Leading under sustained pressure

68 %
frequently reach their limits

63 %
frequently see strain impairing their decision quality

12 %
see their company's leadership capacity managed as deliberately as other key corporate resources

45 %
fear disadvantages if they openly admit their limit

KEY MESSAGE

Sustained pressure is wearing down the leadership capacity of German companies. Only one company in eight manages it deliberately.

After five years of permacrisis, the state of emergency has become everyday life at the top. This online survey of 185 managing directors, C-level executives and division heads in Germany shows what that means for strain, decisions and organisations.

1. **The top is running on reserve.**
   68 percent frequently reach their limits, and just as many report more strain than five years ago. 64 percent see their performance below the level of their best phases.
2. **Decision quality falls as strain rises.**
   63 percent frequently experience strain impairing their decisions and results: 73 percent of those who rate their strain as high, 50 percent of those with low strain. For 62 percent, day-to-day business frequently crowds out work on the future.
3. **Leadership capacity goes unmanaged.**
   Only 12 percent say their company manages the performance of its leadership as deliberately as other key corporate resources. 45 percent fear career disadvantages if they openly say they have reached their limit. Only 28 percent have ever used their company's support offers.

The strongest lever. Where dedicated support offers and a known contact person exist, executives feel far safer raising strain openly. Together, both factors explain about half of the differences in this sense of safety, the closest relationship in the study. Self-management often lacks a foundation: more than half have no fixed system for sustaining their performance under pressure.

What this means for companies. Leadership capacity, the reserve of attention, judgement and emotional stability at the top, is a corporate resource like working time or staff. Managing it is the job of top management.

- Manage leadership capacity deliberately
- Model openness from the top
- Assign clear responsibility
- Secure time for the future

MindBright Research (2026): Leading under sustained pressure. n = 185 top executives in Germany, preregistered (OSF). Not representative; self-reports.