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Worries about leadership: Managers' experiences shared in focus group discussions

This study investigated Finnish leaders' worries about their roles as leaders. In addition, the experiences of the leaders were compared to a previously developed model, namely worries about leadership (WAL), which includes three dimensions: worries about failure, worries about harming oneself or others, and worries about work-life imbalance. The qualitative sample included focus group discussions with 17 leaders. Inductive content analysis resulted in 12 different themes that represented leadership-related worries, most of which were classifiable under two of the WAL dimensions. 'Responsibilities and risks' represented worries about failure. Six themes represented worries about harming oneself: experiencing a lack of personal skills, having personal strengths that cannot be used, having to act against one's personal values, acting in the face of conflicting expectations, experiencing a lack of resources, and lacking social support. Worries about harming others included three themes: supporting followers effectively; handling communication, interaction, and feedback; and motivating personnel in a time of change. Two new themes emerged from the data that did not fit the WAL model: worrying about building trust between followers and the leader, and meeting the challenges of leading an organisational culture. It is important to recognise the different worries related to leadership tasks and roles, because they have implications both for supporting the leaders' well-being and the functioning of the work community, and for ensuring the success of the organisation. Information about leadership worries can be applied when planning different supportive interventions for current leaders and for employees who are aspiring to leadership roles.