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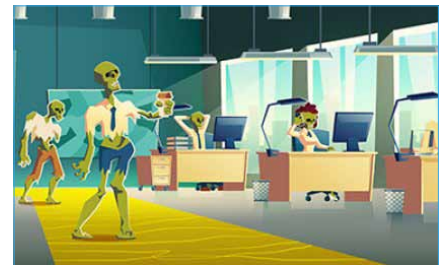


Zombie Leadership Staggers On

A strong, residual commitment to outdated ideas on leadership continues despite the proven harm for individuals, groups and organisations, research by Professor Alex Haslam and the University of Queensland (UQ) School of Psychology has found.

Published in the latest *Leadership Quarterly*, the research has termed the set of ideas as “zombie leadership”, because despite being demonstrably false, “these claims refuse to die”, says Professor Haslam.

“One example is the assumption that leadership is exclusive to people with special qualities which set them apart from the masses,” he states in a recent *UQ News* release.



“Zombie leadership also considers authority as only involving leaders. But leadership can never be a solo process because it’s always grounded in relationships and connections between leaders and those they influence.”

Although finding that “considerable progress” has been made in the field of leadership in recent years, the research discovered the outdated and repeatedly-debunked perceptions which live on include:

- the idea that all leadership is the same
- that good leadership is easily recognised
- that people cannot cope without leaders
- that leadership is always good

Despite having no empirical support, zombie leadership lives on because it flatters and appeals to elites and to the anxieties of ordinary people in a world seemingly beyond their control, says Professor Haslam.

“Zombie leadership is poisonous for organisations and society. If leadership is considered a special skill limited to special people, it signals it as an elite and exclusive activity, and helps to justify inequalities of esteem, recognition and reward.

“This creates problems not only for organisations, but for leaders themselves – because it fuels narcissism and failure to appreciate and capitalise on the potential of others.”

Once people gain an understanding of what zombie leadership is, they can then recognise when they come across it and engage strategies to overcome, he says.

“Understanding leadership as a group process can help leaders be more inclusive. And then championing an approach which sees leadership as a process everyone can contribute to will make groups more successful.

“It’s time to work together to stamp out zombie leadership, because it has persisted for far too long.”

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