

## Will emotional demands become the new topic in leadership in 2024?

**Psychological safety has been a hot topic in leadership studies over the past few years. It is by no means a settled issue, but Norway's largest occupational health provider, Avonova, now observes that emotional demands are emerging as a hot topic. In short, emotional demands refer to the emotional requirements placed on employees when interacting with others.**

Recently, SINTEF released a report showing that emotional demands and burdens receive far too little attention. The survey, conducted on behalf of Unio, reveals that few leaders address key challenges that can result in absenteeism, mental health issues, and caregiver fatigue (see the report here). For many, the workday largely consists of interacting with clients, patients, or students. Managing one's own emotions as well as those of others is an important part of the job.

"We tend to think of care professions when we talk about emotional demands. But we must be careful not to think too narrowly. For example, many middle managers may find themselves caught between employees and management during change processes, thereby facing high expectations to conceal their own negative emotions. Employees in service, hotel, and tourism sectors also encounter high demands to respond to other people's emotions," explains organizational psychologist Tone Vang at Avonova.

According to STAMI, approximately 500,000 employees in Norway face high emotional demands at work. Dealing with people who are confronted with difficult choices and life situations can put a strain on both mental and physical health. Now, we must elevate our knowledge of effective tools and adapted leadership accordingly, Avonova asserts.

### **Ensure systems that provide support**

"The work environment and the support system surrounding employees must provide adequate support and resources," points out Vang. For example, a teacher who loves working with students in the classroom but who must spend too much time, effort, and concentration on documentation, record keeping, and planning may eventually become exhausted due to the overall burden. Based on research, she emphasizes that it is particularly important for leaders to facilitate:

- Good organizational frameworks in the workplace that allow employees to manage emotional demands
- Adequate resources for employees to meet high demands
- A sense of meaning and mastery in their work
- Autonomy and self-control over tasks
- Regular colleague support
- Clear roles

Vang also reminds us of the importance of taking breaks and allowing for recovery from emotional demands—both during the workday and afterward so that employees have time to unwind, ideally with colleagues who are experiencing similar situations.

**It can also be positive**

Emotional demands can also be positive. Many who have chosen professions centered on human interaction find great meaning in their work.

“Leaders must ensure that those facing emotional demands have enough resources and support to devote energy to the aspects of the job that bring them meaning—often, the human interactions themselves,” Vang concludes.

**How leaders can address emotional demands**

1. Ensure that your employees have the time and resources to perform the tasks that provide meaning and motivation, the very reasons they chose the profession.
2. Show understanding and discuss your responsibility as an employer to make the work feel manageable. Avoid placing the burden of “dealing with it” solely on the individual.
3. Provide help and relief regarding demands that distract from core tasks, such as administration, record keeping, and new ICT systems.
4. Take an extra look at employee surveys. Do they reveal how employees experience emotional demands?
5. Work for psychological safety and ensure a good work environment. A safe environment is a strong buffer.
6. Encourage your employees to show a genuine and authentic side of themselves. Be mindful that people should be allowed to exhibit human reactions at work.
7. Ensure time for the recovery of the “care muscles.”
8. Allow employees time and space to regularly “let off steam.” As a leader, you might consider organizing colleague groups where debriefing can take place. Facilitate these group discussions.

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**About Avonova**

Avonova is Nordic's leading provider of occupational health services and is the only Nordic occupational health services provider with a fully integrated hybrid digital/physical delivery model.

Avonova offers a comprehensive range of services to promote well-being and reduce absences, among employees of companies and institutions of all sizes and in all industries. It is leading in preventive evidence based occupational health services in highest impact areas, such as presenteeism, vaccination, and drug testing and rehab.

Avonova has its main offices in Larvik, Norway and Stockholm, Sweden and delivers its services digitally and from 166 locations in Norway and Sweden, by about 1 100 employees – mainly physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, and workplace engineers. For more information, visit [www.avonova.se/no/fi](http://www.avonova.se/no/fi).