

Working conditions and health of leaders

40 baua: Facts

Leaders are exposed to high demands at work, particularly in terms of work intensity. At the same time, however, they have more work-related resources at their disposal (e.g. larger decision latitude) than employees without leadership responsibilities. These resources may help leaders to cope with work demands. Nevertheless, adverse or exceeding work demands of leaders may affect their well-being and health. In this contribution, we present according results of the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018.

The behaviour of leaders is linked to the health and well-being of employees.¹ If leaders find themselves in favourable working and health conditions, healthy leadership is more likely.² Using data from the 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey, we analyse working conditions, resources and health complaints to which employees with and without leadership responsibilities are exposed. In addition, the number of employees managed are considered in this context. Our analysis refers to full-time employees subject to social insurance requirements (n= 13,275).

Demands on leaders

Leaders report high work demands in terms of work intensity (see Figure 1). Compared to employees without leadership responsibilities, leaders have to take immediate decisions, manage multiple tasks or processes simultaneously, work under strong pressure to meet deadlines or pressure to perform and work at the limits of their capabilities. In addition, they are often disturbed or interrupted at work. The more staff they have to manage, the higher are the work demands they face. In contrast to leaders managing one to two employees, those with responsibilities for more than ten employees report more requirements in terms of multitasking (69 % vs. 84 %), strong pressure to meet deadlines or pressure to perform (56 % vs. 66 %), disturbances and interruptions (54 % vs. 66 %) and the need to work very quickly (38 % vs. 42 %).

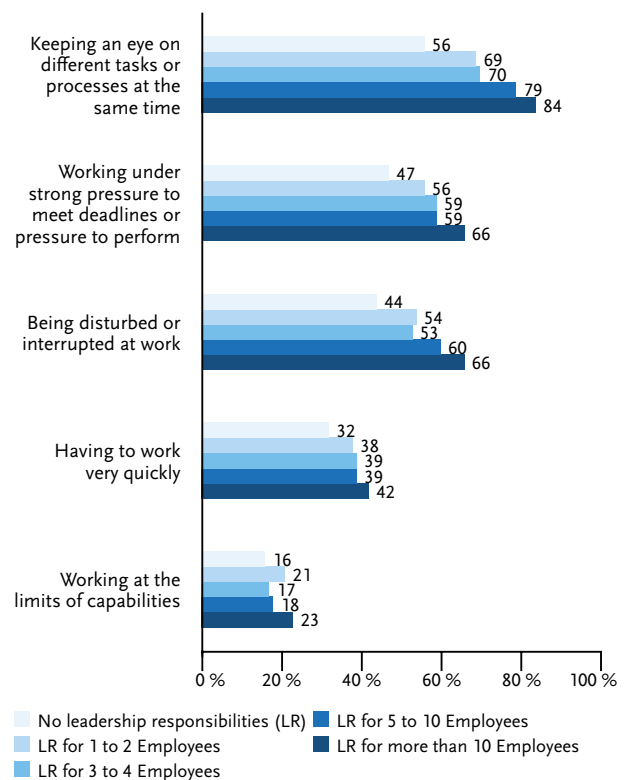


Fig. 1 Frequent work demands of employees subject to social insurance requirements with and without leadership responsibilities (in %)

Resources of leaders

In order to cope with adverse work demands, work-related resources are important (see Figure 2). Leaders, who manage only one or two employees, tend to have less options to plan and schedule their work independently compared to those, who manage more than ten of staff (71 % vs. 80 %). The two groups also differ in terms of taking breaks freely (65 % vs. 74 %) and to influence the amount of their work (32 % vs. 39 %). In terms of social support from colleagues and the direct supervisor no differences could be found, neither amongst leaders nor between leaders and followers.

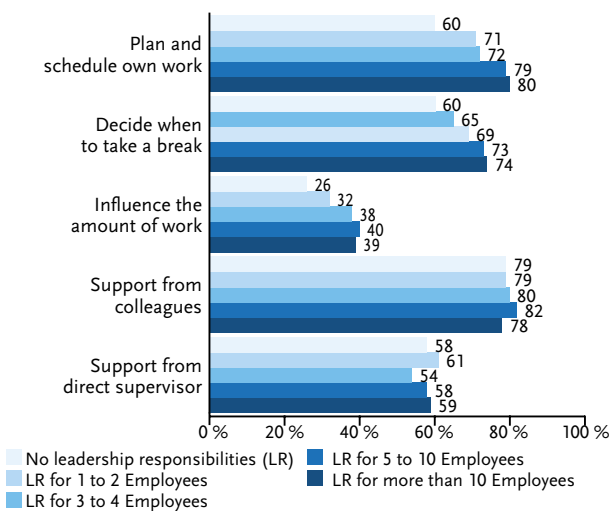


Fig. 2 Frequent resources of employees subject to social insurance requirements with and without leadership responsibilities (in %)

Health complaints of leaders

Figure 3 shows the number of psychosomatic complaints of leaders who are frequently versus never exposed to aspects of work intensity. These psychosomatic complaints include symptoms such as digestive complaints, headaches, exhaustion, fatigue, or sleep disorders. Specifically, exceeding workload at the limits of capabilities is associated with psychosomatic complaints: 71 % of leaders who frequently mention this degree of work intensity report three or more complaints. In addition, 53 % of leaders who often have to work under strong deadline or performance pressure or very quickly have three or more complaints. The same applies to about half (46 % and 50 %) of the leaders who often manage different tasks or processes simultaneously or experience disturbances and interruptions. Leaders, who report lower grades of these requirements report less psychosomatic complaints.

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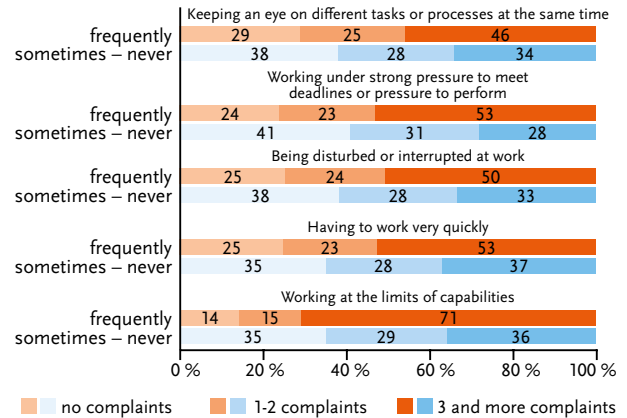


Fig. 3 Frequent work demands and psychosomatic complaints of leaders subject to social insurance requirements (in %).

Conclusion

Leaders are exposed to higher demands in terms of work intensity than employees without leadership responsibilities. At the same time, they report more work-related resources with the potential to buffer these demands. This especially applies to leaders, who manage more staff. For those leaders, increased demands often go along with health complaints, despite additional resources. Further industry specific analyses show, that leaders in the service sector report specific demands. However, independently of service sectors, working conditions and resources of leaders in the service sector are associated with health complaints.³ Unfavourable requirements and psychosomatic complaints can contribute an unhealthy leadership style. Against this background, companies should focus on the health status of their executives as a key employee group.

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Further information

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- 2 Stressreport Deutschland 2019. Psychische Anforderungen, Ressourcen und Befinden 1. Auflage. Dortmund: BAuA 2020. Verfügbar unter www.baua.de/dok/8824662
- 3 F. Pundt & M. Lück, 2021. Working conditions and health of leaders in three service sectors. SMR – Journal of Service Management Research, 5 (2), 103–118.