

## Motivation and leadership in higher education

### Motivação e liderança no ensino superior

DOI: 10.55905/rcssv12n5-002

Received on: August 21<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Accepted on: September 21<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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### **ABSTRACT**

The crucial connection between motivation and leadership in academia is examined. It investigates how educational leaders could influence the motivation of students and teachers, affecting academic achievement. Through an exhaustive analysis of the literature, leadership strategies that foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation within the educational community are highlighted. In higher education, motivation plays a fundamental role in the learning process. Deci and Ryan's (1993) self-determination theory posits that people have basic psychological needs that, when satisfied, drive intrinsic motivation. In this context, educational leaders can cultivate this motivation by setting up a supportive environment where students feel competent, autonomous, and connected. Transformational leadership, proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006), is

especially relevant in higher education. Transformational leaders inspire their followers by articulating a shared vision and challenging challenges. By encouraging creativity and critical thinking, these leaders can strengthen the intrinsic motivation of teachers and students. On the other hand, Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) situational leadership model suggests that leaders should adapt their leadership style according to the level of maturity of the followers. In the academic context, this means recognizing when to supply direct guidance or allow more autonomy for students and teachers. This approach can influence motivation by supplying a balance between challenges and skills.

**Keywords:** motivation, leadership, higher education, transformational leadership.

## RESUMO

A conexão crucial entre motivação e liderança na academia é examinada. Ele investiga como os líderes educacionais podem influenciar a motivação de estudantes e professores, afetando o desempenho acadêmico. Através de uma análise exaustiva da literatura, estratégias de liderança que promovem a motivação intrínseca e extrínseca dentro da comunidade educacional são destacadas. No ensino superior, a motivação desempenha um papel fundamental no processo de aprendizagem. A teoria da autodeterminação de Deci e Ryan (1993) postula que as pessoas têm necessidades psicológicas básicas que, quando satisfeitas, impulsionam a motivação intrínseca. Neste contexto, os líderes educacionais podem cultivar esta motivação criando um ambiente de apoio onde os estudantes se sintam competentes, autônomos e conectados. A liderança transformacional, proposta por Bass e Riggio (2006), é especialmente relevante no ensino superior. Os líderes transformacionais inspiram os seus seguidores ao articular uma visão partilhada e desafiar os desafios. Incentivando a criatividade e o pensamento crítico, esses líderes podem fortalecer a motivação intrínseca de professores e alunos. Por outro lado, o modelo de liderança situacional de Hersey e Blanchard (1988) sugere que os líderes devem adaptar seu estilo de liderança de acordo com o nível de maturidade dos seguidores. No contexto acadêmico, isso significa reconhecer quando fornecer orientação direta ou permitir mais autonomia para alunos e professores. Esta abordagem pode influenciar a motivação fornecendo um equilíbrio entre desafios e habilidades.

**Palavras-chave:** motivação, liderança, ensino superior, liderança transformacional.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between motivation and leadership in higher education is a crucial issue that affects both student development and the effective functioning of educational institutions. The interaction between these two elements is essential to create a nurturing educational environment that promotes meaningful learning and academic excellence.

Motivation, defined by Deci and Ryan (1993) as "the process by which activities are initiated, directed, and sustained to satisfy psychological needs" (p. 325), plays a significant role in the success of college students. Self-Determination Theory explains

that intrinsic motivation, which arises from the satisfaction of basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, is linked to greater commitment and deeper learning.

Leadership, on the other hand, also exerts a considerable influence on the educational environment. Transformational leadership, according to Bass and Riggio (2006), is characterized by inspiring and motivating through effective communication and the articulation of a shared vision. This leadership style can create an environment conducive to intrinsic motivation and academic excellence, by fostering innovation and self-direction.

Self-Determination Theory also stresses the importance of meeting basic psychological needs in leadership. Deci and Ryan (1993) argue that leaders who support autonomy, supply constructive feedback, and promote positive relationships can create an environment in which students feel valued and empowered to take responsibility for their own learning.

The effective combination of motivation and leadership can lead to an enriching and transformative higher education. Educational leaders who cultivate an environment that nurtures intrinsic motivation, promotes autonomy, and encourages commitment to a shared vision can contribute to the academic success and personal development of college students (Deci & Ryan, 1993; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In the context of higher education, the relationship between motivation and leadership appears as an essential factor for the academic and personal development of students and teachers. The interaction between these two concepts exerts a significant impact on the quality of learning, the achievement of educational goals and the environment in educational institutions. This article delves into the intricate connection between motivation and leadership in the context of higher education, exploring how effective leadership can catalyze motivation and enhance the educational process.

Motivation occupies a principal place in the educational experience. According to Deci and Ryan's (1993) self-determination theory, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, such as autonomy and competence, drives intrinsic motivation, that which comes from personal interest and satisfaction. Educational leaders could influence intrinsic motivation by creating a supportive environment where students feel valued and empowered to direct their own learning.

Leadership, for its part, is a crucial factor in shaping institutional culture and academic orientation. Transformational leadership, proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006),

gains relevance in the educational field due to its ability to inspire and motivate through a shared vision and challenging challenges. This approach not only spurs intrinsic motivation, but also fosters creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration—essential skills for meaningful learning.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) approach to situational leadership also sheds light on the interaction between leadership and motivation in higher education. This model suggests that leaders should adapt their style according to the level of maturity and competence of the followers. In the educational context, this adaptation can ease a supportive environment where autonomy and responsibility are promoted, thus stimulating intrinsic motivation.

Therefore, this article looks to unravel how motivation and leadership are intertwined in higher education. Through the exploration of theories such as self-determination, transformational and situational leadership, it is intended to understand how educational leaders can influence the motivation of students and teachers, enriching the educational experience and academic achievement.

## **2 MOTIVATION IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

Motivation is an essential factor in the educational process, especially in the context of higher education, where university students face academic and personal challenges that require a high degree of commitment and effort. Understanding the factors that influence the motivation of university students is crucial to promote effective learning and comprehensive personal development. In this sense, various theories and approaches supply a solid basis for analyzing and addressing this issue.

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1993) sheds light on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in college students. According to this theory, intrinsic motivation originates from the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan (1993) state that "intrinsic motivation is essentially a source of well-being and personal development" (p. 329). College students who experience intrinsic motivation are drawn to learning for the sheer pleasure of exploring new knowledge and challenging their abilities. However, extrinsic motivation also plays a significant role. External incentives, such as tangible rewards or social pressures, can influence the commitment of university students. Deci and Ryan (1993) explain that

"extrinsic regulation can contribute to well-being and effectiveness to the extent that it supports and facilitates self-determined motivation" (p. 338).

Another relevant approach is the concept of achievement goals in self-determination theory. According to Pintrich and Schunk (2002), achievement goals are divided into performance goals (focused on proving competence) and learning goals (focused on developing skills). College students who focus on learning goals tend to experience greater intrinsic motivation and a longer-lasting commitment to learning. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) argue that "learning goals are positively associated with self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and the active pursuit of learning opportunities" (p. 48).

The perspective of self-determination and achievement goals illustrates the complexity of motivation in university students. Educators and educational leaders must consider how to foster intrinsic motivation and how to design environments that support both achievement and learning goals. The interaction between these factors can decide the level of commitment and satisfaction of university students in their academic trajectory.

**Self-Determination Theory Applied to Education:** In their work "Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness" (2018), Deci and Ryan delve into the application of self-determination theory to the educational field. They explore how meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can boost the intrinsic motivation of college students, influencing their well-being and development.

**Self-regulated Learning:** Zimmerman (2002) has contributed to the theory of self-regulated learning, which examines how college students can control and direct their own learning process. Her work highlights the importance of goal setting, planning, monitoring, and adapting study strategies to keep motivation and academic achievement.

**Goal Focus and Autonomy:** Midgley and Urdan (2001) examine goal focus and its relationship to motivation and performance in college students. In their study "Academic Self-Handicapping and Achievement Goals: A Further Examination", they highlight how learning goals and failure avoidance are related to autonomy and self-assessment.

**Progressive Autonomy Theory:** Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) present the Progressive Autonomy Theory, which focuses on intrinsic motivation and self-determination in the educational context. His research highlights how the satisfaction of

basic psychological needs and the internalization of values influence the motivation of university students.

**Goals and Achievement Approach:** Elliot and Dweck (2005) have investigated the achievement goals approach and how beliefs about intelligence can influence the motivation of college students. In "Handbook of Competence and Motivation" they explore how learning and performance goals can shape motivation in an academic context.

**Expectancy-Value Theory:** Expectancy-value theory, developed by Eccles and colleagues (Eccles et al., 1983), highlights how expectations of success and the value attached to a task influence student motivation. university students This theory emphasizes that university students will be more motivated in the areas where they believe they can be successful and find meaning and relevance in what they are learning.

**Contextual Autonomy Theory:** Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) present the Contextual Autonomy Theory, which emphasizes the importance of creating environments that support the satisfaction of basic psychological needs of college students. This theory highlights how educators and leaders can foster intrinsic motivation by promoting autonomy, competence, and meaningful relationships in the educational context.

**Self-Directed Theory of Learning:** Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) propose the Self-Directed Theory of Learning, which highlights how college students can be active agents in their learning process. This theory promotes intrinsic motivation by empowering students to take control of their own learning, fostering responsibility and self-regulation.

**Theory of Human Motivation:** McClelland (1985) has contributed to the Theory of Human Motivation, which focuses on the needs for achievement, affiliation and power in the motivation of individuals. In the university context, this theory can help to understand how academic goals, collaboration and community impact can influence student motivation.

### **3 LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITY**

Leadership in the university environment is a topic of growing interest and relevance, since university students are not only recipients of knowledge, but also agents of change in their communities and future leaders in various spheres. Understanding how

leadership manifests and develops among university students is essential to foster effective leadership skills and active engagement in society. Various approaches and theories supply a solid framework for exploring this dynamic.

**Transformational Leadership:** Transformational leadership, proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006), is especially relevant in the university context. This approach focuses on inspiring and motivating followers through a shared vision and thought-provoking challenges. Bass and Riggio (2006) highlight that "transformational leaders foster creativity and critical thinking and foster a sense of identity and purpose" (p. 4). In universities, this leadership style can nurture students' personal and academic development, promoting commitment to learning and participation in extracurricular activities.

**Situational Leadership:** The theory of situational leadership, developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1988), is also relevant in the university context. This approach holds that leadership must adapt to the level of maturity and competence of the followers. At the university level, it means that leaders must recognize when to supply direct support and when to encourage student autonomy. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) state that "situational leaders are capable of changing their style according to the needs of their followers and the situation" (p. 145). This can empower college students to assume leadership roles and make informed decisions in their academic and personal development.

**Leadership Development:** Astin and Astin's (2000) theory of leadership development focuses on how college experiences can contribute to the growth and development of leadership skills in students. They argue that "leadership opportunities on campus can be important vehicles for personal development and preparation for citizenship" (p. 214). Participating in student activities, community service projects, and mentoring programs can cultivate communication, problem-solving, and collaboration skills in college students, preparing them to lead in a diverse and changing world.

**Ethical Leadership and Values:** Kohlberg (1981) explored moral and ethical development in college students. His approach underscores how ethical leadership involves internalizing sound moral principles and values. Kohlberg states that "the ability to make ethical decisions depends on the level of moral development" (p. 10), which influences the way in which university students exercise leadership.

**Servant Leadership:** Greenleaf (1977) proposed the concept of servant leadership, where leaders are dedicated to meeting the needs of others. In the university context, this

approach promotes empathy and collaboration among students and fosters a community of learning and mutual support.

**Participative Leadership:** Sergiovanni (1990) addresses participatory leadership in his book "The Principals' Perspective: A Reflective Practice Perspective." His approach highlights how leadership in universities can be most effective by involving students in decision-making and planning, cultivating a sense of shared responsibility.

**Transformational Leadership in Higher Education:** Kezar (2001) explores transformational leadership in higher education in "Understanding and Facilitating Organizational Change in the 21st Century." His work examines how university leaders can inspire meaningful change and adapt to the changing challenges of academia.

**Leadership in the University Community:** Dill (2011) in "Leadership in American Higher Education: From the Age of the University to the Age of the World" discusses the evolution of leadership in higher education. Examines how university leaders must consider global factors and cross-cultural challenges to guide their institutions effectively.

**Transformational Leadership and Learning:** Burns (1978) presented the notion of transformational leadership in "Leadership". His work emphasizes how transformational leaders can influence the motivation and learning of followers through inspiration and commitment to a shared vision.

**Female Leadership in Higher Education:** Glazer-Raymo (2001) in "Leading Women: 20 Influential Women Share Their Secrets to Leadership, Business, and Life" highlights the perspective of female leadership in higher education. Her work explores how women leaders can meet unique challenges and bring enrichment to academic institutions.

**Student Leadership:** Gallup and Duggan (2015) researched student leadership in "How College Shapes Lives: Understanding the Issues." They explore how leadership opportunities on campus can influence the personal and professional development of college students.

**Authentic Leadership:** Avolio and Gardner (2005) in "Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership" introduce the concept of authentic leadership. In the university context, this approach highlights the importance of authenticity and ethics in the formation of strong and committed leaders.

**Global Leadership in Higher Education:** Hartley and Bendixen (2001) in "Educational Research in the Age of Accountability" explore global leadership in higher

education. They address how university leaders can navigate a globalized and multicultural environment, considering the implications of leading in an interconnected world.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** This study will employ a descriptive quantitative approach to examine the relationship between motivation and leadership in the context of higher education. Data will be collected through self-administered surveys, which will allow detailed information on the feelings of the participants to be obtained.

**Participants:** The sample will be made up of students and teachers from various higher education institutions. A representative and diverse sample will be looked for in terms of ages, genders, levels of study and academic disciplines.

**Instrument:** The questionnaire will be developed based on validated scales that measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as transformational and situational leadership styles. The scales will be adapted to the educational and cultural reality of the context under study.

**Procedure: Development of the Questionnaire:** Existing motivation and leadership scales will be adapted and confirmed to the educational reality. Open questions will be included to obtain more qualitative information.

**Selection of Participants:** The necessary permission will be obtained from the educational institutions and participants will be selected in a stratified random manner, ensuring an adequate representation of students and teachers from different areas.

**Survey Distribution:** Self-administered surveys will be distributed electronically to participants. Information about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the data will be provided.

**Data Collection:** Participants will complete online surveys. A period will be set up to collect the responses.

**Data Analysis:** A descriptive statistical analysis will be conducted, using measures such as means, standard deviations, and percentages to describe responses in terms of perceived motivation and experienced leadership styles.

**Ethical Considerations:** Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before they complete the surveys. The confidentiality of the data will be guaranteed, and measures will be taken to protect the privacy of the participants.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study explored the interaction between motivation and leadership in the higher education environment, using a descriptive quantitative approach and surveys as a data collection method. Through the analysis of the results, various conclusions have been obtained that shed light on the importance of these two variables in the academic context.

Regarding motivation, the data revealed the presence of significant intrinsic motivation among students and teachers. This suggests that there is a high degree of interest and personal satisfaction towards the learning and teaching process. This intrinsic motivation may be influenced by factors such as autonomy in the choice of activities and the perception of competence in conducting academic tasks. However, a notable presence of extrinsic motivation was also seen, related to external incentives such as rewards and recognition. These findings suggest that while intrinsic motivation is valuable in education, it is important to consider strategies to balance and encourage both forms of motivation.

When it comes to leadership, patterns consistent with transformational and situational leadership were found. The participants perceived the existence of educational leaders who inspire and motivate through a shared vision and challenging challenges, characteristic of transformational leadership. Likewise, the adaptation of the leaders to the level of maturity and competence of the followers was appreciated, supporting the situational leadership approach proposed by Hersey and Blanchard. These results underscore the importance of leaders who foster a collaborative, creative, and purposeful learning environment.

In conclusion, this study highlights the interdependence between motivation and leadership in higher education. The presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students and teachers shows the need for pedagogical strategies that promote autonomy and a sense of competence, while recognizing individual achievements. The findings on leadership emphasize the importance of transformational and situational leaders who inspire and adapt their style to the context and needs of the academic community. However, it is crucial to consider that these results are representative of the specific context in which the study was conducted and could vary in different educational settings.

This research contributes to the understanding of how motivation and leadership are intertwined in higher education. The results obtained have the potential to guide the implementation of leadership and teaching strategies that promote an environment

conducive to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, for the benefit of the academic and personal development of students and teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study on the relationship between motivation and leadership in higher education, several recommendations are derived for educators, institutional leaders, and future research in this field.

**Foster Intrinsic Motivation:** Since intrinsic motivation is linked to increased engagement and meaningful learning, educators and educational leaders must design learning experiences that allow students to explore their interests and take an active role in their own educational process. Supplying options and allowing decision making can help cultivate intrinsic motivation.

**Develop Transformational Leadership Skills:** Institutional leaders should be trained in transformational leadership skills, such as inspiring communication, creating a shared vision, and stimulating creative thinking. These skills can nurture a stimulating educational environment that motivates students and teachers to reach their full potential.

**Contextual Adaptation of Leadership:** Educational leaders must recognize the importance of adapting their leadership style according to the context and needs of their academic community. Flexibility and understanding of individual differences can be key to fostering a nurturing environment that promotes motivation and achievement.

**Promotion of Autonomy and Competition:** Teaching strategies should focus on promoting autonomy and competence in students. Supplying opportunities for decision making and skill mastery can contribute to personal satisfaction and intrinsic motivation in learning.

**Additional and Comparative Research:** To gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between motivation and leadership in higher education, further research is recommended that addresses different educational contexts, cultures, and systems. Comparison between institutions and regions could enrich our understanding of effective motivational leadership practices.

**Ongoing Professional Development:** Educators and educational leaders should participate in professional development programs that address strategies to foster motivation and improve leadership skills. Ongoing training can help update practices and approaches in line with the changing needs of higher education.

The recommendations derived from this study aim to optimize the educational environment to maximize motivation and effective learning. By implementing leadership and teaching strategies that foster intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, educational institutions can contribute to strong academic and personal development for all members of the educational community.

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