Self-Management Competencies and Employee Effectiveness: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

Self-management practices are useful in enhancing the behavior that is desirable for the employees at workplace, and controlling the behavior that is undesirable and which may arise from impulses, innate habits and behavior learned due to upbringing. Self-management differentiates from management relying on strong supervisor involvement because it is conducted without the immediate presence of external control. Successful self-management can be very beneficial for organizations, as it can enhance job satisfaction, attendance, self-efficacy, job performance, learning and career success, as well as improve work behaviors such as learning, attendance and task performance. For employees, self-management at workplace means that they are responsible for determining approaches to task execution as well as monitoring and managing their own behaviors. This paper examines the impact of self-management competencies on employee effectiveness. It is conceptual in nature and thus adopts a desk research approach by reviewing extant literature.

Keywords: *Self-Management, Employee Effectiveness, Self-Regulation, Self-Leadership, Self-Awareness*

1.0 Introduction

Work environment is usually made up of people from various ethnic backgrounds, morals, beliefs, profiles and so on thus the differences between one employee and others reflects on our daily work methods and lives (Senyucel, 2009). We all have different personalities, wants and needs, and different ways of showing our emotions. Navigating through this all takes tact and cleverness especially if we hope to succeed in life. This is where self-management becomes very important. Poor employee productivity rates with regards to output and time requirement are most often precursors to poor organizational performance and eventual failure. This is because a well-managed organization usually sees an average worker as the root source of quality and productivity gains to capital investment (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). An

organization is effective only to the extent that its employees are able to achieve the required output levels and within the required time frame.

All managers, despite their management level, need to possess specific important competencies to perform optimally in a management position (Lazenby, 2015). Erasmus, Strydom and Rudansky-Kloppers (2013) state that management is of vital importance to keep the business in balance with its environment. For managers to be responsible for their life at work and outside of work, it is essential for them to have strong self-management competencies at their command (Hellriegel, Slocum, Jackson, Louw, Staude, Amos, 2013). In the business context, this entails that managers should be capable of developing their own goals as well as opportunities and to obtain resources that will enable them to adapt to the work environment (Symington, 2012). Ross (2014) adds that if managers can lead themselves, they will be equally able to lead others. Strydom, Bruwer, De Beer, Holtzhausen, Kiley, Maritz (2015) confirm that self-management is an essential competency required from managers to be successful and with that to contribute to business success.

According to Alsemgeest, Booysen, Bosch, Boshoff, Botha and Cunninghum (2017:79), self-management refers to the behaviour that an individual must adopt to see the desired change in his or her life and at the workplace. Botha and Musengi (2012) suggest that before people can become managers for businesses, they should know who they themselves are. Knowing who you are relies heavily on your capacity for self-management (Schermerhorn, 2013). Self-management involves intentionally undertaking activities that complement personal attributes such as honesty, trustworthiness and reliability (Botha & Musengi, 2012). Within the business context, Daft, Marcic, Griffin and Van Fleet (2015) posited that self-management embraces individuals' efforts to manage their personal activities and decision-making by assessing complications and formulating detailed goals and tactics in order to address those problems. Symington (2012) adds that career self-management includes formulating one's own goals and opportunities as well as being able to search for new resources to enable easier adaption to the work environment. Thus, it is essential for managers to be capable of leading themselves to be competent towards leading others. Leadership entails that one can take responsibility for and have control over one's personal actions (Ross, 2014). According to Hellriegel, Slocum, Jackson, Louw, Staude and Amos (2013), self-management as a managerial competency involves ethical conduct and integrity, personal drive and resilience, self-awareness and self-development as well as work–life balance.

Many aspects of employee's work activities are not naturally motivating, at least when comparing to alternative activities (Chen & Chung, 2014). Undesirable work activities can be facilitated by using self-management strategies. The basic self-management process, both in personal and work life, includes following steps: self-assessment, goal setting, self-monitoring and self-reinforcement. These steps will assist in behaviors that will lead the individual to their goals.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Self-Management Competencies

This refers to the continuous process of managing, evaluating and reinforcing our actions, thoughts and emotions to have appropriate behaviors or performance in relation to our surroundings and environment through constantly reminding ourselves of our norms and values (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Instead of the usual blame of others for mistakes we make or constantly defending ourselves, we should be able to take responsibility for our own behaviors, deeds, mistakes and in general emotions and how they impact our behaviors and daily lives such as the so many decisions that we have to make in our lives (McPheat, 2010).

Self-management at workplace is about "planning, organizing and controlling [the employee's] own work activities" (Renn et al., 2011). Self-management practices are useful in enhancing the behavior that is desirable for the employees at workplace, and controlling the behavior that is undesirable and which may arise from impulses, innate habits and behavior learned due to upbringing. Self-management differentiates from management relying on strong supervisor involvement because it is conducted without the immediate presence of external control. In this way, self-management can aid in internalizing motivation so that the motivation system of the workplace doesn't depend only on external ways of motivating.

Self-management practices can be performed, when the employee has the sufficient amount of responsibility to make decisions independently (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Thus, the employees own need or will to perform self-management is not enough; the support of the organization is needed in order to do that. Successful self-management can be very beneficial for organizations, as it can "enhance job satisfaction, attendance, self-efficacy, job performance, learning and career success", as well as "improve work behaviors such as learning, attendance and task performance" (Renn et al., 2011). Thus, introducing self-management practices to workplaces can resolve many issues that organizations face nowadays. A more complex problem at the workplaces is one that might be hard to identify; organization has their visions and values, but they differ radically from their employees' counterpart systems of visions and values (Manz et al,. 1980). Self-management can be useful in merging these two separate systems together, so that the employee internalizes the organization's values in their work and becomes a more productive employee.

Self-management practices are of a great interest for organizations as they can provide a competitive advantage for them (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Self-management can cut costs by reducing the need for strong involvement of the supervisor, self-managing employees are more productive thus increasing the overall productivity of the company (Renn et al., 2011) and the organization can transform from a rigid, management-down structure to a flexible and adaptable organization because it trusts its employees to make valid suggestions and decisions. Selfmanagement is suited well for contemporary markets "because of its emphasis on employee commitment rather than on control-oriented approaches to management" (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

2.2 Dimensions of Self-Management

2.2.1 Self-Regulation

It is about the ability to resist innate behavior and impulses which are not desirable at workplace or in personal life. Self-regulation is needed in all of the processes of self-management (Abele & Wiese, 2008). If employee's self-regulation fails at work, their thoughts, feelings and behavior are driven by immediate internal and external stimuli (Renn, Allen & Huning, 2011). Understandably, this can lead to undesirable behavior which may harm goals at workplace, such as career opportunities or social relationships. It has been found that: Proper self-management can reduce self-regulation failure by formalizing self-goal setting, self-monitoring and operating on oneself and the environment to reduce discrepancies between behavior and self-set goals. (Renn I2011) .This way the person becomes more aware of their goals and their progress in achieving them, and they are more capable of avoiding behavior that does not benefit in goal pursuit.

2.2.2 Self-Awareness and Self-Development

Self-management competencies are related to and build upon self-awareness. Developing self-control, such as formulating goals, supports managers in giving direction to their own life and workplace (Alsemgeest *et al.* 2017). Frost (2014) refers to self-awareness as a continuous

venture; being able to question yourself at any specific point in time is built upon large amounts of self-awareness development experience. Sutton, Williams and Allinson (2015) point out that self-awareness is a noteworthy notion, which indicates the degree to which individuals are knowingly conscious of their interactions or associations with others and also of their inner conditions.

In business context, De Janasz, Dowd and Schneider (2012) explain that self-awareness is the initial dynamism which enables work productivity, built on the belief of experiencing work satisfaction. Self-awareness is also linked to vital results such as increased job satisfaction (De Janasz *et al.,* 2012) and more effective career decisions (Sutton *et al.,* 2015). Self-awareness additionally enables an in-depth understanding of the business in which individuals are working, which leads to improved efficiency, successful management of subordinates, relationship development, suitable career and life-goal selection, which all contribute to business success (De Janasz *et al.,* 2012).

Doulas (2013) states that employees are bound to feel frustrated from time to time to time but then what keeps us going is the ability of our friends, supervisors, colleagues recognizing and understanding our frustration and guiding us on how to reach the end of this frustration instead of ignoring it. Doulas (2013) further states that as leaders and managers ought to be very sensitive to the needs of others and feelings and they can do this by recognizing their issues and values and offering to lend them a shoulder to cry on whenever they need it and even when they are not willing to talk about their issues, they know they can always come to you whenever they want to talk about something and this improves your reliability and credibility among followers.

2.2.3 Self-Leadership

Self-leadership As a concept, self-leadership differs from self-management: self-leadership is more about the cognitive processes behind the self-management strategies and actions (Millikin, Hom & Manz, 2010). Self-leadership and self-management are closely related with each other, and to ensure success in self-management, it requires self-leadership. Self-leadership goes further to consider the desirableness of the standards that self-management strategies are developed for achieving, and provides reasons for self-management behaviors (Manz, 1986). Self-management as a concept concentrates more on the practical questions about what the person should do in order to achieve their goals, and how and when the person should do it. Self-leadership can answer the question why people do this and gives intrinsic value for the behavior. As an example, if an employee aims to finish one report per day in their work, and because of that schedules their day to enable that, as well as reward themselves for succeeding in it, this can be considered as self-management behavior. Self-leadership on the other hand, will concentrate on asking why they should provide one report per day. The reasons can vary from being the employee of the month, being a good provider for the family or developing themselves to become faster in analyzing and producing information.

It can be said, that self-leadership encompasses the behavioral decisions of the self-management process (Manz, 1986). Leadership is required in successful management; this is relevant also in self-management. Self-leadership is about motivating oneself, giving purpose for what they do and persuading oneself to do things that do not seem appealing. Along with self-management, also self-leadership has been showed to have a positive relation to task performance (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). Self-leadership gives the employee the responsibility for internal regulation and for developing internal incentives (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Self-regulation and self-motivation are integral parts of self-management and thus, performing well in self-leadership will increase the chances in succeeding in self-management processes. Internal regulation is a very effective approach for management, as well as internal

incentives are very effective for employee commitment and motivation (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Self-leadership strategies have been found to increase job satisfaction and therefore they can predict job performance (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012; Ross, 2014).

Self-leadership incorporates intrinsic work motivation into self-management strategies (Manz, 1986). Because of the cognitive process behind self-management behavior, the person is able to discover new motivators for the tasks that might seem undesirable at first. Self-leadership emphasizes the role of the employee's need for self-actualization as a motivator (Pihl-Thingvad, 2014). Thus, with the use of self-leadership, it might be that the person motivates themselves in their work tasks, rather than the overall organizational visions and motivational systems (PihlThingvad, 2014). Self-leadership is also about evaluating individual's values and beliefs; evaluating how their values and beliefs fit to their current work activities and then moulding these beliefs to fit the situation better and avoiding intrapersonal conflict (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). If the person is unable to perform this kind of self-leadership processes, they can find themselves in a very stressful work situations, because of the conflicts between the person's and the organization's values and visions.

Self-leadership strategies can also go beyond immediate task performance and improve performance in supportive work activities and personal life (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). Becoming better in self-leadership in all aspects of life can significantly improve the person's quality of life by being able to achieve challenging goals in personal aspirations, social skills as well as work environment. Proactive behavior can be enhanced by teaching self-leadership strategies at workplace: "self-starting, future oriented action with the aim to change the situation and/or oneself" (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). This promotes for the employee's active role in the workplace, which is essential in order for the employees to create new standards and more effective work procedures (Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012). This is especially important for knowledge workers who are crucial for the organizations because of their innovation and creativity.

2.2.4 Motivation

Motivation is the origin for work-related behavior, as it causes employees to perform particular actions that are beneficial for the organization (Hauser, 2014). Motivating their employees is therefore necessary for the organization in order to function properly. Maximizing motivation of their employees is a way to increase performance of the employees and thus, the organization (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Self-management can aid in transforming organization-level visions and values into intrinsic motivation (Chen & Chung, 2014). When the organization level visions and values are very different from the employee's personal visions and values, it is hard for the organization to motivate the employee; they will have to rely on extrinsic and economical motivation which can be very resource-consuming (Hauser, 2014). Involvement and engagement by implementing self-management at workplace can help the employee to internalize the organization's visions, and therefore become as an intrinsic motivation for the employee.

Self-management can act as a way of internal motivation for the employee in the absence of external motivation from the organization (Manz *et al.,* 1980). In cases where resources are not sufficient for motivating the employees enough externally and economically, it is beneficial for efficient performance of the employee's tasks that they are able to motivate themselves. Self-management practices can help the person to identify new motivational means, such as self-reward and self-praise, and finding motivating aspects of the task, such as personal development and fulfilling their values. Finding ways to "feel good" about one's work will improve the level of motivation of the person (Korschun, Bhattacharya & Swain, 2014). Successfully performing self- management will affect positively on motivation (Manz, 1986).

This means that when the employee has set personal goals regarding their work and they have successfully performed self-management, it will increase their motivation of performing their work.

Self-managing individual's motivation can also be about recognizing one's intrinsic motivations and combining them into work activities (Manz, 1986). For example, a person who enjoys conversations over phone would try to implement that method of information sharing rather than sharing information through emails. This will increase the motivation for the task, because the person has merged an intrinsic motivational factor into possibly otherwise undesirable task. Being able to affect their work conditions and methods for performing the work is therefore important for the employee's motivation. Involvement in job activities has shown to increase employee's motivation (Zatzick & Iverson, 2011). If the employee is able to participate in planning their work tasks, creating evaluation criteria, and organizing their work conditions, they are more motivated to perform their work.

2.3 Self-Management and Employee Effectiveness

Nowadays, many organizations require self-directed work behavior, at least to some extent, from their employees, and therefore it is important for managers to introduce themselves to this concept (Renn Allen & Huning, 2011). The culture of self-management can be very attractive for organizations to aim at, as self-management "can be a powerful management tool" when properly performed (Christensen, 2010). Specific training in thought patterns will increase task performance, satisfaction and self-efficacy of employees (Marques-Quinteiro & Curral, 2012). Managers have to be able to convince their employees about the idea of self-management, which can be rejected by employees or even whole work environments. Employees' eagerness, desire and capacity will affect the success of introducing self-management into a work environment (Manz *et al.,* 1980). Manager has to find the appropriate way to present the methods of self-management, so that the employees will get excited about the idea rather than refusing to understand the benefits of it. It is impossible to teach self-managing if the employee doesn't have the desire or the ability to do it, and the presentation of the concept can have a lot to do with it (Covey, 2010).

Employees can develop their self-awareness by practicing self-management. Self-awareness is strongly linked to self-regulation; it means, how well a person knows their triggers and in which situations they tend to appear (Bonfante, 2014). Self-regulation is needed in being able to react on or discard triggers. Triggers can be useful for the person if they result in reactions, which are positive in relation to the person's goals. Many triggers, on the other hand, are the kind which trigger actions that can be very harmful regarding to the person's goal achievement. Self-awareness is an essential part of self-management; When you know what impulses and triggers you encounter in different situations, you can learn what to do to manage them (Bonfante, 2014).

Self-management can also be beneficial for the employee's career; previous research shows a relationship between self-management actions and career success (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Renn *et al.,* 2011). The different aspects included in the self-management process are useful for realizing, what are the person's true aspirations regarding their career, and whether the person is going in the right direction. Career goals can also be seen as goals in self-management processes (Drucker, 1999). The person can think about strategies for achieving their career goals, and change their behavior so that they can achieve them. Even though the person has considered their career goals, they might be acting in a way that is not beneficial for achieving those goals. Performing self-management can help in finding those conflicting elements, and defining, how the person should act in their work.

Implementing self-management in an organization can have widespread benefits. Employee self-management increases the employees' commitment to the organization, because in that case, commitment is self-established (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Enthusiasm and performance are also examples of aspects beneficial for the organization, which will improve in work because of self-management strategies (Prussia et al., 1998). For employees, self-management at workplace means that they "are responsible for determining approaches to task execution as well as monitoring and managing their own behaviors" (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). These are traditionally seen as the supervisor's tasks, but with appropriate self-management, employees are capable of performing them independently. This requires that the supervisor and the employee share the same understanding about the employee's job description and task assignments; therefore the communication between supervisor and the employee has to be forthcoming and explicit. When the task demands are well defined and explained, this task-related knowledge becomes a substitute for leadership (Manz *et al.,* 1980). Task demands are them used as a basis for the employee's self-management process. When employees are practicing self-management, the management is able to concentrate on longer-term issues rather than monitoring and controlling the minor issues of the employees (Manz et al., 1980).

Employee self-management can be a great help in sustaining the organization's competitiveness (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Developing employee self-management is a long-term project, and maybe de-emphasized by management because of that. The benefits of self-managing employees cannot be seen immediately, and because of that managers might feel hesitant in implementing such a change in the organization. Employee self-management can be advantageous for organizations, but it's important to notice that self-management and external management control are never completely excluding each other (Manz *et al.,* 1980). There will always be both, although the proportion of each can vary. In any case, reinforcing the self-management process is left for management. This means that reinforcing the self-management strategies of employees', training and educating, giving information and resources are needed from the organization in order for the employees to be able to self-manage (Chen & Chung, 2014).

3.0 Conclusion

An increasing amount of organizations are transforming their management strategies from control-oriented management towards self-management. Organizations are encouraging their employees to have more responsibility and to be more independent with their work activities (Renn *et al.,* 2011). Employees might be able to make their own strategies regarding the details of task performance: making schedules independently, forming teams for projects, crafting budgets for projects, and deciding in which location they are going to work. In addition to instrumental activities, self-management is also about the cognitive process which occurs when employee is performing work activities. At workplace, proper self-management strategies will aid the employee to reduce "deviation from standards in higher level control loops", meaning that self-management training can assist the employee in fulfilling their job requirements (Manz, 1986). It is worthy to note that implementing self-management in an organization can have widespread benefits. Employee self-management increases the employees' commitment to the organization, because in that case, commitment is self-established (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998).

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