

## **Motivation to Lead: A contingent approach to female leadership**

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*The author looks at the concept of motivation when women step into leadership positions, adopting the view that leadership behavior may change due to a change in motivation to lead. Since values shape our behavior and motivation is our desire to do something, a change in our motivation from an extrinsic to intrinsic approach may, consequently, also change our leadership behavior. Furthermore, a change from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation (or vice versa) may happen over the lifespan or can be triggered by a traumatic event, which in turn may lead to a change in leadership behavior.*

### **LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND BEHAVIOR**

Successful leaders have a keen sense of knowing themselves, their personal and professional values, their self-awareness, and how they perceive the world. Such self-knowledge is vital in managing people and dealing with vast amounts of information. It is imperative to know our own dreams in order to inspire our followers. Knowing ourselves allows us as leaders to see beyond our own model of the world, to ignore personal patterns and filters, and to perceive the world from outside the box.

Self-knowledge (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and self-management (Politis, 2001) are key traits of successful leaders (Harshman & Harshman, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; McCoy, 2008). Furthermore, having struggled with our own competing beliefs and values promotes better leadership.

Values, as the consequence of upbringing, education, and personal background, shape our behaviors and attitudes (Adler, 2002). Such values play an important role in leadership behavior and effectiveness (Thomas, Dickson, & Bliese, 2001) as values make something significant and sought-after (Harshman & Harshman, 2008). DuBrin defined leadership style as “the relatively consistent pattern of behavior that characterizes a leader” (DuBrin, 2006, p.114).

According to upper echelons theory, the executive is the most powerful and influential actor of an organization (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Jensen & Zajac, 2004; Nadler & Heilpern, 1998), and he or she has influence on the organization’s strategic choices. According to Hambrick and Mason, “organizational outcomes—both strategies and effectiveness—are viewed as reflections of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in the organization” (Hambrick & Mason, 1984, p.193).

### **MALE VS. FEMALE LEADERSHIP**

Although women and people in minority groups have taken on more leadership roles, they have yet to show a strong presence in the top executive positions (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Joy, 2008). In 2015, the United States Department of Labor concluded that up to 57% of women participate in the labor force. Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi (2009) noted that only 14% of top management positions and 17% of seats in Congress are held by women. Thus, the progress of women taking on leadership roles, and

especially top executive positions, is rather slow and can be explained by women's disadvantages in mainly male-dominated leadership roles (Eagly, Karau, Miner, & Johnson, 1994). The research of Fuchs, Tamkins, Heilman, and Wallen (2004) confirmed that in male-dominant areas, successful women are less liked and such negative response can have an effect on their careers. In a recent article on entrepreneurial leadership and gender, Henry, Foss, Fayolle, Walker, and Duffy claimed that "the traditional view of women entrepreneurs possibly being less capable or lacking in comparison to their male counterparts is both outdated and inaccurate" (Henry, Foss, Fayolle, Walker, & Duffy, 2015, p.584) and highlighted the importance of further research on women's entrepreneurial leadership. Not only do values and behavior affect leadership style but so do culture and especially gender. Many successful women in executive positions mirror their male counterparts' leadership styles, especially in more traditional organizational hierarchies (Nahavandi, 2006) because these masculine behaviors are equated with successful leadership behavior. However, the belief that women need to take on masculine leadership traits to be successful in the corporate world (Sandberg, 2013) is at odds with the opinion that such traditional hierarchical corporate models of leadership are archaic and no longer the best way to lead a company (Slaughter, 2016).

Despite the obvious differences between men and women, there are human aspects of us all that are similar, such as cognitive function (Spelke, 2005) and personality traits (Hyde, 2005). When analyzing different leadership styles, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) found more similarities than differences, concluding that gender did not define a person's leadership style.

According to Prime, Carter, and Welbourne (2009), women are perceived as being more effective at the care-taking leadership behaviors whereas men are more effective at action-oriented leadership behaviors. Successful leadership is associated with taking action, delegating, problem-solving, assertiveness, individualism, and influencing upward, all traditional masculine behavior traits (Jacobs, 2007; Prime et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2014); however, Bass and Avolio noted that women display "higher levels of effort, performance, and advancement across organizations" (Bass & Avolio, 1994, p.550). Furthermore, they claimed that women already display the leadership traits that are imperative in managing organizations and that their transformational leadership approach positively affects organizational performance. Although male-female stereotyping is still very common, Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, and Bongiorno (2011) found that it is the context that matters in "think manager-think male" associations. However, despite male-female stereotyping, Paustian-Underdahl, Slattery Walker, and Woehr (2014) found no difference in male vs. female perceived leadership effectiveness although when asked to self-rate their effectiveness, women tended to rate themselves lower than their male counterparts.

Powell, Posner, and Schmidt found that "female managers were more committed to their careers, as opposed to their family or home life, than male managers" (Powell, Posner, & Schmidt, 1985, p.45), which may be due to the many barriers women have to overcome to get that management position. Men and women perceive the world, and thus communicate, differently (Gilligan, 1982), and organizations should incorporate both male and female leadership in order to benefit from their strengths.

## **MOTIVATION**

Personal values do play a role in how we perceive the world as well as in how we approach that world. Those values guide our being and doing and influence our choices and decisions. Values and the corresponding personal traits are the core explanation as to why some people ambitiously climb the career ladder and why others are happily content with what is.

Motivation as the means to be moved to do something is innate to all people and is considered the main cause of human behavior. Maslow (1943) established the hierarchy of needs stating that motivation is a person's drive to fulfill his (or her) five basic needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Schuh et al. referred to the human motivation theory, defining motivation as "anticipations of desired situations that guide human behaviors toward these situations" (Schuh et al., 2014, cited in McClelland, 1985, p.365). Self-regulatory focus combined with values (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007) can motivate us to take on a leadership role, so can our power motivation, which Schuh et al. (2014) found is

more pronounced in men; thus, they concluded that the lack of such power motivation may affect women's aspiration to take on leadership roles.

The extent to which we are motivated to do something depends on the amount of motivation and the reason for doing so. Ryan and Deci stated that "natural motivational tendency is a critical element in cognitive, social, and physical development because it is through acting on one's inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.56).

Motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is based on our interest, curiosity, self-expression, and personal satisfaction and enjoyment; in other words, an intrinsically motivated person does something based on the sheer enjoyment of doing the activity. Extrinsic motivation is based on our drive to achieve a goal that is separate from the activity itself, i.e., monetary reward, status quo, power, praise, or even pressure (Amabile, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, an extrinsically motivated person does something to obtain the consequences rather than because of the activity. Early research on intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971) eventually led to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1990, 1995), which differentiates between amotivation, or lack of motivation, and motivation and more specifically, the difference between autonomous (i.e., intrinsic) and controlled (extrinsic) motivation and its consequences on work performance (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Deci claimed that "both the intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to motivating employees have advantages: each is effective to some degree" (Deci, 1976, p.67); however, he advises against combining extrinsic and intrinsic rewards at work.

Intrinsic approaches to motivation foster more positive results than extrinsic approaches (Howard, Gagné, Morin, & Van den Broeck, 2016). Employees of visionary leaders are more intrinsically motivated and show greater job satisfaction and commitment to the company (Bono & Judge, 2004).

With regards to motivation to take on a leadership role, for a leader to be effective, she "must want to lead others" (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, p. 52). Kirkpatrick and Locke found that "people with high leadership motivation think a lot about influencing other people, winning an argument, or being the greater authority" (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, p.52), which is often associated with a need for power. Leaders are more motivated to lead if they compare themselves to their leadership ideals and to leader role-models (Guillén, Mayo, & Korotov, 2015) and if they possess a chronic self-regulatory focus (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007).

Motivation is influenced not only by our immediate circumstances but also by our values. Values as the core aspect of a human being define what we judge as important or desirable and drives our behavior. Hence, motivation as a consequence of personal values will, to a certain degree, influence a leader's behavior. So, then the question arises as to whether the type of leader motivation affects leadership style, and if so, will leadership behavior change once personal motivation changes?

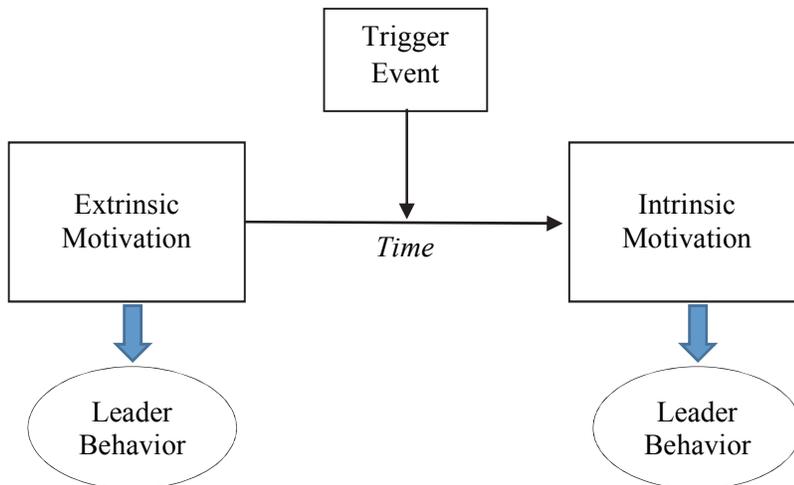
## **CONTINGENT LEADERSHIP MOTIVATION**

Considering that values are the most important aspect of human beings and, as defined by Harshman and Harshman, are "(a) the quality—positive or negative—that renders something desirable or important and/or (b) the beliefs of a person or social group in which they have a significant emotional investment for or against something" (Harshman & Harshman, 2008, p.181), they drive human behavior and attitude (Adler, 2002). In the lifespan, what we deem important and desirable may change with age. There are different stages in an adult's lifespan each with its own challenges (Wortley & Amatea, 1982). Young adults' focus may be more geared towards a career, success, money, and self-expression (i.e., extrinsic motivation), whereas a person towards the age of retirement may value family, quality time, health, and self-realization (i.e., intrinsic motivation) over money and career. Ryan and Deci noted that "the quality of experience and performance can be very different when one is behaving for intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55).

Motivation, as a consequence of personal values, changes over time and thus affects a leader's behavior. Additionally, such motivation may change sooner or more abruptly if the person experiences a traumatic, life-changing event such as an accident, illness, birth, death of a beloved, a husband with PTSD from active military duty, and even bankruptcy, i.e., a triggering event (See Figure 1). Such major events

leave a mark on our outlook on life and raise questions as to what we consider important, hence, possibly changing a leader’s motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic.

**FIGURE 1  
RESEARCH MODEL**



According to Kouzes and Posner, “personal searching is essential in the development of leaders,” and they advised that “you can’t lead others until you have first led yourself through a struggle with opposing values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p.394). Exactly such a struggle with competing beliefs fosters personal integrity and may in turn make for a better leader. Leaders that have explored their own struggles and dreams are better at inspiring others and achieving goals (Boyatzis, McKee, & Goleman, 2002). This is what James (1902, p. X) called “twice-born” one who has struggled and feels separate from their environment. Those people, Zaleznik (1992) claimed, make for leaders that bring about change.

Everyone, especially when their passion for work declines, will eventually question their purpose and if they are truly living their lives the way they want (Boyatzis et al., 2002). This questioning will either creep up after years of unfulfilling work, a milestone birthday, getting married, or simply from slowly fading health. However, a triggering event is usually the wake-up call that will jolt any person out of their trance. A change in a person’s outlook on life due to such a traumatic event will force them to evaluate themselves, their work, and their values. Such self-examination will reconnect the person with their core values, which may have been ignored because of their focus on work, money, and achieving goals. Being empowered with a new, intrinsically motivated, outlook on life may bring out new leadership behavior and possibly a new approach to making decisions.

The contingency theory claims that the task and the situation must be taken into account when analyzing leaders and their styles. Therefore, not only will the situation of the company have to be taken into consideration but also the leader’s personal situation in order to understand executive behavior. A major life-changing event may cause turmoil in the leader’s model of the world, changing her leadership motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic and, as a consequence, will be affecting her behavior since her personal values may have changed in the process. Because a woman can be more in tune with herself and her personal motivations, when she experiences a life-changing event, that situation may have a greater impact on her personal motivation to lead and therefore, may change her leadership behavior more significantly.

## CONCLUSION

Although there is no one correct way to lead people as it depends on the situation and the environment (Drucker, 1998; Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Campbell, 2004; Lorsch, 2010; Vroom, 1976), it is important for a leader to know and understand her personal motivation and behavior to better lead her followers. Different values lead to different behaviors, which lead to different motivations as to why someone wants to step into a leadership role.

Nevertheless, exploring if a leader's motivation affects leadership behavior may uncover a new and interesting perspective. Also to be explored is the question of difference between a leader's extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and if such different personal motivation relates to gender in general, to the leader's age, to a triggering event and, as a result, her leadership behavior.

This author does not claim that women leaders possess a higher self-awareness and that such awareness enables them to make more appropriate decisions in regards to their leadership behavior compared to male leaders. The author also does not propose that every young leader will take on a leadership role based on their extrinsic motivations and that they will change over time or, due to a triggering event, will take up a more intrinsically motivated approach to leadership. However, both concepts will provide further information in understanding leadership in general, and especially, women's leadership behavior.

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