

What Drives Your Leadership?

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Horsepower. Torque. Crankshaft speed. These are just a few of the performance specifications upon which racing engines are measured. From America's NASCAR to international Formula One racing, a motorsports driver seeks the highest engine performance possible in order to win the race. In much the same way, leaders drive organizations with distinct styles governed by their own inward motives. According to Spreier, Fontaine and Malloy (2006), these "motives generate needs, which lead to aspirations, which in turn drive behavior" (p. 75). In this article, charismatic leadership, transformational leadership and transactional leadership are examined in terms of their distinct "driving" forces. Employed both positively and negatively, each style is directed by the underlying motive of the leader. Therefore, superficial characterization as either a charismatic leader, a transformational leader, or a transactional leader does not automatically guarantee good leadership – motive makes the difference!

Empower or Devour

Depending upon the leader's motive, charismatic leadership will either *empower* or *devour* followership loyalty. From beloved civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. to despised political tyrants like Adolf Hitler, the term "charismatic leadership" has been used to describe a large cross-section of influential figures – some good, some not so good. While these leaders are commonly identified as visionaries and inspirational communicators, there exist polarities in the implementation of charismatic leadership. As Howell and Avolio (1992) explain, "Charisma can lead to blind fanaticism in the service of megalomaniacs and dangerous values, or to heroic self-sacrifice in the service of a beneficial cause" (p. 44). Fundamentally, motive determines the bend of one's charismatic leadership.

Motivated by a desire to empower followers; charismatic leaders augment their leadership vision with followers' aspirations (Howell & Avolio, 1992). These *socialized* charismatic leaders cultivate

loyalty from followers because they “serve the collective interest without being motivated solely by self-interest” (Popper, 2000, p. 731). Proponents of this type of charismatic leadership are also known as “ethical charismatics” and maintain their moral standards while consistently modeling the virtues of fairness and courage (Howell & Avolio, 1992, p. 48).

Conversely, “unethical charismatics” follow moral standards only at the convenience of their immediate self-interests (Howell & Avolio, 1992, p. 49). Motivated by a need for personal validation, these charismatic leaders “devour” followership loyalty as a source of “deserved” esteem and are appropriately termed *personalized* charismatic leaders (Popper, 2000). With a controlling reputation of exclusively promoting their own interests, personalized or unethical charismatic leaders are driven by a markedly narcissistic motive compared with that of socialized or ethical charismatic leaders.

Lift or Lower

Governed by the leader’s motive, transformational leadership will either *lift* or *lower* followership potential. Much like the charismatic leadership dyad, polar-opposite motivations distinctly influence transformational leaders. While *authentic* transformational leaders adhere to an *altruistic* motive, an *egotistic* drive characterizes *pseudo-transformational* leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kanungo, 2001; Whittington, 2004). As Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) explain, the four components of transformational leadership – *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* – vary in manner with the leader’s motive.

The *idealized influence* of authentic transformational leaders lifts an organization’s moral values, unlike *inauthentic* or pseudo-transformational leaders who lower these values. While an authentic leader reflects integrity and altruistic values worth emulating; an inauthentic leader may “downsize their organization, increase their own compensation, and weep crocodile tears for the employees who have lost their jobs” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 187).

Leadership motive also determines how *inspirational motivation*, as a component of transformational leadership, lifts or lowers followership potential. Authentic transformational leaders seek to enable followers by highlighting their positive attributes and contributions (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). However, pseudo-transformational leaders constantly dwell on the negative in people, thereby subtly pursuing control and maintaining follower dependence (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Similarly, motive in *intellectual stimulation* gives transformational leaders opportunity to either lift or lower followership development. Given constructive employment through authentic leadership, intellectual stimulation seeks to produce positive change in follower values. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) contend that, applied correctly, this process “helps followers to question assumptions and to generate more creative solutions to problems” (p. 188). However, pseudo-transformational leaders, motivated by “narcissistic interests,” use manipulative persuasion in intellectual stimulation; substituting “emotional argumentation for rational discourse” (p. 189).

Individualized consideration, like the other components of transformational leadership, stands to lift or lower followership potential, depending on leadership motive. An authentic leader, motivated by the altruistic desire to cultivate leadership ability within followers, will offer individualized support through mentoring and coaching practices (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Conversely, egotistic desire motivates an inauthentic leader to give the kind of individual attention which only “foments favoritism and competition among followers” (p. 189).

Clearly, each component of transformational leadership ranges from constructive or “lifting” to destructive or “lowering” with the leaders’ motive as the independent variable. While altruistic motive yields authentic transformational leadership, narcissistic motive breeds pseudo-transformational leadership.

Mobilize or Manipulate

Subject to the leader’s motive, transactional leadership will either *mobilize* or *manipulate* followership contributions. Traditionally seen as devoid of moral or relational intention, transactional leadership facilitates the exchange of rewards and resources between leaders and their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Whittington, 2004; Winston, 2006). Hence, transactional leaders maintain a reputation for meeting the “more immediate,” physical and social needs of followers; juxtaposed to charismatic and transformational leaders who engage followers on “deeper,” emotional levels (Kanungo, 2001). Nevertheless, motive also determines the fundamental nature of transactional leadership.

As Kanungo (2001) explains, “positive” transactional leaders lead from a *mutual altruistic* or *utilitarian* motive which seeks the mutual benefit of both leader and follower. In an equitable exchange of power, rewards and material benefits, utilitarian transactional leaders mobilize followers

in accomplishing corporate tasks. Here, followers gain desired rewards and avoid negative consequence; leaders receive personal benefits, such as greater influence and status; and productivity persists (Kanungo, 2001).

When transactional leaders operate under an *egotistic* motive, however, productivity may occur, but through altogether different means. Egotistic transactional leaders relentlessly fulfill their own self-interests without regard for the needs of followers (Kanungo, 2001). These transactional leaders influence through unethical approaches, wielding coercive power to manipulate followers. As Kanungo (2001) confirms, they satisfy their personal interests “by making followers act like programmed robots” (p. 261). Obviously, transactional leaders motivated by a utilitarian intent of mobilizing followers enjoy preference over those who, from an egotistic motive, exhibit manipulative behavior.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the motive which drives a particular leadership style (charismatic, transformational or transactional) determines its true nature. Positively, socialized charismatic, authentic transformational and utilitarian transactional leaders operate from an altruistic motive which empowers, lifts and mobilizes followership, respectively. Negatively, personalized charismatic, pseudo-transformational and egotistic transactional leaders operate from a narcissistic motive which devours, lowers and manipulates followership, respectively. Altogether, this article’s discussion of leadership motive demonstrates the awesome power leaders possess for either good or bad. A leader’s motive undoubtedly influences leadership style, no matter which methodology one employs. Thus, the nature and effects of moral and ethical orientations in leadership determine the success of task-groups, departments, and whole organizations (Kanungo, 2001). What’s more, these invisible patterns drive every individual, producing the behaviors which shape our families and sculpt our communities. Which begs the question, what drives your leadership?

About the Author

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