

STARTING FROM THE TOP

Could Supporting Leaders Multiply Missionary Well-Being?

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Mental Health & Missions 2021 - Research & Resource Fair

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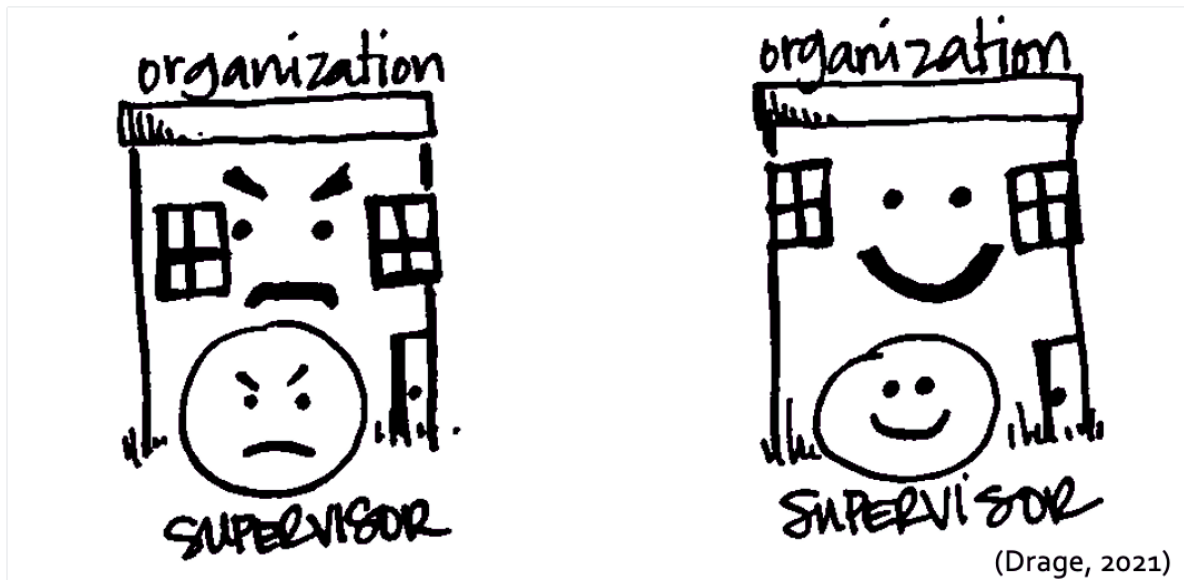
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POSTER SUMMARY

Immediate Supervisors
Play a Key Role
in
Missionary Well-being

FROM THE LITERATURE



According to Organizational Support Theory, we tend to personify organizations depending on our experiences with the people and culture within them. Feeling supported by your organization is usually associated with a greater sense of well-being at work (Kurtessis, et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Several reviews and meta-analyses identify leadership as an important factor contributing to well-being in the workplace (Fisher, 2010; Kurtessis, et al., 2017; Luchman & Gonzalez-Morales, 2013; Modini, et al., 2016; Parker, et al., 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Parker and colleagues (2003) found that perceptions of leadership had one of the strongest correlations to psychological well-being. The opposite is also shown in the literature with destructive leadership correlating to negative well-being outcomes for followers (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

In addition, Grawitch and colleagues (2006) noted that all efforts to encourage well-being in the workplace were dependent upon the effective communication of organizational leadership, making another important connection between leadership and well-being.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the role of organizations in missionary well-being. In support of research from Psychology, Missions and Management, findings from this study indicate that:

Immediate supervisors play a key role
in both enhancing and diminishing well-being for missionaries.

Findings also point to the potentially compounding mental health implications of a lack of support and training for people in supervisory roles.

This research suggests that approaching missionary mental health from an organizational development perspective could open strategic and collaborative avenues for strengthening missionary mental health.

Recommendations include:

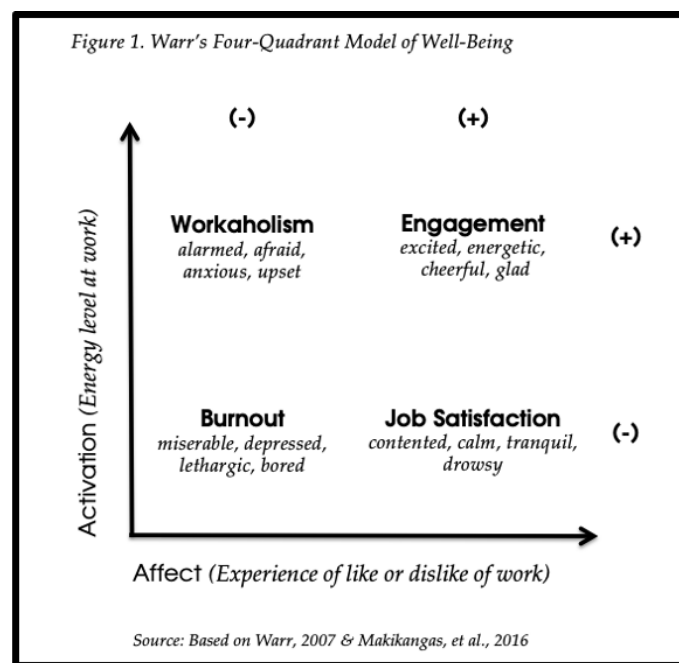
- Take the Organization-Member Relationship into consideration when engaging missionary mental health both at the individual and organizational level.
- Work with organizational leadership to build up immediate supervisors as the front lines of mental health support for global workers.
- Work with organizational leadership to ensure immediate supervisor roles are adequately covered especially in times of planned absence (furlough) or transition.

METHODS

These findings are an in-depth look at the role of immediate supervisors which emerged from a study looking at the role of mission organizations in missionary well-being more broadly. Here are the methods for that study:

Each participant was given the opportunity to answer questions related to a time when they liked their work (positive affect) and a time when they did not like their work (negative affect). They also provided a self-report of their energy level (activation) during the reported time period.

- 1) Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 8 active missionaries serving with 8 different organizations in Africa, Asia or Europe.
- 2) All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and designated with a well-being category based on Warr's Model of Well-being using self-reported affect and activation levels (See Figure 1).
- 3) The data was further analyzed through systematic coding of interviews using the Gioia method (Gioia, et al., 2012).
- 4) Finally, I analyzed the data aiming specifically to explore themes and patterns related to the role organizations played in the well-being of respondents.

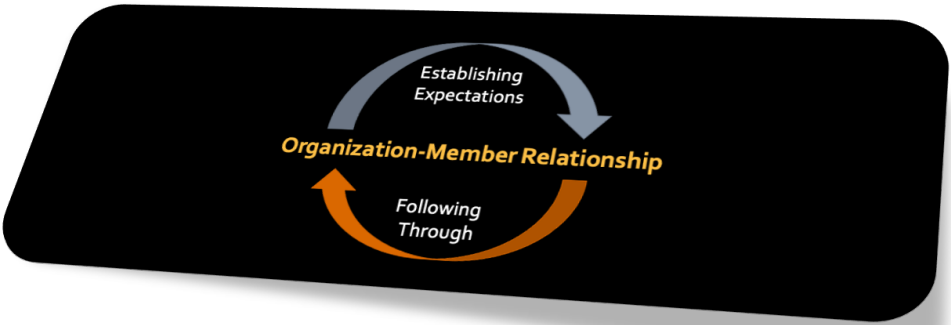


RESULTS

THE ORGANIZATION-MEMBER RELATIONSHIP & WELL-BEING

Well-being enhancing roles from organizations tended to involve connectedness, which was supportive of missionary aims or low organizational involvement that was clearly communicated and aligned with missionary expectations.

Well-being diminishing roles from organizations tended to involve high organization involvement that was perceived as irrelevant or costly (taking resources away from missionary aims) or low organizational involvement that left missionaries feeling isolated or unsupported.



	Well-Being Enhancing	Well-Being Diminishing
High Organizational Involvement	High involvement that felt supportive to missionary aims	High involvement that hindered or frustrated missionary aims
Low Organizational Involvement	Low involvement clearly communicated and aligned with missionary expectations.	Low involvement leading to a sense of isolation or lack of support

RESULTS

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS & WELL-BEING

Immediate Supervisors played a key role in the Organization-Member Relationship

Every participant reported some positive experience with an immediate supervisor during their reported period of work engagement.

In the 6 out of 8 reported negative work periods, the immediate supervisor played a key role either through their absence, through ineffective leadership or through their support.

For 2 participants, experiences of negative affect in this study were the result of feeling unsupported in leadership roles. This suggests that lack of support for field-level leaders not only has well-being implications for the people being led, but also for under-supported leaders themselves.

In some cases, engagements with the immediate supervisor were the only consistent experience missionaries had with the organization.

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS & WORK ENGAGEMENT

During time periods associated with work engagement, every participant identified positive experiences they had with their immediate supervisor (or someone who took on that role for them).

Empowerment was a common theme and took the form of a desire to see workers grow (both professionally and spiritually), providing opportunities for trying new things marked by both freedom and feedback, walking alongside ministers through prayer and seeking God's guidance, work accountability, encouragement to go beyond their comfort zones, and help in setting reasonable expectations for themselves.

Presence, both relationally and simply through time together also emerged. These relationships were marked by rhythms of time together (regular meetings) and being present to the highs and lows of these ministers' experiences. In some cases, these supervisors were readily identified as friends.

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You know, I don't know how else to explain it, except that they really walked alongside me and, you know, comforted me when I needed comfort and pushed me when I needed pushing. P1

He saw something in me that he wanted to draw out and grow. P4

I've been really impressed with how he can input into my life and still not be controlling and give an opinion, but doesn't have to be followed. Yeah, I kind of wish I could be more like him. P7

accountability, encouragement to go beyond their comfort zones, and help in setting reasonable expectations for themselves.

Presence, both relationally and simply through time together also emerged. These relationships were marked by rhythms of time together (regular meetings) and being present to the highs and lows of these ministers' experiences. In some cases, these supervisors were readily identified as friends.

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS & ABSENCE

For four participants, immediate supervisors being unavailable played a significant role in the time-period they identified with negative affect. These absences were the result of organization transition or regular "home assignments."

Participants also experienced emotional or professional absence from their supervisors when they were offered inadequate support for the situations they were facing.

In one case, the person was almost entirely cut off from organizational support as immediate supervisors were the gate keeper to most organizational resources.

As a result of these absences, missionaries felt alone, abandoned, and frustrated.

Well, since, most of that time period was without immediate supervision. My boss left, uh, and...

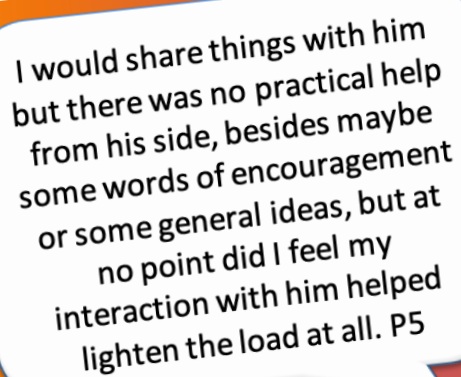
As she stepped out- there was no, then, immediate supervisor to step in um, so the next level of supervision, then actually would have kicked me up to the president of the organization. Who was also in transition and who really, met with me once and basically said I really don't have time to meet with you anymore so just keep doing what you're doing.

Uh, and then toward the end of the timeframe, my new boss was appointed, but he was actually working 3 jobs....he was so scattered trying to do so many things that I was still fairly on my own. Uh, and that was hard. That was very difficult. P4

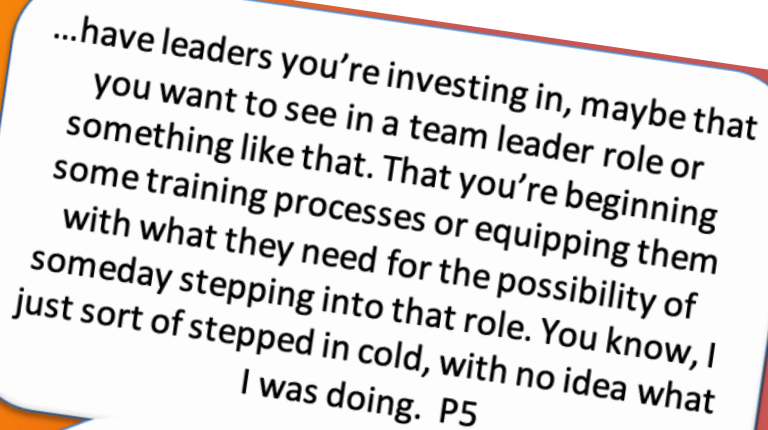
IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS & LACK OF SUPPORT

A lack of preparation and support for those who were placed in immediate supervisor roles led to well-being diminishing outcomes for three participants in this study. These participants felt in over their heads. One person used the word, “drowning” to describe how he felt after getting into a supervisory role, realizing there or was no job description, that they had no training and that their immediate supervisor had no practical support to offer. This person left the field in burnout.

Since immediate supervisors play a key role in supporting the well-being of missionaries, it follows that a lack of support for people in these roles will have well-being implications not only for themselves, but for those whom they are serving as supervisors.



I would share things with him but there was no practical help from his side, besides maybe some words of encouragement or some general ideas, but at no point did I feel my interaction with him helped lighten the load at all. P5



...have leaders you're investing in, maybe that you want to see in a team leader role or something like that. That you're beginning some training processes or equipping them with what they need for the possibility of someday stepping into that role. You know, I just sort of stepped in cold, with no idea what I was doing. P5

CONCLUSION

HONOR THE ORGANIZATION-MEMBER RELATIONSHIP BY BUILDING UP IMMEDIATE SUPERVISORS

This qualitative study explored the role of organizations in missionary well-being. In support of research from Psychology, Missions and Management, findings from this study indicate that immediate supervisors play a key role in both creating and diminishing stress for missionaries. Findings also point to the potentially compounding mental health implications of a lack of support and training for people in supervisory roles.

This research suggests that approaching missionary mental health from an organizational development perspective could open strategic and collaborative avenues for strengthening missionary mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Collaboration: Doing Together What None Can Do Alone

- Take the Organization-Member Relationship into consideration when engaging missionary mental health both at the individual and organizational level.
- Work with organizational leadership to build up immediate supervisors as the front lines of mental health support for global workers. This could come in the form of:
 - Specific support aimed at ensuring the well-being of those in supervisory positions.
 - On-going training for supervisors in understanding the significance of their role in supporting the well-being of missionaries with particular attention given to equipping supervisors to empower global workers (provision of accountability, meaningful feedback, good challenge) and to building relationships of support.
- Work with organizational leadership to ensure immediate supervisor roles are adequately covered especially in times of planned absence (furlough) or transition.
 - Establish systems that will help identify upcoming leadership gaps and how they can be covered.
 - Establish ongoing training and development for potential future supervisors.
 - Take care to provide extra support and training for new or temporary supervisors.

Please feel free to contact me for more information or follow up questions.
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FOR FURTHER READING

Drage, K. (2021) 'The Role of Mission Organizations in Missionary Well-Being', Evangelical Mission Quarterly, 57(3), pp. 26-29.
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