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Press Release

## Study

# Little Risk of Burnout for Top Managers

**More responsibility = more likely to suffer from burnout? A study on the relation between status and the risk of burnout, just released by Kühne Logistics University (KLU), shows just the opposite: managers in the topmost tiers are at less risk of burnout than those in middle and lower management. The study identifies two critical factors in this regard and discusses what can be done to protect managers at all levels.**

“Our research shows: the farther up in the hierarchy a manager is, the less risk there is of them suffering from burnout,” says Jennifer Korman. Together with Prof. Niels Van Quaquebeke and Prof. Christian Tröster, in a new study she investigates the relation between a manager’s position in the corporate hierarchy and their risk of burnout.

## More control means less stress

Previous studies had already indicated that being at a higher level in the hierarchy generally led to better mental health. Yet the question remained whether this trend also applied to burnout – in other words, whether managers were at less risk. According to Prof. Niels Van Quaquebeke: “Simply put, people in leadership positions enjoy more control, say, when it comes to executing their tasks, or over the people they work with. This feeling of having things “under control” helps protect them from mental strains like stress, fear or, as our study now shows, burnout.” What factors influence this relation?

## Power and self-efficacy

In their study, the researchers concentrated on two potential factors, both of which are facets of “control.” One is the “sense of power,” i.e., the respective manager’s ability to influence the people around them; the second is their “self-efficacy”: the feeling that they can successfully perform their duties because of their own skills and expertise. In the course of two rounds, the authors surveyed 580 and 154 managers respectively, and people who were close to them. “We found that managers’ own sense of power and self-efficacy, separately and to equal extents, are what explain the connection between hierarchy level and burnout,” says Korman. In other words, both factors proved to be essential prerequisites for preventing burnout.

## Supporting managers’ mental health

“Needless to say, that doesn’t mean companies should try to promote everyone from middle management to the upper tiers, just to protect them

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from burnout,” Van Quaquebeke explains. “But, for instance, improving abstract thinking among those in middle management can improve their sense of power and protect them from burnout.” When it comes to fostering self-efficacy, other helpful factors include a positive error culture, resiliency training, and role models within the company. “Mentoring and competent colleagues can help managers to believe in themselves, and pave the way for success stories,” says Korman. “Moreover, companies should encourage their managers to shape and refine their jobs as independently as possible.”

**Publication:** Korman, Jennifer, Niels Van Quaquebeke and Christian Tröster (in press): Managers are less burned-out at the top: The roles of sense of power and self-efficacy at different hierarchy levels, *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

#### Images:

- [Photo: Jennifer Korman](#)
- [Photo: Niels Van Quaquebeke](#)
- [Photo material, KLU](#)

#### About KLU

*Kühne Logistics University – Wissenschaftliche Hochschule für Logistik und Unternehmensführung (KLU) – is a private university located in Hamburg’s Hafencity. The independent, state-certified university’s major research areas are Sustainability, Digital Transformation and Value Creation in the fields of Transport, Global Logistics, and Supply Chain Management.*

*KLU is one of very few private universities in Germany entitled to confer their own PhDs. The 2021 ranking of the Wirtschaftswoche identifies KLU as one of the strongest research universities in the field of Business Administration in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Comparing the research output per professor among all participating universities, KLU ranked 4th in Germany and 8th in the DACH region. In the latest CHE university ranking, KLU obtained the highest marks for all major criteria.*

*With one BSc and three MSc degree programs, a structured doctoral program, and a part-time Executive MBA, KLU offers its 400 full-time students a high level of specialization and excellent learning conditions. KLU has an international team of 23 professors who teach in English. In open, tailor-made management seminar series, industry specialists and managers alike benefit from the application of academic findings to practical issues.*

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