

Socioeconomic stratification of perceived leadership

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Our results show that the leadership variables are associated with socioeconomic status but also that they predict employee health even after adjustment for socioeconomic status.

Background

Socioeconomic factors are mostly considered to be confounders in analyses of the relationship between psychosocial working conditions and employee health. However, the way in which leadership is experienced in different socioeconomic strata is of interest in its own right.

Methods

Data from SLOSH (Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health, approximately representative of the Swedish working population) in the three waves 2006, 2008 and 2010 were used.

Proxies for socioeconomic factors were education (five-graded scale, self-reported in the questionnaire, high score corresponds to low education) and yearly income (from tax registry, because the distribution was markedly skewed with a right sided tail a log transformation was used). Age and gender were also included as explanatory variables.

The leadership variables were:

“Non-listening leadership”: Does your boss listen to you? There were four response categories ranging from “to a very high extent” to “a very small extent or not at all”.

“Self centered leadership”: This factor was calculated from three questions (non-participating, asocial and loner). For each question there were five re-

sponse categories ranging from “very infrequently” to “very often”.

Work environment and health status variables:

Psychological demands and decision latitude were measured by means of the Swedish shortened version (DCQ) which comprises five demand and six decision latitude four-graded questions. Standardized measures of emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al), SCL-CD depressive symptoms (Bech et al) and self-rated health were used.

Results

MANOVA:s using the three assessments of “self-centered” and “non-listening” leadership respectively in 2006, 2008 and 2010 (repeated measures) as dependent variables and age, income (e log transformed) and education as explanatory variables showed stable effects on the leadership variables: Education was statistically significant for both perceived leaderships styles, whereas income was significant only for perceived “non-listening” manager style. Self-centered manager scores were unchanged 2006-2010 whereas listening manager scores significantly deteriorated in 2010 - which coincided with the last phase of the international financial crisis.

A series of prospective analyses were performed on the effect of the leadership variables on employee

health after adjustments for socioeconomic variables, mental state in 2006 and demands and decision latitude in 2006. Self-centered leadership as well as non-listening manager in 2006 significantly predicted employee depressive mood in 2008 after adjustment for demographic variables. The predictions became non-significant when adjustment was made for demands and decision latitude in the non-listening manager analyses. This was not so in the self-centered leadership analyses, indicating that a good deal of the effect of a non-listening manager goes through the perceived work environment but that the statistical effect of the self-centered manager on depressive mood in employees is to a great extent independent of the work environment. Predictions of self-rated health by means of self-centered and non-listening manager reports were more successful for the four-year analyses (2006-2010), but for both leadership variables the statistical significance disappeared after adjustment for demand and decision latitude indicating that this effect was mediated by work environment effects.

Conclusion

Our results show that the leadership variables are associated with socioeconomic status but also that they predict employee health even after adjustment for socioeconomic status. “Non-listening” scores were more sensitive to societal change and more strongly related to socioeconomic factors than “self-centered” scores.

Non listening manager score dependent variable in MANOVA, n=2330

	2006	2008	2010
<i>B coefficients</i>			
Intercept	2.87	2.69	3.28
Gender	0.02	-0.05	-0.06
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00
Elog income	-0.10	-0.09	-0.19
Education	-0.05	-0.03	-0.04
<i>Means</i>	2.15	2.14	2.40

F-values and corresponding p values

All between variance	F=11.63, p=0.0001
Intercept	F=234.40, p=0.0001
Gender	F=1.31, p=0.252
Age	F=1.91, p=0.167
Elog income	F=12.63, p=0.0004
Education	F=16.31, p=0.0001
Within subject time	F=2.38, p=0.093

Non-listening leadership in relationship to depressive mood as dependent variable (n=2359)

	2006	2008	2010
<i>Mean depressive score</i>	5.64	5.42	5.14

B coefficients

Intercept	7.09	8.79	13.34
Gender (m=1,f=2)	1.24	0.77	0.91
Age	0.00	0.00	-0.05
Income (elog)	-0.58	-0.67	-0.93
Education	0.13	0.22	0.01
Non-listening leader	1.27	0.83	0.69
Demands	0.47	0.40	0.43
Decision latitude	-0.20	-0.12	-0.11

All between subjects variance F=67.61 df= 7/2351 p=0.0001

Intercept F=135.3 df=1/2351 p=0.0001

Gender F=32.63 df=1/2351 p=0.0001

Age F=3.42 df=1/2351 p=0.065

Income F=14.11 df=1/2351 p=0.0002

Education F=3.54 df= 1/2351 p=0.060

Non-listening boss F=66.48 df=1/2351 p=0.0001

Demands F=191.08 df=1/2351 p=0.0001

Decision latitude F=21.20 df=1/2351 p=0.0001

Within subjects variance and interactions:

Significant main effect of study year (successively less depressive mood, p=0.0004).

Significant interaction effects for age (some effect in 2010 and no effects in 2006 and 2008, p=0.0001, however no significant main effect of age), education (lower effect in 2010, p=0.035), non-listening manager and decision latitude (smaller effects for both variables in 2010, p=0.0001 and 0.045 respectively). No interactions with time for other variables.

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