

# Leadership: the missing link in a sustainable approach for New Ways of Working

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Theme 5: Flexibility and entrepreneurialism in future labour markets; What about sustainability?

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### **Leadership: the missing link in a sustainable approach for New Ways**

Many organizations have explored new and more flexible work arrangements known as New Ways of Working (NWW). In these arrangements, team-based knowledge workers, often working remotely, have to share responsibilities and rely more heavily on self-management. Management has to deal with the enhanced autonomy and accountability of empowered employees, but also with problems related to self-efficacy and social cohesion. In this 'new world of work', however, the changing role of leadership is understudied. This theoretical study contributes to the debate. We use Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to explain how leadership influences and motivates workers' behaviour. We propose appropriate leadership approaches and styles and their fit with NWW. Aided by our literature review, we developed four propositions. First, we argue that transformational aspects of formal leaders' leadership have the potential to enhance followers' satisfaction concerning their need for autonomy and competence; similarly, transactional aspects relate to the need for structure. Furthermore, shared leadership can be expected to satisfy needs for autonomy and belongingness. Finally, self-leadership can ensure the satisfaction of followers' needs for autonomy and competence. We conclude that in achieving optimal work outcomes in NWW, a horizontal leadership approach to leadership (e.g., self-management and shared leadership) should be aligned with transformational and transactional aspects of hierarchical leadership. To motivate knowledge workers' performance, managers should adopt appropriate leadership behaviour by facing these workers' needs in NWW. This study offers greater insight into appropriate leadership approaches and styles that stimulate the personal needs fulfilment of knowledge workers in

NWW. Furthermore, the link with employees' intrinsic motivation is original in shared leadership research.

**Keywords** – New Ways of Working, Self-Determination Theory, shared and self-leadership, transformational and transactional leadership, need for autonomy, competence, belongingness and structure

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