THE ART OF SELF- LEADERSHIP – A ROAD TO
EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Introduction - Leadership has been a major topic of discussion from the ancient times. But it was not until the recent times that researchers thought about, Self Leadership. With the advent of the new business and economic conditions, with its implications for increased efficiencies, intensified competition and optimum employee output has made Self Leadership increasingly important and thus new ways of nurturing and developing self leaders are sought after.

Objective - This paper focuses on the behavioural and cognitive aspects of self regulation emphasizing two primary elements, self-realization and self development. The major thrust of this parer is that employees can influence or lead themselves by deliberate utilization of specific technique that focuses on individual self learning and self development. It explores the avenues of self empowerment and proposes few techniques on how an individual can develop self-leadership skills that can be instrumental in escalating self and organizational excellence.
Finding – It is proposed that through effective practice and application of the suggested steps, the art of self leadership can be mastered by every individual employee who can lead to enhanced individual and organizational performance.

Conclusion - Finally it is argued that everything lies within an individual; if you think you can, you can; if you think you can’t, you really can’t.

Research Approach/Design – An array of published works in Self-Leadership and related area has been analyzed and arranged contextually so as to present a collective “story” about Self-leadership and its importance in employee empowerment. Based on the analysis the techniques of developing self-leadership skills have been proposed.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Self-Leadership, Self Efficacy, Self Development.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of industrialization, as the development of the National Economies started revolving around the newly formed industries and the manufacturing organizations, the esteemed place occupied by the Monarchs and Military Leaders were usurped by the industrialists and the managers who were leading these new generation enterprises. Organizational Leaders thus took the front seat. But it was not until the recent times where we are more inclined towards the service economy which is seriously people intensive, that researchers thought about the complex issues involved with leadership which changes with situation and the people concerned.

Employees are the most important asset of an organization. It represents the first “M” in management and the other 4Ms are controlled, co-ordinated and integrated by it. Technologies,
products and structures can be copied by competitors. No one, however, can compete with the highly charged, motivated employees of an organization. With cut throat competition and intense struggle to be the frontrunner, probably a new era of management has began where the organizations now-a-days are not looking at the “cream of the crop” who would navigate the organization towards success. Rather they are in search of a leader in every individual employee who could lead the organization at any given situation without being steered by others; where every entity would ascend beyond their stature of “followers” and becomes a leader himself/herself and would be proactive and effective without any supervision.

Such kinds of employees are a firm's repository of knowledge and they are vital to an organization's competitive advantage. The concept of employee empowerment thus evolved and has been embraced by almost every organization today. The subject of employee empowerment is common to many organizational restructuring efforts. More uniquely, empowering employees is a key source of developing self-managed work teams and participative management style to broaden the quality concepts into business firms. The self-willed decisions made by the employees can either be small or large but offers employees choices and participation on a more responsible level. As a consequence the employees are more invested in their company, and view themselves as a representative of such.

Employee empowerment can merely begin with training and converts a whole company to an empowerment model. There are employee empowerment workshops, books and articles that can help a company adapt employee driven decision-making and thus making for happier employees. Well educated, coached, and highly motivated people are critical to the development and execution of strategies, especially in today's faster-paced, more perplexing world, where top management alone can no longer assure a firm's competitiveness.
As a result, recognition is growing that managers can rely on employee self-leadership rather than on external leadership as it has been traditionally applied (Manz and Sims, 1996). Self-leadership is considered pivotal to employees' enthusiasm for, commitment toward, and performance in empowering organizations (Manz, 1986, 1990). It may be that self-leadership behaviors have their original influence on competence perceptions regarding performance within specific task domains of individual employees. That is, the utilization of general self-leadership behaviors may influence work self-efficacy perceptions which subsequently affect performance and thus enhances personal and organizational excellence. In this study we will try to explore the concept of “self-leadership” and how it can attribute to employee and organizational excellence.

**Self Leadership Defined**

The arrival of the new business and economic conditions, with its implications for increased efficiencies, intensified competition and optimum employee output has made the practice of Self Leadership increasingly important. Self-leadership theory can be described as the ‘process of influencing oneself’ through which men and women influence themselves to control their own actions and thinking. Self-leadership was first developed and proposed by Manz (1986) and Manz and Neck (2004) as an extension of self-management theory. Self-leadership is defined as a process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self direction and self motivation needed to perform (Manz 1986, Manz & Neck 1999).

Self-leadership is a continuous process of self-assessment and discovery which can be used by an individual to develop leadership skills that can be of immense aid in professional and personal life. It focuses on the behavioural and cognitive aspects of self regulation. Though everyone execute this naturally, but self-leading can be of enormous help in the midst of carrying out complex or de-
motivating tasks if used more deliberately as a technique. Self-observation, goal-setting, self-evaluation, Self-reward or punishment are all fundamentals of nurturing self-leadership within an individual and can abet failures.

Modifying behaviours is not an easy task. Most of the time while conducting ourselves in an organizational environment, we fail to realize the fault in our behavior. It needs an external force like a superior or a peer to intervene and make us realize the same. Once individual begins to realize how their values and behavior relate to leadership skills, they set off to identify which behavior is detrimental with their values and thus use this awareness to develop a self-leadership plan. Of course motivation to follow this plan religiously is very much needed and when done so, it leads towards undeniable success.

Lorraine Monroe thus very rightly stated in her doctrine, “becoming a leader is an act of self invention. Imagine yourself as a leader: Act as if you are a leader until you actually become one”.

Self-Leadership us portrays the idea of an individual leading himself/herself to attain a particular goal. It is the influence that individuals can freely use upon himself/herself to control their own approach towards a particular facet and thus become self directed. Thus they can demonstrate internal control and thus perform desirably and as a consequence perk up their organizational performance. But it is much vital to put this concept of self leading at work and develop a plan by one own self so as to nurture the leader within him. The importance of self-leadership has been recognized long back and thus being stressed upon. But what is more important is to put it into practice in everyday life and thus reach the level of perfection. The importance of self-concept and the related concept of work self efficacy have to be realized so as to develop successful leaders who believe they can make positive difference.
The Self concept

Self concept refers to the positive or negative attitudes people have about themselves (Lussier and Achua, 2007). Many of the successes and failures which people experience in their work life is closely related to the ways that they have learned to perceive themselves and their relationships with others. If we think positively about our capabilities then we tend to have positive self confidence. Similarly if we think negatively about ourselves, we lack confidence in ourselves. Self-concept is learned, organized, and is dynamic and thus provides an ample chance to an individual to learn and unlearn, to adapt to various situation and modify accordingly.

Successful individuals with strong self concept and a positive attitude tend to have high self efficacy and take a positive view of the future and thus work towards achieving it.

What is Self Efficacy?

Self-efficacy defines one’s own belief about himself and his capabilities to perform under a given circumstance. It roughly corresponds to a person's belief in his own competence.

Understanding how to foster the development of self-efficacy is a vitally important goal for positive psychology because it can lead to living a more productive work life and a happy personal life as well.

Work self-efficacy assesses a follower’s confidence in managing organizational experiences. Theoretically it explains that individuals with higher work self-efficacy are more likely to look forward to, and to be successful in, organizational performance. Besides, work accomplishments are believed, in turn, to increases self-efficacy through a feedback loop tying consequent performance to enlarged self-efficacy beliefs.
How self-efficacy affects human function

Choices regarding behavior

Employees will be more inclined to take on a task if they believe they can succeed. They generally avoid tasks where their self-efficacy is low, but will engage in tasks where their self-efficacy is high.

Motivation

People with high self efficacy in a task are more likely to make an effort and persist longer than those with low self-efficacy.

Thought patterns & responses

Low self-efficacy can lead people to believe tasks are harder than they actually are. This often results in poor task planning, increased stress as well as task avoidance.

Health Behaviours

Health behaviours such as non-smoking, physical exercise, dieting, personal hygiene etc is also dependent on one’s level of perceived self-efficacy (Conner & Norman, 2005).

Bandura showed that people of differing self-efficacy perceive the world in fundamentally different ways. People with a high self-efficacy are generally of the opinion that they are in control of their own lives; that their own actions and decisions shape their lives. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy may see their lives as somewhat out of their hands.

How can Work self-efficacy be raised?

Bandura’s researches show that self-efficacy is acquired and that there are sources of deriving self-efficacy and some of them are:
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- **performance accomplishments**: Past experiences of success and failure in attempts to accomplish goals are the most important regulators of self-efficacy;

- **vicarious experience**: When individuals witness others’ successes and failures, they are provided with information which they can use as a basis for comparison for their own personal competence in similar situations;

- **verbal persuasion**: Being told by others that one can or cannot competently perform a particular behaviour can lead to increases or decreases in self-efficacy;

- **emotional arousal**: Levels of self-efficacy are also proposed to be influenced by the degree and quality of the emotional arousal an individual experiences when engaging in a particular behaviour in a specific situation.

**Can employees self-train to become Self Leaders?**

In order to address the need for increased self-direction, training programs have been developed to teach self-management and self leadership skills. Kerr and Jermier (1978) first introduced the concept of self regulation which later was refined into the self leadership process by Manz (1986). In training literature self leadership has been conceptualized as a learned behavior, (Andrasik & Hiemberg 1982). The theoretical rationale behind the use of training to increase self leadership behavior can be illustrated with the social learning concept of Triadic Reciprocal. As shown in figure 1, triadic reciprocity posits that an individual’s behavior (B), cognitive and Personal Factors (P) and Environmental factors (E) mutually influences one another (Bandura 1986). Linkage 1 of Bandura’s model refers to the fact that behavior can be changed by providing employees skills such as goal setting and self-reinforcement (Frayne & Latham, 1987).
Figure 2: Bandura’s (1986) Model of Triadic Reciprocity

Self leadership training is thus an environmental interference that has been used to effectively increase desirable behaviours (Stewart, Carson & Cardy 1996).

**How does Self leadership boost Organizational Excellence?**

Individuals who effectively self-lead become highly self directed and effective leaders for their organization and their co-workers and thus become a catalyst for the development of the next generation of achievers. People talk about employee empowerment in many different ways, but the basic theme remains: allow employees to take important decisions, and making those decisions the right ones. The results, when this process is done right, are heightened productivity and a better quality of work life with superior organization reflection. The trick lies in not staggering them by limiting their tools or information but in trusting them to do the right thing. These important principles of managing people reinforce employee empowerment, task accomplishment and self contribution. It enables people to soar high in their...
roles and thus enhance organizational excellence. Figure 2 below proposes a thought how the path towards organizational excellence begins with every individual employee developing the techniques of self-leadership and practicing it in the organizational environment.

**Figure 2 : Structural representation of the proposed model**

**How to develop Self Leadership?**

The main objective of this paper was to arrive to the fact that self leadership can be acquired and there are few techniques that can be helpful in nurturing self leadership amongst employees. Finally it is offered that self leadership skills are acquired and to help get the act right, suggested here are some of such rapidly adaptable techniques.

**Think yourself as a leader**

As stated by Lorraine Monroe in her doctrine, “becoming a leader is an act of self invention. Imagine yourself as a leader: Act as if you are a leader until you actually become one.” Thus to get the act right, here are some of such rapidly adaptable techniques.

**Know yourself**

Self leadership rests upon complete self knowledge and understanding of the potential leadership assets of an individual. Those aspiring to become self leaders need to discover what it is about themselves that they can utilize in a leadership role.
Set goals

Goal setting is inevitable for life; not just for work. Goals not only lend “meaning of life” to an individual but also affect his lifestyle and work too. Goals can be long term or short term depending upon ones need.

Communicate Carefully - Listen to Learn

Communication forms an integral part of leadership. Face-to-face communication is highly relevant. Listen to others believe that beauty exists in everything and everyone, and then go about finding it. One would be amazed at how little he has to invent and much is waiting to be displayed.

Motivate yourself

Self motivation is highly needed in the work place. An individual can start developing constructive approaches towards difficult tasks or situations and in so doing train one self to be an opportunity thinker. This way one starts thinking positively and his beliefs, self talks and mental imagery builds up a significant effect on his overall performance.

Be Authentic

Establish a clear relation between words and deeds. There are some things which you as an organizational entity do not take liberty upon; no matter how innovative one is when he is trying to develop as a leader. For example, to have integrity means to tell the truth. To be ethical is to do the right thing. These are not vague concept and needs to be stuck to whatever the task or situation is.

Be Social, Practice Solidarity

For organizational leaders sociability and solidarity confer certain advantage. In high sociable cultures people enjoy their work and tend to be more productive. Solidarity adds focus. Hence
when an individual is aspiring to be an organizational leader, he has to be sociable and practice this art to increase his acceptability within and outside his assigned team.

**Understand Individuals**

Care for and about people. Compassion and empathy keeps one ever-connected to humanity. People will choose those leaders who are compassionate about them and will want to follow and support their efforts.

**Take Initiative**

Volunteer to be the first. Be daring, bold, brave and fearless, willing to drop down, fail, and get up again for another round. Starting with vulnerability has this amazing way of making us stronger when all is done. This will increase your determination and would empower you to handle obstacle ahead.

**Be Humble and give away the credit**

Practice modesty and never forget to share credentials of a task with co-workers. Learning to go before others is only a small part of leading; you have to go with them too. Therefore, be humble and give away the credit; they have got to want you around.

**Evaluate yourself Periodically**

Evaluation makes certain that an individual is able to identify his areas of strength; weakness and improvement which would help him identify the cause of failure and set some yardsticks for improvements. This would ensure professional as well as personal growth of the employee concerned.

**Be an ultimate pupil**

Practice lifelong learning and be a fanatic about it. Surround oneself with mentors and people smarter than you and observe how they work. Seek to be
continually inspired by some learning. This would help an employee broaden his own perspective and gradually increase their acceptance as a prospective leader.

*Remember the emotional impact of your behaviour*

Every employee should practice discretion constantly, and lead with the example of how their own behaviour does get them great results. Otherwise why should anyone respond to his feelings and follow him when he leads?

*Rewards / Punish Yourself*

Rewards are a good way of motivating one’s own self. Gifting little token to mark their success would boost self confidence and help one think more constructively. A similarly small punishment for failures at times helps to recuperate faster from the remorse of failure.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The idea of self leadership finally rests with an individual. Thus, Dr Pamela Butler, Clinical Psychologist, has beautifully stated that ‘there is a person with whom you spend more time than any other, a person who has more influence over you, and more ability to interfere with or to support your growth than anyone else. This ever-present companion is your own self’. In order to grow in an organization, just being a follower is not enough. Every business institution, every manager today is looking around to hit upon an exquisite individual who has the jest and determination to be a self directed personality, who is ready to take up any challenge even in the absence of an external energy – the leader, and thus empower them to rightly suit the need of the organization. But the willingness to take up the challenge of developing oneself has to come from an individual and that would be his first step towards self-leadership. In the process of developing himself he would also influences his co-workers and thus initiates a change for organisational excellence.
The skills required to develop self leadership can be acquired by every single employee who wants to develop themselves and thus the debate of whether it is gained or acquired can be brought to an end. The simple steps discussed in the paper can be actually implemented by employees under almost all work spheres and can help them to be at the forefront. Organizational leaders on their part can motivate their followers to emerge as self leaders which would initiate an organizational transformation and would therefore help the leaders develop the next generation of baton bearers.

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