

Allowing employees to be self-driven improves performance, study shows

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Credit: University of Melbourne

Managers who encourage staff to take more control over their workflow by putting them in the driver's seat find themselves with more competent and connected teams with motivated, engaged, high-performing and

loyal employees, research by the University of Melbourne shows.

Leaders who employ a style known as autonomously supportive, rather than a controlling, micro-management style, are more likely to encourage greater workplace wellbeing and flourishing employees, according to the meta-analysis published in Springer's *Motivation and Emotion* journal.

And the results are the same across all parts of the globe.

The research shows workers are more likely to be intrinsically motivated – or self-driven – when they can freely choose to pursue their work activities, feel they can master their tasks and are surrounded by important and supportive people like managers, mentors, peers and friends, finding a sense of relatedness.

"We found better workplace wellbeing and motivation when employees were not reliant on external events like rewards or sanctions," said Melbourne Graduate School of Education study author Gavin Slemp.

"Our study showed that autonomy support leads to positive outcomes like [intrinsic motivation](#), wellness, engagement and more committed and loyal employees, no matter the national culture," Dr. Slemp said.

"We explored these leadership behaviours in studies that had accumulated more than 30,000 employees from all over the world and results were similar no matter the location."

The research shows people who are intrinsically motivated do not need external rewards because the activity itself, that is self-driven, is its own [reward](#).

"These practices have a positive influence on [employee](#) work [motivation](#),

performance and psychological functioning. Employees are less likely to suffer from burnout," Dr. Slemp said.

"They might seek out new challenges and learning opportunities or take steps to develop relationships with peers. Decades of research document the positive effects of satisfying these three needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness—and autonomy support is an important contributor."

The study shows an autonomy-supportive leader will: provide opportunities for staff to make their own choices and have input into decisions; encourage self-initiated behaviours within structured guidance and boundaries; and show interest in their perspective and demonstrate empathic concern while avoiding controls that restrain [autonomy](#) or sanctions or rewards.

More information: Gavin R. Slemp et al. Leader autonomy support in the workplace: A meta-analytic review, *Motivation and Emotion* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s11031-018-9698-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9698-y)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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