

# Unhappy at work? The boss or the company may be to blame

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If you are unhappy at work, it could be partly due to your boss' management style, according to a new study by Dr. Nicolas Gillet, from the Université François Rabelais in Tours in France, and his team. Both over-controlling managers who use threats as a way to motivate employees, and organizations that do not appear to value individuals' contributions, frustrate our basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (how we relate to others). This, in turn, is likely to have a negative impact on our well-being at work. The research is published online in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

The way we feel, or our well-being, can account for more than a quarter of the differences observed in individuals' performance at work. Workplace well-being is therefore receiving increasing attention as it may have economic implications for the organization if [workers](#) are underperforming.

The authors looked at the impact of perceived organizational support (the extent to which the organization values workers' contributions) and supervisor's interpersonal style (either supportive towards subordinates' autonomy or controlling their behavior) on workers' well-being.

They carried out two experiments on 468 and 650 workers respectively, from a combination of small, medium and large French companies. Participants filled in questionnaires asking them about their perceptions of their supervisors' management style, as well as the extent to which they felt that their organization supported them.

The more employees felt that their supervisor supported their autonomy, the more their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness were met and the happier and more satisfied they were. The same was true with greater perceived organizational support. Equally, when supervisors behaved in a coercive, pressuring and authoritarian way, or organizations were perceived as unsupportive, workers' needs were thwarted and they experienced lower levels of well-being.

The authors conclude: "Our study shows that both organizational and managerial factors have an influence on satisfying or frustrating the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and how we relate to others. We have shown, for the first time, that the fulfilment and frustration of these needs plays a central role in the improvement or reduction of well-being at work. Therefore, to satisfy employees' needs, supervisors should provide subordinates with options rather than use threats and deadlines, a strategy which could improve their workforce's well-being."

**More information:** Gillet N et al (2012). The impact of organizational factors on psychological needs and their relations with well-being. *Journal of Business and Psychology* [DOI:10.1007/s10869-011-9253-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9253-2)

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