

Study urges rethink on employee well-being

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Deakin University research has revealed managers' leadership styles could be to blame for their employees' health issues.

The paper, published in *Sport Management Review*, finds an urgent

rethink is needed to change the way employers operate to reduce [employee stress](#) and burnout.

Research author and Senior Sport Management lecturer in Deakin's Business School Dr. Steve Swanson said traditional [leadership](#) approaches generally ignore the fact [employee](#) well-being is multidimensional.

Instead, most leaders focus too much on one aspect of staff satisfaction, such as providing meaningful work to their employees. This often results in "managerial trade-offs" where one well-being element is supported while others can be negatively impacted.

Servant leadership, defined as when leaders prioritize serving their employees first and where there is a genuine concern for them and a primary focus on their growth and well-being, was found to be the best leadership style that benefited all key facets of employee well-being.

The latest ELMO Employee Sentiment Index for the first quarter of 2022 showed burnout was on the rise with 46 percent of Australian employees feeling burnt out. A third of workers said they felt overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do, while almost a quarter said they had taken on more responsibility.

Randstad's latest *Workmonitor* study showed more than half of Australians aged under 35 would quit their job if it stopped them enjoying life, and a recent story by Forbes showed chronic work stress can damage people's brains.

"The three main facets of employee well-being we discovered in our research centered around employees' social, psychological, and physical needs," Dr. Swanson said.

"If an employer focuses too much on creating meaningful work and providing their staff with opportunities to take on extra responsibility, we will often see two things happen. One is employees' psychological well-being may be boosted because they feel challenged and that they are building their skillset. On the other hand, these employees are often more prone to experiencing setbacks in social and physical health.

"As a remedy to this situation, a key finding of our research is that servant leaders can bolster well-being in multiple areas by facilitating a strong sense of teamwork within their organizations."

Dr. Swanson's research surveyed 489 people working in business operation roles within professional sport organizations. While his research took place within the sport industry, Dr. Swanson, who is also the co-director of Deakin's Centre for Sport Research, said the findings generally apply to a broad spectrum of workplaces.

"Research into leadership and employee satisfaction has, until now, failed to recognize that people aren't one-dimensional. They have well-being needs across different areas that managers must cater to," Dr. Swanson said.

"Employee well-being is holistic, and the sooner employers recognize that, the sooner they can start creating a better work environment where employees feel challenged, but also valued and supported in all areas of their life."

Main findings:

- The 'servant leadership' style of management has a positive impact on multiple forms of employee well-being: psychological, social, and physical.
- Leadership and teamwork emerged as two critical elements for

fostering well-being

- Practices referred to as "managerial trade-offs" are likely when one leadership approach can improve one area of well-being while detrimentally affecting another

More information: Steve Swanson et al, Leading for multidimensional sport employee well-being: the role of servant leadership and teamwork, *Sport Management Review* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/14413523.2021.2014225](https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.2014225)

Provided by Deakin University

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