

KARL BIMSHAS CONSULTING

Leadership • Human Behavior • Organizational Effectiveness

THE LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS PULSE

What Organizations Are Struggling With Right Now

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**KARL
BIMSHAS**
CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Leadership Problems Pulse** examined 30 leadership-related conditions to identify what organizations struggle with, how respondents assess their severity, and what the reported conditions may reveal about organizational effectiveness.

Three findings stand out.

1. **Organizational health emerged as the strongest area of concern.** Of the four broad categories measured, it had the highest average severity and high-severity rate.
2. **Leadership-related difficulties appear across a range of organizational circumstances.** Written responses described competing priorities, executive misalignment, recurring problems, concentrated decision-making, accountability challenges, and dependence on key individuals. Respondents also described organizations that maintained effective execution and clear accountability under significant pressure, suggesting that complexity alone does not necessarily produce dysfunction.
3. **The reported conditions warrant investigation beyond their visible symptoms.** The findings suggest that recurring organizational difficulties may be associated with leadership decisions, behaviors, and systems. Determining whether and how leadership contributes requires further examination of the circumstances surrounding each problem.

The findings reflect respondents' reported experiences and should not be interpreted as proof of causation or as representative of all organizations. The results identify areas of concern and potential lines of inquiry; they do not establish the prevalence of these conditions across the broader organizational landscape or diagnose individual organizations.

The practical implication: organizations should examine not only the problems they experience, but also the conditions that allow those problems to persist.

The Leadership Problems Pulse asks a fundamental question:

What are organizations struggling with right now, and what might their answers reveal about the way they are led?

01 — THE PULSE AT A GLANCE

What we asked. What we found.

The Leadership Problems Pulse asked 22 respondents from 20 different organizations to assess 30 conditions that can indicate consequential leadership problems.

The findings are based on a small group of respondents and are not intended to represent all organizations. The results describe participants' reported experiences; interpret them as signals for further investigation, not as estimates of how prevalent these conditions are across the broader organizational landscape.

Responses were measured on a scale rating each condition by severity from:

0 — No problem through **4 — Serious problem**

The study examined responses across four broad problem areas:

The Four Broad Problem Areas

Problem area	Average Severity	High Severity
Organizational Health	1.9	37.1%
Execution	1.8	31.1%
Leadership Capacity	1.7	24.1%
Problem Cognizance	1.2	22.7%

The results reflect what respondents reported about the organizations and circumstances they were considering. Read them as descriptive evidence from this study, not as a representative measure of every organization or leader.

The problem we see isn't always the problem we need to solve.

- A crowded priority list may point in an unclear direction.
- Frustrated people may be working around a leadership or organizational problem.
- Recurring problems may indicate that the organization is treating symptoms instead of causes.
- A decision bottleneck may reveal a deeper issue with authority, accountability, or leadership capacity.

“What is actually happening here, and what is producing it?” That question is at the heart of this Pulse.

The results point to persistent conditions that make an organization harder to lead and execute.

You cannot evaluate leadership solely by an individual leader's actions. It also shapes how an organization sets priorities, communicates expectations, distributes authority, maintains accountability, and builds capacity to function.

- Leadership problems can become organizational problems.
- Symptoms do not explain themselves.
- Concentrated capacity creates vulnerability.

Understanding the Results

Average Severity Score reflects respondents' average rating of each condition on a scale from 0 (No Problem) to 4 (Serious Problem). High Severity % represents the percentage of respondents who rated a condition a Significant or Serious Problem.

These results describe participants' reported experiences. They identify areas of concern but do not establish causes or represent all organizations.

Several individual conditions of note:

- **Important priorities keep getting crowded out** — 2.3 average severity; 54.5% High Severity
- **Too much depends on a few key people** — 2.2; 50% High Severity
- **Good people are becoming frustrated** — 2.3; 45.5% High Severity
- **The same problems keep coming back** — 2.2; 45.5% High Severity
- **Accountability keeps slipping** — 2.1; 36.4% High Severity
- **Communication keeps breaking down** — 2.1; 31.8% High Severity

Organizations are carrying friction. People are working. Leaders are making decisions. Problems are being addressed. But the system doesn't always produce the effectiveness it needs.

That is where the investigation begins.

What the written comments add

The fixed-choice questions revealed patterns. The written comments provided context. They surfaced concerns the fixed-choice questions couldn't fully capture, including executive alignment, motivation, anxiety and overwhelm, leadership training, governance and compliance, AI-related risks, board roles, resource and authority mismatches, and the experience of working in growing or increasingly complex organizations.

They also provided exceptions. Not every respondent described an organization struggling under pressure. Some respondents described effective accountability and rapid execution during a complex merger.

Remember that the presence of pressure does not determine the quality of leadership. What matters is how the organization responds.

Looking ahead

The Leadership Problems Pulse will be conducted periodically so future editions can track how these conditions change over time.

The purpose will remain straightforward: **to look more closely at the problems organizations experience, understand what those problems reveal about leadership, and ask better questions about what is producing them.**

02 — THE VISIBLE PROBLEMS

The visible problems are familiar.

The Pulse's strongest signals are conditions leaders recognize immediately.

“Important priorities keep getting crowded out” produced an average severity score of 2.3 and the highest High-Severity percentage of any individual condition: **54.5%**. More than half of respondents rated the condition at the high end of the scale.

“Too much depends on a few key people” scored 2.2, with **50% High Severity**.

One respondent specifically described too much falling on second-line leaders. Others described decision-making and approvals becoming bottlenecked around particular leaders.

“Good people are becoming frustrated” also scored 2.3, with **45.5% High Severity**.

One respondent described declining trust, constant firefighting, and good people becoming frustrated. Another described a hostile executive environment that still promoted collaboration among employees, with good people joining the organization and then leaving.

“The same problems keep coming back” scored 2.2, with **45.5% rating it as High Severity**.

Respondents described inconsistent follow-through, unclear accountability, inconsistent expectations, and competing priorities.

While these conditions are visible, visibility is not diagnosis.

- A crowded priority list tells us something is wrong. It does not tell us why.
- Frustrated people tell us something is wrong. They do not tell us what is producing the frustration.
- Recurring problems tell us something has not been resolved. They do not tell us what remains unchanged.
- A bottleneck tells us that responsibility or authority is concentrated. It does not tell us why.

The visible problem is often where the investigation starts, not where it ends.

Better questions may be more valuable than immediate answers

- What keeps displacing important priorities?
- What are capable people repeatedly having to work around?
- Why do the same problems return?
- Why must decisions move upward?
- What organizational capabilities exist only because certain people carry them?
- Are people accountable for outcomes they can actually influence?

The findings do not establish a single solution. They identify where deeper investigation may be warranted.

03 — SYSTEMIC CAUSES BEHIND THE SYMPTOMS

What looks like an execution problem may start elsewhere.

The visible problem is that important work keeps getting displaced, but competing priorities appeared repeatedly in the written responses.

One respondent described unclear ownership, perfectionism that slows new ideas, and competing priorities. Another described the tension between long-term strategic initiatives and short-term “quick wins.” Another described the challenge of prioritizing growth against what is needed to generate income.

The issue, then, may not be that people cannot manage priorities. Leadership may not have created enough clarity about which priorities deserve protection.

Frustration may be a leadership signal.

When capable people repeatedly encounter poor decisions, weak accountability, inconsistent expectations, or unnecessary friction, frustration is not simply a morale problem. It may reveal something about the system they work in.

Respondents described good people entering an organization and leaving because of a hostile executive environment, and trust becoming harder to maintain while leaders constantly put out fires.

Frustrated employees aren't automatically right about everything, but their frustration tells us something the organization needs to understand.

Recurring problems may reveal unresolved ownership.

When a problem returns after meetings, decisions, and apparent resolution, the organization has something else to learn. The immediate issue may have been addressed. The conditions that produced it may not have been.

Respondents identified accountability, delegation, inconsistent follow-through, ownership, and inconsistent expectations among the problems having the greatest impact.

That points toward a distinction between **solving a problem** and **changing what keeps producing it**.

The recurring underlying conditions

Across the quantitative results and written comments, several conditions repeatedly appear beneath the visible problems:

Direction — What matters most?

Ownership — Who is responsible for what?

Alignment — Are leaders actually pursuing the same outcomes?

Authority — Do people have enough authority and resources to fulfill their responsibilities?

Accountability — What happens when commitments are not met?

Decision rights — Which decisions belong where?

Capacity — Can the organization support what it is asking people to accomplish?

Trust and candor — Can people challenge leadership and surface what leaders need to hear?

Leadership capability — Do leaders have the capability required by their responsibilities?

These conditions affect whether an organization can execute consistently. One concern recurs throughout the Pulse: **too much responsibility and decision-making can become concentrated in particular people.**

04 — THE LEADERSHIP BOTTLENECK

Where responsibility, ownership, and decision-making become concentrated.

The Pulse found meaningful concern around centralized decision-making and the upward movement of operational responsibility.

Respondents described bottlenecks and leaders becoming the “sole point of failure,” which slowed progress. They described their environment becoming too complex to maintain a single decision-making point.

They put the issue plainly: “The leader is making all the core decisions.”

Others described difficulty getting time with senior leadership when they needed decisions.

The concentration doesn't always happen at the very top. Respondents also described too much falling on second-line leaders.

The common thread isn't simply that leaders are busy; it is that organizational capacity concentrates in particular people.

That creates a paradox. A highly capable leader can make an organization function exceptionally well. That same leader can unintentionally become the reason the organization cannot function as well without them.

The problem becomes visible when complexity increases. Growth creates more decisions. New initiatives create more dependencies. A merger creates more coordination. A more complex environment creates more decisions than one person can reasonably make. A small company asks its leaders to wear too many hats. The organization keeps functioning because people compensate. **But compensation isn't the same as capacity.**

The deeper question is:

What can this organization do without depending on particular people to make it work?

Bottlenecks may reveal a capacity problem.

When every decision or approval moves upward, the knee-jerk response is often to ask the leader to delegate more. But delegation is not simply handing work to someone else. People need clarity, authority, capability, and enough confidence to make decisions.

One respondent described the tension directly: employees need to develop decision-making confidence while the organization still needs work to move without using leadership “as a crutch.”

Another described leaders bringing problems to the C-suite and shareholders without receiving the resources or authority required to fix them.

That is bigger than a workload problem; it is a leadership-system problem.

05 — ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

A leadership problem rarely stays confined to the person who creates it. It travels through the organization. Unclear priorities lead to reactive execution. Weak accountability allows recurring problems to persist. Centralized decisions create bottlenecks. Inconsistent leadership erodes trust, while executive misalignment creates competing directions. Over time, responsibility moves upward, capable employees compensate for weak processes, and the organization becomes increasingly dependent on particular people.

Organizational Health had the highest average severity and high-severity rate of the four broad categories measured.

The written responses illustrate how leadership conditions translate into organizational consequences across different environments. Respondents described executive teams split between long-term strategic initiatives and short-term results, senior leaders lacking shared outcomes, and organizations struggling to stay aligned amid growth and competing demands. Others raised concerns about governance, compliance, AI adoption, data protection, and the need for clear guardrails. Some faced declining enrollment and inconsistent operating budgets, while others described the strain of running a startup with limited capacity and people wearing multiple hats.

Circumstances varied, but one question emerged: **how effectively can an organization operate when leadership decisions, priorities, and responsibilities aren't aligned?**

How organizational problems accumulate

Organizational difficulties do not always begin with a major failure. They often develop through a series of individually reasonable decisions and accommodations. A manager avoids a difficult conversation. An urgent request displaces an important priority. A capable employee compensates for a weak process. A recurring problem generates another meeting rather than a lasting solution. A senior leader intervenes again because a decision cannot move forward without them.

Over time, these workarounds become normal. Problems move upward instead of being resolved where they originate. Decisions become concentrated. Priorities compete for attention. Capable people grow frustrated, and leaders spend more time addressing recurring issues than building the organization's ability to function independently.

The underlying concern is not simply that leaders are busy. The organization becomes dependent on particular individuals to sustain performance. A highly capable leader may be instrumental to an organization's success while inadvertently constraining its ability to make decisions, resolve problems, and operate without constant intervention.

Pressure is not the problem by itself

One respondent described an organization navigating a complex merger while maintaining efficient execution and clear accountability. Work continued, and people took responsibility for action items and projects despite the demands of the transition.

This counterexample illustrates that Growth, complexity, limited resources, and pressure do not automatically produce dysfunction. The more useful question is how leadership responds to those conditions, and whether its decisions and systems help the organization adapt or make it increasingly difficult to operate.

The Leadership Problems Pulse provides a view of reported conditions and their potential consequences. It does not establish that leadership caused every problem described, nor does it deliver a verdict on any individual organization. **Its value is in identifying patterns worth investigating and helping leaders ask better questions about what their organizations are experiencing, why those conditions persist, and what might need to change.**

06 — DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

The findings do not produce a universal prescription. They produce questions.

When important priorities keep getting crowded out:	Are we clear about what matters most, and are leaders protecting it when pressure arrives?
When good people become frustrated:	What are capable people repeatedly having to work around?
When the same problems keep returning:	What has actually changed since we last addressed this problem?
When decisions keep moving upward:	Why can't this decision be made closer to the work?
When too much depends on a few people:	What capability exists only because certain people carry it?
When accountability slips:	Is responsibility clear, accepted, supported, and followed through?
When leaders disagree:	Are we actually aligned, or are we simply avoiding the disagreement?
When people hesitate to challenge leadership:	What might leaders not be hearing because it is difficult to say?
When people have responsibility without authority:	Are we holding people accountable for outcomes they can influence?
When leaders are overwhelmed:	Does the organization need more effort, or does the system need to work differently?

These questions are not a checklist. They slow down the rush to explanation. A leadership problem can look obvious and still be poorly understood. Useful work begins when leaders examine what is actually happening rather than immediately deciding what the problem must be.

07 — CONCLUSION

The Leadership Problems Pulse began with a straightforward question: *What are organizations struggling with right now?*

The findings point to familiar difficulties: priorities that keep getting displaced, capable people becoming frustrated, recurring problems, and too much responsibility concentrated in too few people.

These conditions do not establish that leadership caused every problem. They do, however, give reason to examine leadership's contribution rather than assume more effort, another process, or a new initiative will solve the problem.

A leadership problem can become part of the way an organization operates. People adapt. Managers compensate. Leaders intervene. What began as an exception becomes normal, and the underlying difficulty becomes harder to recognize.

The work begins by looking beyond the visible symptom and examining the decisions, behaviors, and organizational conditions that may be sustaining it.

What if the way your organization is led is sustaining the problem you're trying to solve?

APPENDIX

The appendix lists all 30 conditions, ranked by the percentage of respondents who rated each condition a Significant or Serious Problem.

Rank	Condition	HIGH SEVERITY (Sig. and Ser.)
1	Important priorities keep getting crowded out.	54.5%
2	Too much depends on a few key people.	50.0%
3	The same problems keep coming back.	45.5%
4	Good people are becoming frustrated.	45.5%
5	The culture doesn't match what leadership says it values.	36.4%
6	Accountability keeps slipping.	36.4%
7	Difficult conversations are being avoided.	36.4%
8	The team isn't aligned on what matters.	36.4%
9	The team has stopped challenging the leader.	31.8%
10	Communication keeps breaking down.	31.8%
11	The leader is constantly putting out fires.	31.8%
12	The leader has become the bottleneck.	31.8%
13	The organization is experiencing unnecessary friction.	31.8%
14	Trust has become harder to maintain.	31.8%
15	Managers aren't really managing.	27.3%
16	The leader is carrying too much of the organization's responsibility.	27.3%
17	Decisions aren't sticking.	27.3%
18	People aren't clear about who owns what.	27.3%
19	Growth has exposed weaknesses in the way the organization is led.	27.3%
20	Everyone is busy, but not enough is getting done.	27.3%
21	Poor performance is being tolerated too long.	27.3%
22	Feedback isn't changing anything.	27.3%
23	The organization works when the leader is present and struggles when the leader is absent.	22.7%
24	The organization is losing momentum.	22.7%
25	The leader's expectations aren't translating into behavior.	22.7%
26	Something important isn't working, but the leader can't quite identify why.	22.7%
27	Problems are being escalated that shouldn't be.	13.6%
28	The team is becoming dependent instead of capable.	13.6%
29	People aren't taking enough ownership.	13.6%
30	The leader can't get everyone moving in the same direction.	9.1%



KARL BIMSHAS CONSULTING | 2150 COMSTOCK STREET #710192 | SAN DIEGO, CA 92111