

## The Relationship between Self-leadership and Certain Personality Traits among a Group of First-line Supervisors

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**ABSTRACT** The relationship between personality traits (for instance extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability) and self-leadership has not been demonstrated thoroughly. If specific personality traits are related to self-leadership, selection and training strategies can be adapted in order to secure effective and productive employees for teams/organizations. The survey method was employed, using the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire and the revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire. The target group consisted of 69 first-line supervisors working in a state organization. Using the Pearson product-moment correlation, a significant correlation was shown between visualizing successful performance with extraversion, self-observation with introversion, self-talk with emotional stability and self-goal setting with conscientiousness. Specifically in the state sector, where first-line supervisors are faced with difficult and changing demands of the environment, it is important for them to use self-talk (which helps them to maintain emotional stability) and to constantly set self-goals (which help them to know what they are doing and to persevere at their task, that is, conscientiousness). If first-line South African supervisors in the state sector can be aware of the advantages of self-leadership strategies, and be trained in applying them in everyday situations, this can lead to effective leadership, stability and enhanced productivity in team/organizational context.

### INTRODUCTION

The world is characterized by political, social and economic environmental changes (Agumba and Fester 2010; Alam et al. 2010; Van Zyl 2002). South Africa is no exception to the global revolution that is sweeping through managerial and organizational thinking. Internalization, for instance, created world competition and is pressuring companies to utilize their potential more fully. Furthermore, members of the workforce have developed a need for greater meaning in their work lives. Issues such as empowerment and self-managed work teams have become important in the work context (Dorosamy 2010; Elloy 2004).

Given the popularity of employee empowerment as well as self-influencing behavior and its relation with effectiveness (Houghton and Neck 2002: 675), self-leadership appears to hold great

potential for application in today's dynamic organizations. Indeed, self-leadership has often been presented as a primary mechanism in both empowerment (Anderson and Prussia 1997; Prussia 1998) and the successful implementation of self-influencing and effective behaviors (Neck 1996). Houghton, Neck and Singh (2004: 427) state that: "Self-leadership is a term used to describe a comprehensive set of self-influence strategies that have recently demonstrated potential for application in today's organizations".

According to Houghton et al. (2004), the relation between personality traits (for instance anxiety, tough poise, independence, extraversion, and high superego strength or compulsivity) and self-leadership is not demonstrated in detail. If specific personality traits are related to self-leadership, training strategies can be adapted accordingly to secure effective and productive employees for teams/organizations. Furthermore, employees who exhibit these traits can be selected. With specific reference to the state sector, where first-line supervisors meet the difficult and changing demands of the environment (for instance to attain unrealistic work targets, changing legislation, etc.), the above-mentioned research/actions could lead to effective leadership, stability and enhanced productivity in the organizational context.

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## Objective

The objective of this quantitative research is to look at the relationship between self-leadership and certain personality traits among a group of first-line supervisors.

## Self-leadership

### *Recognizing Self-control Systems*

According to Manz (2001), organizations impose multiple controls of varying character on employees. He indicated that control systems attempt to exert influence by identifying appropriate behavior, providing means to monitor behavior that is taking place, and coordinating, rewarding and punishing this behavior. One view suggests that the control process involves applying rational, manageable control mechanisms (work standards, appraisal and reward systems, etc.) in order to influence employees through external means to assure that organizational goals are achieved (Irving 2011; Manz 2001).

However, an alternative view shifts the perspective of the control system-controlee interface significantly. Simply stated, this perspective views each person as possessing an internal self-control system (Manz 2001). Organizational control systems in their best form provide performance standards, evaluation mechanisms, and systems of reward and punishment (Lawler and Rhode 2000). Similarly, individuals possess self-generated personal standards, engage in self-evaluation processes and self-leadership concepts, and apply rewards and punishments in managing their daily activities (Mahoney and Thoreson 1998). Even though these mechanisms take place frequently and almost automatically, this makes them no less powerful.

Furthermore, while organizations provide employees with certain values and beliefs packaged into cultures and corporate visions, people too possess their own value systems, beliefs and visions for their future (Abelson 1998). Organizations provide organizational control systems that influence people, but these systems do not access individual action directly. Rather, the impact of organizational control mechanisms is determined by the way they influence, in intended as well as unintended ways, the self-control systems within the members of an organization.

The above mentioned perspective suggests that the self-influence system is the ultimate system of control. In addition, it suggests that this internal control system must receive significant attention in its own right before maximum benefits are realized for the organization and employee (Carver and Scheier 1991).

From an organizational perspective, recognizing and facilitating employee self-regulating systems poses viable and more realistic views of control than views centered entirely on external influence. Over-reliance on external controls can lead to a number of dysfunctional employee behaviors such as rigid bureaucratic behavior which eventually leads to work dissatisfaction and lower performance (Manz 2001).

According to Manz and Neck (2004), self-leadership is a self-influence leadership approach which has possibilities for application in present-day organizations.

### *Self-leadership Defined*

According to Manz and Sims (2002: 6), Manz (1986: 1), Manz and Neck (2004: 1), and Sahin (2011) self-leadership is a philosophy and a systematic set of actions and mental strategies for leading oneself to higher performance and effectiveness.

Manz (2001:589) conceptualized 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.

According to Houghton and Neck (2002: 672), self-leadership is a process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to behave and perform in desirable ways.

### *Towards a Theory of Self-leadership*

Self-leadership concepts have gained considerable popularity, as evidenced by the large number of practitioner-orientated books and articles on the subject (for example, Blanchard 1995; Cashman 1995; Manz 1991; Sahin 2011; Waitley 2000), and by the coverage in an increasing number of management and leadership textbooks (for example, Ivancevich and Matteson 2002; Kreitner and Kinicki 2003; McShane and Von Glinow 2005; Nahavandi 2000).

Self-leadership is rooted in several related theories of self-influence including self-regulation (Houghton and Neck 2002; Kanfer 1990), self-control (Manz and Simms 2002) and self-management (Luthans and Davids 1998). Self-leadership is generally portrayed as a broader concept of self-influence that subsumes the behavior-focused strategies of self-regulation, self-control and self-management, and then specifies additional sets of cognitive orientated strategies derived from intrinsic motivation theories (Deci and Ryan 1985), social cognitive theories (Bandura 1991) and positive cognitive psychology (Seligman 1991). Thus, drawing from these well-established theoretical foundations, self-leadership comprises specific sets of behavioral and cognitive strategies to shape individual outcomes.

Self-leadership strategies are often divided into three basic categories consisting of behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought patterns (Anderson and Prussia 1997; Manz and Neck 2004; Manz and Sims 2001; Prussia 1998).

*Behavior-focused strategies* involve the self-regulation of behavior through the use of self-assessment, self-reward and self-discipline (Manz 1986; Manz and Neck 2004). These strategies are designed to foster positive desirable behaviors while discouraging ineffective behaviors. Behavior-focused strategies are particularly useful in managing behavior related to the accomplishment of necessary, but unpleasant tasks. These strategies include self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward, self-correcting feedback and practice.

*Natural reward strategies* involve seeking out working activities that are inherently enjoyable (Manz 1986; Manz and Neck 2004). This set of strategies also includes the focusing of attention on the more pleasant or gratifying aspects of a given job or task rather than on the unpleasant or difficult tasks. Naturally rewarding activities tend to foster feelings of increased competence, self-control and purpose.

*Constructive thought pattern strategies* involve the creation and maintenance of functional patterns of habitual thinking (Manz and Neck 2004). Specific thought-orientated strategies include evaluating and challenging irrational beliefs and assumptions, mental imagery of successful future performance and positive self-talk.

### **The Relation between Self-Leadership and Personality Traits**

Although self-leadership is conceptualized as learned behavior (Houghton et al. 2004), some theorists (Guzzo 1998; Stewart and Courtright 2011) have questioned whether self-leadership is a unique and distinguishable concept with respect to certain personality traits, suggesting that self-leadership is a mere repackaging of individual differences already explained by pre-existing and relatively stable personality constructs. Stewart (1996), however, indicated that self-leadership is distinct from personality.

On the other hand, Williams (1997), Furtner and Rauthman (2011), Houghton et al. (2004), Neck and Manz (2004) as well as Dolbier et al. (2006) have suggested that a variety of personality traits are likely to be associated with self-leadership skills in meaningful ways. Williams (1997) in particular proposed positive associations between self-leadership and extraversion, emotional stability and conscientiousness.

Extraversion is most often described as the degree to which an individual is sociable, gregarious, talkative, assertive, active, energetic and ambitious (Manz and Neck 2004). As the skills training of constructive thought self-leadership has been shown to increase positive affect, optimism, and self-efficacy (Manz and Neck 2004), it seems reasonable to suggest that extroverts, who are naturally high in these characteristics, would be more likely to demonstrate self-leadership behaviors than introverts (Manz and Neck 2004).

Emotionally stable persons tend to be realistic, restrained and constant in attitudes and interests and usually tend to be calm and even-tempered. Williams (1997) indicated that an individual high in emotional stability tends to experience positive cognitions leading to rational beliefs, which, in turn, cause effective self-regulating behavior. Recent research (Elloy 2004; Houghton and Neck 2006) has shown a link between self-regulation and positive emotionality.

Conscientiousness consists of the specific traits of competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation (Houghton et al. 2004). In a study involving hotel employees, Elloy (2004) demonstrated a positive relationship between conscientiousness and employee self-leading behaviors.

In view of the above mentioned discussion, the following null and theoretical hypotheses can be stated:

$H_0$ : There is no significant relation between certain personality scores (extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability) and self-leadership scores (visioning successful performance, self-goal setting, self-talk, self-reward, evaluating beliefs/assumptions, self-punishment, natural rewards and self-cueing) among a group of first-line supervisors working in a state organization.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relation between certain personality scores (extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability) and self-leadership scores (visioning successful performance, self-goal setting, self-talk, self-reward, evaluating beliefs/assumptions, self-punishment, natural rewards and self-cueing) amongst a group of first-line supervisors working in a state organization.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach

The survey method was employed, using the South African Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF; Form A) and the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ). The survey method was utilized due to the fact that data was collected by means of different surveys/questionnaires so that the relevant questions could be answered.

### Research Method

#### *Sample and Sampling Procedure*

The target group was 69 first-line supervisors working in a state organization. Due to the fact that questionnaires were administered on first-line supervisors in one state organization, results cannot be generalized to all first-line supervisors in the state sector. Table 1 indicates that 79% of the group fell in the age group of 30-49 years. White as well as Black managers were included in the sample and 64% of the respondents were on an inspector job level.

#### *Measuring Instruments*

The South African Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) was completed to mea-

**Table 1: Biographical data of respondents(N=69)**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Group</i>		
Detective (Mangaung)	16	23.2
Detective (Botshabelo)	21	30.4
Administration (Mangaung)	16	23.2
Bloemspruit	16	23.2
<i>Age</i>		
20-29 yrs	8	11.6
30-39 yrs	32	46.4
40-49 yrs	23	33.3
50+ yrs	3	4.3
Missing	3	4.3
<i>Home Language</i>		
S Sotho	28	40.6
Zulu	6	8.7
Tswana	11	15.9
Xhosa	8	11.6
Afrikaans	12	17.4
Missing	4	5.8
<i>Rank</i>		
Inspector	44	63.8
Senior Inspector	1	1.4
Constable	12	17.4
Sergeant	7	10.1
Captain	2	2.9
Missing	3	4.3
Total	69	100.0

sure managers' personality traits (including extraversion, anxiety, tough poise, independence, superego and compulsivity). The 16PF has construct and content validity, and testing-retest reliability varies between 0.35 and 0.92 (Cattell et al. 1970: 36). A great deal of South African research (see, Van den Berg 2001) supports the use of the 16PF to measure personality factors. The validity (0.80) and test-retest reliability (0.35-0.92) have been proven by South African research (see, Van den Berg 2001).

The RSLQ was administered to measure self-leadership components (including behavior-focused strategies such as self-goal setting, self-reward, self-punishment, self-observation, and self-cueing), natural reward strategies (focusing thoughts on natural rewards) and constructive thought pattern strategies (visualizing successful performance, self-talk and evaluating beliefs and assumptions). In total, 40 items are included in the questionnaire to measure 10 components. The reliability alpha-coefficient of the RSLQ is 0.74, which is above the recommended level of 0.70 (Houghton and Neck 2002: 685). The construct validity of the RSLQ was examined by means of a confirmatory factor analysis that examined the fit of a theoretically-based hierarchical model of self-leadership with the data

of a separate large sample. The superior fit of this second-order factor model suggests that the RSLQ measures self-leadership in a way that is harmonious with the specifications of self-leadership theory, thus providing evidence of construct validity (Houghton and Neck 2002). Van Zyl (2002) identified the content validity and internal reliability coefficient (0.60) of the RSLQ.

A biographical questionnaire measuring age, marital status, qualification, job-level, dependants, gender and language was also administered.

**Research Procedure**

The researcher administered questionnaires to first-line supervisors after permission was obtained from the organization. Anonymity was protected as respondents did not write their names on the questionnaires.

**Statistical Analysis**

The relationship between self-leadership and personality factors was determined by means of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. This correlation coefficient was decided on as data is distributed normally (as seen from the SPSS Normal Q-Q plot program), implying a parametric statistical method.

The internal reliability coefficient was also determined by means of the SAS computer program.

**RESULTS**

The correlations between self-leadership strategies (including behavior-focused strategies such as self-goal setting, self-reward, self-punishment, self-observation, and self-cueing), natural reward strategies (focusing thoughts on natural rewards) and constructive thought pattern strategies (visualizing successful performance, self-talk and evaluating beliefs/assumptions) and personality traits (including introversion/extraversion, emotional instability/stability and opportunism/ conscientiousness) are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that significant correlations were found between the following self-leadership components and personality traits:

- visualizing successful performance with extraversion (r = 0.46)
- self-observation with introversion (r = -0.54)
- self-talk with emotional stability (r = 0.52)
- self-goal setting with conscientiousness (r = 0.62).

From the above mentioned, it can be seen that a significant relationship exists between certain self-leadership strategies and certain personality traits. The theoretical hypothesis, namely that a significant relationship exists between self-leadership scores (visualizing successful performance, self-goal setting, self-talk, self-reward, evaluating beliefs/assumptions, self-punishment, natural rewards and self-cueing) and certain personality scores (extraversion,

**Table 2: Correlations between self-leadership components and personality factors**

<i>Self-leadership components</i>	<i>Factor A Introvert/Extrovert</i>	<i>Factor C Emotional instability /Stability</i>	<i>Factor G Opportunism/ Conscientiousness</i>
Visualizing successful performance	0.461(0.033)*	-0.307(0.956)	-0.537(0.268)
Self-goal setting	-0.394(0.116)	-0.459(0.633)	0.623(0.050)*
Self-talk	-0.425(0.838)	0.525(0.049)*	-0.603(0.407)
Self-rewards	-0.116(0.350)	0.002(0.985)	-0.101(0.415)
Evaluation beliefs and assumptions	0.469(0.580)	-0.604(0.404)	-0.850(0.225)
Self-punishment	-0.804(0.973)	0.344(0.723)	0.148(0.232)
Self-observation	-0.540(0.050)*	-0.433(0.282)	-0.344(0.726)
Focus thoughts on rewards	-0.608(0.951)	-0.408(0.384)	0.431(0.290)
Self-cueing	-0.661(0.625)	0.618(0.883)	-0.661(0.623)
Behavior strategies	-0.441(0.740)	-0.015(0.906)	-0.021(0.867)
Natural reward strategies	-0.879(0.523)	-0.431(0.289)	0.681(0.515)
Constructive thought strategies	0.570(0.573)	0.108(0.384)	-0.019(0.879)
Total	-0.631(0.802)	-0.330(0.810)	0.630(0.810)

\* p d\*\* 0.05  
 \*\* p d\*\* 0.01



conscientiousness and emotional stability) among a group of first-line supervisors working in a state organization, is therefore partially accepted.

The group as a whole obtained an average score on total self-leadership (3.18 out of a possible score of 5). Self-leadership strategies for which low scores were obtained are: self-talk (1.7 out of 5); self-reward (1.9 out of 5); and self-cueing (1.5 out of 5). Average scores were obtained for the rest of the self-leadership strategies.

With regard to the 16PF, the group scored high on extraversion (7 out of 10), low on emotional stability (4 out of 10), high on social self-confidence (6 out of 10) and high on sensitivity (7 out of 10). Average scores were obtained for the rest of the 16PF factors.

The internal reliability coefficient for the RSLQ as determined by the SAS computer program proved to be 0.85, indicating an internally reliable self-leadership measuring device.

### DISCUSSION

The above mentioned results are in line with the findings of Houghton and Neck (2006) who indicated that self-leadership strategies are distinct from, yet related to, certain key personality traits.

From the above mentioned it is apparent that visualizing successful performance can be significantly associated with being an extrovert. The positive relationship found between extraversion and visualizing successful performance is in accordance with research conducted by Houghton et al. (2004) as well as Furtner and Rauthmann (2011) who indicated that extroverts are normally positive and adaptable persons who focus on positive (successful) outcomes of behavior rather than on unsuccessful behavior.

Furthermore, self-observation can be significantly associated with being an introvert. According to Cattell et al. (1970), introverts are more internally driven and therefore self-observation would probably be a natural process for them (Cattell et al. 1970: 36).

Self-talk can be significantly associated with being emotionally stable. Emotionally stable individuals act only after adequate deliberation and then proceed with patient perseverance.

McShane and Von Glinow (2005) indicated that self-talk helps individuals to persevere in what they are doing, and to be realistic and calm in their approach to problems.

Lastly, self-goal setting can be significantly associated with being a conscientious type of a person. Houghton and Neck (2002) indicated that individuals who set goals and constantly revisit them are inclined to know what they are doing and to persevere at the task at hand. According to Houghton and Neck (2006), such individuals might readily accept and reliably discharge responsibility (in other words, be conscientious).

### CONCLUSION

From the above-mentioned can be assumed that self-leadership strategies have a significant relationship with certain personality traits. Self-leadership strategies are indeed distinct from, yet related to certain personality traits.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Specifically in the state sector where first-line supervisors have to face the difficult and changing demands of the environment (as already discussed), it is important for them to use self-talk (which, inter alia, helps them to maintain emotional stability) and to constantly set self-goals (which help them to know what they are doing and to persevere at their tasks, that is, conscientiousness). Although different individuals have specific personality traits shaped by circumstances, it is important for first-line supervisors to be aware of the advantages of visualizing successful performance and to apply self-observation (as discussed above). If first-line South African supervisors in the state sector can be aware of the above-mentioned advantages of self-leadership strategies, and be trained in applying them in everyday situations, this can lead to effective leadership, stability and enhanced productivity in team/organizational context. Specifically in a country like South Africa where improved productivity is expected, the results of this study can help to achieve this. Lastly, due to the high internal reliability coefficient of the RSLQ, this questionnaire can be considered in further research on self-leadership in South Africa.

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