

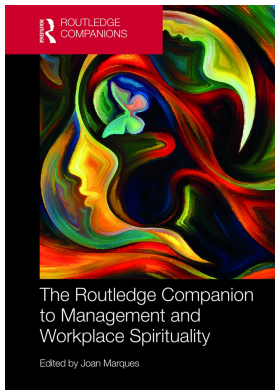
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## **The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality**

Joan Marques

### **Leading in Times of Cultural Diversity**

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## 22

# LEADING IN TIMES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

## Achieving Wellbeing, Inclusivity, and Organizational Performance

*Wanda Krause*

### **Introduction**

At its basic level, wellbeing is about personal happiness—feeling good, healthy, working safely, and achieving productivity. Recognizing and embracing diversity means to be inclusive. An inclusive environment has everything to do with wellbeing. Yet, it is still little understood that if a company or an organization wants to thrive in the long term, keep a competitive edge, and make a difference in some key way, wellbeing must be an immediate organizational imperative. Indeed,

[hu]manity needs to cultivate sustainability practitioners with the skills and capacities to engage and work effectively with complexity; to be adaptive, creative, and generative; to collaborate with diverse stakeholders; and to communicate effectively with a diversity of worldviews and value systems.

*(Lynam, 2014, p. 3)*

Gallup has illustrated the link between wellbeing and workplace performance. Yet, according to a 2013 Gallup poll, in the US more than two in three workers are unhappy in their jobs with 52% of US workers “not engaged,” meaning that even if they don’t actively hate their jobs, they’re unhappy and don’t invest themselves in their job. Another 18% are “actively disengaged,” meaning they can’t stand their jobs and sometimes even sabotage co-workers or their companies. As our workplaces become more diverse, organizational leaders and management will have to grapple with how to lead with the values and qualities it will take when it comes to ensuring wellbeing for a diverse group of people with differing cultures, backgrounds, or religion, among so many more attributes that make us all different.

As such, leaders are recognizing that it is critical to create an environment where individuals can enjoy equal opportunity, dignity, and wellbeing. Thus, how might leaders and managers bridge this knowledge with capability to create the culturally safe and inclusive environment where individuals thrive? Research also shows that diversity in the workplace can contribute to better performance. How might organizational leaders and managers grappling with conflicts in the workplace around cultural differences in teamwork and perspectives harness this knowledge to move past differences and potential sites of conflict to greater performance? The real question then becomes: what values and qualities do we need to possess as organizational leaders and

managers to achieve cultural diversity, individual wellbeing, and better performance? Bias and preference related to sameness as part of our human prejudices might be limiting our ability to answer this question and put into practice what it takes to ensure wellbeing and inclusion in our organizations. I propose that by overcoming misunderstandings and biases to learn how to lead in times of intensifying cultural diversity, we can be well positioned to create wellbeing for all. We know how to harness diversity in the workplace which then leads to greater ability to problem solve, be creative, build strong teams, achieve organizational performance, and sustainability.

### **Why Achieving a Culture of Wellbeing and Inclusion is Critical for Performance**

Embracing diversity is the first and critical step to team building and creating sustainability within organizations. Wellbeing in the workplace includes physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and community wellbeing and, therefore, to be *well* is largely about being inclusive. It's about individual wellbeing and collective wellbeing. It relates to feeling safe and expressing oneself creatively and purposefully without fear of repression, prejudice, and exclusion. Economic growth as the ultimate goal has dominated company strategy but cannot remain the end goal if companies hope to survive into the coming decades. Yet, people tend to have a bias toward sameness both in their personal and professional lives. It would seem that when people can all agree on issues that teamwork is simpler and smoother but when people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences come together they offer more varied perspectives and experiences that are essential for continued growth and creativity of the collective. There are several further reasons why it is essential to consider why achieving a culture of wellbeing and inclusion is critical for the health of an organization, its sustainability, and its impact in the economy or wider world, as described in this section.

We begin with individual wellbeing and performance. High performers cannot sustain their output in a company culture where they are driven to keep producing under pressure and stress. Human beings are not machines; they will become ill, costing the economy in medical care and the organization in low performance and sick leave. If conditions do not enable wellbeing, the organization will be used as a stepping stone for something better. People are increasingly fed up with putting nose to grind with no joy or purpose, as illustrated through people increasingly leaving paid employment to start up their own businesses. Clients of mine and of colleagues are increasingly seeking out support not just around life coaching but more so on two levels—purposefully to brainstorm, plan out, and strategize how they can leave their stressful jobs to becoming their own bosses making a bigger impact around issues they can finally give voice to and to discover and learn how to create stronger relationships for which they have long not exercised skills or created capacities. They are seeking ways to live more purposefully and impactfully from an experience of exclusion, overwork, and lack of a sense of being valued. They will leave the organization, also forcing the organization to rehire and retrain, and the organization will not attract and retain talent. A lack of wellbeing can be costly to the organization.

Emerging leaders require nurturing. Indeed, in every individual is a leader, regardless of a defined role, although not all individuals experience being seen and valued as contributors to their organization and the world. Evidence has shown that leaders rarely emerge on their own but through an environment and culture that value and nurture their potentials. Employers are wasting opportunities for nurturing talent within their organization, and likely contributing to individuals “not engaged” if not “actively disengaged” if they're not actively creating a culture of wellbeing, engagement, and inclusion. Overworking is correlated with lower performance.

Putting off addressing underlying causes for burnout, the related retention issues, and lack of engagement is costing, and costing not just money but individual willingness to go the extra mile for the team or organization when needed.

There are numerous studies that show the impact of adequate sleep over a period of time on physical performance. In a study appearing in *SLEEP*, Cheri Mah, a researcher in the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic and Research Laboratory, showed that basketball players at the elite college level were able to improve their on-the-court performance by increasing their amount of total sleep time. Those players who got more sleep saw their free-throw shooting go up by 9% and their three-point shooting go up by 9.2%. Results are similar regarding mental performance. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos (2017) explains:

Making a small number of key decisions well is more important than making a large number of decisions. If you shortchange your sleep, you might get a couple of extra “productive” hours, but that productivity might be an illusion. When you’re talking about decisions and interactions, quality is usually more important than quantity.

Good cognitive functioning, including decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, are directly correlated to sleep (Killgore, Balkin, & Wesensten, 2006). Good cognitive function is critical for good leadership and performance.

As a result, leaders, such as Arianna Huffington, are teaching organizations to embrace such key aspects to individual wellbeing and performance in the workplace as sleep. Huffington (2017) reasons, “If performance at your job or in your life involves focus, attention, decision-making, productivity, creativity, resilience or learning, sleep can be just as effective as a performance enhancer in your life.” But sleep is one part to wellbeing. In the *Training Journal*, Derek Mowbray (2013) says,

The ingredients for feeling well are clustered around having a purpose in life, feeling personal success and happiness in relation to a number of key elements—relationships, resources, the environment, personal growth, personal control and other items that individuals feel are important to them.

He adds, “if [people] cannot focus and concentrate on completing a task, they are not performing effectively.”

In addition to her own research, Caroline Mbaabu cites several studies conducted in workplaces to track the performance of individuals who engaged in workplace wellness activities and found that “that majority of employees who participated in physical fitness programmes had above average performance, lower rates of absenteeism, higher commitment to work, and lower employee turnover” (2013, p. 15). Some of her research showed enormous increases in performance. According to Mowbray (2013), the link between wellbeing and performance is that people who feel well usually feel in control of themselves and so it’s the attitude that determines the level of performance. Strategy is also of importance. Results-oriented people, instead of simply being “busy,” have the greatest results. According to Benjamin Hardy (2016), it is important to have “intensive activity followed by high quality rest and recovery.” That means that one focuses on the goal and does what is needed in order to reach that goal in intensive spurts.

Similarly, creativity doesn’t happen by working long hours to get through tasks and figure things out, but instead requires those spaces in between for the brain to wander and the person to reflect. Hardy adds, “when you’re working, be at work. When you’re not working, stop working. By taking your mind off work and actually recovering, you’ll get creative breakthroughs

related to your work.” But such practice requires that leaders trust that individuals can have the capacity to self-manage their own energy and time and invest in capacity development to support such practice. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Ron Friedman (2015) says we need to reframe why we are disengaging at the end of the day. He explains, it’s much like exercise where we are doing something that is not just for your own personal, selfish benefit, but rather something that can help us be more effective at work. He emphasizes that the people who don’t disengage, the people who are constantly checking their emails on evenings and on weekends, are the ones who tend to be less engaged a year later—because they’re burnt out. Thus, how do we create individual and organizational wellbeing as well as the inclusion of diverse people?

One key is creating a shared understanding of the benefits of wellbeing not only to one’s own life but to the enhancement of those one shares one’s life with, one’s team, and the good of one’s whole organization. Hence, another key includes the supports that an organization can create for everyone to practice wellbeing, and the supports that must necessarily be put in place, such as through a buddy system where individuals take on responsibility to support each other. Further, while leaders can build supports within the workplace, they can also work toward building the right mindset and culture supportive of wellbeing that the individual takes outside work, too. Such is a leap in reframing. But as Hardy (2016) also points out, “what you do outside work is just as significant for your work-productivity as what you do while you’re working.” In his TED talk, Stuart Brown (2008) refers to a large body of literature on the role play has on the brain and performance. But for wellbeing to really become a value, organizational leaders would need to embrace this value as something that is a life skill and capacity, exercised in and outside the work environment.

Changing organizational culture is one of the hardest tasks for any leader. But when we have a shared understanding of what wellbeing means to us as individuals and as a collective in an organization, and have critical social supports in place, we can be well placed to keep disciplined in reaching and maintaining wellbeing and inclusion as values. All cultures are based on value systems and to create change in any value system takes a common framework, support, and discipline until wellbeing and inclusion of diverse ways of being is an intrinsic value. There will be times ahead in an increasingly turbulent world when the market share sees even greater competition but that is when we will need to rely on individual wellbeing and engaged individuals to make it through. Individual wellbeing and diversity is the new model for economic growth that leading organizations are now embracing.

### **The Values Required for Wellbeing and Inclusivity in Leading through Greater Diversity**

As our organizations become increasingly diverse, workplace culture around wellbeing and inclusivity is a key determinant of how valued and supported people feel in their roles and how productive the organization becomes. Hence, we need to ask what values we need to embody or, essentially, who we need to become in order to enhance how well and included people feel in their organizations. Employee and team relationships are much like any personal relationship. From this basis, we can grasp how important it is to create conditions and opportunities that enable wellbeing to occur and inclusivity to be felt that are embedded in values that we share similarly in our personal relationships. These include foremost trust, belonging, and reciprocity.

The values of trust, belonging, and reciprocity support one another. When there is a sense that the leadership and staff at all levels invest in building trust and belonging, employees are inspired to reciprocate with greater investment in the organization. Practices that support

belonging, trust, and reciprocity, in turn boost productivity. When employees feel they have contributed shared perspectives on how well they feel in their workplace, leaders will have greater success at creating a culture of wellbeing and sustained productivity. Such is achieved by including everyone's ideas, input, experiences, and wishes for how they feel they can get on board with their own wellness, and also how to support each other to achieve wellness and a sense of safety.

Even if well meaning, when ideas of wellbeing and inclusion are imposed, leaders may discover few are on board. In one workplace, the owner generously bought every individual a year's pass to the gym in the same building as a Christmas present. But nearly no one went to the gym. Some employees felt guilty that money was wasted on something they didn't want and the company owner was mad at everyone that she wasted the money. Resentment grew on both sides. Had she solicited feedback on what wellness looked like and what would support different notions of wellness, she would have had different results. Getting everyone on board by gathering a shared understanding of what wellbeing looks like is step one. Had she explored further she might have discovered that some individuals would prefer to exercise in nature, rather than a gym, or at times that were not connected to work. She might have discovered, too, that some people might feel exercising in public, not least at the workplace with co-workers, might be uncomfortable, if not even a cultural oddity, or even taboo. When our ideas around the experiences we want for our own happiness are heard, we feel valued.

Having conversations with people about what people want has everything to do with trusting that they know. When people feel trusted, their motivation to achieve things in the workplace tends to come from the inside, rather than the outside. As a leader, the best approach to ensuring performance is to inspire and motivate. The inducements and punishments approach is still evident in most organizations and awareness around how those methods miss the objective of facilitating belonging and trust is key. Trust must be an objective if leaders want to facilitate wellbeing, sense of inclusion, and one's voice being heard. While few leaders would argue against trust being necessary for performance, many still view trust-building as a "soft" or "secondary" competency (Covey & Covant, 2016). Covey and Covant remind us "It's not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have. Without it, every part of your organization can fall, literally, into disrepair. With trust, all things are possible—most importantly: continuous improvement and sustainable, measurable, tangible results in the marketplace." In one study published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* (Helliwell & Huang, 2011), an increase of trust in management at one-tenth of the scale was equivalent to more than 30% increase in monetary income.

The Great Place to Work Institute partnered with *Fortune* to produce the "100 Best Companies to Work For" in which trust comprised two-thirds of the criteria. They similarly found that those companies beat "the average annualized returns of the S&P 500 by a factor of three" (*Fortune* 100, 2017). Covey and Covant (2016) explain how trust affects two measurable outcomes, speed and cost: "When trust goes down (in a relationship, on a team, in an organization, or with a partner or customer), speed goes down and cost goes up." All leaders need to consider trust-building as a key component to employees' positive experience and sense of wellbeing.

Reciprocity is enhanced when one is feeling valued and supported which correlates to better performance. Social reciprocity goes far beyond "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." It's a means to effective collaboration. Effective collaboration is where each person brings their strengths, capacities, experience, assets, and value to the table that another does not have and can benefit from. In this sense, each person adds to effectiveness by sharing what he or she uniquely can bring and receiving what others uniquely can bring in a relationship of any form. But reciprocity is almost a natural response to feeling included, trusted, their ideas heard, their presence embraced. This aspect to collaboration and performance is often overlooked but has comprised

one of my biggest research findings among the organizations I have studied where people facilitate the changes they want to see, especially in challenging situations and environments.

Studies illustrate the connection between reciprocity and performance that organizational leaders will need to consider. Economists show that employers who are perceived as distributionally fair by their employees generate comparatively more value due to the positively reciprocal behavior of those employees (Bosse, Phillips, & Harrison, 2009). But it's not just fairness that is critical to higher performance but rather the mentality of giving in a relationship, whether a personal one or within an organization, where service entails that you bring your best to the table for the betterment of others and the benefit of the whole. As Englmaier, Kolaska, and Leider (2015) conclude through their research, by practicing reciprocity as a value employees develop more team-working and are generally more successful. Hence, performance in the organization is directly related to the values of reciprocity, trust, giving, collaboration, being included, and being valued.

### **Creating and Embracing a Culture of Wellbeing and Diversity**

There are steps leaders can take to enable the development of a culture of wellbeing, engagement, and inclusivity among diverse groups in the organization supportive of productivity, impact, and/or profit.

#### ***Define Wellbeing, Inclusivity, and Diversity***

For leaders to create awareness and demonstrate wellbeing and inclusivity, it is important to be clear on what the workplace needs in order to be inclusive in practice and not just in theory. It helps if leaders define what wellbeing, inclusivity, and the embracing of diversity means to them and all individuals in the organization by holding conversations around these topics. Leaders often focus on best practices and strategies to the neglect of engagement with the very people in the organization that any changes or adoption of new practices and strategies impact. Defining wellbeing and what it means to be inclusive involves a process of inquiry and engagement with individuals. Inquire into what wellness, happiness, safety, and health means to individuals within the organization. Surveys also comprise a favorite tool among employers and those they consult to collect data for change management. They are usually cheap to administer, quick to answer, and quick to tabulate, given their quantitative nature. While surveys further offer the safety of anonymity, they do not allow leaders to truly engage. The crux of engagement is the conversations that can emerge through the lengthier process of inquiry and circular discussions that can go in unexpected and new directions. Leaders cannot design steps toward and get buy-in for wellbeing and inclusivity if they do not know how everyone defines wellbeing and inclusivity in the complexity and breadth of developing the capacities and practices for enhancing these values.

Diversity is not simply about color, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or educational level. Lynam explains there is a "hidden form of diversity," which Drago-Severson calls "the new pluralism", that functions like an internal operating system in the individual (cited in Lynam, 2014, p. 51). Diversity must be recognized in a much broader spectrum. It includes disabilities and various challenges. It includes approaches and ways of learning information—it's not just about speed of learning. Diversity critically encompasses the logic a person holds to make sense of the world and process information, which differs from person to person. Lynam also points out that "[ho]w adults make meaning, how they respond to different educational experiences, and their capacities for and styles of self-reflection, self-direction, and

collaborative learning are all significantly influenced by a ... developmental stage” (2014, p. 54). Some people are introverts and others extroverts, and while this is one aspect to the way people show up in teamwork and life, it is also essential to understand therefore the different areas for growth and development that individuals want and need. Some individuals exhibit a need for control of their environment and even people. Others are contemplative or thinkers, while others are doers, or tend to delegate, collaborate better, or are highly trusting of their colleagues, etc. People show up differently depending on training, experience, personality, character, psychological make up, and a variety of other reasons. It is important to have conversations about and explore what these differences are from a place of understanding. It is essential to explore how to embrace and support people with their differences so that they feel safe, well, honored, respected, and can perform to their greatest capacities. In sum, the work environment should be one in which people can become their greater versions of themselves continuously.

### ***Create Awareness***

Leaders can help their organization understand the utility of wellbeing and inclusivity by linking these to values which staff, or influencers within and related to the organization, hold. There is a readiness to get on board that starts with awareness. For example, if a “why” for the administration, stakeholders, or shareholders is “profit” it helps to make the connection to wellbeing explicit by pointing to the outcome of greater individual productivity and capacity modeled in other organizations or among teams in the same organization when a culture embracing of wellbeing and diversity is supported. If a “why” is increasing performance, leaders can point to the value of diversity or the value of wellbeing within the organization to it doing better in growing its market share or doing better at achieving the impacts it envisions, among which includes statistics. There are different levels of awareness that people can hold depending on the logics they hold about the world and their place in it. Ultimately, leaders should strive to work with the higher levels of logic around wellbeing and diversity, such as embracing these as a moral imperative or as human values for dignity. However, creating awareness might also require coming from a utilitarian perspective if biases toward sameness to the exclusion of others who are different has been a strong aspect of the company culture.

### ***Model Wellbeing and Inclusion***

All cultures are based on value systems and to create change in any value system takes a common framework, institutional and social support, and, above all, discipline in modeling the value until it is an intrinsic value. Leaders will need to be bold in demonstrating that wellbeing is important by carving wellbeing into their day as daily practice. In other words, leading in times of cultural diversity entails modeling wellbeing and inclusion. Modeling wellbeing comes in the forms of ensuring physical wellbeing to how we interact with one another and make choices that affect others. Considering how physical wellbeing affects productivity, the countries performing the highest have the shortest workdays. Seven countries among those with the highest GDP rank have the fewest working hours. They include Luxembourg, then Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. However, we still live in a culture of bragging about how hard we work and how little we sleep to work. But bragging is actually a sign that one is not performing. In a 2015 interview, LinkedIn’s Chief Human Resource Officer, Pat Wadors tells us:

Trust me, it’s not a badge of honor to brag that you can get by on 4 hours or 5 each night ... You intimate that with fewer hours “wasted on sleep” you are more



productive. Nope. Can't buy that. When you brag about that, you are telling me that it's ok for you to harm your health and not perform your best at work or at home. Is that something to brag about?

*(Cited in Huffington, 2017)*

Modeling physical wellbeing might require taking major steps outside company culture and the country context in which we live to embrace wellbeing. This could be from initiating structural changes within the organization to providing example on how one lives one's work-life balance. Modeling wellbeing includes leading through a stressful company culture with examples of how one creates work-life balance and leading others on how to do the same by providing opportunity. Leading means modeling not only how one lives the values of wellbeing and inclusivity but by actually creating opportunities and means for all to be included, taking steps to provide different ways to learn, personal development time to learn and be creative, and making the embracing of diversity an imperative through advocating for organizational policy and in personal action.

To lead in embracing a culture of diversity, leaders will need to design where and how they will nurture seeds and take bold steps for wellbeing and inclusivity. Leading in this era means being a transformational leader because organizations are just beginning to recognize the need to embrace diversity as a value. Such, then, requires planning on how one can position him/herself within the organization, model the way, and introduce these concepts within the organization's culture, policies, and structure. A strategic plan in consultation with individuals will be important so that one can set a vision, mission, expectations, actionable steps, and therefore garner buy-in. Within such planning at such times, leading effectively can best occur through indices for monitoring success in changing organizational culture to the embracing of wellbeing and diversity. Monitoring starts with evaluating how one is leading and the milestones one is achieving. Because leading these changes is about transforming old systems of making profit and this as central focus requires control as method of leading versus embracing a new system of balance, wellbeing, and inclusion, leaders will have to take care to not get burned out in the process, by practicing wellbeing and balance. There will be times creating awareness and getting buy-in might feel like one is pushing upstream. But the process must be sustainable and as a result monitoring and evaluation must begin with oneself.

## **Conclusions**

Organizations need greater diversity in order to grow and keep their competitive edge in the marketplace and in the world. This is at a time when the world is fast changing and, as a result, solutions to emerging challenges require a greater breadth of perspectives, experiences, and individual propensities. However, as our workplaces become more diverse, leaders are challenged to create the culturally safe and inclusive environments where diversity may be embraced so that all individuals experience dignity, respect, and can thrive and truly contribute. Leading in times of increasing diversity requires learning and embodying the qualities to lead during these challenging times for the success of individuals within their organizations and the sustainability and impact of their organizations in the world. The qualities and values important for leading through such times include, critically, awareness, trust, reciprocity, and giving as corner stones to wellbeing and inclusivity, and modeling the way to wellbeing and inclusivity. To lead in embracing a culture of diversity, further, requires a transformational role where leaders imbue the critical values and introduce concepts of wellbeing and diversity within the organization's culture, policies, and structure.

Leading into the future with these qualities, values, and planning processes is a moral imperative as much as it is the only real means for continued and sustained organizational performance. In other words, embracing wellbeing and diversity is the right thing to do. Working toward progress will indeed be challenging as leaders are transforming old approaches, systems, and paradigms around impacts and profit to new ways of thinking, acting, and being in their organizations around wellbeing, balance, and inclusion, and even profit itself. Such will require sticking to values of wellbeing and inclusion from a developmental perspective that will often be slow, challenged by those who fear change, fear cultural diversity, and fear the new perspectives that cultural diversity will force to emerge. The process will require that they challenge their own perspectives and biases. Such encompasses changing attitudes toward others and around other perspectives that are often rooted deeply in culture. Yet, changing attitudes and developing broader perspectives will need to come first before decision-makers can grasp the utility of changing organizational policies and structure.

Leading in times of cultural diversity is truly a purposeful and noble endeavor. One is not only taking on the task of ensuring success of his or her organization and creating safe environments where individuals can exercise the human right to live in dignity in diversity. Such a leader is facilitating the development of individual awareness and growth into greater humanity when individuals are growing into greater versions of themselves by breaking past bias and limitation into acquiring greater development, perspective and awareness. Steps to achieve these transformations include, at the basic level: engagement in defining wellbeing inclusivity and diversity; encouragement of expression; creating awareness around these concepts and the utility of wellbeing and inclusion; and at the very least, though most critically, modeling the way for wellbeing and inclusion.

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