EPRA International Journal of Environmental Economics, Commerce and Educational Management
Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0414 |ISI I.F Value: 0.815|SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.57 ISSN: 2348 – 814X
Volume: 12 | Issue:8 |August 2025

LEADERS AS WELL-WISHERS: FOSTERING A CULTURE OF FLOURISHING THROUGH WELL-BEING LEADERSHIP

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23758
DOI No: 10.36713/epra23758

ABSTRACT

In an era where workplace well-being is pivotal to organizational success, well-being leadership offers a transformative approach to cultivating inclusive, resilient, and thriving workplace cultures. This introduction outlines the essence of well-being leadership, emphasizing its role in addressing psychological, emotional, and professional needs of employees. By integrating insights from contemporary research, it explores how this leadership paradigm mitigates burnout, fosters trust, and drives collective prosperity. Challenges such as entrenched authoritative structures and implementation barriers are examined, with evidence-based strategies proposed for overcoming them. This discourse bridges philosophical ideals with practical applications, advocating for cooperative leadership to revolutionize organizational dynamics.

KEYWORDS: *Wellbeing Leadership, Organizational Leadership, Employee Wellbeing, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

Ideally, leaders are the catalyst of growth, expansion, and effective organizational efficacy. They are responsible for honing the capacities and capabilities of individuals, rendering them the required motivation needed to flourish. Beyond traditional roles of planning, managing, and ensuring efficiency, leaders are expected to advocate reliance, trust, and a sense of belonging essential for staff or employees. Transformational leadership, which inspires and motivates followers, has been shown to fulfill intrinsic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, significantly enhancing employee well-being (Arnold, 2017). For instance, research demonstrates that transformational leaders increase employees' awareness of task significance, reducing distress and boosting job satisfaction across diverse industries (Nielsen et al., 2017). Well-being leadership as a novel endeavour encompasses these factors and promotes a far promising work culture in an organizational setup where the stakeholders, irrespective of their hierarchical positions, are valued, respected, and honoured for their contribution. It emphasizes paramount welfare for those involved in the organization by practicing inclusiveness and cooperation. This provides a sense of liberty, gratification, and, most importantly, mental bliss. It has turned out to be significant for promoting openness, shared responsibility, and accountability in the members, resulting in a healthy institutional culture. Workplace burnout and stress have been better coped with through the indulgence of well-being leadership. This epitomizes personal as well as collective prosperity and development.

Well-being leadership asserts the importance of creating an atmosphere where individuals can explore their mental, emotional, and professional prospects, consequently leading towards subjective well-being or happiness. To be precise, well-being leadership is a philosophical notion addressing multidimensional welfare—i.e., mental, physical, emotional, social, professional, and organizational—connecting us to our professions intrinsically. A leadership that focuses on building a culture of free expression can never be stalled out of infinite expansion, for it continuously aspires, supports, and regards employees, ensuring an approving atmosphere. It regularizes constant support, builds confidence, and fosters understanding, leading towards organizational excellence. Recent studies highlight that supportive leadership significantly influences employee mental health, with leaders modeling reflective and growth-oriented behaviors to cultivate holistic workplace cultures (Inc Gallup, n.d. 2023). Moreover, Deloitte's well-being surveys emphasize that prioritizing employee welfare correlates with reduced turnover and enhanced organizational performance (*Evolving Leadership to Drive Human Performance*, n.d.). These findings align with broader research

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indicating that empathetic leadership mitigates negative health impacts while boosting efficacy in dynamic work environments (Kock et al., 2025).

Expanding this paradigm, well-being leadership integrates principles from transformational, servant, and authentic leadership theories to create environments where employees thrive holistically. Research shows that when leaders prioritize well-being, organizations experience measurable improvements in engagement, retention, and innovation (Inc Gallup, n.d. 2023). This approach counters traditional success metrics by embedding well-being into core strategies, fostering resilience amid modern challenges like remote work and digital overload. By fostering a sense of community and purpose, well-being leadership not only enhances individual gratification but also drives collective organizational success, positioning it as a cornerstone of human sustainability.

Domains of Well-Being Leadership

Well-being leadership broadly intercepts three domains, namely:

Psychological, which tries to consider and refurbish intellectual transparency, self-sufficiency, flexibility, and a meaningful exchange of the stakeholders, pondering upon their stress, burnout, anxiety, and helplessness, nurturing a more equitable and balanced environment. Integrated analyses reveal that transformational leadership mediates psychological well-being through motivational processes, effectively reducing anxiety and burnout in high-stress settings (Montano et al., 2017). Further, studies on leadership impacts highlight how such behaviours enhance coping mechanisms, promoting intellectual autonomy and reducing workplace distress (Diebig et al., 2016).

Emotional, which focuses on preparing members with the ability to cope with instability by cultivating progressive relationships. Communication, care, and reciprocal support help cultivate a secure and resilient atmosphere. This, in turn, motivates the formation of a reliant and emotionally stimulating periphery. Research on servant leadership demonstrates its efficacy in controlling psychological distress during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by fostering empathy and supportive bonds (Eva et al., 2021). Qualitative studies further highlight servant leadership qualities like humility and ethical behaviour, which reduce emotional exhaustion and promote a sense of community (Hunter et al., 2013). Additional investigations link these behaviours to lower emotional strain, emphasizing third-party support in enhancing well-being (Liden et al., 2014).

Professional, which encompasses job satisfaction, career goals and advancement, appreciation, independence, and alignment between individuals. It is deeply rooted in professional ethics, where leaders are ideally perceived as mentors responsible for providing positive guidance, impartial appreciation, and deserving opportunities for progress, helping members achieve their potential. This outlook towards the workplace helps in building and augmenting institutional commitment through supportive strategies and insightful governance. Evidence from inclusive leadership studies shows positive correlations with workplace well-being, mediated by vigor and developmental feedback, leading to higher job satisfaction and career alignment (Randel et al., 2018). Similarly, organizational culture research affirms strong ties between ethical mentorship, job satisfaction, and commitment, driving professional growth (Schein, 2010).

Pivotal Leadership Theories

Theory Z, advocated by William Ouchi, focuses on reliability, sound organizational commitment aiming to change the dynamics of organizational culture. It intends to blend cultural values and managerial philosophy to escalate successful operations around the globe, drawing on Japanese management practices to foster long-term commitment and collective responsibility (Ouchi, 1981).

Transformational Leadership (Bass & Avolio) looks into psychological well-being and emotive growth, intending to mitigate stress and anxiety through intrinsic motivation, value orientation, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990). The theory aims to inspire employees to transcend self-interest for collective goals, aligning individual and organizational values.

Servant Leadership (Robert Greenleaf) has an altruistic approach, stressing the promotion of followers' well-being above the leader's own interests (Greenleaf, 1977). The theory intends to build a supportive community that enhances self-esteem, mutual trust, and a strong feeling of belongingness among employees.

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Authentic Leadership focuses on self-awareness, tenacity, fineness, decent behavior, and consistency, intending to boost liability, openness, and joint resolution (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The theory aims to create a culture of trust and accountability through ethical and transparent leadership.
Positive Leadership emphasizes strength-based growth, resilience, and meaningful effort, intending to imbue optimism by recognizing constructive effort (Cameron, 2012). The theory aims to create a workplace where employees are motivated by aligning tasks with their strengths and values.

Compassionate Leadership challenges the misery of others, nurturing trust, engagement, and mental safety to carry on even during the odds (Dutton et al., 2014). The theory intends to alleviate exhaustion, lessen tension, and foster a community based on contentment.

Implications for Organizational Success
Institutional achievement largely depends on the well-being of its people; compassionate leaders inevitably create a milieu of trust and loyalty with access to open communication, leading to a collaborative, spirited work culture, resulting in a safe, regenerating, and pleasant organizational ambience. Longitudinal data confirm that compassionate leadership builds trust, reducing turnover and promoting collaborative environments across industries (Inc Gallup, 2022). Investments in well-being radically improve perceptions of leadership and performance, creating regenerative ambiences where innovation thrives (*Evolving Leadership to Drive Human Performance*, n.d.). Broader implications extend to societal levels, where well-being leadership contributes to human sustainability by addressing multidimensional welfare, achieving true employee flourishing (Inc Gallup, n.d. 2023).

Challenges and Future Directions
This idealistic overview faces certain challenges, perhaps due to a deeply seeded authoritative orientation, which is rather orthodox. Inadequate training of leaders leads to the selection of those unaware of and indifferent to the real ethos of leadership; they fail to internalize the roles and responsibilities of a just and legitimate leader, leading to a dark age of unruly workforce and ambience. Other challenges range from indifference or lack of guidance to measure the functional and necessary traits for choosing the right leader. In fact, the lack of freedom and the predominance of bureaucratic control hinders the exercise and implementation of well-being leadership in organizational settings. Hence, it is time to address the truth that real leadership lies in cooperation, not control. Implementation challenges often stem from lack of employer buy-in and leadership disengagement, where programs fail due to superficial initiatives. Corporate wellness studies identify barriers like poor planning and weak communication, exacerbating orthodox structures (Mattke et al., 2013). The well-being paradox highlights failures from disengaged leadership and unclear goals, advocating for visible participation to shift toward cooperative models (Inc Gallup, 2022).

Future directions should focus on targeted training and frameworks that dismantle bureaucratic controls, emphasizing psychological safety and measurable traits for leader selection (Edmondson, 2019). Integrating gratitude cultures and flexible policies can navigate these hurdles, ensuring sustainable implementation of well-being leadership (Emmons & Mishra, 2011). By prioritizing cooperation over control, organizations can herald a new era of workplace harmony and excellence.

Institutional achievement largely depends on the well-being of its members, and compassionate, sensible leaders create a milieu of trust, loyalty, and hope for the working community, cultivating a sound collaborative spirit beneficial for stakeholders to lead a pleasant working life. The following leadership theories—Theory Z, Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, Positive Leadership, and Compassionate Leadership—offer distinct yet complementary approaches to fostering a cohesive, resilient, and congenial organizational culture. By integrating insights from recent research, this analysis preserves the original intent of each theory while highlighting their practical implications and cross-cultural relevance through empirical evidence.

CONCLUSION

These domains of leadership collectively form a robust framework for well-being leadership, supported by best practices advocating for mental health integration. Narrative reviews emphasize creating equitable environments through flexible policies and meaningful interactions, aligning with the psychological domain's focus on transparency (Kossek et al., 2014). Emotionally, cultivating reciprocal support mirrors servant leadership's empathy, proven to enhance resilience in volatile contexts (Eva et al., 2019). Professionally, alignment with career goals echoes findings where mentorship fosters independence, resulting in sustained institutional loyalty (Randel et al., 2018). It also

emphasize that institutional success depends on employee well-being. Compassionate and sensible leaders create trust, loyalty, and hope, fostering a collaborative spirit that ensures a pleasant working life. Each theory contributes uniquely: Theory Z fosters collective responsibility, Transformational Leadership inspires innovation, Servant Leadership prioritizes service, Authentic Leadership ensures ethical consistency, Positive Leadership drives optimism, and Compassionate Leadership promotes empathy. Research shows these approaches enhance productivity, retention, and satisfaction (Hoch et al., 2018), with trust as a key mediator (Dirks & Ferrin, 2021).

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