

Rooted Leadership: A Values-Driven Framework for Resilient and Inclusive Leadership in the 21st Century



UNIVERSAL
JOURNAL OF
21ST CENTURY
Women's Entrepreneurship,
Leadership, Technology & Publishing



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Leadership in the 21st century is increasingly shaped by rapid technological innovation, globalization, workforce demographic shifts, and ongoing societal inequities. Traditional models of leadership, often grounded in hierarchical, authoritarian, or purely transactional approaches, are proving insufficient for the complexity and volatility of the modern landscape (Northouse, 2022). Particularly for women entrepreneurs and leaders, the need for leadership models that integrate purpose, resilience, emotional intelligence, and inclusivity has become paramount (Ely et al., 2020).

This article introduces and advances the concept of Rooted Leadership, a values-driven, resilience-based leadership philosophy grounded in personal purpose, emotional intelligence, adaptive capacity, and inclusive practice. Rooted Leadership draws metaphorically from the natural world: just as the strength of a tree derives from its roots, the strength of a leader comes from inner grounding, clarity of purpose, and sustained connection to community. This framework aligns with contemporary findings in leadership studies, women's entrepreneurship research, and organizational psychology, offering a model

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particularly suited for women seeking to lead enterprises that are both impactful and sustainable.

Foundations of Rooted Leadership Values, Purpose, and Self-Leadership

The cornerstone of Rooted Leadership is a clear sense of personal values and purpose. Research consistently shows that values-based leadership enhances decision-making, ethical judgment, follower trust, and organizational commitment (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Purpose-driven leadership has similarly been linked to increased resilience, adaptive functioning, and intrinsic motivation (Seligman, 2011).

Self-leadership, the capacity to regulate one's behaviors, emotions, and motivations, is another essential pillar. According to Manz and Neck (2004), self-leadership strategies such as constructive self-talk, self-goal-setting, and natural reward strategies improve performance and psychological well-being. Rooted Leadership draws on these principles, emphasizing inner clarity as the starting point from which leadership influence grows.

Emotional Intelligence and Inner Grounding

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a critical role in Rooted Leadership. Leaders with higher EI demonstrate stronger interpersonal communication, conflict resolution skills, and empathic leadership behaviors (Goleman, 1998; Humphrey, 2013). These capabilities form the “inner grounding” necessary for navigating high-stress environments and leading compassionately.

Studies on women leaders specifically demonstrate that EI contributes to both leadership effectiveness and entrepreneurial

intention (Pradhan et al., 2019). Rooted Leadership recognizes EI not as a “soft skill,” but as foundational, akin to the subterranean root systems that sustain a tree’s stability and growth.

Growth Mindset, Adaptability, and Resilience

Contemporary organizations face continuous disruption, requiring leaders to possess a strong growth mindset and adaptive capacity. Dweck’s (2016) research on growth mindset reveals that individuals who view abilities as malleable are more likely to embrace challenges, persist after setbacks, and seek learning opportunities.

Resilience is another crucial component. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017) argue that psychological capital—comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, predicts workplace performance and well-being. For women entrepreneurs, resilience is particularly vital due to ongoing barriers such as gender bias, resource inequities, and work-family conflict (Brush et al., 2019). Rooted Leadership frames adversity not as a detour but as a catalyst for development. Like a tree strengthened by wind, leaders become more adaptive through stressors when supported by clear values, community, and internal resources.

Empathy, Inclusion, and Relational Leadership

A significant body of research highlights the importance of empathy and relational connection in leadership effectiveness. Empathic leaders build trust, psychological safety, and organizational culture that encourages innovation and collaboration (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, 2019). Inclusive leadership, defined by fairness, openness, and active engagement with diverse perspectives, has been shown to enhance

team performance, creativity, and belonging (Randel et al., 2018). These relational competencies align naturally with women's leadership strengths. Studies indicate that women leaders tend to exhibit stronger interpersonal orientation, participatory decision-making, and relationship-focused behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2008). Rooted Leadership synthesizes these findings: empathy, inclusion, and relational authenticity are not secondary traits but constitutive elements of effective modern leadership.

Why Rooted Leadership Matters for Women Entrepreneurs Reframing Success and Leadership Identity

Women entrepreneurs continue to navigate systemic inequities in funding access, representation, and structural support (Kanze et al., 2018). Rooted Leadership provides a framework to reframe success beyond traditional metrics such as revenue or scale, highlighting purpose, well-being, community impact, and legacy.

This aligns with research showing that many women-led ventures are motivated by social purpose, community uplift, and holistic success (Brush et al., 2019). Rooted Leadership integrates these values into a coherent leadership identity that validates relational strengths, emotional intelligence, and purpose-driven innovation.

Competence, Confidence, and Entrepreneurial Intent

Recent research examining women in STEM contexts found that entrepreneurial competencies significantly predict entrepreneurial intention, and that gender does not strongly moderate this relationship (Díaz-García et al., 2024). This indicates that skill development, not gendered

assumptions, drives entrepreneurial capacity, a finding that reinforces the Rooted Leadership emphasis on competence, learning, and self-efficacy.

Rooted Leadership helps address internalized barriers such as imposter phenomenon, role conflict, and self-doubt (Clance & Imes, 1978) by anchoring confidence in purpose, community, and aligned action.

Building Inclusive Ecosystems

Women entrepreneurs frequently create organizational cultures characterized by collaboration, empowerment, and inclusion, traits shown to foster innovation and employee engagement (Randel et al., 2018). Rooted Leadership strengthens these tendencies by integrating values-driven decision-making with evidence-based relational leadership.

Applying Rooted Leadership: Evidence-Based Strategies

- 1. Clarify Core Values and Purpose**
Research shows that written reflection on values enhances resilience under stress and promotes ethical behavior (Creswell et al., 2005). Leaders should write, review, and operationalize their core values regularly.
- 2. Cultivate Emotional Intelligence**
Training in empathy, self-regulation, and emotion recognition improves leadership effectiveness (Humphrey, 2013). Rooted Leaders should invest in EI skill-building as part of ongoing development.
- 3. Practice Reflection and Well-Being**
Rituals Routine reflection, mindfulness, and self-care practices improve cognitive functioning, decision making, and stress

management (Shapiro et al., 2018).

4. Invest in Continuous Learning Leadership and entrepreneurial competencies, including negotiation, financial acumen, communication, and strategic vision, correlate strongly with business survival and growth (Markman & Baron, 2003).

5. Build Inclusive Structures Implementing inclusive decision-making, open communication, and diverse teams enhances creativity and performance (Edmondson, 2019; Randel et al., 2018).

Foster Community and Collaborative Networks Social capital, including mentorship, peer networks, and strategic alliances, significantly influences women entrepreneurs' success and scalability (Ahl & Nelson, 2015).

Challenges to Implementing Rooted Leadership

Rooted Leadership is both aspirational and demanding. Several challenges may arise:

- Internal Vulnerability: Engaging in self-awareness and emotional work requires vulnerability and courage (Brown, 2012).
- Systemic Barriers: Traditional organizational structures may resist values-driven or inclusive approaches, especially when they disrupt established power norms (Ely et al., 2020).
- Sustainability: Maintaining alignment between values and daily decisions requires discipline, especially under economic pressure or competing priorities.
- Balancing Idealism and Pragmatism: Leaders must pair vision with realistic strategy, especially in entrepreneurial

environments characterized by resource constraints.

Yet these challenges highlight precisely why Rooted Leadership matters: because sustainable, inclusive leadership requires both inner resilience and systemic awareness.

Conclusion

Rooted Leadership offers a holistic, values-driven framework for leading with integrity, resilience, and inclusivity. Anchored in research across leadership studies, organizational psychology, women's entrepreneurship, and emotional intelligence, this model responds directly to the complexities of contemporary leadership.

For women leaders and entrepreneurs, Rooted Leadership provides a pathway to align purpose with performance, authenticity with ambition, and personal grounding with systemic impact. In a world in need of steadiness, empathy, and sustainable transformation, Rooted Leadership invites us to lead not only with strength, but from our deepest roots.

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