

Leaders' stress – and the affect on employees

*Parallel session: Leadership,
sickness absence and health –
what is the evidence?*

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Are leaders' well-being, behaviours and style associated with the affective well-being of their employees? A systematic review of three decades of research

Janne Skakona; Karina Nielsenb; Vilhelm Borgb; Jaime Guzmanc

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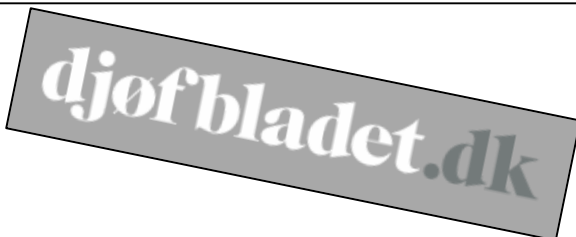
Do managers experience more stress than employees? Results from the Intervention Project on Absence and Wellbeing (IPAW) study among Danish managers and their employees

Janne Skakona, Tage S. Kristensenb, Karl Bang Christensenc, Thomas Lundd and Merete Labriolad



“How does the leaders stress affect the employees’ stress and well being?
– Findings from a qualitative case study”

Lederstress underminerer trivsel og effektivitet



Leadership and stress

-- A hazardous cocktail



1. Background – Stress as a cause of ill health at work
2. How can leaders' stress be explained?
3. How does it show?
4. What are the consequences?
5. And what to do...?

Background

STRESS as a cause of ill health at work

- Mental health and stress issues at work cost billions (OECD 2017)
- According to a Danish study, the most common cause of stress is the work. For those who indicate that they have felt stressed often or constantly, the work is a part of the cause for 94.9 percent (NFA 2016)
- The main outcomes (individual, organisational and societal) of work-related stress include physical and mental health problems, absence from work, reduced quality of outputs, increased welfare and medical spending, and reduced productivity (EurWORK 2010)
- Globalization, increased competition and new technologies might partly explain the work related stress increase (Quick and Tetrick, 2003; Parker and Wall, 1998; Becker-Reims, 1994)

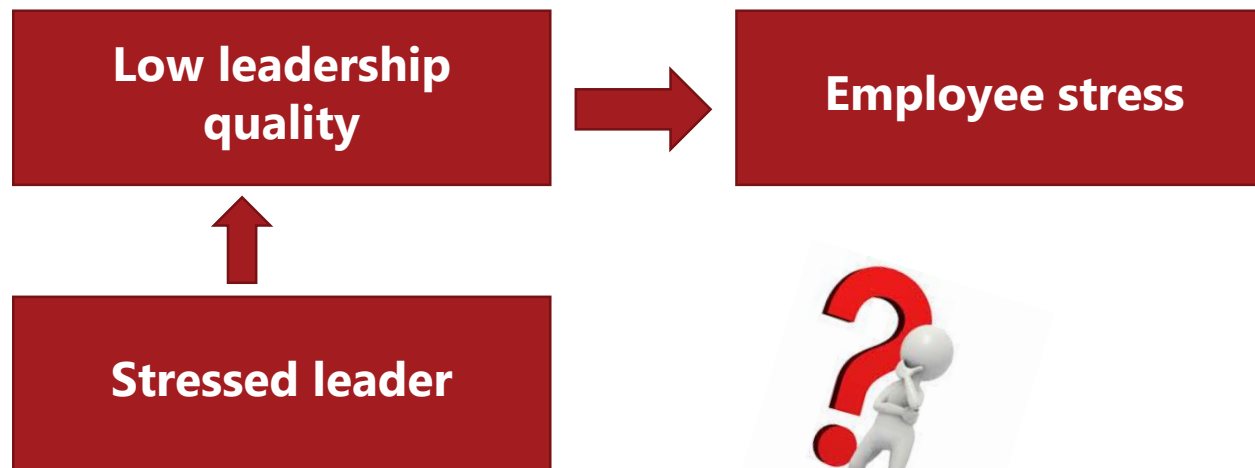
A defined leadership task:

- To prevent and handle employee stress



Leadership and employee stress

- Employees are highly influenced by their leaders (Schein 1984, Bernin, 2002; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003, Amabile, 2004, Skakon et al. 2010)
- Leadership style affects employee health and wellbeing (Schein, 1984; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Amabile et al., 2004; Skakon et al 2010)





**Leaders are strong,
flawless and effective at all
times!**

MYTH



- Makes it difficult to detect and prevent stress among leaders
 - Maintains and enhances the taboo

How do managers actually thrive?

- **83% are doing fine!**

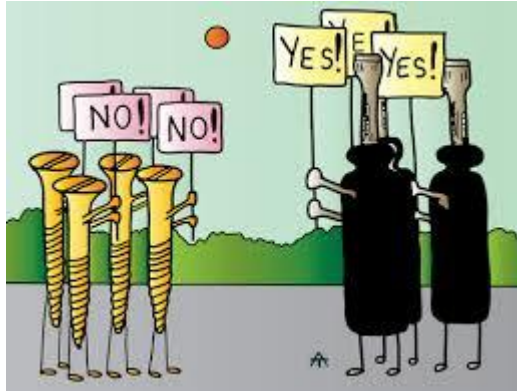


- But at the same time it means that **17% do not feel well** and that some in this group actually experience **severe stress** and are **on the edge of a stress related sick leave!**

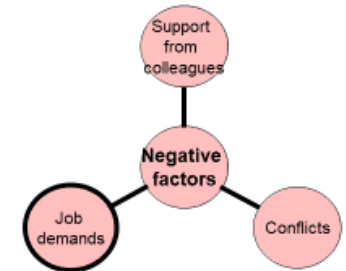
Lederne (2017). Stress. Rapport om virksomheders og lederes håndtering og forebyggelse af stress blandt medarbejderne.



How can leaders' stress be explained?



How can leaders' stress be explained?



Skakon, J., et al. (WORK:2010)
Do managers experience more stress than employees?
(Results from a quantitative study, IPAQ)



There is a raw and disrespectful tone in the leadership team, resulting in a bad atmosphere (leader)

How does it show: Even a good leader gets poor when he or she is "hit by stress":



- lose overview, thus is less able to manage and distribute work,
- have difficulty remembering, think clearly and make decisions,
- put more pressure on employees,
- is quick-tempered (impatient, angry, irritable, emotional)
- and contribute to conflicts.

I might also be short-headed sometimes and that's usually not my style

What are the consequences?

The manager's stress is contagious



"... it's interesting because I see how I'm under pressure and how I put pressure on my employees" (Leader)

- The manager's stress is easily spread among employees if they are not firm in themselves.
- Leadership behavior creates culture:
 - Ex. By trying to work their way out of "the crisis"

"... but it really affect us. When she sends mails late at night and on weekends, then you think, well then, I can not take time off, myself" (Employee)

The consequences are comprehensive



- ... when a stressed leader communicate the wrong messages
- the leader's stressed behavior creates insecurity
- and adds to the employee workload
- *Conclusion: A stressed leader and his department can not - even with a massive effort - achieve their goals effectively.*

"... Often when they ask you something, then you concentrate on something else, and you just give an answer – and that can cause serious consequences at some point" (Leader)

"... Well, I'm not there for them so they lose confidence ... And I'm sure that can make them more stressed when there is no trust" (Leader)

He is not available...postpone or forget appointments, and then you just think, well, I'll have to figure something out myself ...and sometimes it turns out that you should have been doing something completely different" (employee)

Consequences: the costs are comprehensive



Health and healthcare costs

- The leader's own health is at risk, as stress increase risk of serious illness and depression

Personal and financial costs

- A massively overloaded leader might end up with a long-term sick leave...
- ...resignation or firing due to errors and bad performance...
- ...which results in organizational costs, ex.
- ... change of leader is costly for both the organization and the employees.

*"... he is the fourth leader in 3 years. And they all want to make their mark ... Then you start off again, welcome him and think to yourself yes yes, we'll try again. But I wish we could get some peace in order to get the job done"
(employee)*

What to do: Companies who want to prevent and manage stress among their leaders ...

... should **focus on four levels**: Both the leader himself, the leadership team, the company's top management and organization must be involved, *supported adequately by work-environment professionals*.

- **The leader** himself must focus on his own well-being and learn to prevent and tackle his own stress, eg through courses that address stress and by strengthening leadership skills in general.
- **The leadership team** must work to increase mutual confidence and collaboration, ex. by increasing dialogue about tasks and assignments, mutual expectations, cooperation and support – also when it concerns stress.
- **Top management** must pay attention to stress and show courage to address leaders who display stress related behavior. Further, they should ensure alignment of expectations on deliveries, deadlines, priorities and handling of challenges.
- **The company's** stress policy should make it clear to both leaders and employees that the company is emphasizing stress prevention, and that stress is seen as an organizational challenge - not a private problem.



IGLO-model: Jørgensen et al 2008

So, what do you think?

Does it ring a bell as related to your professional experience in practise or research?

Do you have experiences with interventions, also addressing stress among leaders?

- If so, does the intervention address
 - The individual
 - The group/team/department
 - The organisation



Want to know more?



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[LinkedIn](#)

[Research profile](#)

[Improving the workenvironment - Salon](#)

See also:

[Book chapter \(FOA, Sept. 2017\): Når lederen får stress. Betydningen af et tabu.](#)

[Debatartikel \(Politiken 14. januar 2018\) : Mellemliderstress-smitter-nemt-hele-afdelingen](#)