

# GAZDASÁG & TÁRSADALOM

Journal of Economy & Society

## A TARTALOMBÓL:

Okręglicka, Małgorzata – Lemańska-Majdzik, Anna  
Business Process Management in the Finance Area of  
Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Fehér, János  
Value Work and Leadership Practices

Sávay, Balázs – Bartakovics, Gábor – Sávay, Dávid  
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A vállalkozás-vezetés és a stratégia problémái  
a KKV szektorban

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## Value Work and Leadership Practices

*Fehér, János*<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Leadership literature offers a wide array of possible definitions for describing its subject. While influence had been historically—and still has remained—key in interpreting the phenomenon of Leadership, for the past decades other issues, including the leaders' approach to and working through values have gained central importance in the conceptualization of the topic. The aim of this paper is to emphasize the importance of the leader's value work (i. a. a process of identifying, generating, developing, and fostering positive and shared values directed/catalyzed by the leader) in the light of some of the relevant theoretical approaches. It will be addressed how the leaders' activities toward and around values have become an important issue historically. The paper makes references to certain related business aspects of value concern, as well, and offers empirical illustrations about Hungarian leadership practices in question.

**KEYWORDS:** leadership, influence, transformational, value work

JEL codes: M12, M5

### Introduction

Leadership literature offers a wide array of possible definitions for describing its subject. One of the classical definitions sounds: Leadership is „the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts towards goal-setting and goal-achievement” (Stogdill, 1950). An interpretation by Kouzes, Posner from the late 20th century is about Leadership as „the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (1995).

While, as these definitions suggest it, influence had been historically—and we can say still has remained—key in interpreting the phenomenon of Leadership, for the past decades' other issues, including the leaders' approach to and working through values have gained central importance in the conceptualization of the subject. My aim in this paper is to emphasize the importance of value work (i. a. a process of identifying, generating,

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developing, and fostering positive and shared values directed/catalyzed by the leader) in interpreting Leadership and in its academic teaching. For this I would like to briefly review how the issue of the leaders' activities toward and around values has become important historically. I would like to make references to some business approaches related to the value work of the leader, as well. My observations and suggestions are based mainly on some of the mainstream Leadership, and within that, specifically, Leadership History sources. Finally, I would like to illustrate certain related aspects of Leadership practices with some Hungarian research data.

### **Theoretical bases – literature review**

As regards the historical evolution of Leadership, among the most cited theories are the Trait, Behavioral and Contingency approaches (see e. g. Humphrey, 2014; Nahavandi, 2014; Zehndorfer, 2014; Gill, 2011; Buchanan–Huczynski 2013; Yukl, 2010; Lussier–Achua, 2007; DuBrin, 2004; Northouse, 2001).

Following, as an example, Buchanan's and Huczynski's interpretation they describe Trait Spotting as characterized by a search for personality markers (personality traits and other related attributes) of the effective leader in order to facilitate the selection of leaders. The authors (2013, pp. 655–672.) offer comparisons of comprehensive trait lists, i. a. Stogdill' (a revision of hundreds of studies) and Stewart's (based on a survey of American executives). By analyzing them they state "there was limited value in trying to identify leadership traits, although some weak generalization did emerge", insofar leaders tend to score, for example, higher on average on measures of Intelligence, Relevant knowledge, Verbal facility, Participation, Cooperativeness, Popularity, Initiative, Persistence (Buchanan–Huczynski, 2013, pp. 656-657.).

Behaviourally Based Theories show a "switch in attention: from selecting the right leaders on personality traits to training and developing them in appropriate behaviour patterns". (Buchanan–Huczynski, 2013, p. 663.) The main style categories were identified by Behaviourally-based theories as: Considerate, Participative, Democratic, and Involving vs. Impersonal, Autocratic, Directive. An important insight was that 'Consideration'/'concern for people' and 'Initiating Structure'/'concern for production' were independent behaviour patterns, and leaders could qualify high simultaneously in both types of behaviours (ib.).

From the insight that no one style of Leadership would be universally best came the Contingency approach suggesting that the best style is contingent on the situation. Contingency concepts include i. a. Situational leadership, Situational Decision Making, and Emotional Intelligence style application theories. A consensus can be found between different authors that the main concern of the three mentioned historical Leadership Approaches was about influencing followers' behaviour on individual and group level. The approaches had less to say on how to catalyse and implement change in organizations, and to show how significant the Leadership effects would be on organizational level. Also some specific – e. g. emotional, symbolic – methods to influence followers were relatively neglected.

Simultaneously with the growing understanding about organizational culture, in the era of the so called “New-Leadership” the work on and through values, as a leverage and component of Leadership has gained on importance.

**Table 1.: Leadership challenges of the twenty-first century**

From	To
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Downsizing/benchmarking/Quality</li> <li>• Reacting, adapting to change</li> <li>• Information held by few decision makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision, new directions</li> <li>• Creating distinctive competencies</li> <li>• Pro-acting, anticipating change</li> <li>• Designing flat, collegial organizations</li> <li>• Information shared with many persons</li> </ul>

*Source:* Adapted from Bennis and Nanus (1985)

By the late twentieth century we find in the literature the recognition of the role of informal Leadership, at all levels, and the use of additional, i. a. heroic, powerful, charismatic, visionary and empowering, developmental – best generalized as transformational – style-elements.

As one of the above elements, the concept of Charisma comes from Weber (1987, p. 249.). His concept already forecasts the growing importance of values in leadership. House's theory of Charisma underlines strong values (as components of the specific personality characteristics) and trust in leader's ideology (as one of charismatic effects on followers) (House, 1976, pp. 189–207.).

New/transformational Leadership is a complex approach to leadership merging soft tools with specific power elements for handling change situations. It can be characterized by the growing importance of leader's

values and complexity of leadership tools, and behaviours. To the soft tools–beyond Charisma–belong i. a. symbolic effects, and working on shared values and visions. In Northouse’s wordings: „Transformational Leadership (TL) encompasses multiple theoretical and pragmatic approaches with various scopes of analysis” (2001, p. 131.).

The contrast between Transactional and Transformational leadership clearly highlights the growing value emphasis in Leadership.

<p><i>Transactional leadership focuses on the exchanges that occur between leaders and followers</i></p>	<p><i>Transformational leadership refers to the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower</i></p>
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**Figure 1.: Transactional and transformational leadership**

*Source:* Northouse (2001)

In an attempt to synthetize the definitions of several authors it can be suggested that Transformational Leadership puts leaders’ own development, values, shared goals, mutually agreed performance criteria, special emotional-symbolic-charismatic effects, and empowerment into the focus of the influence process. It aims at the development of followers, as well as the raising of their level of aspiration and commitment, in order to bring about necessary change in the organization (Fehér, 2009; 2010a; 2010b).

In a CEE context it can be noted that after 1990 a special transformational challenge to leaders have been the handling and change of the cultural characteristics of organizations of the so-called “Transformational Economies” (About the Hungarian experiences see e. g. Fehér–Bonifert, 1998; Cahoon–Fehér–Kovach, 1994).

As to the overall, global level developments, it can be stated that besides direct business and intra-organizational issues leaders have been confronted with those of the external societal, natural and other environmental segments. One of them is the CSR imperative. Corporate Social Responsibility, in one of its interpretations is “the comprehensive approach organizations take to meet or exceed the expectations of stakeholders beyond such measures as revenue, profit and legal obligations. It co-

vers commonly investment, human rights and employee relations, environmental practices and ethical conduct” (Cable, 2005, 11, in: Mullins, 2007, p. 542.).

Another cause for value orientation in Leadership is the Creating Shared Value paradigm. We can say this in spite of the fact that the term value in this paradigm is firstly reflecting on economic aspects. Porter and Kramer put: “The purpose of the corporation must be redefined as creating shared value, not just profit per se. This will drive the next wave of innovation and productivity growth in the global economy. It will also reshape capitalism and its relationship to society. Perhaps most important of all, learning how to create shared value is our best chance to legitimize business again. ... The concept of shared value recognizes that:

- societal needs, not just conventional economic needs, define markets;
- social harms or weaknesses frequently create internal costs for firms – such as wasted energy or raw materials, costly accidents, and the need for remedial training to compensate for inadequacies in education;
- addressing societal harms and constraints does not necessarily raise costs for firms, because they can innovate through using new technologies, operating methods, and management approaches...” (Porter–Kramer, 2011).

**Table 2.: Characteristics of the twenty-first century leadership**

From	To
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few top leaders, many managers</li> <li>• Direct and supervise</li> <li>• Leader as boss, controlling</li> <li>• Leader as stabilizer, balancing conflicts</li> <li>• Leader develops good managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders at every level, few managers</li> <li>• Empower, inspire, facilitate</li> <li>• Leader as coach, creating learning organization</li> <li>• Leader as change agent, balancing risks</li> <li>• Leader develops future leaders</li> </ul>

*Source:* Adapted from Bennis and Nanus (1985)

The aforementioned developments have increased the importance of identifying managers and, possibly, also other members of organizations as leaders, and simultaneously have further contributed to getting out Leadership from the ‘Management Box’. The latter tendencies are mirrored back by the changing contents of the newer definitions of Leadership. As an example, the authors already quoted in the introduction, Kouzes and Posner



refer to the definition of Alan Keith, Genentech saying: “Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary to happen” (Kouzes–Posner, 2007, p. 3.).

As of today’s Leadership approaches, in a psychological perspective, “the essence of Leadership is influence”, argues Rumsey (2013, p. 1.). Birnbaum (2013, p. 256.) defines Leadership as “interaction that influences others through non-coercive means”. But besides the influence focus much is told also about another important constituent of the subject that we could call the content area(s) of Leadership: the objects/terrain on which the leader cognitively and emotionally works normally before/after and/or throughout trying to exert influence.

Just to quote some of the leading authors in the field, for example, Yukl (2010, p. 26) in his broad definition states that “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.” House and Aditya (1997, pp. 444-445.) distinguish between supervisory and strategic leadership in a way saying that while Supervisory Leadership behavior is “...intended to provide guidance, support and corrective feedback for the day-to-day activities”, Strategic Leadership “is directed toward giving purpose, meaning, and guidance to organizations”. Gill (2011, p. 9.) offers the following definition: “Leadership is showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. This entails envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values and intelligent strategies, and empowering and engaging all those concerned”.

In his review of Leadership definitions Humphrey makes a distinction between two perspectives, saying that “According to a *power perspective definition of leadership, leaders command, control, direct, and influence followers to achieve group, organizational, or societal goals*”. While, “*from the leaders as representative perspectives, leaders are those who (1) best represent the values of their followers and (2) are better at solving their followers’ problems and achieving their goals*”. (2014, pp. 6-7.)

As we can see in the interpretation of the quoted authors getting beyond the influence perspective the notion of leadership includes the following, as for example:

- creating a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse);
- agreeing with others about what needs to be done (Yukl);

- giving purpose, meaning (House, Aditya);
- showing the way, ... envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values (Gill);
- representing the values of the followers (Humphrey).

We can identify within the listed items the aforementioned content area on which Leadership impacts are directed. In the light of the listed definitions/definition-parts Leadership, firstly, or at least, markedly, is about working on a desired state and/or the guiding principles. We can note that value work is important also from the aspect that different future choices and decisions about goals and their ambitiousness are embedded in value preferences.

These conceptual examples illustrate how concern about values has become part of the definition of Leadership. Much is known from Leadership and organizational Strategy literature and organizational practice about using values in the course of leadership activities and strategy development processes. But in the practice often we can see a high difference in the quality of these varying approaches. Under a narrow view clarifying values is one of the ways of influencing people to basically follow the already—partly or wholly—set goals and directions. In contrast there is an existing, broader Leadership, Strategy and HRM concept suggesting that working on and by values is / can or should be made more systematically a prerequisite to goal setting and identifying directions; and that value work becomes increasingly a component of the definition of Leadership. (Regarding HRM practices see e. g. Fehér, 2011 in the Hungarian literature.)

Value work itself can move on a wide range between focusing on strictly instrumental business values on one extreme and broader and deeper social and terminal ones (see the mentioned CSR, CSV and further Business Ethics considerations) on the other.

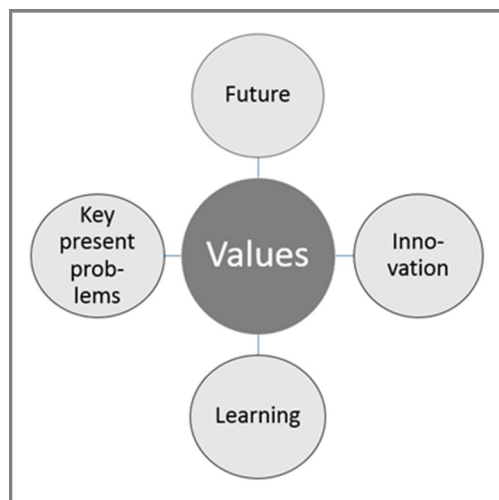
As a special aspect, it can be noted that Leaders' concerns about values can be seen as instrumental in making the Leadership role more tangible: the leaders' value aspirations and value work can be helpful in a better understanding of the differences between the Managerial and Leadership roles.

With regard to Kotter's distinctions between leadership and management (Kotter, 1990), the representatives perspective in Humphrey's interpretation, and the ideas of other authors about what I call the *content area*

of the Leadership we can say that value work postulates itself as one of the distinctive characteristics of Leadership in contrast to Management.

Thus Leadership is markedly, at some authors firstly about “identifying and working on the content”, in other words, the object/terrain to exert influence on or towards. The object/terrain can be in the first place:

1. the guiding principles, the values, themselves,
2. the vision, the nature of change, the goals with their targeted levels, and, logically, the key, non-routine present problems of followers, and
3. foundations of removing human obstacles to and creating opportunities for learning and innovation being instrumental in solving key problems of the present and challenges of the future.



**Figure 2.: Key “Content Areas” in Leadership**

Source: Own construction

It is obvious that value work is / can or should be a prerequisite to and an integral part of #2 and #3, as well, as caring about future, change, key present issues, learning and innovation assume clear value preferences, and supposedly require intensive value work. It has to be noted that the *content areas* of influence and the process and success of *influence* are strictly interrelated.

## Leadership practices – results of international and Hungarian researches

In the following part, I would like to offer some empirical data to illustrate some of the practices in relation to value work and some of the other mentioned key content areas in Leadership. The data are derived from a generic Leadership research for which the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) by Kouzes and Posner was used (Kouzes–Posner, 2001). LPI offers information about leadership behaviors and practices. In the Hungarian research LPI-Self is for leaders with formal managerial responsibilities while LPI-Observer for followers (including subordinated leaders) (Fehér–Kollár, 2013a, 2013b). The results are drawn from a sample of 308 Observers and 113 Self-evaluations. The sample is non-representative though aggregately highly corresponding to population regarding gender distribution, and including a variety of industries, organizational scopes, and organizational functions. It shows a bias toward younger people (in the range of 23-30), but further statistical analysis did not show significant differences along age.

The instrument contains 30 statements (6 behaviors compose 1 practice). Each statement is rated by a 10 points frequency scale. “1” indicates “almost never” and “10” indicates “almost always”.

The Leadership Practices are the following: “Model the Way”, “Inspire a Shared Vision”, “Challenge the Process”, “Enable Others to Act”, and “Encourage the Heart”.

The list of order and means of the practices are the following measured by the LPI-Observer.

**Table 3.: Rank and Mean of five leadership practices – Observers**

(Hungary, n=308)	Hungarian		International	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
<b><i>Model the way</i></b>	1.	40.5	2.	46.9
<b><i>Enable others to act</i></b>	2.	40.0	1.	49.4
<b><i>Encourage the heart</i></b>	3.	38.9	3.	46.0
<b><i>Challenge the status quo</i></b>	4.	38.6	4.	44.9
<b><i>Inspire a shared vision</i></b>	5.	37.8	5.	43.8

*Sources: Fehér–Kollár (2013a), LPI Normative Data*

The same data categories measured by the LPI-Self show the following results:

**Table 4.: Rank and Mean of five leadership practices – Self**

(Hungary, n=113)	Hungarian		International	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
<i>Model the way</i>	1.	49.1	2.	46.9
<i>Enable others to act</i>	2.	47.6	1.	49.4
<i>Encourage the heart</i>	3.	47.4	4.	46.0
<i>Challenge the status quo</i>	4.	46,6	3.	44.9
<i>Inspire a shared vision</i>	5.	45.4	5.	43.8

Sources: Fehér–Kollár (2013b), Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)

The Hungarian ranking order basically follows the international pattern. Both lists reflect a preference for the more traditional leadership practices and a lower priority of challenge and vision.

Differences can be seen in the self-ratings of the leaders. Observer data are systematically lower in Hungary, whereas Hungarian self-ratings are higher in international comparisons. Consequently, the gap between Observer and Self is considerably higher in Hungary. The results can hypothetically signalize a less developed and/or different leadership culture in Hungary, less self-awareness on the part of leaders and/or a more demanding/critical attitude on the part of the followers in Hungary.

**Table 5.: Consensus building around values**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean of 30 items	Rank out of 30 items
"I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization" – Self	113	4	10	7.69	1.383	7.87	#21
"He/she builds consensus around a common set of values for running our organization" – Observer	308	1	10	6.37	2.443	6.52	#21

Source: Edited by the author

LPI contains three statements which can especially be related to value work. There are two falling under the “Model the Way” category. The first is: “I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization”.

This item takes the 21st place out of 30 leadership behaviours. I would not interpret this at any rate as a low estimation of the importance of value concerns in Leadership. This rank can also highlight the relative novelty and the less tangible nature of the item. It can also refer to the difficulties of consensus building in today’s organizational environment. Actually the item reflects not only on the importance of values but on the success of a specific use of them, as well.

Another item in this category sounds: “I am clear about my philosophy of leadership”.

This item holds the 2nd-3rd place within the 30 behaviours. This can be interpreted also by the fact that the phrase “philosophy of leadership” semantically is closer, culturally sounds more familiar to the Hungarian respondents than the expression referring to the relation of “consensus and values”.

**Table 6.: Being clear about one’s leadership philosophy**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean of 30 items	Rank out of 30 items
“I am clear about my philosophy of leadership” – Self	113	3	10	8.65	1.540	7.87	#3
“He/she is clear about h/h philosophy of leadership” – Observer	308	1	10	7.29	2.580	6.52	#2

*Source:* Edited by the author

The third item belongs to the “Inspire a Shared Vision” practice, sounding: “I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work”.

**Table 7.:** Speaking with genuine conviction about the higher

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Mean of 30 items</b>	<b>Rank out of 30 items</b>
"I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work." – meaning – Self	113	4	10	8.36	1.738	7.87	#9
"He/she speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work." – Observer	308	1	10	6.78	2.645	6.52	#10

Source: Edited by the author

This item has earned a 9th-10th rank within the whole list, illustrating the need of followers to have broader understanding about and more feeling for relevance in their activities.

## Conclusion

To conclude we have to mention that the nature, directions and impacts of the value work certainly belong to the less tangible aspects of Leadership. For more intensive research specialized instruments are needed. For illustrative purposes I have used descriptive generic leadership research data which hypothetically show the place of some related items within the spectrum of behaviours among Hungarian respondents. The research—under the mentioned limitations—can be indicative for the further studies and teaching of other aspects of the content areas of leadership, as well. Regarding to the aforementioned key Leadership content area elements it shows relatively low scores for the “Challenging the Process” and “Inspiring a Shared Vision” categories as compared to more conventional leadership items. Further research is needed to interpret these data in the light of the needs of today’s Hungarian business environment toward an effective use of human resources, thus markedly for Leadership foresight and innovation.

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