

THE INFLUENCE OF SUPERLEADER BEHAVIORS ON ORGANIZATION COMMITMENT, JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATION SELF-ESTEEM IN A SELF-MANAGED WORK TEAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of superleader behavior on self-managed work groups in a non-union paper mill which had self-managed workteams in place since it began its operation. Based on a sample of 139 employees, the results indicated groups that were led by a supervisor who exhibited the characteristics of a Superleader [18] had higher levels of organization commitment, job satisfaction, and organization self esteem.

INTRODUCTION

Stemming from the concept of socio-technical systems developed by Emery and Trist, 1969, self-managing work teams are relatively small groups that take complete responsibility for making a product or delivering a service, performing a variety of tasks and utilizing a number of skills which the group as a whole possess [26]. Team members operate without a visible manager and assume many primary responsibilities of management. Where this management system exists, control and accountability are pushed down to the lower levels of the organization. Self-managed work teams are hypothesized to be effective, contribute to employee quality of work life [4] and produce outcomes such as increased employee satisfaction, the opportunity for increased socialization in the workplace, increased autonomy, opportunity to learn new skills, and other aspects such as reduced absenteeism, turnover and increased performance and motivation [4] [25] [26] [27]. Overall, the research on self-managing work teams indicates clear benefits both in performance and in attitudes [11] [3].

Underlying this whole process of self-management is self-regulation [19]. Consequently leadership when applied to self-managing work teams is reflected in the idea of “a person who leads others to lead themselves” [19] [23]. Termed the ‘Superleader’ Manz and Sims (1990) identifies six behaviors that should be performed in order to help a self-managing work team to manage itself. The six leadership behaviors are:

- (1) Behavior that encourages *self-reinforcement* by team members. Through the reinforcement of high levels of group performance, the Superleader encourages the group to recognize and appreciate actions that lead to high performance.
- (2) Encouraging *self-evaluation* so that team members gather the relevant information to monitor and evaluate their performance.
- (3) Team members are encouraged to be *self-critical* of their own performance.
- (4) By promoting a culture based on group outcomes the Superleader helps assist team members to engage in behavior of *self-goal setting*.
- (5) Encouraging *self-expectation* among work team members so that the team has high expectations for group performance.
- (6) Encouraging the behaviors of task *rehearsal* so that the team practices a work activity before performing it.

Based upon the description of the superleader behaviors and the results of the limited studies examining the impact of these behaviors on self-managed work teams and organizational attitudinal outcomes, it can be reasonable to assume that within a self-managing work team, task identity will be enhanced through a collective responsibility for completing a whole piece of work [12] [13]. Superleader behaviors would also encourage the group to self-regulate its activities by allowing team members to control technical variances within the boundaries of the group [5].

Task autonomy would also be enhanced because team members are encouraged to deal with task and environmental demands by making decisions in the process of making a product or delivering a service. Because they are encouraged to self-regulate their behavior they can make decisions to allocate resources efficiently to deal with the total variation in work conditions [5]. Task feedback would also be enhanced because superleader behaviors encourage team members to monitor their own activities and performance and make the corresponding improvements where required.

Self-managing work teams are also said to be operating in a culture that supports employee involvement [21]. In other words team members have the power to make decisions about work processes and outcomes, in addition to having information on work processes, quality outcomes, business performance competition, and organization changes. Superleader behaviors would tend to encourage this. In addition they have the resources to accomplish their work and training that enables work team members to develop the knowledge required for effective performance. All this enhances their job involvement and job influence.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are examined.

Hypothesis 1: Groups with high superleader initiated behaviors will have higher levels of satisfaction and commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Groups with superleader behaviors will have higher levels of organization self esteem.

Hypothesis 3: Job influence will be higher in groups exhibiting superleader behaviors than groups operating under a more traditional management system.

METHOD

Sample

Data were collected on site over a period of three days from employees working in a non-union paper mill located in a small rural community in the Northwest. The plant was a new facility and had been operating with autonomous work teams since its inception. This survey was carried out a year later and was completed by 141 employees for a 99 per cent response rate. Of those who completed the survey 86 percent were male and 14 percent female.

MEASURES

Self-leadership scores were obtained using the Self-Management Leadership Questionnaire developed by Manz & Sims (1987). The 22-item questionnaire is designed to test the extent to which leaders of autonomous work groups display typical Superleader traits. Task identity, task feedback and task autonomy were taken from the Job Characteristics Survey developed by Sims, Szligyi and Keller (1976).

Job involvement was measured using Kanungo's (1982) 10-item scale. A 4-item scale developed by the author measured Job Influence.

RESULTS

For the purpose of analysis, groups falling under the Superleader style of management were generated as follows:

1. A standard mean score and a standard deviation were calculated for all groups based on the sum of the scores from the Self-leadership portion of the questionnaire.
2. Groups that showed mean scores one standard deviation above the population mean were deemed to be Superled groups and those groups whose mean fell one standard deviation below the population mean were termed traditionally led groups. Those groups whose mean fell within one standard deviation of the population mean were deemed to be moderately participative.

A Manova was conducted on the five dependent variables: job involvement, job influence task identity, task feedback, and task autonomy. The independent variable in this analysis was the degree of Superleader behaviors displayed in the teams, i.e., high, medium, and low. The combined analysis indicated that Superleader behaviors displayed a significant influence on the variables. A univariate breakdown of the effects showed that job satisfaction, organization commitment and organization self-esteem appeared to be strongly associated with Superleader behaviors ($p > .10$; $p > .01$). Looking at the variation in the means between high, middle and low Superleader groups a linear relationship is indicated with job satisfaction, organization commitment and organization self-esteem as Superleader behaviors diminished.

DISCUSSION

An important factor in the success of self-managed work teams is the quality of its leadership [23]. From this study it appears that a superleader style of management seems to directly affect attitudes held by team members towards their job. Encouraging self-leadership behaviors directly influences the perceived levels of job satisfaction, organization commitment and organization self-esteem of team members.

Note: Please contact the author for a list of references.