THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF- LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AND ORGANIZATIONAL VARIABLES IN A SELF-MANAGED WORK TEAM ENVIRONMENT

David F. Elloy, Ph.D.
School of Business Administration
Gonzaga University
Spokane, WA 99258
elloy@jepson.gonzaga.edu

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between self- leadership behaviors (as described by Manz & Sims, 1990) and selected organizational variables in self-managed work groups in a paper mill in the northwestern part of the United States (US). Based on a sample of 141 employees, the results indicated that in general, supervisors who are seen as trusting, encouraging innovative behaviors, and give feedback, contribute to the development of Self-leadership behaviors of rehearsal, self-goal-setting, self-criticism, self-reinforcement, self-expectation and self-observation. In addition, providing team training, fostering communication within the group, and allowing the group members to make work-related decisions also enhances the movement toward self-management.

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Over the past 15 years organizations in the United States (US), as well as overseas, have experimented in self-managed work teams. In the US alone, estimates of organizations using self-managed work teams have ranged from 30-55% (Orsburn & Moran, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Allen & Hech, 2005). Traditional bureaucratic organizations are being replaced by self-managing work teams As a matter of fact one of the most common changes that organizations have made is the implementation of teams (Mohrman, Cohen & Mohrman, 1995; Osborn & Moran; Osterman, 2000).

Among researchers, the concept of self- managed work groups has also gained increasing interest (Stewart & Manz, 1995; Cohen & Ledford, 1994; Mohrman, Cohen & Ledford 1995; Lawler 1992; Hackman 1986; Manz 1986; 1990; 1992; Manz & Sims, 1980; 1990). Stemming from the concept of socio-technical systems developed by Emery & Trist (1969), self-managed work groups have been most recently utilized as a form of work system, particularly as pressures from a highly educated workforce for more responsibility and empowerment through team-based shared leadership are being exerted on organizations (Pearce & Manz 2005). In addition there is also additional pressure for organizations to become more responsive to the competitive environment and the global economy that we live in (Writon, 1991; Druskat &Wheeler, 2003).

Self-managed work groups have a number of key characteristics. They consist of a small group of individuals (8-15) who (Jessup 1990; Wall et. al, 1986) are generally responsible for completing a whole unit of work (Jonsson & Zank, 1985), performing a variety of tasks, and utilizing a number of skills which the group as a whole possesses. (Wall & Clegg, 1986). Job feedback is important to the work group so that variance from goal attainment can be controlled by group members within a defined work area boundary.

Although strong empirical evidence supporting the benefits of team structures is still evolving, several case studies, both within the US and Europe, have proved that the implementation of self-managed work teams produces outcomes such as increased employee satisfaction, the opportunity

for increased socialization in the workplace, increased autonomy, opportunity to learn new skills, and other aspects such as reduced absenteeism and turnover and increased performance and motivation (Cohen & Ledford 1994; Verespej 1990; Pearson 1991; Pearce & Ravlin 1987; Wall, Kemp, Jackson & Clegg, 1986 Orsbun & Moran, 2000).

Self-Managed Work Teams and Self-Leadership

An important role in self- managed work teams that has received little attention in past research is the leader in the group. Little research exists on the external leader and its effect on the functioning of the group. The basic idea behind self-managed work teams portrays group members in total control over their work environment and responsibility for all tasks within their group. Past research often presumed that the role of external leader is redundant and, therefore, of little interest.

However research by Manz & Sims (1984, 1986, 1987, 1990;) and Manz, (1992) looks at the role of self-leadership on the effectiveness of self-managed work teams and the changing nature of leadership in self-managed work team environments. Far from becoming redundant, the research suggests that leadership has moved away from the traditional roles of supervision and control to a highly facilitative style of management, much less direct but still essential for the effectiveness of the team.

Initially the term "external leader" might seem a misnomer since the basis of autonomous work groups is self-management -- this represents the ideal autonomous work group situation. In fact, the formal supervisor or manager continues to play a role in the functioning of almost all self-managed work teams. Leadership, when applied to self-managed work teams, describes the idea of "a person who leads others to lead themselves" (Whitsett & Yorks, 1983). Termed the "Superleader" or Self-Leadership by Manz and Sims (1986), the idea of the formal leader in the self-managed work team system implies that the leader works towards making his or her own position eventually redundant through guiding the group towards total self-management. In contrast transformational leadership focuses on the leader's ability to create a highly motivating and inspiring vision (Bass, 1990). The focus is on the leader's vision, and the leader represents the source of direction. Individuals are expected to commit to the vision and the leader. With Self-Leadership the focus is

largely on the individuals in the team who become Self-Leaders and in essence share power with the leader. The leader's job in this environment changes to one that helps followers to develop the necessary skills for work, especially Self-Leadership (Manz & Sims, 1990, Pearce & Manz, 2005)

Later work by Manz and Sims (1991) provides a basis upon which to evaluate leadership in the self-managed work team setting. The recommended style of leadership, namely Self-Leadership reflects the basic requirements of self-managed work teams. According to Manz and Sims (1991), the leader engages in behaviors that help team members learn to lead themselves. Instead of inspiring workers by generating an attractive vision, leaders help members to recognize their own capacity for effective decision-making without the need for direct involvement by the leader. This research has revealed basic behaviors that leaders perform, which directly affect the level of self-management displayed by the team.

For example, Self-Leadership behavior encourages self-reinforcement by team members. Through reinforcement of high levels of group performance, the Self-Leadership behaviors encourage the group to recognize and appreciate actions that lead to effective performance. The leader supplies the group with sufficient information to allow the group to evaluate its own performance. Most of the behaviors enacted by leaders in this environment concern the internalization of the concepts of task responsibility and influence over organizational outcomes. In other words, the leader, through a subtle process of boundary control, helps the team feel responsible for its own outcomes and recognize intrinsic rewards in its own work setting. The leader supplies information and feedback as needed to permit the continuance of self-leadership behaviors. Through the selective use of legitimate criticism and rewards, the leader enforces self-leadership outcomes (Manz & Sims 1987)

Team members are encouraged to be critical of their own performance. By learning to recognize faults in their work practice, members can gain increased knowledge of their work and recognize appropriate behaviors for group success. Not mentioned in the literature, although implicitly implied, is the need for the external leader to promote norms of behavior based on group aspects.

Since the primary goal of the leader in this empowered environment is to improve the

performance of group members through the development of their own Self-Leadership capabilities, employee self-goal setting is an important ingredient. The leader through coaching and modeling helps assist members to engage in the behavior of self-goal setting within the group, and helps them to effectively set specific challenging goals for themselves. Other Self-Leadership behaviors are encouraging self-expectation among team members so that the team has high expectancy of group performance, and developing strategies for implementing a work activity before performing it.

While the leader position in self-managed work teams is described as a leader who leads others to lead themselves (Manz & Sims, 1986), the inference is that the leader is moving toward becoming redundant or at least only influential in a minor way. It would be more suitable to express the role of the leader in this environment as a leader who teaches others to appreciate the effectiveness of Self-Leadership for both organizational and individual benefits, and who encourages group members to look at management in a different, though not necessarily less influential, way. The group's relationship with the leader changes from one of basic reliance for the designation of tasks, rewards and direction, to a subtler, though just as important, role of maintenance and facilitation. The group may not rely on him/her in terms of having to ask for desired input once Self-Leadership is established, but the leader evolves into a facilitator of group behaviors and acts as a buffer between the group and the external environment by supplying information and resources to the team (Manz & Sims 2001).

The concept of Self-Leadership is still relatively unexplored. While theories relating to the type of behaviors required of the leader in a self-managed work team environment are available (Stewart & Manz, 1995; Manz & Sims, 1990; Cordery & Wall, 1985) there is very little research on the actual effects of a variety of organizational variables on the various dimensions of Self-Leadership behaviors. The purpose of this research study then, is to examine the relationship between Self-Leadership behaviors and selected organizational variables. Based upon the above discussion, the following hypotheses are examined. However, due to the lack of research in these areas, literature support for the propositions is limited. Nevertheless, it is important to discover the relationships between Self-Leadership behaviors and those variables that are important for the effective functioning

of self-managing work teams.

Hypothesis 1: Innovation and training will be positively related to self- rehearsal.

 Self-Leadership behaviors encourages group members to think about how they are going to undertake an assignment. In order for employees to be successful in doing this, the leader should foster an environment where individuals are encouraged to discover better ways to perform their work duties. Self-Leaders are found to enhance the effectiveness of the group and the members in it by supporting and encouraging ongoing training. Elloy (1997) found support for this relationship in a study of self-managed work teams in a government-operated railway system.

Hypothesis 2: Self-goal setting will be positively related to trust and team goal setting.

Since a main focus of the Self-Leadership behaviors is to improve the performance of individuals within a team through the development of their own Self-Leadership capabilities, employee self-goal setting is a key element. The leader encourages group members to effectively set specific challenging goals for themselves. For this to happen, there should be trust between the leader and the group members. Also there should be good communications between the leader and the group members and within the group itself so that team goals are effectively formulated.

Hypothesis 3: Self-criticism will be positively related to innovation, decision making and autonomy.

One objective of Self leadership behaviors is to encourage constructive self-criticism as an important part of the transition to Self-Leadership (Manz & Sims, 1986). The major focus is to treat mistakes as learning opportunities. For group members to undertake this function effectively, they require autonomy, and the authority and responsibility to take corrective action to rectify mistakes or variations from set standards. For this to happen, there must be trust between the group and the leader. They should also be encouraged and allowed to make their own decisions. In a study of self-managed work teams Elloy (1997) found that innovation, decision making, and autonomy were significantly related to self- criticism.

Hypothesis 4: Trust and feedback will be positively related to self-reinforcement.

The purpose of Self-Leadership is to lead others to Self-Leadership. An essential ingredient is

to teach group members how to reward themselves and to build natural rewards into their own work (Manz & Sims, 1986). This means there should be trust between the group and the leader. In addition, feedback on performance should also be an important component of this environment.

Hypothesis 5: Self-Expectation will be positively related to trust, and goal setting.

Facilitating positive expectations in group members is an important role of a leader in a self-managed work team environment. The role of the leader is to guide, excite and engage (Manz & Sims, 1984). Trust, and the opportunity to set their own goals are necessary to foster self-expectations among group members.

Hypothesis 6: Innovation, communication and job influence will be positively related to self-observation.

In the process of helping group members to lead themselves, the leader encourages them to be aware of and evaluate their own level of performance. For this to occur there should be an environment where group members are encouraged to find creative ways to solve work-related problems, and have the autonomy to make decisions regarding the performance of their job. It is also important that the leader provides information to solve problems and facilitates communication within the group. Elloy (1997) found in his study of self-managed work teams in a government- operated railway system that communication and innovation were significantly related to self-observation.

METHOD

Site and Research Participants

Data were collected on site over a period of three days from employees working in a non-union paper mill located in a small rural community in the Northwest. The new plant facility has been operating with self-managed work teams since its inception. This survey was carried out a year after the plant opened.

Surveys were completed by 141 employees for a 99% response rate. The high rate was due to the fact that employees filled out the survey at the work site before the start of their respective shifts. Also, the plant manager strongly encouraged the employees to complete the surveys. To ensure strict confidentiality and gain the most candid survey responses, the author administered the anonymous survey directly to the plant employees.

Measures

Supervision. A slightly modified version of Decotiis and Koy's (1981) scales were used to measure various perceptions of the leader, including trust, recognition, fairness and innovation. Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Self-Leadership. Self-leadership scores were obtained using the Self-Management Leadership Questionnaire developed by Manz and Sims (1987). The 22-item questionnaire is designed to test the extent to which leaders of autonomous work groups display typical Superleader behaviors. Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Communication and Decision-Making. Communication was measured with an expectation scale developed by House and Rizzo (1972). Items were rated on a 7-point scale. Decision-making was measured by House and Rizzo (1972). Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Job Characteristics. Modifications of the scale developed by Sims, Szilyagi and Keller (1976) to measure perceptions of specific job characteristics were used to measure autonomy. Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Team Functions. Perceptions of team functions were assessed with scales developed by the Center for Effective Organizations. The scales measured team training and goal setting. Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Job Influence. Job Influence was measured with a 4-item scale developed by the author. Items were rated on a 7-point scale.

Analysis

In order to test these hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regressions were carried out separately for each of the various dimensions of Self-Leadership behaviors. Selected organizational variables were separately regressed on each of the dimensions of Self-leadership behaviors.

Results

Table 2 presents the alpha values, means and standard deviation of the major variables in this study.

TABLE 1

Alpha Values, Means and Standard Deviation of Wages Study Variables

	Alpha	M	S.D.
Sel/Self-Examination	0.88	3.8	0.5
Self-Reinforcement	0.79	4.5	1.0
Self-Criticism	0.88	4.1	1.2
Self-Goal Setting	0.87	4.3	1.6
Self-Expectation	0.91	3.9	1.1
Rehearsal	0.92	3.8	1.4
Decision Making	0.76	4.0	1.2
Innovation	0.83	4.1	1.6
Trust	0.79	4.4	1.1
Training	0.86	4.7	1.7
Team Communication	0.75	4.7	1.5
Job Influence	0.80	5.2	1.4
Feedback	0.82	4.2	1.5
Goal Setting	0.84	4.6	1.7

The results of the hierarchical regression are presented in Table 2. Self-rehearsal was significantly predicted by innovation (beta = .69, p .00) and team training (beta = .14, p .02). Fifty percent (adjusted R2) of the variance was explained. Self-goal setting was significantly predicted by supervisory trust (beta =.57, p .00) and team goal setting (beta =.36, p .00). Forty-two (adjusted R2) of the variance in self-rehearsal was explained.

TABLE 2
Results of Hierarchical Regression

Self-Rehearsal

Variables	Beta	P
Innovation	.69	.00
Trust	.14	.04
Adjusted R^2= .50		

Self-Goal Setting

Variables	Beta	P
Trust	.57	.00
T. Goal Setting	.36	.00
Adjusted R^2 = .42		

Self-Criticism

Variables	Beta	P
Trust	.26	.00
Decision-Making	.18	.03
Adjusted R^2= .10		

Self-Reinforcement

Variables	Beta	P
Trust	.53	.00
Feedback	..25	.00
Adjusted R^2 = .48		

Self-Expectations

Variables	Beta	P
Trust	.61	.00
Team Goal Setting	.31	.00
Adjusted R^2 = .44		

Self-Observation

Variables	Beta	P
Innovation	.74	.00
Team Communication	.58	.00
Job Influence	.14	.02
Adjusted R^2 = .61		

Self-criticism was predicted by supervisory trust (beta =.32, p .00) and decision making (beta

=.18, p .03). Ten percent (adjusted R2) of the variance in self-criticism was explained. Supervisory trust (beta =.53, p .00) and feedback (beta= .25, p .00) significantly predicted self-reinforcement. Forty-eight percent of the variance in self- reinforcement was explained. Self-expectation was significantly predicted by supervisory trust (beta =.61, p .00) and team goal setting (beta =.31, p .00) Forty-four percent (adjusted R2) of the explained variance in self-expectation was explained.   Self-observation was significantly predicted by innovation (beta =.79, p .00) team communication (beta = .28, p < .00) and job influence (beta = .14, p.02). Sixty- one percent(adjusted R2) of the variance in self-observation was explained.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the relationship between the various dimensions of Self-Leadership behaviors and selected organizational variables were explored. The results indicated that in general, supervisors who are seen as trusting, innovative, and who positively reinforce group members when they have performed their job well will contribute to the development of self-management leader behaviors of rehearsal, self-goal setting, self-criticism, self-reinforcement, self-expectations and self-observation. Enhanced feelings of trust result when group members feel that they are receiving a greater degree of responsibility and there is consequently a reduced need for the group to be controlled by the external leader. In addition, fostering communication within the team, and allowing group members to make work-related decisions also enhances the movement towards self-management.

All the hypotheses were supported. The results indicated that encouraging innovation and providing team training were positively related to self-rehearsal. Supervisor trust and team goal setting were also positively related to self-goal setting; self-criticism was influenced by supervisor trust and decision making, and self-reinforcement was positively related to supervisor trust and feedback. With respect to self-expectation, once again supervisor trust was positively related as well as team goal setting. Innovation, team communication and job influence were all positively related to self-observation. It appears that for three of the hypotheses supervisor trust was very important in predicting self-goal setting, self-criticism and self-reinforcement.

Management Implications

It is obvious that the Self-Leadership behaviors are important in the management of self-managed work team and employing them can result in some positive outcomes for the organization. The overall theme of management in self-managed work groups would seem to be learning to use facilitating skills as opposed to controlling skills, and as such is fundamentally different from traditional views of leadership (Manyard & Sims, 1990). In fact, if organizations really want employees to develop into top performers, providing them with the autonomy and responsibility to be more in charge of themselves and their work is essential. As Lawler (1986, 1992) indicates, this high-involvement approach provides the most extensive involvement and ability for self-influence. It entails passing power, information, knowledge and rewards to the lowest levels of the organization. The logic is that if workers are going to care about the organization they need to know about, be able to influence, be rewarded for and have the knowledge and skills to contribute to the performance of the organization.

In work situations where self-managed work groups are used, it would be appropriate for management to develop an employment strategy that recognizes Self-Leadership behaviors, and recruit individuals displaying these characteristics as external leaders for such groups. By endeavoring to employ individuals displaying Self-Leadership behaviors, the organization is aided in it efforts to develop a culture that is conducive for the effective functioning of self-managed work groups.

One of the required elements for the success of self-managed work groups is management support for the system (Lawler, 1992; Druskat & Wheeler, 2003). If organizations want to obtain the maximum benefits that accrue from empowering workers, the focus should be not only in involving employees at all levels in decision making and problem solving, but it should also be integrated with a culture that supports and encourages this new system. Personnel policies should also be developed which supports and reinforces this system. Awareness of programs, which promote the effectiveness of self-managed work groups, and the benefits of improved quality of work life that are purported to result from this system are essential, if organizational structures that cut across organization boundaries to enhance co-ordination, communication and cooperation are to become part of new work cultures.

In conclusion, implementation of effective self-leadership within teams is not an instantaneous process, but adopting and practicing Self-Leadership behaviors may lead to effective and productive work teams over time. Therefore, continual study of this particular type of application will contribute greatly to the understanding and application of Self-Leadership behaviors in organizations with self-managed work teams as the preferred organization structure. Further research is also needed to provide additional insights into those behaviors needed to effectively lead those who are supposed to lead themselves, as well as for badly needed guidelines for training external leaders of self-managed teams.

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