

# Perceptions of leader interpersonal emotion regulation: Daily and longitudinal consequences for employees

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## Abstract

Interpersonal emotion regulation occurs during the workday between leaders and their employees. For example, an employee may perceive that their leader makes them feel better (“affect-improving” interpersonal emotion regulation). The current study examines short- and long-term benefits of perceived leader daily affect-improving. Positive affect (as an affective reaction) and perceived leader effectiveness (as an outcome of an inferential process) serve as daily outcomes and explanatory mechanisms for longer-term job satisfaction and trust in the leader, respectively. We suggest that when employees already start the day with high positive affect, or affect-improving is perceived as inauthentic, the associations are weaker. A daily diary study ( $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ ) showed that perceived affect-improving from one’s leader benefited daily positive affect and perceived leader effectiveness. Start-of-day positive affect was not a significant moderator, but perceptions of inauthenticity weakened the relationship between affect-improving and leader effectiveness. A longitudinal investigation ( $N = 109$ ) showed that employees who generally experienced higher after-work positive affect and leader effectiveness during the diary part, associated with affect-improving, reported

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higher longer-term job satisfaction and trust in the leader 12 weeks after the diary study, highlighting the benefits of affect-improving in the long run.

#### KEYWORDS

affect-improving, diary study, interpersonal emotion regulation, leader effectiveness, longitudinal study, positive affect

## INTRODUCTION

It is the end of the working day, and your leader walks into your office. She asks how you are and offers warm words that make you feel good. This can be a meaningful experience. Such regulatory behaviors aimed at changing others' emotions can be regarded as *interpersonal emotional regulation* (IER). In the workplace, leaders have a powerful influence on employees' emotions (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016) and could, therefore, be important agents of IER. Specifically, employees may perceive that leaders behave in ways that make them feel better, which is termed *affect-improving* in the IER literature. Recent studies have demonstrated the importance of leader affect-improving for employee job performance (Holman & Niven, 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020). However, little is known about daily fluctuations in perceptions of leader affect-improving.

Leader–employee relationships have daily dynamics (Kelemen et al., 2020), and workdays differ in terms of situational demands and affective states. Thus, employees' perceptions of leader affect-improving are unlikely to be constant across days. For example, employees may start their workday with different levels of positive affect (Sonnentag et al., 2025), and their need for leader affect-improving may differ (Battaglini et al., 2023). In addition, experiences of affect-improving are not isolated but may accumulate from day to day, predicting longer-term changes in employees' job satisfaction and trust in the leader.

Still, the current literature about leader affect-improving (e.g., Holman & Niven, 2019) focuses on a generalized experience instead of a fluctuating and enduring one, making it necessary to include a daily perspective in IER research. Moreover, the current focus is on the agent's perspective, in our case, the leader (e.g., the agent should identify the need for IER, set a goal, select a strategy, and implement it; Niven & López-Pérez, 2025). However, it is particularly how the employee, as the target of the regulation process, feels and perceives affect-improving that determines its consequences (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Little et al., 2016). For example, the leader might have good intentions, but if their regulatory behaviors are perceived as inauthentic, they might not be beneficial (van Kleef & Côté, 2022). This means that employee feelings (state positive affect) and perceptions of affect-improving as inauthentic can act as important moderators. In our study, we shift the focus from a generalized and static agent-focused perspective to a daily fluctuating, target-focused perspective that also considers longer-term consequences and boundary conditions.

Theoretically, we apply assumptions from social models of emotions (e.g., Parkinson, 1996; van Kleef, 2009) to Niven et al.'s (2009) IER framework. Van Kleef's social model of emotions (van Kleef, 2009) proposes a dual-path process: One path is the *affective reaction* process, in which affect-improving fosters short-term positive affect. Importantly, we suggest that short-

term positive affect can accumulate, in turn predicting long-term job satisfaction. The second path is the *inferential process* in which employees use information available through fluctuations in leaders' affect-improving to infer evaluations of their leader (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002), fostering daily leader effectiveness. Short-term perceptions of leader effectiveness may also accumulate, predicting longer-term enhanced trust (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). Integrating both paths with moderators on each path allows us to explain both the processes (affective and inferential) and the conditions under which leader affect-improving translates into short- and long-term outcomes. We test our model with a daily diary study, complemented by a longitudinal investigation. Our conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

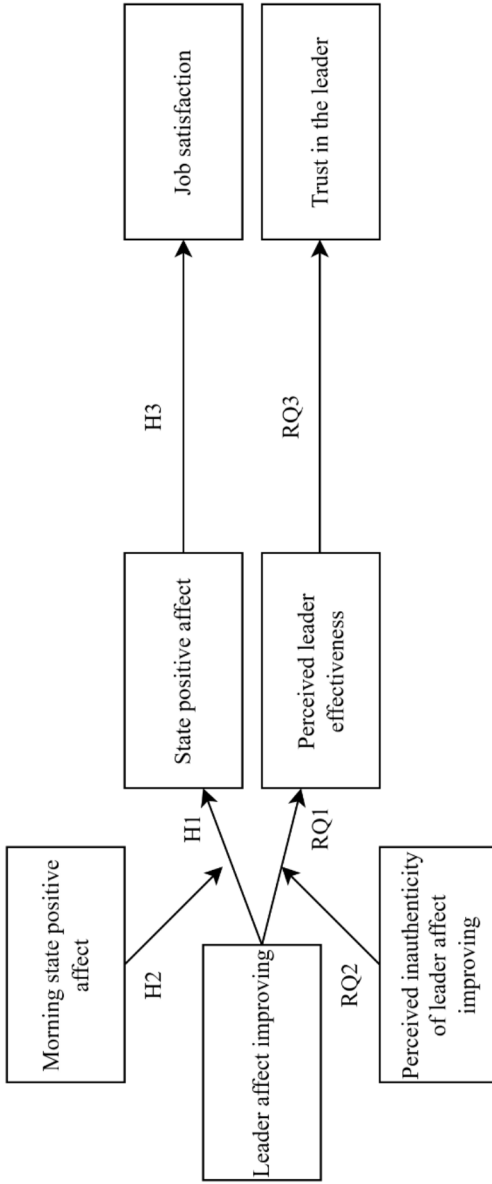
We contribute to the IER literature in three important ways. First, we focus on leader affect-improving as a fluctuating phenomenon and test its short-term, daily consequences. The daily perspective is critical because it more closely captures the phenomenon of being the target of leader affect-improving as it would occur in real life, making it more accurate than the previous static approach (“in general, my leader makes me feel good”). A generalized approach cannot identify the daily experiences of leader affect-improving and therefore overlooks the short-term consequences and longer-term processes stemming from them. This spotlight is highlighted further considering the recent focus on leadership as a dynamic phenomenon (Kelemen et al., 2020). Leaders behave differently from day to day, and employees' perceptions of those fluctuations, in turn, predict variations in daily consequences (e.g., daily positive affect, Kelemen et al., 2020; or perceptions of leader effectiveness, Junça-Silva & Caetano, 2023).

Second, we add a longer-term perspective, acknowledging that many instances of perceived leader affect-improving might drive meaningful longer-term changes in employees (Niven & López-Pérez, 2025). Specifically, we look at a longer term relational outcome (i.e., trust in the leader) and a longer-term attitudinal outcome (i.e., job satisfaction). Complementing short-term processes with longer-term outcomes underlines the relevance of accumulated daily experiences of leader affect-improving in the long run (see Wang et al. [2025] for a similar approach to IER). Methodologically, adding a longer-term perspective is a rarely used advantage of daily diary studies that allows for better understanding of the periods in which psychological processes unfold and how sustainable day-level effects are over time (Neubauer et al., 2023).

Third, we look at the benefits of affect-improving from the target's (i.e., the employee) perspective (Reeck et al., 2016). The IER literature mainly focuses on the agent (e.g., the leader) and the process of IER (e.g., the agent's motives; Niven, 2016; or team processes; Madrid et al., 2019). However, for IER to be influential, employees' subjective perceptions are critical. If affect-improving is unnoticed, unneeded, or perceived as inauthentic, its benefits may be hindered (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). We thus test positive affect and perceived inauthenticity of affect-improving as critical moderators that might determine when affect-improving does not work (Niven et al., 2019). Specifically, we suggest that affect-improving is hindered when it is not needed (i.e., when positive affect is high and thus there is reduced need for improvement) and when it is perceived as inauthentic. Overall, we underline the importance of examining the target's subjective perceptions in IER research.

## **SOCIAL MODELS OF EMOTIONS APPLIED TO THE IER FRAMEWORK**

The broad term emotion regulation refers to “the process of initiating, maintaining, modulating, or changing the occurrence, intensity, or duration of internal feeling states” (Eisenberg



Hypothesis 1-2 (H1-H2) and Research Question 1-2 (RQ1-RQ2) are tested on the within person level in the diary study. Hypothesis 3 (H3) and Research Question 3 (RQ3) are tested longitudinally after 12 weeks on the between person level.

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

et al., 2000, p. 137). Most research has focused on intrapersonal emotion regulation (regulating own emotions), but individuals can also regulate others' emotions and be regulated by others (Gross, 2015). According to Niven et al. (2009) IER framework, an agent (a person who attempts to regulate others' emotions, e.g., the leader) tries to change the experienced emotions of a target (the person whose feelings are subject to the regulatory efforts, e.g., the employee) in different ways. The processes by which IER influences the target include changed emotions, attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors (Gross, 2015; Niven, 2017).

Niven et al. (2009) identified several dimensions of IER inspired by the general emotion regulation literature (Gross, 2015). A central dimension is the valence of affect, according to which two main strategies are suggested. When engaging in *affect-improving*, the agent shows acceptance (e.g., by making the target feel special) and tries to improve the other person's feelings and attitudes (e.g., by making them smile). When engaging in *affect-worsening*, the agent tries to make the target feel worse through rejection and negative engagement (e.g., complaining about the other person's behavior). We focus on affect-improving as is commonly performed in IER research (e.g., Holman & Niven, 2019; Niven et al., 2012), considering that situations in which leaders deliberately try to make employees feel bad (i.e., affect-worsening) are less common. Moreover, affect-improving can have positive downstream consequences on employees' well-being and attitudinal outcomes and, thus, is particularly important in employees' daily lives. For example, leader affect-improving is positively related to employee performance via positive affect (Holman & Niven, 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020). On the team level, leaders' attempts to improve their team members' emotions are positively related to team innovation via the team's positive affective tone (Madrid et al., 2019), and coworkers also regulate each other's emotions (Kunst et al., 2025).

We integrate ideas from social models of emotions to the IER framework (Parkinson, 1996; van Kleef, 2009). Van Kleef (2009) proposed two pathways in his social model of emotions: an affective path in which one person's emotion directly affects the other person's emotion (e.g., via emotional contagion processes) and an inferential path that relies more on appraisals and inferential processing. We suggest that perceived affect-improving also relates to employees' affective states and attitudes through these two paths.

Employees quickly "catch" leaders' emotions (Sy et al., 2005) and make inferences based on leader emotion regulation acts (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). Importantly, although studies on IER "still fall short of encapsulating the dynamic processes involved in many interpersonal ER encounters" (Troth et al., 2018, p. 534), we suggest that perceptions of IER is a dynamic phenomenon. We base our view on the literature on leadership dynamics (Kelemen et al., 2020; McClean et al., 2019; Ohly & Gochmann, 2017). Specifically, this literature suggests that not only general leader behaviors but also daily ones predict employee outcomes (Kelemen et al., 2020), highlighting that daily fluctuations in leader IER behaviors can affect employees even when they are perceived for a relatively short time (e.g., during a single day). In addition, literature on IER suggests that IER and its consequences are affected by the context (Battaglini et al., 2023) which can differ from one day to the next (Sonnentag et al., 2025). Regarding the frequency of IER, studies found that IER takes place in around 50% of people's daily interactions or every other day (Liu et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2023). These findings highlight the fluctuating nature of IER. As workdays differ from each other, a focus on daily fluctuations in the perceptions of leader affect-improving is needed (Sonnentag et al., 2025).

## The affective reaction path

As suggested by social models of emotions, we propose an affective reaction path in response to perceptions of leader affect-improving (Van Kleef, 2009). Similarly, according to Affective Events Theory (AET), affective events are the proximal causes of changes in affect (Weiss & Beal, 2005), and such events are often facilitated by other people (Parkinson, 1996). Social models of emotions suggest that in the affective reaction path, there will be a quick and sometimes even automatic affective reaction to others' emotions and emotion regulation behaviors (Côté et al., 2013; van Kleef, 2009). Applying these ideas to Niven et al.'s (2009) IER framework, affect-improving (despite not being restricted to a single event) could be considered a type of affective event that creates a relatively quick positive affective reaction because it can change, maintain, or shape others' affect positively.

Positive affect following perceived affect-improving might be especially apparent in the case of leader-originated affect-improving because leaders strongly influence their employees' emotions (Côté et al., 2013). Indeed, the positive relationship between leaders' affect-improving and positive affect was empirically demonstrated in multi-source cross-sectional investigations (Holman & Niven, 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020).

Similar to other leader behaviors, we expect that perceptions of leader affect-improving will fluctuate daily (Kelemen et al., 2020). This is reasonable to assume because IER is context-sensitive, meaning that employees will perceive leader affect-improving differently depending on the daily situation. In addition, within-person variation in IER has been reported in previous studies (e.g., Wang et al., 2025), and IER has been found to take place frequently and change on a daily basis (Liu et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2023). Daily fluctuations in perceptions of IER are important because days are the “temporal building block of people's experiences at work” (Sonnentag et al., 2025, p. 208). We expect employees to perceive fluctuations in leader affect-improving, such that their positive affective state will be improved in the short term.

**Hypothesis 1.** On a given day, employee perceptions of leader affect-improving are positively related to daily end-of-work positive affect.

## The inferential path

From the theoretical perspective of the social model of emotions (Van Kleef, 2009), an inferential process takes place (the inferential path). In this process, employees use information about their leader (e.g., the leader made them feel better today) to evaluate them (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Van Kleef & Côté, 2022). Evaluating the leader as effective (i.e., perceived leader effectiveness) is critical, because a “good leader” is expected to be an effective one (Junça-Silva & Caetano, 2023).

Employees are particularly sensitive to inferring their leaders' behavior because leaders' attitudes toward them are influential (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). Although affect-improving is usually not part of leaders' core tasks, if employees perceive those behaviors, they infer that they are “in good hands” and make positive evaluations about the effectiveness of the leader that day (Holman & Niven, 2019; Little et al., 2016).

We suggest that when employees perceive daily acts of affect-improving, it activates the inferential path, predicting fluctuations in perceived leader effectiveness (Junça-Silva & Caetano, 2023). Specifically, on days when employees perceive leader affect-improving, they

may feel they received a message from the leader (Côté et al., 2013; Niven et al., 2012). This message can activate an evaluation process that employees use to evaluate their leader as effective (Vasquez et al., 2021).

An inferential process starting from perceptions of leader affect-improving highlights the importance of the target's perception of IER. It suggests that the target has an active role in the process and is not a passive receiver of IER from the agent. We note that Niven (2017) assumes that IER is originally meant to change the target's affective state and the framework does not predict inferences about the agent as an outcome of IER. However, we suggest that the target's perspective, evaluations, and perceptions are meaningful for the outcomes of IER, and thus postulate the following research question:

*Research Question 1:* Are employee perceptions of leader affect-improving on a given day positively related to daily perceptions of leader effectiveness?

## What hinders positive consequences of affect-improving?

### When affect-improving is not needed: moderator on the affective path

In the IER literature, affect-improving is meant to change or shape the target's affective state positively (Niven et al., 2009). It is particularly influential when it is needed (Niven et al., 2019), meaning that it should align with the situation of the target (van Kleef & Côté, 2022). Employees could be especially sensitive to leader affect-improving when they need their affect to be improved. In situations where affect-improving is not needed, it may have lower benefits (Reeck et al., 2016).

AET notes that changes in affect are context specific (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), suggesting that it might be affected by the current state of the person. AET also suggests that dispositional affect can influence how affective events are perceived (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In our daily approach, morning positive affect represents the situation or the within-person part of positive affect that the person brings with them into the work day (Weiss & Beal, 2005). We suggest that morning positive affect can affect daily perceptions of affect-improving.

Starting the workday with *low* levels of state positive affect represents a situation in which positive affect needs to be improved, and thus, affect-improving is aligned with the current needs of the person (Tepper et al., 2018). On the contrary, having high levels of state positive affect represents a situation in which affect-improving might not be needed, and thus may be less appreciated or easily perceived. Empirically, the consequences of other leader behaviors, for example, transformational leadership, were found to be positive when these behaviors match employees' current needs (Tepper et al., 2018). However, behaviors that are not needed might be less beneficial (Reeck et al., 2016). In the case of affect-improving, the original affective state is an important marker of the daily need of the person. However, this has not been addressed in the IER literature.

**Hypothesis 2.** On a given day, morning positive affect moderates the relationship between affect-improving and end-of-work positive affect: When morning positive affect is high, the relationship is weaker.

## When affect-improving is perceived as inauthentic: moderator on the inferential path

The IER literature has started to investigate the agent's motives (Niven, 2016). Vasquez et al. (2021) showed that leaders' self-rated egocentric motives for IER were associated with lower levels of relationship quality with their employees and leader effectiveness. Niven et al. (2019) found that when employees are led to believe that IER is due to a leader's prosocial character, they evaluate the leader's goals as sincere, and more beneficial consequences arise. These propositions align with theoretical views of the perceived intentionality of others' behavior, suggesting that people's perceptions of the agent's intentions affect their interpretations and reactions to the agent's behavior (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002).

Theories of affect and emotion regulation highlight perceived inauthenticity as an important factor influencing the consequences of others' behavior and emotional displays (Gardner et al., 2009; van Kleef & Côté, 2022). Social models of emotions (e.g., van Kleef, 2009) also acknowledge that when people's affective displays are perceived as inauthentic, negative inferences might be made (Cha et al., 2019).

Perceived inauthenticity of affect-improving is critical over and above perceptions of prosocial or egocentric intentions because it guides people in their evaluation of others (Gardner et al., 2009). When the leader is perceived as inauthentic (i.e., deliberately displaying what is not actually felt; Gardner et al., 2009), the motive behind their behavior is unclear and ambiguous (Horowitz et al., 2006), lowering their credibility, which is especially important for their perceptions as an effective leader on a given day.

Importantly, our focus is on the evaluation that the leader did not sincerely mean to improve one's affective state that day, but rather "faked" affect-improving for other reasons (e.g., manipulative ones). This is different than the leaders' own perception of themselves as "authentic," which might not align with employees' impressions (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). However, employees' impressions are the ones which are most important for employee outcomes. Empirical evidence supports the idea that when leaders are perceived as engaging in inauthentic strategies (e.g., faking their emotions), their employees report negative consequences (e.g., lower job satisfaction; Fisk & Friesen, 2012). Because the question regarding the inferential path is rather explorative in the IER literature, we also postulate a research question in this case.

*Research Question 2:* Does perceived inauthenticity of leader affect-improving on a given day moderate the relationship between affect-improving and perceived leader effectiveness?

## Longer-term processes

Empirical evidence, including a recent meta-analysis, demonstrates that leadership behavior does not only have short-term consequences but also longer-term ones (Bommer et al., 2005; Li et al., 2023). Longer-term consequences of leaders' behavior are critical because they reveal the magnitude of leaders' behavior toward employees. Considering that leaders' behavior is often dynamic (Kelemen et al., 2020), longer-term consequences might represent an accumulation of short-term and daily consequences that translate into longer-term effects.

We suggest that the more static positive consequences of affect-improving reported in one-time studies about IER (e.g., Madrid et al., 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020) might be a result of

repeated daily perceptions of leader affect-improving. Specifically, employees who perceive daily affect-improving and respond with increased daily positive affect and positive perceptions of leader effectiveness can continue to benefit, building more generalized attitudinal and relational consequences over time.

A study on IER in the context of romantic relationships demonstrated that daily effects of IER can accumulate, leading to longer-term outcomes (Wang et al., 2025). To this end, we take advantage of our design (see Neubauer et al., 2023) and test whether the daily relationships suggested in Hypotheses 1 and Research Question 1 may also relate to longer-term changes in employees' job satisfaction and trust in the leader, respectively.

In the context of IER, Little et al. (2016) found that specific leader IER strategies (e.g., situation modification) had positive consequences (i.e., job satisfaction and LMX) 2 weeks later. However, studies using Niven et al.'s (2009) IER framework have not yet applied longitudinal designs that consider longer-term changes in outcome variables because of affect-improving. Nonetheless, scholars have noted that testing for longitudinal effects is an important next step (Madrid et al., 2019).

### Job satisfaction as a longer-term consequence on the affective path

Job satisfaction is a hedonic attitudinal indicator that is considered a critical outcome because it predicts different organizational factors such as job performance (Judge et al., 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2023). Positive affect has an important role in the development of job satisfaction over time. Theoretically, Weiss and Cropanzano (AET; 1996) explicitly discuss job satisfaction as an attitudinal outcome of affective experiences, triggered by affective events, and mention that affective reactions have “direct influences on job satisfaction” (Weiss & Cropanzano, p. 12). It has been suggested that the nature of fluctuations in affect can shape attitudes such as job satisfaction. Frequent positive experiences are especially valuable in predicting job satisfaction (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

In our conceptual model, fluctuations in positive affect are the outcome of daily experiences of leader affect-improving (the affective path). The development of job satisfaction over time is an important outcome of positive affect (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Thus, we suggest that positive experiences of affect-improving that relate to state positive affect may accumulate and predict beneficial changes in job satisfaction. Specifically, employees who repeatedly experience daily positive affect following perceived leader affect-improving will experience higher job satisfaction in the long term. Empirical evidence, including from a meta-analysis (Thoresen et al., 2003), supports the relationship between state positive affect and job satisfaction (Niklas & Dormann, 2005), including longer-term changes (Ilies & Judge, 2004).

**Hypothesis 3.** On the between-person level, there is an indirect lagged effect between affect-improving and longer-term job satisfaction through positive affect.

### Trust in the leader as a longer-term consequence on the inferential path

Trust is a characteristic of the relationship between the leader and the employee. It can be defined as the willingness to be vulnerable and positive expectations regarding the other person's intentions and behaviors (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust in the leader is a critical

organizational outcome because employees who trust their leaders tend to perform better, are more loyal, and are more motivated (Mayer et al., 1995).

Trust in the leader develops over time and can be conceptualized as an outcome of socio-cognitive perceptions and inferences about the leader. As such, it is a consequence of feeling confidence in the other person that is “gained from evidence in hand” (Schaubroeck et al., 2013, p. 1124).

We suggest that when employees repeatedly perceive daily affect-improving, their trust in the leader will be built through perceptions of leader effectiveness. This is because when experiencing affect-improving, employees may feel cared for and positively affected and directed by their leader (Reeck et al., 2016). Indeed, research on IER has shown that affect-improving can change attitudes and contribute to the quality of the exchange between people, and thus, IER can foster trust (Niven et al., 2012). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Naughton et al. (2024) found that affect-improving of political leaders predicts trust.

Perceptions of leader effectiveness are important for the building of trust (Williams, 2007). Continuing inferences of the leader as effective following perceptions of affect-improving can help reduce uncertainty about the leader as they are successful in their role as a leader. This can in the longer term signal that such effectiveness characterizes the leader, and thus the leader can be relied upon. Hence, they can be trusted (Burke et al., 2007; Schaubroeck et al., 2013). Considering that our inferential path starting from leader affect-improving on perceived leader effectiveness is rather exploratory for the IER literature, we also postulate a research question regarding the longer-term effect.

*Research Question 3:* Is there an indirect lagged effect between affect-improving and longer-term trust in the leader through perceived leader effectiveness on the between-person level?

## METHOD

### Participants and procedure

Six students assisted us with data collection at the end of 2021 as part of their Bachelor thesis projects on workplace relationships in Germany. Recruitment was carried out through social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) and the personal connections of the students and the second author. The first and second authors were responsible for all the procedures of data collection, including communicating with study participants. We offered the participants the opportunity to win online vouchers worth a total of 300 Euros as an incentive. We used the online tool Sosci (<https://www.sosciurvey.de/>) to administer the surveys. The participants provided informed consent by clicking a button in the online tool. First, we measured demographics and stable characteristics (dispositional positive affect, job satisfaction, trust in the leader) in an entry survey. Second, we conducted a 10-day diary study in which the participants answered measures in the morning (surveys were sent at 5 a.m. and were available until 10 a.m.), after work (surveys were sent at 1 p.m., 3 p.m., 4 p.m., or 5 p.m. according to participants' preferences, and were open until 9 p.m.) and at bedtime (surveys were sent at 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. according to participants' preferences and were open until 2 a.m.). We measured positive affect every morning. After work, we measured daily affect-improving from one's leader, perceptions of inauthenticity of leader affect-improving, positive affect, and perceived leader effectiveness. The bedtime

survey contained measures (e.g., on recovery experiences) for another research question (Iser-Potempa et al. 2024). These bedtime measures are not part of the current study. Third, 12 weeks after completing the diary part, we invited the participants to take part in the longer-term investigation and guided them to report about job satisfaction and trust in the leader over the previous 4 weeks.

The inclusion criteria were being employed, working at least part-time and at least 4 days a week, not doing shift work or being self-employed, and having regular contact with one's immediate leader. When preparing the data, we excluded daily surveys which were answered much faster than the other surveys, using a speed index implemented in the survey system (Leiner, 2019). Two hundred and eighty-seven people answered the entrance survey fully. In the final sample of the diary study, we included 193 participants who completed the general survey, filled in our inclusion criteria, and had contact with their leader on at least 2 days (we excluded all days in which participants did not have contact with their leader). Otherwise, missing data were handled with a full maximum likelihood approach (Newman, 2014). This resulted in 934 usable days of the diary study (mean days per participant = 5.89).

Of the 193 participants, 67.7% were female. Regarding age, 8.3% of the participants were between 21 and 25 years old, 11.9% were between 26 and 30 years old, 9.8% were between 31 and 35 years old, 10.4% were between 36 and 40 years old, 10.4% were between 41 and 45 years old, 15% were between 46 and 50 years old, 16.6% were between 51 and 55 years old, 12.4% were between 56 and 60 years old, and 5.2% were older than 60 years. Regarding tenure, 64.2% worked in the current organization for 5 years or more, and 26.9% held a leading position. Regarding the relationship with their immediate leader, 52.8% worked with their immediate leader for 2 years or more. The participants worked in diverse occupations (e.g., engineer, secretary, sales) and in diverse sectors (e.g., finance, education). In the longer-term survey, 112 of the original participants took part. Of them, we included 109 participants who answered the longer-term survey and aligned with the inclusion criteria.

We tested if the participants in the diary study differed from those who took part in the first general survey but did not fill in the inclusion criteria ( $N = 94$ ). The dropout sample did not differ significantly regarding gender (60.6% women),  $\chi^2(1) = 1.40, p = .23$ . However, the people who dropped out were significantly younger (76.6% were younger than 45 years old),  $\chi^2(1) = 17.36, p < .001$ , which is common in diary studies (e.g., Venz et al., 2019; Völker et al., 2023). The dropout sample did not differ in workplace characteristics such as tenure in the organization,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.41, p = .11$ ; time working with the immediate leader (54.3% reported that they worked with their leader for 2 years or more),  $\chi^2(1) = 0.05, p = .81$ ; or having a leadership position (33%),  $\chi^2(1) = 1.14, p = .28$ . In addition, we checked if the participants that took part in the longitudinal part differed from the original sample and found no significant differences regarding gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.75, p = .72$ ; age,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.29, p = .13$ ; tenure in the organization,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.35, p = .24$ ; or time working with the immediate leader,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.37, p = .53$ .

## Measures

We presented all items in German and translated unavailable measures with a back-translation approach. We used a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) for all measures unless stated differently. For the daily measures, we report both within-person and between-person level Cronbach's alpha (i.e.,  $\alpha_w$  and  $\alpha_b$ ) when applicable (Geldhof et al., 2014). In Table 1, we present the means, standard deviations, intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs),

and multilevel correlations among the study variables in our overall sample participating in the diary study ( $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ ). The descriptive statistics regarding the subset of participants that took part in the longer-term investigation ( $N = 109$ ) are presented in Table 2.

## Daily surveys

### *Affect-improving*

We measured daily perceptions of leader affect-improving with the 6-item affect-improving subscale of the EROS scale (Niven et al., 2011). Sample items were: “*Today at work, my leader made me laugh*”; “*Today, my leader spent time with me*”; and “*Today my leader listened to my problems*”. Cronbach's  $\alpha_w$  was .81 and  $\alpha_b$  was .93.

**TABLE 1** Means, standard deviations, ICCs, multi-level correlations of the variables, and reliabilities of the diary part.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>SD<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>ICC</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Affect-improving (t2)	2.19	0.72	1.02	.47	--	-.05	.06	.31**	.02	.44**
2. Morning positive affect (t1)	3.09	0.54	0.85	.60	.32**	--	.29**	-.03	-.01	.04
3. Positive affect (t2)	3.16	0.56	0.89	.60	.30**	.94**	--	.03	-.07	.02
4. Perceived leader effectiveness (t2)	2.87	0.82	1.29	.59	.61**	.32**	.34**	--	.02	.31**
5. Perceived inauthenticity (t2)	1.43	0.62	0.84	.47	-.12	-.18	-.19	-.15	--	.04
6. Transformational leadership (t2)	2.15	0.71	0.80	.55	.73**	.14	.18	.63**	.03	--

Note:  $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$  days. ICCs, intraclass correlation coefficients; SD, standard deviation.

t1 = morning survey of the diary study, t2 = after work survey of the diary study.

Correlations above the diagonal are within-person correlations. Correlations below the diagonal are between-person correlations.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

**TABLE 2** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the subset data, including the longer-term variables (between-person).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Affect-improving	2.18	1.02	--					
2. Positive affect	3.21	0.85	.24**	--				
3. Leader effectiveness	2.87	1.30	.53**	.21**	--			
4. Job satisfaction (T0)	3.69	0.97	.24**	.26**	.23**	--		
5. Trust in the leader (T0)	3.68	0.93	.37**	.23**	.49**	.37**	--	
6. Job satisfaction (T4)	3.46	0.90	.26**	.36**	.23**	.73**	.47**	--
7. Trust in the leader (T4)	3.39	1.04	.35**	.23**	.50**	.25**	.69**	.38**

Note:  $N = 109$ , T0 = entrance survey, T4 = longer-term survey. Between-person scores are reported. SD, standard deviation.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

### *State positive affect*

We measured positive affect with the instruction “How do you feel at the moment” and six items of the affective well-being scale by Warr (1990) with a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). A sample item is “cheerful”. Cronbach's  $\alpha_w$  was .84 and  $\alpha_b$  was .95.

### *Perceived leader effectiveness*

We measured perceived effectiveness in the after-work survey with the instruction “How much does the following statement apply to your leader today” and the item: “My leader was very effective in their leadership today” (Vecchio & Anderson, 2009).

### *Perceived inauthenticity*

We measured perceived inauthenticity in the after-work survey right after presenting the items of affect-improving with the item, “I think that my leader only faked those things to make me feel better” adapted from Fisk and Friesen (2012).

### *Control variables in the diary data*

To demonstrate that it is indeed daily affect-improving that predicts subsequent positive affect and perceived leader effectiveness, we controlled for daily transformational leadership as another potential positive daily leader behavior (Breevaart et al., 2014). We measured it after work with five items that Breevaart et al. (2014) adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995). A sample item is “Today, my leader talked enthusiastically about what needed to be accomplished”. Cronbach's  $\alpha_w$  was .83 and  $\alpha_b$  (b) was .97. In addition, to show that it is leader affect-improving that predicted the outcome variables, and not only having a good day (Gabriel et al., 2019), we controlled for morning positive affect when predicting after-work positive affect and perceived leader effectiveness.

## Longer-term survey

### *Job satisfaction*

We measured job satisfaction with four items from the job satisfaction scale of Thompson and Phua (2012). A sample item is “I find real joy in my job”. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .91.

### *Trust in the leader*

We measured trust with three items of the trust scale by Giessner and van Knippenberg (2008). A sample item is “I absolutely trust my leader”. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .91.

### *Control variables in the longer-term data*

We controlled for baseline levels of the outcome variables (i.e., job satisfaction and trust) measured in the entrance survey with the same scales and the instruction “How do you feel in general”. We also conducted our analyses without the control variables, and the results of the hypotheses remained the same.

## Data analysis

We analyzed our data in two steps. In the first step, we tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 2 on the within-person level using the diary data ( $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ ) with a

multilevel path analysis. In the multilevel path analysis, we used mean-adjusted maximum likelihood (MLR) estimation (Preacher et al., 2010). To test the within-person interaction terms, we first person mean-centered the predictor and moderators (other than the one-item perceived inauthenticity construct). Then, we created the interaction terms, which we defined as within-person variables. We estimated all the paths other than the within-person interactions on the within- and between-person levels simultaneously to appropriately decompose their variance on the within- and between-person levels (Preacher et al., 2006, 2016). We allowed after-work positive affect and after-work perceived leader effectiveness to correlate. In the second step, we tested Hypothesis 3 and Research Question 3 using the dataset, including the longer-term data ( $N = 109$ ). We modeled only the main effects on the within-person level. On the between-person level, we modeled the main effects and added the variables from the entrance survey as control variables (T0 job satisfaction, T0 trust in the leader) and the longer-term survey as outcomes (T4 job satisfaction, T4 trust in the leader). Here, we tested the indirect lagged effects suggested in Hypothesis 3 and Research Question 3 with the Monte Carlo method (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

## Construct validity

We tested the construct validity of the variables analyzed in the first step with the diary data ( $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ ) and that of the additional variables analyzed in the second step with the longer-term data ( $N = 109$ ). Using the diary data, we conducted a multilevel factor analysis with a model containing all daily variables that are not single items and specified factors on the within-person level and the between-person level simultaneously (i.e., morning positive affect, affect-improving, transformational leadership, after-work positive affect). We allowed the items of positive affect from the morning and after-work measures to correlate (e.g., the first item of morning positive affect with the first item of after-work positive affect) as is commonly performed in diary studies. This four-factor model fit was  $\chi^2 = 1820.78$ ,  $df = 435$ ,  $p < .001$ , scaling correction factor (SCF) = 1.04, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.862, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.840, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)<sub>within</sub> = 0.049, and SRMR<sub>between</sub> = 0.087. This model showed a better fit than a model in which after-work positive affect and affect-improving items were loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 2531.165$ ,  $df = 430$ ,  $p < .01$ , SCF = 1.02, CFI = 0.790, TLI = 0.753, RMSEA = 0.072, Satorra–Bentler  $\Delta\chi^2 = 14803.33$ ,  $\Delta df = 6$ ,  $p < .01$ ); a model in which transformational leadership and affect-improving items were loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 1887.910$ ,  $df = 430$ ,  $p < .001$ , SCF = 1.02, CFI = 0.854, TLI = 0.829, RMSEA = 0.06, Satorra–Bentler  $\Delta\chi^2 = 2694.32$ ,  $\Delta df = 6$ ,  $p < .01$ ); a model in which all affect items were loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 3487.345$ ,  $df = 454$ ,  $p < .001$ , SCF = 1.02, CFI = 0.697, TLI = 0.662, RMSEA = 0.08, Satorra–Bentler  $\Delta\chi^2 = 2943.044$ ,  $\Delta df = 19$ ,  $p < .01$ ); and a model in which all items were loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 6678.330$ ,  $df = 460$ ,  $p < .001$ , SCF = 1.06, CFI = 0.379, TLI = 0.317, RMSEA = 0.12, Satorra–Bentler  $\Delta\chi^2 = 3682.825$ ,  $\Delta df = 25$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Using the between-person longer-term data, we ran a model containing the two between-person variables that we tested in the longer-term survey (i.e., T4 job satisfaction and T4 trust). The fit of the model was  $\chi^2 = 29.002$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.955, RMSEA = 0.10, which was significantly better than the fit of a model in which the job satisfaction and trust items loaded on one factor ( $\chi^2 = 230.270$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.622, TLI = 0.433, RMSEA = 0.37,  $\Delta\chi^2 = 201.268$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## RESULTS

First, we tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 2 on the within-person level with our full diary data ( $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ ). The results are presented in Table 3. The fit of the multilevel model was  $\chi^2 = 40.109$ ,  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.913, RMSEA = 0.038. Hypothesis 1 was supported. We found a positive significant relationship between daily affect-improving and after-work positive affect when controlling for morning positive affect and daily transformational leadership (estimate = 0.08,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For Research Question 1, we found a positive significant relationship between affect-improving and daily perceived leader effectiveness when controlling for morning positive affect and transformational leadership (estimate = 0.23,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In the interaction-effects model, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Morning positive affect did not moderate the relationship between affect-improving and after-work positive affect (estimate =  $-0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .33$ ). For Research Question 2, we found that perceived inauthenticity significantly moderated the relationship between affect-improving and perceived leader effectiveness (estimate =  $-0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .03$ ). The simple slope tests showed that affect-improving was positively related to leader effectiveness when perceived inauthenticity was low (slope estimate = 0.35,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not when perceived inauthenticity was high (slope estimate = 0.10,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .11$ ). The interaction graph is presented in Figure 2.

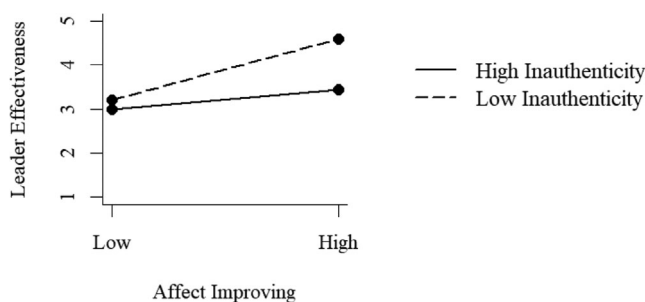
To reduce concerns regarding causality, we conducted a vignette experiment, in which Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 2 were tested on the between-person level. The results of the experiment show patterns similar to those of the main study. Specifically,

TABLE 3 Results of the multi-level path analysis (diary data).

Variable	Positive affect (t2)		Leader effectiveness (t2)	
	Est.	SE	Est.	SE
<i>Within-person</i>				
Morning positive affect (t1)	0.30**	0.04	-0.05	0.07
Transformational leadership (t2)	-0.02	0.03	0.25**	0.04
Affect-improving (t2)	0.08*	0.03	0.22**	0.04
Inauthenticity (t2)	-0.08*	0.03	0.02	0.04
Affect-improving $\times$ positive affect (t1)	-0.06	0.06	0.02	0.08
Affect-improving $\times$ inauthenticity	-0.01	0.04	-0.19*	0.08
Residual variance	0.28**	0.02	0.57**	0.05
<i>Between-person</i>				
Morning positive affect (t1)	0.97**	0.04	0.28*	0.11
Transformational leadership (t2)	0.05	0.06	0.56**	0.16
Affect-improving (t2)	-0.02	0.07	0.30	0.21
Inauthenticity (t2)	-0.02	0.06	-0.22	0.15
Residual variance	0.05*	0.01	0.50**	0.08

Note:  $N = 193$ ,  $n = 934$ . Reported are the unstandardized estimates from one model that tested all relationships simultaneously. t1 = morning survey of the diary study, t2 = after-work survey of the diary study.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .



**FIGURE 2** The interaction between after-work affect-improving and perceived leader inauthenticity predicting after-work perceived leader effectiveness. *Note.* The interaction was plotted using the online tool from Preacher et al. (2006) in R.

Hypothesis 1 is supported, and Hypothesis 2 is not supported. Research Questions 1 and 2 also produced similar patterns. To keep the focus on the daily relationships, we report the full details in Appendix 1.

In the second step, we used the dataset that contains the longer-term data ( $N = 109$ ,  $n = 592$ ) to test Hypothesis 3 and Research Question 3. The results of the between-person paths are reported in Table 4. In Hypothesis 3, we suggested that there will be an indirect effect of affect-improving on lagged job satisfaction through daily positive affect. Controlling for baseline levels of job satisfaction measured in the entrance survey, we found a significant indirect effect on the between-person level (estimate = 0.10,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .04$ , 95% CI [0.0159, 0.2304]), supporting Hypothesis 3. In Research Question 3, we asked if there is an indirect effect between affect-improving and lagged trust in the leader through daily perceived leader effectiveness. Controlling for baseline levels of trust measured in the entrance survey, we found a significant indirect effect on the between-person level (estimate = 0.30,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI [0.0430, 0.4865]).

Following recommendations for testing statistical effects, we also tested our hypotheses and research questions without control variables (Becker et al., 2016; Sturman et al., 2022). The results of the within-person relationships were similar (affect-improving predicted positive affect, estimate = 0.07,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p = .01$ ; affect-improving predicted leader effectiveness, estimate = 0.33,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ; positive affect was not a significant moderator, estimate =  $-0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .43$ ; and perceived inauthenticity was a significant moderator, estimate =  $-0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .019$ ). The results of the longer-term relationships also remained the same (the indirect effect between affect-improving and job satisfaction through positive affect was significant, estimate = 0.16,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .009$ , 95% CI [0.042, 0.289]), and the indirect effect between affect-improving and trust through leader effectiveness was significant, estimate = 0.52,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.292, 0.763]).

## Additional analysis

We tested each of the interaction effects on both paths for consistency. Morning positive affect did not moderate the relationship between after-work affect-improving and after-work perceived leader effectiveness (estimate =  $-0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p = .80$ ). Also perceived inauthenticity did not moderate the relationship between after-work affect-improving and after-work positive affect (estimate = 0.02,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .74$ ).

TABLE 4 Between-person results of Hypotheses 5 and 6 (longer-term dataset).

Variable	Positive affect (t2)		Leader effectiveness (t2)		Job satisfaction (T4)		Trust in the leader (T4)	
	Est.	SE	Est.	SE	Est.	SE	Est.	SE
<i>Between-person</i>								
Job satisfaction (T0)					0.63**	0.09		
Trust in the leader (T0)							0.57**	0.12
Affect-improving (t2)	0.32**	0.08	0.88**	0.12	0.05	0.08	-0.02	0.14
Positive affect (t2)					0.33*	0.13		
Leader effectiveness (t2)							0.34*	0.15

Note:  $N = 109$ ,  $n = 592$  days. Reported are the between-person unstandardized estimates from a model that includes the within-person relationships tested in Hypotheses 1 and 2 without the control variable morning positive affect.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

In Hypothesis 2, we suggested that when morning positive affect is high, affect-improving is not needed and thus less beneficial. One could potentially also suggest that on mornings with high *negative* affect, employees will particularly benefit from affect-improving behaviors from their leader. We tested if morning negative affect moderates the relationship between affect-improving and end-of-work positive affect. We measured negative affect with the respective items from Warr (1990). The interaction effect was not significant (estimate = 0.03,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .67$ ).

In addition, to demonstrate that our longer-term outcomes are specific to the respected path, we tested whether affect-improving has an indirect effect via positive affect on trust (instead of job satisfaction) and whether affect-improving has an indirect effect via leader effectiveness on job satisfaction (instead of trust). Supporting our assumptions, both were not significant: estimate of trust on affect-improving through positive affect =  $-0.03$  ( $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p = .47$ , 95% CI  $[-0.125, 0.058]$ ), and the estimate of job satisfaction on affect-improving through leader effectiveness =  $0.06$  ( $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = .30$ , 95% CI  $[-0.062, 0.197]$ ). Thus, each outcome functions as an outcome only on its suggested relevant path, and not on the other one.

## DISCUSSION

We found that when employees perceived daily leader affect-improving, they had higher positive affect after work and perceived their leader as effective. Over time, this positive affect and perceived leader effectiveness were related to higher job satisfaction and trust in the leader, respectively. Having high positive affect in the morning did not change these results. However, when employees perceived their leader as inauthentically engaging in affect-improving, its positive consequences were weaker.

### Theoretical implications

Our findings have theoretical implications that can help to develop the theory of IER, and promote research on dynamic leadership. First, although research has established that leader

behavior and employee experiences fluctuate from day to day (Kelemen et al., 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2025), and AET explicitly calls for the inclusion of a more dynamic, within-person perspective (Weiss & Beal, 2005), existing models of IER still focus on the general experience instead of a dynamic one (Niven, 2017). Our approach thus meaningfully advances IER literature, by adding a daily perspective. Specifically, finding that even brief experiences of perceived affect-improving are related to an important short-term consequence (i.e., positive affect) and an attitudinal one (i.e., perceived leader effectiveness) highlights the importance of affect-improving in employees' daily work life. With our daily focus, we suggested but did not find that the positive affect that employees starts the day with will affect the affect-improving experience. It might still be that the need for affect-improving is reflected by other states, rather than in the low morning level of positive affect. For example, if an employee feels stressed or low in self-efficacy, affect-improving might have a stronger impact.

Second, our results suggest that accumulation of short-term affect-improving can predict longer-term outcomes, highlighting the importance of daily affect-improving for employee job satisfaction and trust in the leader. By looking at both short-term and long-term consequences, we answer the call to “examine the time-lagged effects of daily leadership behaviors” (Kelemen et al., 2020, p. 14) and can provide support to the suggestion that the consequences of leader IER behaviors are both fleeting and enduring (Kelemen et al., 2020).

Third, we promote the current IER literature by shifting the focus from the agent's perspective (i.e., the leader) to the employee's. This is an important step because employee perceptions play a critical role in how leader behavior is interpreted and, thus, how employees react to it (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). Specifically, we found that daily perceived inauthenticity of affect-improving weakened the benefits of affect-improving for daily perceived leader effectiveness. This finding supports our view of perceived inauthenticity as a meaningful boundary condition influencing the inferences that people make about agents of regulatory behaviors (van Kleef & Côté, 2022).

Fourth, referring to the positivity bias in leadership research, our findings show that perceptions of leader affect-improving are fluctuating. This suggests a less generalized approach to positive leadership and challenges the idea that affect-improving represents a static leader characteristic. In addition, the significant moderating effect of perceived inauthenticity indicates that even positive leader behaviors, such as affect-improving, have boundary conditions. In line with Alvesson and Einola (2019), we focused on the employee perspective and leader–follower relationship, which represents an important step to reduce positivity bias and conflation. We want to emphasize that even though we successfully controlled for transformational leadership on the day level, we do not suggest affect-improving as a new leadership style (Eva et al., 2025). Rather, affect-improving is a set of daily behaviors that any leader can engage in, and, when perceived well by employees, may have positive consequences over and above broader styles such as transformational leadership.

All in all, the most important implication of our study is the strength of leader affect-improving. Perceived affect-improving from one's leader had short-term daily consequences over and above morning positive affect and transformational leadership and was related to longer-term job satisfaction and trust in the leader, underlining the relevance of affect-improving for employees.

## Limitations and future directions

Although our empirical approach bears important strengths, it also has limitations. First, we focused on fluctuating IER and tested daily and longitudinal relationships. However, we did

not have a theory to guide us regarding the optimal time frames. Thus, we chose time frames suggested in the general emotion regulation literature (e.g., "... events ... 24-h periods ... months"; Gabriel et al., 2023, p. 26). We chose a 12-week time lag to detect longer-term relationships, assuming that experiencing leader affect-improving over such a time period can be sufficient to detect changes in job satisfaction and trust in the leader. Nonetheless, in further developing the IER theory, it would be important to address the topic of time and dynamics more explicitly.

Second, our use of self-report measures may raise the threat of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Our within-person approach in the daily part helps to reduce the risk, and we controlled for baseline measures of our outcome variables as much as possible. Moreover, although our data was collected before the introduction of Gen-AI, and we took steps to ensure the quality of the data, we cannot fully rule out careless responses, which is a potential risk of survey data.

Third, the daily measures were assessed at the same data point. Potentially, positive affect and perceived leader effectiveness can affect perceptions of leader affect-improving. To reduce concerns regarding reverse causality, we report the results of an experiment that tested and fully replicated the current study's daily relationships in Appendix 1. Moreover, although we separated the time points, our longitudinal mediation test does not model change in the mediating variables. Thus, our findings regarding the accumulation process and mediation should be interpreted cautiously. Future studies can take a nuanced approach and target several leader–employee interactions during one day. Another option is to use an event-sampling design asking participants to report only on the events during which they experienced affect-improving from their leader. This, however, will be burdensome for participants, which bears risks as well (Gabriel et al., 2019). One should note that our within-person variables did not show high construct validity (see confirmatory factor analysis). One reason could be our use of shortened measures which are common in daily diary studies. Future studies can use longer measures that may allow better construct validity but could potentially burden participants as well.

Fourth, we focused merely on the employee (the target). However, this focus does not allow us to consider the perspective of the leader. It might be, for example, that employees' perception of the inauthenticity of daily affect-improving was not accurate (Groth et al., 2009), and leaders authentically tried to improve employees' affect but were perceived as inauthentic. Previous IER studies did take a multi-source approach (e.g., Holman & Niven, 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020), but the question of congruence between agent and target in perceiving IER was not addressed. In a future diary study with dyads of leaders and employees, both can rate daily perceptions of IER. The question would be: What matters most for IER outcomes (e.g., employee positive affect)? Is it the IER behaviors that leaders believe they are enacting, or the IER that employees perceive that drives positive employee outcomes? Incongruence of perceptions of IER might itself be an interesting direction to pursue (Little et al., 2016) because previous studies have shown that agreement between leaders and employees (e.g., over the quality of the exchange) plays a role in leader behavior consequences (Matta et al., 2020).

We have several further directions that studies can take. First, referring to the IER construct, we used the conceptualization and measure of Niven et al. (2011), which is commonly used in work-related leader–employee interactions. There are, however, other approaches that might be promising. For example, a newer measure (i.e., Interpersonal Regulation Interaction Scale; Swerdlow & Johnson, 2022) considers more aspects of IER, such as physical presence (e.g., eye contact or facial expressions). Future studies can enrich the investigation by considering these aspects of IER.

Second, it is important to broaden the investigation and test the effects of being the target of IER on additional outcomes. IER was found to affect performance, affect, and relationship quality (Niven & López-Pérez). It would be interesting to see if IER affects other aspects of employee well-being (e.g., physical well-being; Sonnentag et al., 2023). Consistency of IER is also an interesting direction (Schilling et al., 2023). Future research could investigate if employees are more or less affected by consistent and low-volume experiences of affect-improving (e.g., a leader doing a small gesture of affect-improving every day) or inconsistent but memorable experiences (e.g., when difficulty arises, the leader puts in a great deal of effort to improve the employee's affect). In light of developments in the leadership literature, it will be valuable to test if leader IER has consequences for *leader* dynamic well-being (Kaluza et al., 2020). Engaging in IER might, for example, be effortful for the leader and thus cost energy while improving the employee's affective state.

## Practical implications

Our findings also offer practical implications for organizations. Specifically, if daily experiences of perceived affect-improving are beneficial, organizations can help employees and leaders learn about these psychological processes via workshops. For employees, affect-improving is beneficial for their affective well-being (i.e., daily positive affect and longer-term job satisfaction). For leaders, perceptions of leader effectiveness and trust are valuable because they are related to crucial outcomes such as performance, citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). Important aspects of the workshops can be the role of the target (and not only the agent) in IER. Moreover, as our dynamic approach demonstrates that even short, daily experiences of leader affect-improving are meaningful, the workshops can highlight that affect-improving can be achieved in micro, context-specific experiences. Finally, it is important to mention that affect-improving should be authentic. If employees perceive affect-improving to be inauthentic, its benefits are significantly reduced.

## CONCLUSION

We added a dynamic perspective to the literature on IER using Niven's IER framework (Niven et al., 2009), identifying a dual-path process based on social models of emotions (Parkinson, 1996; van Kleef, 2009). On the affective reaction path, affect-improving predicted enhanced daily positive affect and longer-term job satisfaction on the between-person level. On the inferential path, affect-improving was positively related to daily perceived leader effectiveness, which was attenuated when the employee perceived leader affect-improving to be inauthentic. Longer-term trust was found to be a consequence of the inferential path. Our findings demonstrate that affect-improving from one's leader has short-term and longer-term benefits for employees.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest or competing interests.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT


Data are available at <https://osf.io/jw653/overview>.

### ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical statement for the main study is not applicable as it is an observational study. The experiment reported in the Appendix received ethics approval: EK Mannheim 14/2022.

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## APPENDIX 1

### RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

To support causality, we conducted an experiment in which we manipulated interpersonal emotional regulation (IER). Two hundred and four people participated in a between-person online experimental vignette study in which leader IER (affect-improving vs. affect-worsening) was manipulated. Of the participants, 61.8% were women, and 65.7% were younger than 26 years. Although 68.1% were students, 65.2% of the overall sample had more than 1 year of working experience.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions (affect-improving versus affect-worsening). At the beginning of the experiment, the participants answered a baseline measure of current state affect. Next, they were instructed to imagine themselves in the position of an employee at a fictional company, to read the vignettes, and then answer the survey. We based the vignettes on the validated vignettes by Niven et al. (2019), translated them to German, and adapted them to the purpose of the current study. The experimental manipulation was receiving IER (affect-improving or affect-worsening) from one's leader during one episode. Each vignette described a conversation between a leader engaging in IER and an employee. For the full, original vignettes, see Niven et al. (2019).

For the manipulation check, we followed Niven et al. (2019) and assessed the manipulation of IER (six items for affect-improving and three items for affect-worsening referring specifically to the leader in the vignette) with an adapted measure of the extrinsic subscale of the emotion regulation of others and self (EROS; Niven et al., 2011). Cronbach's alpha was .94 for affect-improving and .80 for affect-worsening. A sample item for affect-improving is: "At work, the leader makes me laugh". A sample item for affect-worsening is: "At work, the leader behaves annoyed toward me". In the results of the manipulation check, we found significant results indicating that our manipulation was successful. Specifically, regarding affect-improving, the mean of perceived affect-improving was higher when participants read vignettes with the affect-improving manipulation ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) than when they read vignettes with the affect-worsening manipulation ( $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). The difference between the two means was significant,  $t(203) = 24.00$ ,  $p < .01$ .

For the hypotheses test, we used similar measures to those used in the main study. Specifically, positive affect was measured with the scale from Warr (1990) and perceived inauthenticity with an adapted item based on Fisk and Friese (2012). For perceived leader effectiveness, we used five items of the leadership circle profile scale (Vecchio & Anderson, 2009). A sample item is "I am satisfied with the quality of the leadership that the leader provides.". We tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 2 from the main study.

Leader affect-improving had a positive effect on participants' subsequent positive affect after reading the vignette (estimate = 1.23,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and also on perceived leader effectiveness (estimate = 2.14,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Baseline levels of affect did not moderate the effect of affect-improving on positive affect (estimate = 0.17,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p = .18$ ). Perceived leader IER as inauthentic significantly moderated the effect of affect-improving on perceived leader effectiveness (estimate =  $-0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Simple slope tests showed that although the relationship remained significant even when perceived inauthenticity was high (slope estimate = 1.13,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the effect of affect-improving on perceived leader effectiveness was weaker than when perceived inauthenticity was high (slope estimate = 1.92,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, we could replicate our results from the diary study, providing causal support for our findings.