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Editorial:

Leadership in occupational health psychology

The papers that we have published in Work & Stress over the last decade or so have tended to focus on a limited number of subjects that lie at the heart of what occupational health psychology (OHP) involves. Think of topics like the effects of various sorts of job demands and job resources on worker health and well-being, bullying and aggression in the workplace, the relation between effort and recovery, the work-home interface, and interventions designed to deal with problems regarding these issues, to name just a few of the subjects that have received much attention in the past years.

Interestingly, one characteristic of the work environment that could exert a major influence on these and other problems at work – leadership – has received less attention in this journal, as the number of good submissions in this area is considerably lower than we would have liked. This is unfortunate, for several reasons. Most importantly, given that leaders exert power over their subordinates' work by definition (determining the goals to be achieved by employees, the way they must achieve these goals, the rewards that are given for obtaining these goals, et cetera), one would expect research on leadership and its effects on employee health and well-being to be of central interest in OHP. On the one hand, such research should focus on its effects on follower health and well-being: what sort of leadership styles result in positive effects for a leader's followers? And which conditions promote or hinder these positive effects? On the other hand, given the apparent importance of leadership for OHP, research on factors that could affect leaders' style of leading seems imperative. Obviously, this type of research will focus on interventions to improve leadership, but it could also refer to leader characteristics and well-being (e.g., leader stress) or the context in which the leader must operate (from an OHP point of view, especially characteristics of the work

environment would seem to be relevant).

Therefore, we felt it would be useful to provide a special edition of Work & Stress that focuses on leadership in OHP. The present issue brings together six papers. The first of these, by K. Nielsen and Taris, introduces this special issue more fully, presenting a short overview of challenges and issues to be addressed in future research on leadership in OHP. The second and third paper focus on the effects of leadership on follower well-being, employing methodologically strong designs. In a daily diary study, Ellis, Bauer, Erdogan and Truxillo show that employees who evaluate the relationship with their supervisor positively are more likely to feel a sense of belongingness, which in turn relates negatively to exhaustion and positively to vigor. In a two-wave longitudinal study, M. Nielsen, Skogstad, Gjerstad and Einarsen report that neither transformational nor laissez-faire leadership were related to later state anxiety among employees. However, low levels of anxiety were associated with reporting the leader as less transformational and more laissez-faire at the second wave of the study, challenging current models that construe leadership as a one-directional process in which the leader affects the followers, but not vice versa.

The fourth paper, by Tafvelin, K. Nielsen, von Thiele Schwarz and Stenling, extends the studies of Ellis et al. and M. Nielsen et al. by showing that the negative relationship between transformational leadership and employee burnout is stronger for leaders who report high levels of vigor and peer support. Apparently, the presence of such resources helps leaders to engage in transformational leadership behaviors.

The fifth paper, by K. Nielsen, Daniels, Nayani, Donaldson-Feilder and Lewis, focuses on a possible boundary condition for leadership. Current leadership models assume that having face-to-face interaction is a sine qua non for leadership to have effects on followers, but what if workers work away from their main location of work? K. Nielsen et al. show that even in such relatively unfavorable circumstances, health-and-safety-specific

leadership was positively related to distributed workers' self-rated health, safety compliance and safety proactivity.

The final paper in this issue by Hammer, Truxillo, Bodner, Pytlovany and Richman presents an evaluation of a training to increase workers' safety and health outcomes using supervisor/leadership training as a target of the intervention. Main effects of this intervention were absent, although there was some evidence that the intervention was more beneficial for work crew members who had poorer pre-intervention perceptions of their supervisor (lower leader-member exchange) and who perceived their work team as being not cohesive. This suggests that the effects of interventions on outcomes may be sensitive to context characteristics.

Overall, the present special issue provides a broad overview of current research on leadership in an OHP-context. These papers are both challenging and promising. They are challenging, in that the findings presented here are by no means conclusive and frequently go against the study hypotheses. These papers challenge current insights on the effects of leadership on follower well-being and may best be considered as starting points for future research in this area. But the papers presented here are also promising, in that these papers clearly underline the importance of leadership for OHP. Obviously, more research into the effects of leadership and its boundary conditions to have effect is warranted to bring us closer to improving employee health and well-being.

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