MEASURING SELF-LEADERSHIP: INCORPORATING COLLECTIVIST VALUES

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ABSTRACT

Although the measurement of self-leadership (RSLQ) has been developed and validated with samples from the US with promising reliability and construct validity, its generalizability to other non-western context is problematic. We refine its measurement based on the cross-cultural theory about self-concept differences between individualism and collectivism. The reliability and construct validity of this refined self-leadership scale are explored using exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). EFA demonstrated good reliability and stable factor structure for the refined scale and CFA demonstrated acceptable model fit for eleven factors of the refined self-leadership scale. Implications of the results are discussed, and directions for future research are offered.

Key words: Self-Leadership, Collectivism, Survey Design.

Self-leadership is a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to carry out tasks to reach desired goals (Manz, 1986; Manz and Neck, 2004). Individuals differ in their practice of self-leadership strategies, and these differences can determine whether an individual performs well or fails in achieving their own goals (Manz, 1986; Neck and Manz, 1992, 1996; Prussia et al., 1998; Stewart et al., 1996). The self-influence process associated with self-leadership consists of specific behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to positively influence personal effectiveness (Manz, 1986; Manz and Neck, 2004). Self-leadership strategies are usually grouped into three primary categories.
of behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies (Manz and Neck, 2004; Manz and Sims, 2001; Prussia, Anderson and Manz, 1998). Behavioral-focused strategies include using self-goal setting, self-observation, self-cueing, self-reward and self-punishment to promote effective behavior and discourage ineffective behavior (Manz and Neck, 2004). Natural reward strategies are designed to leverage intrinsic motivation to enhance performance (Manz and Neck, 2004). Constructive thought strategies involve visualizing performance, engaging in positive self-talk, and examining individual beliefs and assumptions to align cognitions with desired behavior (Neck and Manz, 1996; Neck et al., 1995). Despite the potential use of self-leadership strategies in organizations, the majority of self-leadership research has been conceptual with only a few empirical studies examining its application in organizational settings.

One reason put forward to explain this limited empirical research has been the lack of a valid scale for the assessment of self-leadership skills (Houghton and Neck, 2002). Consequently, recent research has sought to develop and validate a measure of self-leadership. Based on the self-leadership questionnaire developed by Anderson and Prussia (1997), Houghton and Neck (2002), have developed a revised self-leadership questionnaire (RSLQ). Using samples from the USA the questionnaire displayed promising reliability and construct validity. However, its generalizability to other non-western context appears problematic. Neubert and Wu’s (2006)
replication study found that the RSLQ did not uniformly generalize to a Chinese context. In their analyses, the best fitting model was a five-factor model that included the factors of goal setting, visualizing successful performance, self-talk, self-reward, and self-punishment. Natural rewards, self-observation, evaluating beliefs and assumptions, and self-cueing did not uniformly generalize to the Chinese context. These results suggested that further refinement is required on the RSLQ.

The purpose of this study is to address the cross-cultural application problem of self-leadership measurement in a non-western context. Based on cross-cultural theory (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Hofstede & Bond, 1984) highlighting differences between individualist and collectivist societies, we refine the RSLQ so as to enhance its generalizability to a Chinese context and carry out exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis on the modified self-leadership scale.

**Influence of Collectivist and Individualist Cultures on Self-leadership**

Since self-leadership has developed largely within the context of the culture of U.S., it is likely that some conceptual dimensions of self-leadership may be culturally bound (Alves et al, 2006). While recognizing the critical perspectives applied to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions framework (McSweeney, 2002) we have chosen to utilize this model given the significant attention to it in the literature. Drawing on Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) cultural dimensions
framework, Alves et al (2006) discussed how the application and understanding of self-leadership may differ across cultures and argued that “the examination of self-leadership from a global perspective should not be made independent of cultural dimensions” (p.356).

According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), the cultures of North America and Northern and Western Europe have been identified as generally individualistic. This suggests that individuals in this type of culture (referred to as ‘Individualists’ in the remainder of the paper), perceive a clear boundary that separates the self from others, and give higher priority to their personal goals than to group goals. Individualists value independence and the expression of one’s unique configuration of needs, rights, and capacities. These people perceive themselves as consisting of a unique set of attributes that enable them to achieve independence and autonomy. Individualists also strive to establish their distinctiveness from others without being influenced by group and environmental pressures.

In contrast, the cultures of Easterners, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, have been identified as collectivistic. The focal point of people from these collectivistic cultures (referred to as ‘Collectivists’ in the remainder of this paper) is not the inner self but rather the relationships one has with others (Hamaguchi, 1985). The social-oriented nature of collectivists’ beliefs, which stress the close connection of one’s well-being with the interests of one’s group, can be traced back to the deep influence of Confucian ideology (Triandis, 1995)
which have shaped the social interaction of people in Eastern and Southeastern Asian countries for more than two thousand years. Thus Collectivists are motivated to find a way to fit in with relevant others, to fulfill and create obligation as part of social networks. Any inner attribute such as desire, personal goal and private emotion that may disturb harmonious equilibrium of interpersonal transaction should be suppressed and restrained (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, 1993; Triandis, 1995).

**Re-Conceptualization of Self-Leadership to incorporate Collectivist Values**

In this section we briefly discuss the re-conceptualisation natural reward strategies, self-observation strategies, and strategies of self-evaluation of assumptions and beliefs to incorporate collectivist values. Natural reward strategies identified within self-leadership assume that once activities and task can be chosen, structured or perceived in ways that lead to increased feelings of competence and self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985), the enjoyment of the task and the intrinsic motivation to engage in it will be enhanced, resulting in higher task performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006). The potential for intrinsic motivation value within a network of social relations related to task performance is completely ignored. We argue that the measurement of self-leadership dimension should be expanded to include relation-based natural reward strategies. We suggest that relation-based natural reward strategies may be reflected in the following ways: 1) Identify pleasing contexts in which one
could work with those people one likes; 2) List out the in-group members who are involved in the tasks that make one’s work naturally rewarding; 3) Think of doing something that can satisfy the needs of those important people cooperating with us to complete the task. (e.g. give small gifts); 4) Think of pleasure gained by working harmoniously with colleague/team member; and 5) Think of enjoyment we may gain from helping colleague/team members to reach their goals.

The strategy of self-observation seeks to heighten an individual’s self-awareness in order to facilitate behavior management, especially the management of behaviors related to necessary but unpleasant tasks (Manz and Sims, 2004). Self-observation strategy is grounded on the role of feedback within the theoretical concept of cybernetic control theory (Powers, 1973; Carver and Scheier, 1998). We argue that RSLQ items for task-based self-observation strategy does not adequately address the behavior of people from collectivist cultures whose self-monitoring is also associated with maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations. We suggest that a person adopting relation-based self-observation strategies may include the following behaviors: 1) Examine how well he/she can fulfill one’s obligation; 2) Evaluate how well he/she could adjust oneself to meet the expectation of the authority figure and team members; 3) Keep track of how well he/she can cooperate with his/her colleagues or team members.
Self-evaluation of assumptions and beliefs is a constructive thought strategy that seeks to influence or lead oneself through the purposeful control of one’s thoughts (e.g. Neck and Manz, 1996; Manz and Neck, 1991; Neck et al., 1995). We argue that this strategy has highlighted individual-oriented thoughts and beliefs as it focuses on self-referent thinking which directs attention to how one reflects on personal thinking processes to increase personal task success.

We suggest the social-oriented strategy of evaluating beliefs and assumptions may include the following behaviors: 1) Identify any beliefs and assumptions that differ from others’ opinions and adjust them accordingly to avoid conflicts for maintaining harmony; 2) Evaluate whether one’s own thinking can fit in with the opinions of his/her boss or team members.

**Method**

Participants in the study were a sample of 569 local Chinese students undertaking management studies at a community college in Hong Kong. The whole data set was randomly split into two halves. One half constituted the calibration sample used for exploratory factor analysis (sample 1: n = 284; 44% male, 56% female) and the other half constituted the validation sample using confirmatory factor analysis (sample 2: n = 285; 43% male, 57% female). Mean age in both samples was 20. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and participation was voluntary.

Self-leadership was measured using Houghton and Neck’s (2002) RLSQ, with some
modifications with additional new items that reflected our arguments concerning the inclusion of questions that identified relationship orientation within self-leadership strategies. We followed Brislin’s (1980) translation/back-translation procedure to create a Chinese version of the questionnaire. (Due to word restrictions the complete modified RSLQ, measured on a 5 point Likert scale where 1 = not at all accurate to 5 = completely accurate, is not included but is available from the authors).

**Results**

Exploratory factor analysis of the modified RSLQ yielded 12 factors (with eigenvalues >1) that explained 64% of the variance. One factor was eliminated because it was not interpretable as it did not make any conceptual sense. All the remaining 11 factors loaded in a pattern broadly consistent with our theoretical expectation. Employing Amos 7.0 (Arbuckle, 1997), CFA was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation procedures to compare the one-factor with the eleven-factor model. Given the fact that there is no universal agreement about a set of fit indices used for determining overall model fit (Maruyama, 1997), we generated a number of fit indices to provide a comprehensive indication of fit (Bagozzi and Yi, 1998). The first model was our hypothesized eleven-factor model found in the EFA, in which each of the items was constrained to load on its respective latent variable. The second model was a one-factor model, in which all of the items were constrained to load on one latent variable. The one-factor model fit the data poorly as none of the fit indices approached an
acceptable level, $\chi^2 (781, N = 284) = 3,089.85, p<0.0001 (\chi^2/df = 3.96, IFI = 3.96, TLI = .44, CFI = .47, RSMEA = .1)$. The eleven-factor hypothesized model provided a much better fit, as indicated by all fit indices, $\chi^2 (741, N = 284) = 1,009.52, p < .001 (\chi^2/df = 1.65, IFI = .9, TLI = .88, CFI = .90, RSMEA = .05)$. Four out of six fit indices reached their respective recommended levels indicating that this 11-factor model fitted the data well. The chi-square difference test also revealed that the one-factor model was significantly worse than the hypothesized model, $\Delta\chi^2 (56, N = 284) = 2,080.23, p<0.001$. All items of the hypothesized model loaded significantly ($p<.05$) on the anticipated factors.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study provide support for the validity and reliability of this modified version of RSLQ as an acceptable measure of self-leadership skills and behaviors within a Chinese sample. Two expanded dimensions proposed for the modified RSLQ, relation-based natural rewards and social-oriented evaluation of beliefs and assumptions, consistently emerged in two independent student samples. In addition, task-based and relation-based self-observation items merged together to form one factor, suggesting that in Chinese culture, task-based self-observation cannot be separated with relation-based self-observation. The results suggested that this modified RSLQ is measuring self-leadership in a way that matches the specifications of self-leadership theory, thus confirming the construct validity of the modified RSLQ. Based on the results of both the EFA and CFA, we conclude that the refinements made
to the RSLQ were successful in making it more applicable for assessing Chinese people’s self-leadership behaviors and skills.

This study contributes to the self-leadership in at least five important ways. First, we extend the theoretical breadth of self-leadership by incorporating the features of social relations into self-leadership theory. Second, the Chinese version of RSLQ we developed broadens the breadth of the construct operationalization with two newly development subscales named as relation-based natural rewards and relation-based evaluation of beliefs and assumptions. Third, our validation study adds further evidence that self-leadership is a wide-spread practice in different cultures. Additionally, the study highlights the potential for inclusion of potential self-leadership approaches of members from ‘East’ and ‘West’ cultures in cross-cultural team research.

There are also a number of limitations in our study that open the way for further research to refine understanding of self-leadership. Our study utilized a student population from Hong Kong. The extent that our results are generalizable to the wider work population as well as those from the Chinese mainland requires further research. Second, the focus of this study was on the construct validity of the RSLQ, and it did not specifically examine the scale’s predictive validity. Thus further research should be done to examine whether the three relation-based
measures could increase the prediction power of self-leadership on performance, particularly in collectivistic culture.

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