Promoting Health-promoting Leadership:
Leader Behavior and Followers’ Health and Well-being

Eric M. Hansen, Carina Loeb and Kerstin Isaksson
Mälardalen University
REwarding and SUstainable health-promoting LEADership

RE-SU-LEAD

Ulla Kinnunen
Kaisa Perko

Gisela Mohr
Kathleen Otto
Thomas Rigotti
Torsten Holstad
Christiane Stempel

Kerstin Isaksson
Carina Loeb
Eric Hansen
Funding organizations

- The Finnish Work Environment Fund
- Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA)
- Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research
Introduction

- Much research has focused on
  - leader characteristics and behavior
  - effectiveness on outcome variables such as
    - performance
    - productivity
    - job satisfaction

(Furnham, 2005; Yukl, 2006)
Introduction

We chose to focus on

- the causal link between leadership and employee well-being, viewing leadership as a two-way interactive process.

- Leader behavior and followers’ perceptions and reactions to it.
Overview of Present Research

➢ The research project – Re-Su-Lead

❖ Purpose – Explore the role of leadership in relation to workers’ psychological well-being with consideration to cross-cultural differences in leadership

❖ Design

☐ Cross-cultural longitudinal and intervention study
☐ Conducted in a field setting
Overview of Present Research

- Finland – Public sector non-intervention control
- Germany – Public and private sector intervention and control
- Sweden - Public sector intervention and control
The Swedish Sample

Total: 30 leaders and 440 followers

from two municipalities

with a variety of work tasks

(e.g. preschool/primary school, care for the elderly, social services, food preparation, city planning, building permit inspectors)
The Swedish Sample

- Intervention group: 17 leaders and 241 followers
- Control group: 13 leaders and 199 followers
Material

- All instruments were validated in previous studies, some were shortened, and all were pilot tested

- Four domains
  - Work characteristics – (e.g. cognitive/emotional demands; autonomy)
  - Leadership (e.g. authentic, fair, transformational)
  - Health and well-being (e.g. irritation, depression)
  - Personal resources (e.g. occupational experience, background factors)
Material

- Measures of leadership

  - Leadership Climate (Nyberg et al., 2009) (e.g. My boss gives me the information I need; I am praised by my boss if I have done something well)

  - Health and Development-promoting Leadership (Vincent, 2010) (e.g. My immediate supervisor allows me to decide for myself how I organize my tasks; My immediate supervisor searches for solutions to conflicts with those involved).
Material

- Measures of health and well-being

  - General Health (Pejtersen et al., 2010)
    (In general, how would you say your health is?)

  - Sick leave (Guest et al., 2010)
    (e.g. How many days have you been absent from work due to your state of health?)

  - Job Exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1996)
    (e.g. I feel emotionally drained from my work)
Material

- Measures of health and well-being
  - Team Climate (Kivimäki, M., & Elovainio, M. (1999) (e.g. How far are you in agreement with the objectives of your work unit?)
Material

- Measures of well-being
  - Turnover intentions (Mauno, et al., 2005) (e.g. It is likely that I seek other jobs in the near future)
  - Organizational Commitment (Cook & Wall, 1980) (e.g. I feel myself to be part of the organization)
Intervention overview

**Germany**
- Leader Workshop I
- Lecture I
- Team Workshop I
- Leader Workshop II
- Lecture II
- Team Workshop II
- Leader Workshop III
- Observation
- Diary writing I
- Diary writing II

**Sweden**
- Leader Workshop I
- Lecture I
- Team Workshop I
- Leader Workshop II
- Lecture II
- Leader Workshop III
- Observation
- Diary Writing I
- Diary Writing II

2011:
- T1

2012:
- T2
Intervention

- Leader workshop (meeting) one (March 2011)
  - Presentation of the agenda, the project, and its goals
  - Completion of the pretest questionnaire
  - Reflections and discussions about their perceptions of their own leadership
  - Presentation of leadership theories, gender and communication, etc.)
Intervention

- Lecture one for leaders and their followers (April, 2011)
  - Leadership and health
    - Presented research on leadership and health
    - Provided an overview of the study and planned activities
Intervention

- Team workshop one (April-June 2011)
  - Presentation of the pretest results for the work group in comparison with the larger sample
  - Working in groups the employees generated specific goals related to health and well-being at work based on the feedback from the pretest
  - In groups they generated action plans for achieving their goals
  - The workshop was evaluated
What to do (necessary tasks)?

- Give positive feedback
- Give constructive criticism

How do we achieve goal? What can I do?

- Listen
- Show appreciation
- Separate the person from the problem

When to do it? Who is responsible?

- Everyone
- Start today
- Follow up in May

Improve feedback

Separate the person from the problem
Intervention

- Leader workshop two (September, 2011)
  - Leaders discussed their experiences and reflected on their progress (to increase self-efficacy)
  - The planning of future activities was discussed
  - The workshop was evaluated
Intervention

- Lecture 2 for leaders and their followers (October, 2011)

- Cooperation at work
  - Presented research on attribution and social motivation
  - Presented Yukl’s (2006) suggestions about how workers can contribute to effective leadership
Intervention

Observation of a team meeting to see interaction in the team (October, 2011 - March, 2012)

- Completed a structured work sheet concerning communication, team climate, division of tasks, goals, etc.

- A written summary of the researchers’ observations was given to the leader

- Followers were given a structured sheet to reflect on as preparation for team Workshop two
Intervention

- Individual coaching for leaders (January – April, 2012)

  - An opportunity to give support to the leaders and to stimulate them to reflect on their leadership

  - An opportunity to here the leaders reflections about the intervention concerning their progress and possible changes

  - Each coach who wanted had three sessions in which they identified goals, formed strategies to achieve them and evaluated the progress
Intervention

- Diary writing one (October, 2011 - January, 2012)
- Diary writing two (February – April, 2012)

- Each leader was given the opportunity to keep a private journal for three consecutive days.

- They were to reflect on their leadership for the day, think about positive examples of their leadership, how they felt, etc., and were given examples of things they might choose to write about (e.g. a time they inspired their team).

- They completed post-writing questionnaires to evaluate the process.
Leader workshops three (November – December, 2011)

- Leaders learned about a work content analysis method (ARIA); a method for objective evaluation of work obstacles and opportunities
- Leaders interviewed each other using the method
- Leaders reflected on their experience and discussed the possibility of using the method with their employees.
- The workshop was evaluated
Team workshop two:

- The group reflected on what had happened with the goals from team workshop one, what worked, what didn’t and why.

- Working in groups, the employees discussed their reflections on team climate, communication, etc. (using the observation tool as a guide)

- They identified goals to improve and then generated action plans for achieving their goals

- The workshop was evaluated
Results

Follower data from the pretest show that health-promoting leadership behavior correlates

- positively with
  - Leadership Climate \( (r = .53) \)
  - General Health \( (r = .28) \)
  - Team Climate \( (r = .37) \)
  - Organizational Commitment \( (r = .36) \)

- negatively with
  - Turnover Intention \( (r = -.29) \)
  - Exhaustion \( (r = -.30) \)
  - Number of Sick Days \( (r = -.16) \)
Discussion

• The results from the pretest show some promise

• Some issues we will examine when the posttest and follow-up data are collected and analyzed.
  ❖ Identifying health-promoting leadership behavior
  ❖ Examine effects of leader gender and culture
  ❖ Evaluation of the intervention to determine which aspects may be most useful

• Based on these analyses, we hope to make concrete suggestions for how leaders can promote and sustain the health and well-being of their employees.
References


