

## **The role of leaders in motivating their subordinates at work**

### **Abstract:**

There is substantial research on the importance of autonomous motivation in the workplace; however, little is known on how to change motivation. For instance, vast research supports the beneficial effects of transformational leadership on leaders and their subordinates; and yet, the role of leaders' own motivation has often been ignored. Drawing on self-determination theory of motivation and the full range leadership model, this research examined whether leaders' own motivation and/or their leadership styles have an effect on their subordinates' motivation. Using a longitudinal research design, Study 1 demonstrated that a) leaders' own motivation predicted their leadership style; b) leaders' leadership style had an impact on the quantity, but not the quality, of their subordinates' motivation; and c) leaders' own motivation predicted the motivation of their subordinates such that amotivation and autonomous motivation were contagious between leaders and their subordinates. Given the contagious nature of autonomous motivation found in Study 1, Study 2 used an intervention to examine whether the effects of a training and coaching program aimed at enhancing leaders' autonomous motivation would extend to their subordinates as well. This intervention for leaders was delivered and evaluated using a longitudinal control group design. Compared to leaders who did not receive the intervention, leaders who participated in the training and coaching a) experienced increased autonomous motivation, b) perceived greater meaning in their work, and c) had a more autonomy-supportive style of leadership. Subordinates whose leaders participated in the intervention also experienced increased autonomous motivation and meaningful work. Accordingly, this research suggests that the motivational effects often attributed to transformational leadership may in fact be the result of a motivation contagion effect.