

The manager's oxygen mask strengthen your leadership

Are you thriving or surviving?

That is a question we do not ask often enough. But it is here your good leadership begins. During a workweek filled with tightly scheduled meetings and nonstop urgent tasks, it is your job as a manager to take responsibility, stay focused and be there for others. But do you take care of yourself as well?

Far too many managers navigate a constant field of tension between demands and resources, ambition and exhaustion and what you give to others – and what you need yourself.

So, the question is not just how you perform as a manager, but also how you feel while doing it?

Research clearly indicates a close connection between the manager's well-being and the quality of his or her leadership. When you feel balanced, you make better decisions, are more present and therefore lead more effectively.

Knowing how to take care of yourself is important not only for you, but also for your team.



Help yourself before helping others

This instruction is given for oxygen masks as part of the safety procedure on a plane. The same instruction applies to you as a manager. To be able to help your employees and be the best possible manager, you have to prioritise your own needs and be in balance.

It begins with you

Good leadership requires balance – with breaks, prioritisation, planning, reflection and awareness built into everyday routines.

The critical balance between demands and resources

This tool is designed to focus on perceived demands and resources in order to create awareness of what causes imbalance and what can be done to restore the balance.

Identify demands and resources in your everyday work

When working on your own well-being, it is a good idea to start by taking stock of what is pressuring you and what could improve your well-being.



Imagine a two-sided scale:

- **The left side:**
Represents all the demands you are currently facing. The things that sap your energy, aggravate your sense of pressure and cause imbalance. They can be internal demands you feel withing yourself (e.g. “I just need to pull myself together”) or external demands (work pressure, too tight deadlines, unsatisfied employees, etc.).
- **The right side:**
Represents your resources. The things that give you energy and strengthen your wellbeing and job performance. They can be internal resources (e.g. your competence and experience, your ability to deal with difficult emotions under pressure). They can also be external resources (your high level of well-being when your team performs and succeeds or when you solve complex dilemmas).

Start by taking out a sheet of paper and note your demands and resources on the respective sides of the scale.

The last part of the exercise is about focusing on what you can influence in order to adjust the balance.

- How can you increase the focus on strengthening your resources and reducing your sense of demands if you feel that the scale has tipped?
- Where do you feel that the scale is tipping – and what can you do to change it?
- What kind of support from others is required for you to influence the factors?

These questions can help you clarify what you can do yourself.

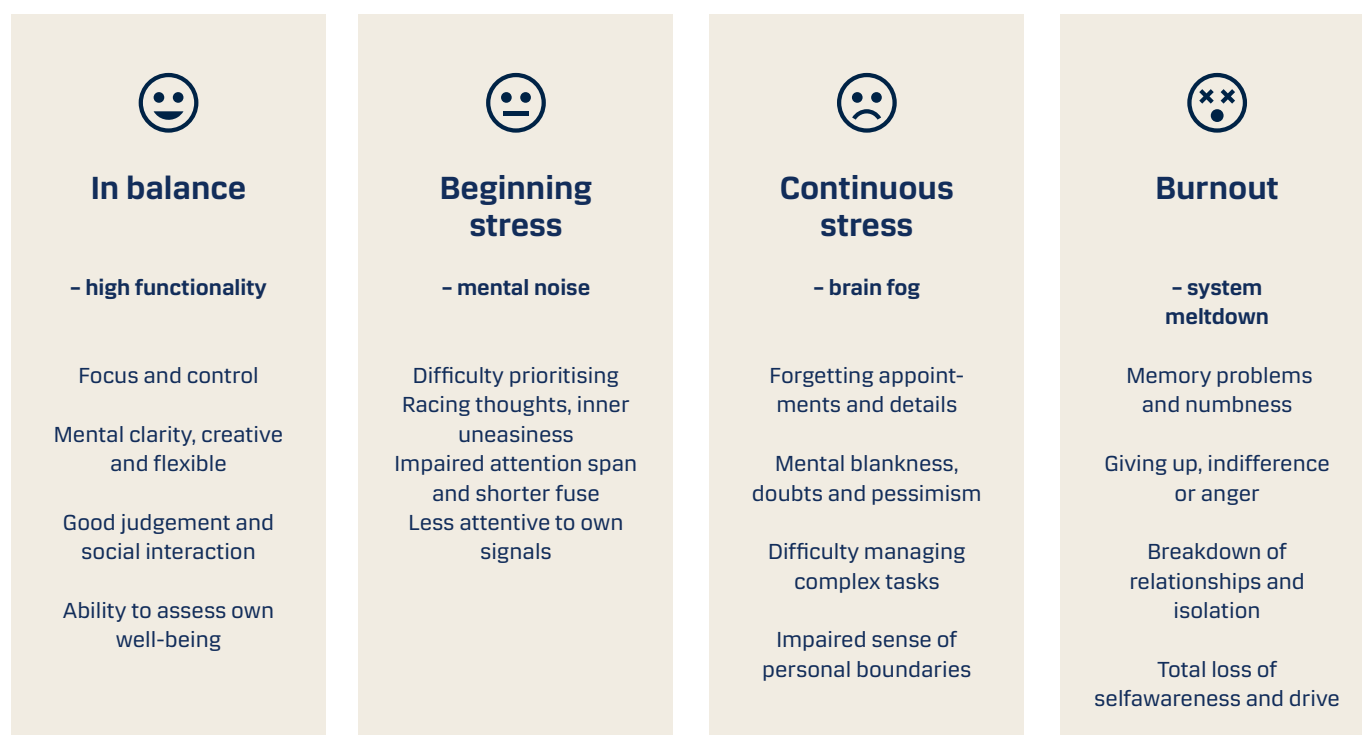
Pay attention to your own signals

A long-lasting imbalance weakens the functions of the brain's frontal lobes, which can result in impaired cognitive flexibility and empathy – two key leadership skills*.

So, you will not become a better manager by pushing yourself harder. If you are under a lot of pressure, your brain function deteriorates – even if you do not feel it yourself. It affects your sense of control, your judgement and your ability to be present. Being a manager comes with special risks, so it is especially important that you keep an eye on your own balance.

Cognitive stress – here are some signs you need to know as a manager

Here you can see how cognitive stress develops over time – from high functionality to burnout. The aim is to help you detect signs of stress in time.



The earlier you notice symptoms, the easier it is to restore balance. As a manager, it is not a sign of weakness to feel stress – it is a condition in a complex role. What is important is that you take action in time.

We often see that managers react too late – when they have become so burnt-out that they need to withdraw completely from work for a period of time.

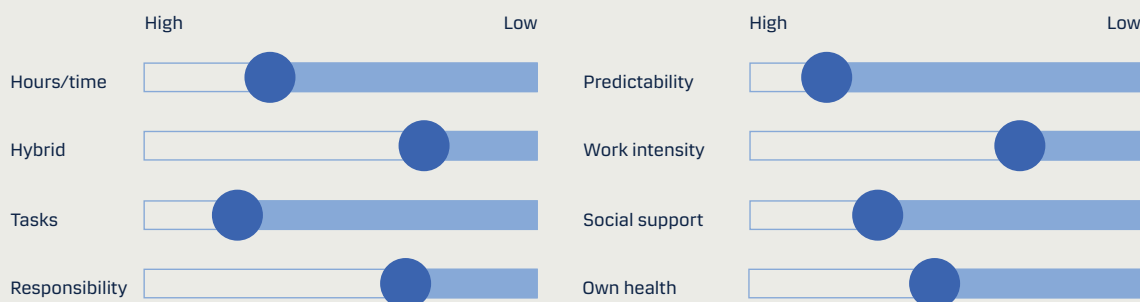
Unfortunately, we often also see that returning to work can be challenging for managers. One of the reasons may be that it is often difficult to adjust the hours expected from and the demands made on managers.

* Arnsten, 2009

Turn up and down as necessary

To be the best possible manager, it is essential to know where and when to adjust your focus. It is not just about cutting back on work hours, taking a long holiday or taking a break from work for a period of time. It is about creating flexibility on several parameters.

Create more focus



The point is simple: When you get the opportunity to turn down a little here – and a little up there – you can create a better balance before the strain becomes overwhelming.

It is not about doing less. It is about doing the right thing for you and for your well-being.

Use the tool for self-reflection

Reflect:

- What is turned up too high – and what do you need more of?
- What factors could you adjust to most effectively improve your well-being – e.g. amount of work, responsibility, predictability and support.

You can also use the tool to express your needs when talking to your manager.

It can facilitate a concrete and forward-looking conversation about how you succeed in your role – without burning out.

When you thrive – your team and the organisation thrive

We hope the tools and inputs presented to you here will help you remember your own oxygen mask. Not only when you are pushed to the edge – but as a natural part of your leadership.

Get support and advice in your role as manager

If your workplace has a health package with us, you can get online leadership coaching and psychological counselling weekdays from 9am to 9pm.

Read more and book an appointment via our Mobilpension App.

Because you as
a manager also
**deserve a life
in balance.**