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Self-Leadership: A Paradoxical Core of Organizational Behavior

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Abstract

This review focuses on the paradoxical concept of self-leadership—defined as a comprehensive self-influence process capturing how individuals motivate themselves to complete work that is naturally motivating or work that must be done but is not naturally motivating—as a fundamental process that challenges many traditional assumptions in organizational psychology and organizational behavior. We first present a historical review that traces the roots of self-leadership to early psychological theory and research. We next briefly summarize research related to self-leadership at both the individual and team levels of analysis. We then discuss four paradoxes associated with self-leadership: the paradox of self-leadership depletion and strengthening, the paradox of self-leadership through collaboration, the paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership, and the paradox of needing self-leadership to improve self-leadership. We conclude with guidelines for future research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Self-leadership challenges many traditional assumptions in organizational behavior and organizational psychology. In fact, it may appear to be an oxymoron in that the words "self" and "leadership" reflect seemingly incompatible perspectives. This is because a usual requirement within most definitions of leadership is an assumption that more than one person, at least two, is involved in a process of mutual influence (DeRue & Ashford 2010). In other words, for leadership to occur, both a leader and at least one follower are required. However, self-leadership challenges this fundamental assumption. Defined broadly as "the process of influencing oneself" (Manz 1983, p. 5), self-leadership captures "a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating" (Manz 1986, p. 589). Consequently, the concept of self-leadership suggests that a single individual can act as both the leader and the follower.

Our overarching purpose here is to review theory and research related to self-leadership, as well as to propose avenues for future research and practice. We begin with a review of the historical roots and theoretical context underlying self-leadership. From there, we briefly review the empirical research on self-leadership, at both the individual and team levels of analysis. Finally, we pay special attention to some of the paradoxes related to self-leadership that challenge its acceptance and application in both academia and organizations. By framing self-leadership as a paradoxical phenomenon, we highlight several intriguing elements of this promising area of research and thereby encourage further exploration in the years to come.

HISTORICAL ROOTS AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Self-leadership draws from and is grounded in several different literatures, and it has implications for multiple levels of analysis (Stewart et al. 2011). Perhaps most fundamentally, it is grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), which includes the concept of triadic reciprocity. Triadic reciprocity suggests that behavior, cognitions, and the external environment reciprocally influence one another such that behavior is influenced by both internal mechanisms and the external environment, and vice versa. Furthermore, social cognitive theory recognizes and incorporates self-control, which is closely aligned with self-management. Thoresen & Mahoney (1974, p. 12) offer the following classic definition of self-control or self-management from the early psychology literature: "A person displays self-control when in the relative absence of immediate external constraints he or she engages in behavior whose previous probability has been less than that of alternatively available behaviors."

On the basis of that definition, the earliest research on self-management at work (which, as we explain below, self-leadership draws and expands on) connected it with social learning and behavioral modification theories (Bandura 1986, Luthans & Kreitner 1985, Manz & Sims 1980), and placed special attention on self-managing environmental consequences and antecedents of behavior (Cohen et al. 1997, Manz & Sims 1987, Uhl-Bien & Graen 1998). In particular, this early work paid attention to primarily behavioral and cognitive self-influence strategies (Andrasik & Heimberg 1982, Hackman 1986, Luthans & Davis 1979, Manz 1986, Manz & Sims 1980). A comprehensive listing and review of the various strategies that have been examined can be found elsewhere (Manz 1986, Neck & Houghton 2006, Neck et al. 2017, Stewart et al. 2011). Briefly, however, some examples of self-management strategies discussed in the literature include self-goal setting, self-reward, self-criticism, self-observation, and self-management of cues. Other strategies that have been studied and encompass more cognitive strategies are self-influence of beliefs/assumptions, mental imagery, self-dialogue, thought patterns, rehearsal, and building in and focusing on natural rewards of tasks.

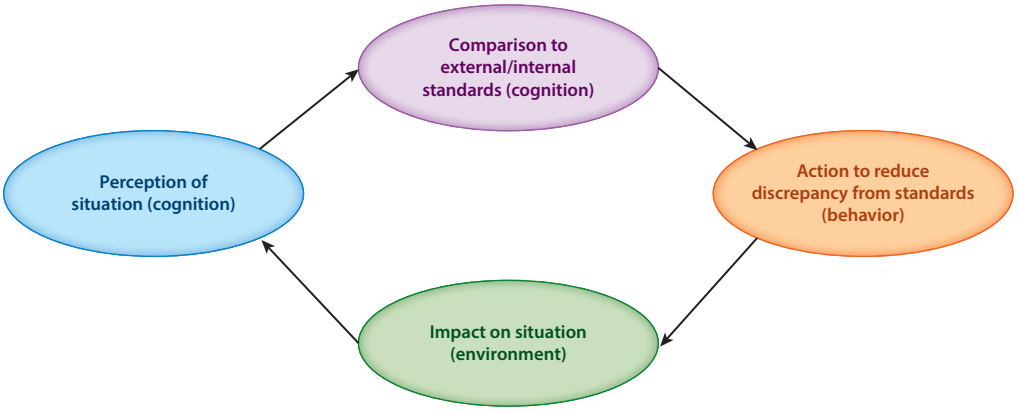

Figure 1

A control theory view of self-leadership. Figure adapted from Manz (1986).

The subsequent literature on self-leadership was originally drawn from this earlier literature on self-management (Bandura 1986, Mahoney & Arnkoff 1979, Thoresen & Mahoney 1974), but it extended this prior work. In particular, self-leadership places greater emphasis on cognition, intrinsic rewards, and other internal factors that extend beyond a primary focus on behavior (see Neck et al. 2017). Indeed, self-influence processes are best viewed as situated on a continuum, with one end of the continuum being when behavior stems primarily from external sources. In what might be considered a middle range, self-management can be viewed as involving some level of personal control, but strategies are chosen and progress is assessed based on externally set standards. At the other end of the continuum, self-leadership reflects a higher degree of control where individuals not only apply self-management strategies but also assess the appropriateness of existing standards as well as set their own standards. The degree of control originating from external sources versus individuals themselves is thus an important consideration when studying self-influence processes at work. In essence, the further one moves on the self-influence continuum toward self-leadership, the more he or she has influence over what work to do, how to do it, and why to do it (Stewart et al. 2011). Furthermore, the more one moves toward self-leadership, the less dependent his or her behavior is on extrinsic incentives. Self-leadership thus captures the highest degree of internal control in organizations (Manz 2015).

Modern conceptualizations of self-leadership are therefore primarily grounded in control theory (Carver & Scheier 1982). **Figure 1** conceptually conveys a control theory view of self-leadership and was first introduced by Manz (1986). This perspective suggests that the self-leadership process begins when an individual compares the current state of a perceived situation to a self-set standard. Assessment is then made regarding the gap between the standard and current state, and behavior is applied to reduce the gap. After examining the behavior's impact, the new state of the situation is perceived and the cycle begins again. Although the process depicted in **Figure 1** is reflective of organizational control systems in general, when it comes to self-leadership, the process of control is ultimately self-imposed rather than externally mandated. In this sense, self-leadership can actually be thought of as a central aspect of organizational influence and control. For example, when people become members of organizations that have hierarchies and formal leaders, naturally they are subject to job requirements, boundaries, and managerial and leader influence. Nevertheless, each person ultimately has a choice of whether to respond to and incorporate these influences, boundaries, and demands into their thinking and behavioral choices.

Although some individuals may not be particularly adept at recognizing and acting on their individual choices, nevertheless, even in the face of significant external demands, this discretion remains. They might choose to ignore, selectively act on, or completely accept external influences on their own internal self-influence (self-imposed control) process. Thus, from this perspective, self-leadership is a critical, even core, element of organizational psychology and organizational behavior.

We have thus far reviewed the historical and theoretical roots of self-leadership from an individual-level perspective. However, the literature on self-leadership progressed from focusing just on individual self-influence processes to understanding self-influence processes at the team level. Work in this area can largely be traced to job design theories such as sociotechnical systems theory (Cummings 1978), which considered teams, rather than individuals, the fundamental unit of analysis in organizations. Integrating sociotechnical systems theory and control theory, the concept of team self-leadership focuses on whether control over work strategies, standards, and processes is held internally by the team or determined by an external supervisor—in other words, whether teams are internally versus externally regulated. Recalling the continuum of self-influence discussed above, teams that are self-leading are those that have discretion not only in how they carry out their work (e.g., setting work schedules, determining budgets, monitoring quality, etc.), but also in terms of what their standards should be and the strategic basis for those standards. Unfortunately, as the literature on team self-influence began to emerge, authors frequently used the terms self-managing teams and self-leading teams interchangeably. However, just as the distinction between self-management and self-leadership is important at the individual level, it is important at the team level as well. Teams that are self-leading essentially have even more self-influence, whereas self-managing teams have a mix of external and internal control. Admittedly, most of the research at the team level has focused on self-managing teams, although there is certainly also work on team self-leadership (Manz 1991, 1992).

Following this conceptual background, we provide in the section below a brief review of the scholarly research on self-leadership at the individual and team levels. As Stewart et al. (2011) note, most of this research has focused on three issues: (*a*) outcomes of self-leadership, (*b*) internal forces of self-leadership, and (*c*) external forces of self-leadership. We review research on each of these issues, first at the individual level and then at the team level. We also review the scant yet interesting literature on cross-level effects of self-leadership. This latter discussion ultimately helps us set up our proposed agenda for future research, which is to focus more on understanding and resolving various paradoxes associated with self-leadership.

RESEARCH ON SELF-LEADERSHIP

Outcomes of Self-Leadership

In Stewart et al.'s (2011, p. 195) review of empirical research on outcomes of self-leadership, one of the key conclusions made was that "self-leadership is generally beneficial at the individual level but context dependent at the team level." For example, individual self-leadership is consistently related to higher individual performance (e.g., Frayne & Geringer 2000), job satisfaction (e.g., Neck & Manz 1996, Uhl-Bien & Graen 1998), self-efficacy (e.g., Latham & Frayne 1989, Prussia et al. 1998), and long-term career success (e.g., Murphy & Ensher 2001, Raabe et al. 2007). Moreover, self-leadership is related to lower absenteeism (e.g., Frayne & Latham 1987) and decreased work anxiety (e.g., Saks & Ashforth 1996).

At the team level, however, the findings on outcomes of self-leadership are mixed. For example, some studies find positive effects of self-leadership on team performance (e.g., Cohen & Ledford

1994, Stewart & Barrick 2000), whereas others find null effects (e.g., Devaro 2006). The same is true for collective team attitudes, with self-leadership being linked in some studies to higher team satisfaction (e.g., Wall et al. 1986) and commitment (e.g., Cordery et al. 1991), but null effects on collective attitudes in other studies (e.g., Cohen et al. 1997, Kemp et al. 1983). Some studies have even found negative effects of team self-leadership on team satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Mueller & Cordery 1992). This is true as well of outcomes such as collective turnover and absenteeism in teams. In particular, some studies show positive effects of self-leadership on these critical team outcomes (Cordery et al. 1991, Wall et al. 1986), whereas others reveal null (Kemp et al. 1983) or even negative effects (Barker 1993, Seers et al. 1995). Thus, there appear to be moderators that influence relationships between self-leadership and team-level outcomes.

Antecedents of Self-Leadership

Besides identifying outcomes of self-leadership, research has also examined the antecedents (or forces) of self-leadership at the individual and team levels. Generally, these antecedents can be categorized as either internal forces or external forces of self-leadership (Stewart et al. 2011). Internal forces are antecedents that originate from the individual him/herself or within the team, whereas external forces capture contextual factors that influence the exercising of self-leadership. Each of these types of antecedents have important implications for self-leadership.

Regarding internal forces at the individual level, research has shown that intrinsic (or natural) rewards are important for individual self-leadership. In particular, individuals who either choose jobs with natural rewards or embed their jobs with naturally motivating tasks are more likely to be self-leading (Neck & Manz 1996). Moreover, certain traits such as conscientiousness predispose individuals to exercise self-leadership (Stewart et al. 1996). Apart from traits, individuals who practice self-talk—that is, a cognitive strategy for leading oneself through self-verbalizations—are also more likely to exercise self-leadership (Neck & Manz 1996).

Internal forces of team self-leadership have also been researched at the team level. For example, teams that structure their tasks to be more highly interdependent tend to be more self-leading (Courtright et al. 2015, Stewart & Barrick 2000, Wageman 2001). Teams that are high on cohesion also allow for greater self-leadership as norms within the team are strong and thus help rewards and punishments to be more self-reinforcing (Barker 1993, Stewart et al. 2012). Conflict is another internal force, as optimal levels of task conflict enable teams to make better decisions and be committed to those decisions (Paulson et al. 2009).

Various external forces also influence both individual and team-level self-leadership. At the individual level, for example, self-leadership training enables people to use self-leadership strategies (Frayne & Geringer 2000, Frayne & Latham 1987, Latham & Frayne 1989). Stewart et al. (1996) showed that self-leadership training was particularly helpful for individuals who are lower on conscientiousness—who, as noted earlier, are less natural at engaging in self-leadership strategies. National culture also makes a significant difference in enabling self-leadership, and it also impacts the meaning of self-leadership within that culture. For example, Neubert & Wu (2006) found that certain self-leadership strategies, such as self-goal setting, visualizing successful performance, self-talk, self-reward, and self-punishment, were generalizable to a Chinese context. Other self-leadership strategies, however, such as self-observation, evaluating beliefs and assumptions, and self-cueing, tend to be used more in Western samples.

Similarly, national culture influences team self-leadership. For instance, Kirkman & Shapiro (2001) found that teams operating in collectivist cultures are significantly less resistant to team self-leadership than those in more individualistic cultures. Furthermore, beyond just national cultural norms, organizational culture and structure can be an external force of team self-leadership.

Specifically, teams in more high-involvement cultures, as well as those in companies that are less centralized and formalized, are more effective at self-leadership (Manz et al. 2009). Finally, team-based reward systems tend to be effective facilitators of self-management. These systems include those that reward individuals based on group performance (Druskat & Wolff 1999, Shaw et al. 2001) and those that base individual rewards on peer evaluations of team members' contributions to the group (Stewart et al. 2012).

One of the more interesting forces of self-leadership is external leadership (Manz & Sims 1987). In essence, leaders who purposefully lead workers to lead themselves enable teams to be self-influencing and self-reinforcing. For this reason, empowering and shared approaches to leadership have been shown to help individuals and teams become more self-leading (Ahearne et al. 2005, Manz & Sims 1987, Pearce & Sims 2002). At the same time, however, external leaders must also provide the right type and amount of resources that allow individuals and teams to be self-leading. For example, external leaders enable self-leadership by providing self-leadership coaching and providing resources to teams for making independent decisions (Druskat & Wheeler 2003). Leaders who explicitly recognize and provide rewards for self-leadership behaviors are also more likely to see their employees and teams lead themselves. In that sense, external supervisors motivate teams to be more self-influencing when they support and reward self-leadership behaviors, and provide resources and information that help the team manage and make decisions internally. Thus, external supervisors are, somewhat paradoxically, essential to helping individuals and teams exercise self-leadership.

Cross-Level Research

Thus far, we have treated individual and team self-leadership as separate and orthogonal. However, some studies of self-leadership focus on cross-level effects and show how team self-leadership has implications for individual self-leadership, and vice versa. For example, Langfred (2000) found that although greater team self-leadership enhances team cohesion, individual self-leadership decreases team cohesion. This means, then, that individual self-leadership can actually be harmful rather than helpful for teams. Building on these findings, Langfred (2007) found in a longitudinal study that team self-leadership undermined individual autonomy, particularly when these teams experienced conflict. Langfred (2004) in another study found that members of self-leading teams are generally reluctant to monitor each other given their effort to maintain high individual autonomy. As such, it seems that individual and team self-leadership can be at odds with each other and, therefore, must achieve some sort of optimal combination (Langfred 2005).

These findings point to a need for more multilevel research on self-leadership, as Stewart et al. (2011) noted previously. We continue to view this as an important avenue of future research, and hope that more studies will be done on the multilevel implications of self-leadership. Not only will this kind of research help scholars achieve a more comprehensive understanding of self-leadership in organizations, but it will also paint a more realistic picture of both the upsides and downsides of self-leadership, as well as potential paradoxes that need exploring. Indeed, the multilevel research done up to this point has already helped to uncover one important paradox around self-leadership—a paradox that might be termed the multilevel paradox. Specifically, although individual self-leadership is beneficial for individuals, it can be detrimental to teams because it can undermine collective efforts of self-leadership. Moreover, although team self-leadership is sometimes beneficial for teams, it can be harmful to individuals because it inhibits their ability to exercise individual self-leadership.

From this perspective, we propose that not only is multilevel research needed in the future, but so is research that examines additional paradoxes of self-leadership. Indeed, in the leadership

literature there have been recent calls for studying leader behavior through a paradoxical lens (Zhang et al. 2015). A similar need exists for examining self-leadership—which, as noted above, is already a rather paradoxical, nontraditional leadership concept. In the next section, we propose four different paradoxes to be examined in future research.

PARADOXES OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

The Paradox of Self-Leadership Depletion and Strengthening

With the following, Muraven & Baumeister (2000, p. 256) summarize a well-known perspective of self-regulation—often referred to as the strength model: "People have only a limited capacity to control and alter their behavior, and this capacity appears to be vulnerable to depletion in the aftermath of strenuous use." The underlying notion is that self-regulation requires consistent effort and energy that becomes depleted when expended (Maranges & Baumeister 2016). The strength model assumes, then, that at least some forms of self-leadership require individuals to transcend automatic responses and actively engage in choosing alternative courses of action that, although less likely to occur in the short term, more strongly relate to long-term interests and objectives. From this perspective, consciously exercising self-leadership draws on an individual's finite psychological and emotional resources and thereby makes long-term sustainment of self-leadership difficult. Specific examples of depletion and its negative impact on long-term change include inability to stick to diets (Hofmann et al. 2007), making impulse purchases (Vohs & Faber 2007), and alcoholism (Christiansen et al. 2012).

At the same time, the strength model suggests that "self-control abilities also resemble a muscle in that they can be strengthened over time with practice and exercise" (Maranges & Baumeister 2016, p. 50). The strength model of self-regulation thus suggests that long-term self-leadership requires successful short-term enactment, which is difficult because such efforts deplete mental and emotional resources in the near team. Thus, self-leadership can be difficult to enact over long periods of time if one simply tries to gut it out through conscious choices that override automatic responses requiring less ongoing effort. People simply get tired and eventually give in to impulses that self-leadership efforts are attempting to inhibit, even though overcoming such impulses builds long-term skill. This presents, therefore, an interesting paradox of self-leadership, which we term the paradox of depletion and strengthening self-leadership. Essentially, exercising self-leadership in the short run can deplete finite psychological resources necessary for the long-term exercising of self-leadership.

Given the potential short-term depleting effects of ongoing self-leadership efforts, we suggest that certain forms of external support may help assure adequate self-regulation resources. For example, receiving emotional support and encouragement from another person increases perseverance in the face of depletion (Alberts et al. 2007). Choosing to be in an environment that provokes positive affect similarly reduces depletion effects (Shmueli & Prochaska 2012). Moreover, even though the effect lasts only as long as the reward is in place (Volpp et al. 2008), monetary incentives have been shown to be effective for increasing self-regulation persistence related to abstinence from addictive substances (Prendergast et al. 2006), engaging in exercise (Cabanac 1986), and completing difficult cognitive tasks (Boksem et al. 2006). In these ways, external factors create an environmental influence that supports self-leadership in the long run and increases the likelihood of persistence in the face of ongoing challenge.

In addition to using external sources of support for overcoming the short-term depleting effects of self-leadership, people who succeed at self-leadership use internal forces to manipulate the environment to persist in self-leadership. For example, individuals who consistently engage

in self-leadership over time generally plan ahead and manipulate their environments to provide cues that facilitate their efforts to engage in desired behavior over long periods of time. A specific type of planning—known as if-then planning (Gollwitzer & Oettingen 2016)—may be particularly helpful for overcoming environmental obstacles and persisting at self-leadership. If-then planning is grounded in an important distinction drawn by Gollwitzer (1999), who clarified the difference between goal intentions and implementation intentions. Goal intentions relate to desired end states, whereas implementation intentions relate to proposed reactions when confronted with specific environmental cues. In short, implementation intentions proactively prescribe behavioral reactions to possible setbacks presented in one's environment. For example, a sales representative deciding to react to rejection by moving to the next client within 24 hours provides a near automatic response that reduces the strain of self-regulation by increasing the accessibility of the desired choice and thereby reducing the amount of resources needed to overcome the natural reaction to quit. The benefits of such implementation planning as a way for individuals to manipulate and overcome external challenges have been specifically shown in relation to positive eating (Adriaanse et al. 2011), physical activity (Belanger-Gravel et al. 2013), and memory improvement (Chen et al. 2015).

The role of planning as a long-term internal self-leadership strategy for overcoming resource depletion is also relevant to teams (Marks et al. 2001). Often, teams are composed of individuals who naturally engage in planning processes, such as teams in which the majority of members are high on conscientiousness (Barrick et al. 1998). Another form of planning at the team level is the use of a team charter—a formal document written by team members at the outset of a team's life cycle that specifies acceptable behaviors in the team (Courtright et al. 2017). Team charters enable teams to internally set expectations for team member behavior without the need for an external supervisor, and they are associated with positive trajectories in performance over time (Mathieu & Rapp 2009). However, Courtright et al. (2017) found that team charters are primarily helpful for teams low in conscientiousness, as teams higher in conscientiousness did not need a formal mechanism such as team charters to initiate self-leadership processes toward the accomplishment of long-term team objectives. Ironically, however, the researchers found that teams lower in conscientiousness are less likely to create team charters in the first place, even though they are the teams that benefit the most from them.

As such, the paradox of depletion and strengthening self-leadership suggests that short-term self-leadership is difficult because self-regulatory resources become depleted, but that assuring external support and planning can help overcome short-term obstacles to build long-term self-leadership capacity. Thus, in accordance with triadic reciprocity, environmental surroundings can be influenced by individuals, teams, and organizations in such a way that they provide ongoing support for self-leadership efforts. Such efforts are critical for overcoming resource depletion that can occur as individuals engage in self-leadership over extended periods of time. Self-leading individuals and teams also proactively plan ways to more automatically respond to negative environmental cues in a manner that supports long-term goal achievement. Taken together, these points highlight several areas that can guide both practice and future research.

One implication for practice that emerges when exploring the paradox of self-leadership depletion and strengthening is that self-leadership efforts that do not include external support are less likely to succeed. Certain aspects of self-leadership are difficult to maintain over time, but can be aided by external supports such as empowering leaders and aligned incentives. Nevertheless, future research can further explore potential limits to external influence by trying to identify how external support practices can be administered in ways that do not reduce feelings of individual control. For example, external rewards have been alternatively linked to both higher and lower levels of internal motivation (Deci et al. 1999, Eisenberger et al. 1999). What drives this variance

in reactions? Perhaps the answer lies more in the way that rewards are administered, particularly whether they are used as a method of external control, than in the simple provision or absence of the reward.

Another area of practice related to the paradox of depletion and strengthening self-leadership is the potential value of including implementation planning and team chartering in training and development interventions. In almost every case, attempts to change individual and team behavior will encounter barriers and difficulties. Implementation planning and team chartering provide mechanisms for proactively responding to environmental influences that can short-circuit attempts to engage in and improve self-leadership. Including implementation planning and team charters as part of formal training plans thus represents clear guidance for facilitating transfer of training to long-term on-the-job behavior. Future research should continue to explore methods for facilitating implementation planning, as well as ways that resource depletion can be minimized. For example, people who perceive greater self-efficacy for self-leadership are more likely to feel energized than depleted during self-regulation (Job et al. 2010). What, however, builds self-efficacy for self-leadership? Similarly, practitioners could make team chartering a focus of team development efforts, as developing charters appears to help reduce process losses. However, teams that need team charters the most are probably the least likely to actually engage in team charter exercises. Thus, how do practitioners motivate these teams to create team charters in the first place? These are all questions that could be addressed in future research as a way to inform practitioners on how to facilitate long-term self-leadership.

The Paradox of Self-Leadership Through Collaboration

Even though self-leadership is both an individual-level and a team-level concept, the term self-leadership may imply that it is a solitary process. However, the exercise of self-leadership often involves making choices that allow a person to successfully navigate challenges and opportunities, to perform at a higher level, and in general to increase personal effectiveness. Because any single person, as a human being, will experience limits in terms of knowledge, experience, and overall capabilities, focusing on obtaining behavioral and performance resources from only one's self is, by definition, suboptimal. In fact, in accordance with the broader too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (Pierce & Aguinis 2013), establishing too much self-influence and autonomy for oneself can be self-defeating. Even in potentially productive empowerment situations, too much focus on the self can perhaps result in dysfunctional results (see, for example, Langfred 2005). As such, this introduces another key paradox of self-leadership, which we term the paradox of self-leadership through collaboration. Specifically, effective self-leadership paradoxically requires reaching outside of oneself to establish collaborative connections with others.

To address this paradox, we suggest that collaboration with others can be used as an intentional self-leadership strategy to obtain support and potential synergies related to working with others, as well as expanded access to expertise and resources beyond one's own. Collaboration used as a self-leadership strategy can enable individuals to enjoy the benefits of empowering team processes, which have been found to provide a wide array of benefits across a variety of situations (Manz & Sims 1987, Seibert et al. 2011, Spreitzer 2008). Collaboration can also serve as an antidote to personal blind spots and skill weaknesses, and can supplement one's capabilities beyond personal limitations.

The same is true at the team level in that self-regulating teams who boundary span are more likely to be effective (Marrone 2010). Boundary spanning is defined as team efforts to build and maintain relationships outside of the team, including with stakeholders in the organization (e.g., different functions or businesses) or outside of the organizational boundaries (e.g., regulatory

bodies, customers, suppliers, etc.). Teams, like individuals, do not usually have a monopoly on knowledge, skills, abilities, resources, and capabilities that are needed to make the team successful. As such, teams that are able to cross organizational boundaries or functional silos through boundary spanning are more likely to have access to resources and information than teams that are insular though self-regulating (Mathieu et al. 2018). Thus, similar to what occurs at the individual level, collaboration can serve as an important tool for enhancing the effectiveness of team self-leadership.

Shared leadership (Pearce 2004, Pearce & Conger 2003) is another notable collaborative influence process that can be purposely incorporated into individual and team self-leadership practice (Manz 2015). Shared leadership is a dynamic interactive influence process in which individuals lead each other as they work toward the goals of the team and organization (Pearce 2004, Pearce & Conger 2003). By engaging in shared leadership as a personal self-leadership strategy one can obtain expanded capacity and synergies beyond one's own limitations. With shared leadership, depending on the characteristics of the immediate work situation, leadership shifts to different people during the work process who have the experience and capabilities needed at the time. Thus, shared leadership taps into the performance advantages of teamwork, and collaborative processes and choosing to facilitate and participate in shared leadership processes can be effective self-leadership strategies (Manz 2015). Meta-analytic studies have linked shared leadership with improved performance (D'Innocenzo et al. 2016, Nicolaides et al. 2014).

However, emphasizing shared leadership without balancing it with more individual-based self-leadership can also create vulnerabilities to group dysfunction such as groupthink (Pearce & Manz 2011). Thus, shared leadership at the expense of individual discretion and authentic contributions drawing from one's own perspectives and experiences can be self-defeating. Organizations with cultures and systems that emphasize hierarchy and centralization may further impede the advantages of shared leadership unless changes are made toward more organic, flexible, and flatter work designs that empower individual self-leaders. In a paradoxical fashion, self-leadership thus requires a careful balance of authentic individual choices and behaviors that seemingly eschew external influence with collaborative advantages of shared leadership that seemingly seek to supplant individual interests with group interests. As such, self-leadership is necessary for shared leadership to improve collective performance, and shared leadership represents an external influence that facilitates self-leadership. Consistent with the social learning theory concept of triadic reciprocity (Bandura 1986), there is a process of ongoing mutual influence whereby self-leadership is part of a larger network of behavior and influence.

The paradox of self-leadership through collaboration highlights several issues related to practice and future research. One lesson for practice is the acknowledgment that even the greatest self-leader likely contributes less than the whole of a high-functioning group or organization. Recent perspectives have appropriately noted that high performers have a relatively high impact on collective performance (Aguinis & O'Boyle 2014, Humphrey et al. 2009). Nevertheless, high performers still benefit from collaboration, and the nature of this collaboration between individuals who unequally contribute to collective results is in need of additional research. Should each member of a group be granted opportunity for equal self-leadership? Do group members with less core roles have a more difficult time engaging in self-leadership than do members enacting central roles within the team? How can researchers more effectively measure the contributions of team members who are not star performers but who are nevertheless self-leaders and valuable collaborators supporting the more visible contributions of star performers?

Another lesson for practice from the self-leadership through collaboration paradox is that an important building block of shared leadership is individual self-leadership. Individuals who are not effectively practicing self-leadership are less likely to be capable of filling group leadership

roles, making development of self-leadership an important objective in organizations seeking to enact shared leadership. There are, however, once again several areas where future research can help clarify the appropriate melding of self- and shared leadership. One such area is developing a better understanding of how a group of self-leaders decides on how to share responsibilities. Does the individual highest in self-leadership take overall responsibility for coordinating efforts? Do individuals who are effective at self-leadership prefer working on tasks that they can closely control rather than efforts that require coordination with others? If each individual in a team is a strong self-leader with somewhat different interests and skill strengths, what then becomes the coordination mechanism that facilitates shared leadership?

The Paradox of Me-But-Not-You Self-Leadership

As noted above, prior research has shown that self-leadership has generally positive benefits for individuals. At least part of the reason for this may relate to theories around fundamental human needs. Specifically, needs related to self-leadership, such as freedom, self-direction, and autonomy, play a central role in most needs frameworks (Deci & Ryan 2000, Ryff & Keyes 1995). Indeed, the need for self-leadership appears to be universal across different cultures, and is consistently linked to individual subjective well-being (Tay & Diener 2011). Thus, humans fundamentally desire to exercise self-leadership based on underlying needs for freedom and autonomy.

However, despite that humans have a fundamental need for self-direction, a paradox exists in that not all employees in organizations actually exercise self-leadership. One explanation for this is that employees' external managers sometimes constrain the ability to self-lead since the ability to exercise self-leadership depends at least to an extent on the behavior of one's external leader. As noted above, the more that managers enable self-leadership through empowering approaches to leadership—that is, the more that managers lead others to lead themselves (Manz & Sims 1987)—the more likely it is that employees will exercise self-leadership.

Because managers, as well as subordinates, have fundamental needs for self-direction, one might assume that managers would be naturally prone toward exhibiting empowering forms of leadership to enable self-leadership. In other words, if managers themselves value autonomy, would they not lead in ways that foster the autonomy of others? Moreover, if managers truly lack the time to complete work that they feel others should be doing, will they not delegate and share power simply as a means for improving their own lives? Unfortunately, this is not always or even usually the case. In fact, in most workplace surveys, micromanagement is reported as one of the top complaints that employees have of their bosses (e.g., Solomon 2015), and research has shown that directive forms of leadership constrain rather than enable the exercising of self-leadership (Pearce & Sims 2002). Taken together, these findings introduce a critical paradox of self-leadership, which we term the paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership—namely, although leaders fundamentally desire self-leadership for themselves, they often do not allow their employees sufficient opportunity to exercise self-leadership.

What are the reasons for this paradox? Research has yet to uncover all the reasons for this paradox. However, we offer a few ideas here. First, leaders may be largely unaware that their behavior is constraining self-leadership. For example, managers may pride themselves on being detail-oriented while not considering that this is causing them to behave in ways that constrain employees' ability to determine the how of their work (Stewart et al. 2011). Along these lines, it could also be that managers feel more comfortable managing day-to-day operations rather than taking a more hands-off approach toward leadership. This is because empowering leadership in many settings removes leaders from the day-to-day operations of the individuals and teams they lead (Stewart & Manz 1995), which may cause leaders to feel isolated and distant from followers

(Antonakis & Atwater 2002). Leaders may thus unwittingly constrain self-leadership as they try to mitigate feelings of isolation and distance by involving themselves in day-to-day operations of teams and individuals.

We also suggest that the loss of perceived control is one of the key underlying factors of the empowerment paradox. In addition to having needs for freedom and autonomy, managers (and nonmanagers alike) have a need for control (Bandura 1986)—that is, the need to "exert control over one's environment and to act as an agent capable of producing desired results" (Leotti et al. 2010, p. 458). Aguinis & Glavas (2017) linked this agentic perspective of human behavior to corporate social responsibility and search for meaningfulness through work. Indeed, having a sense of control over one's environment is generally associated with positive outcomes for individuals and teams. At the same time, however, leading others to lead themselves could represent in the leader's mind a threat to control, as empowering leadership inherently involves yielding control to others (Pearce & Sims 2002). In other words, leaders may fear that by delegating control, they will end up being powerless. Given our adversity to the feeling of being powerless, it is possible that although leaders have a need for freedom, any desires they may have to help fulfill that need for others could be overridden by a personal need to maintain control. A recent study by Haselhun et al. (2017) provides some support for this prediction in that they found leaders who feel powerless are less likely to delegate decision making authority to their employees. Another recent study by Stewart et al. (2017) found that leaders, specifically physicians with high professional status, were reluctant to delegate because of threats to their distinct identity. Intense socialization into a high-status profession created an identity of being in charge that was difficult to reconcile with new demands associated with a role of sharing power and responsibility for patient care with other team members such as nurses and clerks. Unfortunately, behavioral responses to such threat included problems with delegating either too much or too little responsibility.

Although it has not been studied at the team level of analysis, the paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership also has interesting implications for interactions between teams. Do self-leading teams encourage or discourage effective self-leadership for other teams? A potentially interesting setting in which to study between-team self-leadership is multiteam systems, which are defined as "two or more tightly coupled interdependent teams in pursuit of a superordinate goal" (Mathieu et al. 2018, p. 335). Most multiteam systems research has focused on situations where an integration team is placed hierarchically above component teams (Davison et al. 2012), and little attention to date has been given to the question of how such cross-team hierarchy influences team-level self-leadership. Although the hierarchical relationship is seen as critical for facilitating between-team coordination in multiteam systems, future inquiry might explore whether collectives of teams—similar to individuals—can benefit from shared leadership in certain settings.

A practical implication of the paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership is the need to carefully plan organizational interventions designed to increase self-leadership. Hierarchical forms of organizational control are difficult to change, meaning that organizations are more likely to succeed when they specifically plan ways to overcome leader resistance. One potential method of facilitating self-leadership, as suggested by Stewart et al. (2017), is the provision of role models. Given past experiences and implicit notions of effective leadership, many leaders may simply not know how to lead in a way that facilitates self-leadership. They may not have a clear sense of how to enact the new leadership identity that often runs counter to how they have historically seen themselves as leaders. Of course, additional research is needed to gain greater understanding of the specific actions of leaders who facilitate self-leadership, as well as organizational conditions that encourage them to not only seek greater self-leadership for themselves but also provide self-leadership opportunities for followers who may have less skill and ability in technical areas as well as self-leadership itself.

A related focus of practice associated with the paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership relates to encouraging followers to be assertive in their attempts toward greater self-leadership. Consistent with DeRue & Ashford's (2010) model of granting and claiming leadership, leaders are more likely to grant individuals self-leadership when those individuals step up and claim the opportunity to engage in self-leadership. An important part of overcoming leader resistance to providing opportunity for follower self-leadership is thus to help followers see the importance of proactively engaging in self-leadership activity. Acts of successful self-leadership are likely to be met with greater opportunity for future self-leadership, thereby creating a positive spiral of granting increased autonomy and control to followers. However, because it was not conceptualized from the perspective of leadership within groups, additional research is needed to understand how the granting and claiming perspective of leadership applies to self-leadership. Does the same process that explains sharing of leadership among group members apply to the sharing of opportunities to lead oneself?

The Paradox of Needing Self-Leadership to Improve Self-Leadership

Another important question in the self-leadership realm concerns how self-leadership can be improved. Paradoxically, most answers in one form or another suggest that enhancing one's capacity to exercise self-leadership is dependent on the exercise of self-leadership. For example, as noted earlier, team chartering is a form of team-level planning that both manifests and enables team self-leadership; however, it is usually teams that are naturally prone to self-leadership (i.e., teams with high mean levels of conscientiousness) that create high-quality team charters, even though they need team charters the least (Courtright et al. 2017). This spiraling process of gaining additional capacity through exercising current capacity leads to what we label the paradox of needing self-leadership to improve self-leadership.

At the individual level, this need to have self-leadership to develop self-leadership can be illustrated by revisiting the strength model, which explicitly suggests that not only is self-regulatory capacity finite in the short term, but also it can be increased through consistent engagement over the long term. Engagement in self-regulatory activity is thus thought to build long-term capacity similar to the effect of physical exercise on muscles (Maranges & Baumeister 2016). Since self-regulatory capacity is seen as a resource that can be applied across different tasks, building capacity in one domain is expected to build capacity in other domains. For example, engaging in regular exercise is expected to facilitate the achievement of a goal to effectively manage email communication. Evidence supporting engagement in self-regulation in one area as a method of strengthening self-regulation in other areas has been shown in several laboratory studies (Inzlicht & Berkman 2015). However, the extent to which such an effect of strengthening a common self-regulatory resource in natural settings across extended periods of time is unknown (Berkman 2016). Moreover, the process by which such self-influence can be increased in settings that lack strong external situational cues for motivating self-leadership is not well understood. In these natural settings it seems that the key to developing greater self-leadership is to begin exercising more self-leadership, which of course is tautological.

Alternatives to the strength model provide other ways of viewing self-leadership development. These perspectives include several theoretical models that suggest motivation rather than increasing personal resources as the key to improving self-leadership. From this perspective, persistence toward goal achievement is expected to be facilitated by aligning goals with core values and identity (Berkman 2016, Ryan & Deci 2000). In other words, behavioral change and maintenance is expected to be most successful when the desired behavior is linked to core beliefs. Specific support for this effect has been found in research illustrating the linking of core values to

behavioral changes such as medication compliance (Ogedegbe et al. 2012), alcoholism (Armitage et al. 2011), and academic achievement (Cohen et al. 2009). Motivation is also enhanced by allowing individuals autonomy to freely choose behavior, such as when physicians encourage positive choices such as physical activity or smoking cessation in ways that affirm patient choice and volition (Fortier et al. 2007, Markland et al. 2005, Williams et al. 2006). These processes of linking goals to core beliefs and focusing on the why of behavior are, nevertheless, cognitive forms of self-leadership, suggesting once again that the process of enhancing self-leadership does indeed require the exercise of self-leadership, although perhaps more cognitive forms of self-leadership than might be associated with prescriptions for improvement based simply on the strength model.

One promising avenue for increasing individual self-leadership is recent research that links physical well-being to self-leadership capacity. Positive relationships have been found for health-related issues such as nutrition (Gailliot et al. 2007), rest (Tyler & Burns 2009), and sleep deprivation (Krizan & Hisler 2016). Perhaps some of the most interesting work in this area relates to sleep. Sleep-deprived individuals have lower behavioral constraint (St-Onge et al. 2014) and find it more difficult to focus attention and effort (Engle-Friedman et al. 2003). They also discount the value of future rewards that require effort (Libedinsky et al. 2013), and are less likely to learn from feedback (Whitney et al. 2015). All of these areas correspond with lower self-leadership suggesting that self-leadership and sleep are interrelated. This is true at the team level as well, as sleep deprivation is associated with reduced team performance, perhaps due to a lack of self-leadership (Pilcher et al. 2011). Consistent with our paradox, methods of improving individual and even team self-leadership include adequate sleep and nutrition, whereas from the other side, engaging in self-leadership can be important for regulating things such as when to go to bed and what to eat. Coming back to the notion of triadic reciprocity, it seems clear that there are bidirectional paths between people and their actions. Engaging in self-leadership builds capacity to engage in more self-leadership such that small acts can spiral into greater success.

A practical implication of the paradox of needing self-leadership to improve self-leadership is the importance of celebrating small wins as a method of achieving even greater success. Motivational interviewing within the context of healthcare is a clear example of this cycle. Patients are encouraged to begin behavioral change by choosing to focus on things that they want to change, even if what they choose may seem insignificant in relation to the problems they face (Miller & Rollnick 2002). However, achieving success with minor behavioral changes builds self-efficacy and facilitates future effort toward resolving larger problems. Similar practices are advocated for organizational change, illustrating how individuals in work organizations can benefit from building efficacy through exercising self-leadership in small ways as a means of building capacity for engaging in self-leadership in additional, and often more difficult, situations. Of course, this process of incremental change in individual behavior is still not fully understood, providing an important avenue for future research. Moreover, the benefits of using small victories to build team-level efficacy for engaging in self-leadership are not yet fully understood.

A second practical implication associated with the need to engage in self-leadership to further develop self-leadership relates to the importance of emphasizing physical health. External supports such as wellness programs are likely to provide a means for helping employees develop good health habits that in turn increase self-leadership capacity. Interestingly, viewing wellness programs from the perspective of self-leadership also provides insight into areas for additional research. For example, do employees who build self-leadership skills through physical exercise develop greater capacity to manage themselves with less supervision? From the other side, do self-leadership interventions in the workplace build skills that transfer to other life domains such as family?

Table 1 Guidance for practice

The paradox of self-leadership depletion and strengthening	Organizations should encourage empowering leadership that provides external support for individual self-leadership.
	Implementation planning, which develops contingency planning for overcoming obstacles to self-leadership, should be incorporated into training and development activities.
	Team charters, which formally document expected behaviors in teams, should be used to set the stage for team self-leadership, particularly for teams that are lower on conscientiousness.
The paradox of self-leadership through collaboration	Self-leadership should be encouraged in conjunction with shared leadership.
	The important collaborative contributions of self-leading individuals who have noncore roles in teams but who support star performers should be acknowledged and rewarded.
The paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership	Overcoming supervisor resistance is a necessary part of facilitating individual and team self-leadership and empowerment implementation.
	Individuals not in formal leadership roles need to be encouraged to claim opportunities for self-leadership.
The paradox of needing self-leadership to improve self-leadership	Small victories in self-leadership are an important building block toward larger victories.
	Organizations should encourage employees to improve their physical health and habits as a method of improving self-leadership in work activities.

GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICE

Throughout the review we have noted several areas where self-leadership can guide organizational practice. **Table 1** summarizes several specific recommendations. An underlying theme associated with the recommendations concerns the need to recognize self-leadership as occurring within the complex social relationships that constitute organizations. Although self-leadership is fundamentally enacted internally within individuals and teams, it does not happen in a vacuum. External leadership that encourages others to lead themselves, and that shares leadership across multiple individuals, is necessary for achieving the highest levels of self-leadership. However, empowering and shared forms of leadership are not a natural response for many leaders. Organizations will likely only succeed at facilitating self-leadership when they consciously plan to replace hierarchies and entrenched status and power structures with arrangements that include flexible, emergent influence among organizational members.

Another critical factor related to self-leadership is the acknowledgment that facilitation is an ongoing process. One-shot training programs for either teams or individuals will almost always fail. Incremental approaches to skill development that are supported by ongoing leadership and external rewards represent a path much more likely to yield success. In fact, developing a high-functioning self-leadership culture may be something that is easier to accomplish by creating a new organization than by trying to change an existing culture. Indeed, most organizations with strong self-leadership cultures, such as W.L. Gore and Zappos, were founded on philosophies that eschew traditional hierarchical leadership structures.

GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCHERS

We have also identified several areas for future research. Several of our recommendations are summarized as research questions in **Table 2**. Although substantial laboratory research in related areas such as self-regulation has been conducted, there continues to be only limited empirical studies that study self-leadership in organizational settings. Studies in such naturalistic settings

Table 2 Questions to guide future research

The paradox of self-leadership depletion and strengthening	How is depletion of self-leadership resources different at the team level than at the individual level?
	How can leaders encourage self-leadership in ways that facilitate coordinated effort but do not destroy individual autonomy?
	Can implementation planning and other forms of team planning (e.g., team charters) be applied to improve the success of change management in organizations?
The paradox of self-leadership through collaboration	How does self-leadership by team members without high-profile roles aid team members with high-profile roles?
	How do multiple strong self-leaders cooperatively share leadership and coordinate efforts such that skills and abilities are best matched to tasks?
The paradox of me-but-not-you self-leadership	What can be done to help leaders replace their identity as hierarchical expert in control with an identity of facilitator of collaboration and self-leadership?
	What can be done to encourage followers to more actively assert self-leadership in contexts that do not provide encouraging cues?
The paradox of needing self-leadership to improve self-leadership	Does self-leadership in one domain of life, such as work, transfer to self-leadership in other domains, such as family?
	How can concepts of self-leadership be used as a potential method for reducing work-family conflict?

are critical given that self-leadership is expected to be highly interconnected with organizational factors such as external leadership and reward structure. Moreover, truly effective self-leadership is a long-term endeavor that is not likely to be captured effectively in most laboratory experiments. Given an expectation that it unfolds over time, longitudinal studies related to the facilitation and maintenance of self-leadership seem especially warranted.

Another recommendation for research is that concepts of self-leadership be incorporated into existing lines of inquiry. For instance, given that it is facilitated by wellness and is potentially transferable across settings, integrating concepts of self-leadership into work-family and occupational health research seems like a potentially valuable avenue for future exploration. Such relationships, however, may not be universally synergistic. For example, on one hand it seems that organizational efforts to help employees develop skills that improve goal-directed behavior can provide help for employees needing to accomplish several tasks both at work and at home. On the other hand, encouraging employees to focus greater attention on core values and sources of internal motivation may result in decreased time spent doing work activities that are not seen as closely related to what matters most to some individual employees. Another area of research that can benefit from incorporating self-leadership ideas is the broader area of leadership. A good example is the recent emphasis on shared leadership that has been found to facilitate organizational success but that is still not well understood in terms of the process by which the facilitation takes place or the conditions that make shared leadership easier to enact in some settings than others. Gaining a better understanding of how shared leadership encourages self-leadership, as well as how self-leadership facilitates shared leadership, may provide critical insight into this emerging stream of research.

CONCLUSION

We have presented the historical and theoretical context around the topic of self-leadership, and we have reviewed the research in this area. We have also framed self-leadership as a paradoxical

concept, and have expanded on this notion by highlighting several different paradoxes related to the exercising and facilitating of self-leadership. Taken together, these paradoxes introduce numerous areas that are ripe for future research on this core topic of organizational behavior and organizational psychology. Our hope is that this review initiates a renaissance of self-leadership research that not only extends what researchers currently know about this important topic but also informs practice.

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Errata

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