

CHAPTER 16

Self-Management: The Fundamental of Managing Teams

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ABSTRACT

The leaders who manage others well, are generally leaders who manage themselves well. Self-management refers to the competent and conscious control of behaviour, feelings and productivity in the workplace; the aim of this article is to explore the idea that self-management is the bedrock upon which the ability to lead a team is developed. The article combines the best of both the scholarly and empirical research literatures to define leadership and self-leadership and to examine what competencies are most important – emotional regulation, time management, intrinsic motivation, decisiveness and continuous learning – and how they might be nurtured and what might follow for a team when these competencies are in place. It traces the intellectual origins of the concept from early scientific management through Drucker's account of executive effectiveness to contemporary work on self-leadership and self-managing teams, and it examines the practical steps by which such teams are built: selective recruitment, bounded empowerment, supporting tools and structured reflection. The article further considers the obstacles that make self-management difficult to acquire, particularly the scarcity of candid feedback available to managers, and the way in which a leader's own habits gradually shape organisational culture. It argues that reflective practice is not a personal indulgence but a mechanism of organisational continuity, and concludes that in a self-managing team self-mastery necessarily precedes team mastery.

Keywords: Self-management; Self-leadership; Self-managing teams; Self-discipline; Team effectiveness.

1.0 Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, leading well consists in something more than directing the work of others.

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It rests substantially on the manner in which leaders manage themselves. A principal reason that managers resort to micromanagement — with the loss of creativity and the accumulation of frustration that follow — is that they have not learned to govern their own work and emotions. This article examines self-management as a constituent element of managing a team, drawing on established theory and on reflective observation, and it proceeds from the premise that self-management is the foundation of effective leadership.

Self-management encompasses conscious oversight of one's time, emotions, decisions and development. It shifts the basis of leadership from command and control towards trust, allowing groups to perform without continuous supervision. Self-management is important because a lack of it brings a lack of internal order into the relationship, while an ordered relationship between leader and team member creates conditions for the development of internal order in the team.

2.0 Understanding Self-Management

Self-management is defined as a collection of interrelated skills that enable a person to manage him or herself in a way that is congruent with the group's purposes. Emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive and manage their own emotions and those of others (Goleman, 1998), is at the heart of this. A leader who has this ability takes time to think through a response, rather than react to it, because if he/she loses his/her calm, the team will interpret that as lack of self-control, and that will affect their trust in the leader.

Time management is a second key component, which means prioritising and sequencing work tasks, particularly in the face of interruption. The Eisenhower matrix is one framework used to prioritize tasks. The Eisenhower matrix is a prioritization framework. If the leader turns a blind eye to this, he becomes engrossed in what is most pressing, and team members follow suit.

Intrinsic motivation provides persistence. Purpose and the push for mastery are more reliable motivators than external reward, and a working journal is an effective reflective tool that enables a leader to record both wins and losses fairly and not simply what they want to remember. Motivation of this kind, combined with a disposition to treat adversity as instructive, is central to continued development.

Decision-making requires clarity about what is sought and the resolve to act. Leaders who manage themselves examine the evidence, weigh the disadvantages of each option and then decide, without prolonging deliberation indefinitely. Sound decision-making is inseparable, in turn, from continuous learning: reading widely in one's field and soliciting the views of others are habitual rather than occasional practices among such leaders. These capabilities accumulate over time. Disciplined use of time and developed resilience together reduce the risk of burnout, while emotional awareness improves the

quality of judgement. Within collaborative teams, leaders who establish these habits in themselves are able to move from the position of principal decision-maker to that of coach and collaborator (Manz & Sims, 1987).

3.0 Historical and Theoretical Foundations

The idea of self-management has its origins in management thought of the early twentieth century. Frederick Taylor's scientific management addressed efficiency in the organisation of work, but it was Peter Drucker, in *The Effective Executive* (1967), who treated the management of oneself as a complete managerial discipline. His contention that effectiveness arises from building upon strengths rather than from correcting weaknesses amounted to an invitation to leaders to audit their own capacities honestly.

Later, other frameworks elaborated the argument. Goleman describes self-regulation as one of the abilities of outstanding leaders and self-leadership theory has built up a considerable amount of empirical evidence of strategies individuals use to control their own behaviour and thinking (Manz, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006). In practice, agile methods make the same assumption: If the authority is distributed across the team members, then each member must be able to lead their own work.

An observation written in a reflective manner can be included. When things are going off schedule, the need for personal routine is starkly apparent, and when the external structure is most fragile, consistency of preparation and review seems to consolidate performance. This is consistent with the larger body of evidence relating engagement with a work unit to the quality of local leadership (Harter et al., 2002).

4.0 Key Self-Management Skills for Leaders

- **Control of time.** Using structured working practices, like the Pomodoro technique that breaks work into chunks of time, helps to reduce procrastination. Demanding leaders who set aside time for demanding work also get more of it done, setting a standard for the team to follow.
- **Control of emotion.** Cognitive reappraisal is deliberately changing the way a leader thinks about a situation to change the way they feel about it, and it helps them not to feel a certain way but to feel less — without suppressing the emotion completely.
- **Alignment of goals.** Personal objectives are aligned with the team's objectives through periodic review (quarterly) Structured frameworks like objectives and key results are helpful here because they clarify the link between the work of one person, and the outcomes for the group.

- **Mitigation of stress.** Maintaining energy (sustained leadership) through regular rest, physical activity and attention to well-being. If leaders don't pay attention to this, they are much more prone to fatigue, and their teams lose their stability.
- **Loops of accountability.** Ongoing, regular reviews with honest feedback about their own work promotes ownership. Groups mimic what they see and dependency decreases as a result.

5.0 Building Self-Managing Teams

Selection is the first step. In teams that are meant to be self-managing, motivation to do work—not supervision—should come first, and the goal of the interviews should be to find out who is motivated and to make certain that each person will be held accountable for a specific job responsibility.

Empowerment follows. Autonomy should be bound by authority, by definite limits (a budget within which decisions can be made, for example), ensuring that autonomy is real but limited. Leaders who openly discuss their own mistakes, set up a climate of acceptable risk-taking and make it clear that mistakes are part and parcel of work and not a personal failing (Edmondson, 1999).

Supporting tools make an impact. Shared task management platforms enable work distribution to be visible to all, while structured retrospectives provide a regular time frame for teams to review and learn. Training in the constituent skills of self-management completes the arrangement.

Difficulties nevertheless arise, most commonly where the surrounding organisational culture is accustomed to close control. A practical response is to begin with pilot projects and to demonstrate their effect through agreed measures of throughput and quality, using that evidence to build wider support for extending the approach.

The decentralised team structures adopted by a number of technology firms offer an instructive illustration. Spotify's organisation of engineering work into small autonomous squads grouped into wider tribes was designed explicitly to push decisions downward and to reduce dependence on managerial approval (Kniberg & Ivarsson, 2012). What is notable in such arrangements is the discipline they require of leaders themselves: authority is exercised through the design of structures and the articulation of purpose rather than through direct instruction.

6.0 Challenges in Developing Self-Management

Self-management is demanding to acquire. Managers contend simultaneously with heavy workloads, competing demands and considerable stress, and the effort required to

build self-regulatory capability must be found alongside these rather than instead of them.

A further difficulty is structural. Managers frequently receive little candid feedback: subordinates are reluctant to offer it, peers are preoccupied and organisations rarely provide systematic support for managerial development. Since self-management depends on accurate self-perception, and accurate self-perception depends on information from others, the absence of honest feedback is a serious impediment. Progress therefore tends to require deliberate effort sustained over long periods, and often the assistance of a mentor or coach willing to speak plainly.

7.0 Organisational Culture and Long-Term Sustainability

Self-management is not solely an individual matter. Where leaders use their time efficiently, respond to emotion calmly and accept full responsibility for their actions, these behaviours gradually influence the functioning of the whole organisation. Leaders are continuously observed in how they handle pressure, reach decisions and respond to mistakes, and organisational culture forms in large part from what is observed.

A leader in this way sets the pattern for independence from constant supervision and for the trust between members that makes such independence workable. Organisations in which these behaviours are prevalent generally find it easier to adjust to change, to operate amid uncertainty and to sustain performance in difficult conditions. Self-management therefore contributes not only to the success of individual teams but to the longer-term viability of the organisation itself.

8.0 Conclusion

Self-management is not a collection of efficiency techniques but the ethical foundation of leadership, and it cultivates teams capable of sustaining high standards without continuous oversight. By developing emotional regulation, resilience and disciplined attention, leaders make possible gains in innovation and retention that no amount of supervision can produce.

Reflective practice is what secures this. The question a leader should return to regularly — whether they are in fact modelling what they expect of others — is uncomfortable by design, and answering it honestly requires a degree of vulnerability. The remuneration is lasting impact. Organisations that value self-management will likely thrive, as people who have mastered self-management can establish teams that withstand stress.

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