

“Panel discussion: Addressing employee well-being through music and adaptive leadership”

A well-being-crisis and a leadership challenge

Well-being problems and burnout are pervasive in society and part of a tendency that has been characterized as a global epidemic of mental health crisis with severe costs for individuals, organizations, and society at large. The German philosopher Han speaks in this context of the ‘burnout society’ (Han, 2015). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this health crisis hits the youth especially hard, where they define mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” (WHO, 2022).

The well-being tensions that the new generation experience constitute a complex, leadership problem. The key question is what leadership can do to increase psychological safety. The notion of adaptive leadership with its focus on changing behavior in appropriate ways as the situation changes (Yukl & Mashood, 2010) appears to be especially promising in this regard.

In this panel discussion, we consider the prospects of adaptive leadership for addressing well-being through music. Framing leadership as a complex interactive dynamic, which may support employee and leaders flourishing from which adaptive outcomes emerge, fits with an understanding of how music is created together, brings together, requires patience and adaptability. Being in an orchestra reminds us of the importance of creating a safe space – where the players can be themselves and trust and rely on those around them. This leadership dimension seems to have an important and overlooked practical potential - given the increased focus on the role of psychological safety on well-being (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Music creates a sense of a community and belonging based on emotional/aesthetics appreciation of a piece of art. For particularly the young generations it is a crucial element bringing groups together.

This panel discussion brings together researchers, members from the young generation, and practitioners to discuss the well-being problem from the perspective of leadership and music.

Addressing the absence of scholarly attention paid to the role that music and orchestrating may play for leadership to supporting collaborative capabilities and psychological safety, the panel discussion contributes to start a conversation, potentially filling what Edmondson and Bransby (2023) highlight as the “most glaring gap” pertaining to how to create psychological safety.

A basic premise of dominant leadership approaches (e.g., Bass, 1999; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007) is that leadership is relational, happens as a shared effort and requires embracing the tensions experienced by the employees in the leadership relationship.

Orchestrating well-being and the power of music

Given the WHO definition of well-being, it seems that burnout and human flourishing are mutually exclusive. Celenza (2023) argues that the process of thinking and writing about music can lead to human flourishing.

Aim and feature of the panel discussion

The discussion has a triple intension: Providing food for thoughts, practice, and the heart.

- We present research-based knowledge on the workplace well-being-tension and how these tensions constitute a leadership matter.
- We discuss how working with and conducting an orchestra and the music can be a resource for addressing employee well-being
- We create knowledge with the audience and spark a conversation about how to advance knowledge on investigating the intersection of leadership and well-being-challenges.

We bring in the music to scene. After each theme, we will listen to chamber musicians from Danish Chamber Orchestra (DCO).

Employee well-being is approached as a wicked problem (Grint, 2005), and the attendees will not leave with solutions, but an enhanced understanding of the leadership challenges. The audience will be actively involved in the discussions. We invite the participant to both share their own experiences, and we encourage to ask questions to the panel.

The panel

Pernille Steen Pedersen, Assistant Professor (CBS). Pernille is leading a research project on stress and well-being among students (well-beinglab.cbs.dk).

Andreas Vetö, CEO and conductor of DCO). Andreas has worked practically with several large companies to bring the music in connection with business practice.

Lea Thingmann Kristiansen, CEMS Master in international management. Defended august 2023 her master thesis: *A Both/And View on Well-being of Young Employees: Unfolding Presence and Relationships for Leadership practice*. She has played the piano and sung in different choirs.

Francesca Mus, CEMS Master in international management. Defended august 2023 her master thesis: *A Both/And View on Well-being of Young Employees: Unfolding Presence and Relationships for Leadership practice*. She has studied classical guitar and solfeggio.

Michael Pedersen, associate professor (CBS) moderates the discussion.

References

Bass, B.M. (1999) Two Decades of Research and Development in *Transformational Leadership*. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8, 9-32.

Celenza, A H. (2023). *Music and Human Flourishing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Coe, E; Cordina, J, Enomoto, K Jacobson, R Mei S & Seshan, N (2022). Addressing the unprecedented behavioral-health challenges facing Generation Z. *McKinsey's webpage*
- Edmondson, A C., & Bransby, D. P. 2023. Psychological Safety Comes of Age: Observed Themes in an Established Literature. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology & Organizational Behavior*, 10(1): 55-78.
- Grint, K. (2005) Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership.' *Human Relations* 58(11): 1467-94.
- Han, B.-C. (2015). *The Burnout Society*. Stanford University Press.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., & McKelvey, B. (2007). Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(4), 298–318
- World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) Mental health: *Strengthening our response*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response> (accessed 13 January 2023).
- Yukl, G & Mashod, R (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 81–93