Paper Title: Rethinking leadership and its importance for workplace well

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Employee wellbeing is gaining increasing attention in academic research as it is an important component of workplace relations and Human Resource Management. Poor wellbeing can lead to chronic absenteeism, presenteeism, occupational and organisational risk, loss of productivity and damage to an employee’s reputation as an ethical organisation. This is particularly so in public sector organisations that engage in frontline emergency and first-responder work. Public organisations are subject to high levels of scrutiny and community expectations and operate with limited resource funding. The nature of work places unusual psychological, emotional and physical demands on workers who are likely to be involved with traumatising situations.

Based on a study of a large public sector first-responder service organisation examining the factors that are impacting the wellbeing of frontline workers, the findings of this study suggest that the notion of leadership deserves deeper consideration as a mediating factor. There is considerable evidence that leadership plays an important role in enhancing employee wellbeing (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Inceoglu, Thomas, Chu, Plans, & Gerbasi, 2018; McHugh, 2016). However the evidence is scattered and there remains important challenges for research on the complex interrelationships between leadership and employee wellbeing (Nielsen & Taris, 2019).

The findings show that in spite of the analytical complexities, leadership is an important mediating factor in worker wellbeing and that the research on these relationships may need to run parallel with more contemporary and nuanced theorising on leadership. Such notions of leadership go beyond the actions of individual managers and consider leadership as a relational process, distributed and shared across the organisation.


