

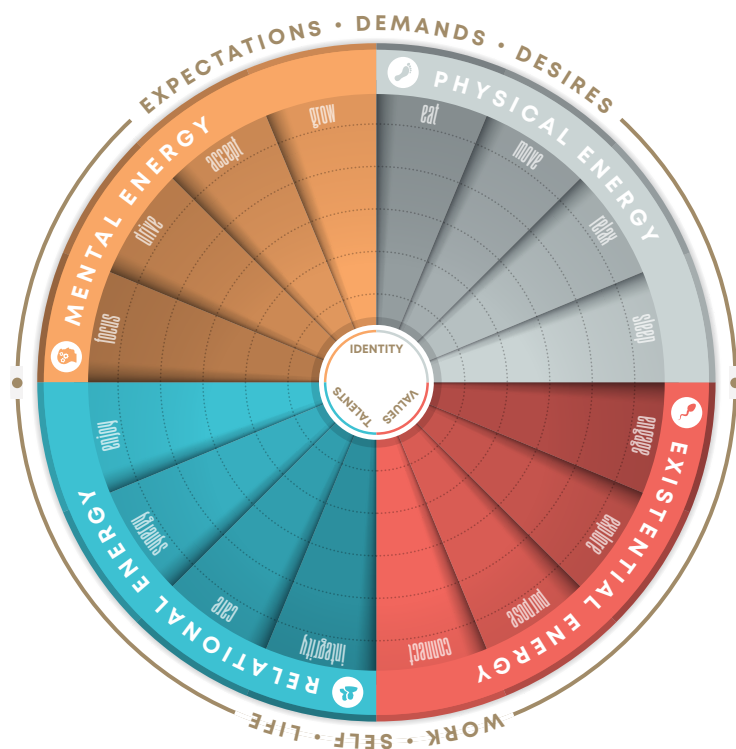
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The Energy Wheel

A FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING ON ENERGY AND HEALTH IN ORGANIZATIONS



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In order to perform well, it is important to feel good. Traditionally, we approach this mainly from a social-psychological standpoint as a mental-relational issue. It is becoming increasingly clear that more is needed. In addition to feeling good mentally, you also need to feel good physically. And the two are closely linked. Optimal well-being occurs when there is sufficient energy on a mental, physical, relational and existential level. If we want to meet the challenges of life and work in the 21st century, we need to focus on optimum availability and distribution of energy. The key lies with companies, organisations and schools, which are places where people live and work together. And where it is very important to do so in optimal conditions.

What it means to be *human* and how we can create environments in which people can flourish is a question that has long driven us at Kessels & Smit. Usually the focus is on what happens inside people's heads, and what happens between people's heads. What we often forget is that there is also a body underneath those heads.

As coaches, we are increasingly confronted with personal issues that have to do with energy. People feel a shortage of energy or experience an energy leak. This often also has effects on the physical plane. These issues contain a complexity that we often cannot solve on our own with our own competences. This has led us to learn and experiment a great deal ourselves in new areas and to cooperate intensively with other professionals in other disciplines. We work with them in a network that we call KOPMAN. With this network, we create for ourselves a unique place where new knowledge can emerge. For example, we have developed a new framework for looking at energy and well-being, applicable to organisations and individuals. It is underpinned by the many solid scientific studies that have been conducted in the various fields.

We hope that as a framework it can support organisations, companies and schools that want to become healthier places to learn, work and live together.

How evolution raises health issues

The world in the 21st century looks very different to the way it did when the first Homo sapiens saw the light of day some 160,000 years ago. With our intelligence, we have dramatically changed the environment in which we live. Especially during the last 200 years, our lifestyle has changed fundamentally. For the better, of course, because we have never been so mobile and we are now rarely too cold or too hot. When we are hungry, we just need to open the fridge, when we are sick we go to the doctor. Never before in history have so few people died of violence or infection. Moreover, we are living longer and longer. We are doing well.

But the prosperity we have created for ourselves turns out to have a downside as well. The evolution of our genes cannot keep up with the speed of change. We have created a context for ourselves to which we are insufficiently adapted. Never before have so many people stayed home from

work due to psychosocial complaints. Just about everyone suffers from mental stress to a greater or lesser extent. Age-related illnesses, such as diabetes, back pain, depression and heart disease, now occur much more frequently and much earlier in life. The early onset of these diseases has a lot to do with our lifestyle. We live differently, we eat differently, we exercise differently, there is more air pollution, the quality of the food we buy has declined, we live indoors more often, the type of work we do is different, how we spend our leisure time is different and how we live together has changed. Many aspects of life have changed fundamentally, for better or for worse.

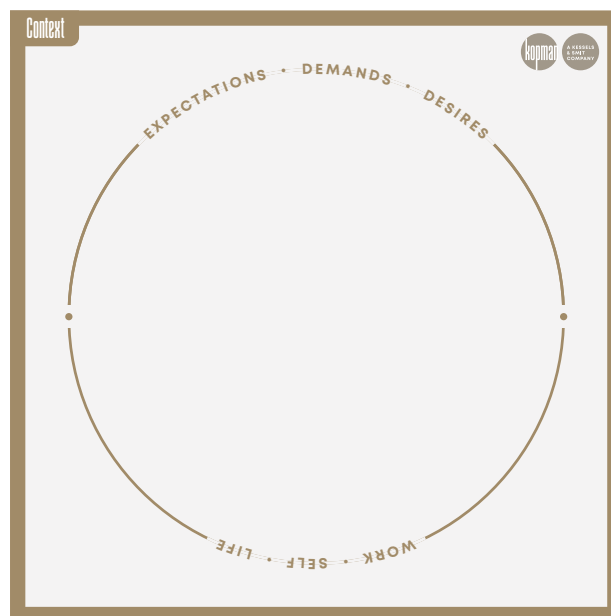
So, along with prosperity, we have created for ourselves an environment that is far removed from what we as humans are designed for. And that world is something we have to learn to deal with. To be able to do that, it is important to have enough energy and to use it in the right way.

The Energy Wheel

In our work on this theme, we have brought together the various facets that determine people's energy into a framework. The main purpose of this framework is to be pragmatic as a model for analysis and intervention and to provide the necessary insights to get started. The wheel starts from the distance that exists between our context and what we as humans are made for. Subsequently, energy is needed in various domains to be able to bridge that distance. Each form of energy has its own interventions, some of which we will mention here by way of example.

We all live in a certain context. That context is different for everyone, because the type of work we do and the conditions of life are different for everyone. What is true for everyone is that this context has certain expectations and demands that we have to meet. If you want a salary at the end of the month, you have to meet certain

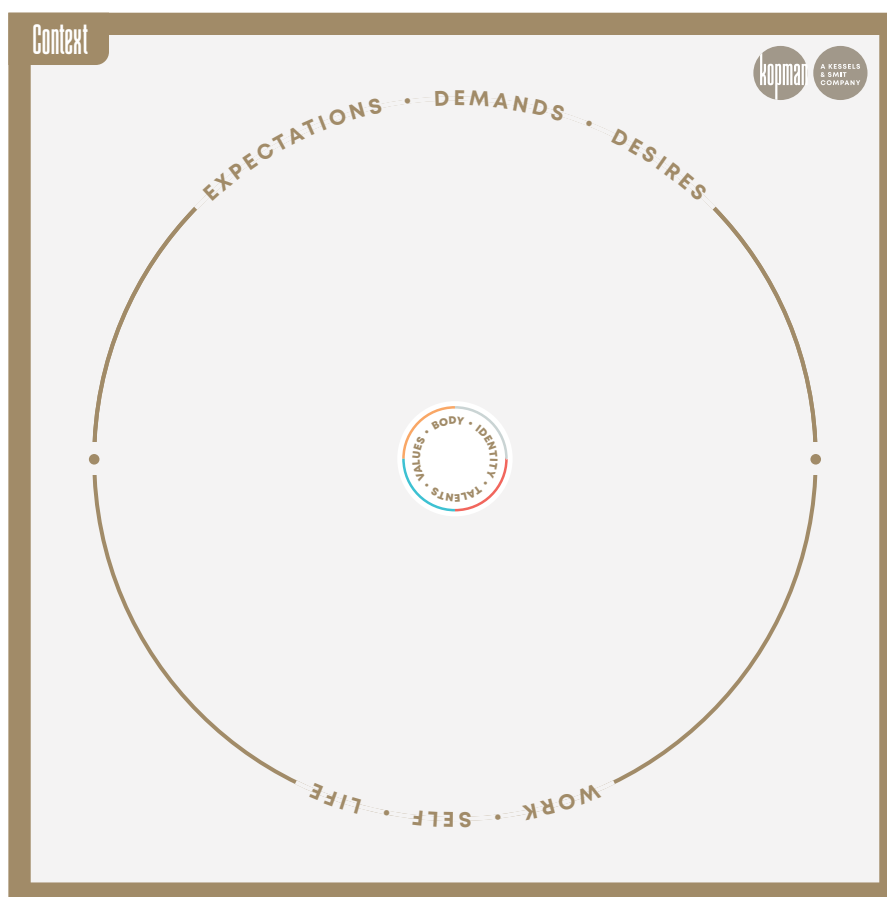
expectations. At the same time, that context is constantly changing. The world changes at breakneck speed. The expectations placed on you by your job ten years ago were completely different to those today. A family with small children also places different expectations on you than when your children have left home. If you are healthy, it is different than if you live with a disability or illness. This means that the sum total of requirements and expectations is different for everyone. Sometimes it feels great, and sometimes you are overwhelmed and wonder how long you can keep this up. Besides the expectations that work and life place on you, there are also desires, ambitions or aspirations that come from within you. These can also increase the general pressure of expectations. Those who make high demands on themselves, or are even somewhat perfectionist, make their own context even more challenging and demanding.



In the middle of that demanding environment is you, with all the assets you have: your talents, the values you cherish and who you are as a person. When the overlap between what you have to offer and the context is great, it is easy to deal with those demands. A context that fits well with your talents, your values and your identity enables you to experience a great deal of energy in life and work and to meet expectations without much effort.

Suppose, for example, that your work context expects you to have many social interactions

with people, and it is important for your work that you build up a relationship with them and do a lot of networking. If this is also something that feels very natural to you, is effortless and gives you pleasure, it will not take much energy to meet these expectations. But if you have no talent for relationships at all and dread every new meeting, it will be very difficult for you to meet the expectations of your work every day. As long as there is enough energy, it works. But if you can't recharge and keep going for a long time with a lack of energy, you get into trouble. You need energy to bridge the gap with the context you are in.



ENERGY IN ALL ITS FORMS



When we talk about energy, we usually mean **mental energy**. In order to better cope with the expectations of the context, it helps to develop competences, to learn and to grow. Many of the training courses offered to professionals are aimed at this. Top athletes also invest a lot in developing mental skills, in order to be able to perform when the pressure and importance are high. They develop a certain toughness, a sturdiness, with which they can direct and control their mental energy. Having a clear focus, being able to motivate yourself, setting goals and being well organised for them are skills that help to increase mental energy and expand your 'mental space'.



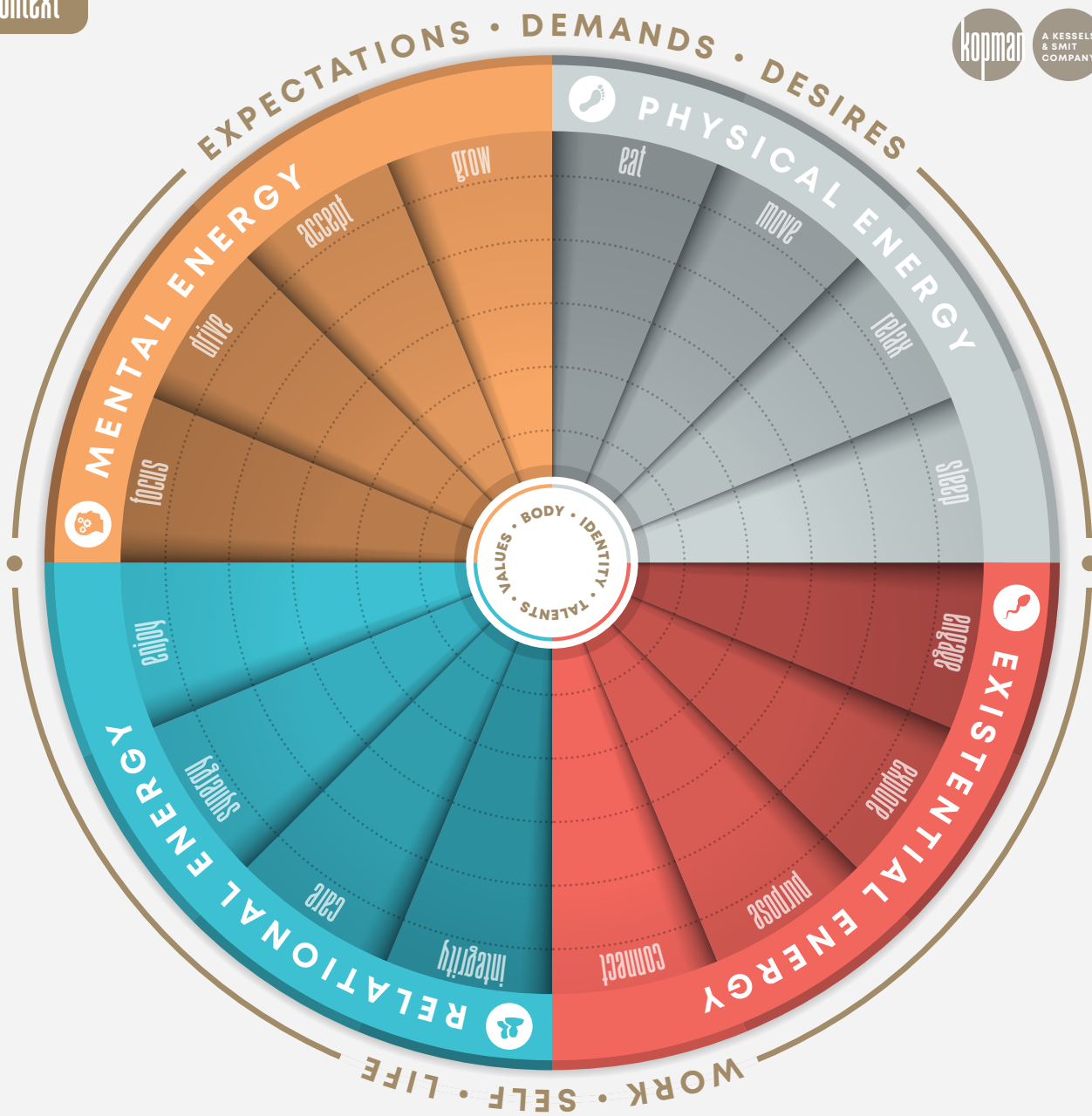
A second form of energy that gets a lot of attention is **relational energy**. Everyone feels that relationships can give a lot of energy, but that relational problems or conflicts between people can be an enormous energy eater. To get the relational energy high, organisations invest a lot in relational competencies and team building. Mastering these skills makes it easier to connect with others or to put difficult themes on the table, but also to create together with others and to have fun together. Being able to build and maintain good relationships ensures that relational energy is high.



There is a strong connection between mental and relational energy and **physical energy**. The *head* and the *man* or *woman* are more connected than we sometimes think. It is becoming increasingly clear that a prolonged shortage of mental energy can cause physical problems, and vice versa. A well-known example of this is burnout. Prolonged cognitive stress eventually disrupts sleep and biorhythms, increases blood pressure, speeds up the heart rate, makes breathing shallower and reduces movement. Over time, this leads to various physical complaints. But also vice versa: chronic inflammation or chronic pain can have an effect on your mental health. So you can also get burnout as a result of a physical problem, or from a relational problem. The mental impact is then only secondary. This also makes it complex to diagnose and treat burnout. The effect of exercise, a healthy diet and a good night's sleep on people's mental health can hardly be overestimated.



The fourth domain is the **existential** or spiritual **energy**. Existence is about the right to exist, about the meaning that life gives and has. Work today is for many an important source of meaning. We want to do something meaningful, contribute to the world, be of service. Being able to do meaningful work, into which you can put your heart, is a great source of existential energy. The feeling that your work contributes to nothing, or has little meaning, is an energy eater.



Many people experience a certain efficiency in their lives. They are here with a certain mission or purpose. When they experience that their work and life are in line with this purpose, it gives them a great deal of energy. Inner turmoil and conflict often arise when one is unable to serve that meaningful purpose in life, and that takes energy.

As *homo sapiens*, we are also social beings, for whom it is important to feel connected to

something larger than ourselves: a family, a group of friends, colleagues, a particular community, a nation or nature. The opposite of feeling connected is loneliness. From connectedness comes security and trust. This is a basic condition for that which perhaps most characterises the *homo sapiens*: searching for new horizons and exploring. In this way, consciousness, change, growth and evolution arise.

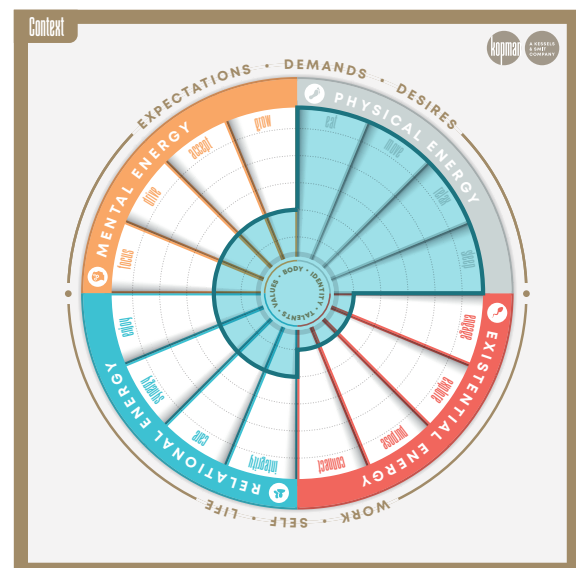
AVAILABILITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF ENERGY

Energy is needed to cope with the expectations of the context. The more challenging the context, the more energy is needed. So, in today's rapidly changing and demanding society, a lot of energy is needed in general.

So what does it mean to have enough energy? Well, a healthy person is naturally fit, curious, explorative and entrepreneurial. These are the qualities that made us start from Africa to explore the rest of the world and made us evolve so much as human beings. Those who did not have sufficient energy did not survive evolutionary selection. So optimal health and optimal **availability** of energy means that there is a surplus of energy. You can only explore, take risks, undertake and learn if extra energy is available to invest. Young people who do not have enough energy cannot learn well. Employees whose energy level is too low do not show entrepreneurial behaviour.

People sometimes experience that they have an *energy leak*. That means that the energy is redistributed in such a way that it feels like there is too little energy in certain places. The available energy remains the same, but the **distribution** changes according to what is needed at that moment.

When you are ill, for example, all energy is redistributed in function of your physical recovery. Consequently, there is less relational energy, so you isolate yourself and want to be left alone. Your ability to think and also your memory deteriorate at that time (mentally) and you do not get to work on big questions in life (existentially). When a week later the illness is over, your body restores the distribution of energy.



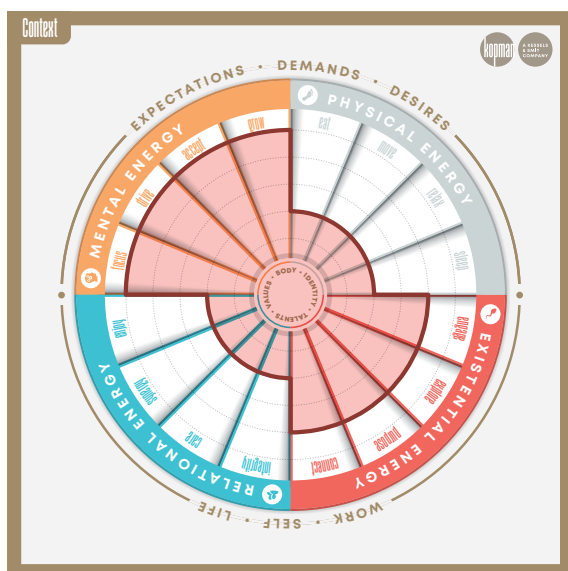
Distribution of energy in case of e.g. flu

Illness is one, but also with other stressors, energy is redistributed. Deadlines, for example, are something we don't handle well. Deadlines are so recent in evolution that we have not yet developed a system to respond to them adequately; so we use another (old) strategy. From an evolutionary perspective, a deadline is a threat, similar to a lion. As the lion approaches, more mental energy is needed: to think of solutions and to determine an escape route. More physical energy is also needed: heart rate and blood pressure rise, breathing becomes shallower and metabolism speeds up.

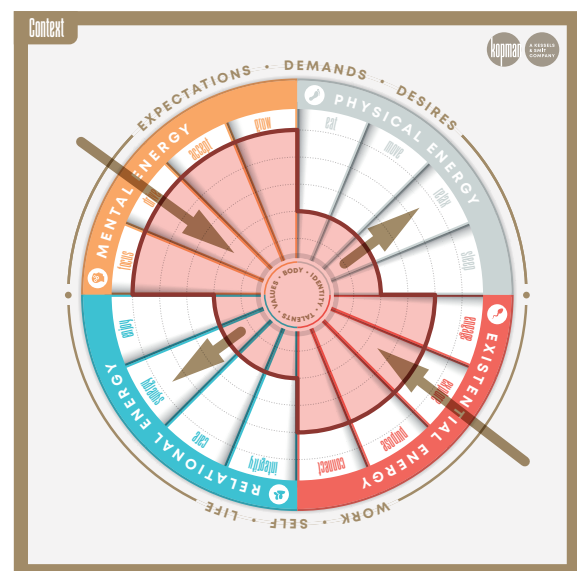
So we react to a deadline in the same way as we would to a lion. At that moment it is of vital importance that as much as possible of all available energy is sent to the mental and physical part. The consequence is that less energy is available in the other parts (relational and existential). This is normal and very natural: if the energy would not be redistributed in this way, you would be eaten by the deadline (or lion). And at that moment it is less important to maintain relationships with others (relational energy), let alone to start philosophising (existential energy). So at moments of acute stress we have a well-functioning system, which enables us to deal with the challenge. The moment the threat disappears (the lion is gone, or the deadline has been met), everything goes back to normal.

What we don't have a system for is to keep this up for months or years. *Homo sapiens* cannot cope well with chronic stress. The danger of chronic redistribution of energy is a chronic lack of energy in certain areas. On a physical level this can lead, for example, to a disturbance in your sleep, weight fluctuations, lower back pain, a poorer diet, high blood pressure and too little movement (you prefer not to move because all the energy is for the mental part). Your relationships can also start to suffer. Since you have little relational energy at your disposal, you don't want to put in effort there and you might repel others.

The paradox is that the solution lies in taking measures that feel **counternatural**. Just when a lot of mental energy is required from you (deadlines, mental stress, etc.), it is important to still take sufficient exercise and do sports, eat healthily, go to bed on time or make time to have fun with your friends. In other words, it is necessary to consciously send energy to the areas where it is at risk of becoming low. This way, you can actively divide up your energy for the right balance. But just when exercising is good for you, your body tells you that it doesn't want to do it. Just when healthy food is good for you, you feel like eating junk food (because that is 'fast' energy). The unnatural character of that what is



Distribution of energy in case of chronic mental stress



needed also ensures that people often make the wrong choices at those moments and end up in a vicious circle. Or fail to do what they know is right for them.

The same applies to top athletes. For them, competitions are their 'lion'. In order to perform, they allocate all their energy towards the physical component. To be able to continue doing so in a sustainable way, they also

need to invest in the other energy domains: developing mental skills (mental), building a life and relationships outside sport (relational) and studying or working in combination with top-class sport (existential). For them too, these things feel counternatural in the heat of the moment. However, a lack of energy in these areas can, in the long run, also affect sporting performance itself.

SUMMARISED

In the course of evolution, we, *homo sapiens*, have drastically changed our living environment and lifestyle. And with it, the challenges that life and work present to us. Energy is needed to cope with these expectations. There is a limited amount of energy available, which is distributed in such a way that it enables us to act appropriately. If an imbalance persists for too long, it can lead to energy deficits in specific areas, which can result in, for example, physical or mental complaints.

The challenge for the future is to ensure that sufficient energy remains in all areas so that a balance can be maintained.

By way of illustration, we here below apply this framework to 'stress' and then provide tools for dealing with stress intelligently and effectively in organisations.

Application: the stress paradox

We all experience, to a greater or lesser extent, what we call 'stress'. This generally refers to 'mental stress'. This form of stress is now one of the most frequently reported psychosocial problems in organisations. Of course, a lot is asked of people: everything is going much faster, more is required with less manpower, and moreover, it is expected that you can easily combine your busy job with a family and household. Many people feel they are constantly under pressure and wonder how long they can keep this up.

Paradoxically, we in the West have never had so little stress since the emergence of *homo sapiens*. Of course, it depends on how you define 'stress'. Stress can be described as a moment when a certain balance (or homeostasis) is disturbed, which leads to the need for *movement* to restore homeostasis. So being cold is stress that makes you shiver and seek a warmer place (movement). Hunger makes you move in search of food. An infection is also a stressor, which activates your entire immune system. Social stress used to be fought literally (movement) and you had to run away from dangerous animals. So movement is always the answer to stressors.

Humans have a very well developed stress regulation system. When stress occurs, the *sympathetic* nervous system triggers a movement towards a solution. That system works at any time and place. When the danger is gone, the balance is restored. The *parasympathetic* nervous system ensures that calm returns to

its normal level. But if we have such a powerful stress regulation system, how come we are so bad at handling mental stress?

In the last 200 years, we have become so clever that we have devised preventive solutions to those physical stressors. We are now rarely too cold or too hot. To combat hunger, we have invented supermarkets and central heating to combat the cold. Antibiotics have given us a powerful weapon against infections from which people were dying not so long ago. We have established courts and the United Nations to protect us from war and violence. In other words, we have hardly any physical stress, but we are systematically losing our ability to cope with those stressors.

So when is someone healthy? We are not at our best as human beings when everything is in balance. Homeostasis is not the goal. Health cannot be measured by the amount of homeostasis there is, but has everything to do with *allostatic capacity*. That is the ability to quickly bring disturbed balances back to homeostasis, resilience so to speak. So, the greater our capacity to step outside our *comfort zone*, but also to recover from it quickly, the healthier we are. Or to put it another way: being healthy means being very **flexible** to distribute your energy and being able to switch quickly. Experiencing or seeking out few stressors reduces our allostatic capacity and thus our ability to cope with stress and our flexibility.

How to handle stress in the 21st century

When there is a lot of mental stress, the energy in the body is redistributed in such a way that the mental good can be served. This can cause a shortage of energy in other areas, such as the physical and relational, which in the long term can lead to problems. That is why it is important to consciously choose a kind of *counternatural* attitude and ensure that those neglected areas receive a supply of energy. In periods when a lot is asked of you mentally, it is important to consciously make time for your family and friends, to do things that give you pleasure and to ensure that you eat healthily. And perhaps most important is to get enough exercise and do sports. Earlier, we indicated that stress should be followed by exercise to be able to de-stress. Well, the way to reduce mental stress is to increase physical stress. By directing the energy to the physical or relational quadrant, less goes to the mental, making it calmer in your head.

To rebalance the energy in the mental domain, you can also choose to learn to see the mental stretch you are going through as a learning opportunity. Consciously working on increasing your competences, choosing a focus and learning to accept what you cannot change are sources of energy that help you on the mental plane. We learned a lot of *mental skills* from the top sports world, which are also good for non-top athletes to learn to deal with mental stress.

Prevention: increasing your stress tolerance

The best way to deal with the stress of the 21st century is to work preventively. Prevention means increasing your capacity to handle stress, your allostatic capacity. Good ways to do this are activities that lead to stress reduction, such as mindfulness, heart coherence and meditation. These are skills you can learn to actively reduce your stress level. The better you master these skills, the faster and easier you can bring your stress down at any time.

Developing competences

Much of the stress we experience today stems from the social interactions we have with one another. Because those disagreements today are no longer settled by fists, it is necessary to develop other strategies to eliminate the stress of difficult situations. Preventive development of communication and social skills, is a strong resource to deal with those situations, to have that difficult conversation, or to speak out. By developing these skills, you will feel able to handle stressful situations, because you will have *weapons* at your disposal that will help you to eliminate the stressors, and also stop the physiological stress reaction.

Aligning work with talents and purpose

Having a job that does not suit you is a huge source of stress. Many people stay in the same job for too long, because it offers comfort and a certain security, it is familiar territory. Something you don't just let go of. Often, the work changes so imperceptibly over the years that you do not immediately realise that you are becoming alienated from it. You started the job because you could use some of your talents, but in the meantime all kinds of other competences have been called for. Sometimes people wake up one day with the question "why am I still doing what I am doing? They are trapped in a context where they no longer come into their own. Quality career guidance, which focuses on discovering talents, and examines underlying motives and purpose, can help to get back on track. You need to stand back and take a thorough look at what you can do, what you want and what you need in order to do so.

Intermittent living: surprise your body

The best way to reduce mental stress is to increase physical stress. You can do this on the one hand by exercising sufficiently in stressful situations and by exercising moderately to intensively for 30–45 minutes at least three times

a week. But there are other physical stressors that can help you become more stress tolerant. As humans, we can handle acute physical stress quite well. We have a good system that can cope with cold, with heat, with hunger, with infection, with thirst... If you come into contact with those stressors more often, you learn to cope better. So we have to give back to the body what it is made for. Good preventive interventions are: going to the sauna regularly, taking ice-cold showers, skipping meals regularly, once fasting for 24 hours, not drinking for a day. Having sex is also a good physical stimulus to reduce stress, which we can only recommend.

We have organised our lives in such a way that we work, eat, exercise and relax with the regularity of a clock. At fixed times and very predictable. In this way, it is no longer a stimulus, no stressor. In order to add some physical stressors into our life again, it is necessary to ensure that there is less regularity and to start living *intermittently*. This means living irregularly on a regular basis, so that at an unexpected moment you skip a meal, take an ice-cold shower or exercise intensively. When the stimulus is unexpected, it is a greater stressor for the body, and you train your ability to deal with stressors.

Restoring biorhythm

So you increase your stress tolerance by making a mess of your life. The one thing that does need regularity is sleep. Of all the strategies to increase stress tolerance, sleep (and by extension biorhythm) is the most important. When sleep is disrupted, things go from bad to worse. And a good night's sleep is the basis for good health and a productive life.

We arose in the equatorial region, where there were hardly any seasons and the days were

the same length 365 times a year. There was no electric light, so people lived with the rhythm of nature. Always getting up at the same time, at the crack of dawn. Meanwhile, we have invented electric lighting, televisions and smartphones, streetlights, cafés and computer screens. Ingenious inventions, but they are detrimental to our biorhythms. Most people have very little sense of biorhythm. They don't get tired in the evening and can't get out of bed in the morning. The effect on their physical and mental health cannot be underestimated. Everything in the body and in nature has a rhythm. Any attempt to break that rhythm results in problems. And a lack of rhythm lowers stress tolerance.

An optimal *homo sapiens rhythm* means that you wake up spontaneously every day and feel rested. Even at the weekend. Consequently, in the evening you are tired enough to fall asleep within 15 minutes. Ideally, you should sleep 7–8 hours a night. Many of us are far from that. Our cultural development has brought about that at the weekend we like to go out to a pub or party, so we go to bed far too late and like to sleep in in the morning. That's all it takes to be disturbed. Monday mornings therefore become an energy challenge. But even more subtly, television and smartphone screens prevent us from getting tired because they emit a large amount of blue light. That blue light inhibits the production of melatonin (the sleep hormone). A poor night's sleep means that you cannot recover enough physically or mentally to prepare for the next day, which of course has an effect on your productivity, your mood and your stress tolerance. If you want to start somewhere to better manage stress, start by restoring your biorhythm.

Conclusion

We cannot simply eliminate the social and mental stress that life comes with today. What we can do is increase our defensibility, our resilience, or in other words our stress tolerance. A good night's sleep and a healthy biorhythm are the basis for everything. By starting to live *intermittently*,

you force your body to learn to cope better with physical stressors, which improves your ability to cope with mental stressors as well. Moreover, developing mental and relational competencies helps you to handle and control mental and social stress.



Make your own action plan

With this Energy Wheel, we want to help you get started with your own energy and health. By going through the steps below, you will get insight in the context in which you live and the sources of energy that you have. The aim of this exercise is to come up with a plan that will ensure that you have enough energy to cope with what life and work demands of you.

Step 1: What's on my mind?

Every day, you try as hard as you can to cope with the expectations and demands that come your way. At work, much is expected, your family expects things of you and you yourself have aspirations and ambitions for the future. In this first step, you will map this out: what is on your plate?

In the middle of the big picture is you. Who are you? Quite a big question, of course. And yet, the extent to which you know yourself and can use your own energy sources helps you in this exercise. Knowing what your energy sources are also helps you to use them efficiently.

A number of elements say something about who you are:

- **Talents:** what are the activities that you do effortlessly and that give you energy?
- **Values:** What do you find important in life and what are those things that you find valuable to pursue?
- **Body:** Some people naturally have a lot of energy, others less so. After an illness, your body can also react differently than how you would like it to. This is a fact that affects who you are today.
- **Identity:** the family you grew up in, the course of your life so far, what you have experienced in your life, also largely determines who you are today.

Step 2: How is my energy distributed when I am at my best?

Energy follows attention. Whatever you focus your attention on, energy is sent to. This changes the distribution of energy. Sending your energy in one direction results in less energy available in the other quadrants. The constant redistribution of energy is essential for adapting to what is important in the moment.

There is no standard for this, no right or wrong, no value judgement. The “norm” is different for everyone, depending on who you are and what your situation is. **Think of your own norm**, when does it feel right for you?

For example:

- a top athlete who is at his best when he can direct a lot of attention and energy to the physical quadrant
- a researcher who flourishes when mental energy is most available
- a networker who likes to give a lot of attention to the relational quadrant
- a world traveller who loves to be inspired and is at his best when exploring new countries or cultures

If you start from your own norm, are there also energy quadrants that get too little attention? Is that a problem, or is it ok? Also in the long run?

For example:

- the top athlete who is so preoccupied with his sport that he neglects his social relations
- the researcher who is so absorbed mentally and sitting in a chair all day that she pays too little attention to movement
- the networker who loses sight of his family
- the world traveller who begins to feel lonely

Step 3: How is my energy distributed today?

Step 4: What differences do you observe?

You have now made a drawing on the wheel in two steps. What differences and what similarities do you notice? What do you learn from the drawing? Which quadrants receive **too much** attention (overdrive) and which receive **too little** attention (neglected)?

Step 5: What changes do you want to make?

What movement could you make to achieve a more optimal and sustainable distribution of energy? What change would you like to make in each of the four quadrants?

Step 6: Define actions to make the change happen

If you want to make these movements, it means that you actively choose to divide your attention (and thus your energy) differently. In this way you can bring your energy back into balance. What is good for you does not always feel natural. You usually have “no time” or “no energy” for it. If an action feels **counternatural**, it is usually an indication that it is a good strategy. Counternatural actions are necessary to break unhealthy patterns.

In order to arrive at a good action plan, it is important to formulate an action in each of the four energy domains. And to approach the action plan **as a whole**. Focusing on one domain alone usually has too little effect to fundamentally redistribute energy in the right direction. How big or small the actions are, doesn't matter. What is important is that it is a feasible action plan, which at the same time also sufficiently challenges you to do 'something else'.

It takes some **creativity** to come up with a good action plan. The cards in this Energy Wheel box can be inspiring to draw up your own action plan. Within each quadrant of the Energy Wheel, you will also find 4 domains in which you can take action. They can inspire you in your search for actions that suit you. Below, we briefly explain what these 16 words mean. You can use the cards with this wheel to get inspiration for your action plan. You can also do something else with them!

There are 52 cards in the box, one for each week of the year. On Monday morning, pick a card at random and place it in a holder on your desk. Set yourself the goal of doing this task every day for a week. The following Monday, choose a new card. In this way, with a little effort, you work on your health and wellbeing every day!

ACTION AREAS PER ENERGY QUADRANT

Mental energy

- **Focus:** Know what you are doing. Set priorities and focus your attention. Make choices, so that you have clear and concrete goals on which you work. Choose your battles, do work that you see results from and that you can influence.
- **Motivation:** Choose what motivates you and sets you in motion. What do you get out of bed for in the morning? What are you good at and what makes you happy?
- **Acceptance:** Accept that things do not always go as you expect. Learn to deal with setbacks and disappointment. Put things in perspective, realise that everyone worries about something. Know what is beyond your control and let go of the things you cannot change.
- **Growth:** Invest in your personal growth and development. Learn from life. Take a course, read a book or go to a coach. Develop yourself and grow as a person.

Physical energy

- **Food:** Feed your body, don't fill it. Eat healthily and consciously. Discover that what you eat affects your energy. Enjoy tasty and healthy food.
- **Exercise:** Get enough exercise. Make sure you feel fit to do the things you have to do. Use your body for what it is made for. Feel how good that feels. Make sure you are literally comfortable in your own skin. Move enough now for later.
- **Relaxation:** Relaxation that serves to balance effort. Enjoy the quality of your moments of rest. Actively choose that which is relaxing for you.
- **Sleep:** Take care of your sleep. A healthy biorhythm is the source of all health. Get enough sleep, it ensures recuperation and recovery so that you are fit during the day. Do everything you can to wake up rested in the morning.

Existential energy

- **Commitment:** Do something out of commitment, because you find it important, believe in it, and can live it wholeheartedly. Engage with and for others.
- **Discovery:** Set out actively, step into the world with courage. Open up to new and unknown things with confidence. Let yourself be surprised. Explore with curiosity and surrender to the experience. Use all your senses in new experiences: taste, smell, feel, hear, look.
- **Life purpose:** Do that which gives you direction and meaning. Find your place and know what you have to do. Realise yourself.
- **Connectedness:** connect with others, with ideas and concepts. Make sure that you feel connected. That you are part of something bigger than you.

Relational energy

- **Integrity:** examine the relationship with yourself. Make sure you can look yourself in the eye. Be happy to be yourself. Dare to stay close to yourself by saying 'yes' to what is important to you and 'no' to what is too distant.
- **Care:** give and receive love from those who are most dear to you. Make sure you feel that you are cared for and that you can care for others yourself.
- **Synergy:** experience the power of cooperation and co-creation. Build and create together with others. $1+1 = 11$
- **Fun:** Enjoy your relationships with other people. Find people who give you energy and pleasure. Experience joy and lightness in being together. Celebrate often.

Step 7: Choose actions and implement your action plan

Everything that came before was easy. Now comes the hardest step: actually implementing the plan and sticking to it. A good plan really changes your daily lifestyle, challenges you, but is still achievable. It is better to start with small steps than to make a plan you are fed up with after two weeks.

The temptation is great to want to do it all yourself. Allow yourself professional support: a coach, a personal trainer, your GP, a dietician, career guidance, an course or a really good book. Professionals can help you tailor your plans, choose the right direction or make sure you don't get injured, for example.

How can you make sure you actually do it?

- Do something that suits you: There is no point in playing squash if you don't like it. Then do something else, go boxing for instance.
- Make it fun: you'll last the longest if you really like what you've planned. With friends, in a nice place, or right after work: look for ways to give that extra touch.
- Spread the word: the more people know about your plans, the more encouragement you can expect.
- Make it a shared responsibility: find others to join you. Your family, a colleague, a good friend or a fellow sufferer. Feeling responsible for someone else will make you show up when you don't feel like it. A 'buddy' is also there to help you, to listen, to encourage you, etc.
- Make a commitment: join a club, subscribe to that magazine, set a deadline for yourself, join a gym, invest money in yourself. If the investment is large, it is more likely that you will commit yourself to continue.
- Make it easy to organise: if you have to put in too much effort to realise a certain action, chances are it will not happen.
- Make healthy the logical choice: sell your car, throw all the sweets out of your house, always take the stairs, start a vegetable garden... Make it easy for yourself to make healthy choices.
- Reward yourself: remember to celebrate milestones and reward yourself when you succeed in your goals. Celebrate and do so together with others!

Working on health in organisations

For organisations, it goes without saying that employees who feel good about themselves, and who are mentally and physically healthy, are more productive for the organisation. Not only are they more productive, innovative and creative, but the cost of absenteeism is also drastically

reduced. So how can you, as an organisation, be an environment where people automatically make healthier choices? In our search for effective interventions, we have established a number of things. From these observations, we want to provide tools to get to work in a concrete way.

OBSERVATIONS IN WORKING ON HEALTH IN ORGANISATIONS

Well-being is in the interest of both the organisation and the individual employee. And yet it seems as if the two worlds are separated. There is already a first issue: to what extent can an organisation intervene in the personal choices that employees make?

Finding 1: Everyone and no one is responsible

To a certain extent, everyone is responsible for their own health. The culinary choices you make and whether or not you do any sport is a choice you make for yourself. But can you blame someone for sitting in front of a screen all day? Can you make someone responsible for being involved in a relational conflict, for experiencing work pressure? That is more difficult. A large part of the responsibility lies with the 'employer', who after all determines the working conditions and therefore has a lot of influence on whether or not the workplace is healthy. But who 'the employer' is, is not always entirely clear. Usually there is no one in the organisation really responsible for these issues. Often there is a prevention advisor or an occupational physician, but also

managers and trade unions bear some of the responsibility. The responsibility is thus widely spread throughout the organisation. Therefore, when designing and implementing actions, it is necessary to find a way to involve the whole system.

Finding 2: You mainly reach people who do not need it

When you set up initiatives to promote health, it seems that the employees you reach are usually those who are already aware of the benefits and actively working on them. Participants in healthy eating workshops are usually those who already make healthy food choices in their daily lives. So the challenge is to raise awareness in other parts of the organisation and create a gateway for each employee to get involved.

Finding 3: people do not want to be changed

People have an enormous capacity to adapt. If you really want to, you can change. But nobody wants to *be* changed. Attempts to do so are

counterproductive. So it is not about making top-down decisions about what is healthy and what is not. The aim is to seduce people, to stimulate their curiosity and make them aware of their choices, so that they themselves remain in control of what they want to change. We aim to make *healthy* the easy and natural choice for everyone.

Finding 4: people do want to change, but often do not know how to

Many people feel that they have to do something about their health. Many of them make some good New Year's resolutions, but at the beginning of February there is not much left of those good resolutions. The reason is that they do not have a plan or do not know how to start. They also experience conflicting information, especially about healthy eating and exercise. So people need good information and knowledge about the choices they want to make. If they understand what they can do and how, they are more likely to change their behaviour.

Finding 5: no snacking in the candy shop

We have created a society where we live like children in a candy shop. And now we say: "sweets are not good for you". That is not self-evident. Sugared food is readily available all around us, many people have to sit all day at work, and recreation is becoming more and more passive. Anyone who buys organic vegetables is labelled as 'alternative', and anyone who wants to work standing up must first apply to the occupational health physician. Whereas organic vegetables are actually the most 'normal' vegetables, just as working in an upright position

is very natural. We often have to fight against a culture that is very self-evident but not suitable for us as *homo sapiens*. So in organisations, it is not only important to inform people well, but also to develop a culture and work context that makes healthy choices natural, easy and widely accepted.

Finding 6: investing in problems for the future

There is no quick profit in investing in healthy employees. It is a long-term investment. By improving the mental and physical health of employees, the number of burn-outs can decrease and absenteeism can be reduced. Perhaps the greatest benefit is that people are more productive, happier at work and remain loyal to the organisation. So if an organisation invests in health today, it will take some time before it can reap the full benefits. More than the profits it can bring, it is about being consistent: what kind of organisation do you want to be? And then doing what you say.

These observations give direction to a number of design principles that are important. For example, it teaches us that we must bring all voices and stakeholders in the organisation to the table. That you cannot force people to change, but must entice them to make healthy choices. That you have to make healthy choices easy and natural. That people must be able to keep control. That, on the one hand, employees need good information, but that on the other hand, context and culture also need to be addressed. That it is a continuous process and that you should be happy with every choice in the right direction that employees make. These principles are leading for the way we organise the approach.

OUTLINES FOR AN APPROACH

The design principles give direction to possible approaches. Based on our experience, we would like to give some guidelines – or recommendations – for those who want to use them in their own organisation. In short, it means that as an organisation you initiate the dialogue on ‘healthy working’ and try to achieve a cultural change.

Start a process that involves all stakeholders, with a support structure

Because responsibility for health is a split responsibility, and people do not want to be changed, a top-down approach simply does not work. Because you get close to the employees’ private lives, you almost immediately hit a wall of resistance. It is difficult to make a second attempt successful.

In order to move forward, it is necessary to involve all stakeholders in the process. Every voice matters, and different interests need to be aligned. This does not mean that every person in the organisation has to be at the table. A limited group of representatives from the various stakeholders can also form a design team. A design team is not only a ‘think tank’ but also a ‘do tank’ and has primarily a coordinating and architecting role. The design group usually also has a steering committee or a *sponsor*, who decides on timing and budget and can take facilitating measures. It is a success factor if someone with the authority to make decisions can be the driving force and sponsor. He or she can draw attention to the project and defend it at all levels of the organisation.

Develop a vision, a goal and a plan

The first step in the process of the design group is to give meaning to the theme. With questions like: “What does health mean?”, “How do you recognise someone who is healthy?”, “What does

it mean if this is a healthy organisation?”. Health means something different for everyone, and the context of the organisation also determines the meaning that is given to health, for example, ergonomics, safety, etc.

The aim of the first step is to find agreement on the ambition that the design group has for the organisation. Working on health is therefore not implementing one or other model or action plan, but exploring together what the meaning is, the goal and the way to get there.

Map what is already there and support growth

The advantage of working on health topics is that there is always a lot going on already. A lot of people in the organisation are actively working on health in their personal time: healthy food, sports, volunteering, meditation... So there is always a certain awareness and action present, but often invisible. At the organisational level, cycling may be encouraged, the canteen may have a healthy diet, or it may be possible to work from home. Perhaps it is possible to play sports at lunchtime, or maybe there is even an extensive football league. It is easy to make initiatives grow by paying attention to them and supporting them. Paying the rent for a sports field, providing jerseys for the football club, paying registration fees for running competitions. Often, with a little effort, these initiatives can be given attention, and they are immediately encouraged to continue.

In many organisations, many initiatives are already being taken, but they are often very fragmented. It is a good idea to bring all these elements together under one umbrella. When you do that, you will see how much is actually already happening. Often, we turn that umbrella into a recruiting ‘brand’ that reflects the ambition of the project. This makes the initiatives better

known, makes them more coherent and makes them more attractive for those who are not yet participating.

Use an integrated perspective

On the supply side too, we see a fragmented picture. There is an enormous increase in the number of providers working on health themes. Often focused on a single domain: giving people pedometers to get them to move more, supervising sports activities, mindfulness training, career guidance... All valuable initiatives, but at the same time often one-sided, resulting in a lack of lasting effects. We notice the power of an integrated approach. The four domains are equally important: mental, physical, relational and existential energy.

An energy shortage in one domain has effects on the other domains. The objective remains to achieve an optimal distribution of the available energy. An action plan for sustainable interventions therefore benefits from always considering all dimensions.

Keep control within the organisation

Social support and commitment from the management have a significant impact on the health of employees. If health is important to you, show it, stick your neck out and talk about it.

Health is not a theme that can simply be outsourced to an external prevention service or a commercial company. As an organisation, it is in your interest to keep control yourself and to gear the actions to the needs and ambitions of the organisation. By coordinating the initiatives internally, you increase sustainability. At the same time, it is good to keep investing in external support and expertise, to bring in new knowledge, approaches and perspectives. Perhaps it is an idea to also create a formal role in organisations for someone who is committed to this theme and coordinates the policy and actions around it, a Chief Health Officer, so to speak.

HOW WE ARE WORKING WITH THE ENERGY WHEEL

The Energy Wheel is used as an intake instrument to map the current and desired energy distribution in the organisation in an integrated manner. Usually, figures are known in the organisation, such as absenteeism rates and risks. Many organisations also question the well-being of their employees on a regular basis.

We enrich these objective figures with subjective stories. We do this by setting up a dialogue in the organisation around the theme. Using the wheel, the design group can make an analysis of the current and desired situation. Together with a design group, we determine interventions in various areas and monitor progress. We support those responsible for setting up a sound and sustainable policy.

Each part of the wheel encompasses an entire discipline with associated knowledge, insights and interventions. Because no one is completely versed in every theme, we build a guidance team around the organisation, based on the focus that is on the table. To this end, we invite experts from our Energy Wheel network to give lectures, workshops, advice or other forms of guidance. We have an eye for what can be done internally, and we strengthen that, but also for what is needed from the outside.

In the future, we also want to set up an Energy Wheel community, where leaders from different organisations can learn from and with each other: a group where we can exchange inspiration, literature and best practices.





Who is Kopman?

Kopman is a network under the initiative of Kessels & Smit. Different professionals from complementary disciplines come together to support organizations, companies and schools to become healthy places for thriving people. Connecting strengths, in other words. To make the world a little better for ourselves and those who come after us. And because we find it fun and educational to work together.

More info at www.kessels-smit.com
and www.kopman.eu



Peter Beschuyt is a partner at Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company. As a coach, advisor and facilitator, he supports organizations in becoming healthy places where people can flourish. His approach is characterized by an integrated talent-oriented perspective on what makes people flourish in life and work, looking for the sweet spot between high performance and optimal well-being. To do that, he combines his competencies as an educator with the insights and practice of clinical psychoneuroimmunology. In other words, he connects the head, soul and body to the context of managers, professionals and athletes who want to be at their best.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this article.

