

Support and recognition by supervisors – Important factors for the well-being of employees

39 baua: Facts

Supervisors play a central role in the experience and actions of employees. In the BAuA project "Mental Health in the World of Work", an overview of the state of research (scoping review) on this topic was conducted. This showed that leadership styles characterised by clear communication, supportive behaviour, respect and available feedback and participation channels, among other things, have a positive effect on health.¹ The data from the 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey indicate that only 59 % of employees can frequently rely on the support of their supervisors, and only 33 % frequently receive praise and recognition from their manager. This means there is potential for development in this regard.

Support and recognition by supervisors – Resources not to be underestimated

The 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey offers the opportunity to take a closer look at two key aspects of good and health-promoting leadership:

- 1.) help and support and
- 2.) praise and recognition by supervisors

In the survey, employees were asked to indicate how often certain resources occur in their work. Possible answers were "frequently", "sometimes", "rarely" or "never". This fact sheet focuses on employees and compares the following:

- a) Help/support from supervisors frequently (n=10,358) compared to never (n=1,044).
- b) Praise/recognition by supervisors frequently (n=5,723) compared to never (n=1,806).

Support from supervisors is an important resource and can help to make daily work easier. First, it can reduce employees' workload. For example, help or advice can point to solutions that make it easier to overcome difficulties in the work task. Moreover, conflicts with colleagues or customers, unclear priorities and the like can be resolved more easily. Second, support may also counteract health impairments and reduce the occurrence or extent of stress. In addition, the negative effect of work stress can be "buffered" through help and support, enabling employees to cope with stress more easily.²

Praise and recognition from supervisors are also an important resource at work. Employees who feel valued at work are more satisfied and motivated. Recognition can also lead to an increase in employees' well-being and organisational commitment.³

Less stress through support and recognition

In the 2018 BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey, employees were asked, among other things, about various work demands. As an example, five psychological demands are considered below: working at the limit of one's capabilities, strong deadline/performance pressure, disruptions/interruptions at work, keeping an eye on different tasks at the same time, and confrontation with new tasks. Figure 1 shows only those workers who are frequently exposed to these five demands and feel stressed by them. Workers who frequently experience support and/or recognition from their manager are less likely to report being stressed by psychological work demands. For example, 59 % of those with frequent support report being stressed by frequent intense pressure to meet deadlines or to perform, compared to 73 % of those without support. When comparing those with frequent recognition and those without, the difference is even greater at 21 percentage points (54 % vs. 75 %).

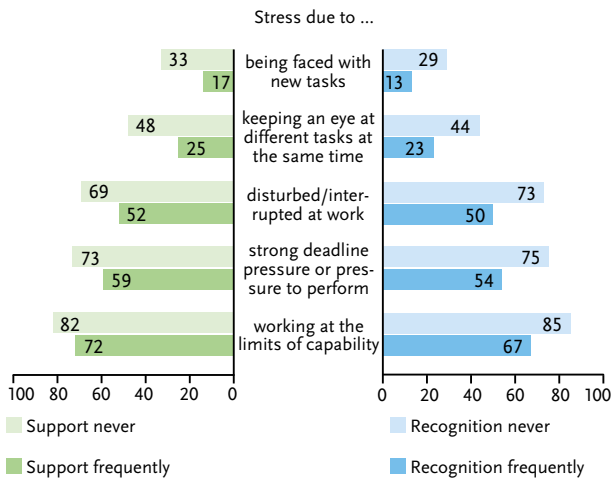


Fig. 1 Stress due to frequent psychological demands among dependent employees who frequently or never receive help/support or praise/recognition from supervisors (in %)

Support and recognition as a health resource

Employees who experience frequent support and recognition from their manager report fewer psychosomatic complaints. This refers to symptoms such as exhaustion, fatigue, irritability or sleep disorders. For example, Figure 2 shows that 39 % of employees who receive frequent recognition report no complaints; the same is true for only 18 % of employees who never receive it. It should be noted that a reverse effect cannot be ruled out, meaning that healthier people receive recognition more often.

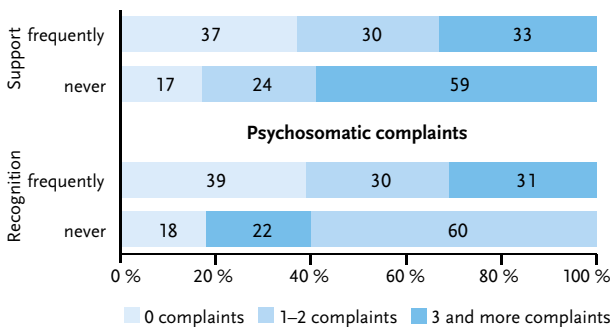


Fig. 2 Number of psychosomatic complaints of dependent employees who frequently or never receive help/support or praise/recognition from supervisors (in %)

Furthermore, fact sheet no. 09, "Support by supervisors – trebly important, simply underestimated" refers to the buffering effect of support from superiors. The likelihood of reporting psychosomatic complaints in the face of frequent mental work demands is higher if employees never experience support from their managers.²

Conclusion

The results show that support and recognition from supervisors are positively related to the health situation of employees. However, only some of the employees regularly receive support and recognition. Possible starting points for improvements are to be found at the company, management and employee levels. A company policy that emphasises appreciative cooperation and encourages employees to openly communicate problems or mistakes and to give and seek feedback is beneficial. Raising awareness and training managers on the importance of supportive and appreciative behaviour for mental wellbeing is also beneficial.⁴ But employees can also help improve the situation: support is easier for managers if employees themselves actively seek solutions to problems, ask for specific help and do not take it for granted.²

English translation. German original version available:
doi: 10.21934/baua:fakten20210629

Further information

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- 3 B. Steinmann, C. Steidelmüller, B. Thomson: Führungsverhalten als Schlüsselfaktor für arbeitsbezogene Anforderungen und Ressourcen und die psychische Gesundheit der Beschäftigten, in: Stressreport Deutschland 2019. Psychische Anforderungen, Ressourcen und Befinden. 1. Auflage. Dortmund: Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin 2020.
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Suggested citation:

Hünefeld, Lena; Kopatz, Florian, 2022. Support and recognition by supervisors – Important factors for the well-being of employees. baua: Facts 39. Dortmund: Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. baua: Facts