Report from Falck (formerly Previa)

How is the boss doing?

A survey of Sweden's managers' well-being based on 4,000 managers.

5 April 2024

FALCK

1. Summary "How is the boss doing?"

In this report, Falck (formerly Previa) has made an in-depth look at how Swedish managers are feeling. The report is based on 4,256 health and work environment profiles conducted with managers from the first of January 2023 to the end of December 2023 across the country. The comparisons with employees are based on 23,934 health and work environment profiles carried out during the same time period.

The Health and Work Environment Profile is a mapping tool that deals with lifestyle habits, musculoskeletal disorders, well-being and the social and organisational work environment. The respondents answer a series of questions and give the individual the opportunity to take part in how lifestyle habits, physical problems, fitness and work environment affect well-being. The health and work environment profile provides a broad health perspective with a focus on what can improve the health of the individual and the organization.

In the report *"How is the manager?"* We have delved into managers' health and well-being in particular, but also looked at how managers' well-being and employees' well-being differ.

In general, managers feel that they have a meaningful and stimulating assignment. The report shows that managers in most areas rate their health slightly better than employees do. In a comparison of eight different areas, we see that in six out of eight areas where we compared managers and employees, managers experience a better well-being than employees. This applies to *general health*, *exercise*, *musculoskeletal disorders, overall social and organizational work environment, sleep* and *energy levels*.

In two areas, however, managers report answers that fall more within the risk level than employees. More managers than employees experience *stress* that can lead to a risk of ill health, and more managers than employees report answers about alcohol that can lead to risky drinking for the individual.

In the report's in-depth study, we go through managers' experiences of the *social and organizational work environment*, *stress* and *alcohol consumption*. The in-depth study of the social and organizational work environment shows that managers feel that many parts work well. At the same time, there are clear challenges. The areas where managers experience the greatest shortcomings are those that are largely about things that "come from above": Managers primarily experience shortcomings when it comes to "getting information in good time regarding important decisions, changes and future plans" about getting support from their immediate manager when needed and challenges in keeping up with their tasks.

When it comes to stress, more than half of the managers state that they find it difficult to relax. The report also shows that the managerial assignment comes with a higher level of stress, regardless of the level of education. The experience of constantly being available limits the possibility of recovery and rest.

When it comes to alcohol, more managers than employees report alcohol consumption, which can lead to risky drinking. The difference between managers and employees seems to show that the managerial role has as great an impact on alcohol habits as the level of education has. We also see that managers without high stress levels still give answers that may constitute risky drinking for the individual to a greater extent than employees – regardless of stress level.

Please note, however, that the answers do not show *that* the respondent has a high-risk use. The responses show that the estimated alcohol consumption *can constitute a risk drinking for the individual*. To find out if an individual has a risky use, blood tests and other alcohol markers are required to see how the individual's consumption affects that particular individual.

Being a manager today involves high demands and expectations from both management and employees. Sustainable leadership is crucial for the well-being of the organization as a whole. That's why it's important to put your manager's well-being on the agenda.
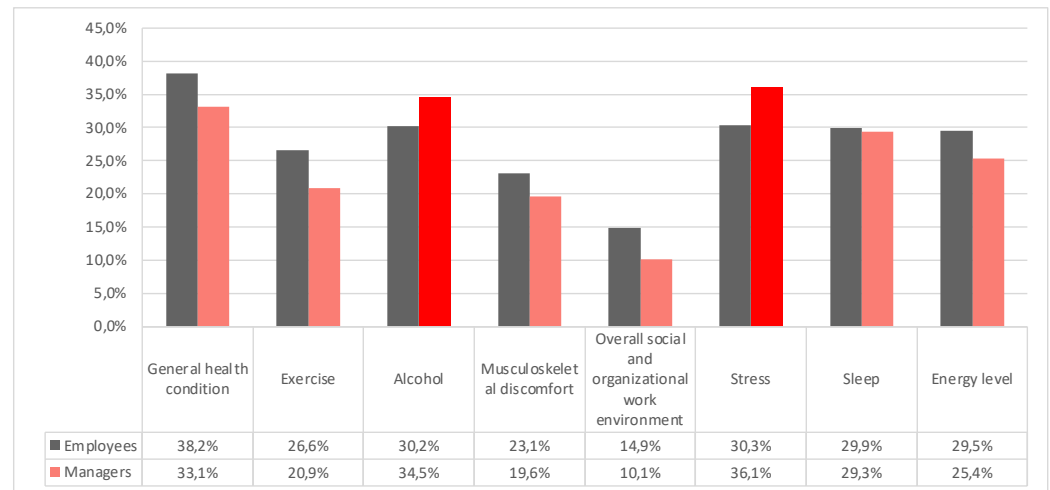
FALCK

2. Managers' well-being – overall

When managers and employees all over Sweden have completed their health and work environment profiles, each individual has answered a series of questions about their health status in different areas. These questions form an overall index within each area that shows whether the individual's perceived situation may constitute a risk of ill health.

In most areas, managers seem to rate their health better than employees. In a comparison of eight different areas, we see that in six out of eight areas, managers show a better well-being than employees. This applies to *general health*, *exercise*, *musculoskeletal disorders, overall social and organizational work environment, sleep* and *energy levels*.

In two areas, however, managers report answers that to a greater extent fall within the risk level than employees: More managers than employees report *stress* that can entail a risk of ill health, and more managers than employees report answers about *alcohol* that can mean risk drinking for the individual.

Diagram 1. Proportion who estimate themselves at levels that may entail a risk of ill health. Managers and employees.

	General health condition	Exercise	Alcohol	Musculoskeletal discomfort	Overall social and organizational work environment	Stress	Sleep	Energy level
■ Employees	38,2%	26,6%	30,2%	23,1%	14,9%	30,3%	29,9%	29,5%
■ Managers	33,1%	20,9%	34,5%	19,6%	10,1%	36,1%	29,3%	25,4%

To get a bigger picture of the managers' well-being, we have in this report delved into three areas: Organizational and social work environment, stress and alcohol. This is because the organizational and social work environment is a fundamental part of the work environment and also the area where managers seem to be most satisfied. We have delved deeper into stress and alcohol, as these are the areas where managers, to a greater extent than employees, report answers within levels that may entail a risk of ill health.

3. Managers' social and organizational work environment

Organisational and social work environment, OSA, is about such things as stress, conflicts, security, fair treatment, work-life balance and support from managers and colleagues. A good organisational and social work environment is a prerequisite for employees to feel good and do a good job.
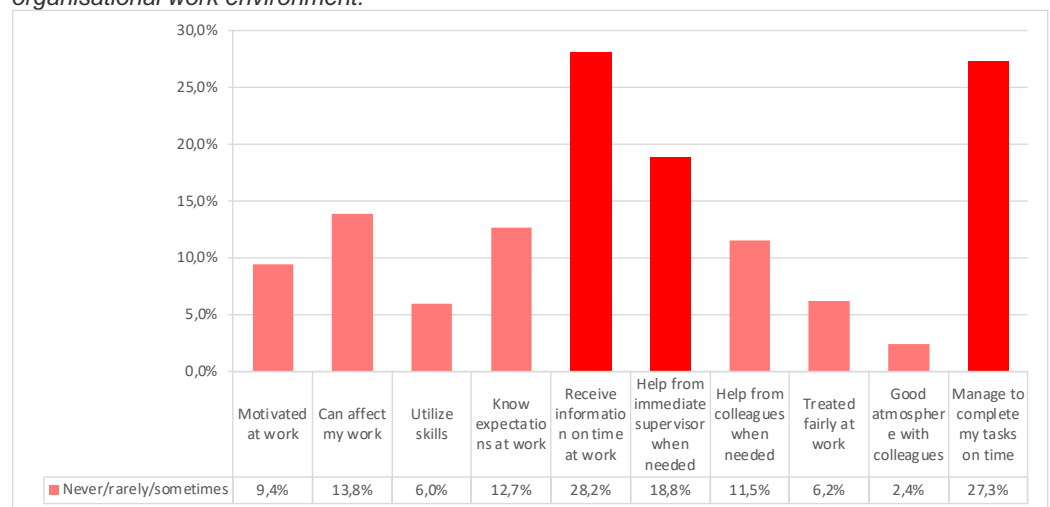
When the respondents completed the health and work environment profile, they answered a number of questions concerning the social and organizational work environment. The questions include whether you feel motivated and engaged in your work, whether you can influence what you do in your work, whether you know what is expected, whether you get support from your manager and co-workers when needed, and about the atmosphere between colleagues.

3.1 Managers are often more satisfied than employees – but there are challenges

Managers' answers in the organizational and social work environment show that many managers overall experience a good work environment. Nine out of ten managers are as a whole satisfied with the organisational and social work environment. When we look at each issue, however, a more varied picture emerges. Each individual states on a five-point scale how they experience the situation. The answer options are always, often, sometimes, rarely and never/almost never.

Here it turns out that there are areas where managers have a strongly positive experience, but also areas with clear challenges. Managers are generally relatively satisfied and satisfied, but when it comes to keeping up with their tasks, getting information on time and whether they themselves get help from their immediate manager when needed, the experience is more negative.

Diagram 2. Percentage of managers who report never/rarely/sometimes in matters of social and organisational work environment.

	Motivated at work	Can affect my work	Utilize skills	Know expectations at work	Receive information on time at work	Help from immediate supervisor when needed	Help from colleagues when needed	Treated fairly at work	Good atmosphere with colleagues	Manage to complete my tasks on time
Never/rarely/sometimes	9,4%	13,8%	6,0%	12,7%	28,2%	18,8%	11,5%	6,2%	2,4%	27,3%

Many managers today have major challenges in being a present manager. Large work groups and an increased amount of administrative tasks are factors that affect the manager's work environment. We know that managers' well-being directly affects the well-being of employees, which in turn has an impact on the organization's results. Therefore, it is important to develop organizational support based on the needs of managers.

3.2 The manager's big challenge: Difficult to find time for

In most areas, managers have a more positive attitude towards the social and organizational work environment than employees. Nine out of ten managers (90.6%) state that they are always or often motivated in their work. The corresponding figure for employees is just over eight out of ten. Similarly, managers feel to a greater extent than employees that they can influence what they do in their work.

To a very large extent, both managers and employees feel that they are treated fairly in the workplace and that the atmosphere between colleagues is good. Managers are also more likely than employees to feel that they receive information in time when it comes to important decisions. However, managers' perception of receiving information in time is low in comparison to how managers estimate other areas of the work environment. Almost three out of ten managers feel that information is not provided on time as a shortcoming in the work environment.

Around two out of ten managers experience shortcomings in getting support from their immediate manager when needed. Again, this figure is low in relation to managers' experiences in other areas. Managers and employees feel to about the same extent that they receive support from their immediate manager when needed.

The area of the social and organizational work environment where managers stand out negatively in relation to employees is time. Managers state to a greater extent than employees that they do not have time to complete their tasks on time. Almost three out of ten managers feel that they only sometimes, rarely or never manage to complete their tasks on time.

FALCK

Table 1. Experiences in the social and organizational work environment. Managers and employees.

Question	Role	Always/Often	Sometimes/rarely/never
Do you feel motivated and committed to your work?	Managers	90,6%	9,4%
	Collaborator	81,1%	18,9%
Can you influence what you do in your work?	Managers	86,2%	13,8%
	Collaborator	68,2%	31,8%
Are you able to use your know-how or skills in your work?	Managers	94,0%	6,0%
	Collaborator	88,5%	11,5%
Do you know exactly what is expected of you in your work?	Managers	87,3%	12,7%
	Collaborator	85,8%	14,2%
Do you receive information in good time at your workplace, e.g. when it comes to important decisions, changes and future plans?	Managers	71,8%	28,2%
	Collaborator	56,6%	43,4%
If you need it, can you get support and help from your immediate manager?	Managers	81,2%	18,8%
	Collaborator	80,9%	19,1%
If you need it, do you get support and help from your colleagues?	Managers	88,5%	11,5%
	Collaborator	88,1%	11,9%
Are you treated fairly at your workplace?	Managers	93,8%	6,2%
	Collaborator	91,1%	8,9%
Is there a good atmosphere between you and your colleagues?	Managers	97,6%	2,4%
	Collaborator	96,2%	3,8%
Do you have time to complete your tasks?	Managers	72,7%	27,3%
	Collaborator	84,1%	15,9%

A high workload for managers usually stems from the amount of tasks and responsibilities that fall within the manager's duties and area of responsibility. Many managers experience high conflicting demands and a constant influx of tasks that do not end. Many managers in today's working life are administratively burdened at the same time as they have employee responsibility.

When managers find it difficult to keep up, it can have major effects on the entire organization, and become a built-in system failure that causes new problems. That's why it's important to identify and eliminate challenges in the workplace.

At the same time, managers have a challenge in managing loyalties at work both "up and down". The manager needs to be there for his or her team and at the same time live up to the demands of senior management. Being a manager is often challenging, if the manager experiences an imbalance in the opportunity to be "the manager you want to be", it can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

4. Managers and stress

Today's working life is characterized by a high tempo with ever-increasing demands on efficiency, profitability and results in relation to high goals. Being a manager today involves an enormous pressure of demands and expectations from senior management and from employees.

As previously described, managers show higher levels of stress than employees. In an overall index of stress, 36% of managers report stress at a level that can pose health risks. The

corresponding figure for employees is 30%. The fact that managers find it more difficult than employees to complete their tasks is probably part of the higher stress experience.

Diagram 3. Proportion who estimate their stress at levels that may entail a risk of ill health. Managers and employees.
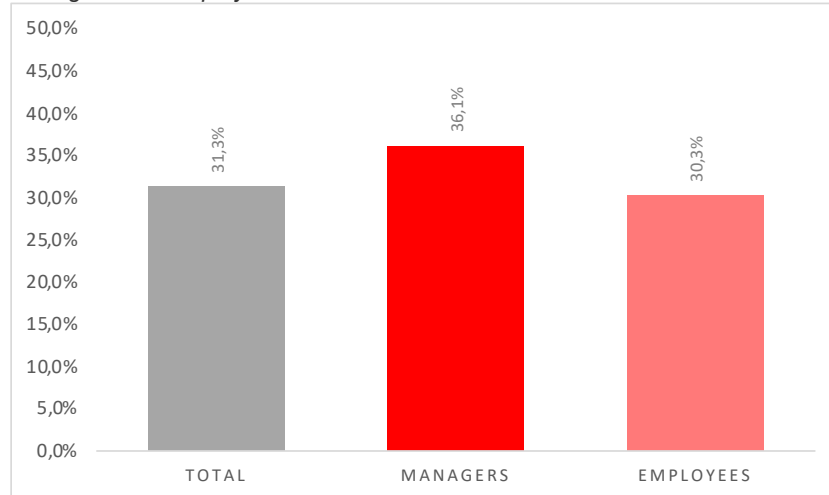

4.1 Educational attainment is blurred by managers' stress
A known fact is that those who have a higher level of education are more likely to experience higher levels of stress. To get a picture of whether it is the level of education and not the leadership itself that contributes to higher stress, we have therefore delved into this.

Overall, 33.8% of those with tertiary education experience stress at levels that may pose a risk of ill health. The corresponding figure for those who have compulsory school/upper secondary school as their most recent completion of education is 28.5%.

Figure 4. Proportion who estimate their stress at levels that may entail a risk of ill health. Managers and employees, total, broken down level of education.
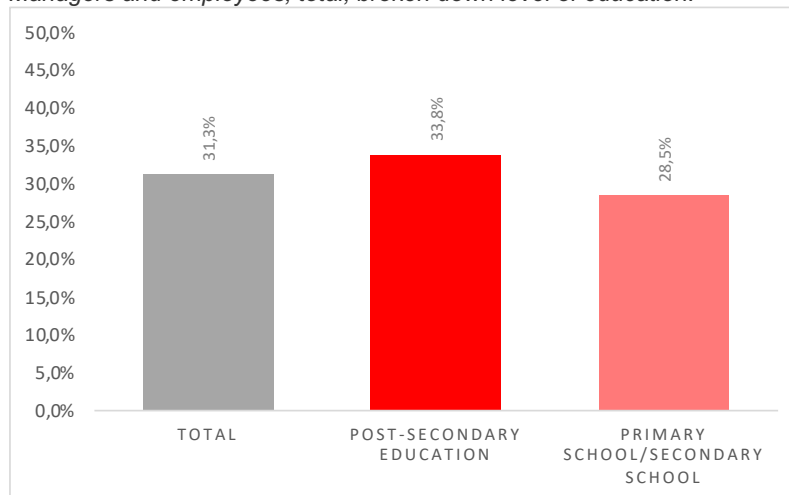
However, the idea that the higher level of stress can be explained by the level of education changes when only managers are studied: Among those who are managers, the level of education does not seem to have a significant impact on the level of stress. Around 36% of managers rate their stress at levels that may entail a risk of ill health – regardless of level of education.

Figure 5. Proportion who estimate their stress at levels that may entail a risk of ill health. Managers divided education level.
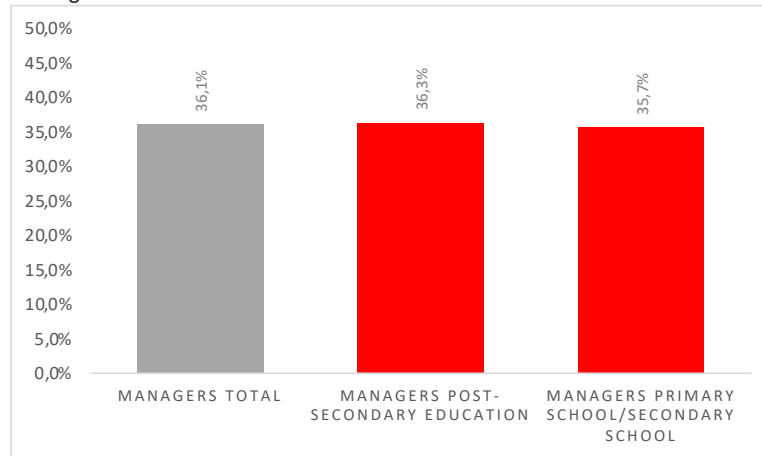
For employees, on the other hand, there is still a difference in stress level according to level of education. A total of 33.1% of employees with post-secondary education are stressed at a level that may pose a risk of ill health, while the corresponding figure for those with primary/secondary education is 27.2%.

This shows that the managerial assignment itself comes with a higher level of stress, regardless of level of education, and that the experience of stress can be linked to the managerial role.

4.2   More than half find it difficult to relax

Stress is often defined as a combination of tension and uneasiness. Short-term stress can be useful and good when you have to perform a little more than normal. On the other hand, an elevated level of stress over a long period of time is harmful to both quality of life, work effort and health.

In the health and work environment profiles that form the basis of this report, all participants have answered a number of in-depth questions about stress. On all but one question, managers rate their stress levels higher than employees. More than half of managers (53.6%) state that they find it difficult to relax some of the time/much of the time/all the time. A total of 46% of managers state that they have been tense and 55.1% stressed part of the time/a large part of the time or all the time. Irritable is the issue where managers and employees experience challenges to roughly the same extent.

Table 2. Experiences of stress. Managers and employees.

Question	Role	Not at all/little part of the time	Part of the time	A large part of the time / All the time
How often have you found it difficult to relax?	Managers	46,4%	32,9%	20,7%
	Collaborator	54,0%	29,0%	17,0%
How often have you been irritable?	Managers	68,1%	25,1%	6,8%
	Collaborator	69,9%	22,8%	7,3%
How often have you been tense?	Managers	54,0%	31,2%	14,8%
	Collaborator	61,7%	26,3%	12,0%
How often have you been stressed?	Managers	44,9%	37,3%	17,7%
	Collaborator	54,4%	31,9%	13,7%

The fact that managers find it more difficult to relax may be related to the fact that you always carry your managerial assignment with you. Employee responsibility doesn't end at the end of the working day. The experience of constantly being available limits the possibility of recovery and rest.

5 Managers and Alcohol

Part of the systematic work environment management is to pay attention to when the employees' use of alcohol (risky use, harmful use or dependence) may affect the ability to work/safety in the work environment. Alcohol problems can lead to increased ill health and absenteeism from work, but also an increased risk of accidents, work-related injuries, lost productivity and human suffering.

In Sweden, it is estimated that about 1 million people have a risk consumption of alcohol. Risky use is a risk factor, not a disease in itself. When talking about risky use of alcohol, it is a degree of consumption that entails a risk of harmful physical, psychological and social consequences.

Risky drinking can be defined either by a high average consumption over time (10 standard glasses or more per week) or by drinking a lot of alcohol at one and the same time (4 standard glasses or more per occasion) at least once a month. In other words, it is determined by both how much alcohol you drink and what the drinking pattern looks like. There is a great deal of individual variation in how we are affected by alcohol, but no consumption is risk-free.

In the Health and Work Environment Profile, participants answer questions about their alcohol consumption. Managers give answers that to a somewhat greater extent may constitute a risk drinking for the individual.

It is good to remember that when we use self-assessment to report what our actual alcohol consumption looks like, we tend to underestimate the amount of alcohol we actually drink.

Please note, however, that the answers do not show *that* the respondent has a high-risk use. The responses show that the estimated alcohol consumption *can constitute a risk drinking for the individual*. To find out if an individual has a risky use, blood tests and other alcohol markers are required to see how the individual's consumption affects that particular individual.

Figure 6 The proportion of those who state answers that may constitute a risk drinking for the individual. Managers and employees.

5.1 The managerial role has as much impact as the level of education
Similar to perceived stress, we have investigated whether the difference between managers' and employees' alcohol consumption can be related to educational level. Those who have post-secondary education then report to a somewhat lesser extent answers that may constitute risk drinking for the individual.

Table 3. The proportion of those who give answers that may constitute may constitute a risk drinking for the individual. Level of education in total as well as managers and employees.

	Completely	Chief	Collaborator
Primary/secondary education	33,9%	36,2%	33,5%
Post-secondary education	28,5%	33,5%	27,2%

However, in a comparison between managers and employees in combination with the level of education, we see a difference between managers and employees, which shows that the managerial role has as great an impact on alcohol habits as the level of education. Managers with

post-secondary education report answers that fall within the risk consumption of alcohol to the same extent as employees without post-secondary education. Thus, the positive effect education has on drinking habits seems to be as great as the negative effect that a managerial role comes with.

5.2 Managers drink more often – but fewer glasses at a time

When it comes to how often managers and employees drink alcohol, managers state that they drink alcohol more often than employees.

Table 4. How often do you drink alcohol? Managers and employees

	Never	Up to 1 time/month	2-4 times/ month	2-3 times/week	4 times/week or more
Managers	6,3%	17,9%	47,6%	26,5%	1,6%
Collaborator	10,2%	26,1%	44,6%	18,0%	1,1%

On the other hand, managers state that they drink slightly less on a typical day they drink alcohol than employees.

Table 5. How many standard glasses do you drink on a typical day when drinking alcohol? Managers and employees

	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10 or more
Managers	54,1%	34,1%	8,2%	2,6%	0,9%
Collaborator	53,9%	30,6%	10,4%	3,7%	1,4%

Note, however, that people up to the age of 30 are heavily overrepresented among those who drink many glasses per occasion. Since there are not that many managers under the age of 30, it may be at least a partial explanation for why drinking many glasses per occasion is more common among employees.

We have also looked at whether stress among managers can be the explanation for managers stating answers that may constitute risk drinking for the individual more often than employees. However, this seems to be only a small part of the explanation as managers without high stress levels still report answers that can constitute risk drinking for the individual to a greater extent than employees – regardless of stress level.

As an employer, it is important to have a clear and communicated policy on what applies to alcohol and the workplace. For example, it may be that you are not allowed to be at work with a hangover or be under the influence during working hours. For many employers, this is a direct safety risk for everyone in the work environment.

Feel free to talk about the topic at workplace meetings or equivalent. This can help employees to signal their need for help and support at an earlier stage. When you as an employer receive signals or have suspicions that employees have alcohol use that is unhealthy/affects the work environment – have a conversation with the employee in a safe, secluded environment. This also applies when there is a suspicion of drugs. Here you can also get help from your occupational health service. The most important thing is to do something.

6 Concluding Words

Being a manager today involves high demands and expectations from both management and employees. At the same time, the boundary between work and private life is blurred and the opportunity to be available is unlimited. It goes without saying that the manager has the ultimate responsibility for the employees' work environment. It is crucial not to forget that the manager is also an employee with the right to a sustainable work environment.

Sustainable leadership is crucial for the well-being of the organization as a whole. That's why it's important to put your manager's well-being on the agenda. In addition to organizational conditions, a culture and climate that enables managers to reflect on their work environment and their well-being are also required. Although managers are employees themselves, they have a special role with responsibility for the business and the employees. This creates a specific need for organizational support to promote the well-being of managers – a need that is different from that of other employees.

FALCK

Ten tips for manager well-being

1. **Prioritize from the top:** The manager is ultimately responsible for work environment management, but it needs to be prioritized from the top and owned by everyone in the organization. When work environment management starts at the highest management level and involves the entire organization, it can result in concrete behaviors.

2. **Ensure support:** Ensure that the manager has the opportunity to get support, feedback and help with prioritization from the superior manager.

3. **Break the loneliness:** Break the loneliness and establish a network of managers where there is room for support and exchange of experiences. Set aside time for the network of managers to meet regularly. Develop mentoring programs so that experienced leaders can support those who are new to the managerial role.

4. **Relieve the manager:** Many managers take on new tasks without taking anything away. Review responsibilities and workload annually. Review the size of the staff groups if the workload has increased and the manager's conditions have changed. Relieve the manager of the amount of administrative tasks.

5. **Prepare for conflicts:** Conflicts are draining and it's best if you can stop them before they occur. One way is to clarify the agreements that govern how employees behave towards each other Involve employees in the process and have the discussion: How do we address each other? How do we behave towards each other?

6. **Share responsibility:** Today's leadership research points to the importance of a more communicative and transformational leadership where the leader sets direction, provides overall conditions and delegates responsibility without micromanaging and controlling. Give responsibility and authority to employees, and avoid detailed involvement in operational matters.

7. **Substitute in case of absence:** Make sure you have a clear replacement who has the mandate to act and who steps in in the manager's absence.

8. **Collaborate with HR:** Close and active support from the HR function can facilitate the managers' work situation by contributing to clear structure, routines and processes.

9. **Digital accessibility policy:** Leading in a digital context, or with employees who work remotely, involves more complex conditions. Digitalisation also means that the manager's own work environment becomes more borderless. Clarify norms and develop policies regarding accessibility during and after normal working hours. Time for recovery is just as important as working hours if you are to last in the long run.

10. **Follow up on an ongoing basis:** Continuously follow up on the work environment and stress factors in the workplace and act immediately on signs of ill health.