

# How Does Secure-base Leadership Influence Employee Well-being?

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**Abstract:** To improve their operations in fast-paced business environment, organizations need leaders who embed the required changes into corporate strategy and implement it accordingly to maintain competitive edge. However, organizational change is disruptive and have a significant impact on employee well-being, unfortunately, the literature does not provide a comprehensive answer on what kind of leadership can be more effective to support employee well-being in environmental uncertainty. To ensure a smooth transition in dynamic environment, among several influential leadership styles, recent research found that employee well-being in the organization can be improved through secure-base leadership. Since, secure-base leadership recognizes the value of employees and provide them with secure-base support in organization. However, the literature is silent on the attributes of secure-base leadership. Therefore, to explore the attributes of secure-base leadership and how these attributes affect employee overall well-being, the study conducted a thematic analysis, data was purposively collected via interview from eight respondents. The study found that secure-base leadership is characterized by the elements such as (1) autonomy to make decisions (2) maintaining healthy work life balance (3) open communication (4) handling conflicts (5) recognizing and appreciating employees (6) promoting employees wellbeing and mental health (7) collaboration and teamwork and (8) working on a challenging project, among others. All these attributes are positively related to employee overall well-being, for example secure-base leaders fulfil employee psychological needs by providing autonomy through trust and empowerment, fostering competence through feedback and development opportunities, and promoting relatedness through open communication and interpersonal support. Fulfilment of employee psychological needs positively affect intrinsic motivation which in turn lead to higher level of job satisfaction and employee overall well-being. Findings of the current study enriches the literature on the relationship between secure-base leadership and employees well-beings. Further, the study shed light on key attributes possess by secure-base leaders, therefore, HR manager should formulate selection criteria for managers in which priority should be given to candidates with secure-base leadership attributes.

**Keywords:** Secure-base Leadership; Employee Well-being; Secure-base Leadership Attributes; Environmental Uncertainty

## 1. Background

Over the years, competition in the business sector has witnessed major changes regarding the way businesses carry out their operations. These changes place new demands on leadership and created a need to explore leadership and the leadership theories that have evolved. Consequently, the trend has been moved from a reliance on autocratic leadership and transactional leadership to a more comprehensive leadership style which seeks to consider the psychological and emotional needs of employees. The need to emphasize more secure leadership is a concept that has arisen from attachment theory and emphasizes that leaders who create a safe and secure environment for their employees enable them to take risks, explore, and express dissent without fear of negative consequences. Despite the wide range of available research on secure-base leadership, extensive studies have been needed to establish the impact of secure-base leadership on employee overall well-being (Zhang & li, 2024; Dong et al., 2023; Li & Zhang, 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Tu et al., 2022; Zhisong et al., 2021). Transformation leadership and the attachment theory have been instrumental in providing the background on leadership and the manner in which leadership is executed (Tan & Wu, 2022; Minhaj et al., 2019). However, research on how secure-base leadership operates within organizational settings remains limited. In addition, the changes in the workplace setting and the evolution of the job sector today are characterized by evolving workplace dynamics, including remote work arrangements and diverse workforce compositions. Adapting these changes warrant an investigation on secure-base leadership to ensure that organizations long-term goals are being met. Therefore, this study seeks to extend the research on secure-base leadership by exploring the attributes of secure-base leadership and the influence of secure-base leadership on employees overall well-being, thus providing insights for leaders and organizations concerning how they can promote a positive work environment in today's business world.

The study contributes to the existing literature in the following ways. First, the study demonstrate the attributes of secure-base leadership. Second, the study explore the significance of secure-base leadership on the employee well-being by examining the ways in which secure-base leaders can create a winning culture within organizations. Examining secure-base leadership through this study will provide leaders deeper insights into how they can foster employee satisfaction and promote employee well-being. This research has potentially far-reaching implications in leadership and in scholarship application by expanding the research on secure-base

leadership. Thirdly, exploring the influence of secure-base leadership on employee well-being and ultimately organizational performance can enhance our knowledge on effective leadership strategies that companies can implement in an ever-changing business environment and adjust their strategies and practices accordingly. Finally, this study will provide insights into how secure-base leadership can help organizations in promoting positive employee outcomes while providing further information on how to improve the relationships between the leaders and the employee in the workplace.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Background**

Secure-base leadership positively impacts employees' psychological needs and intrinsic motivation from self-determination, and attachment perspectives. Self-determination theory (RyanM & Deci, 2020; Yip et al., 2018; Ng & Ng, 2015) is linked to secure-base leadership as it is based on the foundation of personal fulfilment and establishing an environment where employees can experience a supportive and nurturing environment. For instance, promoting autonomy, relatedness and competence, secure-base leadership directly contributes to fulfilling these psychological needs, secure-base leadership also helps to establish a supportive and nurturing environment, promoting positive relationships within the team as they demonstrate accessibility, approachability, and genuine concern for their employees (Tafvelin & Stenling, 2021). This, in turn, affect well-being (Sodagar & Nastiezaie, 2021).

Similarly, employees in the organizations might see their leaders as attachment figures (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2022; Mayseless & Popper, 2019; Hinojosa et al., 2014) thereby leading to positive work behaviours. The perception of employees about their leaders as a secure-base can lead to positive work outcomes. In this sense, we can argue that secure-base leadership has a direct link with the attachment theory in that it helps in creating elements such as support, trust, and safety, which are positively influencing the employees' day-to-day activities (Wu, & Parker, 2017).

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 The Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore how secure-base leadership can be utilized to enhance employee well-being of a manufacturing organization. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection technique. This approach allowed participants to share their narratives in an open manner. A total of eight employees were interviewed from various departments: Information Technology Department; Marketing Department; Manufacturing Department; Research and Development; Customer Service; Operations Department; Human Resources Department; Accounting and Finance Department. The selection of participants reflected a diversity in roles, departments, and tenure within the organization. This inclusive approach helped provide a comprehensive understanding on how secure-base leadership is functioned across various organizational departments and in the day-to-day operations. Participants were provided with clear and accessible information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes. Informed consent was obtained, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of their stories.

### **3.2 Thematic Analysis**

As part of the research process the results were codified based on the themes related to secure-base leadership. The first step of the thematic analysis involved familiarizing ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the interviews. This was key, as it allowed us to expand different elements, which included gaining a comprehensive understanding of the content and identifying initial ideas or patterns related to secure-base leadership. The next step in the thematic analysis was to interpret and contextualize the themes within the broader framework of secure-base leadership, and through this we examined the relationships between themes, explored variations in participants' perspectives, and identified any significant insights or patterns that emerged from the data.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

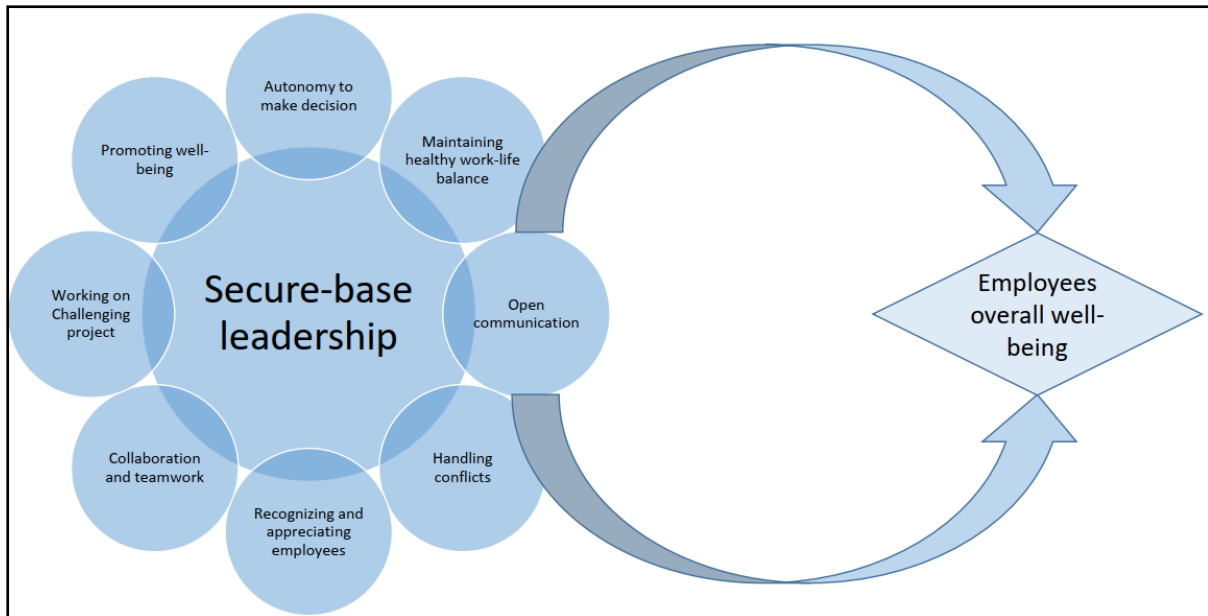
The results highlighted that communication and coordination are important in the workplace, and that it is the role of the leader to ensure that constant communication is occurring. Results show that the leaders were able to make sure that all departments were in constant communication. This was done through regular updates, meetings, and sometimes digital communication platforms, which helped maintain project alignment and transparency. Moreover, secure-base leaders also ensure that there must be a seamless flow of information between different departments and external vendors, and this is vital in aligning objectives and timelines. The results collaborate with the research by Wahid et al. (2024), Khalijian et al. (2023), Lee et al., (2015) who found that secure-base leadership is an important part of the company's success and that communication and coordination are vital to long-term success since they help to guarantee the happiness of employees.

Another finding of this research is the significance of strategic planning and execution, where the leaders provide clear directions and milestones and help the team understand expectations and the timeline, which is crucial for planning and prioritizing tasks. The results also indicated that organizations should come up with measures to promote flexibility in planning and execution, and that the leaders' flexibility helped the team navigate unforeseen challenges without derailing the project. Flexibility in the workplace is a crucial concept of secure-base leadership. These results are supported by another study (Wen et al., 2021) that points out the importance of flexibility in an organization setting.

A study by Messmann et al. (2022) shows the importance of autonomy in the decision-making process and how it can cultivate employee motivation. This is supported by the present study, which shows that with significant autonomy in decision-making, the leader was able to swiftly address issues, reallocate resources as needed, and adjust project timelines, all of which are crucial for keeping a project on track. On the other hand, the concept of resource and task management was evident from the research, which showed that effective delegation is fundamental to project management and hence, the leader's ability to assign tasks appropriately maximized efficiency and was paramount to project execution. Therefore, secure-base leaders should have the ability to work with limited resources, and as evidenced by this study, the leader's ability to manage and allocate limited resources effectively ensured that the project did not suffer despite constraints, showcasing skillful resource management. Managing resources in the workplace, allocating limited resources, and supporting employees were traits that were found to be aligned with secure-base leadership (Alblooshi et al., 2021; Joullié et al., 2021; Attia & Hadi, 2020).

Motivation was one of the key elements that emerged in the research and its connection to team dynamics and the implications this may have on the company. The results show that the leaders' efforts to encourage high performance and recognize contributions will probably boost morale and productivity while also fostering a culture of creativity (Tu et al., 2022; Cui Zhisong et al., 2021) and collaboration. In addition, the leader also relied on strategies such as recognition and professional development, providing opportunities for growth and regularly recognizing achievements greatly enhanced team satisfaction and loyalty (Kwarteng et al, 2024; Al Subaie & Hadi, 2024; Al-maaitah et al., 2021). Secure-base leaders have the ability to create a culture that promotes the employee motivation and at the same time identifies different ways to ensure that the employees are given opportunities, as evident from the research. This is align with (e.g., Ye et al., 2022; Malibari & Bajaba, 2022; Amina et al., 2021) findings.

The research also shows the necessity of risk and conflict management and that the leader's approach to handling conflicts through open communication and active listening helped in maintaining a harmonious work environment and employee well-being. Conflict resolution is important as it helps in improving the relationships between the employees and sees to it that conflicts are handled in a fair and transparent manner, which also has ability to impact the employee performance. Secure-base leadership can help in conflict resolution, which is key to a healthy work environment (Cvenkel, 2021) promoting these practices can also contribute to team cohesion. Özkan et al. (2023) indicated that managing conflict in the workplace is vital as it helps ensure that such conflicts have been managed effectively and timely. Secure-base leadership has the ability to ensure that employees have excellent work-life balance. This is consistent with (Alabdulazeem and Hadi, 2024).



Source: authors own compilation

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was twofold; the study first explored the attributes of secure-base leadership and found that secure-base leadership is characterized by autonomy to make decision; maintaining healthy work environment and work life balance; open communication; handling conflicts; recognizing appreciating employees; promoting mental health; collaboration and teamwork and working on challenging projects. Results of thematic analysis also revealed that secure base leadership is positively related to employee well-being. For instance, secure-base leaders fulfil employee psychological needs and positively affect their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation which lead to employee job satisfaction and employee well-being; autonomy is a key component of secure-base leadership therefore, cultivating autonomy in the workplace helps cultivate the element of trust in the workplace, which will ultimately improve the relationship between the employees and the leaders. Secure-base leadership in the context of work-life balance involves creating an environment where employees feel supported in managing their professional and personal responsibilities. Similarly, communication and transparency are important parts of secure-base leadership, leaders foster transparency in the workplace by considering employees in the communication process. Transparency in the organization thus fosters trust and reduces uncertainty and anxiety among team members thereby leading to employee-wellbeing. Secure-base leadership can help in conflict resolution, which is key to a healthy work environment. By focusing on mental health and creating a supportive work environment, the leader ensured that the team remained healthy and productive. Secure-base leaders are able to provide the employees with the support they need for project execution, thus empowering employees to work on challenging projects.

### 5.1 Implications

The research undertaken shows that secure-base leadership plays a key role in improving the organization and the ability of the employees to function well within the organization and thus propelling the organization to success. While there are positive instances where leaders have contributed to employee well-being, motivation, and a sense of security (Moriano et al., 2021), there are also areas that need attention and improvement. The use of secure-base leadership can be an effective strategy for organizations to address their shortcomings while improving their overall effectiveness. Secure-base leaders have the ability to transform the organization. This can occur when the elements of trust and communication have been fostered. The importance of trust, transparent communication, and effective conflict resolution cannot be miscalculated. Moreover, an organization's commitment to employee well-being, both physically and mentally, is a key factor in creating a secure and supportive work environment. Therefore, secure leadership provides an environment that helps the employees focus on their individual strengths and secure-base leadership should continue to address identified

areas for improvement, and maintain an ongoing dialogue with employees to adapt to evolving needs. By doing so, the organization can foster a culture of secure leadership that not only meets the current expectations of employees but also prepares them for future challenges. However, regular feedback loops and open communication channels will be crucial in sustaining and enhancing the positive aspects of leadership identified through these interviews. It is the responsibility of the leader to provide the employees with the directions they need so that they can meet the goals that have been set.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Secure-base leaders should strive at all times show care and concern and in the process, they should be accepting as this helps instill employees with the confidence they need to navigate through the challenging situations they might face. Secure-base leaders have the knowledge, expertise, and experience they need to inquire and listen to the employees while relying on strategies such as the use of empathy, active listening, and open communication. Therefore, leaders should strive to create an environment where the employees feel appreciated and cared for, which will and help employees feel free to express themselves as well as their concerns. With this in mind, secure-base leaders also have the ability to focus on the elements such as positivity as this helps in motivating the employees to ensure that they are able to execute the set task as per the required standards. One of the main issues that often impacts employee performance is lack of support and the fear of negative consequences, which can severely hinder their ability to perform well.

In an organizational context, secure-base leaders have the ability to structure leadership in a way that promotes teamwork and collaboration. This is essential given that leaders should lead by example by demonstrating a healthy work-life balance themselves to set a precedent for the rest of the team. Moreover, leaders need to communicate the importance of work-life balance and encourage their teams to prioritize it, which will ultimately contribute to improving employee performance levels. However, the goal in this case is the feedback mechanism and the manner in which the communication has been structured to ensure that regular feedback mechanisms gauge the effectiveness of current policies and identify areas that may need adjustment. Secure leadership can enhance the work-life balance by relying on the proactive and adaptable approach and by acknowledging the diverse needs of employees, offering flexibility, improving communication, and leading by example, leaders can contribute significantly to creating a work environment that supports both professional success and personal well-being. As a result, the leaders should regularly assess the policies and refine policies based on employee feedback, in order to maintain a culture that values and prioritizes work-life balance. Once the policies have been modified, secure-base leaders develop the ability to promote and support work-life balance, which contributes not only to employee satisfaction but also to long-term organizational success and resilience.

According to secure leadership, teamwork not only enhances job satisfaction but also fosters a positive work culture, where employees feel valued and supported. Secure-base leaders have the ability to promote collaboration and teamwork within the company. This results in sharing ideas and coming up with strategies that target the achievement on the long-term goal of the company. Therefore, the support from the leaders is crucial to creating an employee culture within the company that promotes collaboration and teamwork, ultimately improving company performance. Finally, a leader is responsible for formulating policies and providing the resources that help in safeguarding their employee well-being and employee mental health. Through secure-base leadership, an organization can focus on the well-being and mental health and prioritize mental health to promote a healthy and supportive work environment, positively impacting employee morale and productivity.

## **5.3 Research Limitations**

Although the study was a success overall, one of the main limitations was the sample size, which limited the amount of information collected. Another key limitation is that the study relied on the middle managers as the key respondents and did not include the perspectives of top management. Moreover, the research focused on a manufacturing company and did not explore other industries such as the service industry or other non-manufacturing industries. The qualitative nature of the study is also the main limitation however, the literature on secure-base leadership is not matured yet.

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