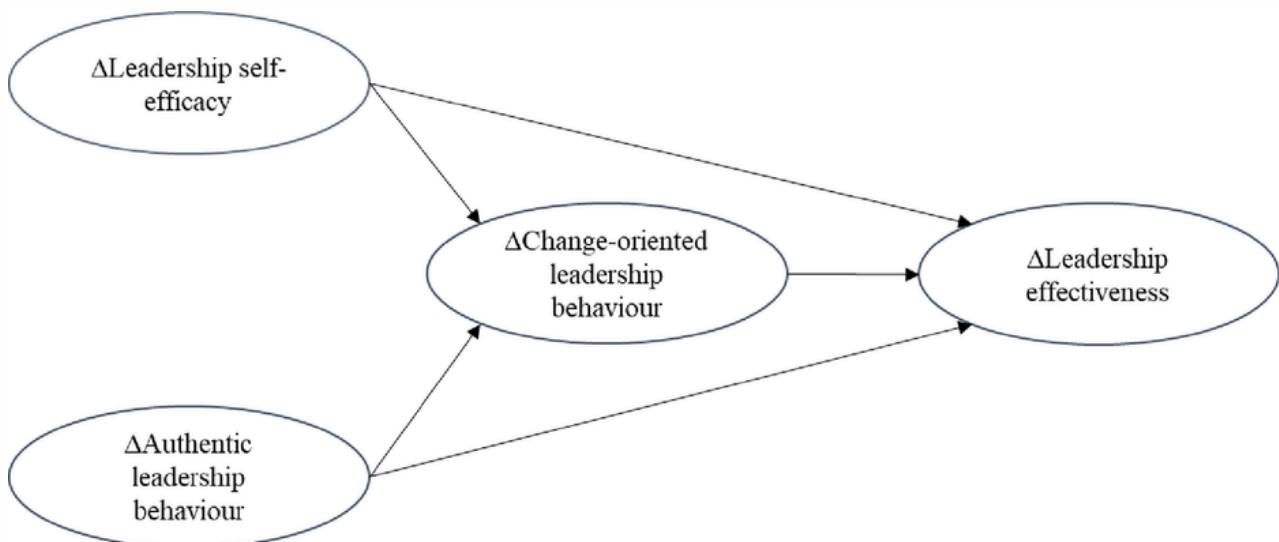


Figure 1. Conceptual Model (Halliwell, Mitchell & Boyle, 2023)

The Deep Dive | February 2026

Deepsky View

Leadership development often focuses on visible skills: strategy, communication, execution.

Sustainable leadership improvement begins with internal shifts in how leaders see themselves and show up with others.

Coaching works because it creates structured reflection. Leaders question assumptions, clarify intent, and align behaviour with values.

A simple reflection used in coaching:

Before a key decision, ask:

- What outcome do I want? And why?
- How will I know when I've got it?
- What information might I be missing?
- What belief is shaping how I'm approaching this?
- What emotional state am I in when making this decision?

This creates the pause needed to move from reaction to deliberate decision.

In environments defined by disruption, the ability to lead change consistently is no longer optional. Coaching accelerates the development of that capability.

Executive Assessment

Are you ready for the role after this one?

In February's newsletter ([Deep Dive | February 2026 | LinkedIn](#)), we shared a promotion framework from [Andrew Stoneham Knott](#), CEO of the Miramar Global Group, which raised a simple question:

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

This month, we consider the opposite perspective.

What if you are the one aiming for the next step?

Results, strengths, and titles still matter in senior appointments. Increasingly, they are only the starting point. Boards and executive recruiters are looking for evidence of adaptability.

Your ability to articulate how you navigated change and complexity is now as valuable as the targets you hit.



[Watch Chris Whipp talk about the Deepsky coaching method here](#)

The Deep Dive | February 2026



- How did you pivot when strategy shifted?
- How did you respond to a revenue shock or organisational redesign?
- How did you integrate new technology without destabilising performance?

Adaptability shows up in reinvention, lateral moves, crisis response, and the transfer of judgement across contexts.

Deepsky View

Promotion at senior level is a judgement about future complexity.

Track record proves capability within an environment. Adaptability signals readiness for the next one.

Leaders who accelerate their learning, absorb disruption quickly, and realign others around a new direction demonstrate a pattern that boards notice.

If you are seeking progression, ask yourself:

- Where have I evolved, not just executed?
- Where have I strengthened my judgement under pressure?
- What evidence shows I can operate when conditions shift?

Readiness is not declared. It is evidenced.

In Closing

A clear pattern runs through this month's insights: leadership doesn't fail for lack of expertise, but for limits in awareness, reflection, and behavioural adaptability.

The leaders who sustain performance build both the external skills to deliver results and the internal capacity to navigate complexity. As environments shift, so must leadership capability - across development, coaching, team dynamics, and assessment.

This is Deepsky's work: strengthening leaders' ability to think clearly, lead effectively, and perform when conditions are anything but predictable.

Connect with us to prepare for tomorrow



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

deepskyleaders.com | +44 (0)203 034 0850
connect@deepskyleaders.com