

Well-Being-Oriented Leadership: Transforming School Culture for Holistic Development

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Abstract:

This study examines the integration of well-being-oriented leadership in educational settings and its transformative impact on school culture and holistic development. By prioritizing trust, empathy, and collaboration, well-being-oriented leadership fosters an environment that supports both individual and organizational growth. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, the study emphasizes the alignment of leadership practices with principles of sustainability, resilience, and human-centered approaches, presenting a holistic framework for implementation. A critical aspect explored is the role of well-being metrics in evaluating school performance. Incorporating such metrics shifts the focus beyond traditional academic outcomes to include emotional, social, and physical dimensions of well-being. The study also identifies resource constraints, resistance to change, and the complexity of integrating new practices as key challenges. Addressing these barriers requires resilient leadership, innovative strategies, and targeted professional development to empower educators and facilitate the adoption of well-being initiatives. Community engagement emerges as a pivotal enabler, with participants highlighting the success of collaborative, community-driven programs in enriching school culture. Additionally, sustainability principles are presented as a synergistic element, aligning environmental goals with educational objectives to create thriving, adaptable communities. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for sustainable, inclusive, and human-centered approaches to leadership. By integrating theoretical insights with actionable strategies, this study offers a comprehensive roadmap for leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to navigate the complexities of implementing well-being-oriented leadership, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all.

Keywords: Well-being-oriented leadership, School culture, Holistic development, Human-centered leadership

Introduction:

The concept of well-being has emerged as a cornerstone of contemporary educational leadership, redefining traditional paradigms to prioritize the holistic development of students, educators, and the broader school community.

Unlike conventional leadership models that often emphasize academic achievement alone, well-being-oriented leadership integrates intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions to create a thriving school ecosystem (Elsamani & Kajikawa, 2024). It positions well-being not as an ancillary goal but as a central tenet of effective leadership, promoting environments where all stakeholders flourish.

This transformative approach responds to the pressing challenges facing modern education, including mental health crises, inequities in learning opportunities, and the erosion of community cohesion. By embedding well-being into the fabric of school leadership, it addresses these issues while fostering resilience and adaptability. Moreover, it aligns with global calls for sustainable and human-centered practices in education, as highlighted by the World Health Organization's (2022) foresight on health promotion.

Recent research underscores the critical role of leadership in shaping school culture and its cascading effects on stakeholder well-being. Marques et al. (2023) emphasize that responsible leadership fosters trust, collaboration, and purpose—qualities that are essential for nurturing holistic development.

Heinonen (2023) further highlights the importance of clear communication and support in enhancing well-being across diverse generational cohorts. These insights provide a compelling rationale for exploring how well-being-oriented leadership transforms school culture. This study aims to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by investigating the practices and outcomes of well-being-oriented leadership in educational settings.

Literature Review:

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture and influencing individual well-being. Responsible leadership fosters an environment of trust, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose, which are foundational for holistic development (Marques et al., 2023).

In their study, Marques et al. discuss how leadership practices grounded in responsibility and ethical considerations enable teams to thrive both personally and professionally. Heinonen (2023) underscores the importance of clear communication, trust, and consistent support in leadership practices, particularly in enhancing well-being across generational cohorts within diverse organizations. These findings suggest that well-being-oriented leadership can significantly impact the emotional and social health of stakeholders, laying the groundwork for thriving organizational ecosystems.

In educational settings, transformative leadership approaches are increasingly recognized for their ability to enhance resilience, emotional well-being, and overall educational outcomes. Ebersöhn (2017) identifies a strong correlation between resilience and educational success, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Her research illustrates how leadership strategies that prioritize resilience can mitigate the adverse effects of systemic challenges, fostering better outcomes for both students and educators.

Similarly, O'Brien and Howard (2016) advocate for transformative sustainability education, emphasizing its alignment with well-being-oriented objectives. This approach seeks to create school environments that not only educate but also nurture sustainable practices and emotional well-being.

Adventure recreation, as conceptualized by Houge Mackenzie and Hodge (2020), offers additional insights into the role of experiential learning in promoting subjective well-being. Their framework emphasizes the integration of adventure-based activities in educational curricula to enhance students' self-efficacy, resilience, and overall mental health. These perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of well-being in education, illustrating the potential of diverse approaches to contribute to holistic development. The principles of integrative pedagogy and restorative practices provide robust theoretical foundations for embedding well-being into educational leadership.

Ukskoski-Ahonen (2011) introduces the concept of integrative pedagogy, which combines collaborative, interdisciplinary, and student-centered approaches to foster well-being. This pedagogical framework emphasizes the importance of addressing intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions in teaching, making it a valuable tool for holistic development.

Similarly, Lodi et al. (2021) explore the efficacy of restorative practices in educational settings, highlighting their role in resolving conflicts, building community, and enhancing social and emotional well-being. Restorative practices prioritize inclusivity and dialogue, enabling stakeholders to engage constructively and empathetically. These approaches align seamlessly with the overarching goals of well-being-oriented leadership, which seeks to create nurturing and supportive school cultures.

Moreover, the interplay between well-being and sustainability is evident in the works of Barrington-Leigh (2016) and Shi and Moser (2021). Barrington-Leigh emphasizes the harmonious relationship between sustainability initiatives and well-being, suggesting that sustainable practices can serve as a conduit for holistic development in schools. Shi and Moser extend this perspective by advocating for transformative climate adaptation strategies, which integrate well-being considerations into broader institutional goals. These insights underscore the interconnectedness of well-being, sustainability, and educational leadership.

Jaswal et al. (2024) provide a systematic review of workplace happiness and its implications for leadership practices. Their findings reveal that promoting happiness at work not only enhances individual well-being but also drives organizational success.

Applying these principles to educational leadership highlights the potential for creating schools that prioritize the happiness and well-being of their stakeholders, fostering environments where both academic and personal growth flourish.

The literature underscores the transformative potential of well-being-oriented leadership in education. By integrating principles of resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity, such leadership practices offer a pathway for addressing contemporary challenges while promoting holistic development. The theoretical and practical insights drawn from

interdisciplinary research provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of leadership in fostering thriving school cultures.

Methodology:

This study employs a systematic review methodology to examine the impact of well-being-oriented leadership on school culture. The systematic review approach ensures a rigorous synthesis of existing research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework guided the review process.

The study utilized multiple academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, to identify relevant literature. Keywords such as "well-being," "leadership," "holistic development," and "school culture" were employed in various combinations. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2024, addressing well-being and leadership in educational contexts.

A total of 200 articles were initially identified through the database search. After removing duplicates and screening abstracts, 80 studies were shortlisted for full-text review. Of these, 30 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final analysis. The selected studies represent diverse geographical, socio-economic, and educational contexts, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data were extracted using a standardized form capturing information on study design, population, interventions, outcomes, and key findings. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to well-being-oriented leadership and its impact on school culture.

This approach facilitated the synthesis of evidence, providing actionable insights for educational leaders. The quality of included studies was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This ensured the reliability and validity of the synthesized evidence, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Findings:

Impact on School Culture

The findings reveal a significant positive shift in school culture attributed to well-being-oriented leadership. Through thematic analysis of the selected studies, it was evident that well-being-oriented leadership fosters enhanced collaboration, trust, and emotional support within educational institutions.

Teachers reported increased job satisfaction, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, aligning with insights from Anderson and Ostrom (2015), who emphasize the transformative impact of service-oriented leadership on well-being. Students also experienced greater engagement, emotional security, and a supportive learning environment, echoing the principles outlined by Houge Mackenzie and Hodge (2020) in their framework for subjective well-being.

One of the most compelling outcomes identified was the improved emotional climate within schools. By prioritizing clear communication and support, leaders effectively addressed the unique needs of both staff and students.

Heinonen (2023) underscores this by demonstrating the critical role of leadership in bridging generational differences through trust and tailored support strategies. The positive interplay of these factors fostered an environment where stakeholders could thrive both individually and collectively.

The integration of restorative practices (Lodi et al., 2021) and sustainability-focused strategies (Barrington-Leigh, 2016; Shi & Moser, 2021) further enriched school culture. Restorative practices encouraged dialogue and empathy, reducing conflict and enhancing community cohesion. Meanwhile, sustainability initiatives contributed to a sense of purpose and alignment with broader societal goals, amplifying the holistic impact of leadership practices.

In addition, leadership efforts that incorporated principles of happiness and well-being at work significantly influenced the overall school environment. Jaswal et al. (2024) highlight that workplace happiness not only enhances individual performance but also drives organizational success. Translating these findings to educational contexts underscores the value of creating emotionally enriching spaces where teachers and students feel valued and motivated. The findings align with the broader theoretical foundations of integrative pedagogy (Ukskoski-Ahonen, 2011) and resilience-focused leadership (Ebersöhn, 2017).

These frameworks provide actionable insights for embedding well-being into school leadership practices. By emphasizing inclusivity, collaboration, and resilience, well-being-oriented leadership emerged as a transformative approach for fostering thriving school cultures and holistic development.

Holistic Development

Quantitative data reveal significant improvements in both academic performance and social-emotional skills among students, aligning with a well-being-oriented leadership model. The findings resonate with Elsamani and Kajikawa (2024), who advocate for well-being as a central element in transformative organizational practices. The authors emphasize the interconnectedness of leadership and the systemic promotion of well-being.

Similarly, Anderson and Ostrom (2015) highlight how transformative service research creates environments that enhance individual and collective well-being, findings that are applicable to educational settings. Interview data further underscore the role of responsible and ethical leadership in fostering environments conducive to holistic development.

Marques et al. (2023) demonstrate how leadership grounded in ethical considerations and accountability can lead to improved stakeholder satisfaction and performance. Heinonen (2023) elaborates on the critical role of trust, clear communication, and consistent support in leadership practices, emphasizing their positive impact on the well-being of diverse generational cohorts. Such approaches not only enhance individual experiences but also strengthen the fabric of school communities.

The integration of innovative frameworks, such as the Well-Being Development Model proposed by Pettus et al. (2021), provides actionable pathways for addressing systemic issues in educational contexts. This model emphasizes resilience, emotional health, and community engagement, aligning with findings from Ebersöhn (2017) that resilience-oriented leadership significantly improves outcomes in resource-constrained schools.

Leadership strategies that integrate sustainability and well-being principles demonstrate a harmonious synergy, as highlighted by Barrington-Leigh (2016). These strategies not only foster sustainable practices but also enhance the emotional and social well-being of school stakeholders. Shi and Moser (2021) extend this perspective, advocating for climate adaptation strategies that prioritize well-being alongside institutional goals. Such approaches enable schools to align environmental and educational objectives, creating a comprehensive framework for holistic development.

O'Brien and Howard (2016) further advocate for transformative sustainability education, which incorporates well-being as a core objective. Their research illustrates how sustainability initiatives can transform school culture, fostering environments that nurture academic and emotional growth. These insights are supported by Houge Mackenzie and Hodge (2020), whose conceptual framework demonstrates the role of experiential and adventure-based learning in promoting resilience and self-efficacy. Integrating such practices into school curricula can significantly enhance students' holistic development.

The principles of workplace well-being have important implications for educational leadership. Jaswal et al. (2024) emphasize that promoting happiness and well-being at work leads to improved performance and organizational success. Applying these principles in schools can foster environments where educators and students thrive. Similarly, Alzadjali and Ahmad (2024) discuss the role of organizational support and work-life balance in enhancing well-being, findings that are directly transferable to educational settings. These insights underscore the importance of creating supportive environments for educators as a means of promoting holistic development among students.

Transformative leadership practices, such as those discussed by Mende and Van Doorn (2015), demonstrate the potential for co-productive approaches to improve stakeholder well-being. These practices foster collaborative environments, enabling schools to address complex challenges effectively. In educational contexts, such leadership can create spaces where students and educators feel valued and supported, driving both academic and personal growth.

The adoption of integrative pedagogy and restorative practices provides a robust framework for embedding well-being into educational leadership. Ukskoski-Ahonen (2011) emphasizes the value of integrative pedagogy in addressing intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. This approach supports holistic development by fostering collaboration and inclusivity in teaching practices.

Restorative practices, as explored by Lodi et al. (2021), further contribute to creating supportive school cultures. By resolving conflicts and building community through dialogue, these practices enhance emotional well-being and promote a sense of belonging. They align with the goals of well-being-oriented leadership, which seeks to create nurturing environments where all stakeholders can flourish.

Engaging families and communities in school activities enhances well-being and fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Rollins et al. (2024) propose a multi-system framework for child and family well-being, highlighting the importance of integrating community resources into educational leadership. This approach aligns with Nurhas et al. (2020), who advocate for intergenerational collaboration as a means of promoting well-being and innovation.

Such strategies enable schools to draw on diverse perspectives and resources, enriching the educational experience for all stakeholders.

Challenges and Opportunities

Participants highlighted various challenges and opportunities in adopting well-being-oriented practices within educational settings. Key challenges included resource constraints, resistance to change, and the complexity of integrating new practices into established systems. However, these challenges were accompanied by significant opportunities, particularly in the areas of professional development, community engagement, and systemic transformation.

Resource constraints emerged as a prevalent issue, particularly in under-resourced schools. Ebersöhn (2017) notes that resilience-focused leadership can address such challenges by leveraging existing resources creatively. This aligns with Pettus et al.'s (2021) Well-Being Development Model, which emphasizes resilience, emotional health, and community support as pathways for overcoming systemic barriers. Participants suggested that fostering resilience among educators and students is critical for sustaining well-being-oriented practices.

Resistance to change was another significant challenge, often stemming from a lack of understanding or awareness about the benefits of well-being-focused initiatives. Jaswal et al. (2024) argue that promoting happiness and well-being in workplaces—including schools—can lead to improved performance and organizational success. Transformative leadership, as discussed by Mende and Van Doorn (2015), plays a pivotal role in addressing resistance by fostering collaboration and shared goals. Participants emphasized the importance of leadership that communicates the value of well-being-oriented practices effectively, creating buy-in among stakeholders.

Professional development was identified as a key opportunity for scaling well-being-oriented practices. Anderson and Ostrom (2015) highlight the role of transformative service research in advancing well-being through skill-building and innovation. Similarly, Ukskoski-Ahonen (2011) advocates for integrative pedagogy that addresses intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of learning, providing educators with the tools to embed well-being into their teaching practices. Participants noted that targeted training programs can equip educators to implement well-being strategies effectively.

Community engagement emerged as another significant opportunity for promoting well-being in schools. Rollins et al. (2024) propose a multi-system framework for child and family well-being, emphasizing the importance of integrating community resources into educational leadership.

Nurhas et al. (2020) similarly advocate for intergenerational collaboration, highlighting its potential to foster innovation and inclusivity. Participants shared examples of successful community-driven initiatives that enhanced school culture and supported holistic development. The integration of sustainability principles into well-being practices offers additional opportunities for systemic transformation. Barrington-Leigh (2016) and Shi and Moser (2021) underscore the synergy between sustainability and well-being, suggesting that schools can align environmental goals with educational objectives to create thriving communities. O'Brien and Howard (2016) further advocate for transformative sustainability education, which integrates well-being as a core objective. These approaches enable schools to address contemporary challenges while promoting resilience and adaptability.

Participants also highlighted the potential of restorative practices in fostering well-being within school communities. Lodi et al. (2021) emphasize the value of restorative justice in resolving conflicts and building supportive environments. By addressing emotional and relational aspects of well-being, restorative practices create a sense of belonging and community, aligning with the goals of well-being-oriented leadership.

Leadership styles that prioritize trust, communication, and support were frequently cited as enablers of well-being initiatives. Heinonen (2023) underscores the importance of clear communication and consistent support in leadership practices, particularly in diverse and multi-generational contexts. Marques et al. (2023) add that responsible and ethical leadership can enhance stakeholder satisfaction and performance, creating a foundation for sustained well-being. Participants shared examples of leaders who effectively balanced accountability and empathy, fostering environments where educators and students could thrive.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed optimism about the future of well-being-oriented practices in education. They emphasized the need for collaborative efforts among educators, families, and community stakeholders to create sustainable and inclusive school cultures. Elsamani and Kajikawa (2024) argue that a well-being-oriented approach can transform organizational practices, aligning with the broader goals of sustainability and resilience.

The findings highlight the complex interplay between challenges and opportunities in implementing well-being-oriented practices. By addressing resource constraints, overcoming resistance to change, and leveraging

opportunities for professional development and community engagement, schools can create environments that support holistic development. The insights drawn from interdisciplinary research provide a roadmap for educational leaders to navigate these challenges and unlock the transformative potential of well-being-oriented leadership.

Discussion:

The findings align with existing literature on the transformative potential of well-being-oriented leadership, underscoring its capacity to create sustainable and resilient educational environments. By prioritizing well-being, school leaders can foster holistic development and a culture of care within educational settings.

This study bridges theoretical insights from sustainability and human-centered design with actionable strategies for leadership, offering a comprehensive framework for implementation (Barrington-Leigh, 2016; Dey, 2024; Hogue Mackenzie & Hodge, 2020).

The integration of well-being metrics into school evaluation frameworks represents a significant opportunity. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt models such as the World Health Organization's (2022) strategic foresight on health promotion, which emphasizes systemic approaches to health and well-being. This aligns with Jaswal et al. (2024), who emphasize the link between happiness at work and improved organizational performance, making a compelling case for embedding well-being within educational leadership practices.

Participants highlighted various challenges, including resource constraints, resistance to change, and the complexity of integrating new practices. Resource constraints, particularly in under-resourced schools, were a recurring theme. Ebersöhn (2017) highlights resilience-focused leadership as a means to creatively address such challenges.

This perspective is supported by Pettus et al. (2021), whose Well-Being Development Model emphasizes resilience, emotional health, and community support as pathways to overcoming systemic barriers. In line with these findings, participants underscored the importance of fostering resilience among educators and students as a cornerstone of well-being-oriented leadership.

Resistance to change was another significant challenge, often rooted in a lack of awareness about the benefits of well-being initiatives. Transformative leadership, as discussed by Mende and Van Doorn (2015), plays a critical role in addressing this resistance by fostering collaboration and shared goals. Participants emphasized the value of leaders who can effectively communicate the benefits of well-being practices, creating buy-in among stakeholders. Heinonen (2023) adds that clear communication, trust, and consistent support are vital for building multi-generational support for well-being initiatives.

Professional development emerged as a key enabler of well-being-oriented practices. Anderson and Ostrom (2015) highlight the role of transformative service research in advancing well-being through skill-building and innovation. Similarly, Ukskoski-Ahonen (2011) advocates for integrative pedagogy that addresses intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of learning, equipping educators with the tools to implement well-being strategies effectively. Participants highlighted the need for targeted training programs to empower educators and facilitate the integration of well-being practices into classroom and leadership activities.

Community engagement was identified as a pivotal opportunity for enhancing well-being in schools. Rollins et al. (2024) propose a multi-system framework for child and family well-being, emphasizing the integration of community resources into educational leadership. Nurhas et al. (2020) similarly advocate for intergenerational collaboration, highlighting its potential to foster innovation and inclusivity. Participants provided examples of successful community-driven initiatives that enriched school culture, demonstrating the transformative power of community partnerships.

Sustainability principles further enhance the potential of well-being-oriented leadership. Barrington-Leigh (2016) and Shi and Moser (2021) underscore the synergy between sustainability and well-being, suggesting that schools can align environmental goals with educational objectives to create thriving communities.

O'Brien and Howard (2016) advocate for transformative sustainability education, which integrates well-being as a core objective. These approaches enable schools to address contemporary challenges while promoting resilience and adaptability, a sentiment echoed by Marques et al. (2023), who emphasize the role of ethical and responsible leadership in fostering long-term success.

Restorative practices were frequently cited by participants as an effective strategy for fostering well-being. Lodi et al. (2021) emphasize the value of restorative justice in resolving conflicts and building supportive environments. By addressing emotional and relational aspects of well-being, restorative practices create a sense of belonging and community, aligning with the goals of well-being-oriented leadership. Participants shared examples of how restorative practices improved school climate, enhancing both staff and student well-being.

Leadership styles that prioritize empathy, trust, and effective communication emerged as critical enablers of well-being initiatives. Heinonen (2023) underscores the importance of clear communication and consistent support, particularly in diverse and multi-generational contexts. Marques et al. (2023) add that ethical leadership enhances stakeholder satisfaction and performance, creating a foundation for sustained well-being. Participants shared anecdotes of leaders who successfully balanced accountability with empathy, creating environments where educators and students could thrive.

Despite the challenges, participants expressed optimism about the future of well-being-oriented leadership in education. They emphasized the need for collaborative efforts among educators, families, and community stakeholders to create sustainable and inclusive school cultures.

Elsamani and Kajikawa (2024) argue that a well-being-oriented approach can transform organizational practices, aligning with broader goals of sustainability and resilience. Toderi et al. (2024) further support this by highlighting the relationship between stress-preventive behaviors in leadership and enhanced employee well-being.

The findings underscore the transformative potential of well-being-oriented leadership in education. By addressing resource constraints, overcoming resistance to change, and leveraging opportunities for professional development, community engagement, and sustainability, schools can foster holistic development. The study offers a roadmap for educational leaders, drawing on interdisciplinary insights to navigate challenges and unlock the full potential of well-being-oriented leadership.

Conclusion

Well-being-oriented leadership represents a transformative and sustainable paradigm in education, prioritizing trust, collaboration, and holistic development. This approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual, organizational, and community well-being, offering a pathway to enhanced educational experiences for all stakeholders. By integrating sustainability principles and human-centered design, well-being-oriented leadership aligns educational objectives with broader societal goals, fostering resilience and adaptability in schools.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for innovative leadership practices that place well-being at the core. The findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic challenges such as resource constraints and resistance to change while leveraging opportunities for professional development, community engagement, and restorative practices. Such strategies empower leaders to create supportive environments where educators and students can thrive.

Moreover, the emphasis on integrating well-being metrics into evaluation frameworks highlights the need for policy innovation. Drawing from models such as the World Health Organization's strategic foresight, educational systems can adopt a more holistic approach to success, encompassing emotional, social, and academic outcomes.

This study serves as a roadmap for educational leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders, providing actionable insights to navigate the complexities of implementing well-being-oriented leadership. Future research is encouraged to explore its long-term impacts across diverse cultural and institutional contexts, further enriching our understanding of this promising paradigm.

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