

SELF-MANAGEMENT AND SELF-LEADERSHIP REEXAMINED: A LEVELS-OF-ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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This article critiques the concepts of self-management and self-leadership from a levels-of-analysis perspective. Conceptual and methodological problems in identifying the most pertinent levels of analysis are noted. We articulate the ways in which the individual, the dyad, the group, and the organization can be theoretically melded into existing self-leadership theory. Suggestions for future research are explored, as well as practical applications in the areas of self-managed work teams and high-performance organizations.

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the concepts of self-management and self-leadership have entered the management literature (Manz, 1986, 1992a; Manz & Sims, 1980; Adrasik & Heimberg, 1982; Mills, 1983; Hackman, 1986). The allure of this notion for a practicing manager is clear: to the extent that self-management can be encouraged as an employee empowerment practice, then supervisory staff can be cut with resulting salary savings. However, when the self-management and self-leadership concepts evolved into the self-managed work team (SMWT) movement (e.g., Manz, 1990, 1992b; Manz & Sims, 1986), both conceptual and empirical quandaries became evident as a

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Leadership Quarterly, 6(3), 343-359.
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ISSN: 1048-9843

theory that was originally developed to explain individual differences migrated to a higher level of analysis. While this theory might be viewed as a "person-group" theory from a levels perspective, the problem for the theory is that it has not been clearly articulated at either single or multiple levels of analysis.

From a general research viewpoint, the core problem centers around the notion that a theory formulated at one level of analysis (in this case, individuals) does not necessarily correspond directly to other levels (in this case, cohesive teams). (In conjunction with theoretical formulations of levels issues, there is also an empirical counterpart to this problem in terms of how such theories are tested; this is discussed below.) The specific paradox revolves around the tradeoff between increasing self-leadership for individuals while at the same time trying to increase a group's ability to manage itself. In other words, does maximizing self-leadership for individuals translate directly into groups, departments, or even whole organizations that are more coordinated and more effective (Manz & Angle, 1986)? More generally speaking, should self-leadership be analyzed as a phenomenon occurring as a result of individual processes (such as self-control of thoughts), dyadic processes between superiors and subordinates (such as mutually satisfying professional exchanges), or group processes (such as socialization and norm creation)? These types of questions exemplify a unique conceptual issue currently faced by many organizational theoreticians as they expand level-specific notions of leadership to account for the many richly complex entities that encompass organizational life.

In conjunction with this conceptual quandary, there are equally important methodological issues for the self-management/self-leadership arena that pertain to the ways that tests of group versus individual effects have been conducted. More specifically, previous methods that were employed to test substantive questions about the proper levels of analysis at which self-leadership unfolds have not allowed for clear inferences concerning the entities of interest.

The purpose of this article is to help highlight some of the theoretical quandaries concerning how to extend theories and measures derived from self-leadership notions to larger organizational entities by: (1) reviewing the major theoretical elements of self-management and self-leadership and positioning them within the domain of leadership theory, (2) articulating the conceptual and methodological problems of levels-of-analysis perspectives for self-leadership, and (3) suggesting future research topics for both field and experimental designs.

BACKGROUND

Self-Management: An Individual-Level Formulation

Within the broader conceptual domain of the self-control literature, Manz and Sims (1980) proposed the term self-management to refer to the degree to which any incumbent within an organizational role takes responsibility for the managerial (planning, scheduling, organizing, and controlling) aspects of his or her job above and beyond the mere execution of the production- and content-related responsibilities. Self-management especially occurs when the incumbent selects low-probability responses and/or self-administers consequences (Manz & Sims, 1980). This conceptualization is similar to that suggested by Hackman (1986). However, it is this notion of the self-

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