

# Respectful Leadership: How Satisfying Subordinates' Needs for Self-Determination Will Lead to Identification, Respect and Satisfaction

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## Background

Empirical research in the field of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has shown that increasing people's Self-Determination will lead to positive outcomes, such as well-being and performance enhancements (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the present work, we adapted the SDT approach to the workplace, in particular by using the notion of basic psychological needs as a means to explain facets of leader-subordinate relationships. Following the reasoning of SDT, we assumed that the satisfaction of employees' intrinsic psychological needs (for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) by their leaders will not only predict subordinates' general level of job satisfaction but also, more specifically, the identification with and respect for their leaders. We tested this hypothesis among two samples of employees.

## Study 1

### Sample

To recruit the sample we used a multi-site-multi-entry strategy. We included only adults who indicated that they currently work for a leader. 602 participants completed the survey and met the above requirements. The sample's mean for age lay around 36 years ( $SD = 9.40$  years). Women made up half of the sample. The total employment time in life spread around 14 years ( $SD = 9.68$ ).

### Methods

A German adaptation of the *Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships Scale* (Deci & Ryan, 2005) was used to assess the extent to which employees experience satisfaction of their three intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness on their job. Subscale scores can be used separately to test specific hypotheses or averaged to yield an overall intrinsic need satisfaction score.

To assess work satisfaction we used a German adaptation of the *general work satisfaction* subscale of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Schmidt, Kleinbeck, Ottmann, & Seidel, 1985).

The *Respect for Leader Scale* (Graf & van Quaquebeke, 2006) focuses on leader influence which is voluntarily accepted and sought by their subordinates.

And the *Identification with Leader* construct was measured by the Mael and Ashforth questionnaire (1992) with the current leader as the target focus of the relational identity.

### Results

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations among the variables of study 1 ( $N = 602$ ) are presented in Table 1. One can see from the table that the three outcome variables were related to need satisfaction. As predicted, work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader correlated significantly with overall intrinsic need satisfaction and with satisfaction of each of the separate needs. This indicates that a follower's work satisfaction, his/her respect for the leader and his/her identification with the leader depends highly on the degree of his/her intrinsic need satisfaction in the relationship with his leader.

Table 1: Descriptives, Correlations, & Reliabilities in Study 1

	M	SD	1	1a	1b	1c	2	3	4
1. Intrinsic need satisfaction	3.40	0.92	(.90)						
1a. Autonomy	3.54	1.14	.91***	(.82)					
1b. Competence	3.79	0.92	.80***	.62***	(.82)				
1c. Relatedness	2.88	1.12	.88***	.72***	.52***	(.85)			
2. Work satisfaction	3.61	1.02	.53***	.52***	.40***	.44***	(.77)		
3. Respect for leader	3.04	1.10	.67***	.68***	.34***	.68***	.44***	(.91)	
4. Identification with leader	2.14	0.79	.35***	.28***	.19***	.42***	.27***	.44***	(.77)

Note.  $N = 602$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is in brackets; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The results of simultaneous regression analyses of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader onto the three separate need satisfactions appear in Table 2. When work satisfaction was simultaneously regressed onto the three separate need satisfactions, satisfaction of each of the three needs accounted for significant independent variance with satisfaction of the autonomy need being the strongest predictor. 29% of the total variance in work satisfaction is explained by satisfaction of the three needs. When respect for leader was simultaneously regressed onto the three separate need satisfactions, satisfaction of each of the three needs

accounted for significant independent variance with satisfaction of the autonomy need and satisfaction of the relatedness need being the strongest predictors. 56% of the total variance in respect for leader is explained by need satisfaction. Finally, a simultaneous regression of identification with leader onto the three separate need satisfactions shows that only the satisfaction of the relatedness need was significant. 18% of the total variance in identification with leader is explained by need satisfaction.

Table 2: Simultaneous regression models of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader onto the three separate need satisfactions in study 1

	Work satisfaction			Respect for leader			Identification with leader		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Autonomy	.38	.06	.37***	.53	.05	.48***	-.02	.05	-.03
Competence	.11	.05	.10*	-.21	.04	-.19***	-.03	.04	-.04
Relatedness	.13	.05	.12*	.48	.04	.44***	.36	.04	.46***

Note.  $N = 602$ ;  $R^2 = .29$  for work satisfaction;  $R^2 = .56$  for respect for leader;  $R^2 = .18$  for identification with leader; \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

All relations that were hypothesized as part of the path model did emerge as significant, indicating that it would be appropriate to test whether self-determination theory's need-satisfaction model of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader would fit the data. We examined the path model, and the results are shown in Figure 1. All of the hypothesized paths in the model were significant (all  $p < .01$ ). The overall fit

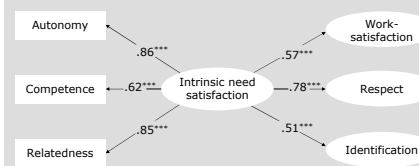


Figure 1: Parameter estimates for path analysis of the intrinsic need satisfaction model of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader.

of the model to the data was good, as indicated by these goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2(132) = 695.6$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is not surprising when  $N > 500$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = .90; nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = .89; and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08.

## Study 2

### Sample

For the purpose of replication we used the same recruitment procedure as in study 1. Again, we included only adults who indicated that they currently work for a leader. 613 participants completed the survey and met the above requirements. The sample's mean for age lay around 35 years ( $SD = 9.26$  years). Women made up 44 %, men 56 % of the sample. The total employment time in life spread around 14 years ( $SD = 9.67$ ).

### Methods

The same measures as in study 1 were used in study 2.

### Results

With study 2 the results of study 1 could be replicated in a very similar way.

Table 3: Descriptives, Correlations, & Reliabilities in Study 2

	M	SD	1	1a	1b	1c	2	3	4
1. Intrinsic need satisfaction	3.35	1.01	(.92)						
1a. Autonomy	3.47	1.19	.93***	(.83)					
1b. Competence	3.66	1.03	.85***	.69***	(.85)				
1c. Relatedness	2.92	1.15	.90***	.77***	.63***	(.83)			
2. Work satisfaction	3.50	1.08	.55***	.52***	.45***	.49***	(.79)		
3. Respect for leader	3.05	1.13	.71***	.70***	.45***	.73***	.49***	(.91)	
4. Identification with leader	2.20	0.83	.42***	.35***	.31***	.46***	.32***	.51***	(.79)

Note.  $N = 613$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is in brackets; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations among the variables of the replication study ( $N = 613$ ) are presented in Table 3. One can see from the table that, again, the three outcome variables were related to need satisfaction. As predicted, work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader correlated significantly with overall intrinsic need satisfaction and with satisfaction of each of the separate needs.

As indicated in Table 4, a simultaneous regression of work satisfaction onto the three separate need satisfactions shows that each of the three needs accounted for significant variance with satisfaction of the autonomy need being the strongest predictor. When respect for leader was simultaneously regressed onto the three separate need satisfactions, satisfaction of each of the three needs accounted for significant independent variance with satisfaction of the autonomy and the relatedness need being the strongest predictors. Finally, a simultaneous regression of identification with leader onto the three separate need satisfactions shows that only the satisfaction of the relatedness need was significant.

Table 4: Simultaneous regression models of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader onto the three separate need satisfactions study 2

	Work satisfaction			Respect for leader			Identification with leader		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Autonomy	.29	.06	.27***	.49	.05	.43***	-.04	.05	-.04
Competence	.16	.05	.15**	-.17	.04	-.15***	.04	.04	.05
Relatedness	.21	.06	.19***	.55	.05	.49***	.38	.05	.46***

Note.  $N = 613$ ;  $R^2 = .30$  for work satisfaction;  $R^2 = .59$  for respect for leader;  $R^2 = .22$  for identification with leader; \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

We examined the path model again, and the results are shown in Figure 2. All of the hypothesized paths in the model were significant (all  $p < .001$ ). The overall fit of the

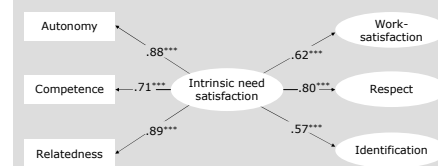


Figure 2: Parameter estimates for path analysis of the intrinsic need satisfaction model of work satisfaction, respect for leader and identification with leader.

of the model to the data was good, as indicated by these goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2(132) = 654.5$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is not surprising when  $N > 500$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = .92; nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = .91; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08.

## Discussion

Both studies showed consistently that satisfaction of subordinates' basic psychological needs by their leaders evokes positive reactions in subordinates towards their job and their leaders. The satisfaction of subordinates' need for autonomy was the strongest predictor for their general level of job satisfaction. Subordinates' respect for their leaders was predicted strongest by the fulfillment of their needs for autonomy and relatedness and subordinates' identification with their leaders was only predicted by the satisfaction of the relatedness need.

For managerial practice these results have an important implication, because respecting and identifying with leaders coincides with being receptive to leader influence. For an efficient leadership process it is indispensable that a leader who tries to exert influence has subordinates who are more or less open towards it. By satisfying subordinates' intrinsic needs a leader can induce such an openness. Particularly with regard to efficient corporate management in times of change, managerial practice should therefore consider all three needs.

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