

Motivating Leadership

What can Self-Determination Theory research teach us about leadership?

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An Introduction



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“Leaders’ interpersonal behaviours, the way leaders communicate and interact with their followers, are perhaps the most important antecedent of motivation, performance, and wellness at work.”

- Slemp et al., 2018

This Presentation

Motivating Leadership: What can Self-Determination Theory research teach us about leadership?



Objective

Explore leadership through the lens of motivation theory.

Learning outcomes

1. Describe the process through which interpersonal interactions between leaders and followers impact work motivation, workplace well-being and performance in organisations.
2. Translate SDT into concrete leadership behaviours that support followers' basic psychological needs and trigger motivation, wellness, and optimal functioning.
3. Distinguish and assess motivating leadership behaviours and demotivating leadership behaviours in organisations.

“Supportive behaviours that unfold within interpersonal relationships (whether from a parent, teacher, boss, colleague, clinician, coach, friend, or intimate partner) are core determinants of a recipient’s motivation, well-being, and performance”

- Slemp, Field, Ryan, Forner, Van den Broek & Lewis, 2024.

Self-Determination Theory Foundation 1.

*Basic psychological
needs are essential
nutrients for human
functioning.*

Basic Psychological Needs are the key ingredients for optimally motivating and mentally healthy environments, including at work.



AUTONOMY

Basic psychological needs are essential nutrients for human functioning.

Ingredient for optimally motivating and mentally healthy environments.



BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED

Volition, making decisions, expressing ideas, feeling like you can be true to yourself.



COMPETENCE

Basic psychological needs are essential nutrients for human functioning.

Ingredient for optimally motivating and mentally healthy environments.



BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED

Feeling skilled, capable, effective and that you can develop and grow.



RELATEDNESS

Basic psychological needs are essential nutrients for human functioning.

Ingredient for optimally motivating and mentally healthy environments.



BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED

Belonging, feeling accepted, understood and cared for by others

Self-Determination Theory Foundation 2.

*Satisfaction of Basic
Psychological Needs
facilitates self determined
motivation (and more)..*

People experience motivation, growth, development and well-being to the extent they their basic psychological needs are satisfied.

The Motivation Continuum

Satisfaction of basic psychological needs enables the process of internalization
(see Organismic Integration Theory).

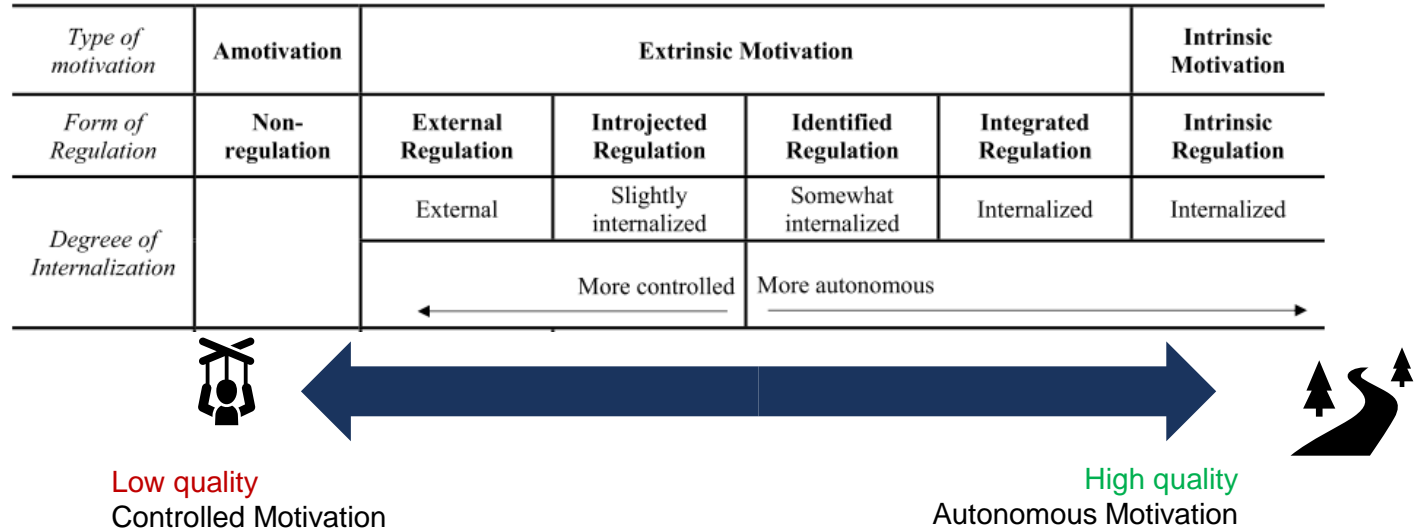


Figure 1.
Motivation Continuum
adapted from Slemp et
al. (2018)

Internalized work motivation has positive outcomes for both employee and organisation.

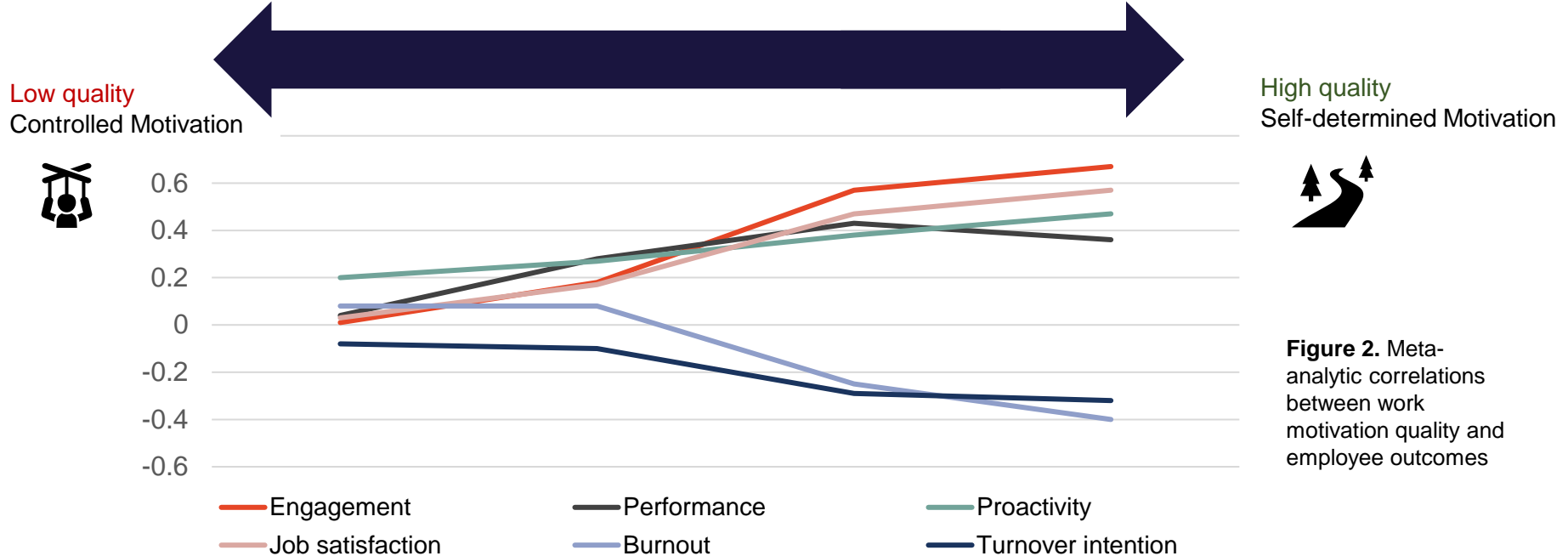


Figure 2. Meta-analytic correlations between work motivation quality and employee outcomes

Van den Broeck, A., Howard, J. L., Van Vaerenbergh, Y., Leroy, H., & Gagné, M. (2021). Beyond intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: A meta-analysis on self-determination theory's multidimensional conceptualization of work motivation. *Organizational psychology review*, 11(3), 240-273.

Extensive evidence supports the benefits of Basic Psychological Need satisfaction work

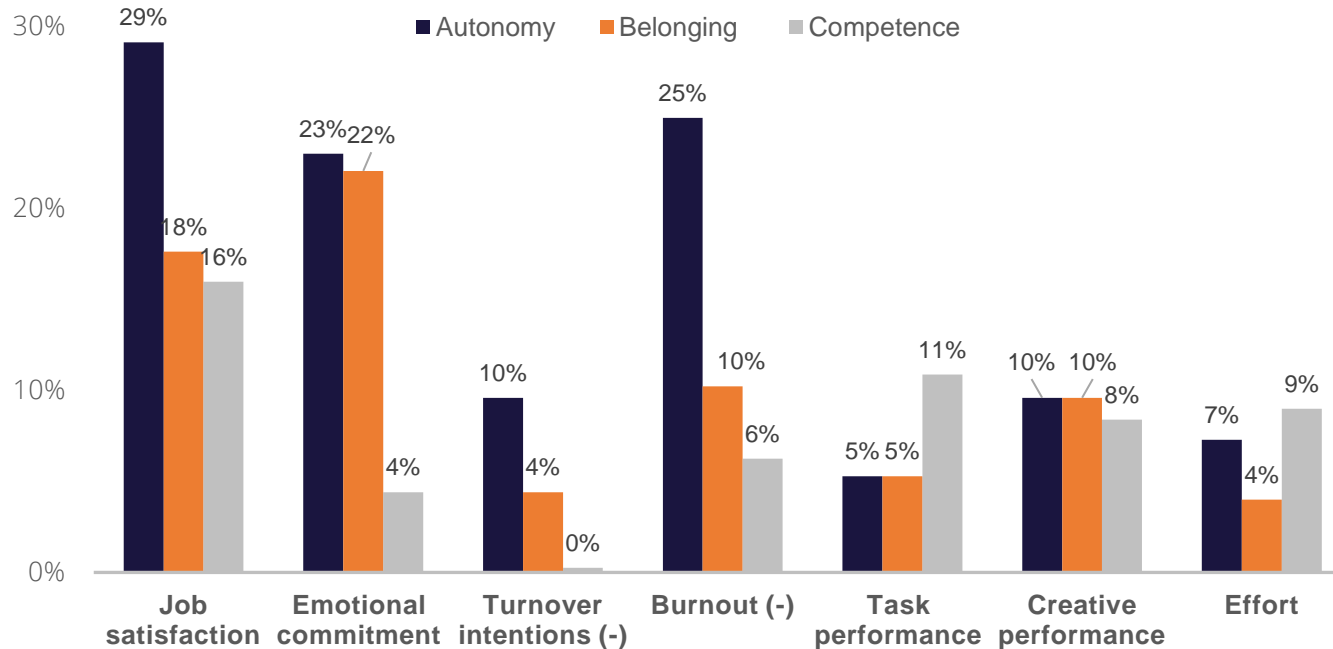


Figure 3. Percentage variance explained (r^2) by each basic need across 99 research studies in the workplace.

Van den Broeck, A., Ferris, D. L., Chang, C.-H., & Rosen, C. C. (2016). A Review of Self-Determination Theory's Basic Psychological Needs at Work. *Journal of Management*, 42(5), 1195-1229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316632058>

Key take away

For Organisational Psychology practice

SDT has substantial utility for organisations!



AUTONOMY

The three basic psychological needs are universal ingredients for optimally motivating and supportive environments.



COMPETENCE

They provide three trigger points that can be used to improve work engagement, motivation, performance and wellbeing



RELATEDNESS

How do we support basic psychological needs at work?

Leadership. Leaders' interpersonal approach and communication style.

Self-Determination Theory Foundation 3.

*Basic Psychological Needs
are supported through
one's social context, during
interactions with
significant others in that
context.*

At work, interpersonal interactions between leaders and their team members are the primary source of basic psychological needs support for workers.

What can Self Determination Theory research teach us about leadership ?



An empirical model of the process through which interpersonal interactions between leaders and followers impact work motivation, workplace well-being and performance in organisations.

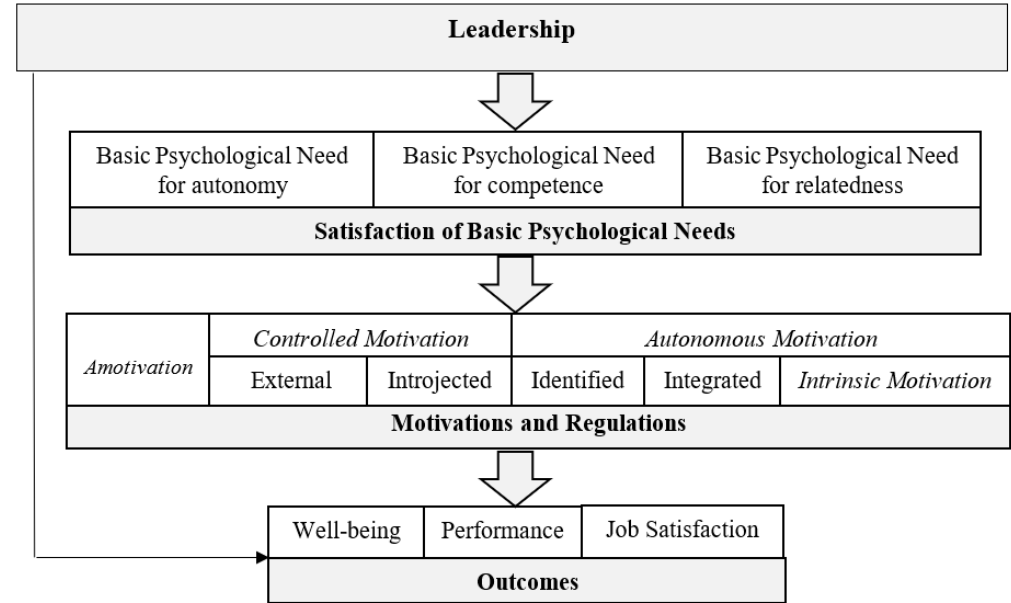


Figure 4. Self Determination Theory process model of how leadership impacts employee outcomes.

What can SDT research tell us
about what this leadership style
looks like?

Controlling vs Autonomy Supportive Leadership



Controlling Leadership

- Prescriptive, authoritarian and rigid
- Takes charge of decision making and expects others to comply with their demands.
- To coerce or induce desired behaviours, leaders invoke feelings of guilt and utilize sanctions, such as pressure, social comparisons, and offers of rewards or threats of punishment, to coerce or induce a desired behaviour.
- Performance is monitored.
- Controlling language “must” “have to”



Leader Autonomy Support

- A leadership style that nurtures the inner motivational resources of employees.
- Listens to and acknowledges the feelings and perspectives of employees.
 - Provides opportunities for choice and input.
 - Provides rationales for requests.
 - Avoids the use of external rewards or sanctions to motivate behavior.

Autonomy Support from leaders in organisations predicts employee wellness and work outcomes

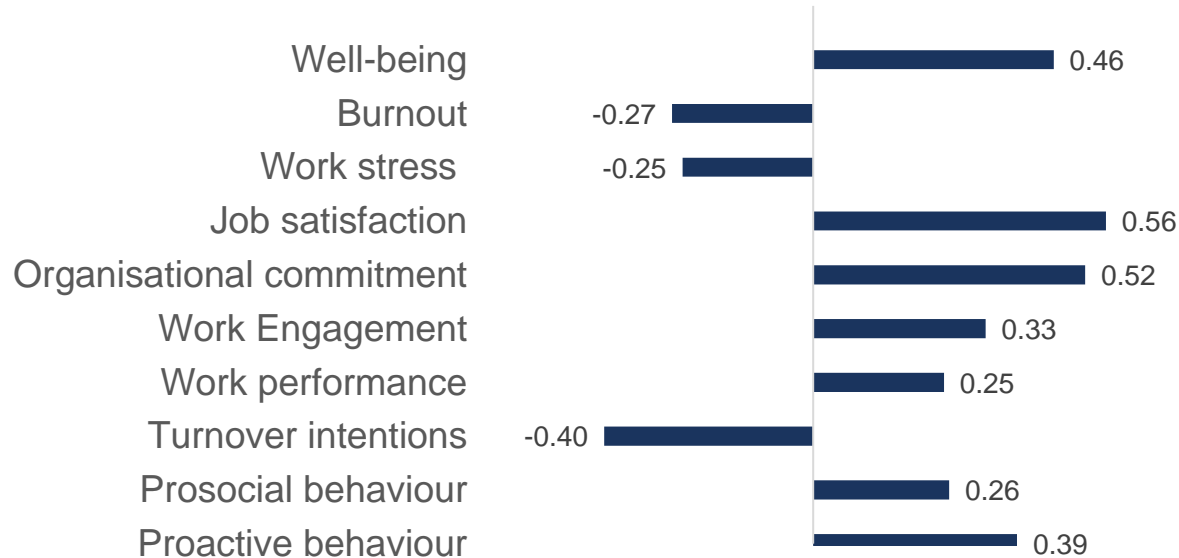


Figure 5. Meta-analytic correlations between Leader Autonomy Support and employee wellness and work outcomes across 72 studies (32,870 participants)

What can Self
Determination Theory
research teach us about
leadership ?



An **empirically derived leadership style** that motivates employees, improves their wellbeing reduces burnout, improves psychological health engagement, and performance.

This leadership style **can be developed**.

Extending our understanding



So far we have looked at a very narrow set of behaviours,

- Listening to and acknowledging the feelings and perspectives of employees.
- Providing opportunities for choice and input.
- Provide rationales for requests
- Avoid the use of external rewards or sanctions to motivate behavior.



Towards a practically useful evidence-based framework of leadership behaviours that trigger motivation and beneficial outcomes for workers and the organisation

Extending our understanding...

How do leaders support basic psychological needs of employees in practice?

Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
<i>Volition, making decisions, expressing ideas, feeling like you can be true to yourself.</i>	<i>Feeling skilled, capable, effective and that you can develop and grow.</i>	<i>Belonging, feeling accepted, understood and cared for by others</i>
Encourage innovation	Provide development/learning opportunities	Implement team bonding activities
Consult with those who are affected by your decisions	Support and help build self-esteem and confidence	Induct new members into the team
Be less prescriptive in assigning tasks	Offer regular positive and constructive feedback	Learn about workers outside of the work context
Provide workers opportunities to express their ideas	Let team members learn at their own individual pace	Know your team members' names, interests and skills
Provide a rationale for decisions where possible	Introduce mentoring opportunities	Respect others' background and experience.

Forner, V. W., Jones, M., Berry, Y., & Eidenfalk, J. (2020). Motivating workers: how leaders apply self-determination theory in organizations. *Organization Management Journal*, 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.1108/OMJ-03-2020-0891>



Interpersonal Supports for Basic Psychological Needs

“An umbrella term used to describe interpersonal behaviors that nurture the autonomy, competence, and relatedness basic needs, thereby triggering self-determined (autonomous) motivation, well-being, and optimal functioning in others”
- Slemp et al 2024

More than just autonomy support

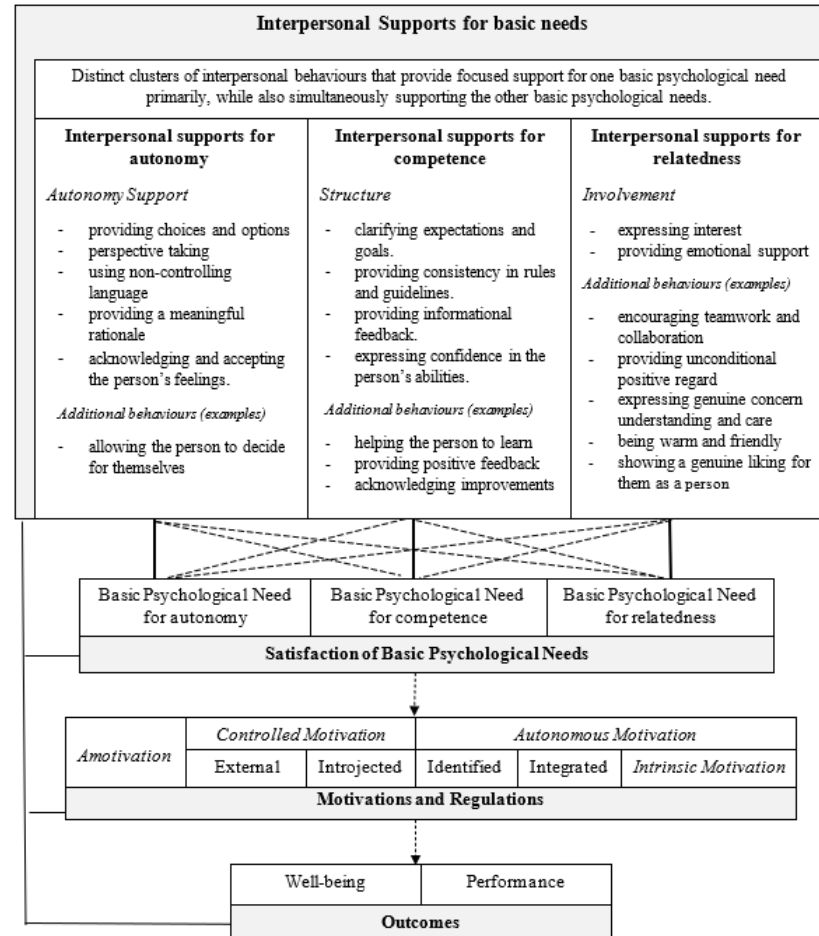


Meta-analysis of interpersonal supports for basic psychological needs across Domains.

We identified all the research across domains that has looked at autonomy support, competence support and relatedness support (2,588 screened) across more than 35 years of research.

Combined and meta-analyzed the data (443,556 people).

Slemp, G. R., Field, J. G., Ryan, R. M., Forner, V. W., Van den Broeck, A., & Lewis, K. J. (2024). Interpersonal supports for basic psychological needs and their relations with motivation, well-being, and performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000459>



Key Finding from meta-analysis

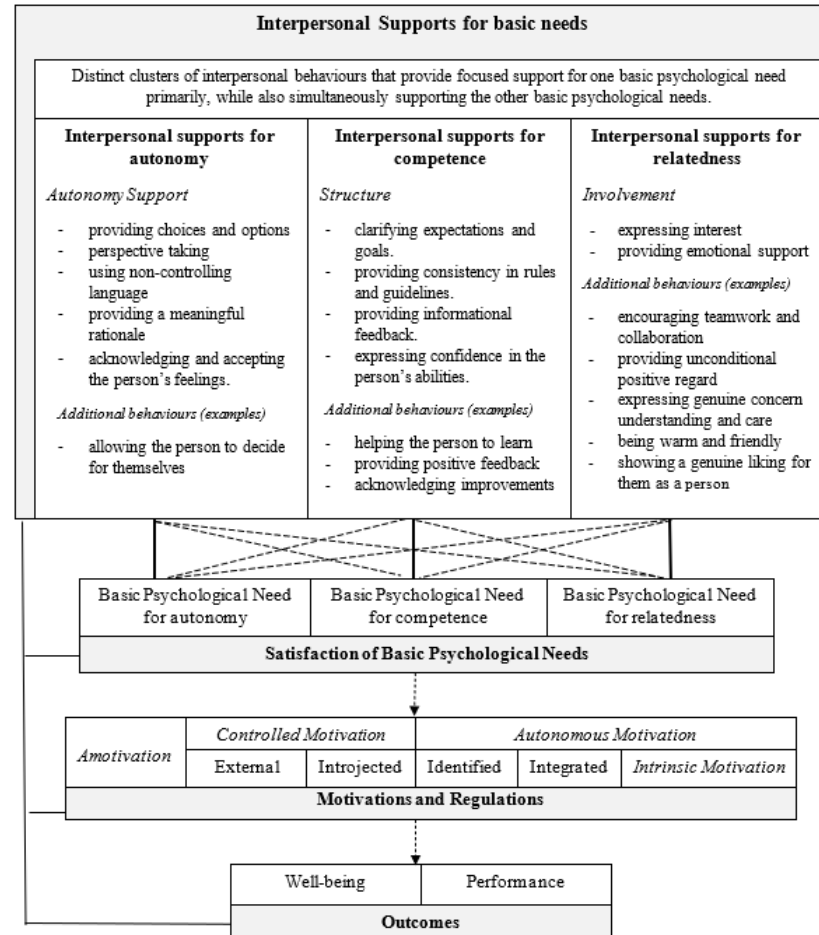


Incremental Value of Competence and Relatedness Support

Competence and relatedness supports added unique contributions to need satisfaction and motivational outcomes, even after controlling for autonomy support.

This demonstrates that these interpersonal supports are important beyond just autonomy support in improving well-being and performance.

Slemp, G. R., Field, J. G., Ryan, R. M., Forner, V. W., Van den Broeck, A., & Lewis, K. J. (2024). Interpersonal supports for basic psychological needs and their relations with motivation, well-being, and performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000459>



What leadership behaviours support and thwart workers' basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness?

And how can we measure them in a more concrete way?

The Present research

A measure of leadership behaviours that support and thwart basic psychological needs.

Aim



To delineate concrete managerial behaviours that satisfy and thwart basic psychological needs and develop a tool to assess/measure these behaviours.

Method



Two waves of data

Round 1.

We developed behavioural items of possible need supportive and need thwarting leadership behaviours.

Collected data (N = 5,016), did some psychometric assessment to identify items that did not perform as expected.

Round 2.

Replaced items that were not performing.

Collected data (N = 5,789)



Item Development

We developed behavioural items of possible need supportive and need thwarting leadership behaviours.

These were derived from theory and practice (Forner et al., 2020).

Results (for the psychometric people)

First wave (n = 5,016) - six factor loading (ESEM)

		SUPAUT	THWAUT	SUPCOM	THWACOM	SUPREL	THWREL
SUPAUT2	They give me choices about how I carry out my role	0.867	-0.071	-0.043	0.115	-0.001	0.020
SUPAUT3	They consult with me about decisions that will affect me	0.921	0.029	0.025	-0.020	-0.026	-0.041
SUPAUT4	They listen to my suggestions and enable me to implement my ideas	0.901	0.004	-0.036	-0.029	0.082	-0.015
SUPAUT5	If they ask me to do something, or not do something, they take the time to explain why it is important	0.628	-0.024	0.224	0.083	0.025	-0.013
THWAUT3	They use an authoritarian tone of voice when speaking to me	-0.176	0.517	0.063	-0.077	-0.040	0.050
THWAUT5	They try to motivate me by making me feel guilty for not doing enough	0.017	0.873	-0.002	-0.048	0.009	0.019
THWAUT6	They pressure me to do tasks and activities I don't really want to do	0.026	0.937	-0.056	-0.048	0.007	-0.008
THWAUT7	They prevent me from doing activities that I enjoy at this organisation	-0.006	0.620	-0.102	-0.052	-0.034	0.111
SUPCOM2	They let me learn at my own pace	0.076	-0.202	0.531	-0.026	0.091	0.110
SUPCOM4	They involve me in activities where I can use my skills and strengths	0.192	-0.054	0.554	-0.004	0.048	-0.017
SUPCOM5	They acknowledge when I have done a good job	0.051	-0.042	0.629	0.010	0.114	-0.072
SUPCOM6	They provide guidance in the form of practical advice, strategies, and assistance when I need	0.033	0.010	0.787	-0.017	0.048	-0.043
THWCOM1	They focus on doing their own tasks rather than giving me help	0.037	-0.030	-0.113	0.296	-0.166	0.104
THWCOM3	They set unattainable standards or expectations that I struggle to meet	-0.005	-0.054	0.012	0.973	0.028	-0.071
THWCOM4	The goals they set for me are not realistic for my current skill level	-0.014	-0.061	-0.012	0.819	0.102	0.022
THWCOM5	They are overly critical of me and draw attention to my failings	0.027	0.211	0.016	0.571	-0.105	0.083
SUPREL1	They are open to hearing my opinions and my point of view even when different from theirs	0.123	-0.002	-0.075	0.015	0.787	-0.019
SUPREL2	They show they understand that sometimes club activities are difficult or tedious	-0.057	-0.010	-0.108	-0.027	0.995	0.125
SUPREL3	They are available to help me when I need them	-0.022	-0.027	0.271	-0.037	0.529	-0.089
SUPREL4	They take the time to get to know me	0.080	0.045	0.263	0.009	0.316	-0.321
THWREL2	They only talk to me because it's part of their role - they don't really care about me as a person	-0.037	-0.008	-0.016	0.064	-0.098	0.707
THWREL3	They do not like me as much as other members of the team	-0.004	0.016	0.025	-0.018	0.008	0.930
THWREL4	They exclude me from group activities	-0.027	0.084	0.016	0.094	-0.060	0.712
THWREL5	They don't try to understand what life is like for me	-0.058	0.104	-0.012	0.028	0.005	0.716

Results (for the psychometric people)

Second wave (n = 5789) Two-factor solution loadings

		<u>SUPPORT</u>	<u>THWART</u>
SUPAUT3	They consult with me about decisions that will affect me	0.889	0.034
SUPAUT4	They listen to my suggestions and enable me to implement my ideas	0.884	0.012
SUPAUT5	If they ask me to do something, or not do something, they take the time to explain why it is important	0.827	0.021
THWAUT3	They use an authoritarian tone of voice when speaking to me	-0.021	0.723
THWAUT6	They pressure me to do tasks and activities I don't really want to do	0.001	0.761
THWAUT7	They prevent me from doing activities that I enjoy at this organisation	-0.092	0.742
THWAUT8	They threaten not to help me anymore if I don't do things their way	0.104	0.933
SUPCOM4	They involve me in activities where I can use my skills and strengths	0.830	-0.030
SUPCOM5	They acknowledge when I have done a good job	0.774	-0.097
SUPCOM6	They provide guidance in the form of practical advice, strategies, and assistance when I need	0.880	0.004
THWCOM3	They set unattainable standards or expectations that I struggle to meet	0.030	0.750
THWCOM5	They are overly critical of me and draw attention to my failings	0.143	0.969
SUPREL3	They are available to help me when I need them	0.751	-0.114
SUPREL4	They take the time to get to know me	0.854	0.007
SUPREL5	They listen to me and care about how I am feeling	0.860	-0.038
THWREL6	They deliberately ignore me	-0.110	0.766
THWREL7	They do not comfort me when I am feeling low	-0.345	0.316
THWREL8	They make it clear that they don't like me.	-0.006	0.846

Results interpreted into leadership behaviours

Motivating (need-supportive) leadership

They give me choices about how I carry out my role

They consult with me about decisions that will affect me

They listen to my suggestions and enable me to implement my ideas

If they ask me to do something, or not do something, they take the time to explain why it is important

They let me learn at my own pace

They provide me with optimally challenging tasks and activities

They involve me in activities where I can use my skills and strengths

They acknowledge when I have done a good job

They provide guidance in the form of practical advice, strategies, and assistance when I need

They show they understand that sometimes [work] activities are difficult or tedious

They are available to help me when I need them

They take the time to get to know me

They listen to me and care about how I am feeling



AUTONOMY



COMPETENCE



RELATEDNESS

Results interpreted into leadership behaviours

Demotivating (need-thwarting) leadership

They use an authoritarian tone of voice when speaking to me

They closely monitor my activities and control details of how I carry out my tasks

They try to motivate me by making me feel guilty for not doing enough

They pressure me to do tasks and activities I don't really want to do

They prevent me from doing activities that I enjoy at this organisation

They focus on doing their own tasks rather than giving me help

They give me critical feedback, focusing on things I need to improve

They set unattainable standards or expectations that I struggle to meet

The goals they set for me are not realistic for my current skill level

They are overly critical of me and draw attention to my failings

They only talk to me because it's part of their role - they don't really care about me as a person

They do not like me as much as other members of the team

They exclude me from group activities

They deliberately ignore me

They do not comfort me when I am feeling low

They make it clear that they don't like me.



AUTONOMY

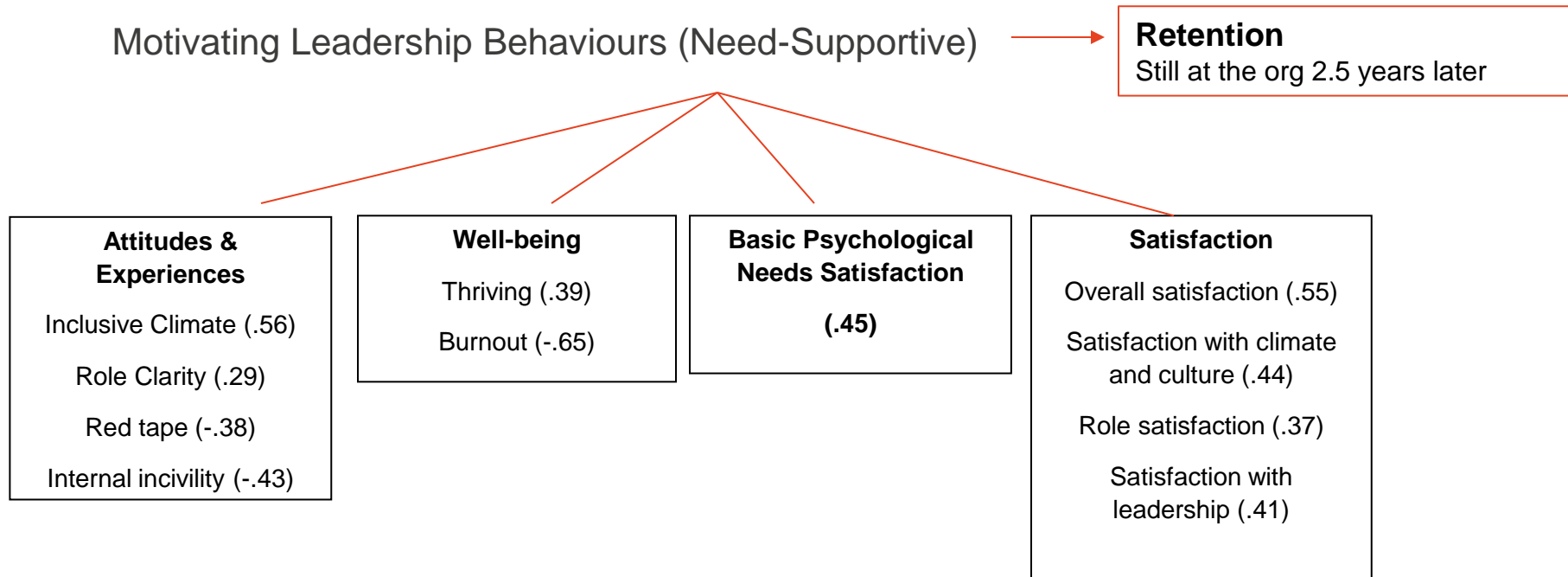


COMPETENCE

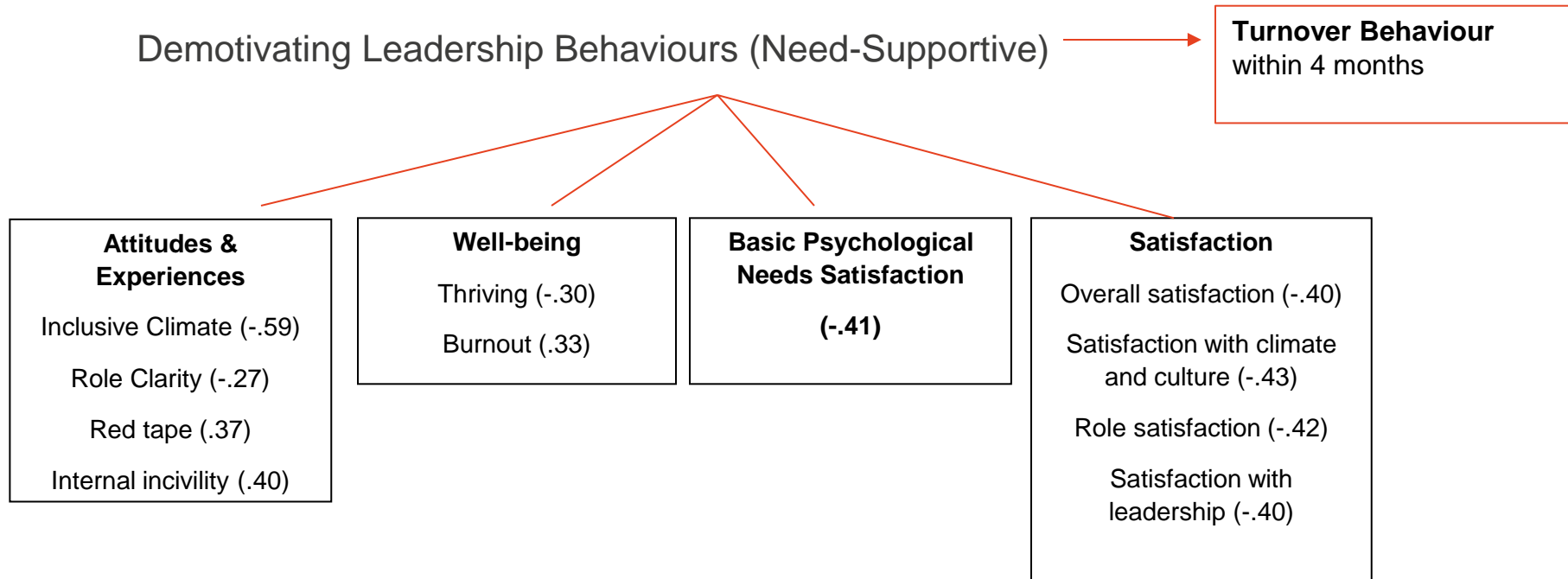


RELATEDNESS

Motivating Leadership behaviours *predict beneficial outcomes*



Demotivating Leadership behaviours *predict detrimental outcomes*



Contribution

The findings reveal **explicit leadership behaviours** that support and/or undermine the satisfaction of followers' basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence.

This data is contributing towards the development of a tool for researchers, IO psychologists and organisations to be able to **measure and monitor motivating leadership behaviours at work**

What can Self Determination Theory research teach us about leadership ?

Over three decades of Self-Determination Theory research has shed light on ...



The process through which interpersonal interactions between leaders and their followers come to influence motivation and wellbeing at work



An **empirically derived leadership approach** that facilitates motivation, wellbeing, and performance (and more).



Concrete managerial behaviours that satisfy and thwart basic psychological needs and a tool to assess/measure these behaviours.

Contributors

Connect

If you are interested in this measure and/or leveraging SDT in your leadership research or professional practice.

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