How leaders benefit from engaging in high-quality leader-member exchanges: A daily diary study

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LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   1

Abstract

Purpose

Drawing from the conservation of resources theory and the success resource model of job stress, we investigated the role of leader behaviours in the context of leader-member exchanges (LMX) as a driver of leaders' job-related well-being and recovery. Specifically, we hypothesized positive affect and perceived competence as potential mechanisms enhancing leaders' job satisfaction and psychological detachment.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach

Daily diary data was collected from 85 leaders over five consecutive working days (376 daily observations) and analysed using multilevel path analyses.

Findings

Leader LMX behaviours were positively associated with leaders' positive affect and perceived competence at work at the person and day level. Additionally, results provided support for most of the assumed indirect effects of leader LMX behaviours on leaders' job satisfaction and psychological detachment via positive affect and perceived competence.

Practical implications

Leadership development activities should raise leaders' awareness of the relevance of resourceful interactions with followers for leaders' own well-being. Organisations should create a working environment that facilitates high-quality exchanges amongst their members. The current trend towards increasing digital and less face-to-face collaboration may pose a risk to this important resource source for leaders.

Originality

These findings emphasise the day-to-day variation in leadership behaviours and that leaders' engagement in high-quality leader-follower interactions has the potential to stimulate a resource-building process for the benefit of leaders themselves.

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   2

Keywords: leadership, leader-member exchange, leader well-being, diary study,

positive affect, perceived competence, job satisfaction, psychological detachment

How leaders benefit from engaging in high-quality leader-member exchanges: A daily diary study

Leaders' crucial role for organisations' functioning and success has been emphasised repeatedly in past research. From the perspective of occupational health psychology, the question of how leaders exert influence to guarantee safety and health at the workplace is an important research area, and in this vein effects of both constructive and destructive leadership behaviours have been addressed (cf. Montano *et al.*, 2017). However, the literature's focus has been dominated by research on the consequences of specific leadership styles or behaviours on employee health and well-being. Recently, scholars have highlighted the need to take leaders' well-being into particular consideration (Barling and Cloutier, 2017). Current meta-analytical evidence confirmed a link between leadership behaviours and leaders' self-rated well-being (Kaluza *et al.*, 2020). Scholars in leadership research also called for overcoming the focus on employee-related outcomes in examinations on leader-follower interactions. Research should explicitly consider effects on leaders themselves, e.g., in terms of individual leader outcomes such as energy, burnout, or motivation (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014). The present study aims to integrate these two streams of research and address respective gaps in the literature.

First, we focus on leader-member exchange (LMX) behaviours as a form of relationship-based leadership. LMX behaviours involve leaders' behaviours aiming to establish and maintain a high-quality LMX relationship, i.e., a relationship characterised by respect, trust, and mutual obligation (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Past research on leader-follower interactions is primarily based upon LMX theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Gottfredson *et al.*, 2020) and has yielded extensive evidence for the beneficial effects of high-quality relationships, e.g., in terms of employees' stress and health (e.g., Harms *et al.*, 2017).

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   4

However, previous research mainly applied a follower-centric perspective by linking followers' perceptions of leaders' contribution to the LMX quality to employee-related outcomes. Over the last decade, leadership scholars emphasised the need for closer investigations of leaders' perceptions in LMX relationships (Tse *et al.*, 2018) and the potential consequences for leaders themselves (cf. Zhou and Schriesheim, 2009). Empirical evidence on the link between leader-follower interactions and leader outcomes has remained scarce (for an exception, see, e.g., Bernerth and Hirschfeld, 2016). Thus, we aim at advancing the current state of research by investigating the role of leader LMX behaviours as a potential driver of leader well-being.

Second, we advance the understanding of how LMX behaviours are associated with leaders' well-being by focusing on the benefits leaders may obtain by engaging in LMX behaviours. Drawing on the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and the success resource model of job stress (SRM; Grebner *et al.*, 2008, 2010), we argue that leader LMX behaviours elicit subjective task-related and prosocial success experiences at work. Subjective occupational success is defined as "positive and meaningful work events that are related to work goals and one's working behaviour and which are salient for the individual in terms of subjective goal attainment or reasonable goal progress" (Grebner *et al.*, 2010, p. 70). Specifically, we propose that the subjective success associated with LMX behaviours fosters leaders' positive affect at work and induces elevated perceptions of competence. Moreover, as COR theory suggested that resource gains may stimulate a resource-gain spiral, we hypothesised that these favourable affective and cognitive experiences spill over into leaders' non-work domain and promote leaders' job-related well-being (i.e., job satisfaction) and recovery (i.e., psychological detachment) outside work.

Third, even though LMX was considered a relatively stable construct and, therefore, investigated at the between-person level in the past, scholars underlined the importance of

adopting a within-person perspective in the research on leadership and leader-follower interactions (Kelemen *et al.*, 2020). First empirical evidence indicated that LMX represents a job resource that may vary on a day-to-day basis (e.g., Ellis *et al.*, 2018). We assume that these daily LMX fluctuations should also be observable in leaders' reports. Thus, we conducted a diary study to investigate leader behaviours and leaders' personal experiences in a more natural context, i.e., as a part of their everyday work. Using this approach, we were able to disentangle between within- and between-person effects. Therefore, we will draw conclusions on inter-individual and intra-individual effects of leaders engaging in LMX behaviours offering valuable insights and implications for practice and future research.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

We build our theoretical argumentation on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) complemented by the assumptions of the SRM (Grebner *et al.*, 2008, 2010). The COR theory's key tenet describes that individuals "strive to retain, protect, and build resources" (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Additionally, the investment of resources is necessary to protect oneself against or recover from the loss of resources and acquire further resources. Individuals equipped with more resources are assumed to be more resilient in the face of resource loss and to more likely enter spirals of resource gain. Even though COR theory was often used to explain the emergence of stress and burnout at the workplace, it likewise offers assumptions for examining positive experiences because the availability of more resources is beneficial for individuals' positive well-being and health (Hobfoll, 2011). Moreover, COR theory considers that resources are not necessarily stable but fluctuate between phases of conservation and acquisition (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).

The SRM (Grebner *et al.*, 2008, 2010) shares common features with the COR theory. While originally resources were defined as objects, conditions, states, and other things people centrally value (Hobfoll, 1989), Halbesleben et al. (2014) revised the definition by

emphasising resources' relevance in supporting individuals' goal attainment. Similarly,

Grebner et al. (2008, 2010) described the role of subjective achievements, i.e., subjective

occupational success, as essential resources in the job stress process promoting well-being

and health. Additionally, they put emphasis on the event character of subjective occupational

success experiences. Interestingly, both approaches recognised that a leadership role itself

may represent a resource (Hobfoll, 2001) or is closely linked to subjective occupational

success (Grebner *et al.*, 2008, 2010). The SRM described two types of immediate subjective

success resulting from an individual's effort, i.e., task-related and prosocial success.

Subjective task-related success comprises the achievement or progress of personal goals or

performance-related goals. Prosocial success occurs when people succeed in improving the

situation of others (Grebner *et al.*, 2010). Leadership responsibilities, e.g., supporting and

motivating followers and initiating followers' development, represent an in-role prosocial

type of success (Grebner *et al.*, 2010). These immediate success experiences were expected

to positively affect individuals' well-being and health (Grebner *et al.*, 2010).

Engaging in High-Quality Leader-Follower Exchange Behaviours as a Driver of

Leader Well-Being

Taxonomies of managerial behaviours, e.g., by Yukl (2012), accentuated the

importance of relationship-oriented behaviours as an aspect of effective leadership and, thus,

a means to accomplish organisational goals. From the perspective of SRM, holding a

leadership position is particular in that the two sources of achievements, i.e., goal attainment

and pro-social success, that stimulate subjective occupational success are considerably

intertwined in this work role (Grebner *et al.*, 2008). By taking care of followers' working

conditions and health, leaders actively improve their employees' situation while

simultaneously achieving organisational objectives. Therefore, we propose that establishing

high-quality interactions with their followers facilitates leaders' goal progress and prosocial

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   7

success as a part of leaders' everyday work.

LMX theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between leaders and their followers, emphasising that the relationships are not equal but individually negotiated with each team member (Henderson *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, LMX relationships are characterised by the mutual exchange of resources whereby the specific resources vary depending on the exchange relationship stage and quality (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). We suggest that leaders who engage in beneficial mutual exchanges with their followers experience goal progress and prosocial success. Grebner et al. (2008) pointed out that such success experiences in turn may elicit an upwards spiral, i.e., by generating and protecting leaders' own resources and subsequently promoting leaders' health and well-being. COR theory acknowledged the value of goal attainment and success as a resource itself. Hobfoll (2001) provided a comprehensive list of COR resources, of which several are related to feelings of success and being a leader. Thus, we believe that the success experiences provoked by relational leadership behaviours translate into positive outcomes for leaders themselves.

Meta-analytical results endorse a positive relationship between successful goal striving and subjective well-being (ρ = .43 ; Klug and Maier, 2015). Drawing from the SRM framework, Kronenwett and Rigotti (2020) demonstrated that task-related and prosocial achievements reduce the risk of depressivity. Considering specifically the effects of prosocial achievements, meta-analytical evidence indicated that prosociality is beneficial for the psychological functioning of the giver (Hui *et al.*, 2020). Lanaj et al. (2016b) reported perceived prosocial impact restores the helpers' daily resources. Prosocial impact refers to "the degree to which employees feel that their actions benefit other people" (Grant, 2008, p. 110). We argue that this feeling is closely linked to leaders' prosocial and task-related success experiences.

Previous research in the working context found favourable effects of perceived prosocial impact on positive affect (Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015; Sonnentag and Grant, 2012). Positive affect is defined as a state characterised by being "enthusiastic, active, and alert" (Watson et al., 1988, p. 1063). According to affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), work-related events congruent with an individual's goals stimulate positive affect. Thus, positive affect at work can be viewed as an indicator of daily goal progress or attainment, as shown by Harris et al. (2003). Furthermore, previous literature emphasized the relevance of dynamic affective experiences in the context of LMX development, e.g., with regard to processes of emotional contagion and mutual entrainment of emotions that may contribute to positive affective spirals between leaders and their followers (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Tse et al., 2018), whereby the leader typically initiates exchanges and creates affective events at work. Leaders engaging in high-quality LMX behaviours may experience elevated levels of positive affect as they strengthen relationships with their followers and, thus, progress both with task-related and prosocial goals.

A further benefit of (prosocial) achievement experiences refers to elevated feelings of self-efficacy or competence (Bandura, 1978), representing a major personal resource (Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012). Perceived competence is described as "an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform activities with skill" (Spreitzer, 1995, p. 1443). In their diary study, Sonnentag and Grant (2012) found higher levels of prosocial impact to be associated with increases in perceived competence. Moreover, task-related achievements elicit competence need satisfaction (Kronenwett and Rigotti, 2020). We assume that leaders experience occupational mastery when offering their followers appropriate resources that fit the individual's needs and perceiving the effectiveness of these leadership endeavours, e.g., increased follower satisfaction and performance. This mastery experience is likely to raise leaders' judgments of their own competence.

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING
9

Taken together, we propose that leaders' engaging in LMX behaviours represent goal-relevant work events characterised by task-related and prosocial achievement experiences that stimulate a resource gain spiral and result in leaders' enhanced positive affect and perceived competence.

As prior empirical evidence revealed considerable within-person-variability considering the processes relevant to our assumptions (Kronenwett and Rigotti, 2020; Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015) and due to our interest in inter-and intra-individual processes, we specify our hypotheses at both the within- and the between-person level. More precisely, we assume that on days on which leaders have shown more LMX behaviours, they report an enhanced perception of their competence and higher positive affect at the end of the workday (within-person level). Those leaders who generally engage in more LMX behaviours show higher positive affect and perceived competence on average than leaders who engage in less LMX behaviours (between-person level).

Hypothesis 1: Leader LMX behaviours are positively related to leaders' positive affect, at a) the within-person and b) the between-person level.

Hypothesis 2: Leader LMX behaviours are positively related to leaders' perceived competence at a) the within-person and b) the between-person level.

An Affective Process Linking LMX Behaviours to Leader Well-Being

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals with greater resources are more prone to gain further resources, resulting in resource gain spirals. Grebner et al. (2008, 2010) also explained that subjective success experiences are likely to provoke further resources, such as resilience and recovery. Therefore, we assume that the immediate positive experiences originating from engaging in LMX behaviours may spill over into leisure time and promote favourable non-work experiences. Specifically, we suggest that positive affect and perceived competence experienced at the end of the workday translate into higher job

satisfaction and psychological detachment at bedtime.

Job satisfaction has been suggested as an outcome of resource gaining processes (Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012) and refers to an individual's attitude towards one's job. Empirical evidence inspired by affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) indicated that positive affect elicited by affective work-events is related to increases in job satisfaction in both between-person (e.g., Wegge *et al.*, 2006) and within-person studies (e.g., Niklas and Dormann, 2005). Meta-analytical results corroborated a positive association of positive affect and job satisfaction ($\rho = 0.34$, Thoresen *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, we propose that on days on which leaders engage in more LMX behaviours, the resulting elevated level of positive effect at work promotes them to be more satisfied with their job at the end of the day (within-person level). On the between-person level, we propose that those leaders who generally show more LMX behaviours report on average higher positive affect that translates into a higher degree of job satisfaction than leaders who engage in less LMX behaviours.

Hypothesis 3: Leader LMX behaviours are indirectly related to leaders' job satisfaction via positive affect at a) the within-person and b) the between-person level.

Drawing on the SRM model, subjective success experiences should show advantageous effects on recovery (Grebner *et al.*, 2008, 2010). We propose that affect plays a crucial role in linking leader LMX behaviours and leaders' psychological recovery. Positive emotions "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 3). Pleasant feelings due to, e.g., prosocial success experiences in leader-follower interactions, may facilitate engagement in a wide range of leisure activities. Non-work activities, such as exercise or joint activities with others, contribute positively to individuals' psychological detachment (cf. Feuerhahn *et al.*, 2014).

Additionally, positive affect is beneficial for leaders' recovery because it reduces physiological arousal that may have arisen from encounters with negative experiences

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   11

(Tugade and Frederickson, 2004). Negative affect and a sustained, elevated physiological

arousal are related to perseverative cognitions, e.g., work-related rumination during leisure

time (Brosschot *et al.*, 2006), with both potentially leading to health impairments (Berset *et*

al., 2011). Therefore, we propose that on days on which leaders show more LMX

behaviours, they experience higher positive affect at work which in turn facilitates

psychological detachment during non-work time in the evening (within-person level). On the

between level, we suggest that those leaders who generally engage in more LMX behaviours

report on average higher positive affect at work and in turn better psychological detachment

than leaders who engage in less LMX behaviours.

Hypothesis 4: Leader LMX behaviours are indirectly related to leaders' psychological

detachment via positive affect at a) the within-person and b) the between-person level.

A Cognitive Process Linking LMX Behaviours and Leader Well-Being

Apart from leaders' positive affect, we assume perceived competence to play a vital

role in the resource gain spirals provoked by their LMX behaviours. As pointed out

previously, success experiences are a crucial source of perceived competence or self-efficacy

(Bandura, 1978). Achieving leadership-related goals and success by supporting their

followers and providing individually fitting resources may lead to mastery experiences for

leaders. The perception of having succeeded in the job is positively related to being satisfied

with this job. The previous literature provides a wide range of empirical evidence for a

positive relationship between generalised self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Judge and Bono,

2001). Research focusing specifically on occupational self-efficacy confirmed this

association (e.g., Maggiori *et al.*, 2016). Thus, we suggest that on days on which leaders

engage in more LMX behaviours, the enhanced perceptions of their competence at work

results in experiencing higher job satisfaction at the end of the day (within-person level). On

the between level, we assume that those leaders who generally show more LMX behaviours

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   12

on average perceive themselves to be more competent which in turn is associated with higher

job satisfaction than leaders who engage in less LMX behaviours.

Hypothesis 5: Leader LMX behaviours are indirectly related to leaders' job

satisfaction via perceived competence at a) the within-person and b) the between-person

level.

Understanding perceived competence as a sign of goal progress and success links this

state to leaders' psychological detachment. Smit (2016) could show that completed work

goals are related to increased psychological detachment. Converse effects were found for

unfinished tasks being positively associated with work-related rumination (e.g., Syrek *et al.*,

2017). Furthermore, Weigelt et al. (2019b) demonstrated that competence need satisfaction

acts as a mediator in the association of unfinished tasks with work-related rumination.

Translated to our research question, we argue that having engaged in LMX behaviours

induces leaders to perceive themselves as competent in their leadership role. This state

signals successful goal progress and, thus, facilitates mentally detaching from work during

leisure time. From the perspective of COR theory, an accelerating resource gain spiral at

work may spill over to the non-work domain with beneficial effects, e.g., in terms of quality

time with the partner and family or new challenging leisure activities (Brummelhuis and

Bakker, 2012; Hobfoll, 2011), that help to unwind from work.

Taken together, we propose that on days on which leaders show more LMX

behaviours, the associated elevated perceptions of their competence at work facilitate leaders'

psychological detachment during non-work time. Those leaders who generally engage in

more LMX behaviours report on average higher perceptions of their own competence at work

and in turn better psychological detachment than leaders who engage in less LMX

behaviours. *Hypothesis 6*: Leader LMX behaviours are indirectly related to leaders'

psychological detachment via perceived competence at a) the within-person and b) the

between-person level.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

We collected data using an online-based daily diary study. Interested people received

detailed information about the study and a link to the general survey encompassing questions

about sociodemographic data. Participants were also asked to select a week for the daily

assessments. During the respective working week, participants filled out two daily

questionnaires over five consecutive workdays. Participants completed the first daily

questionnaire at the end of the workday. It included measures on day-specific leader LMX

behaviours, positive affect, and perceived competence. The second survey was answered in

the evening before going to bed and included measures on day-specific job satisfaction,

psychological detachment, and the total amount of work hours of the respective day.

In sum, 96 leaders voluntarily agreed to participate in our study. We only included

participants in the data analyses who completed the two daily questionnaires on at least two

workdays. Our final sample consisted of 85 leaders with 376 complete daily observations

(i.e., one observation corresponds to having answered both daily questionnaires). Included

participants provided on average 4.42 complete daily data sets.

The sample was mainly male (77%), with age ranging between 25 to 64 years (M =

45.14, SD = 8.95). Most participants held a university degree (42%) or an apprenticeship

(46%), i.e., vocational training or comparable education. Participants worked in different

industries, e.g., manufacturing and processing industry, financial and insurance services, and

public administration. On average, they worked 44.74 hours per week (SD = 7.31).

Participants held a leadership position for, on average, 11.32 years (SD = 8.06).

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   14

Measures

All scales were administered in German and adapted to the day level. Unless

otherwise stated, participants answered items based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (=

strongly disagree) to 5 (= *strongly agree*). We report multilevel alphas based on the

procedure by Geldhof *et al.* (2014) as estimates for scales' reliability.

Leader LMX behaviours

Participants rated their contribution to leader-member exchanges retrospectively concerning the respective workday based on an adapted version of the German LMX-7 (Schyns, 2002). Items were adapted to match the perspective of the leader and to target the respective leaders' followers (e.g., "Today, I have shown concern for the job problems and needs of my employees."). We deliberately chose this approach, i.e., leaders providing an overall evaluation of their own contribution to the relationships with their followers. This study does not intend to examine the impact of the exchange quality in distinct relationships. Moreover, taking into account the scarce temporal resources of leaders, we forwent asking for separate ratings of the relationships with each of their followers to reduce the participants' effort in completing the daily questionnaires. Previous research has already successfully applied similar adaptations (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005) and emphasized the value of using leaders' self-rated behaviour (cf. Walsh and Arnold, 2018). Within-person level alpha was .83, between-person level alpha was .90.

Perceived competence at work

We used three items from Spreitzer (1995), e.g., "Today, I was self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities." Within-person level alpha was .66, between-person level alpha was .96.

Positive affect at work

Participants indicated their momentary positive affect by rating six items (i.e., active, interested, excited, strong, inspired, and alert) from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule by Watson *et al.* (1988) following the instruction "For each word, please indicate how much it applies to you at the moment.". Within-person level alpha was .79, between-person level alpha was .92.

Job satisfaction

We measured daily overall job satisfaction with a single-item measure based on Baillod and Semmer (1994). Participants rated how satisfied they were with their job on the respective day based on a Kunin Faces Scale (1= *extremely dissatisfied* to 7 = *extremely satisfied*).

Psychological detachment

Participants rated four items from the German version of the Recovery Experience Questionnaire (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). A sample item is "Today during my leisure time, I have forgotten about work.". Within-person level alpha was .79, between-person level alpha was .97.

Control variables

We included the following control variables to rule out other potential explanations for the results. Gender (0 = men, 1 = women) and age were used as controls on the person level and daily work hours as control variable on the day level. These variables were found to relate to well-being and recovery indicators in past research, e.g., older employees were shown to be more satisfied with their jobs (Ng and Feldman, 2010). Moreover, an increase in daily work hours may impede recovery processes, thus, is associated with reduced psychological detachment (e.g., Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005).

Construct validity

Before testing our hypotheses, we calculated multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (MCFA) with Mplus version 7.4 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2015) to our measures' construct validity. We compared different models and specified a homologous factorial structure on both the within- and between-person model. We applied item parcelling to reduce the number of parameter estimates in relation to our

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   17

sample size (Little *et al.*, 2013). Thus, we created three-item parcels for leader-member

exchange with two to three items each, three two-item parcels for positive affect, and

two-item parcels for psychological detachment. For each variable, items were randomly

assigned to parcels. Results of the MCFA supported a five-factor model over other

alternative models (χ^2 (93, N = 85) = 136.72, *p* = .002, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA =

.04). Particularly, the hypothesized model showed a superior fit than a one-factor

solution (χ^2 (109, N = 85) = 1,112.52, *p* < .001, CFI = .40, TLI = .27, RMSEA = .16)

indicating that common method variance may not represent a major threat in this study

(Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Analytic Strategy

To account for the non-independence in the data resulting from our data's hierarchical

structure (daily reports nested in persons), we conducted multilevel path analyses in Mplus

Version 7.4 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2015). We followed the recommendations for

multilevel indirect effects by Preacher *et al.* (2010) and specified an overall 1-1-1 model with

random intercepts and fixed slopes on both the within- and between-person level. This

approach separates between the within-person and between-person variance in Level-1

variables and therefore corresponds to an implicit latent group-mean centring. Thus, as all

between-variance is removed from the within-person relationships, no further centring was

necessary for our focal variables. However, we centred variables that only accounted for

variance at one level. Therefore, we chose grand-mean centering for the between-level

control variable age to facilitate the interpretation (Enders and Tofighi, 2007). As we aimed

at focusing at the within-person differences of the control variable working hours per day

only, we accordingly applied group-mean centring to eliminate the between variance for

reasons of parsimony (Preacher *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, we calculated 95% Monte Carlo confidence intervals with 20,000 repetitions (Selig and Preacher, 2008) for the indirect effects.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among all study variables. We calculated ICCs for our focal variables to verify that a considerable proportion of the variance is attributable to intra-individual fluctuations. Calculations revealed considerable amount of variance attributable to the within-person level for our focal variables (46 – 70%).

[Insert Table 1 around here]

Test of hypotheses

Following the recommendations by Becker (2005) we ran the multilevel path model with and without the control variables (i.e., age, gender, work hours per day). The results do not differ decisively indicating that the control variables are not responsible for the findings[1]. Thus, we report the more parsimonious model without controls. The respective overall 1-1-1 indirect effects model that fitted the data well (χ^2 (2, N = 85) = 2.80, p = .247; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .03). Examining R-squared values showed that on the within-level the model explained 4% of the variance of positive affect, 8% in perceived competence, 17% in job satisfaction, and 5% in psychological detachment. On the between-person level, the model explained 29% of the variance of positive affect, 14% in perceived competence, 59% in job satisfaction, and 26% in psychological detachment.

Unstandardized estimates and standard errors of hypothesized direct effects are depicted in Figure 1. As expected, leader LMX behaviours positively and significantly predicted positive affect both at the within- (b = 0.16, SE = 0.05, p = .001) and between-level (b = 0.67, SE = 0.15, p < .001), lending support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Results confirmed

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   19

a positive and significant association of leader LMX behaviours with perceived competence

on the within- (b = 0.17, SE = 0.04, p < .001) and between-level (b = 0.41, SE = 0.12, p <

.01). Thus, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported.

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

Results showed that the indirect effect of leader LMX behaviours on job satisfaction

via positive affect was significant at both levels (within: b = 0.07, 95% CI [0.02, 0.13];

between: b = 0.50, 95% CI [0.20, 0.83]). Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported. In line

with Hypotheses 4a and 4b, the indirect effect of leader LMX behaviours on psychological

detachment via positive affect was significant at the within-person level (b = 0.05, 95% CI

[0.02, 0.09]) and the between-person level (b = 0.52, 95% CI [0.15, 0.99]). Hypotheses 5a

and 5b proposed indirect effects of leader LMX behaviours on job satisfaction via perceived

competence. The results confirmed the indirect effect on the within-person level (b = 0.06,

95% CI [0.01, 0.11]) and the between-person level (b = 0.38, 95% CI [0.12, 0.73]). The

indirect effect of leader LMX behaviours on psychological detachment via perceived

competence was only significant at the between-person level (b = 0.26, 95% CI [0.05, 0.58]),

but not at the within-person level (b = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.07]). Therefore, Hypothesis 6a

could be supported, while Hypothesis 6b had to be rejected.

Discussion

Based on calls for research on leaders' well-being (Barling and Cloutier, 2017), its

link to leader-follower interactions (cf. Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014), we applied a leader-centric

perspective to investigate the benefits of leaders' engagement in LMX behaviours for

leaders' job-related well-being and recovery as well as potential underlying resource-building

mechanisms.

Our findings offer valuable implications for the literature. First, they extend previous

research on the interrelations between leadership behaviours and leader-related outcomes (cf.

Lanaj *et al.*, 2016a; Weiss *et al.*, 2018) by focusing on the advantages of engaging in LMX behaviours. Our results support the notion that showing behaviours aimed at providing individual support and creating a trustful relationship with their followers is related to higher positive affect and perceived competence at work for leaders. On days on which leaders reported engaging in more LMX behaviours, they were more likely to experience higher positive affect at work and perceived themselves to be more competent. This effect was also found at the person level, i.e., individuals who generally engaged more in LMX behaviours reported more positive affect and perceived competence during work than leaders showing less LMX behaviours. Thus, corresponding to the suggestions of the SRM (Grebner *et al.*, 2010) and evidence on the effects of prosociality (e.g., Hui *et al.*, 2020), supervisory tasks in terms of perceiving an individual's needs and knowing how to contribute to the followers' development may represent a source of prosocial success in leaders' everyday work.

Second, in line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011) we found evidence for a resource-gain spiral as leader LMX behaviours were linked to job satisfaction and leaders' psychological detachment with positive affect and perceived competence acting as linking mechanisms. On days on which leaders experienced enhanced levels of positive affect due to a higher engagement in LMX behaviours in interactions with their followers, they also reported to be more satisfied with their jobs and to be able to better detach from work in their leisure time. The same pattern of relationships could be found on the between-person level. Thus, leader LMX behaviours elicit a resource growth that spills over into the non-work domain.

However, the indirect effect of leader LMX behaviours on psychological detachment via perceived competence was only significant at the between-person level. Leaders who generally showed more LMX behaviours seemed to feel more competent at work and, thus, detach better from work. On the day level, perceiving oneself as more competent did not

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   21

contribute to leaders' detachment. This finding is surprising when considering that

competence need satisfaction has been shown to reduce work-related rumination (Weigelt *et*

al., 2019b). However, previous research indicates that the interface of psychological

detachment and pondering on work-related thoughts is in fact conceptually complex (Weigelt

et al., 2019a; Casper *et al.*, 2019). Previous research indicated that positive interpersonal

experiences may also be associated with positive work reflection, i.e., thinking about the

positive aspects of the job during the non-work time (Sonnentag and Grant, 2012).

Accordingly, there may be positive causes in leaders' daily work hindering leaders from

mentally detaching from work. The within-person link between leadership behaviours and

leader recovery processes, therefore, deserves further attention.

Third, to our knowledge, we contribute to the literature by presenting the first diary

study investigating LMX from the leaders' perspective. In agreement with a recent study

showing that LMX assessed from followers' perspective may vary daily (Ellis *et al.*, 2018),

our findings corroborate the claim that LMX relationships substantially vary over one

working week. We found a considerably higher percentage of variance being attributable to

within-person variation (70%) than reported in the follower-centric study (36%) by Ellis *et*

al. (2018). A recent study demonstrated that the average within-person variation for

leadership was about 47% (ranging from 35% to 75%; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2019). This stands in

clear contrast to the vast majority of LMX research in which followers are often asked to

report their aggregated perception, i.e., providing information about how they perceive their

leaders in general. These judgments are most likely contaminated with retrospective bias

(Ohly and Gochmann, 2017). Thus, it becomes clear that examining within-person variability

of leadership behaviours, e.g., daily or weekly fluctuations, represents a critical approach to

better understand the evolving processes. The reasons why leaders do not consistently engage

in the same extent of LMX behaviours towards their followers may be manifold. Due to other

tasks and responsibilities, leaders may not have the opportunity to interact with their

followers every day. Furthermore, evidence shows that constructive leadership behaviours

require the mobilisation of resources. If other events or experiences in their work or private

life drain relevant resources, the engagement in resourceful leadership behaviours becomes

less likely (cf. Byrne *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, our results indicate that research should

consider both the within- and between-person perspective (cf. McCormick *et al.*, 2020) on

the association between leadership behaviours and leader well-being. In line with a recent

meta-analysis on findings in diary studies (Pindek *et al.*, 2018), our effects at the between-

person level turned out to be stronger than at the within-person level. For instance, leader

LMX behaviours could explain 29% of the differences in positive affect between persons,

while on the day level LMX behaviours could only account for 4% of the variance in positive

affect. Between-person effects of LMX behaviours represent the relatively stable, habitual

tendency to show these behaviours and may be related to stable personal characteristics such

as leaders' relational identity (Chang and Johnson, 2010). In contrast, within-person effects

of leader LMX behaviours are contingent on the specific situation. Taken together, we could

show that even though there is a high amount of within-person variability in our focal

variables and favourable resource-gain spirals were observable on a daily level, it may be

particularly crucial for leaders to acknowledge the importance of enduring commitment in

high-quality exchanges with their followers in order to benefit from these efforts and not only

to occasionally engage in relationship-oriented behaviours.

Limitations and directions for future research

As with most studies, the findings of this investigation have to be seen in the light of

some limitations. First, self-reports may raise the risk of common method bias (CMB;

Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, leaders themselves were the best source for the purpose of

our research as we were especially interested in their personal perceptions and aimed at

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   23

answering calls for more leader-centric examinations (Tse *et al.*, 2018). In general, applying a

daily diary design has the advantage of collecting data close to the actual event or experience,

thus, reducing potential retrospective bias (Ohly *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, we separated the

data collection temporally by assessing the data on two measurement occasions throughout a

working day to minimize the probability of potential CMB (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). We

further investigated the within-person correlations of our focal variables (Tims *et al.*, 2014)

that did not turn out to be extremely high (r = .18 to .45), thus, indicating differentiated

answers by our study participants to the daily surveys. Furthermore, results from our MCFAs

comparing different models (i.e., hypothesized five-factor vs. one-factor model) showed that

the one-factor model could not account for the majority of variance in our data. Combining

the stated arguments, we are convinced that CMB cannot fully explain the findings of the

current study. Nevertheless, we recommend future research to undertake additional steps to

reduce the risk of CMB by the use of objective measures of leader well-being and recovery

(e.g., objective sleep parameter, saliva cortisol) or the integration of multi-source data.

Second, our measure of leader LMX behaviours may be a target of criticism as we did

not differentiate single leader-follower relationships. However, we purposely assessed

leaders' overall evaluation of their engagement in leader-member exchanges and used an

adapted version of a traditional LMX measure (i.e., LMX-7). Still, it is important to note that

the conceptualization of LMX and, particularly, its measurement has been repeatedly

criticized in the past (e.g., Gottfredson *et al.*, 2020). For example, LMX-7 items do not

explicitly address the concrete exchanges or resources being exchanged (cf. Wilson *et al.*,

2010). We endorse future research that applies a rigorous methodology to fully capture

leaders' experiences based on the simultaneous maintenance of exchange relationships with

each of their followers. Network analyses may represent a promising approach as was

previously demonstrated by studies on energizing relationships within teams (Cullen-Lester

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   24

et al., 2016). Besides quantitative approaches, the collection of additional qualitative data may help to gain further in depth insights (cf. Martinaityte and Sacramento, 2013; Zhou and Schriesheim, 2010). For example, open-ended questions in surveys or interviews could be used to gain a better picture about the concrete situation in which leaders have interacted with their followers and how exactly leaders have behaved or what they have said during these interactions as well as how followers have reacted.

Further, we focused on the resource-enhancing impact of daily interactions with followers and therefore neglected potential downsides. Previous research showed that several interactions, e.g., helping followers with personal issues, may pose the risk of negative consequences for leaders themselves (Lanaj and Jennings, 2020). In this regard, it appears promising to draw on the mentoring literature which provides insights into negative relational experiences from a mentor's perspective, e.g., protégé performance problems or destructive relational patterns (Eby, 2011). Future research may also identify boundary conditions on the person as well as day level that hinder or additionally stimulate the resource gain process elicited by engaging in leader LMX behaviours, e.g., other positive or negative work events. Furthermore, social exchanges are based on the premise of reciprocity. If their followers do not reciprocate leaders' efforts and offered resources, leaders' resources may be drained over the short- and long term.

Practical implications

From a practical point of view, it appears important to raise leaders' awareness of the various advantages of engaging in relational leadership behaviours. Not only do such behaviours contribute to employees' motivation, performance, and well-being, but they are also beneficial for leaders' experiences and well-being. Such resourceful interactions show effects that endure several hours during the day and, thus, even enrich leaders' non-work domain. Therefore, leadership development activities should aim at enabling and motivating

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING

leaders to build and maintain high LMX-relationships with their followers on a regular basis.

In LMX trainings, leaders could be taught, e.g., active listening, empathically discussing

followers' concerns and mutual expectations (cf. Graen *et al*., 1982) as well as feedback

skills and how to invigorate existing LMX relationships (Mayfield and Mayfield, 1998).

Supplemental coaching sessions would be useful to individually prepare difficult

conversation scenarios. Moreover, HR managers and consultants should integrate strategies

for stress management and self-care as crucial components into leadership development

activities as constructive leadership behaviours require the investment of leaders' resources,

(c.f. Byrne *et al.*, 2014).

Additionally, leaders of organisations should apply a holistic approach to act as enablers of

high-quality relationships amongst their members. Respective strategies may focus on, e.g., a

job design that explicitly considers the relational nature of jobs with supervisory

responsibilities (Grant, 2007). A central characteristic of enriched relational job design

encompasses the possibility of frequent, deep, and extended contact with beneficiaries

(Grant, 2007). Especially in times of accelerating digital collaboration, e.g., due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, it remains a challenge to find and apply appropriate tools and

strategies to ensure continuous, resourceful leader-follower exchanges. Thus, leaders should

be mindful of current structural and logistical changes in work settings and possibly

restructure their ways of communication with their followers in order to avoid the crucial of

resource of high quality relationships to be dramatically reduced.

LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING

26

Footnotes

[1]Detailed results are available from the first author upon request.

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LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING   38

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LMX BEHAVIOURS AND LEADER WELL-BEING　　　　　　　　　　39

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables

| Variable	M	SD	1-ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Person-level measures[a]											
1. Gender[b]	0.24	0.43		—							
2. Age	45.14	8.95		−.22*	—						
Day-level measures[c]											
3. Work hours per day	8.95	1.53		−.18	.21	—	.02	−.07	−.13*	−.09	−.18**
4. Leader LMX behaviour	3.43	0.71	.70	−.11	−.02	−.00	—	.31**	.30**	.26**	−.01
5. Positive affect	3.05	0.70	.57	−.12	.03	.05	.44**	—	.18**	.45**	.27**
6. Perceived competence	4.38	0.57	.46	−.05	.03	−.18	.33**	.21	—	.43**	.20**
7. Job satisfaction	5.23	1.03	.58	−.11	.09	−.08	.29**	.50**	.54**	—	.22**
8. Psychological detachment	3.35	1.06	.47	.05	−.09	−.21	−.04	.29**	.25*	.25*	—

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are person-level correlations. Correlations above the diagonal are day-level correlations. ICC = intra-class-correlation. 1-ICC = proportion of the total variance attributable to within-person variance. LMX = leader-member exchange.

[a] $N_{persons}$ = 85. [b] Gender is coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. [c] N_{days} = 376.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

Figure 1

Multilevel path coefficients of direct effects

Between – person level

Within– person level
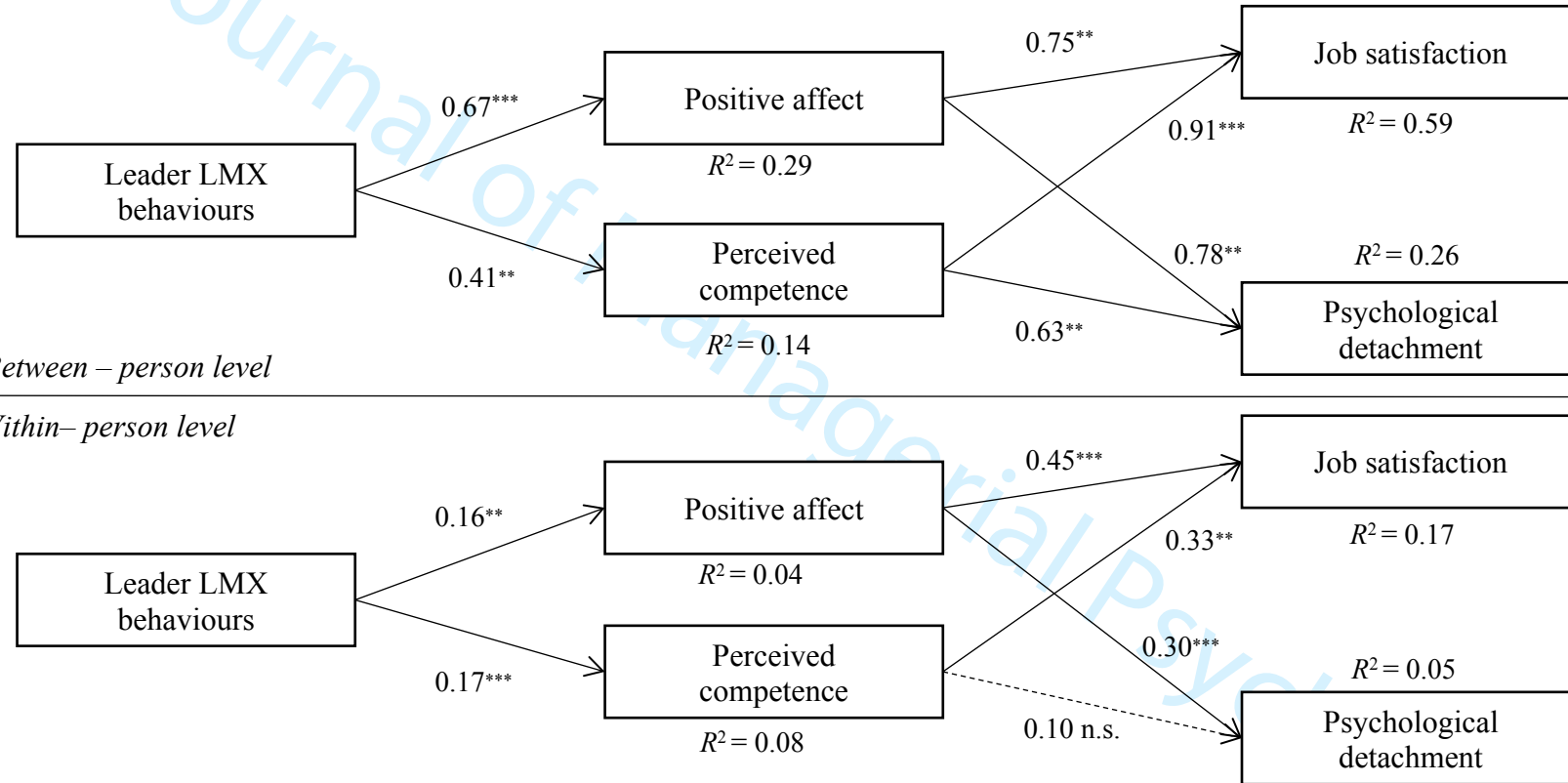
Note. Estimates are unstandardized coefficients. Dotted lines represent nonsignificant relations. LMX = leader member exchange.

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**} p <.01.$ $^{***} p <.001.$

LMX BEHAVIOUR AND LEADER WELL-BEING

How leaders benefit from engaging in high-quality leader-member exchanges:

A daily diary study

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