



**SELF-LEADERSHIP AND ITS APPLICATION TO TODAY'S LEADER
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

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Accepted: December 23, 2020

ABSTRACT

This article attempted to delineate the centrality of self-leadership in defining the success or failure of today's leader given that the way leaders conduct themselves at the individual level is a key predictor of the policies and blueprints that organizations pursue. Through a systematic review of literature, this paper established that self-leadership is indispensable practice that can enable leaders in the contemporary business environment to manage change in the most efficient, effective, and sustainable way. By the virtue of the leader influencing their actions, feeling, and thinking towards their objectives, this paper portended that today's leader can transform group thinking towards the realization of the set organizational goals. Summary of current evidence provided a snapshot of existing patterns and trends on the essentials of self-leadership. By adopting an evidence-based approach, the paper deliberately gathered existing evidence on how self-leadership can enhance good private and public management. This review portended that organizations and most governments across the world have not been able to achieve the set goals due to weak foundation of self-leadership. Accordingly, this paper underscored the centrality of incorporating the component of self-leadership into leadership practices. Self-leadership will enhance self-awareness, self-confidence and good governance since the practice of intentionally influencing others by encouraging, motivating, guiding, and inspiring will change organizational thinking towards a positive path.

Keywords: Self-Leadership, Theories, Application, Self-Awareness, Self-Efficacy

CITATION: Daud, Y. M. (2020). Self-leadership and its application to today's leader - A review of literature. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 8 (1), 1 – 11.

INTRODUCTION

The current literature is replete with information on the essentials of self-leadership since this defines the extent to which organizations achieve the set goals. Many of the researchers have shown that exceptional leadership is cultivated through self-leadership. In other words, the leadership encompasses the person at the helm of decision making (Katewa, 2016). Furthermore, it has been widely argued that the approach used by a leader in self-leadership is a key predictor of success or failure given that managing self is one of the tough management snugs (Hybels, 2016). Thus, the ability of leaders to effectively govern themselves tells a lot about their management capabilities since leadership style adopted by leaders speaks volumes about their individual leadership traits. Notably, studies have shown how poor leadership manifested by top management teams have led to poor organizational performance since leaders of these organizations seem to lack head start at the individual level which can snowball to the management of the organization (Neck & Manz, 2010)

The present body of research on leadership has demonstrated that leadership attributes at the individual level are sine qua non for successful organizations, where self-leadership continues to be cited as a critical enabler of successful organizational leadership (Alnakhli, Singh, Agnihotri, & Itani, 2020). Despite this consensual position on self-leadership, today's leader seems to be facing plethora of challenges owing to inapt practice of intentionally influencing their actions and thinking towards what should be achieved. As a result, most business firms have been showing performance red-flags since leaders at the top lack self-awareness and self-management. Thus, inculcating a culture of self-leadership with a view of ensuring that before individuals take leadership positions, they can discern personal strengths and weaknesses.

Besides ingraining a culture of self-leadership, Backlander, Rosengren, and Kaulio (2018) states

that employee burnout and stress are caused by lack of self-leadership on the part of employees. This appears to suggest that leadership through training alone, is incapable of addressing challenges facing today's leader. Consequently, addressing the needs of the contemporary leaders through self-leadership is significant for successful management. This paper examines self-leadership literature and provide insights into the theories and application of self-leadership principles and practices portrayed in today's leader. Leadership plays an important role in handling today's globalization challenges and effective self-leadership is arguably one of the most important aspects of effective leadership.

Self-Leadership

Leadership plays an important role in handling today's globalization challenges and self-leadership is arguably one of the most important aspects of effective leadership. The perspective on leadership has continuously evolved and adopted to global events, generational change, technology, among other influencing factors (Northouse, 2007). Despite the existing research on leadership, the perspective on self-leadership continue to grow in leaps and bounds. Bryant (2012) observes that self-leaders have developed sense of self-awareness and efficacy and demonstrate the ability to influence leader's communication, emotions, and behaviour.

The concept of self-leadership continues to gain tremendous attention for organizational leadership scholars owing to the indispensable role it plays in enhancing organizational performance. Several conceptual studies have been conducted in the area, where majority of these studies have and continue to underscore the centrality of self-leadership and its application to today's leader. Backlander et al. (2018) focused on self-leadership among Danish management consultancy firms, where the author developed a self-leading framework to define self-leadership as an approach to self-focus and be proactive and reactive for the achievement of the set goals. This seems to suggest that self-leadership is entails developing a self-discipline and beliefs so that one can proactively

manage both external and internal situations for enhanced results. Stewart, Courtright, and Manz (2019) conceptualizes self-leadership as a comprehensive self-influence process capturing how individuals motivate themselves to complete work that is naturally motivating or work that must be done but is not naturally motivating. This appear to signify that self-leadership is an essential process that challenges many traditional assumptions in organizational psychology and organizational behaviour. Bryant and Kazan (2012) defines self-leadership as the practice of intentionally influencing one's ways of thinking, feeling and actions towards the set goals.

Kotze (2018) posit that self-leadership is a stronger determinant of psychological capital than mindfulness and describes psychological capital having mediating influence on the dedication component of work engagement. Elsewhere, Browning (2018) states that leadership is the process of influencing others through motivation and empowerment, while self-leadership includes dimension of self-awareness, self-regulation, and being the change, you want to see in the world. Jooste et al. (2015) contends that self-leadership leads to shared leadership and empowering leadership based on approaches and principles of discovering, motivating and influencing self to attain desired behaviours and to maximise their abilities. Cranmer, Goldman, and Houghton (2019) underline that self-leadership concentrates on self-awareness and regulations that motivates the person to achieve optimum performance.

Andreessen, Konradt, and Neck (2012) observes that self-leadership is a process factor that mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee motivation and has a higher influence on motivation in virtual work structures. Elsewhere, Bryant (2012) states that self-leadership encompasses having a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going, coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions, and behaviours on the way to getting

there. Cristofaro, and Giardino (2020) suggests that self-leadership enables leaders to distinguish themselves from the rest of the leadership owing to possession of superior self-leadership. Despite the criticality of self-leadership, much of the existing research seem to concentrate more on management of the self-compared to leading self. Hybels (2016) appear to support this alluded evidence on leadership of self by underpinning the centrality of self-management. Much of the existing literature agree that when a leader first oneself, it cascades down to organizational success. For instance, Drucker as cited in Hall, Yip, and Doiron (2018) delves into the importance of self-management by encouraging individuals to know one's strengths and values as a pathway toward building on the positive dimensions that are already present in our lives rather than working to improve deficits.

Rationale for Self-Leadership

Goleman (2013) and Neck and Houghton (2006) describe self-leadership as self-knowing, self-awareness, self-management, and self-discipline: each of these components assisting in the implementation of leadership within the organization. Manz (1986) defined self-leadership as a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating. This demonstrate that self-leadership is based on positive view of human nature, it is an inside-out look and a learning behaviour, and people have the potential to lead and improve themselves which is at the very heart of the leadership development. Organizational life today is often a complex social environment of confrontation, miscommunication, manipulation, hostility, and conflict. A primary concern of most organizations today is the attraction and retention of talented people. Researchers on organizational leadership underscore that the magnitude of the skills that future leaders need are expanding owing to the increasingly disruptive business environment.

Today's business environment is characterized by rapidly changing strategies, business model innovation, and operational transformation (Jooste et al., 2015). While leaders trapped in yesterday's mindset often struggle to find their place and voice in this new business world, self-disruptive leaders are highly learning agile, self-aware, emotionally, and socially intelligent, purpose-driven, and assured but humble. Self-leadership is about developing and managing your individual energy to initiate, motivate and perform at a high level, improving and sustaining your organization's leadership philosophy at an individual level (Neck & Manz, 2007).

At the core of good leadership are the skills for self-management (Houghton & Neck, 2006). Some of the essential skills on managing self as well as teams include emotional competencies, time management, and communication skills with focus on listening skills. To ensure organizations succeed in a rapidly changing business world in the years ahead, Hybels (2016) states that a new kind of future-ready leader must take priority. To succeed in the shifting business landscape of the 21st century, leaders must rethink their historical views and cultivate a new configuration of attitudes and abilities.

KEY SELF-LEADERSHIP THEORIES

The literature on self-leadership has developed many perspectives and viewpoints. Self-leadership is an inside-out look where individuals can control and influence their own behaviour while leading and influencing others to follow them (Neck, 2006). In support of this assertion, Manz (1986) states self-leadership as a process through which individuals control their own behaviour, influencing and leading themselves with specific sets of behavioural and cognitive strategies, categorizing self-leadership strategies into behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies. Bandura (1977) argues that self-leadership is rooted in Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory. He states that social learning theory explain how

people influence their own cognition, motivation, and behaviour while on the other hand, social cognitive theory explains the continuous interaction between people and their environment and how behavioural outcomes are means of information and motivation.

In the 21st century organizations, business and institutions of higher learning have embraced self-leadership concepts through training programs designed to increase self-leadership skills and behaviours in the workplace (Neck & Manz, 2010). Moreover, self-leadership has earned the respect of many academics and learning institutions such as Pan Africa Christian University in Kenya as reflected by robust academic programs and other theoretical and empirical self-leadership journal publications and the growing number of management and leadership books. Self-leaders are constantly developing in self-awareness and self-control. The sense of who they are, what they can do, and where they are going and ability to influence their thought patterns, emotions and behaviour as they pursue their goals is developing (Bryant, 2016). In fact, exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of their superior self-leadership, a demonstration that self-leadership brings out various outcomes in a leader that distinguish them from others.

The theoretical foundations of self-leadership are based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). The Social Learning Theory is about observing others and learning from them and the Social Cognitive Theory is to do with internal mental processes. There are three categories of individual-level strategies that enhance self-leadership, namely, "behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought strategies" (Neck & Houghton, 2006, p. 271). Behaviour-focused strategies include such methods as self-goal setting, self-reward, self-punishment, self-observation, and self-cueing. The self-goal setting method involve improving people's performance by setting and implementing challenging goals, while self-reward relates to

reinforce desirable behaviours and goal attainments by using something tangible or abstract. Self-punishment is used to shape desirable behaviours.

Self-reinforcement and self-punishment (or self-criticism) involve self-applied consequences (positive for self-reinforcement and negative for self-punishment) for behaviour (Manz, 1986). Self-cueing involves planning for an activity before doing it, which promote improvement, and corrective adjustments for greater individual effectiveness. Manz and Neck (2006) observe that natural reward strategies are considered essential to make the tasks naturally rewarding. They argue that people apply two primary natural reward strategies, namely building more pleasant and enjoyable features into a given activity or shaping one's own perceptions by focusing attention away from the unpleasant aspects of a task and this increase motivation, self-determination, and feelings of competence. According to Neck and Houghton (2006), the constructive thought strategies create positive habitual ways of thinking replacing negative destructive self-talk with optimistic self-talk. These strategies can change thinking patterns according. For instance, good constructive thinking is seeing the positive side of things and been realistic about it without reacting and being judgemental about it.

APPLICATION OF SELF-LEADERSHIP TO TODAY'S LEADERS

Leadership literature is one of the most researched and published work owing to its criticality in enhancing organizations goals and objectives. In an endeavour to demarcate the essentials of leadership, the construct of self-leadership has been accentuated as a key enabler of successful organizations given that leaders who understand personal weaknesses and how to overcome are more likely to lead others (Cranmer et al., 2019). This appears to suggest that self-motivated workforce is more likely to attain the set goals compared to the workforce that works on stimuli. Many researchers from various sectors of the economy have underscored the cruciality self-

leadership in today's leader. For instance, Daskal (2017) underlines that today's leaders should first be able to management individual affairs in an effective since this is central in predicting the way the individuals will conduct themselves upon assuming leadership positions that require strategic vision for attainment of the set goals.

Megheirkouni (2018) states that self-leadership is one of the key ingredients that determines career success of individuals in sport leadership. In other words, the capability of an individual to belief in their abilities to implement or circumvent challenges is essential in career success. To become an effective leader within the realm of sport leadership, there is need for prospective leaders to inculcate the tenets of self-leadership since this is important is unlearning behaviours that hamper self-efficacy of an individual. Choi (2020) contends that self-leadership can enable the modern leader to effective in sport management given that the field of physical education has become competitive and dynamic. This result shows that self-leadership is sine qua non for sports organizations and management entities. Park, Song, and Lim (2016) suggests that self-leadership is essential in work engagement and organizational justice. This evidence seems to imply that today's leader ought to leverage self-leadership for the same leader to effectively engage at their work places. Interrelationships in workplaces have been dwindling owing to low self-leadership, denoting that most engagement at places of work go haywire due to lack of emotional intelligence, which is cultivated at the individual level.

Leadership in today's dynamic business world has been disaggregated in terms of gender since men and women leaders exhibit distinct levels of self-management and/or regulation. Dizaho, Salleh, and Abdullah (2017) argues that self-leadership is vital in augmenting women's career development. Owing to low effective leadership of women leaders, it has been argued that self-leadership is a panacea for women leaders since self-leadership strategies are central to career development of

women leaders. Towards this end, it appears that self-leadership is a precondition for effective leadership since self-led employees or top management teams can effectively lead others effective practices of self-leadership skills and strategies.

Liu, Chitpakdee, and Akkadechanunt (2020) states that self-leadership is important in changing environments and helps enhance group leadership and quality of care for staff. The central of self-leadership within the nursing profession appear to signify that leaders across the spectrum of professions and fields can leverage self-leadership as a springboard of effective delivery of results given self-led approach trickles down to the performance of leaders. Thus, today's leader should borrow the principal tenets of self-leadership, such self-awareness and self-evaluation to improve their management effectiveness. Elsewhere, Kusdinar and Haholongan (2019) contends that self-leadership influences positive innovation behaviour, denoting that the more positive self-leadership, the higher the level of innovative behaviour of employees. Employees' innovations are related to effective leadership. This evidence seems to indicate that challenges that today's leaders are facing go beyond effective leadership to include inadequate self-led employees who can spur innovations. Borrowing from leadership theories, such as transformational leadership theory and trait leadership framework, it is evident that leaders in any organizational setup should act as role models that inspire employees to do innovative behaviour.

There are scholars who have argued that for organizations to survive the modern turbulent business environment, there is need to try to find novel ideas, build creativity, make engineering, to give birth to new findings, so that it can be said that innovation is the source of life (Ivancevich, Matteson, & Konopaske, 2017). This finding appears to support existing research literature on transformational leadership, which underscores the centrality of innovative behaviour since consumer needs are constantly changing (Bryant & Kazan,

2012). Notably, Crentsil (2020) points that the gender of the leader influences self-leadership, where it is highlighted that how one's gender approach self-leadership application differently within the workplace and the role work experience plays in self-leadership and leadership developmental process in an organizational leadership outcome.

Marques (2017) contends that today's leader can adopt self-leadership starting from an informal stance, with a focus on self-regulation, self-control, and self-management. However, in an endeavour to learn self-leadership, there are several challenges that one can encounter, which include unexpected turns, obsolescence of old habits, the pace of life, mindsets, the requirement of lifelong learning, change, paradigm shifts, and entrepreneurial spirit. It is instructive to note that each of the highlighted challenges is a strong element onto itself, yet can also be a pitfall if not applied well. On the consequences of self-leadership, Sesen, Tabak, and Arli (2017) state that self-leadership has the potential to affect job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and innovative behaviours. This signifies that self-led individuals are in many instances satisfied with their duties and responsibilities at work, remain committed to organizational goals and can formulate innovative approaches that will increase organizational competitive capital.

Leadership and Self-awareness

There is increased emphasis today on self-awareness in leadership discourse (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Self-awareness (Goleman, 2013; Neck & Houghton, 2006) is the knowledge of the self by the self, awareness by the self about others and awareness by others about you demonstrating an honest assessment and understanding of your own values, desires, thought patterns, motivations, goals, emotions, ambitions, strengths and weaknesses, as well as their effect on others. This is the starting point of effective and authentic leadership, which enhance individual effectiveness and performance. The injunction to 'know thyself'

has received wisdom from Socrates in ancient Greece and self-aware people take notice of and anticipate their thoughts and feelings real time and use them productively. Self-awareness epitomize authentic leadership demonstrating that leaders with high level of self-awareness are better in understanding their strengths and weakness and are able to influence followers to drive performance. Additionally, self-leading people demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Manz, 2010). Understanding self will improve leadership abilities and help leaders navigate the weathers of global challenges. The common phrase “the first task of a leader is to lead himself and the first step in self-leadership is knowledge of self signifies the importance of self-awareness.

Self-awareness is considered the first component of emotional intelligence and gives both leaders and followers the ability to internalize any information honestly and positively translating the same toward achieving the set goals and as Goleman (2013) put it, “People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest with themselves and with others” (Loc. 118). Bandura (2001) has also suggested that to navigate a world of opportunity, challenge and complexity successfully, individuals must have self-awareness of their capabilities, an ability to estimate probable cause and effect of actions they take, an understanding of the context in which they operate, and an ability to regulate their behaviour. Therefore, self-aware leaders use their awareness of self, awareness of others and awareness of situations to manage themselves and lead others.

Leadership and Self-regulation

According to Goleman (2013), self-regulation is core leadership skills and represent the ability to control or redirect disruptive moods. He argues that leaders who exhibit good self-regulation are honest, adaptable and their actions are in line with their values. Baumeister (2003) add to this argument that self-regulation is an individual’s capacity to inhibit, override, or refrain from acting upon his/her

impulses and desires. The role of self-control in leadership is having the self-restraint, even when you want to act in a different manner, helping leaders maintain a reputation for being adaptable, trustworthy, and good under pressure. Research further suggests that leaders who manage their moods and emotions may be more effective at developing group goals and objectives, motivating others, generating cooperation, trust, and encouraging flexibility in decision making (Ivancevich, Matteson & Konopaske, 2017).

This demonstrate that self-regulation has various positive outcome such as improved ability to think and cope with stress, improved concentration and improved decision-making enhancing integrity which is not only a personal virtue but also organizational strength. Self-regulated leaders have inclination towards reflections and thoughtfulness; acceptance of uncertainty and change and integrity -the ability to say no to impulsive urges. Self-mastery is learning how to gain a greater understanding of what goes on inside and around you and learning to regulate disruptive thoughts and emotions by paying closer attention to your internal states. Through this practice, self-leaders can learn to make better, wiser decisions in stressful situations (Goleman, 2013).

Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

Goleman (2013) described emotional intelligence as the ability to understand and manage own emotions, and those of the people around you. He further argues that people with a high degree of emotional intelligence know what they are feeling, what their emotions mean, and how these emotions can affect other people. There are five key elements of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2013). Emotional intelligence is very significant in helping leaders to understand and put into control their emotions, meet challenges, and succeed in their goals. Arguably, emotionally intelligent leaders have strong verbal ability and reasoning that enhances

effective self-leadership thus making emotional intelligence an important leadership trait.

Leadership and Self-efficacy

Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as “the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p.391). People with high efficacy approach challenges with confidence and have stronger sense of commitment. On the other hand, people who have a low sense of self-efficacy tend to avoid difficult tasks viewing them as threats and can lose faith in their personal abilities and easily develop depression and stress (Bandura, 1997). The strong belief in our own abilities to deal with various situations can play a crucial role in successfully achieving our goals. Faced with leadership challenge, a leader can be an effective problem solver or a coward. Leaders who have the technical competence but lack the confidence generated by self-efficacy to deal with situations are just leaders who exist only in title.

Leadership and Locus of Control

Rotter (1966) describe Locus of control as one's belief in his or her abilities to control life events, i.e. the outcomes of their experiences or their achievements or failures. These attributes could be attributed to luck, fate or powerful acquaintances beyond one's control as well as own behaviour. In the face of challenges, our belief in our own abilities to deal with various situations can play a crucial role and a leader can be an effective problem solver or a coward who cannot manage his/her own situation.

IMPLICATIONS AND PRACTICE OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

The concept of self-leadership in today's global environment has great potential for application in organizations (Houghton, 2006). The self-leadership theories and principles are used by organizations as part of the human resource development practices to effectively improve the performance of the leaders and the performance of the organization. This is the starting point in the journey of self-discovery and self-assessment thus empowering

individuals in organization to reflect and grow their leadership. The challenges facing our society today is because of lack of self-leaders. For instance, Africa generally and Kenya in particular continues to grapple with many development challenges. These challenges include poor leadership, corruption, and poverty among others. Buchanan and Badham (2008) observe that “the cardinal sins of today are ...dishonesty, manipulation, deception, fraud, rouses, trickery, scams, duplicity, cheating, lying, deceit, con corruption and above all cover ups” (p. 126). President Kenyatta of Kenya in June 2018 in his Madaraka Day speech mentioned the devastating effect of corruption in the country. There is urgent need of self-leaders, ethical, servant and value-based leadership to address and curb the destructive leadership and help Kenya wade out of the current challenges.

Without effective self-leaders at all levels in private and public organizations, it is probably impossible to achieve goals, to sustain quality and deliver services. The increasing complexities and requirements arising from the constant change in society, coupled with the constant push for higher levels of productivity, require self and ethical leadership, which is essential requirements for an organization to be successful in the 21st century. Through this, strong leaders make strong teams and strong teams make strong organizations thus laying the foundation for building a strong organization and society. Great self-leaders create a happy society and a happy society can build a strong nation. Finally, Leaders self-evaluation prior to their evaluation of others is very important. While it may be easy for leaders to recognize faults and mistakes in others, leaders must *first* engage in in the hard work of looking in the mirror and engaging in a self-evaluative process of reflection.

CONCLUSION

From the literature review, the author put forward the following recommendation: Self-leadership epitomizes ethical and effective leaders, so the need to train and develop leaders with self-leadership competencies and skills both in

institutions and public life to manage and operate in a faster-paced, globally connected, stakeholder driven marketplace where uncertainty is the norm, knowledge is rapidly outdated and where the need to address today's challenges is urgent. Self-leadership is critical factor for the success of both leaders and followers. Good leaders lead their organizations well. Better leaders lead themselves well first. Employers want employees who can make informed and effective decisions. Some of the

primary elements of self-leadership is self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and locus of control. These elements help leaders to understand themselves better, highlight the personality, behaviour, skills, talents, build better relationships, strengths, and weaknesses among other attributes that help them carry out the leadership role effectively. A leadership culture that cultivates self-leadership leads to greater effectiveness and efficiency.

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