# Self-Leadership and Empowering Leadership in a Western Balkan Context

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**ABSTRACT**

In to-day's dynamic business world, a trend is towards more flexible organisations with enhanced autonomy and self-leadership of employees and teams. This study introduces the concepts of self-leadership and empowering leadership in the Western Balkans. The study measures employed professionals' views of self-leadership and experienced empowering leadership. Special attention is given to possible differences in views by gender and by professionals with/without a leadership role. Two instruments are applied, the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire and the Empowering Leadership Survey (n = 265). Subsequently interviews were conducted with 10 company directors to generate their viewpoints and experiences of self-leadership and empowering leadership. Results show correlations between self-leadership and empowering leadership and show differences between men's and women's reports. The study also notes that better understanding the potential of empowering leadership leading to more self-leadership demands another type of research. A discussion of the study and suggestions for future research conclude the article.

**Keywords:** Self-leadership, Empowering Leadership, Self-management, Western Balkans, Albania
**JEL Classifications:** M12, M19, M54

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation, ICT developments, changing political forces and other factors, have led to a new context for organisations. This ever-changing business environment has been referred to as a VUCA world; volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (Lawrence, 2013). Modern organisations streamline efforts to adjust towards more responsiveness to this changing environment and modify their organisational design and functioning. Many organisations aim at more flexibility in their bureaucracy, delegating decision making and working with self-managing teams (Clegg et al., 2016; Fong and Snape, 2015; Houghton and Yoho, 2005; Quintero et al., 2015). Leadership for modern organisations in a VUCA environment is different from conventional transactional leadership; amongst many others, Furr and Dyer (2015) suggest that leadership needs to be more entrepreneurial. One of their roles is enabling adaptive processes, by creating space for

ideas advanced by entrepreneurial leaders to engage in tension with the operational system and generate innovations that scale into the system to meet the adaptive needs of the organization and its environment (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018). In modern organisations more is expected from the self-regulating functioning of employees (both professionals and management). In other words, self-leadership of individuals and teams is needed more than in the past (Manz and Sims, 2001; Pearce and Manz, 2005; Nandram and Bindlish, 2017). Leaders have the task to foster employees' self-managing and self-leading behaviour through empowering leadership. In more popular (academically informed) management literature, the need for "leading without authority" (Ferrazi, 2020) is stressed. Hamel and Zanini (2020) coin the term "humanocracy," to stress that most organizations are overburdened by bureaucracy and resilient and daring organizations are needed to cope with unrelenting change and unprecedented challenges. Relevant is also the COVID-19 aftermath, that is expected to

strengthen the need for more self-leadership, as more flexibility and self-regulation is expected from employees who may have to work from home more often without direct supervision from their managers. Indeed, self-leadership is also important in view of the emergence of teleworking (Müller and Niessen, 2019).

Self-leadership and empowering leadership are still rather unfamiliar concepts in management discussions in the Western Balkans (WB) and in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) for that matter. Researchers such as Steyrer et al. (2006), Lang et al. (2013), Auer-Rizi and Reber (2012) and Nientied and Toska (2019) have concluded that traditional/conservative leadership styles of the managers that can be labelled as transactional leadership, still succeed. However, more modern leadership styles also exist in organisations. The increasing impact of globalisation, internationalisation of companies and mass social media fosters a certain convergence of values and leadership ideals across cultures and countries. In the CEE context, these developments could lead to a reduction of the presently observable high levels of power distance and low levels of participative leadership behaviour (Lang et al., 2013), but this development takes time.

Research on self-leadership and empowering leadership has its roots in the Western world and to what extent these two concepts are experienced in and are relevant for Western Balkan countries, has not been discussed yet. To encourage an examination of self-leadership and empowering leadership, an empirical study was initiated. The purpose is to take stock of responses to questions about self-leadership and empowering leadership in Albania among professionals with higher education and a mid-career employment profile, and to search for relationships between self-leadership and empowering leadership and whether gender and having a leadership role influences the results. Ideally speaking, the study on self-leadership would search for the relationship between self-leadership plus empowering leadership in relation to organisational outcomes, answering questions such as 'Will more self-leadership and empowering leadership lead to better company results and HRM (human resource management) outcomes?' However, given the present conditions in a region without earlier studies, this ambition is too grand – firstly the concepts of self-leadership and empowering leadership have to be introduced, assessed on relevance and studied in the real-world. That is what this article sets out to do. The available recent literature (Manz, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2019; Neck et al., 2017; Bäcklander, 2019) provides good reviews of the literature on self-leadership and empowering leadership. This literature will be summarized in the next chapter before attention turns to the empirical research.

## 2. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In many textbooks on leadership (e.g. Northouse, 2016; Dinh et al., 2014; Coe, 2017) the topic of self-leadership is absent. The literature on leadership has been paying most attention to how leadership can exert influence on followers to achieve goals (Yukl, 2012). Since the 1980s the perceptions of 'the process of influencing' have been reconsidered and attention has also been paid to how working people manage and lead themselves, in other words 'the process of influencing oneself' was added (Stewart et al., 2011; Danserau et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2019). In their review of empirical evidence, a strong case for self-leadership becomes evident, argue Stewart et al. (2011, 195-196); "Having individuals regulate their own actions is consistently helpful both to them personally and to the organization. Self-leading employees have more positive affect at work. They also tend to have higher productivity and more fulfilling careers." If organisations expect more innovative behaviour at work, self-leadership skills are required (Carmeli et al., 2006; DiLiello and Houghton, 2006; Bäcklander, 2019), next to creating organizational conditions that foster such behaviour. The organizational context is important for the development of self-leadership. Two factors stand out: leadership encouraging, or not, the development of self-leadership among employees, and the nature of work to be done. Various authors (Stewart et al., 2019; Neck et al., 2017, Houghton and Yoho, 2005) have concluded that empowering forms of leadership (also labelled as super-leadership by Manz and Sims, 1989) are required for the development of more self-leadership among employees.

Self-leadership has been defined as "a comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating" (Manz, 1986, 589). Napiersky and Woods (2018, 441) state that, "Self-leadership is a concept from the organizational and management literature broadly combining processes of self-goal setting, self-regulation and self-motivation". Furtner et al. (2010; 2015) describe self-leadership competencies as managing one's own thoughts and behaviours in order to intrinsically pursue goals effectively and be productive. Bäcklander (2019, 38) provides an overview and comparison of self-leadership and similar concepts related to employee discretionary behaviours and opts herself for a work-related definition ("exerting influence over one's organizational activities."). The literature on self-leadership has studied the development and application of effective strategies for self-leadership, especially suited for contexts that involve autonomy and otherwise require significant self-influence to successfully navigate tasks (Neck and Houghton, 2006; Stewart et al., 2011, Manz, 2015). Hauschildt and Konradt (2012) showed that self-leadership has a positive effect on individual task and team member work role performance, self-efficacy and long-term career success. Important for the development of self-leadership is whether, and how, leadership gives support to self-leadership in organisations. Self-leadership of employees is relevant in its organisational context. The nature of work and the culture of the organisation, and the leadership present, are two significant factors. All employees have a leader, close by or at a distance. In some work contexts, with very structured work, along a factory production line or a work process in a bank, self-leadership is limited to staying focused and disciplined and discussing work schedules, which is called self-management rather than self-leadership (Stewart et al., 2011). Self-leadership has a continuous nature, it is constantly developing and in practice the distinction between self-management and self-leadership (Figure 1) is sometimes not made. Self-leadership does not stand on its own, it occurs within the complex social relationships that constitute organizations.

**Figure 1:** Continuum of self-leadership

| Externally managed | Self-management | Self-leadership |
|---|---|---|
| No influence over What, How, and Why of work | Influence over How of work | Influence over What, How, and Why of work |
| Dependent only on extrinsic incentives | Mainly dependent on extrinsic incentives | Dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. |

Source: adapted from Stewart et al. (2011, 190)

Houghton and Neck (2002) give a detailed description of the sub-dimensions. All but one sub-dimensions suggest that 'more is better'. The sub-dimension self-punishment works differently; some self-punishment can encourage performance (feeling a bit guilty may lead to an extra effort) but high scores on self-punishment are unlikely to help one's performance and wellbeing. Based on these strategies, an instrument in the form of a questionnaire was developed by Houghton and Neck (2005) that has been used in the present empirical study and will be discussed in the next chapter on methodology.

The concept of self-leadership has been linked to other aspects. For example, Bracht et al. (2017) adds an entrepreneurial dimension and searches for links to one's deeper values (authenticity) and to organizational culture. Houghton et al. (2004) and Ho and Besbit (2018) search for relationships between self-leadership and personality, Manz (2015) investigates moving self-leadership to a next level through dimensions of authenticity, responsibility and increasing capacity. Ross (2014) describes conditions that are needed for an individual to function as a self-leader, identifying and describing important dimensions associated with self-leadership. He reiterates the axiom widely used in leadership development training, that if an individual is unable to lead him/herself, then that individual cannot be expected to lead others ('leading yourself, leading your team, leading the business). Self-leadership is a current academic theme with a high relevance for practice.

## 2.1. Empowering Leadership

Studies show that empowering leadership can enhance employees' psychological empowerment, creativity, and performance (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Sharma and Kirkman, 2015; Spreitzer, 2008; Seibert et al., 2011). Stewart et al. (2019) stress that organizations should encourage empowering leadership that provides external support for individuals to develop self-leadership. Empowering leadership has been defined as "the process of influencing subordinates through power sharing, motivation support, and development support with intent to promote their experience of self-reliance, motivation, and capability to work autonomously within the boundaries of overall organizational goals and strategies" (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014, 489; cf. Cheong et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2018) confirmed the potential benefit of empowering leadership for individual and organizational outcomes. Amudsen and Martinsen (2014; 2015) argued that the clue for fostering self-leadership is not inspiring a vision and motivating to move beyond self-interest [typical for the transformational leadership style (Roe, 2017)] but to show behaviours like delegating authority, guiding people at work and sharing vision and own work practices. They argue

that empowering leadership is a distinct form of leadership compared to other leadership approaches, including aversive, directive, transactional, and transformational leadership, and leader–member exchange (Amudsen and Martinsen, 2015). The idea behind empowering leadership is that 'empowering' is about giving influence to rather than having influence over employees, in other words about supporting employees' autonomy (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014). Manz and Simz (1987) use comparable words – the tenet of empowering leadership is to help employees develop self-leadership. Empowering leadership assumes that leaders themselves practice self-leadership and serve as observable models for their subordinates (Manz and Sims, 1987). Amundsen and Martinsen (2014) identified eight different behavioural manifestations that underlie empowering leadership: delegating, coordinating and information sharing, encouraging initiative, encouraging goal focus, efficacy support, inspiring, modelling, and guidance, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Dimensions and behaviour of empowering leadership

| Dimension | Behaviour (sub-dimension) |
|---|---|
| Power sharing | Delegation |
| | Coordination and information sharing |
| Motivation support | Encourage initiative |
| | Encourage goal focus |
| | Efficacy support |
| | Inspiring behaviour |
| Development support | Guidance |
| | Modelling |
| | Visualising successful performance |

Source: Amundsen and Martinsen (2014)

Cheong et al. (2019, 36) clearly explain the difference between self-leadership and empowering leadership, as follows "the concept of empowering leadership is clearly different from self-leadership." Empowering leadership is a set of *leader behaviors* intended to enhance the followers' perceived meaningfulness and confidence toward their work, participation, and latitude of autonomy. In contrast, self-leadership is a *set of focal individual behaviors or strategies* that employees exert over themselves to control their own behaviors" [italics in original]. The relation between empowering leadership and self-leadership is important for the concept of empowering leadership because a positive relationship between experienced empowering leadership and employees' self-leadership looks plausible. Govender (2017) found in a South African case study on municipal services that employees perform better when they are empowered by their leaders and that there is a positive relationship between work effort and service delivery. On basis of longitudinal data Yun et al. (2006) concluded that leaders' empowering behaviours had a positive impact on followers' self-leadership interacting with followers' need for autonomy. Ho and Nesbit (2014), amongst others, demonstrated the relevance of empowering leadership in the Chinese organisational context. Fong and Snape (2015) report findings suggesting that empowering leadership is associated with psychological empowerment at both the individual and group levels. Lee et al. (2018) reviewed literature and noted that scholars have cautioned about the potential negative effects of unregulated employee empowerment (overconfidence for example), and that too much or too little empowerment may be dysfunctional for the

optimal functioning of employees. Based on a detailed review of empowering leadership, Cheong et al. (2019) identify various instruments to measure empowering leadership, and conclude with Chong et al. (2017), that in terms of measurement development perspective, the area of empowering leadership is still imperfect. However, a question is whether in the real organizational world, conditions can be found that give perfect research results – organizational conditions are not the same as a medical laboratory.

The theme of self-leadership and empowering leadership has hardly, if at all, been investigated in CEE countries, let alone in the Western Balkan region. To fill this knowledge gap, a study was designed to explore self-leadership, empowering leadership and possible correlation between the two concepts. In addition, two themes receive special attention. The first concerns possible gender differences. The theory of self-leadership has a focus on individual task achievement, self-reliance and autonomy, and this could relate more to men's gender roles than to women's gender roles – which could be more oriented towards nurturing and the communal (Ho and Nesbit, 2018). Ho and Nesbit (2018) state that self-leadership strategies help all individuals strive for personal achievement, self-reliance and competence, but that individual's practice of self-leadership strategies is more consistent with Chinese men's gender roles than women's roles. However, they found no significant difference. It is worthwhile to study whether a WB context shows differences between men's and women's reports. The second theme is whether self-leadership strategies of employees with a leadership role differ from those of employees without a leadership role. The literature does not reveal, as far as we could check, any details on this topic. An expected number of employees with a leadership role in the survey made an investigation into this topic possible.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates perceptions on self-leadership and empowering leadership in the Western Balkan region though an in-depth study in Albania among higher educated professionals who are expected to enjoy a degree of autonomy in their job. Respondents filled out a questionnaire on self-leadership and a questionnaire on empowering leadership behaviour of the respondent's manager or supervisor. After finishing the questionnaire survey and the analysis of survey data, the researchers conducted individual interviews with leaders in organisations to substantiate the findings of the survey. For self-leadership, the Revised Self-leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ) of Houghton and Neck (2002) was selected. This questionnaire has three dimensions with 9 sub-dimensions (Figure 3). Neck and Houghton (2002) tested the instrument and concluded that on basis of validity and reliability, the RSLQ is a good measure of self-leadership skills and behaviours. The present study uses the original English language questionnaire with 35 questions among our target group – all respondents speak English. In both questionnaires, all measures were rated on seven-point symmetrical Likert type scale. An open question was added to the self-leadership section of the questionnaire; "If you can give one (1) advise to yourself to improve your self-leadership competencies, what will you recommend?" For the concept of empowering leadership, the Empowering Leadership

**Figure 3:** Dimensions and strategies of self-leadership

| Dimension | Strategy (sub-dimension) |
|---|---|
| Behavioural focused strategies | Self-goal setting |
| | Self-reward |
| | Self-punishment |
| | Self-observation |
| | Self-cueing |
| Natural reward strategies | Focusing thoughts on natural rewards and adding pleasant aspects to work |
| Constructive thought pattern strategies | Visualising successful performance |
| | Self-talk |
| | Evaluating beliefs and assumptions |

Source: Houghton and Neck (2002)

Survey of Amundsen and Martinsen (2014) was used. This survey was found to be a valid measure for empowering leadership. To the empowering leadership section of the questionnaire, an open question was added: "If you can give one (1) advise to your leader to improve him./herself as a leader, what will you recommend?", and It was expected that respondents would give priorities aligned with the questionnaire they had just completed. Organizational tenure (measured in years), ownership, number of employees, leadership role, gender, educational level, and age were included as control variables. The two questionnaires are shown in Annex 1 to this article.

The questionnaires were filled out by professional specialists and managers reporting to a manager (unlike CEO's). They are working in various sectors, from services such as banking, tourism and retail, to sectors like energy and medical, and have roles as specialists in their field, as project manager or team leader / manager. Questionnaires have not been sent out via e-mail because that procedure leads in our experience to lower quality of information in Albania, as explained by Nientied and Shutina (2017). Distributing questionnaires through a network (of trusted people) and in hard copy gives much better results. Therefore, purposive homogeneous sampling was applied. First, the questionnaire tested among a restricted number of observations and it appeared that the questionnaire worked well. Then, after a briefing of the objective and the implementation of the study, questionnaire forms were given to post-graduate students studying in Polis University's executive MBA in the module Human Resource Management. They were introduced to the questionnaire, were asked to fill out the questionnaire themselves and then to give questionnaires to 5 people in their network, have the questionnaires filled out and have a discussion with the respondents about their scores, to check whether respondents had understood everything and to discuss about the final open-ended question (that also functioned as an overall check on the answers given). Post graduate students (with relatively more females) are typically in the age category of 26 to 35 years, have a good command of English, and jobs with a degree of autonomy. The survey part was conducted during February-March 2019 and January 2020. In total, 304 completed questionnaires were received. Questionnaires from respondents working in small organisations (<10 employees) were excluded from the study (n=34). As a result, 265 valid questionnaires were processed. The study has limitations. The survey sample is not representative for the whole Albanian work force since it

has a strong bias towards English speaking workers (i.e. higher educated people) because the original English questionnaires were used. Despite testing the questionnaire, it was decided to skip one question (no. 23) of the RSQL as the formulation of the question appeared to be quite difficult. The study has an unknown bias (towards higher educated persons, English speaking, female respondents) and is therefore not representative for an identified segment of Albania's population. Also, questionnaire surveys assume accurate and open answers from respondents, but self-reports may have self-favouring response biases – we will come back to this point in the concluding reflection of this article.

In Tables 1 and 2, the Cronbach alpha's for sub-dimensions are depicted. The numbers behind the names of the sub-dimensions refer to question numbers in the questionnaires. They are given in Annex 1 and 2. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha$) was used to estimate the reliability of the dimension's sub-scales investigated in the study, both for self-leadership and empowering leadership. Results suggest for an acceptable reliability of dimensions sub-scales in self-leadership since the Cronbach alphas exceed 0.7. The same holds for the dimensions sub-scales in empowering leadership, excluding delegating sub-scale, which shows an alpha of 0.65 (alpha goes up to 0.795 if question 1 is deleted). However, in the framework of this study it can be acceptable as suggested by Hair et al. (2006).

# 4. RESULTS

## 4.1. Survey Results

The sample was composed of n=265 observations, 169 females (63.8%) and 96 males (36.2%). The age distribution is shown in Table 3.

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha's sub-dimensions self-leadership SL (n=265), numbers between [ ] refer to survey questions in the questionnaire**

| | |
|---|---|
| SL_D1_Vizualising successful performance [Q: 1,10,19,27,33] | 0.81 |
| SL_D2_Self-goal setting [Q: 2,11,20,28,34] | 0.81 |
| SL_D3_Self-talk [Q: 3,12,21] | 0.87 |
| SL_D4_Self-reward [Q: 4,13,22] | 0.89 |
| SL_D5_Evaluating beliefs assumptions [Q: 5,14,29] | 0.73 |
| SL_D6_Self-punishment [Q: 6,15,24,30] | 0.81 |
| SL_D7_Self-observation [Q: 7,16,25,31] | 0.73 |
| SL_D8_Focus on natural rewards [Q: 8,17,26,32,35] | 0.74 |
| SL_D9_Self-cueing [Q: 9,18] | 0.88 |

**Table 2: Cronbach's alpha's sub-dimensions empowering leadership EL (n=265), numbers between [..] refer to survey questions in the questionnaire**

| | |
|---|---|
| EL_D1_Delegating [Q: 1,9,17] | 0.65 |
| EL_D2_Initiative [Q: 2,10,18] | 0.81 |
| EL_D3_Goal Focus [Q: 3,11,19] | 0.70 |
| EL_D4_Efficacy Support [Q: 4,12,20] | 0.71 |
| EL_D5_Inspiring [Q: 5,13,21] | 0.83 |
| EL_D6_Coordinating [Q: 6,14,22] | 0.76 |
| EL_D7_Modeling [Q: 7,15,23] | 0.82 |
| EL_D8_Guidance [Q: 8,16,24] | 0.82 |

Based on the gender composition and age group distribution of observations, the sample has a bias towards younger age categories and towards females (Table 4). Since the details of employed workers are not known, details of this bias cannot be given. From the researchers' professional experience, it can be shared that in Albania more female professionals than male professionals work as employees; employed women ensure a certain stability of household income and a monthly salary gives families financial security. The percentage of males among self-employed professionals is likely to be higher than the percentage of females.

The sectoral composition of the sample shows that 78.5% of the respondents work in the private for-profit sector, 3.8% in private not for profit and 17.7% in the semi-public sector. More than 50% of the respondents has a leadership role within the organization while the rest are specialists/professionals without leadership role, as Table 4 shows. The category 'other' includes coordinators and project managers with a leadership role, but without HR responsibility. A somewhat higher percentage among females works in a job without a leadership component compared to men.

Specialist professionals, employees with a supervisory or management role and others all have a leader to whom they have to report – the highest rank in organisations was excluded. Therefore, self-leadership and empowering leadership experienced is relevant for all categories. The dimensions average scores on the 7-point scales the SL and EL questionnaires are shown in Tables 5 and 6. We noted a difference of averages between scores of males and females (with females scoring higher than males) and performed an independent samples t-test. They are also shown in Tables 5 and 6.

On a scale from 1 to 7 (1 is completely disagree, 7 = completely agree), the scores are on average positive. The lowest scores in the empowering leadership survey concern modelling and coordination, whether the manager show his/her way of working to his professionals or explains his/her own goals to professionals and ensures alignment of goals. Interesting is the significant difference between answers from male and female respondents regarding sub-dimensions like self-talk, evaluating beliefs and assumptions, self-punishment and to a lesser extent self-observation and

**Table 3: Age groups (n=265)**

| Age group | % |
|---|---|
| 18-29 years | 57.4 |
| 30-40 years | 34.7 |
| 41-50 years | 4.9 |
| 51 years and older | 3.0 |

**Table 4: Roles of employees in the companies**

| | Total | % | Males, n | % | Females, n | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Specialist | 130 | 49.1 | 42 | 43.8 | 88 | 52.1 |
| Supervises 1-5 | 42 | 15.8 | 16 | 16.7 | 26 | 15.4 |
| Supervises 6+ | 63 | 23.8 | 32 | 33.3 | 31 | 18.3 |
| Other | 30 | 11.3 | 6 | 6.3 | 24 | 14.2 |
| Total | 265 | 100 | 96 | 100 | 169 | 100 |

efficacy support. The differences (Table 6) observed cannot be sufficiently explained in the framework of this study and demand other research. Correlations between self-leadership / empowering leadership and duration of employment in the company and age groups did not show any noteworthy or surprising correlation.

Possible differences in answers between specialist and employees with a leadership role were also checked and the results are in Table 7 for the different dimensions.

Employees with a leadership role scored slightly higher in natural reward strategies and self – punishment in self-leadership strategies. While, employees score higher in all three empowering strategies dimensions, power sharing, motivation support and development support. Nevertheless, specialists and leadership role group means are not statistically significantly different as suggested by the independent sample test t-statistics and significance level. That meaning, having or not a leadership role within the organisation says little regarding leadership strategies and empowering leadership behaviours.

Correlations between dimensions of empowering leadership and self-leadership based on all questionnaires are shown in Table 8.

What can be observed is that the 3 dimensions of self-leadership show high correlations – which should not come as a surprise - and that the correlation between the three dimensions and the sub-dimension of self-punishment, is substantially lower. The correlation between self-leadership dimensions and empowering leadership dimensions, is positive, but lower. The sub-dimension 'self-punishment' shows different correlation with most dimensions (the average score goes with a high standard deviation, Table 5), indicating that this dimension is different from the other dimensions, as explained.

In both questionnaires two open questions were included: (i) in the self-leadership questionnaire the open question was "If you can give one (1) advise to yourself to improve your self-leadership competencies, what will you recommend?"; and in the empowering leadership questionnaire the question was (ii) "If you can give one (1) advise to your leader to improve him./herself as a leader, what will you recommend?." Self-advices aiming at improving self-leadership competences are quite different including: more self-confidence, courage, self-esteem, positive, motivated, trusty, participative, social and caring, realistic, organized and correct, delegate powers, ambitious and take more risks etc. Regarding empowering leadership, the main subject was communicating

**Table 5: Average scores on sub-dimension self-leadership, n=265**

| | Average (total) | Standard deviation | Average Males | Average Females | t-Test | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SL_D1_Vizualising successful performance | 5.29 | 1.34 | 5.13 | 5.38 | −1.77 | 0.08 |
| SL_D2_Self-goal setting | 5.60 | 1.12 | 5.48 | 5.67 | −1.51 | 0.13 |
| SL_D3_Self-talk | 5.11 | 1.65 | 4.60 | 5.36 | −4.25 | 0.00 |
| SL_D4_Self-reward | 5.06 | 1.47 | 4.82 | 5.19 | −2.04 | 0.04 |
| SL_D5_Evaluating beliefs assumptions | 5.13 | 1.23 | 5.10 | 5.43 | −2.74 | 0.01 |
| SL_D6_Self-punishment | 4.83 | 1.81 | 4.37 | 5.09 | −4.47 | 0.00 |
| SL_D7_Self-observation | 5.29 | 1.48 | 5.13 | 5.38 | −1.98 | 0.05 |
| SL_D8_Focus on natural rewards | 5.50 | 1.31 | 5.47 | 5.51 | −0.41 | 0.68 |
| SL_D9_Self-cueing | 5.37 | 1.87 | 5.08 | 5.54 | −3.43 | 0.00 |

**Table 6: Average scores on sub-dimension empowering leadership, n=265**

| | Average (total) | Standard deviation | Average Males | Average Females | t-Test | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EL_D1_Delegating | 4.97 | 1.30 | 4.81 | 5.06 | −1.48 | 0.14 |
| EL_D2_Initiative | 5.08 | 1.40 | 5.03 | 5.11 | −0.42 | 0.68 |
| EL_D3_Goal Focus | 4.93 | 1.31 | 4.98 | 4.92 | 0.06 | 0.93 |
| EL_D4_Efficacy Support | 5.16 | 1.25 | 4.98 | 5.27 | −1.82 | 0.07 |
| EL_D5_Inspiring | 5.25 | 1.34 | 5.16 | 5.29 | −0.78 | 0.43 |
| EL_D6_Coordinating | 4.54 | 1.36 | 4.53 | 4.54 | −0.03 | 0.97 |
| EL_D7_Modeling | 4.27 | 1.51 | 4.05 | 4.40 | −1.87 | 0.06 |
| EL_D8_Guidance | 4.78 | 1.40 | 4.64 | 4.86 | −1.20 | 0.23 |

**Table 7: Average scores on dimensions for specialist and employees with leadership role**

| | Average (total) | Standard deviation | Specialists | Leadership role | t-Test | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SL_Behav | 5.33 | 0.87 | 5.38 | 5.28 | 0.94 | 0.35 |
| SL_Reward | 5.39 | 0.87 | 5.37 | 5.41 | −0.35 | 0.72 |
| SL_Constr | 5.21 | 1.08 | 5.36 | 5.12 | 1.40 | 0.16 |
| SL_Punish | 4.83 | 1.32 | 4.76 | 4.89 | −0.85 | 0.40 |
| EL_Power | 4.76 | 1.21 | 4.64 | 4.86 | −1.50 | 0.13 |
| EL_Motiv | 5.10 | 1.16 | 5.03 | 5.18 | −1.02 | 0.31 |
| EL_Devel | 4.53 | 1.39 | 4.49 | 4.56 | −0.42 | 0.68 |

SL-Behav: Behavioural focused strategies, SL-Reward: Natural reward strategies, SL-Constr: Constructive thought pattern strategies,
SL Punish: Self-punishment, EL-Power: Power sharing, EL-Motiv: Motivation Support, EL Devel: EL Development Support.

**Table 8: Pearson correlation between dimensions SL (self-leadership) and EL (Empowering Leadership), n = 265**

|  | SL_Behav | SL_Reward | SL_Constr | SL_Punish | EL_Power | ELMotiv | EL_Devel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SL_Behav | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| SL_Reward | 0.79** | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| SL_Constr | 0.71** | 0.60** | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| SL_Punish | 0.55** | 0.62** | 0.37** | 1 |  |  |  |
| EL_Power | 0.37** | 0.42** | 0.32** | 0.17** | 1 |  |  |
| EL_Motiv | 0.39** | 0.46** | 0.34** | 0.21** | 0.88** | 1 |  |
| EL_Devel | 0.39** | 0.39** | 0.31** | 0.15* | 0.82** | 0.79** | 1 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). SL-Behav: Behavioural focused strategies, SL-Reward: Natural reward strategies, SL-Constr: Constructive thought pattern strategies, SL Punish: Self-punishment, EL-Power: Power sharing, EL-Motiv: Motivation Support, EL Devel: EL Development Support

with and informing employees, followed by honesty, trust and loyalty to employees. Communication, information sharing and participation, honesty and trust to employees are among the main advices suggested by respondents for their leaders to improve their leadership skills. Also, respondents suggest that their leaders should be more organized and improve their managing skills, promote effective collaboration and cooperation within the team, listen more and more control over stressful situations, delegate more and support the staff. A good leader should inspire, innovate and encourage his or her employees.

## 4.2. Interviews

After the analysis of results, 10 interviews with company leaders were held. The selection of respondents was from the network of the researchers, with representatives from large, smaller and semi-public companies. This selection is a far from representative sample since it signifies a selection of more modern leadership. However, all respondents have experience in more traditional, hierarchical organizations. The smallest company directed by our respondents was a consultancy office with 25 employees, the largest a company with well over 500 employees. The age of the respondents ranged from 36 – 45 years old, all respondents have a MSc/MBA degree. The respondents are all directors / CEOs of significant companies operating nationally and internationally in sectors like ICT, transport, tourism, banking, trade and construction. Respondents recognise the importance of self-leadership and empowering leadership and what these practices can contribute to organizations. They note however that the word leadership has become a buzzword - it is overused, often inappropriately used and not well understood by the average manager in Albania. The term leadership is frequently used to embellish social media profiles. This is unhelpful for promoting the expressions of self-leadership and empowering leadership. Respondents see the concept of self-leadership as a driver for self-fulfilment, self-esteem, self-confidence, and the like. Self-leadership can be taught (by good teachers and using inspiring cases) or cultivated over time in organizations. Respondents point out that the theme should be part of academic curricula.

Within their own organizations, practices of self-leadership are promoted in structured and ad-hoc manners. The choice between these two solutions is related to the size of the company and available (financial) resources dedicated to human resource development. Some larger companies with more employees and more financial resources, promote self-leadership in structured way, multi-annual and multi-level, though continuous training programs like management development. That helps to ensure the continuity in leading positions in the business, supports development of career paths, and staff motivation. In general, advancement and training of self-leadership is still rather uncommon, even within large businesses. In smaller companies, with budget constraints, ad-hoc solutions are applied aiming more at motivating employees to perform better. Often, smaller companies prefer professional (technical) training rather than training soft skills and this can be ascribed to budget limitations and the prevailing management culture. In semi-public organisations the approach to self-leadership is blurred, mostly because of rigid organisational structures and leadership power relationships. In these institutions, financial resources are not a constraint, but the dominant management culture is.

Regarding employee autonomy, respondents share that in general in Albania managers and professionals do have some autonomy but within well-defined boundaries. The nature of autonomy depends also on factors like company size and type of operations. Large companies try to promote autonomy of middle managers and professionals as a tool to boost self-leadership skills and develop confidence in themselves and in the company. In smaller size companies, with company owners often involved in the management, less autonomy is given to employees and more control is exerted. The interviewed leaders suggest that the poor culture of doing business (including a limited educational background and limited knowledge), a lack of trust in others sometimes employees behaviour (where they do not want to have autonomy, prefer to be followers and not accept more responsibilities) explain the present situation in Albania. The interviewed leaders recognise the importance and added value of empowering leadership, defining it as a key element for self-leadership and creation of value for the company. All the interviewed leaders had in their earlier career own experiences, in various practices, of being subject of empowering leadership. These practices enhanced their confidence and self-leadership skills. In the cases when empowering leadership was experienced, the respondents exploited the opportunities offered and this resulted in promotion to a higher management position. On the other hand, respondents who did not experience empowering leadership but more transactional and controlling leadership styles, left the company and found employment in other companies or started their own business. The interviewed leaders suggest that empowering leadership is not very common the in the Albanian context, authoritarian and controlling management styles are still ubiquitous.

Now being leaders themselves, the respondents try to promote empowering leadership in a structured way (in large companies),

try to practice this style to uncover employees' potentials (in smaller companies) or it in a more informal manner (in the cases of semi-public organizations). Empowering leadership is applied through delegating of tasks, motivation through different pay schemes, through information sharing and effective communication such as an 'open door policy'. Among the respondents, gender is not seen as a factor that makes a difference in self-leadership and empowering leadership. The interviewed leaders suggest that empowering leadership depends on one's own culture and attitude in doing business, and the type of business, rather than being a gender-based issue.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to initiate an academic discussion in the Balkans about the two concepts self-leadership and empowering leadership and their interrelations. We conclude on basis of theory and our professional and academic experience that the concepts signify a pertinent theme for Balkan (and CEE) leadership studies. Empirical research is not easy due to existing processes in organizations and to inherent limitations of research based on self-reports and the significance of the work 'leadership'. Theory suggests that an empowering leadership style stimulates self-leadership. The correlation between empowering leadership dimensions and self-leadership dimensions is in the range of 0.3 to 0.4; significant but not remarkably high. The connection between empowering leadership and self-leadership of employees may sound as common-sense, but how the relationship between empowering leadership and self-leadership exactly works in practice is not so obvious. A statistically positive relationship between empowering leadership and self-leadership does not necessarily demonstrate that empowering leadership leads to higher score self-leadership. For example, a situation can be imagined where leaders with empowering leadership characteristics appoint professionals with more developed self-leadership qualities, and leaders with low empowering leadership may search for conforming followers who don't ask difficult questions or want more autonomy. Also, employees may select job opportunities in such a fashion. Modern and traditional organizations co-exist (Nientied and Shutina, 2017) in the Western Balkans and professionals who have a higher degree of self-leadership and want to have adequate autonomy are likely to aim at jobs in modern organisations, and other professionals may go for other reasons (a structured environment, clear tasks, etc.) to more conventional organisations.

This study, both the questionnaire survey and interviews conducted, builds on self-reports based on personal experiences and mindsets. Aside from research issues such as 'do employees fully understand or acknowledge the influence exerted onto them', and 'can employees and managers give an accurate self-report on self-leadership', the reliability of the research may be threatened by different biases. Three are mentioned; the social desirability bias (SDB), a tendency of individuals to present themselves in a favourable manner relative to prevailing social norms, a self-serving bias (SSB), meaning that human behaviour is affected by mental strategies which aim to protect or enhance individuals' self-perceptions, and a self-enhancement bias (SEB), the perception of being better than the average person (Alicke and Govorun, 2005).

These types of biases are hard to grasp. Brenner and De Lamater (2016) build on identity theory to explain measurement bias. SSB has been recently discussed in relation to self-leadership and personality traits by Cristofaro and Giardino (2020). They show that individuals with strong self-leadership are more likely to be victim of SSB. These three biases (and perhaps others as well) must have played a role in the questionnaire survey of this study, but their magnitude and impact are unknown for researchers cannot investigate the minds of the respondents. Various intertwined psychological processes (based on how respondents perceive their own situation to be, how they would want it to be, how they would want to represent their situation to others) cannot be disentangled. A review discussion was organized with four respondents after they completed the questionnaire in order to get more insight in their motives for answering the survey questions. It appeared that respondents with different work contexts experiencing different leadership styles (from transactional to more empowering leadership) did not give very different scores on empowering leadership. This is a point to be noted when evaluating the value of this study (and questionnaire research in general); there is no objective norm or standard for self-leadership or empowering leadership, personal experiences are measured.

The present study used the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ). This questionnaire has performed well among the higher educated and English-speaking target group. In 2012 Houghton et al. (2012) presented an Abbreviated Self-Leadership Questionnaire (ASLQ), which is shorter (it reduces the 35-item questionnaire to only 9 items) and easier than RSQL. If self-leadership studies are pursued among other groups, a translated version of the ASQL may be considered. Also, recent experiences from empirical research in the educational sectors in Greece (Ioannis, 2019) and Turkey (Bozyigit, 2019) may be taken into account.

Three subjects are submitted to further develop insight into self-leadership and empowering leadership in the WB and CEE regions. Firstly, qualitative research is needed to better grasp the real-world practices and the drives of respondents. Managers who consciously have been trying to implement empowering leadership practices can be asked about their experiences. Among specialists, in-depth interviews can be organised to uncover their self-leadership practices and drives, and to what extent they have experienced positive influences from their managers. A second type of follow-up research recommended is to look more closely to the work context. In conventional organisations based on tight bureaucratic procedures, room for empowering leadership seems to be limited. This may be functional; Manz (2015) argues that self-leadership is not a panacea and that its significance will vary depending on the situation; unchecked self-leadership could foster self-serving behaviour that reflects corporate social irresponsibility when motivated by personal interests. But in most organizations, there is ample space for giving employees more autonomy that they can responsibly handle. How HRM could support employees' self-leadership capacities is worth studying in this regard. A third option for advancing our understanding of self-leadership and empowering leadership in the WB context, is exploring working with a translated version of the shorter ASQL, among respondents with different levels of education, and different types of education.

Self-leadership has been found relevant for students (Neck et al., 2017) and also looks like a meaningful research field.

# 6. CONCLUSION

This study has introduced the concepts of self-leadership and empowering leadership in the WB. It is concluded that the present study serves as a start for further exploration. At face value self-leadership and empowering leadership are relevant for the WB and CEE, not only for modern organisations but especially for more conventional organisations. Follow up research is needed after this first stock-taking. In the Western world, notably the United States, many studies have already been carried out, resulting in detailed directions for further research (cf. Cheong et al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2019). In the WB, and in CEE, first better insight is needed into various aspects of employees and the context of organizations.

This study can stimulate organizations to reflect on their current leadership practices and develop a view whether empowering leadership and self-leadership can be beneficial to the organization. To this end the researchers will write an accessible article for a business magazine on the topic and inform organizations on these issues.

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# ANNEX

## Annex 1: Self-leadership survey

| | Completely disagree | | | | Completely agree | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

1. I use my imagination to picture myself performing well on important tasks.
2. I establish specific goals for my own performance.
3. Sometimes I find I'm talking to myself (out loud or in my head) to help me deal with difficult problems I face.
4. When I do an assignment especially well, I like to treat myself to some thing or activity I especially enjoy.
5. I think about my own beliefs and assumptions whenever I encounter a difficult situation.
6. I tend to judge myself negatively in my mind when I have performed poorly.
7. I make a point to keep track of how well I'm doing at work (school).
8. I focus my thinking on the pleasant rather than the unpleasant aspects of my job activities
9. I use written notes to remind myself of what I need to accomplish.
10. I visualize myself successfully performing a task before I do it.
11. I consciously have goals in mind for my work efforts.
12. Sometimes I talk to myself (out loud or in my head) to work through difficult situations.
13. When I do something well, I reward myself with a special event such as a good dinner, movie, shopping trip, etc.
14. I try to mentally evaluate the accuracy of my own beliefs about situations I am having problems with.
15. I tend to be tough on myself in my thinking when I have not done well on a task.
16. I usually am aware of how well I'm doing as I perform an activity.
17. I try to surround myself with objects and people that bring out my desirable behaviours.
18. I use concrete reminders (e.g., notes and lists) to help me focus on things I need to accomplish.
19. Sometimes I picture in my mind a successful performance before I actually do a task.
20. I work toward specific goals I have set for myself.
21. When I'm in difficult situations I will sometimes talk to myself (out loud or in my head) to help me get through it.
22. When I have successfully completed a task, I often reward myself with something I like.
23. I openly articulate and evaluate my own assumptions when I have a disagreement with someone else
24. I feel guilt when I perform a task poorly.
25. I pay attention to how well I'm doing in my work.
26. When I have a choice, I try to do my work in ways that I enjoy rather than just trying to get it over with.
27. I purposefully visualize myself overcoming the challenges I face
28. I think about the goals that I intend to achieve in the future.
29. I think about and evaluate the beliefs and assumptions I hold.
30. I sometimes openly express displeasure with myself when I have not done well.
31. I keep track of my progress on projects I'm working on.
32. I seek out activities in my work that I enjoy doing.
33. I often mentally rehearse the way I plan to deal with a challenge before I actually face the challenge.
34. I write specific goals for my own performance.
35. I find my own favourite ways to get things done.
36. OPEN QUESTION
If you can give one (1) advise to yourself to improve your self-leadership competencies, what will you recommend?

**Annex 2: Empowering leadership survey**

| | Completely disagree | | | | Completely agree | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

1. My leader communicates to me that I shall take responsibility
2. My leader encourages me to take initiative
3. My leader is concerned that I reach my goals
4. My leader listens to me
5. My leader is enthusiastic about what we can achieve
6. My leader coordinates his/her goals with my goals
7. My leader lets me see how he/she organizes his/her work
8. My leader shows me how I can improve my way of working
9. My leader gives me power
10. My leader encourages me to start with my own defined tasks
11. My leader makes me work towards goal achievement
12. My leader recognizes my strong and weak sides
13. My leader conveys a bright view of the future
14. My leader talks with me about his/her own and my goals
15. My leader's planning of his/her work is visible to me
16. My leader guides me in how I can do my work in the best way
17. My leader gives me authority over issues within my department
18. My leader encourages me to start work tasks on my own initiative
19. My leader is concerned that I work in a goal-directed manner
20. My leader invites me to use my strong sides when needed
21. My leader shows that he/she is optimistic about the future
22. My leader discusses shared affairs with me
23. I gain insights into how my leader arranges his/her workdays
24. My leader tells me about his/her own way of organizing his/her work
25. Open question:
If you can give one (1) advise to your leader to improve him/herself as a leader, what will you recommend?