



JBL RESEARCH · EDITION 01

STATE OF LEADERSHIP FRICTION

The JBL Friction Report 2026

What friction costs mid-market businesses, where it hides in the leadership layer, and what removing it returns.

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Good people, held back by friction.
We find it and remove it.

THE REPORT IN EIGHT NUMBERS

**nearly
3,500**

Managers through JBL engagements

30+

Organisations across 10+ countries

~4 hrs

Reclaimed per manager, every week

40%

More decisions made at the right level

15%

Fewer escalations to senior leaders

8.75/10

Line managers who would sponsor again

92.5%

Recommend rate

4.92/5

Average programme rating

01 WHAT REMOVING FRICTION RETURNS

Good people, held back by friction

Across JBL High Performance engagements with nearly 3,500 managers in more than 30 organisations, removing friction gave each manager back **around four hours a week** and moved 40% more decisions to the right level.

Those hours were already being lost before the work started: to escalations that didn't need to travel, rework and meetings that clarified nothing. Escalations fell by 15%, and the change was confirmed by the managers' own line managers, who scored the work 8.75/10 for whether they'd sponsor it again.

Friction is rarely a people problem. JBL's work with mid-market businesses keeps finding capable managers stuck in the weeds because decision rights are unclear, priorities multiply and work flows upwards by default. Fix the friction and the same people run the business, rather than running to you.

Where friction concentrates

The JBL Friction Index scores five dimensions of the leadership layer out of 100, where lower means more friction. The 2026 read from the JBL Friction Finder puts leadership bandwidth at the top of the list, with an average overall score of 37.6 out of 100.

1. Leadership Bandwidth 35.5/100



Senior people are absorbing work that should sit with their teams. This is where capacity disappears first.

2. Communication Clarity 41.8/100



Messages are sent but not landing. Teams interpret rather than execute.

3. Strategic Alignment 45.0/100



The strategy exists, but the people making daily decisions can't connect their work to it.

4. Team Autonomy 48.0/100



Teams wait for permission instead of acting. Decision rights haven't been handed down.

5. Decision Velocity 53.3/100



The strongest dimension, and still short of the point where decisions flow without bottlenecks.

Most friction is quiet, not catastrophic

More than three quarters of leaders in the 2026 Friction Finder read sit in the Icebreaker or Moderate Friction profiles. The friction isn't breaking the business. It's draining capacity, time and decision quality every week, which is why it so often goes unaddressed.

Icebreaker Leader

44%

Doing well, with specific patterns holding the team back.

Moderate Friction

33%

Friction is measurable and costing time, but not yet structural.

High Friction

11%

Friction is embedded in how the team operates.

Amplifier Leader

11%

Already multiplying capacity across the team.

See it, solve it, scale it

These findings map directly onto Simplify to Amplify, the method JBL uses to find and remove friction.

SEE

Find the friction

Leadership Bandwidth is the first place to look. Map where your managers' week actually goes and which decisions keep travelling upwards.

SOLVE

Remove it at the source

Clarify decision rights and the handful of priorities that matter this quarter, so teams act without waiting and messages land first time.

SCALE

Make it stick

Build the new habits into the day job, not on top of it, and have line managers confirm the change rather than relying on self-report.

ABOUT THE DATA

Engagement outcomes (section 01 and the key numbers) are the measures JBL High Performance tracks and publishes across its programmes: participant and line-manager evaluations, programme ratings and before-and-after measures of escalations, hours and decision level. Hours reclaimed and escalation figures come from measured client programmes such as Tatua; line-manager scores come from the managers' own bosses, not self-report.

The JBL Friction Index (sections 02 and 03) is an early read from JBL Friction Finder responses submitted between May and September 2026. It's a small, self-selected sample, so treat the dimension scores and profiles as directional rather than a benchmark. JBL will update the Index as responses grow.

Internal and test submissions were removed. No names, email addresses or company names appear in this report; every figure is a count, percentage or average.

Where is friction costing you?

The JBL Friction Finder takes about five minutes and scores your leadership layer on the same five dimensions as this report.

Find out where friction is costing you: jblhighperformance.com/leadership-friction-finder

JBL High Performance. The Leadership Consultancy and Advisory for businesses held back by friction.