Editorial: Motivation styles of leaders and organizational performance

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Motivation styles of leaders and organizational performance

Leadership is vital in all organizational contexts, impacting team performance, engagement, and innovation (Seo et al., 2025). The motivational style of a leader influences organizational culture, operational efficiency, and resilience (Ahsan, 2025). In the current competitive landscape, leadership transcends mere decision-making; it involves the ability to inspire excellence (Nielsen and Larsson, 2025). Effective motivation enhances employee engagement (Sharafizad et al., 2020) and productivity, thereby contributing to overall organizational success through intentional influence (Haleem et al., 2024).

Motivation styles among leaders generally fall into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Aljumah, 2023). Intrinsic motivation involves inspiring employees through vision, purpose, and personal growth, whereas extrinsic motivation relies on rewards, incentives, and external recognition. The effectiveness of these styles varies depending on organizational culture, industry demands, and employee expectations.

Transformational leaders, who emphasize intrinsic motivation, focus on long-term goals and employee development (Islam, 2024). By fostering a sense of purpose and aligning individual aspirations with organizational objectives, they create an environment of innovation and commitment. Such leaders encourage autonomy, continuous learning, and a culture of trust, leading to sustainable success. On the other hand, transactional leaders primarily use extrinsic motivation, emphasizing structure, discipline, and tangible rewards (Milhem et al., 2024). Bonuses, promotions, and performance-based incentives can drive short-term results, particularly in high-pressure industries where efficiency and consistency are paramount. However, over-reliance on extrinsic rewards may lead to a lack of long-term engagement and creativity among employees.

Beyond transformational and transactional leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, responsible leadership, empowering leadership and autocratic leadership also play roles in motivation. Servant leaders prioritize employee wellbeing and development, fostering high levels of trust and collaboration (Wang et al., 2025). Authentic leadership emphasizes positive psychological capacity and ethical climate in order to enhance leader's self-awareness, transparency, balance processing, and internalized moral perspective for enhancing follower's self-development (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Whereas, ethical leaders emphasize ethical issues while taking decisions, making policies and procedures, and influencing followers through their ethical attitudes

and behaviors (Mayer et al., 2009). Moreover, responsible leader's primary objective is to make a responsible change and create sustainable value. Accordingly, the responsible leader establishes ties with the stakeholders and motivates them to accomplish a shared goal (Maak and Pless, 2006). Moreover, empowering leadership is defined as "a process through which the leader inculcates autonomy, power, motivation, and other work privileges among followers" (Muafi et al., 2019). Autocratic leaders, in contrast, use authority and control to drive performance, which can be effective in crisis situations but may limit innovation and morale in the long run (Huang et al., 2015).

The most effective leaders tailor their motivation strategies to their team's needs, blending intrinsic and extrinsic approaches for optimal impact (Profeti and Toth, 2025). A hybrid strategy fosters a motivated workforce that is both driven by personal growth and incentivized by tangible rewards. When leaders understand their employees' motivational triggers, they can cultivate an engaged, high-performing workforce that contributes to organizational success.

Ultimately, leadership is not just about authority—it is about influence. The motivation style a leader adopts serves as the foundation for building a resilient, committed, and high-achieving team. As businesses navigate an ever-evolving corporate world, leaders must continually refine their motivational strategies to foster innovation, productivity, and long-term growth.

Papers in this Research Topic

In the paper "*Paradoxical leadership: a meta-analytical review*", Lee et al. examined the relationship between paradoxical leadership behavior and follower/team outcomes. Result shows that paradoxical leadership has consistent incremental benefits over transactional leadership, but it is less clear how it works incrementally with transformational and servant leadership, except when it comes to predicting innovation. It was finally shown that paradoxical leadership affects follower behavior through socio-cognitive (psychological safety), role-based (role clarity), and relational processes, which change depending on the result.

Another paper titled "*Leader motivation identification: relationships with goal-directed values, self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and self-regulation*" authored by Van Doom and Raz examined leader motivation through traits, cultural values, and behavior approaches, including motivation to lead (MTL)-style differences subsuming affective-identity, social-normative, and non-calculative styles; MTL-style relationships to culture values, global self-esteem, and self-concept clarity; and personal self-regulation. Evidence showed power and self-direction culture values predicted affective-identity style. Power, achievement, conformity, and security predicted social normativity. Achievement, self-direction, conformity, and compassion strongly influenced leader behavior in goal-setting and impulse control. Goal-setting and impulse control were adversely predicted by tradition, security, excitement, and universalism. Values, global self-esteem, and self-regulation characteristics differed between MTL styles. Through MTL evaluation and leader training on goal-setting and self-regulation diplomacy, this study may help identify organizational leaders.

Cairney et al., in the paper "*Toward a knowledge-synthesis heuristic for sport leaders: the strategic leader synthesis model*" highlighted leadership behaviors, particularly transformative leadership, have dominated sport management leadership studies, ignoring the complex, diverse nature of sports leadership. This ignores the fact that sports leaders work in complicated organizations and environments that shape their actions. Sports leadership requires decision-making, communication, strategic thinking, and a mindset that affects perception, decision-making, and behavior. Thus, focussing on transformative leadership may devalue other traits. This study proposes a leadership framework that blends behaviors, roles, capabilities, and mindset and borrows from business management. This study proposes a paradigm across four domains—Context, Roles, Capabilities, and Mindset—to explore sports leadership dynamics and emphasize the need for a holistic approach that acknowledges their interdependence.

In the paper "*From football pitch to boardroom*" Lambridis intends to assess talent coaching ideas' transferability from football to business leadership by creating a model for corporate talent management success. To analyse talent coaching in business and football leadership, a comparative case study was used. Both domains emphasize individual strengths, teamwork and communication, and a growth attitude, according to the comparison. Both features seem to require continual improvement, feedback mechanisms, and goal setting. These findings suggest that business and football executives may learn from talent coaching. This study concludes with two coaching models for trainers (POSITIVE) and parents (AAAA) as a practical guide for the organization/athletic club. The pilot club is Athletic Club Palaio Faliro in Athens, Greece.

Conclusion

Understanding and using motivational tactics is key to leadership. Leaders may enhance performance, dedication, and creativity by combining inner and extrinsic tactics. Leadership drives sustainable growth by adapting incentive approaches to team demands to enable resilience and success in today's dynamic organizational landscape.

Author contributions

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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