

PRESSURE MAP

How pressure flows through organisations and how to shift it.

Pressure is part of organisational life. But when it's the only lever leaders use, it creates reactivity: criticism, people-pleasing, withdrawal, or overdrive. The signal that flows back up isn't uplift, it's exhaustion and defensiveness. CEs see the noise and ask us "why can't people just deliver?". SLTs meet with us and request "that our Tier 3s need to step up." Tier 3 managers tell us they feel stuck and think "no matter what I do, it's never enough." The cycle continues.

This tool sets out to show how pressure moves through an organisation and how leaders at every level can interrupt that cycle. Instead of pressure cascading down and reactivity flowing back up, the map offers simple reflection questions and practical steps for CEs, SLTs, and T3 Leaders to turn pressure into presence, and presence into performance.

TYPES OF PRESSURE

- **Deliberate demands:** targets, deadlines, KPIs.
- **Shifting priorities:** urgent pivots, moving goalposts.
- **Behaviour at the top:** poor modelling, tolerance of bad habits.
- **Unfiltered ideas:** spur of the moment requests that cascade if not caught.

EVIDENCE BEHIND THIS MAP

- Only 27% of managers are engaged globally; they account for about 70% of team engagement Gallup 2024
- 74% of managers feel unprepared to lead change; 73% of employees report change fatigue. Gartner 2025
- 44% of middle managers cite bureaucracy/noise, not workload, as their main drag .McKinsey 2024
- High demands only burn people out when resources are low; with resources, demands can energise. JD-R model
- Psychological safety is the strongest predictor of team performance. Google's Project Aristotle

SHIFT YOU CAN MAKE

- CE's decide consciously whether to create the demand
- SLT frame and filter before anything leaves the room
- T3 Receive with presence, test it and respond productively.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

	CE LEVEL	SLT (T2)	LEADERS (T3)
	Check the cascade	Translate Pressure	Respond to Pressure
Ask yourself	- When I make a new demand, what cascade am I creating? - Am I sharing a well-formed request, or just sparking an idea? - Am I modelling presence and clarity, or fuelling urgency and noise?	- Am I translating expectations into clarity, or just passing pressure down? - If I have taken an action from our SLT meeting to pass on, have I done the <u>clarity, impact and sustainability check on it</u>? - Do I avoid naming poor behaviour at the top?	- Which reactive state do I slip into (critic, pleaser, passive, or driven)? - When I feel like saying “no”, what conversation am I avoiding?
Ask others	- What requests from me create unnecessary churn? - What would make it easier for you to deliver without adding pressure?	- Is this demand about resources, timing, priority, or collaboration? - What’s the clearest support you’ll need from me to make this doable?	- What’s one way we could reduce pressure this week? - Where can we share the load instead of me carrying it all?
Experiment with	Cascade check flow: Why am I asking for this? Urgent, important, or habit? What outcome will it deliver? Who will it touch? What meetings/reports will it trigger? Is the impact worth the cascade?	Translation flow: Define what is being asked in one clear sentence. Clarify why it matters Name trade-offs, what will this displace or compete with? Frame delivery and agree 2–3 next steps and support. Catch ideas before they cascade: Ask: “Is this an action, or an idea to explore later?” Log ideas separately, don’t send them downstream as tasks.	Response flow: Pause: notice your state, reset (breath, jot, step outside) and get into place to respond from. Test the request for resource, timing, priority, or collaboration? Respond with “Yes, if ...” reframe into a constructive ask.
Prompt	“If this lands on 200 desks tomorrow, am I confident it adds more value than noise?”	“Before this goes out, let’s name the why, the trade-offs, and the support, otherwise we’re just exporting pressure.	“I want to deliver this and here’s what would make that possible ...”