Exhaustion, depression and work
– Is prevention possible?
NEW OSH ERA
Brussels,2009-10-29

Christer Sandahl
Number on sick-leave >30 days in december
Downsizing and sick-leave due to psychiatric diagnosis among remaining employees 5 years later in Swedish county councils

Relative change (%) 1998-2003

Bryngelson et al., 2009

Relative change (%) of number of employees 1993-1997
Diagnoses among patients on long-term (> 90 days) sick-leave (2001)
County council employees on long term sick-leave. Main diagnoses.
Mental problems among patients sick-listed due to a psychiatric diagnosis

![Chart showing mental problems among patients sick-listed due to psychiatric diagnosis.](chart.png)
Stress

A perceived or real threat to an individual’s physical or mental integrity, resulting in physiological and behavioural reactions

(McEwen, Encyclopedia of Stress 2000)
Social support - Attachment
Amygdala and unconscious stress

A picture of a threatening face is exposed very shortly and then covered by a neutral picture. The first picture is not perceived consciously.

Right amygdala is activated by unconscious emotional stimulation, as well as the sympathetic system.

*Morris, Öhman & Dolan, Nature 1998*
Exhaustion (Burn-out)

- The physical and mental reaction to long term stress without enough time for recovery
- Mental and physical fatigue which is not recovered by rest, cognitive and somatic symptoms
- Long term condition with poor prognosis if professional rehabilitation is not offered
- Biochemical disturbances in stress hormones and some cellular growth factors
Depressed and hospitalized

On long term sick leave with affective diagnosis

The depth of the depression

MADRS-scale
DSM-criteria fulfilled
in two types of depression

- Low mood
- Low interest
- Appetite
- Sleep
- Retardation/ag.
- Fatigue
- Guilt
- Concentration
- Suicide

Depressed outpatients
Exhaustion cases

per cent with criterion
Rehabilitation

- Group psychotherapy
- Job coaching
- Stress management
Can exhaustion be prevented?

Yes!

- Individual level: Stress management
- Work group level: Reflecting peer-support groups
- Management level: Backstage groups
- Organisational level: Adequate resources, understandable structure and trust
Stress management
Health effects of peer support groups (n = 58 + 74)

(Peterson et al., 2008)
Case study: The best work place in Sweden 2003

(Johansson et al., 2009)

- The vision of good palliative care realized in the daily work
  - Adequate resources and an understandable structure
  - A common experience of meaningfulness
  - Trust and shared responsibility in the work group
  - Reliable, just, predictable, engaged and considerate managers
Managerial leadership and employee health

(Nyberg, 2009)

- Leadership associated with good employee health
  - Provide means to carry out work in an independent manner (information, power and clarity)
  - Encourage partaking in the development of the workplace
  - Provide support
  - Inspire
  - Show integrity (justice)
  - Integrate team members to work well together

- Leadership associated with poor employee health
  - Acting dictatorial
  - Forcing own opinion on others
  - Being insincere
  - Actively unfriendly
  - Withdrawing
Leadership can be studied with scientific methods but is an art in itself.

"The synthesis in concrete action of contradictory forces, instincts, interests, conditions, positions, and ideals"

Chester Barnard
We are in the insecurity business

Sometimes I worry that I'm not doing this job properly.

Me too.

Insecurity guards.
To be a boss
What differs from other roles?

- Visibility
- Primitive projections
  - Denigration
  - Envy
  - Idealization
- Accountable for the work of the group
- …and completely dependent on them

Feelings

- Frustration
- Anger
- Disappointment
- Shame/humiliation
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Pride
- Satisfaction
- Joy
Enquiry based learning

- **Backstage**
  - Reflection & metareflection
  - ARROW

- **On stage**
  - Action
  - ARROW
  - Action
  - ARROW
  - ARROW
The Stockholm model

- Coaching in groups
- Managers as group conductors
- Manualised method (Backstage groups)
- Five day training of group conductors
- Continued supervision
- Centralised administration
Backstage groups

→ Groups of 8 first line or middle managers
→ Three hours, once monthly
→ 12 occasions
→ Manual based
→ ”Lay persons” as group conductors
→ Group supervision between sessions for the group conductors
→ Confidentiality
→ Real problems or dilemmas
→ Problem solving at the work place
Examples

- How to deal with an employee who does not function satisfyingly
- Role ambiguity
- Role conflicts
- Non-productive meetings
- Problems in cooperation
- How to deal with a development project
- Stress and worry for one's own work load
- A sense of not being in control of one's own work situation.
Professional consultants compared to internally recruited group conductors

(“Helped me to improve in my role as manager”)

- Internal group conductors’ first group
  → (M = 4.43, Sd = 1.2)

- Internal group conductors’ second group
  → (M = 4.87, Sd = 1.2)

- Professional consultants
  → (M = 4.76, Sd = 1.2)
Qualitative analysis of focus group interviews

- Main category

→ A non-competitive forum
  - The region behind the scene
  - Not alone with problems
  - Confidentiality and presence
  - "Strangers" group
City of Stockholm  (45 000 employees)

- 55 managers trained as group conductors
  - Increased security in their own roles as managers
  - Increased knowledge about common organisational challenges

- Central administration for the organisation of Backstage groups
  - (10-20 /year)
### Similar results

(Different cohorts in the public sector; education, health care, social services, technical management etc. 70% female managers, n>500)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you bring up problems from your own workplace that you were personally engaged in?</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the other members bring up interesting problems?</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My participation in the Backstage group contributed to strengthen my self confidence?</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why better self confidence?

1. To be able to contribute with one's own knowledge and competence
2. The sense of community and the support from the group
3. Instrumental problem solving
The Competence Circle

Competence → Behaviour

Self-confidence → Decision

Christer Sandahl, MMC/ LIME
30 November 2017
Coping as leader
(n=38)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in WQ</th>
<th>M (Sd) Before</th>
<th>M (Sd) After</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>0.60 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.53 (0.23)</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>3.43 (0.42)</td>
<td>3.71 (0.46)</td>
<td>4.49 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.29 (0.34)</td>
<td>2.25 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>13.39 (4.01)</td>
<td>14.13 (3.65)</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity</td>
<td>15.12 (5.11)</td>
<td>18.38 (5.22)</td>
<td>3.92 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>38.12 (9.91)</td>
<td>41.77 (9.55)</td>
<td>2.38 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative analysis of responses to WQ

- Increased
  - Relation orientation
  - Confidence in leader role
  - Focus on leadership qualities ("teamleader", "coach" etc)
  - Future orientation
i.e. security seemed to increase as a result of dialogue back............stage