

## **CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SELF-LEADERSHIP**

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**Publication Date: May 2025**

### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** To explore why self-leadership should serve as the foundational principle for all leadership practices.

**Method used:** Literature-based review. The study analysed existing literature on self-leadership and its role in effective leadership.

**Findings:** Self-leadership is the ability to actively influence oneself and one's future. It encompasses self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-development. Self-leadership is essential for effective leadership practices. Leaders who master self-leadership can think strategically, allocate resources wisely, and foster a culture of self-leadership within their organizations. Self-leadership is not only beneficial for individual growth but also for creating a collaborative and effective leadership environment.

**Conclusion:** Self-leadership should serve as the foundational principle for all leadership practices. It is essential for individual and organizational success. Leaders who recognize and embrace self-leadership are better equipped to achieve their goals and create a positive and productive work environment.

**Keywords:** *Critical, Evaluation, Self-Leadership*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Self-leadership is a dynamic process that blends a person's inner guidance with their external actions, guided by their own free will and control. This ability lets people take the first step, set goals, and guide their own behaviour (Bandura, 1997). The concept has gained importance in leadership studies as a key practice for those looking to improve their leadership skills. Defined as the management of oneself to achieve set goals, self-leadership is also described as "the capacity to actively shape one's own future" (Luthans et al., 2006). Taking the initiative to motivate oneself is crucial for success in every aspect of life. Therefore, self-leadership should be the core idea behind all leadership methods. The aim of this paper is to explore why self-leadership should be the basic principle at the heart of all leadership practices.

## **SELF-LEADERSHIP**

Self-leadership is a crucial initial step in leading both oneself and others and should serve as the cornerstone of every successful leadership practice. Covey (1989) argues that effective leaders must first become competent managers of themselves. As Alvarez et al. (2005) puts it, "self-leadership needs to be the foundation for inspiring others to follow." Consequently, to become a successful leader, one must understand oneself and align personal goals with those of the organization or team. Self-leaders also have the skills to challenge themselves and improve performance. The ability to self-lead involves cultivating specific personal attributes and skills that contribute to a leader's success, such as personal awareness, self-management, self-motivation, and self-regulation. Smith (2009) discovered that successful self-leaders use their personal values, responsibilities, and goals to guide their decision-making and actions. These skills help leaders become more aware and conscious of their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Self-leaders are comfortable with themselves and understand their strengths and weaknesses. This self-knowledge allows them to take control of their own lives, manage their behavior, and ultimately determine their own success.

Essential to self-leadership is a high level of emotional intelligence, as noted by Konovsky et al. (1994). This emotional intelligence propels self-leaders beyond mere technical skills to impactful, transformative actions in their work and lives. True self-leaders also have the ability to balance their strengths and weaknesses effectively, leading to success (Neck & Manz, 2005). This self-awareness and knowledge contribute to a higher degree of professionalism, which, in turn, can earn greater respect from others. DuBrin (2009) points out that self-leaders possess the necessary decision-making, problem-solving, and communication skills to be effective

leaders. Self-leaders set objectives and formulate plans to reach those goals, maintaining a focus on desired outcomes. In challenging situations, they can remain objective and impartial, making sound decisions for the benefit of the team (Konovsky et al., 1994). They also have the drive to continue pursuing goals despite facing obstacles and criticism. Lastly, for self-leaders to succeed within an organization, effective implementation and follow-through are required (Neck & Manz, 2005). Self-leaders need to evaluate the effectiveness of their plans and make adjustments when needed.

## **THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF SELF-LEADERSHIP**

Self-leadership is shaped by both psychological and social-environmental factors (Judge, Bono, & Ilies, 2004). The concept of self-leadership effectively illustrates a person's standards, beliefs, and goals (Barnes & Bartol, 2002), and is based on a variety of core theoretical foundations. These include self-efficacy, goal setting, and reinforcement (Balkin & Dirks, 2004), as well as the Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy is based on the notion that individuals are responsible for their success or failure depending on the perceived abilities they have to control their environment or themselves (Bandura, 1997). Goal setting theory suggests that individuals produce higher levels of performance when goals are specific (Lockwood et al., 2005). Meanwhile, reinforcement theory states that individuals are more likely to repeat behaviour that are rewarded or validated (Curtis et al., 2009).

### **Behavioural Self-Leadership**

Behavioural self-leadership theories suggest that the foundation of self-leadership lies in self-regulation. Self-regulation is defined as an individual's capacity to control their own behaviour and direct it toward the achievement of desired goals. Behavioural self-leadership theories focus on how a leader develops self-control and uses this control to motivate his/her own behaviour in pursuit of a goal. This theory is based on the belief that an individual's behaviour is largely a function of self-regulation and self-directed motivation. In this view, an effective leader must not only be competent in the leadership role, but also must possess the capacity to regulate his/her own behaviour.

### **Cognitive Self-Leadership**

Cognitive self-leadership theories assert that an individual's behaviour is the result of the mental processes that occur during and prior to the act of leading. These mental processes can be divided into two broad categories: cognitive strategies and motivational strategies.

Cognitive strategies often focus on the development of cognitive maps which direct the leader's behaviour toward a desired outcome. Motivational strategies involve the development of positive attitudes and beliefs that motivate an individual to strive for a desired goal. Through the use of cognitive and motivational strategies, an individual can direct his/her behaviour toward achievement of a particular goal.

### **Identity-Based Self-Leadership**

Identity-based self-leadership theories builds on the principals of self-leadership, as the focus is on understanding oneself and one's identity from the inside out (Northouse, 2020). This theory proposes that self-leadership consists of developmental, contextual, relational, and core identity orientations. Kirkpatrick & Locke (1996), further noted that developmental identity orientation focuses on the importance of self-growth and understanding how certain life experiences shape one's identity. Contextual identity orientation is centred on understanding the impact of one's social, economic, and cultural contexts on how one relates to one's self and others. Relational identity orientation focuses on understanding the importance of relationships throughout one's life. Lastly, core identity orientation is based on understanding one's core purpose and values, and using that to create well-being and meaning in their life. According to Ellison & Day (2015), the primary characteristic of identity-based self-leadership is that it is an internalized form of leadership that is rooted in self-determination and identity.

Self-determination is central to this approach because it fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. In this approach, the leader is expected to take ownership of the solutions he or she finds and become an advocate for these solutions. This also necessitates taking the initiative and providing leaders with the tools to accomplish objectives. Self-leadership also requires individuals to develop a deep sense of their own identity. This is achieved through reflection on one's life experiences, traits, and beliefs. By connecting one's self-definition to the organizational values and goals, individuals can develop a more holistic understanding of themselves as leaders (Derks, Bakker & Glas, 2014). McCallum & Kelloway (2015), pointed that the advantage of identity-based self-leadership is that it allows individuals to be reactive and proactive in finding and executing solutions. The self-motivation to take responsibility for decisions and actions is a source of strength that allows leaders to take initiative and influence the direction of organizations.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

According to Bandura (1977), leaders are critical to the success of any business, industry, or even political setting. Leadership is a highly desirable trait and has been long studied and analysed to understand its nature and effects. Self-leadership is the form of leadership that focuses on the individual and their own development to develop leadership qualities, and this has been a very popular and effective method of leadership. By emphasizing the internal drive of the individual, the practice of self-leadership can provide a strong foundation on which to build any leadership practice. Specifically, self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-development are three components that are essential for effective self-leadership. As these components are individualized, they allow for the individual leader to customize their leadership approach to best fit their needs and the needs of their organization. Proper implementation of self-leadership principles can lead to successful leadership practices that are mindful and reflective of a leader's values.

Self-awareness is an essential component of self-leadership. It involves understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and being aware of how these characteristics play a role in leadership decision making. According to Druskat (2012), self-awareness is what allows an individual to recognize and appropriately respond to their environment and other individuals. Being self-aware can help an individual to make decisions that are both effective and reflective of their beliefs and values. Additionally, self-awareness can help an individual to be aware of their emotions and reactions in difficult situations, thus allowing them to assess their behaviour and make better decisions. Self-motivation is another important component of self-leadership. It is essential for leaders to be able to motivate themselves and propel their actions in order to achieve desired outcomes. Self-motivation involves recognizing one's own intrinsic value, and having the internal drive to continue working towards a goal even when the going gets tough. A leader must be able to push themselves in order to stay focused and determined in their work. According to Latham and Locke (1991), self-motivation is what allows a leader to utilize their own capabilities and resources to stay focused and work towards achievement of a goal.

Self-development is a crucial component of self-leadership. In order to be an effective leader, it is essential to continually build on existing skills and knowledge in order to further develop one's self. This includes actively seeking out new experiences and engaging in meaningful activities that will help to further develop the individual's leadership skills. Additionally, self-development also involves commitment and dedication to one's own growth, and having the

self-discipline to pursue knowledge which is pertinent to one's specific goals. According to Authur and Rousseau (1994), self-development plays a critical role in leadership and is essential for successful performance in any leadership role.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SELF-LEADERSHIP**

The fundamentals of effective leadership all start from one's self-awareness and commitment to maintain a clear sense of purpose. Self-leadership has been recognized as a practice that has the capacity to increase personal proficiency and effectiveness in managing one's own actions towards individual and collective objectives, and helps leaders and their followers to work together towards a common purpose. Leaders who engage in self-leadership can create meaningful cultures by being willing to take their own feeling of self-responsibility for their actions. Self-leadership requires leaders to internalize the concept of intrinsic motivation and protection of values, and to apply this attitude and belief system to their daily actions and decisions. According to Day et al. (2015), self-leadership relies not only on individual motivation but also on the perception and realization of personal goals. Self-efficacy is an important part of self-leadership; it is a personal belief of an individual's capability to manage their feelings, control their own behaviour, and overcome challenges. There are three core components to establish and maintain self-efficacy in leaders, which are constructing a vision of the leader's future development and success, setting personal goals within an achievable timeframe and exercising positive self-talk (Bosley & Hobby 2018).

Self-leadership processes can comprise several strategies such as goal setting, receiving feedback to using affirmations and developing specific plans of action (Day et al., 2015). Effective goal setting allows self-leaders to clearly define their purpose of action, acquire necessary resources, and properly focus their efforts in order to reach they set aspirations (Sprigg & Schwartz, 2014). When setting a target, clear goals should be established that are open to personal assessment and initiatives. This way, leaders can observe their progress and identify areas of development. Additionally, positive self-talk is an essential element of self-leadership as it helps to build self-confidence and create a positive outlook in difficult situations. Leaders can administer positive self-talk through repeating affirmations through solo activities such as journaling or even by rewarding oneself. By adopting positive mental and emotional habits, leaders can more efficiently deal with difficult challenges and remain dedicated to their objectives.

Overall, self-leadership can be applied through several strategies, such as goal setting, utilizing positive self-talk, and identifying hopeful expectations of future development and success. Self-leadership is an iterative process that requires continuous commitment and corrections of personal behaviour. It is the foundation and driving force of every leadership practice, setting the tone and norms of collective interaction and helping leaders and their teams become aware of their roles and responsibilities in order to achieve common goals. Organizations must have the knowledge and commitment to take on the responsibility for closely monitoring and effectively developing transformational strategies and operational decisions if they are to remain competitive in the face of today's constant changing market dynamics (Gülân, 2017). This article seeks to discuss why self-leadership should be the foundation of every leadership practice. It will explore the three key components of self-leadership and how they should serve as the foundation for all other leadership practices, namely strategic thinking, resource allocation, and fostering a culture of self-leadership.

The requirement for leaders to have a strategic view of their organizations is one of the aspects of self-leadership that should be explored (Fogarty et al., 2019). Self-leadership requires leaders to think strategically, understanding both the short and long-term implications of their decisions. It requires leaders to review current conditions, anticipate future developments and make sure the organization's decisions align with its strategy. Ultimately, this requires leaders to be able to think and develop solutions holistically, rather than creating single or isolated solutions. Self-leadership should also include the ability to make insightful decisions when it comes to resource allocation. In a competitive business landscape, leaders need to be able to make the best decisions in allocating the resources available to ensure the best outcomes. This requires the ability to evaluate the different alternatives based on their potential outcomes and to use the available information and resources to strategize the best allocation of resources.

Ultimately, leaders should strive to foster a culture of self-leadership throughout the organization. Self-leadership should be encouraged in all employees, including at the top management level. This can be done through providing regular and meaningful feedback to employees, supporting the implementation of self-set goals, and creating opportunities for employees to cultivate their skills in self-leadership. By building an organizational culture where self-leadership is seen as a key foundational principle (Uruci et al., 2018), leaders can ensure that the organization is able to successfully generate and sustain the changes required to remain competitive in today's changing landscape.



## CONCLUSION

Self-leadership is a foundational concept crucial for any successful leader. The ability to effectively lead oneself is essential for managing a team and achieving successful outcomes. Self-leadership demands an understanding of oneself as well as of those around you. It requires qualities like self-discipline, resilience, self-awareness, and honesty. Every effective leader needs to cultivate these skills to develop the capacity to lead both themselves and others. Therefore, self-leadership must be the basis for any leadership practice. The key to successful leadership lies in the ability to identify self-limiting beliefs and attitudes that may hinder progress toward goals. This involves a deep level of self-awareness and reflection. Once these areas are recognized, leaders must actively seek opportunities to enhance and expand their capabilities to fulfill their potential. By building self-efficacy, leaders can better motivate and inspire those around them to aim for similar results.

Leaders can also identify opportunities for growth and skill development beyond their current strengths and abilities. Acquiring new skills and insights allows leaders to better understand the context and environment in which their teams operate. This understanding fosters an atmosphere of trust and collaboration, vital for any team's effectiveness. Furthermore, this situational awareness enables leaders to make context-based decisions, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their strategies. In addition, self-leadership equips leaders to set realistic goals and expectations for themselves and their team members. Through the delegation of tasks and responsibilities, leaders can foster a shared vision and unified purpose. This collective approach enables the team to collaboratively tackle challenges and advance toward organizational goals. Self-leadership also supports emotionally informed decision-making, a critical element for effective leadership. Leaders skilled in self-awareness and emotional regulation are better equipped to trust their intuition, thus making challenging decisions that benefit both their team and organization.

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