

The practice of self-leadership in personal and professional development of contract nursing staff in the environment of a higher education institution

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Abstract

Self-leadership is a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward the performance of naturally motivating tasks and managing oneself to do work that must be done but that is not naturally motivating. Contract employment is increasingly becoming a trend among higher education institutions to address nursing faculty shortages. Therefore, self-leadership may be challenging for contract employers to remain positive about their temporary employment status. Studies highlight that contract staff continue to feel under-valued and that job insecurity and fewer benefits may decrease their level of motivation and self-leadership in an organisation. Self-leadership, however, may assist contract staff to regulate their own actions, personally and professionally, because the motivation to lead may promote higher productivity and a more fulfilling career. A review of literature on self-leadership was conducted within the conceptual framework. This paper provides a review of literature on self-leadership that was integrated into a conceptual framework of using power, authority and influence in the context of contract staff at an undergraduate nursing school. This concept paper therefore outlines a new framework on how self-leadership of contract workers can enhance their personal and professional development.

Keywords: Self-leadership, contract employment, personal and professional development, organisation, leadership.

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Introduction

Leadership styles in the workplace during the 20th century was largely characterised by formally designated leaders who were responsible for overseeing, directing, and controlling subordinate behaviour, while the subordinates had to follow mottos to the letter. The modern era, with its ever changing and challenging work environment, requires an empowered workforce who has both the intellectual and behavioural capabilities that will ensure optimal organisational effectiveness (Pearce & Manz, 2005). Recognition is

growing that managers can rely more and more on employee self-leadership which involves internal empowerment, instead of relying on an external person who assumes the leadership role as it has been traditionally applied (Prussia, Anderson & Manz, 1998). Having employees who are able to manage their own behaviour in such a way that it contributes positively to their performance on a personal and professional level in their work environment could be highly valuable to any organisation. One such form of leadership that can facilitate a shift to a more empowered workforce is self-leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2005).

Self-leadership seems to be effective as a strategy to contribute positively to individual's personal and professional development in the workplace, even in less favourable conditions. One such less favourable condition could include the employment of staff members in contract positions. Literature has shown that employees on contract often experience the workplace in a negative and less satisfying way in comparison with their permanently employed colleagues, which obviously may result in a negative work experience, general attitude, and comprehensive development as a person and professional in the workplace (Cacioppe, 2001). Through the application of self-leadership strategies, personal and professional development of contract staff in the workplace can be encouraged, and its practice can effectively help these staff members to manage negative perceptions associated with contract employment.

Temporary employment, including fixed term contract employment, has undergone much growth since the mid 1980's and because of an increased need for flexibility in the workplace, as well as employers 'requirements for cost reduction, has become a more universal and widespread phenomenon' (Amuedo-Dorantes, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009). Part-time employment in the United States affects nearly one in five workers. During the 1990s the temporary employment industry accounted for approximately 10% of total job growth, twice as much than during the 1980s (Kalleberg, 2009). The South African Department of Labour (2007) introduced a policy limiting the employment of foreign health professionals to three year contracts that were non-renewable. Unpredictable economic patterns, increasing competitiveness in many organisations, market factors, vacancies, leave periods, and special tasks all resulted in a continual demand to adjust employee requirements in order to avoid over- or understaffing. These factors are seen as some of the main reasons why employers hire contract workers (Foote, 2004; Mohan, 2008).

At Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), that are colleges and universities, the appointment of staff on a contract basis is also seen as a beneficial way of meeting the needs of the educational institution while containing costs in the face of tight fiscal demands, and has now become a more permanent strategy (Anthony & Valadez, 2002). The employment of employees on a contract basis

within HEIs, therefore, also includes nursing staff because of specific challenges associated with teaching in nursing programmes. Nursing schools often rely on a contractual workforce to staff their theoretical and clinical programmes (Halcomb, Andrew, Peters, Salamonson & Jackson, 2009). According to Halcomb *et al.* (2009), nearly half of all teaching-related duties are undertaken by part-time staff and comprise the full range of tasks, from face-to-face teacher to discipline-specific coordinator. Furthermore, there is currently a worldwide faculty shortage of nursing educators, even in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa which has developed from the global shortage of nurses in general, the aging of current permanent faculty employees, and higher salaries for clinical nurses (Halcomb *et al.*, 2009; National Nursing Summit Report, 2011). These staff shortages add to the already existing pressures in the sector to increase the number of nursing staff employed on contract basis (Halcomb *et al.*, 2009). In addition to these pressures, Sarmiento, Spence Laschinger and Iwasiw (2004) state that globally, the education of nurses is in the midst of rapid professional, social, and educational changes due to factors such as financial constraints because of government funding reductions, decrease enrolment of nurses, shortage of educators, fewer available resources, and increased class sizes. Staff shortages could, furthermore, result in extremely heavy workloads in nursing programmes, due a lack of funds to create new permanent teaching positions, which exacerbates the reliance on contract employers. Because of all of these factors, contract staff may experience negative attitudes and feelings that might contribute negatively to their personal and professional development in the workplace.

Nursing schools at HEIs rely heavily on contract employment to compensate for the general shortage of nurse educators in relation to factors such as aging nurse educators, higher salaries in the clinical practice, and a lack of funding to create new permanent teaching positions (Cacioppe, 2001; Halcomb *et al.*, 2009; National Nursing Summit Report, 2011). These issues result in an increase in workload pressures, in addition to increased reliance on part-time staff members that might reduce instructional effectiveness and, therefore, the quality of education at an institution (Anthony & Valadez, 2002). Contract staff might, therefore, experience these qualities in a negative and less satisfying way, which may influence their general attitude and development as a person and professional in the workplace. Similarly, nursing schools at South African universities experience the same type of challenges (National Nursing Summit Report, 2011).

In the context of management meetings at a school of nursing in the Western Cape, that has a very high portion (approximately 80%) of its staff employed on annual contract basis, staff members have indicated concerns that their contribution to the common goals of the organisation is not sufficiently valued.

Halcomb *et al.* (2009) and Cacioppe (2001) indicate that salary disagreements and heavy workloads are factors that are perceived by contract staff as the organisation lack commitment to their specific component of the staff complement. These factors are associated with the teaching of large numbers of students (in the face of staff shortages) and lack of access to basic resources essential for their teaching; for example email / computer facilities, professional development, office space, and equipment (e.g. telephone), as well as library services / text book loans. Other matters, such as limited rewards while having a high turnover rate of contract staff, have also been expressed as challenges by contract staff at the School. D'Intino, Goldsby, Houghton and Neck (2007) state that undesirable settings may reduce better personal and professional performance of staff members. This ultimately leads them to feel less proficient and independent in their work situation; therefore, they fail to reap the natural rewards from their work situation.

In spite of the challenges that contract workers may face because of their employment status, they may achieve successful performance when they embark on positive strategies, such as self-leadership strategies, to overcome the challenges that are associated with being on contract. The question posed was thus: What impact does self-leadership have in enabling contract employers to use their personal power and authority so that it positively contribute (influence) to their personal and professional development in the workplace?

Conceptual framework

Jooste (2009) defines leadership as the use of an individual's power and authority to influence others towards reaching their vision. This role is, therefore, not just limited to leaders and supervisors, but also to other members, such as contract workers, in an organisation. Likewise, the assumptions are made that self-leadership is based on the following premises:

- Using one's own authority to reach one's objectives in personal and professional development.

Through self-leadership, individuals become enabled to lead and direct themselves, and develop the capacity to self-motivate, to cope, and to generally become more efficient (Lovelace, Manz & Alves, 2007). The individual is able to make plans and get things done without being directed by others, even to the point of taking responsibility for those things that must be done even though those actions happen under unfavourable conditions. Contract workers may regard their employment status as a less favourable condition, but through the application of self-leadership strategies, they may be able to exercise more self-control in reaching their personal and professional goals. This may ultimately

shape and drive their personal development. Natural reward strategies consist of the strategy of making personal choices to include more satisfying aspects when completing a task (Manz & Sims, 2001; Manz & Neck, 2004).

- Applying one's personal *power* to achieve successes and goals thereby enhancing one's personal and professional development.

Because self-leadership enables a person to regulate his or her own actions, it creates within the individual a feeling of proficiency, as well as an ability to work independently, which may boost and inspire personal and professional performance (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007). Natural reward strategies focus on changing a person's view so that he or she focuses his or her attention on more pleasant tasks (Manz & Sims, 2001; Manz & Neck, 2004). A positive perception of self would lead contract workers to select more ambitious goals. Subsequently, more ambitious goals would reflect rising personal standards because the individual feels more positive about his or her capability to achieve these goals (Ross, 2014).

- Influencing one to reach one's personal and professional goals.

Behaviour-focused strategies help a person to become more aware of the specific behaviour that is needed to assist them with accomplishing mandatory but generally dreadful tasks, so that they are more productive (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007).

While an individual is learning to recognise negative self-talk, such as those things that people secretly tell themselves, thinking processes can become more positive when he or she replaces these thoughts with more affirmative and enabling internal dialogue. Through the practice of self-leadership strategies, such as mental imagery whereby a person would actually envision his or her successful performance of a given task in advance of actual performance, the person may be more likely to perform successfully when faced with the actual task (Manz & Sims, 2001; Manz & Neck, 2004). Constructive thought patterns enable a person to develop productive thinking processes that are useful to in a certain position of *authority*, positively contribute to work effectiveness in a certain position of *authority* (Manz & Sims, 2001; Manz & Neck, 2004).

Mental imagery can also stimulate thoughts that would cause individuals to identify with and achieve common organisational goals, causing them to act and follow through on organisational goals and to do what they say they would do. The more they develop these positive attitudes, the more they have a desire to act in positive ways (Ross, 2014). Positive feelings such as these might strengthen their desire to remain at the organisation even longer and commit to its goals, which may ultimately enhance a person's growth and development on a professional level in the organisation.

The framework below (Figure 1) is a reflection of the assumptions above, on which self-leadership can be built to highlight a person's desire for a position of authority, the need to influence self and others, and using that personal power to achieve this.

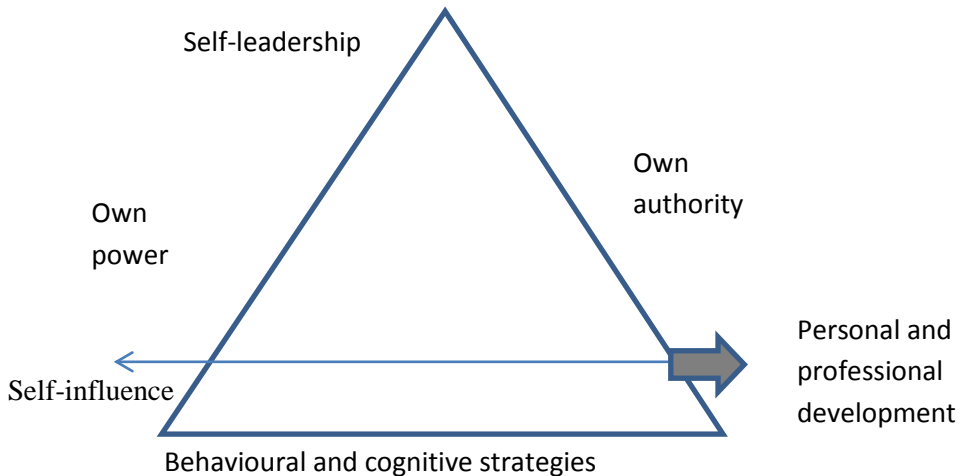


Figure 1: Components of self-leadership

Self-leadership in personal development within the workplace

Contract employment often goes hand-in-hand with the perception of job insecurity. On a personal level, this perception might incite anxiety in the person and decrease job satisfaction. This in turn may negatively affect performance and organisational productivity. Furthermore, it may also give rise to deviant behaviour; such as less effort on the job, taking longer breaks than permitted, or getting to work later (Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles & König, 2010). The more attentive an individual becomes to existing conduct or behaviour, the more it influences the individual to establish personal goals (self-reward). The current conduct of a person, therefore, changes and may in the end improve her or his level of performance, while self-reward and self-cueing could strengthen their determination to attain these goals (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007). When individuals conduct tasks that are naturally not motivating, such as re-arranging one's office, they should focus on how such tasks influence their personal time management and eventually efficiency at work. The application of a natural reward strategy could create a feeling of proficiency and satisfaction within the individual, which further boosts and inspires personal performance (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007).

Contract employment workers need to believe that the organisation values their contribution and cares about them as individuals. In a study by Feldman and Turnley (2000), it is found that a part-time contract worker experiences more

relative deprivation when comparing themselves to their permanent peers. Thus, collegial treatment should focus on building a trusting relationship and open communication with contract colleagues. The exercising of self-leadership of contract workers may place less demands on other colleagues in the academic environment, since it enables staff members to lead and direct themselves, a capacity needed to drive a person's own motivation, coping abilities, and general efficiency (Lovelace, Manz & Jose, 2007). If contract staff perceives their workplace in a negative way, they might experience limited integration into the departments where they are working. To overcome negative attitudes associated with contract work, the individual should focus on developing those self-leading personal abilities that would personally improve their general self-esteem and self-concept. A positive perception would most likely be reciprocated by an employee's organisational commitment and an attitude to assist that leads to achievement of goals (Ross, 2014). Irrespective of the conditions in the working milieu, the onus still rests on the contract employees to create a meaningful position of authority and a positive work environment for themselves.

Literature has pointed out that positive emotions could diminish negative emotions and behaviour. When people are content at their place of work, they are more persevering of tasks, an effect that may decrease anxiety and even reach beyond the individual to influence the organisation through higher job performances (Berg & Karlsen, 2014). The individual could, therefore, use their personal power to assist them with being more productive. This increased attentiveness may aid them in establishing personal objectives that will change their existing conduct and which may in the end improve their level of performance, while self-reward in acknowledging their power (e.g. knowledge) can strengthen their determination to attain these objectives (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007). Self-observation may help persons to alter either negative attitudes or unproductive behaviour that influence their personal and professional development in the workplace (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007). Positive reactions, therefore, could be associated with performance-enhancing factors; such as personal creativity, less negative stress, a feeling of better health and well-being, holistic thinking, and emotional resilience.

Enhancing professional development by means of self-leadership in the workplace

Factors that may impact on the professional development of contract workers relate strongly to the principles of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Job satisfaction could refer to a general affective reaction that contract employees hold towards their position of authority, e.g. specialisation of teaching, or a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of a person's career or job experiences. It may reveal the person's contentment with factors;

such as growth, compensation, co-workers and supervisors in her or his position of authority (Chu & Hsu, 2011; Wilkin, 2013). Self-leadership has a powerful effect on people and what they do, which can be achieved through the process of self-influence (Manz & Neck, 2004). This process stimulates people's self-motivation and self-direction that enable them to make plans and get things done without being directed by somebody else.

Organisational commitment is described as a psychological state that is characterised by an employee's relationships with the organisation, a person's agreement with organisational goals, determination to carry out greater effort for the organisation, and an ambition to remain with the organisation (Chu & Hsu, 2011). Manz (1986) notes that apart from being motivated to perform tasks that are naturally interesting and stimulating, self-leadership also helps a person to manage those obligatory responsibilities that are not naturally exciting or motivating. Furthermore, when contract workers' perceive that they are being treated with respect and consideration by an employer, they would respond with a positive attitude and work-directed effort. These attributes may eventually contribute to their general professional growth. Because of their contract status, contract staff members' commitment to the aims of the organisational and general satisfaction in the workplace should increase, which may increase their motivation (Biggs & Swailes, 2006). In addition, the negative public picture of a frustrated academic searching for permanent fulltime employment, as a result of an incommensurate salary and insufficient benefits, may create feelings of frustration for contract staff at higher education institutions that could, furthermore, decrease their motivation (Anthony & Valadez, 2002). Increased self-motivation may augment their productivity. Higher productivity would enable them to stay in the tertiary environment when contracts are renewed, due to their increased desire to develop and grow professionally in the workplace. The more individuals observe themselves (self-observation), the more aware they become of the reasons why they are involved in certain behaviour (e.g. self-goal setting) (D'Intino *et al.*, 2007). Through the practice of mental imagery, contract workers can envision their successful performance of a given task in advance of actual execution, and then they are more likely to perform successfully when faced with the actual task (Manz & Sims, 2001; Manz & Neck, 2004).

Recommendations

In order to better cope with less favourable conditions associated with their contract employment status, it is strongly recommended that these individuals include self-leadership strategies when planning personal and professional goals. In addition, organisations should also consider providing training interventions designed to support contract staff with the self-leadership strategies outlined.

Strongly embedded in these self-leadership strategies, should be the focus on individuals' ability to use their own authority, power, and influence to overcome challenges associated with contract employment. According to Halcomb *et al.* (2009), a lack of formal policy and procedure in relation to the employment and administrative support of contract staff and how they fit into the tertiary environment may pose a real challenge to employers in ensuring that contract workers are not exploited and continually managed. Such procedures have a great potential for increasing positive effects and self-management in order to deal with undesirable circumstances in the workplace.

Conclusion

While the traditional role of a leader in an organisation can never be underestimated, modern-day complexities in the workplace do place increasing demands on employees of any organisation to motivate and direct their own performance to ensure personal and professional success. In spite of the differences in employment conditions generally experienced by temporary employees, surveys through the years have shown that these staff members are generally just as satisfied with their choice of academic career and institution as their full-time or permanent counterparts (Gappa, 2008). The productivity and general well-being of these staff members and those in permanent positions are equally important and is critical for the quality and success of the institution. Self-leadership is an effective strategy to improve a positive attitude and is valuable in enabling any staff member, whether permanent or on contract, to effectively manage negative situations or experiences in the workplace.

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