
SELF-LEADERSHIP THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Joyce J. C. Kiplimo

PhD student, Department of Leadership Studies, Pan African Christian University

Email address: jkiplimo2013@gmail.com

Publication Date: August 2023

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to define self-leadership and to examine the importance of self-leadership for effective leadership in meeting today's globalization challenges.

Research methodology: The study used a systematic review of the literature. The authors searched a variety of databases for articles that defined self-leadership and that examined the importance of self-leadership for effective leadership. They also reviewed articles that discussed the psychological research and theory that support the importance of self-leadership.

Findings of the study: The study found that self-leadership is the process of influencing oneself to achieve a desired outcome. It is a foundation for every leadership practice because it involves the skills and abilities that are essential for effective leadership, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and locus of control. The study also found that self-leadership is essential for effective leadership in meeting today's globalization challenges. Globalization is a complex and ever-changing environment that requires leaders to be adaptable, flexible, and proactive. Self-leadership skills help leaders to manage their own emotions, stay motivated, and make sound decisions in uncertain situations.

Conclusion: The study concluded that self-leadership is a critical skill for leaders who want to be successful in today's globalized world. The study also found that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-leadership. The best approach for a particular leader will depend on their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendation: The study recommended that aspiring leaders develop their self-leadership skills. They should focus on developing their self-awareness, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and locus of control skills. They should also learn from the self-leadership practices of successful leaders.

Keywords: *Self-Leadership, Foundation, Leadership, Practice*

INTRODUCTION

Self-leadership is essential for organizations to achieve their goals, and research has shown that effective leadership is nurtured through it. Leadership has evolved to reflect global events, generational change, and technology (Northouse, 2009). Self-leadership is therefore essential for effective leadership in handling today's complex and dynamic environment. A crucial component of a leader's management skills is their capacity to successfully manage oneself, and poor leadership shown by top management teams may result in subpar organizational performance owing to a lack of self-leadership. (Neck & Manz, 2010). Self-leadership is the practice of guiding oneself toward personal life goals, taking responsibility for one's actions and making decisions that align with personal values and goals (Neck et al., 2020). He further noted that self-leadership is a comprehensive self-influence process involving specific behavioural and cognitive strategies.

Self-leadership fosters quality, responsibility, and growth. It helps create goals, track progress, and adjust them since success depends on it (Holroyd et al., 2015). According to Bandura (1995), understanding who you are, determining your desired experiences, and purposefully leading yourself in that direction is the discipline of self-leadership. George et al. (2008) further support this by asserting that Self-leadership entails being true to oneself, open and transparent in exploring one's life story to understand who you are, where you fit in the world, how you can use leadership to impact the world, and how to leave a lasting legacy. He noted that leaders who are true to themselves creates a virtuous circle of sustained effectiveness in organizations, leading to superior team performance and the potential for organizations to compete and excel.

Self-leadership is also understanding one's values and how they align with their vision and purpose (Neck et al., 2019; Drucker, 2008). They noted that such leaders are authentic and credible, and able to win the trust of their followers. Great leaders model the way and inspire their followers and

this requires a high degree of self-discipline and personal -mastery. Leaders are characterized by their values, which are firmly-held ideas that direct their behavior (George et al., 2008). To lead by one's values is to convey one's most firmly held ideas, and one's behavior under pressure serves as a gauge of one's values. Leadership is essential for solving existing problems and realizing unimagined opportunities since we have only faint clues of what the future may hold (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Without leadership, the possibilities will not be envisioned or achieved. In his assessment, Daud (2020) observed that the lack of self-leadership among organizations and governments has prevented them from achieving their objectives. To increase self-awareness, self-assurance, and excellent leadership, he emphasized the need of integrating self-leadership into leadership activities. He said that self-leadership may shift organizational thinking in favor of a favorable direction by motivating, inspiring, and developing others.

Leadership skills are a combination of self-awareness, cognitive, emotional understanding of leadership, and professional competence to lead individuals to high performance (William 2006). He noted that leadership skills are a development journey from incompetence to high levels of professional understanding which is characterized by learning and personal development. Finding your True North is for all leaders, regardless of whether they have already established their leadership or plan to be a leader in the future (George et al., 2008). He noted that discovering one's leadership gifts requires understanding your unique life story to become a True North leader. When one knows their why, they are able to significantly influence what they do and why they do it (Sinek, 2010). He mentions that his understanding of WHY fundamentally altered his perspective on the world and his passion was rekindled to a level that was many times larger than it had ever been after discovering his own WHY. Neck et al. (2019) further argue that developing a sense of purpose is a crucial component of a naturally gratifying work process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on self-leadership has created several concepts and points of view. Self-leadership is an inside-out approach in which individuals may influence and guide their own behavior while inspiring and persuading others to follow them. Neck et al. (2019) stated that psychological research and theory, including those related to positive psychology, social cognitive theory, self-management, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation, as providing the foundation to self-

leadership. He points out that these self-leadership strategies not only address the standards and goals and the reasons why something should be done but also the manner in which it should be done.

Leadership and Self-regulation

Self-regulatory theory, according to Neck et al. (2019), contends that if there is a discrepancy between a person's actual and desired level of performance, they should alter their behavior to perform better. Goleman (2013) argues that self-regulation is essential for successful leadership, as it allows leaders to control or redirect disruptive moods and be honest, adaptable and aligned with their values. Through self-leadership, a leader is able to find ways to control their emotions and direct them in productive ways. Goleman argues further that, self-regulated leaders create an environment of trust, fairness, healthy completion, and integrity, which is both personal and organizational value. Self-regulation, a facet of emotional intelligence, allows people to escape the emotional prison of their emotions (Goleman, 2013). He states that the ability to understand and control one's own emotions as well as those of others is a sign of emotional intelligence. He argues that people with high emotional intelligence are conscious of their feelings, what they mean, and how they could affect other people.

Therefore, leaders who exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence are better able to comprehend and regulate their emotions, overcome obstacles, and achieve their objectives. Emotional intelligence is an essential leadership trait and arguably most of the leaders that are emotionally intelligent are excellent communicators and analysts which promotes effective self-leadership. Goleman (2013) on the contrary noted that in modern organizations self-regulated leaders may be seen to lack passion due to their reflection and thoughtfulness, while those with fiery personalities are seen as a hallmark of charisma and power. His research has however shown that when such leaders get to the top their impulsiveness works against them. According to Ivancevich et al. (2017), leaders who are able to control their emotions and moods are better able to inspire and grow their teams, fostering collaboration, trust and flexibility in decision-making. Self-regulation, therefore, has a number of positive outcomes, such as improved thinking and stress-coping abilities, higher attention and decision-making, and enhanced integrity, which is beneficial to both individuals and organizations (Mutalib et al., 2022). Self-restrained leaders are prone to reflection

and introspection, integrity, as well as the ability to embrace change and uncertainty. They are excellent leaders because they have the capacity to resist impulsiveness.

Leadership and Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is one of the self-imposed strategies that is key to self-leadership, which can be improved to reach higher performance in work and business (Bandura, 1995). Neck et al. (2019) argued that a leader should be able to display the qualities he expects to see in his followers and through self-management, demonstrate emotional competence in all situations. Drucker (2008) on the other hand believes self-management requires self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, and self-discipline. Self-awareness helps people harness their abilities and reduce weaknesses to make educated, goal-oriented decisions. Self-motivation inspires leaders (Reeve, 2001). Self-discipline exhibits self-control, focus, and work ethic. Self-awareness according to Goleman (2013) is a “deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and will”. According to Drucker (2008) leaders with high levels of self-awareness, have fewer possibilities of missing an opportunity, offer, or task and are more eager to help others achieve. Self-awareness, the first component of emotional intelligence, helps leaders and followers to integrate knowledge.

According to Goleman (2013), those who have a good sense of self-awareness are self-assured are neither unduly pessimistic nor overly optimistic. Bradberry and Greaves (2021) noted that most people are controlled by emotions due to a lack of skills to spot and use them for their benefit. They emphasized that making wise judgments requires not just factual knowledge but also self-awareness and emotional control. Self-leadership involves being more self-aware and self-reliant and continuously learning to regulate thoughts, feelings, and behavior while working towards the set objectives. This can be achieved through self-observation (Bennett, 2016). Self-awareness and self-mastery is the starting point to being an effective leader. Self-leadership is the outcome of self-mastery. Germano (2010) says "Show me a person who has mastered themselves, and I will show you one who will make a great leader." According to this, self-leadership creates influential leaders and demands responsibility for actions, behaviors, and development (Mutalib et al., 2022). You are a leader if your actions inspire others to dream, learn, do, and become more (Maxwell, 2019). Self-aware leaders are more likely to inspire and direct others to navigate challenges with

resilience and foster a positive and empowering work environment. They have the confidence and belief to demonstrate their excellence and greatness.

Leadership and Self-Efficacy

The second significant self-influence process according to the social cognitive theory is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is crucial for self-leadership because it lowers the possibility that life demands will be negatively assessed and offers protection from emotional suffering (Bandura, 1995). He further noted that self-efficacy is not a characteristic that certain people are born with but is the belief that a person has in their ability to carry out tasks, accomplish goals and overcome obstacles. Self-mastery increases self-efficacy, which boosts leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). A leader with self-efficacy is confident and persistent (Maddux, 2009). Effective leaders must understand who they are (Covey, 2004). In addition, self-efficacy includes both cognitive and emotional beliefs in a person's own ability as well as a confident evaluation of their behavior (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016). According to Neck et al. (2019), a person's mastery experience, vicarious experience, social influence, and physical and emotional circumstances all have an effect on their sense of self-efficacy.

He noted that mastery experience comes out of prior accomplishments and levels of success or failure while vicarious experiences refer to observing others who are like you or whom you admire (Bandura, 1997). Observing our role models tackle difficult tasks and succeed increases one's belief to complete such tasks. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges they set for themselves (Bandura, 1995). Sims and Manz, (1996) further mention that the rewards of effective self-leadership involve setting long-term goals, short-term goals, and persisting to reach them which leads to personal excellence in life. Neck et al. (2019) noted that leaders with high levels of self-efficacy may take initiative, establish challenging but doable objectives, and ask for feedback when they encounter issues. They also instil confidence and trust in their subordinates, encouraging them to adhere to the leader's vision and make greater contributions. Self-efficacy can also provide a technique for coping with stress and other issues associated with the task, as it encourages the leader to rely on their ability to handle the challenges. Commitment is essential for success and failure, as it allows people to remain grounded and keep moving despite setbacks (George et al., 2008). According to Bandura (1986) is described as "the

belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations. People with high efficacy tackle difficulties with confidence and a stronger sense of commitment.

In contrast, those with poor self-efficacy avoid challenging jobs because they see them as a danger, lose trust in their own talents, and are more prone to melancholy and stress (Bandura, 1997). Being confident in our capacity to handle a variety of circumstances might be essential to attaining our objectives. When presented with a leadership challenge, a leader may either be a great problem solver or a coward. Leaders who are technically competent but lack the self-efficacy needed to deal with issues are only titleholders. Self-efficacy, therefore, is essential for self-leadership as it lays a good foundation that helps leaders set challenging goals, take initiative, seek feedback, and cope with setbacks. It also inspires trust and confidence in followers, making them more willing to follow their vision.

Leadership and Locus of Control

Another crucial aspect of self-leadership is the locus of control, which describes a person's sense of how much influence they have over how their lives turn out. Drucker (2008) and Neck et al., (2019), mention that an internal sense of control is when an individual thinks they can influence their conditions and results through their own choices and actions while individuals with an external locus of control attribute control primarily to external factors beyond their influence. Leaders who feel strong about their internal locus of control are more likely to accept responsibility for their actions, hold others and themselves responsible, and set an example for others. Locus of control, as described by Rotter (1966), is the conviction that one has the capacity to influence life events rather than leaving it up to chance, fate, or influential friends. Leaders can be effective problem solvers or cowards if they can manage their own situation. To develop self-leadership, a leader should start with their own experiences and life story. Examining what they have learnt along the way and exploring the greatest crucible of their life to discover how it impacts their leadership (Lefcourt, 2014). Authentic leaders can take their leadership to a higher level of performance by inspiring confidence, trust, and loyalty, aligning others around a common purpose, and using their leadership capabilities (George et al., 2008).

Social persuasion means positive feedback and encouragement from others upon completing a task (Holroyd et al., 2015). This also plays a role in determining our reaction to the external environment. For instance, when a colleague, a supervisor or someone influential praises your accomplishments, your self-confidence and motivation to do more is enhanced (Neck et al., 2019). Finally, emotional states refer to physical and mental well-being. A healthy, energetic, relaxed, and happy state increases their belief in their abilities and readiness to provide leadership (Neck et al., 2019).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE THEORIES AND STRATEGIES ON SELF LEADERSHIP

The key components of self-leadership described in this study are locus of control, self-efficacy, self-awareness and self-regulation. These components support successful leadership by assisting leaders in developing a better understanding of themselves and highlighting their personalities, behaviors, abilities, and talents as well as their strengths and limitations. As a consequence, a leadership culture that encourages self-leadership leads to greater efficacy and efficiency while also developing tighter relationships between leaders and their followers. From the literature review, it is evident that self-leadership exemplifies moral and successful leadership. It is vital to cultivate leaders with self-leadership capabilities and abilities in order to manage and function in an economy that is more quickly paced, internationally networked, and stakeholder-driven, where uncertainty is the norm and information quickly becomes outdated. Self-leadership is essential for an organization to prosper in the 21st century due to social change and pressure to achieve higher levels of performance. It will be difficult to fulfill objectives, maintain quality, and provide services without strong self-leaders at all levels in our organization today. It is therefore more crucial now than ever before to emphasize the importance of self-leadership as a foundation for every leadership so as to create strong teams and as a result strong organizations. Self-leadership principles have been embraced by organizations, enterprises, and institutions of higher learning like Pan African Christian University via training programs to improve self-leadership abilities and behaviors of leaders, increase accountability so as to make positive impact for themselves and their organizations.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the literature on self-leadership underlines the vital role it plays in the dynamic and globally interconnected business environment of the 21st century. Through concepts like self-regulation, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and locus of control, self-leadership offers a robust framework for personal development and organizational achievement. This concept draws on numerous theoretical bases, encompassing areas like emotional intelligence, social cognitive theory, and intrinsic motivation. The underlying theme across various scholarly works is that self-leadership is not merely a set of skills but a philosophy of personal responsibility and self-directed behavior. It represents a movement away from traditional command-and-control leadership paradigms towards a more holistic approach that values introspection, self-mastery, adaptability, and influence. Incorporating self-leadership principles creates leaders who are not only resilient and self-assured but also empathetic, inspiring, and effective. Such leaders cultivate environments that foster trust, integrity, and collaboration, thereby enhancing both individual and organizational performance. This paradigm shift in leadership thinking is not merely desirable but imperative for contemporary organizations facing rapid change, complexity, and uncertainty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review, the following recommendations can be made:

Organizations, including educational institutions like Pan African Christian University, should incorporate self-leadership training into their developmental programs. This training should focus on enhancing self-awareness, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Management should foster a culture that supports and rewards self-leadership. Encourage open communication, recognize individual achievements, and promote a growth mindset that allows for constructive feedback and continuous improvement. Recognize that self-leadership development is a personal journey. Utilize assessments and tailored development plans that recognize individual strengths and weaknesses to help leaders and employees at all levels build the skills and awareness necessary for self-leadership. Emphasize the cultivation of emotional intelligence as a core competency for leaders. Provide tools and resources to help them understand and manage emotions in themselves and others, which is integral to self-regulation and effective communication. Encourage mentorship programs where more experienced leaders can guide and support emerging leaders in

developing self-efficacy and resilience. This mentorship should include real-world problem-solving experiences and reflective practices. Implement metrics and regular evaluations to assess the impact of self-leadership initiatives on individual and organizational performance. Use the results to continuously refine and enhance the programs to ensure they align with organizational goals and adapt to changing needs. Incorporate ethical considerations into self-leadership training to ensure that the focus on self-mastery and personal achievement aligns with organizational values and societal norms.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: a Social Cognitive Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (Ed.). (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511527692>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bradberry G and Greaves B (2021)). Emotional Intelligence. *A Primer on Multiple Intelligences*, 69-83.
- Bryant, A. (2016). Self-leadership/ What is self-leadership? [Web]. Retrieved from <https://www.selfleadership.com/what-is-self-leadership?on> June, 6, 2016.
- Caldwell, C. and Hayes, L.A. (2016). Self-efficacy and self-awareness: moral insights to increased leader effectiveness. *Journal of Management Development*, 35(9), 1163-
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-01-2016-0011>
- Covey, S. R. (2004). *The 8th habit: from effectiveness to greatness*. Free Press.
- 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.
- Drucker, P. F. (2008). *Managing Oneself*. Harvard Business Press.
1173. <https://ezproxy.pacuniversity.ac.ke:2070/10.1108/JMD-01-2016-0011>
- George, B., McLean, A., & Craig, N. (2008, June 2). *Finding Your True North: A Personal Guide* (Vol. 156). Jossey-Bass.
- Goleman, D., (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence*. Harvard Business Press.
- Holroyd, J., Brown, K. A., & Turner, A. P. (2015). What is Self-leadership? In *SAGE Publications, Inc. eBooks* (pp. 23–42). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473917132.n2>

- Ivancevich, J. M., Matteson, M. T., & Konopaske, R. (2017). *Organizational Behavior and Management*: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2017, April 17). *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*. Jossey-Bass.
- Lefcourt, H. M. (2014). *Locus of Control: Current Trends in Theory & Research*. Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315798813>
- Maddux, J. E. (2009). Self-Efficacy: The Power of Believing You Can. *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187243.013.0031>
- Manz, Charles C. (1986). "Self-Leadership: Toward an Expanded Theory of Self-Influence Processes in Organizations" *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 pp. 585-60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258312>
- Maxwell, J. C. (2019). *Leadershift: The 11 essential changes every leader must embrace*. HarperCollins Leadership.
- Mutalib, M. A., Rafiki, A., & Razali, W. M. F. a. W. (2022). Definition of Concepts and Understanding of Leaders and Leadership. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 17–31). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0908-5_2
- Neck, C. P., Manz, C. C., & Houghton, J. D. (2019, March 21). *Self-Leadership: The Definitive Guide to Personal Excellence*.
- Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2007). *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence*: Pearson.
- Northouse, P. G. (Ed.). (2009, October 27). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*.
- Reeve, J. (2001). *Understanding motivation and emotion*. Harcourt College Publishers.
- Sims, H. P., & Manz, C. C. (1996, February 1). *Company of Heroes: Unleashing the Power of Self-Leadership*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301\(97\)86597-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301(97)86597-1)
- Sinek, S. (2010, January 8). *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio.
- Scott, J. S. (2017). *The Path to Self-mastery: A Complete Self-Mastery Guide to Breaking Through Resistance So You Can Actualize Your Potential*. Sage.
- Williams, M. (2006). *Mastering leadership*. Thorogood Publishing. Created from pacuniversity-ebooks on 2023-06-09 12:58:51.