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A model of the well-being among French school counselors: Effects of personal and psychosocial variables

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### **Abstract**

In line with self-determination theory and psychological well-being theory, we examine the effects of career counseling self-efficacy (CCSE), self-esteem, and leader-member exchange (LMX) on well-being via the satisfaction of the three psychological needs (PNs). Using a cross-sectional design, we submitted an on-line questionnaire to 235 school counselors psychologists working in French public counseling centers. The results showed that satisfaction of the PN for autonomy mediated the links between CCSE, self-esteem, and LMX as explanatory variables and well-being as a resultant.

Satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy mediated the links between LMX, CCSE and self-esteem as inducers, and well-being as a criterion.

**Keywords:** well-being, career counseling self-efficacy, self-esteem, leader-member exchange, need satisfaction

# **A Model of the Well-Being among French School Counselors: Effects of personal and psychosocial variables**

## **Introduction**

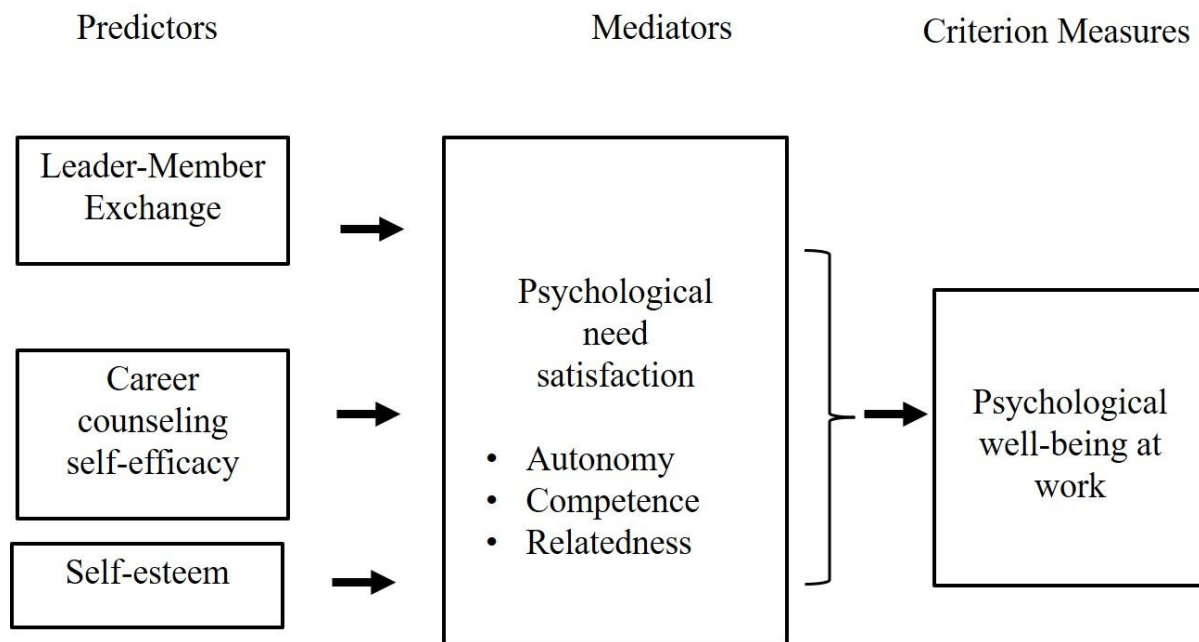
A fundamental question at work is how employees can preserve their health and how to achieve well-being. Well-being is widely acknowledged as a positive indicator of health (Massé et al., 1998). From the eudemonic perspective, well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Straume & Vittersø, 2015). Literature on well-being in terms of individual and social functioning (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010) explained why people are engaged, and are protected from work-related illnesses.

Research conducted in the workplace has supported the hypothesis that employees' need satisfaction is positively correlated with work-related well-being (i.e., higher job satisfaction, lower stress, lower burnout, and more positive attitudes toward work), and better performance (see for reviews, Gagné & Deci, 2005; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). Accordingly, need satisfaction at work has been related to lower ill-being (eg., Van den Broeck et al., 2008) and to self-esteem, well-being, and vigor (Van den Broeck et al., 2008).

Considering factors influencing dimensions of psychological health, a growing body of empirical studies supports the view that PN satisfaction can significantly affects well-being (Deci et al., 2001; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Satisfaction of the three needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) is positively correlated with various indicators of psychological well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). Empirically, satisfaction of the three basic needs postulated by SDT is positively linked to workers' health indicators such as self-esteem, well-being, and vigor (Van den Broeck et al., 2008).

In this vein, we looked at whether satisfaction of the three basic needs plays a mediating role between self-esteem, career counseling self-efficacy, and well-being. The first purpose of this study

was to predict well-being based on the hypothetical model shown in Figure 1. This model includes three independent variables (two personals: career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem; and one psychosocial: LMX), three mediators (the three psychological needs), and one dependent variable (psychological well-being at work).



**Figure 1**

*Hypothetical Model of Psychological Needs Satisfaction among French School Counselors*

This approach should allow us to test the respective effects of each type of predictor (personal and organizational) and each mediator (satisfaction of competence, relatedness, and autonomy) on psychological well-being. Our second purpose was to test the model on school counselors.

The French context of counseling needs to be explained to understand this study. As observed in Northern European countries (Hauge et al., 2019) like as Danemark (2003), several reorganizations have been implemented in France. However, the school system is different and separate from the adult system, and counselors are specifically trained for pupils and students by the French Ministry of Education and for adults by the French Ministry of Labor. France has

experienced a profound reorganizing of career guidance through a professionalization strategy and the formation of independent youth career guidance centers for pupils and students. French national strategy for school counselors called “psychologists in national education” was to merge guidance programs for pupils and students at all levels, and counselors are psychologists. In accordance with the decree of 2017 regarding psychologists in the national education system, two professions were merged: school psychologists who counseled preschool and elementary school students, and psychological counselors who provided guidance to high school and university students. Since then, psychologists specializing in education, development, and learning have been working in the preschools and elementary schools. Psychologists specializing in education, development, and counseling in school and vocational guidance work not only in information and guidance centers but also in secondary.

School counselors, in France are employed by the national board of education. This occupation combines the jobs of orientation counselors and school counselors. They specialize in "education, development and counselling in school, and vocational guidance" and are most have a degree in psychology. They are employed by information and guidance centers (3770 professionals in 450 centers) and work in the schools (middle schools and high schools for general and technological education, and vocational high schools, etc.). Their tools are tests, orientation reports, qualification resumés, interviews, meetings, and group interventions. They are responsible for providing guidance to young people, supporting young people who have dropped out of school, or guiding adults undergoing vocational retraining. They also support school staff and teachers in their information and guidance tasks.

Because of their relational job, counselors and psychologists may be exposed to psychological, cognitive, emotional, and relational risks (e.g., burnout: Lim et al., 2010). In France, the counselling professions cover a diversity of practices (Guichard & Pouyaud, 2020). To our knowledge, the literature on psychosocial counselors’ risks is scarce and only a few studies have

explored counselors' well-being in relation to career success (Dose et al., 2018) or counselors' need satisfaction in relation to organizational support and career success (Dose et al., 2019a). In France, the consulting profession has evolved in terms of numerous constraints (Pouyaud & Cohen-Scali, 2016). Support counsellors are weakened in terms of their psychological health (working hours of national education psychologists, fragmented activities, etc.) and their professional fulfilment (Bernaud et al., 2020; Bernaud et al., 2007). Regularly exposed to numerous role conflicts (Viviers, 2016), emotional dissonance, and institutional and societal changes, workforce integration counselors and guidance counselors are known to be subject to burnout (Machado et al., 2015).

By testing need satisfaction as a mediator between career counseling self-efficacy, self-esteem, leader-member exchange (LMX) and well-being, our contributions to the literature are both theoretical and practical. Firstly, the literature is rather sparse concerning counselors' health, and we do not know if their occupational activities can satisfy the three psychological needs. Secondly, links between the mediating effects of psychological needs and career counseling self-efficacy, self-esteem, and well-being have not been studied much. Thirdly, many studies on psychological needs do not examine the specific links between each need and other personal and organizational variables. Indeed, it is important to understand whether specific PNs are levers of well-being at work. Fourthly, to our knowledge, two self-related variables, career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem, are rarely tested simultaneously. It is theoretically and practically important to understand the specific and complementary effects of career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem. Fifthly, although some professionals who benefit from a great deal of autonomy (teachers, school counselors, psychologists) may suffer at work and develop burnout (Ross, Altmaier, & Russell, 1989); there is a lack of research on this issue within the population school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Here, we report a study to help fill this gap.

### **Psychological Well-Being at Work and Psychological Need Satisfaction**

Individual and organizational resources satisfy psychological needs (PNs). The impact of organizational factors on psychological needs and their relations to well-being are well known (Gillet et al., 2012; Schuler et al., 2013; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). A meta-analysis by Van den Broeck et al. (2016) showed that satisfaction of the three psychological needs at work plays a prominent role in well-being. According to self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), psychological need satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is crucial and necessary to personal balance and well-being. The need for autonomy refers to the need of having the choice of and control over one's own actions, to the freedom to actualize behaviors, to organize one's occupational activities, and to make decisions (deCharms, 1968). The need for competence (White, 1959) relates to the need to have the necessary resources and capabilities, to be effective, and to experience that one is able to successfully carry out tasks and meet performance objectives. The need for relatedness is satisfied when a person feels related to others (in the immediate, occupational circle), receives esteem, recognition, consideration and valuation from others, and develops and maintains secure and respectful relationships with others. Numerous studies have shown that satisfaction of the three PNs brings vigor and vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) and self-concordance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Need satisfaction is a motivational basis of performance and well-being. A deficiency in any one of the three needs can dramatically diminish well-being. It is important, however, to distinguish need satisfaction and well-being. Within the framework of the optimal approach to psychological well-being (Laguardia & Ryan, 2000), psychological well-being at work (PWBW) corresponds to a positive individual experience where the worker exhibits the best of him/herself. Psychological well-being at work is not an offshoot or subcategory of well-being, but a complex independent, and dynamic element that enables the individual and his or her relationship to work to be understood. Need satisfaction does not refer directly to well-being but to satisfaction of psychological needs. Again need satisfaction is not a subcategory of well-being but a path or a necessity for achieving

well-being in the eudaimonic perspective, where well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Empirical studies have shown that PN satisfaction is a mediator between job resources (i.e., climate, task autonomy, positive feedback, etc.) and psychological well-being or vigour (respectively, Desrumaux et al., 2015; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). For example, satisfaction of the psychological needs for competence and relatedness fully mediates the links between job climate and psychological well-being at work (Desrumaux et al., 2015). Satisfaction of all three needs mediates the relationship between transformational leadership, and job satisfaction and commitment (Kovjanic et al., 2012) and satisfaction of the three needs mediates the links between self-esteem and LMX, and well-being (Dose et al., 2019b; Molix & Nichols, 2013). Based on the above considerations, the present study was aimed at determining the conditions under which the satisfaction of certain needs can act as a mediator between certain predictors and psychological well-being. Our first hypothesis was as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Satisfaction of the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy is related to psychological well-being at work.

Self-efficacy and self-esteem are considered along with neuroticism and locus of control to be indicators of a common core construct (Judge et al., 2002). Specifically, self-efficacy is linked to self-esteem (Judge et al., 2000). Despite their conceptual differences, self-efficacy and self-esteem both bring individuals the psychological strength to view the work environment, their supervisor, and their colleagues more positively, and to respond in an appropriate manner. These two facets self-influence well-being in distinct manners (Lent, 2004). First, workers with high self-esteem and high self-efficacy feel wellness and less vulnerable in difficult circumstances at work (e.g., adversity, bullying, etc.) because they can rely on positive psychological strengths and abilities (Diener et al., 1999). Second, individuals with high self-efficacy and high self-esteem are more likely to perceive job demands (e.g., challenging tasks, help demands, educational, rehabilitation, emotional demands)



as a positive purpose or as a challenge rather than as a difficulty or threat. Consequently, well-being would result from both of these facets of the self and from this positive vision of the social and work environment.

### **Psychological Well-Being at Work, Career Counseling Self-Efficacy, and Needs Satisfaction**

Self-efficacy can be defined as the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy plays a key role in the development of human achievements and motivations. One particularly interesting approach has involved the extension of Bandura’s (1997) general social-cognitive theory to the study of counselor development (Lent et al., 1998). Bandura’s work strongly supports the notion that humans’ behaviors, their motivations as well as the results of their actions (success or failure) depend on their self-efficacy (1989, 1997). Indeed, self-efficacy makes a difference in how people think, feel, and act. In terms of feeling, high self-efficacy facilitates cognitive processes, performance, anticipation, effort, and persistence. Self-efficacy and satisfaction of the need for competence are conceptually distinct. Satisfaction of the need for competence refers to the desire to interact effectively with the environment and to feel that one can implement one’s capabilities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this way, an individual’s need for competence is met when the individual is able to apply his or her skills and abilities to perform a task in accordance with his or her abilities, and to achieve the expected results (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Satisfaction of the need for competence should not be confused with the a priori belief in its self-efficacy, nor with one’s actual level of skills. In particular, career counseling self-efficacy is specific to counseling activities.

Some researchers have conceptualized a generalized sense of self-efficacy that refers to a broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Sherer et al., 1982). However, self-efficacy can be seen as being either task-specific or domain-specific. A variety of studies and measures of self-efficacy are

adapted to specific jobs including educational, social, and medical. In the area of counseling, studies of counselor self-efficacy have focused on counselor-trainees' perceived capabilities regarding both general (e.g., Larson et al., 1992) and specific forms of counseling (e.g. career counseling: O'Brien et al., 1997; counselor activity self-efficacy scales: Lent, Hill, & Hoffman, 2003). For these authors, career counseling self-efficacy covers emotional-social competencies ... and career competencies (O'Brien et al., 1997, p. 21). In the context of professional counseling, counselor self-efficacy refers to the beliefs these professionals have about their ability to adopt behaviors related to counselling. Counselling-specific feelings of personal effectiveness are related to positive affects during counselling (Lent et al., 2003). Consequently, an appropriate measure of career counseling self-efficacy should include feeling of efficacy concerning multiple competencies that are engaged in effective career counseling. O'Brien et al. (1997, pp. 23-24) retained sub-dimensions such as *“therapeutic process and alliance skills, vocational assessment and interpretation skills, multicultural competence skills, current trends in the world of work, ethics, and career research”*. These sub-dimensions were chosen for the study.

In organizational research, self-efficacy is linked to leadership (Chen & Bliese, 2002). Reviewing this literature, Larson and Daniels (1998) concluded that existing measures of counselor self-efficacy correlate positively with indexes of counselor performance and developmental level, with more experienced counselors reporting higher counseling-related self-efficacy than do those with less experience. General self-efficacy is known to be related to psychological well-being (Schwerdtfeger et al., 2008; Soysa & Wilcomb, 2015). Karademas (2006) reported that optimism partially mediates the relationships of self-efficacy and social support to well-being. In counseling research, counselor self-efficacy has been shown to correlate positively with satisfaction, and negatively with anxiety, relative to the counseling role (Larson & Daniels, 1998). In these studies, well-being was not directly measured, but their results on its negative effects on health can open a

new and unexplored avenue of research that addresses whether career counseling self-efficacy is substantially predictive of well-being. These studies thus led us to set forth the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Satisfaction of the three PNs will mediate the relationship between career counseling self-efficacy and psychological well-being at work.

### **Psychological Well-Being at Work, Self-Esteem, and Need Satisfaction**

Self-esteem refers to an individual's view of his or her own value as a person (Coopersmith, 1967), or "the individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality" (Rosenberg et al., 1995, p. 141). As a personal resource, self-esteem has been conceptualized as an outcome, a motive, and a buffer, but this personal factor has rarely been examined simultaneously with psychological needs and well-being. For example, Makikangas and Kinnunen (2003) found that low levels of self-esteem and optimism had a direct negative effect on emotional exhaustion and mental distress among male employees, but did not look at whether it also affects well-being. Self-esteem, as an indicator of one's eligibility for social inclusion, is a necessary ingredient in psychological well-being because it maintains both personal balance and balance at work (Leary et al., 1995). The effects of self-esteem on well-being can be explained, firstly, by the fact that higher self-esteem generates greater appreciation of one's work and social environment (e.g., it generates protective positive affect such as feeling challenged rather than threatened); and secondly, by the fact that self-esteem can facilitate social relationships and reciprocal feelings in interactions. A French study by Dose et al., (2019b) focused on 224 counselors employment counselors (for adults looking seeking employment) working in a French national employment office. The mediation model tested (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that satisfaction of each of the three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) mediated the links between self-esteem and LMX as explanatory variables, and well-being. Another study by Molix and Nichols (2013) showed that psychological needs played a mediator role between esteem and, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

Accordingly, we hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 3:* Satisfaction of the three PNs will mediate the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being at work.

### **Psychological Well-Being at Work, Leader-Member Exchange, and Need Satisfaction**

Within the theoretical framework of social exchange (Blau, 1964; Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Cook et al., 2013) and taking into account the different forms of perceived exchanges, it seems crucial to gain an understanding of leader-member exchanges and leader support for school counselors. Plausibly, social support may represent an important means of developing well-being among school counselors and thereby preventing burnout (Ross et al., 1989).

In organizations, leaders exert a facilitating role, offering the employee the possibility of blossoming and working in an optimal way. Reflecting the direct, local, and interpersonal exchange between the leader and the member (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), LMX is a measure of the overall quality of the work relationship between supervisors and their subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and focuses on the separate dyadic relationships that develop between leaders and each of their subordinates (Liden et al., 1997). According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995, p. 238), “*LMX is both transactional and transformational: it begins as transactional social exchange and evolves into transformational social exchange*”. Concretely, the directors of the counseling centers we contacted (all of whom were former counselors) play an important role. Indeed, they manage teams of school counselors and support young counselors in their activities to the extent that they allow for an exchange of experience (transactional exchange). The trusting relationships thus established evolve towards exchanges of good technical methods (transformational exchange). These relationships guide counselors in line with their specific needs and difficulties within the schools or in the context of certain counseling activities. Kovjanic et al. (2012) showed that need satisfaction is indeed a central mechanism behind transformational leadership.

LMX is known to be a factor of well-being (Atkinson et al., 2016; Borgonovi et al., 2014; Sparr, & Sonnentag, 2008). Ross et al.'s (1989) study among school counselors from the staff of university counseling centers showed that social support from supervisors and colleagues was associated with lower levels of burnout. Among counselors, the effects of POS on counselors' subjective and objective success was mediated by PN satisfaction, except for objective career success via relatedness satisfaction (Dose et al., 2019a). Among various samples of workers, Gillet et al. (2012) found that support for autonomy by one's supervisor independently predicted satisfaction of the three needs, which in turn predicted psychological well-being. On the basis of the links reported between support and need satisfaction (Desrumaux et al., 2015; Dose et al., 2019a; Dose et al., 2019b; Gillet et al., 2012) and the links between social support and well-being (Gagné et al., 2003; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009), we formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4:* Satisfaction of the PNs plays a mediating role between LMX and psychological well-being at work.

## **Study Aims**

The present study was aimed at testing our seven hypotheses using a multivariate approach that should allow us to evaluate the respective effects of each type of predictor (career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem as personal predictors; LMX as an organizational predictor) and each mediator (satisfaction of competence, relatedness, and autonomy needs) on psychological well-being at work. We tested the relevance of these determinants of psychological well-being at work on a sample of school counselors, a professional category known to be subject to risks and to be prone to a series of stress-related disorders. The results of our study, long-awaited in this profession, could thus help uncover some promising avenues for prevention and intervention.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants were two hundred and thirty-five French school counselors working in public counseling centers for French middle schools or high schools. They consisted of 29 men and 206 women of various ages ( $M = 39.86$  years,  $SD = 10.56$ ). They worked either full-time (90%) or part-time (10%). The number of years of seniority at work also varied ( $M = 12.50$ ,  $SD = 10.47$ ), with an average of 10 years ( $SD = 9.10$ ) of seniority at the current job.

The researcher first obtained the authorization of the directors of the counseling centers. Then the participants were contacted via the centers. The online questionnaire was self-administered by participants on a voluntary basis. An informed consent form specified the objectives of the study the nature of the participation, a guarantee of anonymity, the right to withdraw, the management of confidentiality, and the monitoring of data and publications. The consent form was filled out just before the questionnaire. Advisors in other fields (HR, occupational training, job placement, etc.) were excluded from the sample.

## **Materials and Procedure**

Participants, contacted at work, received the digital version of a questionnaire that they could fill out online. All data was collected from counselors working in 39 French public counseling centers located in the northernmost region Northern France (Hauts-de-France). Counselors were recruited by mail individually at their workplace in 2017. Each one counseled students from several middle or high schools in that region. A total of 235 French counselors from these 39 public counseling centers answered the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of five scales of 61 subject items, and 20 sociodemographic variables (age, sex, seniority, etc.). The participants filled out the questionnaire using seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). The materials were administered in French. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  exceeded .74 for all study scales, indicating that the scales had satisfactory internal consistency. In order to minimize bias and to neutralize the impact of the

combination of these questionnaires, two versions of the questionnaire (A and B) were employed with different scale-presentation orders: the first (Version A) of the six scales was reversed to obtain the second order (Version B). We also varied the instructions in order to minimize response biases (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

*Leader-Member Exchange.* LMX was measured using Graen et al.'s (1982) seven-item LMX scale (e.g., *My manager recognizes my accomplishments and my potential*). Meta-analytic empirical research has shown that the LMX 7 provides the soundest psychometric properties and the highest correlations with outcomes among all available LMX instruments (Gerstner & Day, 1997). The seven items were presented as Likert scales with response alternatives ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .92.

*Career counseling self-efficacy (CCSE).* O'Brien et al.'s (1997)'s career-counseling self-efficacy scale initially included 25 items (e.g., *Provide support for a client's implementation of her/his career goals*) with 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The career counseling self-efficacy scale (CCSES) was used because it is specifically related to counseling activities and is used for all types of counselors (including school counselors) and is more suited than the COSE (Larson et al., 1992) the oldest scale assessing confidence in performing the basic microskills necessary for general counseling interventions. After a factor analysis with principal axis factoring and a Promax oblique solution (Steger et al., 2012) followed by confirmatory analyses, the final model of the French CCSES (Dose, 2018) with 10 items yielded acceptable fit indices. Cronbach's alpha was .88.

*Self-esteem.* Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (1979) included 10 items (e.g., *I feel that I have a number of good qualities*) rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*agree completely*). Cronbach's alpha was .87.

*Satisfaction of the three needs.* Satisfaction of the three PNs was measured using nine items from a scale originally developed in French by Gillet et al. (2008). The items were contextualized here

with the phrase “At work”. Gillet et al. (2008) provided strong evidence of the factorial structure, construct validity, and internal consistency of this scale. The French version of the adapted and validated scale for the work environment has been validated and used with various types of workers (Gillet et al., 2019; Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Participants were asked to rate 12 items on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*totally agree*): four items on the need for autonomy (e.g., *I often can give my opinion about the planning of the tasks I have to do*), four items on the need for competence (e.g., *Often I feel very competent*), and four items on the need for relatedness ( $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., *Often, I feel a lot of sympathy for people with whom I interact*). Cronbach's alpha was .91 for the three needs, .82 for the need for autonomy, .88 for the need for competence, and .74 for the need for relatedness.

*Well-being at work.* Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie's (2012) measure of psychological well-being at work can be conceptualized through five sub-dimensions, namely, interpersonal fit at work, thriving at work, feeling of competency at work, desire for involvement at work, and perceived recognition at work. (e.g., *Recently at my job, a smile comes easily to me*). The participants rated the 25 items using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .95.

## **Results**

### **Statistical Analysis**

In a preliminary analysis, we examined the descriptive data (means, standard deviations, correlations) and tested the structural equation model using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. A path model was tested using PLS-SEM (Tenenhaus et al., 2005) with Smart PLS software, version 3.2.7 (Ringle et al., 2015).

### **Preliminary Analysis**



The means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations (calculated with SPSS, Version 20 software) are presented in Table 1. The highest means appeared for self-esteem,  $M = 5.42/7$ ,  $SD = .97$ , and career counseling self-efficacy,  $M = 5.41/7$ ,  $SD = .86$ . The lowest means were found for satisfaction of the need for competence,  $M = 5.01/7$ ,  $SD = .98$ . Examining the correlation matrix, out of the 28 tested correlations, 25 were significant and went in the expected direction, and 21 exceeded 0.30.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Leader-Member Exchange	—						
2. Career counseling self-efficacy	.31**	—					
3. Self-esteem	.19**	.06	—				
4. Need Satisfaction for autonomy	.41**	.35**	.34**	—			
5. Need Satisfaction for relatedness	.37**	.42**	.37**	.75**	—		
6. Need Satisfaction for competence	.30**	.49**	.54**	.62**	.72**	—	
7. Well-Being at Work	.40**	.53**	.48	.64**	.73**	.81**	—
Means	5.05	5.41	5.42	5.35	5.31	5.01	5.20
Standard deviations	1.26	.86	.97	.88	.76	.98	.87
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.92	.88	.87	.82	.74	.88	.95

**Table 1**

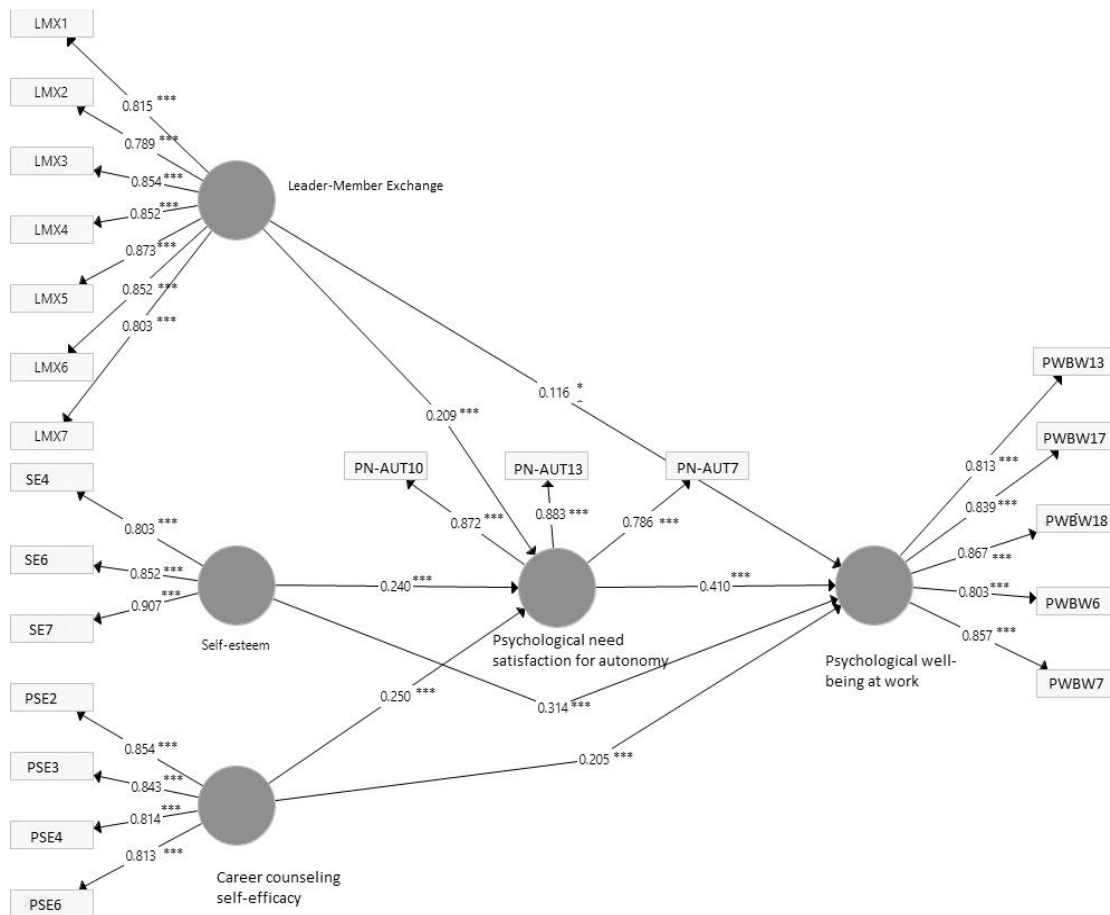
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Study Variables*

*Note.*  $N = 235$ . \*\*.  $p < .01$ ; mean scores were based on mean item scores

### **Modelling (PLS-SEM) of Psychological Well-Being at Work**

In the PLS-SEM modelling framework, it is necessary to evaluate the measurement model (Esposito-Vinzi et al., 2010; Tenenhaus & Esposito-Vinzi, 2005) and then the structural model. The  $R^2$  values for each dependent construct are also computed. The results are shown as path coefficients with their bias-corrected, accelerated-bootstrap (5000 resamples) 95% confidence interval (CI). The overall quality of the model is assessed by examining the quality of the measurement and structural models and also by examining  $R^2$ , SRMR (standardized root mean square residual), and NFI (normed fit index) (Hair et al., 2016).

The initial model with its seven latent variables, including three latent variables as mediating variables (satisfaction of the three psychological needs) obtained an  $R^2$  equal to .79 and an NFI equal to .59, which are unacceptable (Hooper et al., 2008), and an SRMR of .082, which is acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We enhanced Model 1 (Sarstedt et al., 2017) with PLS path-modelling methods (external loads, external weights, VIF). The final model allowed us to integrate one latent mediating variables. The final model — which included the latent variables related to satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, as well as CCSE, self-esteem and LMX — turned out to be the most suitable model, with the following fit indexes:  $R^2$  equal to .59, considered substantial (Chin, 1998); SRMR equal to .07, considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999); and NFI equal to .80, also considered acceptable (Hooper et al., 2008). Overall, this final model of psychological well-being at work validated the links and hypotheses except for the satisfaction of the need for relatedness and for competence (Figure 2).



**Figure 2**

*Structural Model PLS-PM of Psychological Well-Being at Work among French School Counselors*

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Evaluation of the Measure Model of Psychological Well-Being at Work

The final model PLS model of psychological well-being at work (Figure 2) included five latent constructs and 22 measures (manifest variables). In the PLS method, the Cronbach's alphas and Dillon-Goldstein's rho assess the reliability of the model. All values were above .07, so it is possible to verify unidimensionality. The principal component analysis indicated that all values were less than 1.

To validate the final model, we checked the composite reliability of each construct. To be satisfactory, every value must be greater than or equal to .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Composite reliability ranges from .80 to .95. The discriminant validity of each latent construct makes it possible to assess whether they are more related to its indicators than to the other latent variables in the model, based on AVE (average extracted variance). AVE must be greater than or equal to .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which was the case for the model. In addition, the individual values ranged from .70 to .73 and were less than .90, which makes it possible to establish the validity between two reflexive constructs by the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

### **Evaluation of the Model Structure of Psychological Well-Being at Work**

First, the collinearity values of the latent variables based on the variance inflation factor (VIF) indicated that there was no multicollinearity bias for in model ( $VIF < 5$ ). The final model explained 59% of psychological well-being at work, with fit indexes ( $R^2 = .59$ ) deemed substantial (Chin, 1998); SRMR was equal to .07, deemed acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999); and NFI was equal to .80, also deemed acceptable (Hooper et al., 2008) (Figure 2). LMX, CCSE, self-esteem, and satisfaction of the need for autonomy were significantly associated with psychological well-being at work. Stone-Geisser's (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974)  $Q^2$  coefficient, which assesses the quality of each structural equation, must be greater than 0. It is obtained using the blindfolding procedure of SmartPLS for a PLS-SEM. This approach systematically removes data points and provides a prediction of their original values, based on omission distance (D) recommended in the literature, i.e., between 5 and 12 (Hair et al., 2016). We chose a D-value of 7, as recommended by the software SmartPLS. The predictive relevance of the model across the  $Q^2$  for the different constructs was greater than zero ( $Q^2 = .52$  for well-being;  $Q^2 = .57$  for LMX;  $Q^2 = .46$  for CCSE;  $Q^2 = .42$  for self-esteem;  $Q^2 = .41$  for satisfaction of the need for autonomy).

The final model validated the significant paths between LMX, CCSE, SE, and PWBW, mediated by satisfaction of the need for autonomy. Table 2 illustrates the results.

**Table 2**

*Final Results of the Model: Total, Direct and Indirect Effects Between Paths of the Latent Variables LMX, PSE, SE, PNS-AUT, and Psychological Well-Being at Work*

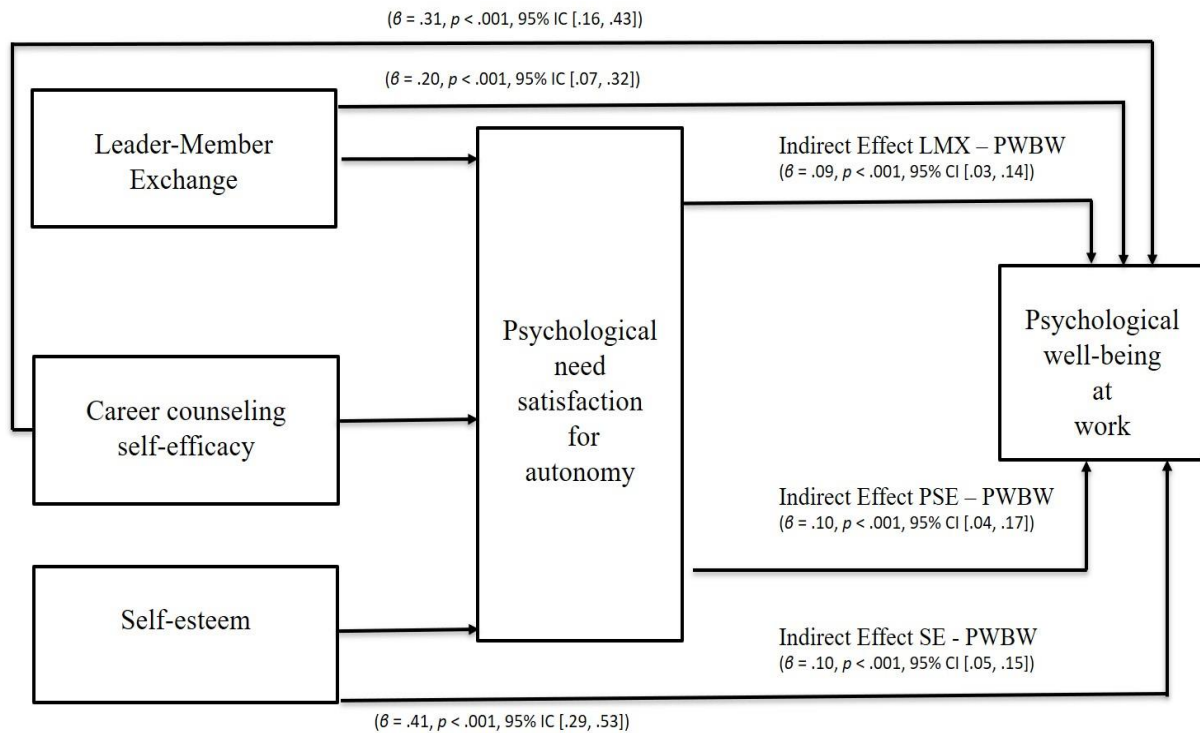
Total Effect					Direct Effect				Indirect Effect			
Paths between latent variables	Path Coefficient	T	p	IC (95%)	Path Coefficient	T	p	IC (95%)	Path Coefficient	T	p	CI (95%)
LMX -> PN-AUT	.21	3.31	.001	[.07, .33]	.21	3.31	.001	[.07, .33]				
LMX -> PWBW	.20	3.21	.001	[.07, .32]	.12	2.18	.05	[.01, .22]	.09	3.00	.001	[.03, .14]
PNS-AUT -> PWBW	.41	7.30	.001	[.29, .52]	.41	7.30	.001	[.29, .52]				
PSE -> PN-AUT	.25	3.55	.001	[.11, .38]	.25	3.55	.001	[.11, .38]				
PSE -> PWBW	.31	4.55	.001	[.16, .43]	.20	3.55	.001	[.09, .31]	.10	3.05	.001	[.04, .17]
SE -> PN-AUT	.24	3.91	.001	[.13, .35]	.24	3.91	.001	[.13, .35]				
SE -> PWBW	.41	6.60	.001	[.29, .53]	.31	5.43	.001	[.02, .42]	.10	3.60	.001	[.05, .15]

*Note.* LMX: Leader-Member Exchange; PN-AUT: Psychological need satisfaction for autonomy; PWBW: Psychological well-being at work; PSE: Career counseling self-efficacy; SE: Self-esteem; CI: Confidence interval.

These results (Table 2) showed that satisfaction of the need for autonomy ( $\beta = .41, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.29, .52]$ ) significantly explained well-being. LMX was significantly and directly linked to well-being ( $\beta = .12, p < .03, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01, .22]$ ) and to satisfaction of the need for autonomy ( $\beta = .21, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.07, .33]$ ). An indirect effect on well-being was significant ( $\beta = .09, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.03, .14]$ ). The total effect was also significant ( $\beta = .20, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.07, .32]$ ).

Career counseling self-efficacy had a direct effect on well-being ( $\beta = .20, 95\%, p < .001, \text{ CI } [.09, .31]$ ) and on satisfaction of the need for competence ( $\beta = .25, 95\%, p < .001, \text{ CI } [.11, .38]$ ). An indirect effect of counseling self-efficacy was significant for well-being ( $\beta = .08, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .12]$ ). The total effect was also significant ( $\beta = .10, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .27]$ ).

Self-esteem had a direct effect on well-being ( $\beta = .31, 95\%, p < .001, \text{ CI } [.02, .42]$ ) and to satisfaction of the need for competence ( $\beta = .24, 95\%, p < .001, \text{ CI } [.13, .35]$ ). An indirect effect on well-being was significant ( $\beta = .10, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, .15]$ ). The total effect was also significant ( $\beta = .41, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.29, .53]$ ).



**Figure 3**

*Model of Psychological Well-Being at Work among French School Counselors*

*Note.* LMX: Leader-Member Exchange; PWBW: Psychological well-being at work; PSE: Career counseling self-efficacy; SE: Self-esteem; CI: Confidence interval.

Thus, well-being was simultaneously directly linked to LMX, CCSE, and SE. Autonomy need had an indirect effect in the relationship between psychological well-being at work and LMX, CCSE, and SE.

## Discussion

Within the theoretical framework of social exchange (Blau, 1964; Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Cook et al., 2013) and taking into account the different forms of perceived exchanges, the present study aimed to determine whether social exchanges with leaders (LMX) affect well-being at work and if the effects of these kinds of exchanges on well-being are influenced by PN satisfaction. In this framework, our goals were to test the effects of two

personal factors (career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem) and one organizational factor (LMX) on psychological well-being among school counselors.

Overall, the present results confirm the relevance of the variables used to predict well-being. One contribution of this study is that it modelled the links between these variables using SEM, which makes it possible to better understand the complexity of dispositional and relational issues related to work, need satisfaction, and well-being, and provides a deductive logic to get closer to causal measures. Most of our research hypotheses were validated, and the explanatory variables and mediators proved relevant in that they accounted for a reliable amount of the variance in the psychological well-being of the school counselors. The results showed that there are both personal and organizational determinants of well-being.

Another contribution of this study is that it linked LMX exchanges with well-being. The lack of literature on these links has been underlined. As Inceoglu et al. (2018, p. 183) remarked, “in leadership research, employee well-being has either been treated as a secondary outcome... [and/or] ... has generally not been considered as an important outcome in and of itself”. Moreover, the main role of satisfaction of the need for autonomy was found to mediate school counselors’ well-being. These fundamental relationships between the need for autonomy and well-being has been stressed in the literature (e.g., Yu, Levesque-Bristol, & Maeda, 2018).

The personal factors (career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem) influenced well-being at work if the counselors could also feel that their need for autonomy was satisfied.

Our analysis of the effects of these factors on well-being partially validated Hypothesis 1 stating that satisfaction of the need for autonomy is related to well-being. Despite their conceptual and practical complementarities (Judge et al., 2000), self-efficacy and self-esteem seem to separately equip individuals with personal strength. The results showed that career counseling self-efficacy was positively related to satisfaction of the need



for autonomy and that it clearly contributed to the school counselors' well-being. It had both direct and indirect effects on well-being, and satisfaction of the need for autonomy mediated the relationship between career counseling self-efficacy and psychological well-being at work, thus validating Hypothesis 2.

The relationship between self-efficacy (particularly, career counseling self-efficacy) and well-being has rarely been examined; the literature has been more interested in the relationships between perceived self-efficacy and illness or stress. For example, self-efficacy has been shown to predict prevention of stress or burnout (Laugaa et al., 2008). In line with this, the present study confirmed that the reinforcement of career counseling self-efficacy is a real factor of positive health at work for counselors. The results concerning self-esteem partially confirmed (only for the need for autonomy) Hypothesis 3. Self-esteem was positively related to satisfaction of the need for autonomy but the needs for competence and relatedness did not mediate the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being at work.

Leader-member exchange has been the subject of numerous studies (Dulebohn et al., 2017; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Consistent with many studies (Atkinson et al., 2016; Borgonovi et al., 2014; Dose et al., 2019b; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008), our analysis confirmed that an organizational factor such as LMX can explain well-being. LMX was related here to satisfaction of the need for autonomy, and the analysis found direct and indirect links between LMX and well-being. The present study partially (only for the need for autonomy) confirmed Hypothesis 4 relating LMX to well-being at work. These results confirm the relations between LMX and well-being (Atkinson et al., 2016; Borgonovi et al., 2014; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008) and stress the importance of the need for autonomy as an intermediary facilitating the beneficial influence of LMX on counselors' well-being. Unlike authors (e.g., Kovjanic et al., 2012, for LMX) who have found

that satisfaction of each of the three PNs play mediating roles, we showed that the need-for-autonomy effect was a mediator but we did not find significant indirect effects of the need for competence or relatedness between the explanatory variables and well-being.

The importance of the need autonomy as a central mechanism could be based on two things. First, the effects of leader-member exchange, career counseling self-efficacy, and self-esteem on well-being may depend on the specific school counselor. Counselors visit many schools and come across different climates, procedures, and norms in the schools in which they work. This may reduce their autonomy to different extents. The organization, the teachers, and the principals may or may not follow their advice. Clarification of a counselor's role can influence LMX, as Sears and Hackett (2011) claimed. The possibility of mobilizing individual resources (career counseling self-efficacy and self-esteem) is therefore linked to the feeling of autonomy. Second, satisfaction of the need for autonomy may be a fundamental mechanism (Yu et al., 2018) in achieving well-being because the focus of this need is freedom and flexibility. This process may be reinforced by the leader as support for autonomy. A meta-analysis by Slemp et al. (2018) confirmed that leader support for autonomy facilitates self-determined motivation in employees, potentially enabling well-being.

### **Practical Implications**

The well-being of employees at work strongly depends on their links with leaders and organizations (Dulebohn et al., 2017; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Unlike our previous research, which focused on employment counselors (Dose et al., 2019a; Dose et al., 2019b), the present study measured relationships between support and well-being for school counselors. In particular, it is important to develop exchanges between school counselors and their nationwide organization (French public counseling centers), as well as the relationships between these professionals and the organizations where they work (middle schools and high

schools). This study underlined the importance of helping to reinforce employees' interpersonal relations within the organization and more specifically, of developing transactional and transformational support (Atkinson et al., 2016; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The fit between the professionals' occupational demands and those of the organization influences well-being in terms of personal satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000).

At the level of leader support, the leader can help counselors improve their practices, organization, and skills. A management style that supports the psychological well-being of school counselors should facilitate time management, methods control, and autonomy, as well as the freedom to develop new skills (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Regular recognition of effort, skills, and work, and the promotion of ideas and creativity increase self-efficacy and self-esteem. Thus, training to develop self-esteem and the feeling of self-efficacy is to be encouraged because these factors are vectors of the satisfaction of the need for autonomy and well-being. Support by supervisors should also be encouraged because it influences employees' adaptive capacities (Charbonnier-Voirin & El Akremi, 2011). Supervisors can help counsellors assess their well-being and estimate their personal resources for managing stress (Thompson et al., 2014). Positive feedback to counsellors should also be given through the head teachers and the persons in charge of the information and orientation center in view on developing counselors' a sense of recognition and well-being at work.

### **Implications for Research**

The research literature has pointed out a few other antecedent variables of well-being, such as optimism, resilience, and the sense of social isolation. These other personal variables could be included in future studies. A future study should also simultaneously address the negative pole of health (stress, burnout) as well as looking at specific links between the explanatory variables and the needs within the specific dimensions of well-being (interpersonal fit at

work, thriving at work, feeling of competency at work, desire for involvement at work, and perceived recognition at work). Fischer et al. (2017) emphasized the role of time effects in the leadership process. We need to develop a theoretical view on time effects with repeated measures to meticulously test the links between, self-esteem, self-efficacy, leadership behavior and well-being at work.

### **Limitations**

Firstly, our cross-sectional design did not allow us to draw conclusions about the causality operating between the explanatory variables and psychological well-being. Secondly, all data were self-reported, in such a way that socially desirable responses may have increased the common variance between responses (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Further studies would ideally include data from the educational context to improve construct validity. Also, experience at the workplace and data on coping with professional demands would be valuable. Thirdly, the questionnaire was not specific enough to grasp school counselors' occupational life (e.g., counseling activities; interactions with schools' directors, and teachers' and leaders' roles). Additional measures (interviews or repeated measures) are needed, specifically concerning the relationships between counselors, pupils, teachers, and parents, whose interactions and demands are likely to affect well-being. A study by Tatar (2009) showed that teachers reported receiving a relatively high degree of emotional and informational input from school counselors. It is therefore useful to understand how such input impacts school counselors' well-being. It is also possible that the diversity and the number of schools in which the school counselor intervenes have an effect on well-being. These characteristics of schools should be controlled in a future study. In the present study sample, women far outnumbered men. This appears to correctly reflect the national (French) sex ratio among school counselors, but from a statistical point of view, it would be necessary

to over-sample males to increase the power, external validity, and generalization of the results.

## **Conclusion**

Attending to the possibility of satisfying the need for autonomy appears to facilitate the emergence of counselors' well-being. Moreover, exchanges and ongoing relationships at work can act as resources, in such a way that positive feedback both satisfies needs and fosters feedback, and the recipient's willingness to respond to that feedback, with positive behavior, as predicted by social-exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Cook et al., 2013). Finally, our study contributes to the literature in showing the relevance of, on the one hand, LMX for employees' well-being, and on the other hand, the relevance of self-esteem and career counseling self-efficacy as personal factors that could be improved by positive relationships at work and well-being on the job.

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