

# Self-Leadership: A Process for Entrepreneurial Success

Robert S. D'Intino - Rowan University  
Michael G. Goldsby - Ball State University  
Jeffery D. Houghton - West Virginia University  
Christopher P. Neck - Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

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*Our purpose in this paper is to provide a comprehensive examination of recent research into individual differences in order to better understand the future promise of self-leadership as a concept and a research subject for entrepreneurship. We briefly present a description of self-leadership research and then proceed to describe and contrast the self-leadership concept relative to other related motivational and self-influence constructs including: optimism, happiness, psychological flow, consciousness, personality models, self-monitoring, the need for autonomy, emotional intelligence, and diversity factors including age, gender, and cultural differences, and the work-life interface. We relate these concepts to entrepreneurship, and conclude with suggestions for future research on the relationships between self-leadership, individual differences, and entrepreneurship.*

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The concept of self-leadership (Manz, 1986; Manz & Neck, 2004) represents an individual level process perspective through which men and women influence themselves to control their own actions and thinking. The goal of increased self-leadership for entrepreneurs is for these individuals to more effectively lead themselves by learning and applying specific behavioral and cognitive strategies to improve their lives and their entrepreneurial business ventures. We propose that the process of self-leadership is inherent in successful entrepreneurship and can be developed by both nascent entrepreneurs just beginning a business and veteran entrepreneurs who may be struggling with taking their businesses to higher

achievements in sales growth and firm profitability.

Self-leadership was first developed and proposed by Manz (1983; 1986) as an extension of self-management theory (Manz, 1990, Manz & Sims, 1980, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1994). Over the past two decades, the self-leadership concept has been extensively written about as evidenced by the large number of practitioner oriented self-leadership books and articles on the subject (e.g., Blanchard, 1995; Cashman, 1995; Manz, 1991; Manz & Sims, 2001; Sims & Manz, 1996; Waitley, 1995). This article will begin with a brief overview of the self-leadership research (see Neck & Houghton, 2006, for an extensive research review and discussion of self-leadership) and then proceed to discuss how recent research on individual differences can extend our understanding of self-leadership within the broader research context of entrepreneurship.

Although there are many similarities in the general entrepreneurship process within the new venture process including initial startups, struggling or rapidly growing small businesses, and large corporations, there are also many significant differences, especially regarding the political factors and personal motivations inherent in larger organizations as opposed to smaller, growing companies (Morris & Kuratko, 2002). Startups and burgeoning enterprises must struggle with issues of gaining legitimacy and support among many stakeholders including customers, employees, suppliers, individual or venture investors, and banks or other lending institutions.

Persistence and maintaining a positive attitude through these challenging times can

sometimes spell the difference between entrepreneurial success and business failure. Furthermore, entrepreneurs must find this drive from within. While lenders and investors exert some influence and pressure on performance, ultimately the survival of the business rests on the founding entrepreneur's shoulders. We propose that entrepreneurs will be assisted through these venture startup and growth stages by understanding and developing personal strategies to remain disciplined and focused on their goals. Fortunately, self-leadership is a motivational area of psychology that offers these skills and strategies to entrepreneurs to remain steadfast and purposeful during these times. In this paper, we present self-leadership as a process for attaining the mindset and behaviors needed for starting and building a new business. In the following section we provide an overview of self-leadership, which will later be applied to entrepreneurship.

### Self-Leadership Overview

Self-leadership describes a self-influence process through which people can and do achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform their tasks and work (Manz, 1986, Manz & Neck, 2004). Self-leadership consists of specific behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to positively influence personal effectiveness. These strategies are generally clustered into the three primary categories: (1) behavior-focused strategies, (2) natural reward strategies, and (3) constructive thought pattern strategies (Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 2001; Prussia, Anderson, & Manz, 1998).

(1) *Behavior-focused strategies* endeavor to assist an individual to increase their self-awareness in order to facilitate behavioral management, especially the management of behaviors related to necessary but often unpleasant tasks (Manz & Neck, 2004). The behavior-focused strategies include self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward or self-punishment, and self-cueing. Self-observation involves focusing on an individual's awareness of how, when, and why they engages in specific behaviors. This type of self-awareness is a necessary first step toward changing or eliminating ineffective or

unproductive behaviors (Mahoney & Arnkoff, 1978, 1979; Manz & Sims, 1980; Manz & Neck, 2004). With accurate information regarding current behavior and performance levels, individuals can more effectively set effective behavior altering goals for themselves (Manz, 1986; Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 1980).

An extensive research literature suggests that the process of setting challenging and specific goals can significantly increase individual performance levels (Locke & Latham, 1990). Rewards set by an individual along with self-set goals, can aid significantly in energizing the effort necessary to accomplish the goals (Mahoney & Arnkoff, 1978, 1979; Manz & Sims, 1980; Manz & Neck, 2004). Self-rewards may be simple or intangible such as mentally congratulating oneself for an important accomplishment, or more concrete like a special vacation at the completion of a difficult project. Self-punishment or self-correcting feedback can consist of a positively framed and introspective examination of failures and undesirable behaviors leading to the reshaping of such behaviors. However, the excessive use of self-punishment involving self-criticism and guilt can be detrimental to performance and should be avoided (Manz & Sims, 2001). Finally, concrete environmental cues can serve as an effective means of encouraging constructive behaviors and reducing or eliminating destructive ones (Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 1980, 2001). Lists, notes, screensavers, and motivational posters are just a few examples of external cues that can help keep attention and effort focused on goal attainment. Thus behavior-focused self-leadership strategies are designed to encourage positive, desirable behaviors that lead to successful outcomes, while suppressing negative, undesirable behaviors that lead to unsuccessful outcomes.

(2) *Natural reward strategies* are intended to create situations in which a person is motivated or rewarded by inherently enjoyable aspects of the task or activity (Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 2001). There are two primary natural reward strategies. The first involves building more pleasant and enjoyable features into a given activity so that the task itself becomes naturally rewarding (Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 2001). The second

strategy consists of shaping perceptions by focusing attention away from the unpleasant aspects of a task and refocusing it on the task's inherently rewarding aspects (Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 2001). Both strategies are likely to create feelings of competence and self-determination, two primary mechanisms of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). To summarize, natural reward strategies are designed to help create feelings of competence and self-determination, which in turn energize performance-enhancing task related behaviors.

(3) *Constructive thought pattern strategies* are designed to facilitate the formation of constructive thought patterns and habitual ways of thinking that can positively impact performance (Manz & Neck, 2004; Neck & Manz, 1992). Constructive thought pattern strategies include identifying and replacing dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions, and practicing mental imagery and positive self-talk. Individuals should first examine their thought patterns, confronting and replacing dysfunctional irrational beliefs and assumptions with more constructive thought processes (Burns, 1980; Ellis, 1977; Manz & Neck, 2004; Neck & Manz, 1992). Negative and destructive self-talk should be identified and replaced with more positive and enabling internal dialogues.

Self-talk is defined as what people covertly tell themselves (Neck & Manz, 1992, 1996) and involves mental self-evaluations and reactions (Ellis, 1977; Neck & Manz, 1992). By carefully analyzing self-talk patterns, negative or pessimistic self-talk can be suppressed or eliminated and replaced with more optimistic self-dialogues (Seligman, 1991). Finally, mental imagery is the symbolic and covert cognitive creation of an experience or task prior to actual overt physical muscular movement (cf. Driskell, Copper, & Moran, 1994; Finke, 1989; Neck & Manz, 1992, 1996). Individuals who envision successful performance of an activity in advance of actual performance are more likely to perform successfully when faced with the actual task (Manz & Neck, 2004). To evaluate this assertion, Driskell et al. (1994) performed a meta-analysis of 35 empirical studies and found a statistically significant positive effect for mental imagery on individual performance tasks.

Our purpose in this paper is to provide a comprehensive examination of recent research

into self-leadership in order to better understand the current state and future promise of it as a concept and as a research subject for entrepreneurship. We believe that self-leadership concepts and skills are inherent for successful entrepreneurship and these concepts and skills can be developed by entrepreneurs just beginning their business ventures and by more experienced entrepreneurs who building and successfully growing their business ventures.

We briefly present a description of self-leadership research and then proceed to describe and contrast the self-leadership concept relative to other related motivational and self-influence constructs including: optimism, happiness, psychological flow, consciousness, personality models, self-monitoring, need for autonomy, emotional intelligence, and diversity factors including age, gender, and cultural differences, and the work-life interface. We conclude with suggestions for future research to better understand self-leadership as a process for assisting entrepreneurs in building their new ventures and rapidly growing their already established businesses.

### **Self-leadership and its Motivational Constructs**

The term *individual difference* is sometimes used to describe the characteristics that make people different from one another. Individual differences of entrepreneurs can include personality traits, gender, age, cultural or educational or work experience backgrounds, as well as individual tendencies to be happy, optimistic or to actively control emotions. Innate or learned self-leadership abilities and skills can both shape and assist an entrepreneur to seek and evaluate positive value proposition opportunities, take the risks associated with creating a business around those opportunities, and persevere to grow the business. While entrepreneurship has a social nature to it, it tends to be more focused on individual actions than other business areas. Thus, the application of self-leadership to entrepreneurship will assist the self-directed nature of building and growing a business.

### **Optimism and Self-leadership**

An important question about optimism and self-leadership states: How does an individual

maintain a focus on self-leadership in difficult times or trying circumstances? The entrepreneur must persevere through many trying times as he or she deals with numerous contingencies and obstacles. It helps if the entrepreneur can maintain an outlook of hope and passion for their business ideas, in order to remain committed to their vision. Examples for better understanding this quality can be found in the psychology literature.

The Austrian psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl described his experiences imprisoned in Nazi concentration death camps in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1984) in which he explains the life lessons he learned from his own and others' responses to extremely trying circumstances. Utilizing his medical education and professional experiences as a psychiatrist, Frankl taught himself to view the world and the human condition optimistically in the midst of his own personal experiences living through horrific conditions. From his Nazi concentration camp experiences, Viktor Frankl developed what he called "*tragic optimism*" by learning to intentionally control his own internal life and thus control how he personally made sense and responded to external events. Learned optimism is illustrated in the following compelling example:

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way". (Frankl, 1984: 86)

Fortunately, the extreme life and death events of a concentration camp are unlikely experiences for most entrepreneurs (but certainly not all—consider the daily life perils of a startup entrepreneur in 2007 Baghdad or a small business owner conducting business in Iraq's Anbar Province). Understanding more about Frankl's learned optimism in the midst of difficult (or even extremely stressful or life-threatening) circumstances can serve to better understand the potential benefits for self-leadership strategies within entrepreneurship and the struggles involved in starting and growing a new venture.

Seligman (1998) has written extensively about optimism and is convinced that optimism is indeed something that can be learned. According to Seligman, people differ greatly in something he calls explanatory style. Explanatory style refers to the way people explain the bad events that they experience. People with more pessimistic explanatory styles tend to see problems and difficulties as being personal, permanent and pervasive. In other words, they see the bad things that happen to them as being entirely their own fault, as being unlikely to ever get better, and as having an impact on every aspect of their lives.

In contrast, other people tend to have more optimistic explanatory styles. People with optimistic explanatory styles tend to see bad events in their lives as impersonal, temporary and specific. Furthermore they tend to see bad things as being unrelated to them personally or at least as not entirely their fault. Thus these bad events can be overcome and relate to only one particular aspect of their lives. In addition, Seligman found in his research that people who expressed gratitude on a daily basis and enjoyed their daily experiences tend to be more satisfied with their life. Seligman's conclusions on this topic suggest an interesting research study involving nascent and experienced entrepreneurs.

Many studies have suggested that individual differences in explanatory style can have a direct bearing on success in life areas including work, school, and sports. For example, one study showed that people with optimistic explanatory styles were more successful in selling life insurance than people with pessimistic explanatory styles (Seligman, 2004). The reason for the difference is simple. Insurance salespeople are told 'no' many times a day, often multiple times in a row. These circumstances are similar to the challenges entrepreneurs face when trying to attain new customers. Optimists are not easily discouraged by these types of setbacks and would persist and keep trying no matter how many times they are told 'no.' In contrast; pessimistic entrepreneurs tend to become discouraged by their setbacks. They do not persist in the face of such difficulties and they are more likely to give up and stop trying (Hisrich & Peters, 2001; Shepherd, 2004). With the high failure rate

found in many startups, better understanding of these explanatory styles may offer guidance for attaining entrepreneurial success.

Another group of studies suggest that professional sports teams and individual athletes with optimistic explanatory styles tend to outperform teams and athletes with comparable talent levels but more pessimistic outlooks (Seligman, 2004). Some data suggests explanatory styles may even help to determine who wins political elections. In 1988, researchers were able to successfully predict George H.W. Bush's election victory over Michael Dukakis based on Bush's higher levels of optimism in his campaign speeches. In fact, an analysis of campaign speeches of presidential candidates from 1900 – 1984 indicated that the more optimistic candidate won eighteen of twenty-two elections (Seligman, 2004). The above research suggests that although some entrepreneurs naturally tend to think more pessimistically than others, with training and effort they can learn more optimistic explanatory styles. Since entrepreneurs use creative tactics, political skills, and persuasion to attain a presence in the market space, they would benefit by developing more optimistic explanatory styles.

Many self-leadership strategies provide entrepreneurs with methods for increasing optimistic or opportunity-influenced thought patterns. For example, an explanatory style can be changed by identifying and subsequently disputing negative self-talk that explains disappointing outcomes as personal (“it’s all my fault I lost that sale”), permanent (“Revenues will never get better”) and pervasive (“the struggles of this business relate to every aspect of my life”). It is possible for entrepreneurs to build a more successful explanatory style with more positive and functional self-dialogues that view setbacks as impersonal, temporary and specific. Furthermore, the process of confronting, challenging and replacing dysfunctional beliefs with more rational, realistic and functional ones can also help an entrepreneur to have a more optimistic and less pessimistic outlook. Furthermore, engaging in mental practice in which successful performance of a task is visualized before engaging in actual performance can also be quite useful as direct feedback for increasing optimism.

Consequently, entrepreneurs must develop optimistic thought patterns that help them to endure during the tough times of building a business.

### **Happiness, Flow and Entrepreneurial Self-Leadership**

Happiness is another area in which individual entrepreneurs may differ greatly from one another. Some appear to be happy and content all the time when dealing with employees and customers, while others appear to be generally depressed, discontent, and on edge. These differences undoubtedly relate in part to the circumstances in which these people find themselves. However, as Viktor Frankl and others in difficult and even tragic circumstances have shown, happiness is possible even under the most trying of conditions. Many entrepreneurs may feel that happiness and depression are emotions over which they have little or no control, but recent advances in the field of psychology suggest that happiness may have more to do with the way we interact with the world around us than with the actual circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In addition to his work on optimism, Seligman has carefully studied human happiness and has suggested several ways to change perceptions of the external environment to increase individual happiness. Specifically, Seligman suggests that individuals identify what he calls their ‘signature strengths’ (Seligman, 2004). These are strengths that people already possess to varying degrees and include things such as creativity, persistence and humor. Seligman identifies 24 possible strengths organized into six different categories. He found the key component is to learn to identify a set of signature strengths and then practice these strengths on a regular basis. By routinely utilizing signature strengths, entrepreneurs can build a business with a unique identity and culture, and interact more positively with their world. Furthermore, entrepreneurs become better equipped to deal with and proactively react to the negative things that can happen in business dealings, thus reducing experiences of negative emotions and increasing happiness with their career choices.

Csikszentmihalyi, one of the primary founders of the positive psychology movement, has developed a concept that he calls psychological 'flow.' Csikszentmihalyi describes his concept of psychological flow in terms of the joy and creativity that come from the process of total involvement with life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). His insightful ideas about flow—published over the past twenty-five years, provide a general framework for developing a theory of life enjoyment and also provide practical methods to help achieve happiness within personal life, career, and business. Csikszentmihalyi states that we must be the creator and protector of our own personal happiness:

"Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:2)

Thinking about controlling inner experiences introduces the concepts of human consciousness—defined as 'intentionally ordered information' by Csikszentmihalyi, interacting with the external physical and social world. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that "the most important step in emancipating oneself from social controls is the ability to find rewards in the events of each moment." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:19). Essentially, for entrepreneurs, his research suggests that individuals will discover happiness when they focus on the moment and the journey of building a business rather than on following social norms or expecting rewards from the process.

Flow tends to occur when goals are clear and provide immediate feedback and when the challenge of an activity is roughly equivalent to an individual's capacity to perform the activity. Flow experiences are generally characterized by an intense concentration that allows a person to become completely absorbed by the activity while being distracted from any unpleasant aspects of life. Flow creates feelings of control and an absence of worry about losing control. Interestingly, the experience of time itself can seem to be suspended and the individual can sometimes lose all awareness of the self. When the flow experience ends and an awareness of

the self returns, it is often a new and improved self that has been enriched by the enhanced skills and achievements that result from the flow experience.

The comments of a rock climber who experiences flow mirrors the experience many entrepreneurs have when focused on their business: "You are so involved in what you are doing [that] you aren't thinking of yourself as separate from the immediate activity....You don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:53). Likewise, a dancer explains the feeling accompanying a dance performance: "Your concentration is very complete. Your mind isn't wandering, you are not thinking of something else; you are totally involved in what you are doing...Your energy is flowing very smoothly. You feel relaxed, comfortable, and energetic." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:53). Similarly, a chess player speaks of the concentration required in a chess tournament: "...the concentration is like breathing—you never think of it. The roof could fall in and, if it missed you, you would be unaware of it." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:53-54). And finally, a young athlete describes the sense of flow that comes from participating in his sport: "Kids my age, they think about a lot...but when you are playing basketball, that's all there is on your mind—just basketball...Everything else seems to follow right along." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:58). Many entrepreneurs are associated with their business in this fashion, such as Bill Gates at Microsoft or Steve Jobs at Apple. Entrepreneurs like Jobs and Gates are often seen as monomaniacal, when in fact they may be in states of flow for longer periods of time than the average businessperson.

Recent research studies suggest that individual happiness, far from being a fleeting and uncontrollable emotion, is to a larger extent than previously realized something over which people can exert direct control. Employing signature strengths (Seligman, 1998; 2004) and cultivating personal flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) can have a significant influence on overall levels of perceived happiness. Furthermore, self-leadership skills can play an important role in these processes. For example, through self-observation of behaviors and analysis of thinking patterns, entrepreneurs can become more aware of what

type of business to build that utilizes their signature strengths on a regular basis. Likewise, entrepreneurs can learn to employ self-goal setting to create clear goals with immediate feedback that are integral to experiencing flow. Ideally, the entrepreneur will create a work environment and identity with which they enjoy continuous involvement and growth. Self-leadership also suggests a focus on pursuing goals involving activities that are naturally rewarding because natural reward strategies can help enjoyment in the moment as well as the journey, finding happiness in the total package. Entrepreneurial success would be aided by focusing on business ideas one finds interesting and satisfying. Finally, engaging in positive self-talk, identifying and replacing irrational and dysfunctional beliefs, and engaging in mental practice can lead to more optimistic and opportunistic thinking in building a business.

### **Personality and Self-Leadership**

Personality is one of the most fundamental ways in which people differ from one another. Personality may be described as the relatively stable pattern of traits and characteristics that help to shape a person's behavior and make the person unique. Personality may also influence life and career choices, work performance, and entrepreneurial behavior. Gartner (1989) recommended that increased understanding of personality could help our understanding of entrepreneurial behavior. Zhao and Seibert (2006) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between the big five personality factors and entrepreneurship roles versus managerial roles and reported interesting results. Entrepreneurs—defined as “the founder, owner, and manager of a small business and whose principal purpose is growth” (Zhao and Seibert, 2006: 263)—scored significantly higher on Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience; significantly lower on Neuroticism and Agreeableness; and they reported no difference for Extraversion between entrepreneurs and managers.

Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott, and Rich (2007) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship of self-efficacy and personality with work performance. Their conclusion recommended the importance of studying

individual differences that must be taken into consideration in research studies of cognition and work performance.

Unlike optimism and happiness, which can be to some extent changed and shaped with self-leadership knowledge and skills, personality characteristics are thought to remain fairly stable and constant over time. Nevertheless, psychological research suggests that personality is related to self-leadership in important and interesting ways. See for example Houghton, Bonham, Neck, & Singh (2004) and Williams (1997). Personality characteristics play a large role in determining predispositions to be natural self-leaders or if an individual needs to learn and practice to develop self-leadership skills. Zhao and Seibert (2006: 268) recommend that “personality must be considered as one important component of a multidimensional model of the variables, processes, and environmental factors affecting entrepreneurship and new venture creation.” In the next section we will provide a brief overview of the relationships between self-leadership and several key personality characteristics as they relate to entrepreneurship and the new venture creation process.

### **Locus of Control**

Locus of control is a construct that has received much attention in the entrepreneurship literature (Shapero, 1975; Perry, 1990; Nelson, 1991). Locus of control refers to the extent that people believe they can control the events and outcomes they experience in their lives. People with an internal locus of control believe that they have direct control over their personal outcomes and that this control comes from within. People with an external locus of control, on the other hand, believe that they have little control over their outcomes and that control comes primarily from factors in their external environment. Not surprisingly, research has shown that self-leadership is related to an internal locus of control (Kazan & Earnest, 2000a; Williams, 1997). The aforementioned entrepreneurship studies also found similar results regarding locus of control, in that entrepreneurs tend to have an internal locus of control. To the extent that an entrepreneur believes that their choices and behaviors can directly shape their business, they will be more

likely to practice self-leadership. On the contrary, if there is expectation that choices and behaviors are largely shaped and limited by the market and competition, entrepreneurs will be less likely to naturally engage in self-leadership.

### **Self-Monitoring**

Self-monitoring is another personality characteristic that may be related to self-leadership. High and low self-monitoring are terms to describe two types of individual behaviors. High self-monitoring describes the extent to which people can successfully assess a given social situation and the behaviors of others within that situation before adjusting their own behaviors so that they will be effective within the situation. High self-monitors closely control the self-image they present in social situations, while low self-monitors follow the beat of their own drummer and are more concerned with just "being themselves" regardless of the situation. High self-monitors tend to be natural self-leaders because they see self-leadership strategies as an effective way to manage their self-presentation (Williams, 1997). In contrast, low self-monitors will be likely to naturally engage in self-leadership only if it helps them to align their personal values with their behaviors. For example, entrepreneurs who value achievement will see self-leadership as useful in helping them to behave in ways consistent with their values and characteristics. Many of today's best companies embrace the ideals and values of their founders. Thus, while successful entrepreneurs are often natural self-leaders, struggling entrepreneurs who may be low self-monitors would likely benefit from learning and applying self-leadership strategies. If these entrepreneurs can utilize strategies that help them to maintain congruence between their values, characteristics, and actions, they may be able to take the company in a new direction that aligns more authentically with their strengths and original vision.

### **The Need for Autonomy**

Need for autonomy is the concluding personality characteristic we will examine that may have important connections with self-leadership and entrepreneurship. The need for autonomy is the extent to which a person needs or is eager to express individual initiative in

performing a job. One study suggests that people with a high need for autonomy are more likely to engage in self-leadership than people with a low need for autonomy (Yun, Cox, & Sims, 2006). In addition, the same study showed that when leaders empowered their followers and encouraged them to lead themselves, those followers high in need for autonomy were more likely to actually engage in self-leadership. A study conducted by Roberts & Foti (1998) demonstrated that individuals scoring low in self-leadership were more satisfied in highly structured job environments with little autonomy. On the other hand, individuals scoring high in self-leadership were more satisfied in unstructured autonomous work environments that provided opportunities for individual initiative.

Taken together, these studies suggest that not everyone may be interested in leading themselves. Similarly, some people may find starting a business more satisfying than other if they prefer the autonomy of ownership over being managed by others (Katz, 1994; Schein, 1985). However, some people may be happier taking direction from others and working in a highly structured environment. Nevertheless, in today's world, the ability to behave entrepreneurially is becoming more and more important in many work situations. Today's business environment does not provide the job security it once did. Additionally, all companies must continually seek new business opportunities. As Dess, Lumpkin, and McGee (1999: 85) have observed, "Virtually all organizations—new startups, major corporations, and alliances among global partners—are striving to exploit product-market opportunities through innovative and proactive behavior." Even people who are low in the need for autonomy and who may not naturally be interested in entrepreneurship will benefit from learning and utilizing self-leadership strategies to seek new opportunities.

Individuals who are high in the personality traits of internal locus of control, self-monitoring, and the need for autonomy are more likely to naturally engage in entrepreneurial behaviors than people who are low in these traits. This does not suggest that people who are low in these traits can not become successful entrepreneurs. Self-leadership strategies can be

learned and used effectively, even by people who are not natural self-leaders. For example, one study of employees at a resort hotel found that employees who scored low in conscientiousness showed much greater improvement in self-leadership behaviors following self-leadership training than those who scored high in conscientiousness (Stewart, Carson, & Cardy, 1996). We would expect to see self-leadership training have a similar effect on other personality traits. Therefore, we propose that it would be time well spent for nascent and experienced entrepreneurs to become more familiar with self-leadership concepts.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Self-Leadership**

Emotional Intelligence is another important individual difference that may be related to self-leadership and entrepreneurship. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, understand and regulate our own or another person's emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Goleman and his colleagues have developed the most popular model of EI to date (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). According to their model, EI consists of four distinct dimensions—two internal and two external—that relate to the regulation of emotions. These dimensions include Self-Awareness—accurately assessing and understanding one's own emotions, Self-Management—effectively controlling or redirecting one's emotions or impulses, Social Awareness—empathizing with and being sensitive to the emotions and feelings of others, and Relationship Management—influencing and shaping the emotions of others. EI is viewed much like traditional cognitive intelligence, except that it operates primarily within the contexts of (1) one's own emotional state and (2) in relationship with other people's emotional states.

Although EI is related to some of the personality traits we discussed earlier, including extroversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability (Van der Zee, Thijs, & Schakel, 2000), most experts agree that unlike more traditional views of personality, a person's EI can be changed and improved with attention, training,

and practice—much like a person's optimism can be improved with training and practice (Seligman, 2004).

Although EI and self-leadership focus on similar processes of self-influence, EI is primarily concerned with the ability to self-regulate emotions while self-leadership focuses on the self-regulation of thought processes and behaviors. Nevertheless, inasmuch as emotions have a powerful potential for impacting cognitive processes and behaviors, emotional intelligence and self-leadership concepts almost certainly interact with one another. People scoring high in EI who can control their emotions will most likely be more effective in leading themselves. At the same time, self-leadership skills such as self-observation, cueing, self-goal setting and self-rewards may be useful in helping people to become more emotionally intelligent. In short, it appears that EI and self-leadership are reciprocally related, or in other words, having EI may make people better self-leaders and self-leadership techniques may help people to improve their EI. Such skills are critical for entrepreneurs in handling the pressures of running a business. The cues he or she sends to employees impacts their performance and commitment (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005). Therefore, it is important for nascent and experienced entrepreneurs to focus on positive emotional states for themselves and others and contain negativity in business interaction whenever possible.

### **Diversity and Self-Leadership**

In addition to the individual differences we have already discussed, self-leadership and entrepreneurship may interact with a number of other personal factors including age, gender and cultural differences. Self-leadership studies may give us further insight into entrepreneurship. For example, one study suggests that age is negatively related to self-leadership (Kazan & Earnest, 2000a, 2000b). In other words, younger people may tend to engage in self-leadership more than older people. One explanation could be that because younger people, who are still in the process of creating an identity for themselves in their careers and personal lives, are generally more goal-oriented than older more established

and stable people, who may have already achieved many of their important career and personal goals. Youth may serve as an ideal time for starting a business. Additionally, younger people may be more willing to take a risk starting a new venture because they literally have less to lose in terms of career investments and personal wealth.

On the other hand, generational differences may help account for lower self-leadership in older people. Older generations, including Matures or Traditionalists (born before World War II) and Baby Boomers (born in the post-World War II baby boom 1946-1960), tend to respect rules, policies and formal authority systems. They are often dedicated to their jobs and have a profound sense of duty. However these generalization that more accurate for traditionalist and less true for baby boomers growing up during the turbulent second-half of the 1960's and the 1970's. During these generations formative years—the 1950's and 1960's—most U. S. work and social organizations had traditional hierarchical command-and-control bureaucratic structures that allowed little room for individual initiative or innovation. People from these generations may therefore rely more on organizational structures, systems and processes for motivational and behavioral guidance than on self-leadership. Please note our caveat that these statements represent broad (and incomplete) generalizations about generational categories, with the full knowledge that many individuals within generations differ in their beliefs and behaviors from the previous statements.

In contrast, younger generations, including Generation X (born 1961-1981) and the Millennial generation (born 1982 to approximately 2001), tend to be more pragmatic and self-reliant. They are achievement-oriented but also value versatility and are much more likely to be following a Protean or boundaryless Career path. Twenty years of plant closings and organizational restructuring have taught them to expect to be less loyal and dependent on established organizations and to therefore create their own career and personal wealth opportunities. During their formative years, people of these generations were exposed to organizations with structures that were

becoming more flexible and were demanding greater individual initiative and innovation.

Our previous statements do not, however, suggest that entrepreneurship is not possible for older generations. Quite to the contrary, people with life and work experiences have a base of knowledge that would be useful in building a business and that would benefit greatly from understanding the self-leadership concept. Self-leadership can help more mature individuals to develop and pursue additional life goals and purposes, increase flow and happiness, avoid depression and maintain an entrepreneurial lifestyle (Kazan & Earnest, 2000a) producing personal satisfaction and wealth.

Gender is another factor that may have some bearing on a person's self-leadership. Studies have generally found no relationship between gender and self-leadership (Kazan & Earnest, 2000a; Kurman, 2001). Overall, women appear to be no more or less effective in leading themselves than men and vice-versa. Nevertheless, gender may have a subtle affect on various aspects of the practice of self-leadership. For instance, some studies suggest that women are more likely than men to engage in rumination or negative, obstacle-type thinking in response to negative emotions than their male counterparts (Nolen-Hoeksema & Corte, 2004). Another laboratory study showed that women tend to choose easier performance tasks than men (Kurman, 2001). The study did not, however, demonstrate lower performance for women compared to men because points were awarded based on the level of task difficulty; choosing either a too difficult or a too easy task was detrimental to performance. The same study also suggested an interaction between culture, gender, and self-regulation. For example, the study reported that Singaporean women seemed to prefer tasks that were too easy while Israeli men chose tasks that were too difficult. Clearly additional research is needed to better understand self-leadership gender factors.

Cultural differences represent another important concept that may impact self-leadership and entrepreneurship. We know that people in various cultures around the world can be very different from one another in terms of their behavior and thinking processes. These differences are often discussed in the research literature using the five cultural dimensions

developed by Hofstede after many years of extensive cross-cultural research (Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions include: Power Distance--the degree of equality or inequality between people in a country's society; Individualism--the extent to which a society values individual or collective achievement; Masculinity--the degree to which a society reinforces traditional masculine roles including male achievement, control and power; Uncertainty Avoidance--the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity in a society; and Long-Term Orientation--the extent to which a society embraces long-term devotion to traditional or more modern values. These five cultural dimensions are quite likely to influence how, and to what extent, people are able to lead themselves (Alves, Lovelace, Manz, Matsypura, & Toyasaki, 2006). Specifically, people in cultures with high power distance are likely to engage in a restricted form of self-leadership that is contingent upon social hierarchies, whereas people in low power distance cultures are likely to engage in a more individually unique and autonomous type of self-leadership. Likewise, people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are more likely to lead themselves in the context of formal plans and rules, while people in low uncertainty avoidance cultures may be more innovative and flexible in their self-leadership. Self-leadership in collectivist cultures is likely to be guided more by group, communal or shared principles. In contrast, self-leadership in individualistic cultures may be guided more by personal interests, material rewards and short-term objectives. In addition, it appears that self-leadership in masculine cultures tends to be more motivated by material and economic outcomes, while self-leadership in feminine cultures tends to be directed more toward enhancing relationships. Finally, people in cultures with long-term orientations tend to focus on leading themselves toward longer-term objectives while deferring immediate gratifications whereas people in short-term cultures tend to focus on more immediate personal or organizational self-leadership objectives. As entrepreneurship becomes further embraced in developing countries, it will be important to conduct additional cultural self-leadership studies to understand what specific obstacles to economic growth may be present

and also what businesses types are more valued in these cultures in order to help design more effective economic development programs fostering local entrepreneurial ventures and small businesses.

### **Self-leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Managing the Work-Life Interface**

Most people agree that having a healthy balance between work and personal life interests is of vital importance. Yet according to a recent survey, more than 80% of respondents say they are unhappy with the current balance between their work and personal lives (Brown, 2005). 'Work-life balance' may be defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000:751) and by "the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and non-work demands" (Greenblatt, 2002). A work-life imbalance often emerges and develops in younger workers who view putting in long hours on the job as essential for establishing themselves and building toward their long-term career success (Sturges & Guest, 2004). As times pass and the hours spent on the job continue to exceed their original expectations, these career minded individuals frequently become disillusioned as they experience the mounting stress created by conflicting work life and personal life roles.

But despite conventional wisdom about the value of hard work, some human resource management experts suggest that long-term career success depends on more than just dedication and long hours. "We respect employees who come to work every day and get the job done. But most employers care more about the quality of work than just face time," says Aubrey Scott, personnel director at General Motor's Fairfax Assembly Plant in Kansas City. "Eight to nine hours a day is enough if you're meeting deadlines and turning out a quality product; 12 hours doesn't mean anything if there's nothing to show for it." (Brown, 2005:20).

Despite the potential of employing self-leadership strategies to increase personal effectiveness on the job, opportunities for increasing on-the-job productivity are not limited to the workplace itself. Ironic as it may

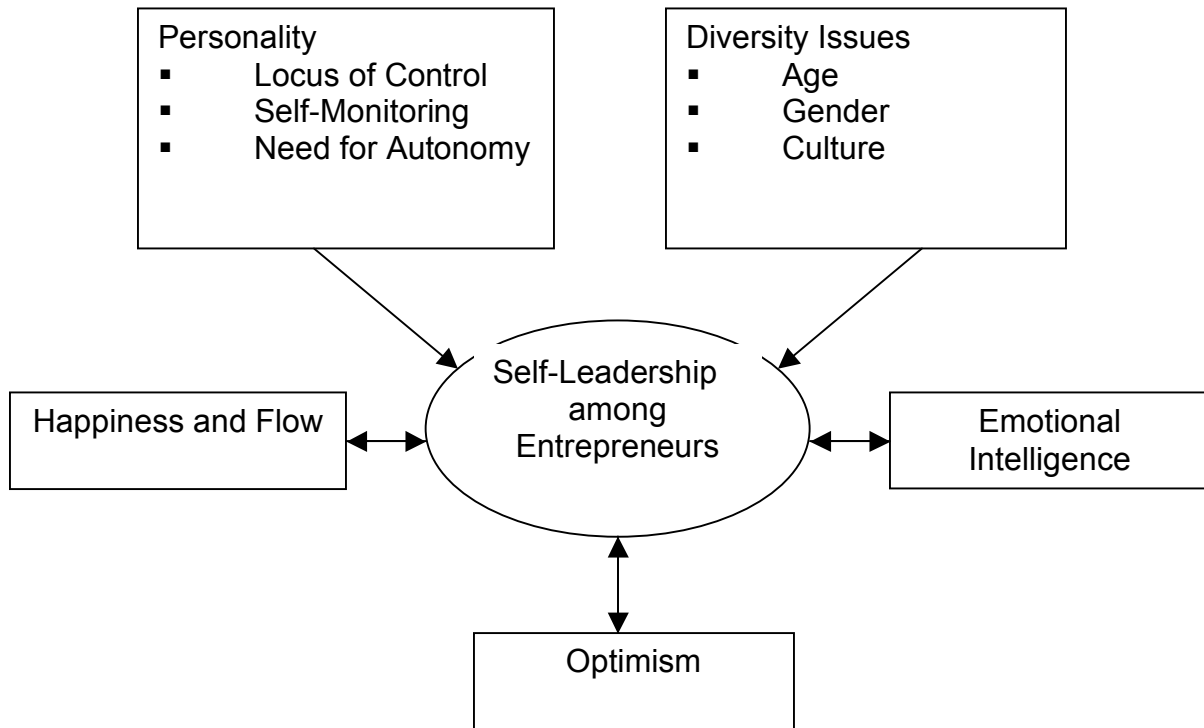


FIGURE 1: Self-Leadership and Individual Differences among Entrepreneurs

seem, workplace effectiveness is often increased by spending less time, not more, in the office. Time prudently invested in oneself outside the workplace often pays big dividends back on the job or in obtaining a new job or in starting a new venture. For instance, increased physical fitness generally leads to improved physiological and psychological well-being and enhanced job performance and productivity (Neck and Cooper, 2000). Another key to creating enhanced personal work-life harmony involves finding ways to maximize enjoyment of one's job. The more enjoyable a person perceives the job to be, the less tension will exist between work roles and other life roles. For example, *natural reward strategies* can be used to increase the intrinsic enjoyment of work—as an organizational employee or an entrepreneurial venture founder. Specifically, a person can either build more naturally enjoyable features into their job or focus attention on the naturally

rewarding aspects of their job. By applying these strategies, individuals can create work-life situations in which they experience psychological flow at work leading to satisfaction and happiness while at the same time minimizing work-life conflicts.

Finally, on the subject of personal stress, Boyd and Gumpert (1983) found four causes of stress that are particular to entrepreneurs: loneliness, immersion in business, people problems, and the need to achieve. Awareness of these causes will assist the entrepreneur in designing personal strategies to better with the stresses of owning and running a business. Additionally, work-life balance is potentially different for each individual at any given point in time. Ultimately, the responsibility for defining boundaries and finding the right balance between work and personal roles lies with each individual. We recommend that finding that right balance for entrepreneurs

starting a new venture or growing an existing business requires effective self-leadership strategies and skills plus a clear understanding of individual differences and their influences on the success of the entrepreneurial process.

### Conclusion

To summarize, in this article we have discussed numerous research studies which provide entrepreneurs with processes for leading themselves during the challenging times of building and growing a business. Individual differences can influence and shape self-leadership strategies; those strategies can also serve to shape individual differences. We would expect reciprocal relationships with constant interaction, suggesting that there probably exist temporal dimensions that could be related to the life-stages of both the individual entrepreneur and also related to specific business firm stages. The individual level entrepreneurship relationships between self-leadership and various individual difference factors among entrepreneurs are summarized and illustrated in Figure 1.

We propose that future research studies should be designed and performed to explore all of these differences in greater depth in order to better understand the reciprocal relations between individual differences among entrepreneurs and effective self-leadership behavior and cognitive strategies. The self-leadership perspective provides scholars with a way of better examining the person/environment interface in the entrepreneurship process. In addition, self-leadership offers personal strategies that entrepreneurs can learn and put into practice to commence and grow their business ventures, either as founder-owners of their own firms or within corporations or other large organizations as internal innovator-entrepreneurs.

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