# Supervisors' Value Priorities:



## What This Means for Leadership

There are many ways organizations select managers. Sometimes a candidate from outside of the company with previous management experience or a relevant degree may be selected to fill a supervisory position.[1] More often, a current employee is promoted based on some metric of performance.[2] Perhaps they have demonstrated great managerial skills. They may be great at setting deadlines, enforcing policies, or motivating other employees toward shared goals. Organizations may hire or promote based on perceived knowledge of the industry, and thus make decisions based on tenure with the organization or number of years in experience. In many other cases, employees move into a supervisory position after showing competence at a more junior level. They may be the top salesman, or more motivated than their peers, and may be moved into a supervisory position in hopes that they can encourage subordinates to perform better. While these approaches may be beneficial because they reward hard-

working, ambitious, and knowledgeable employees with a promotion, they may not be the best methods for selecting employees for positions that require leadership abilities.

More and more researchers and industry professionals are finding evidence for the importance of hiring principled leaders, rather than just top performers. In the absence of a strong ethical background, an ambitious and highly achieving leader can actually be detrimental to a company's performance. Leaders that prioritize performance over honesty and social responsibility may encourage their subordinates to engage in unethical behaviors that hurt the company's image and bottom line in the long run. The Wells Fargo fraud scandal, while partially caused by high-pressure sales goals, was also the result of managers and direct supervisors who turned a blind eye to employees' misconduct.[3] This scandal has also had a real and lasting impact for the company. Though most consumers initially

rated Wells Fargo as more trustworthy than other financial organizations before the scandal was publicized,[4] many consumers lost their trust in the company after they learned their financial and personal information was being stolen by employees in order to create fraudulent accounts.[5] This, and many other corporate scandals, are the result of direct managers and supervisors that emphasized and enforced policies that put fiscal performance before ethics and honesty. In light of this, many leadership experts have begun to encourage organizations to hire managers that practice ethical leadership. Managers who value honesty and responsibility as much as financial results model ethical behaviors for subordinates. This, in turn, decreases the chances that subordinates will engage in unethical behaviors and creates a more positive work environment.

Besides fostering an ethical culture, principled leaders may also create a more trusting and open work environment by emphasizing and building relationships with subordinates. Managers who have strong people skills get better results than leaders who are less interpersonally focused. Supervisors who understand the emotions and emotional needs of other employees are more effective.[6] Similarly, leaders who display positive emotions around their followers are more successful than leaders that display negative emotions (e.g., anger), even though negative emotions are usually better at conveying authority.[7] This is because a manager who is open, inviting and

friendly is more likely to create strong ties with their employees, based on a foundation of trust, caring and loyalty.[8] Leaders who engage in relationship-focused leadership emphasize equality[9] and individual consideration[10] for each employee. They also feel a sense of social responsibility to their employees and may feel a need to "serve" their employees rather than have their employees serve them.[11] This type of leadership actually leads to higher performance from subordinates.[12] Subordinates of relationship-focused leaders have lower turnover,[13] do extra work that is not required of their job,[14] engage in less misconduct[15] and feel more positive about their work and the organization.[16]

> **"Managers who have strong people skills get better results than leaders who are less interpersonally focused."**



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## Comparing Managers and Employees Values

Since more effective leaders tend to be ethical and interpersonally-focused, we would expect that most people in leadership positions would have personal values that focus on helping other people and doing what is right. Yet is that really the case? Do employees who get hired into leadership positions actually have different values than employees who are not in leadership positions? And if so, do they value the traits needed to be an effective leader?

To answer these questions, information was pulled from samples of employed adults in North America who filled out the same personal values survey from the last 40 years of research. Samples were fairly evenly spread out across each time period. Since samples spanned across several industries, preliminary statistical analyses were used to makes sure there were no effects of specific industry, type of organization (public or private sector), etc. Information on employees in formal leadership positions were drawn primarily from surveys of direct supervisors, managers or upper leadership at smaller organizations. These specific groups were targeted because employees in these type of positions tend to have more direct contact with subordinates.

All samples included filled out the Rokeach Values Survey (RVS). I focused on this survey in particular because it is one of the oldest and most widely used surveys of personal values that has not been heavily modified in the last decade. This allowed me to compare across more samples than would be possible in more recently developed surveys. In addition, the RVS covers a very wide range of values, many of which are relevant to the interpersonal (e.g., friendship, helpfulness, politeness) and ethical (honesty, responsibility) aspects of leadership. Unlike many other measures of values, it also requires respondents to rank each value, which give a more in-depth understanding of respondents' priorities. Each set of 18 terminal values (i.e., ultimate life goals) and 18 instrumental values (i.e., traits and behaviors used to achieve goals) are ranked separately.

To test for differences between leaders and non-leaders, each sample was classified based on job description and/or description of managerial level given in each paper. Then regression analyses were used to test whether managerial level of the sample had an effect on rankings of each value. As one of our previous white papers suggested, there may be intergenerational differences in value priorities; I controlled for the year the paper was published. To see if differences between leaders and non-leaders have changed over time, I also looked at the interaction between managerial level and publication year.

## *Values Ranked in the RVS*

| | Value | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| **Terminal** | A Comfortable Life | A prosperous, economically secure life |
| | Equality | Equal opportunity for all |
| | An Exciting Life | A life full of stimulation and excitement |
| | Family Security | Taking care of loved ones |
| | Freedom | Independence; free choice |
| | Health and Happiness | Physical and mental well-being |
| | Inner Harmony | Freedom from inner conflict |
| | Romantic Love | Sexual and spiritual intimacy |
| | National Security | Protection from attack |
| | Pleasure | An enjoyable, leisurely life |
| | Salvation | Connection to a higher power; eternal life |
| | Self-Respect | Self-esteem |
| | A Sense of Accomplishment | Making a lasting contribution |
| | Social Recognition | Respect; admiration |
| | True Friendship | Non-romantic close companionship |
| | Wisdom | A mature understanding of life |
| | A World of Peace | A world free of war and conflict |
| | A World of Beauty | A life full of natural beauty and the arts |
| **Instrumental** | Ambition | Hardworking and aspiring |
| | Broadmindedness | Open-minded |
| | Capable | Competent and effective |
| | Cleanliness | Neat and tidy |
| | Courage | Standing up for beliefs |
| | Forgiveness | Willingness to pardon others |
| | Helpfulness | Looking out for the welfare of others |
| | Honesty | Sincere and thoughtful |
| | Imagination | Daring and creative |
| | Independence | Self-reliant and self-sufficient |
| | Intellect | Intelligent and reflective |
| | Logic | Rational |
| | Love | Affectionate and tender |
| | Loyalty | Faithful to the group |
| | Obedience | Dutiful and respectful |
| | Politeness | Courteous and well-mannered |
| | Responsibility | Dependable and reliable |
| | Self-controlled | Restrained and self-disciplined |

### Accomplishments, Capableness, and Wisdom

Survey respondents in formal leadership roles did vary from non-leaders in several ways. Many of these value differences suggest that employees in leadership roles value higher performance and achievement more than their peers.

- Leaders ranked the goal of making a lasting contribution higher than non-leaders consistently across all 40 years of samples.
- Leaders ranked the trait of capableness (i.e., competence and effectiveness) higher than other traits. Leaders on average ranked capableness as the fifth most important instrumental value.
- Leaders valued gaining a mature understanding of life more than non-leaders, and this difference appears to have gotten larger in recent decades.

### Managers and Supervisors Value Responsibility

In addition to higher performance, value rankings of leaders versus non-leaders also suggest that leaders may be more ethically inclined than non-leaders, and this difference appears to be consistent across the last five decades. Overall, leaders tend to value traits related to being conscientious and responsible. This is reassuring in light of recent corporate scandals that suggest leaders may be less ethical.

- Supervisors and managers consistently rank being honest and sincere more than non-leaders.
- Formal leaders also tend to value being more responsible. In most samples, managers ranked responsibility in the top five most valuable traits.

### Managers and Supervisors Do Not Value Interpersonal Traits

While formal leaders' value priorities suggest that they desire being responsible, this sense of responsibility may not translate into better interpersonal relationships with other employees. In general, employees in managerial roles did not rank values related to interacting with others in a fair and positive manner more than their peers.

- Leaders tended to rank being dutiful and respectful toward others as less important than non-leaders. On average, formal leaders ranked this value in the bottom five.
- Despite a general emphasis on being responsible and honest, leaders tended to rate equality as less important than their peers. This difference has been getting larger in the last few decades.
- In the last few decades, leaders have begun to care less about respect and admiration from others than non-leaders.
- Leaders tend to rank politeness as slightly less important than non-leaders.
- Other traits linked to strong interpersonal skills, such as helpfulness, loyalty and friendship, were the same for leaders and non-leaders.

## Implications for Organizations

The value differences between managers and non-managers have many important implications for organizations. First, employees who are selected for supervisory positions appear to be more driven and achievement-oriented than non-supervisory employees. They also seem to be more ethical and conscientious than their peers, as they rank being responsible and honest as more important than non-supervisors. Though this means that employees who end up in leadership positions may be motivated toward higher performance, they may also be less focused on building strong relationships with other employees. This can be problematic because managers who emphasize building strong ties with subordinates tend to be more effective than managers who focus solely on accomplishments. Many of the specific values that managers considered less important, such as maintaining a sense of equality, being polite to others, seeking admiration from peers and being respectful of other people are linked to subordinates feelings of trust toward and satisfaction with the organization.[17].

Overall, the results indicate that North American organizations tend to do a great job of selecting honest and responsible high achievers for management roles, but they may not consider the interpersonal skills needed to most effectively lead other employees. Employers may want hire managers that focus less on just accomplishing goals and more on building a work environment where employees feel respected and fairly treated.

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