

# Self-leadership: a value-added strategy for human resource development

Self-leadership

Kyung Nam Kim

*Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development (EAHR), Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA*

Jia Wang

*Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA, and*

Peter Williams

*Department of Educational Leadership, Texas A&M University Commerce, Commerce, Texas, USA*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In a rapidly shifting market, organizations seek more diverse and innovative employee development interventions. Yet, these initiatives may have limited impact without employees' engagement. This conceptual paper aims to propose self-leadership as a value-added strategy for promoting both individual and organizational development.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors conducted a conceptual analysis with three case examples. The cases were purposefully selected, aiming to comprehend how the concept of self-leadership has been applied within organizations and to identify real-life examples where self-leadership has been adopted as an organizational strategy.

**Findings** – This study demonstrates that self-leadership plays a significant role in facilitating human resource development (HRD) initiatives. Specifically, the authors illustrate how self-leadership interventions in companies empower individuals to take charge of their development, aligning personal and organizational goals. When effectively applied, self-leadership strategies positively impact HRD practices in the areas of training and development, organization development and career development, yielding benefits for both employees and employers.

**Originality/value** – This study addresses knowledge gaps in the emerging field of self-leadership in HRD by providing three companies' examples of how self-leadership can add value to HRD. The findings offer unique insights into the synergy between self-leadership and HRD, benefiting academics interested in this line of inquiry and HRD practitioners seeking innovative approaches to employee and organizational development.

**Keywords** Self-leadership, Human resource development, Training and development, Organization development, Career development, Conceptual analysis

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

Sudden and gradual changes to work life have exposed a fragile and now fractured façade of hierarchical control in the workplace, prompting a call for research on self-leadership



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(Zhang *et al.*, 2021), “the process of influencing one’s self” (Goldsby *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). COVID-19 prompted a quick shift from in-person to remote work in early 2020, a move enabled in part by the gradually increasing capabilities of digital communication and AI technologies over the last few decades. This shift to remote and AI-assisted work coincided with greater social awareness and discontent with racial and ethnic disparities in health, work and income. In this context, human resource development (HRD) can play an important role in dealing with these drastic changes by challenging traditional approaches to leadership and management, particularly those related to employee agency, as described in the self-leadership literature.

In light of these profound and unexpected changes, self-motivation and self-regulation, two concepts that have been long recognized as important to employee and organization management, have become more critical than ever. As an example, remote employees no longer work under direct supervision in a shared facility (Nientied and Toska, 2021) and must lead themselves (Gregersen and Lehman, 2021). This change challenges the conventional top-down management and leadership styles that heavily rely on direct employee supervision. In resonance with these dynamic circumstances, extensive research on self-leadership has been conducted across diverse fields, including management, applied psychology (Mao *et al.*, 2024), education and human resource management (Goldsby *et al.*, 2021; Stewart *et al.*, 2019). The recent rise of the gig economy, for example, prompted scholars such as Mao *et al.* (2024) to explore how self-leadership contributes to thriving among gig workers in an Asian context, who are digitally monitored beyond formal organizational affiliations. However, after a thorough literature search, we found self-leadership to be notably absent in HRD journals.

Researchers have discerned three pivotal dimensions of self-leadership—self-regulation, self-management and self-motivation (Alnakhli *et al.*, 2020; Goldsby *et al.*, 2021). In self-regulation, individuals monitor their progress toward desired states, while self-management involves strengthening constructive behavioral skills (Alnakhli *et al.*, 2020). Self-motivation encompasses initiatives that promote one’s goal-setting actions (Liu *et al.*, 2023). These three dimensions are closely associated with three key theories that underpin self-leadership: self-regulation, social-cognitive and self-determination. The synergy between these dimensions and theories highlights *individual agency*, emphasizing one’s capability to influence, regulate and motivate changes in cognition and behaviors (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020).

Self-leadership and HRD share the critical mission of enhancing individual development, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance. For example, using self-influencing strategies allows employees to effectively fulfill their responsibilities and make contributions to their organizations (Ghosh, 2015). Similarly, HRD aims to cultivate employees’ knowledge and skills, promote individual career development (CD) and improve organizational effectiveness through diverse strategic interventions (Swanson, 2022). Despite this shared goal and mission, self-leadership and HRD have rarely been discussed together, and very little attention has been given to the value of self-leadership in the field of HRD. This gap implies that HRD professionals might have been missing an opportunity to broaden and strengthen the impacts of HRD.

### **Purpose and driving questions**

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore how self-leadership is applied in the organizational context and how it addresses HRD issues, specifically within the three major domains of HRD practices: training and development (T&D), organization development (OD) and CD. The findings of this research will assist HRD professionals, in both academia

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and the world of practice, in their efforts to promote personal and organizational growth and development. Three overarching questions guided this inquiry:

- Q1. What is self-leadership?
- Q2. How has self-leadership been used as an organizational strategy?
- Q3. How can self-leadership strategies help address HRD issues within organizations?

### Significance

This conceptual exploration is significant for four reasons. First, self-leadership involves self-influence, which allows people to effectively lead themselves (Manz, 1991). Despite its acknowledged value, self-leadership is not well understood by HRD scholars and practitioners, as evidenced by the lack of mention of it in HRD literature. This article aims to introduce the concept of self-leadership to the HRD community.

Second, in the post-pandemic era, when organizations continue to witness the trends of the great resignation, quiet quitting and socio-economic uncertainty that discourages and impedes individual growth and development (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2020), it is necessary to develop a deep understanding of self to ultimately achieve self-actualization (Harari *et al.*, 2021). Self-leadership is highly relevant to HRD's core mission of developing people through various strategies, offering HRD scholars an opportunity to build on the work of scholars from other disciplines while applying HRD principles. Through real-life cases demonstrating the application of self-leadership in employee and organizational development, this article is one step toward expanding the current HRD knowledge base.

Third, the literature shows that self-leadership shares similar goals with three key domains within HRD, encompassing personal growth, CD and organizational performance improvement (Goldsby *et al.*, 2021). Incorporating the concept of self-leadership into HRD interventions can create added value for both individuals and organizations.

Finally, learning self-leadership skills is timely, specifically when changing work environments call for flexibility and adaptability (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2020). Particularly for HRD professionals who are charged with developing people and unleashing their potential, understanding self-leadership competencies will enable them to be more effective in assisting individuals and organizations in accomplishing their goals.

### Method

To explore self-leadership in the organizational context, we conducted a conceptual analysis using publicly accessible case examples from three companies. Conceptual analysis allows researchers to elucidate the meaning of a particular concept by scrutinizing diverse documents, validating evidence for specific events and using ideas that incorporate evidence for drawing inferences and conclusions (Furner, 2004). Additionally, using real-life cases enabled us to examine and articulate context-specific knowledge and experience, such as self-leadership practices within organizational settings, developing new concepts and fostering theoretical comprehension and practical relevance (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

To deepen our understanding of self-leadership interventions, we purposefully selected three cases based on three specific areas of interest. First, we aimed to comprehend how the concept of self-leadership has been applied within organizations. Second, we sought applications of self-leadership in the international context. Third, we wanted to identify real-life examples where self-development has been adopted as an organizational strategy to meet the emerging needs of employees and the shifting trends in global management. To

ensure the cases selected would be meaningful for analysis and relevant to HRD practices in the three domains (T&D, OD and CD), we consulted with two HRD experts. One expert works at an HRD research institution and has analyzed multiple real-life company cases. The other is a performance system manager at a leading global company collaborating with HRD practitioners worldwide. With the authors' subject matter expertise and the two experts' practical experiences, we reviewed diverse organization cases and identified three examples that provide the most insights into the application of self-leadership in HRD.

It is worth noting that the three cases we discuss below, while presenting different contexts (e.g. country, culture and socio-economic status), are by no means representative or inclusive because of the purposive sampling strategy we used; therefore, any generalization of our findings should be made with caution. However, our criteria-based approach to case selection was appropriate, as it enabled us to identify organizations with various self-leadership-based interventions, thereby allowing us to derive valuable lessons for the field of HRD.

The remainder of this article consists of three sections. The first section provides an overview of the concept of self-leadership. The second section presents the three selected case examples. The third section discusses the relevance of self-leadership to HRD, particularly in three areas of HRD domains of practice: T&D, OD and CD. The article concludes with our recommendations for future research.

### **Concept of self-leadership: an overview**

Leadership researchers have traditionally focused on the influence of positional leaders over their subordinates. However, [Manz \(2015\)](#) advocated for recognizing leadership among the entire workforce. This perspective on followers' influences highlights the belief that individuals have the potential and capability to lead themselves toward personal development and organizational goals ([Manz and Sims, 1986](#); [Neck and Houghton, 2006](#)). The concept of self-leadership, therefore, concentrates on individuals' agency and management of their own behaviors, contrasting with the conventional idea that employees must be controlled by supervisors to be productive. Representing a more participatory and respectful approach to leadership, self-leadership values autonomy and self-determination, from goal-setting to self-evaluation and behavioral and attitudinal adjustments ([Manz, 2015](#); [Manz and Sims, 1986](#)).

### **Self-leadership definition and characteristics**

[Manz \(1986\)](#) highlighted the significant role of subordinates, proposing *self-management* as a substitute for leadership. This concept, interchangeable with *self-control*, entails behaviors including personal goal setting, implementation and evaluation, all governed by the self ([Manz and Sims, 1980](#)). The early concepts focused on controlling negative behaviors with the supervisor's support, but later evolved into the term "self-leadership" ([Manz, 1986](#)), emphasizing self-influence strategies for achieving desired outcomes, irrespective of a formal leadership position ([Manz, 2015](#)).

Self-leadership has captured increasing attention in leadership research alongside emerging concepts, such as servant, emotional, participatory, authentic and shared leadership. Rooted in the belief that each employee has the potential to make a difference regardless of status ([Neck and Houghton, 2006](#)), self-leadership highlights individual behaviors as *self-charged* rather than externally forced ([Harari et al., 2021](#)), distinguishing from other leadership concepts. Despite hierarchical influences, self-leaders choose how to respond to their supervisor ([Stewart et al., 2019](#)), underscoring the critical role of employees' choices and actions within organizations.

The significance of individual influence in organizations aligns with the concept of autonomy in job crafting, where individuals proactively design tasks for enhanced job satisfaction (Costantini and Weintraub, 2022). Recent research by Liu *et al.* (2023) posits that self-leadership plays a crucial role in autonomous motivation and job-crafting behaviors, sharing an underlying mechanism of self-determination. Costantini and Weintraub (2022) suggested that self-leadership fosters social interactions and job engagement by fulfilling employees' needs for autonomy and relatedness with others in remote and hybrid work contexts. Recent studies on the role of self-leadership in the well-being of gig workers revealed that gig workers, who by definition work outside of formal organizational structures doing piecemeal jobs, greatly benefit from self-leadership (Crayne and Brawley Newlin, 2024; Mao *et al.*, 2024). Mao *et al.* (2024) found that self-leadership operates through goal clarity to influence thriving at work. Despite its recognized significance, HRD researchers have largely neglected employees' autonomous influence on job design, behavior and performance (Lee and Lee, 2018).

Self-leadership, while individual-centric, yields positive outcomes for teams and organizations as well (Marques-Quinteiro *et al.*, 2019). Many studies have reported positive relationships between self-leadership and motivation, organizational commitment and job performance (Banks *et al.*, 2016; Knotts and Houghton, 2021). In essence, self-leadership, with its self-influence and self-motivation processes, is significantly tied to both cognitive and behavioral outcomes extending beyond the individual level (Harari *et al.*, 2021).

### **Theoretical underpinnings of self-leadership**

Self-leadership is anchored in three central ideas or theories (Neck and Houghton, 2006): self-regulation, social-cognitive and self-determination. Each is discussed below.

#### *Self-regulation*

Self-regulation involves monitoring behavior to minimize the discrepancy between the existing and desired state (Carver and Scheier, 1981), enabling individuals to evaluate and adjust their behavior to align with goals (Neck and Houghton, 2006). Self-regulation theory posits that individuals with positive expectancies (e.g. confidence and hope) for goal attainment are more likely to intensify their efforts when facing obstacles, while those with negative expectancies may change or withdraw from their goals (Carver and Scheier, 1981; Neck and Houghton, 2006). Aiming to promote self-influence, self-leadership strategies enhance self-regulatory effectiveness and empower individuals to set their goals, reflect and identify barriers to goal achievement (Neck and Houghton, 2006).

Similar concepts, self-regulation and self-management, have also been used to understand the performance enhancement of individuals (Harari *et al.*, 2021). Early self-leadership research treated these terms interchangeably to describe the regulated execution of behaviors. However, later work differentiated self-leadership, emphasizing individual choices and behaviors driven by their values, not just control (Manz, 1991).

#### *Social-cognitive theory*

Bandura (1999) posited in social-cognitive theory that internal motivational processes facilitate goal-oriented activities, influenced by reciprocal interactions between personal, environmental and behavioral factors (triadic reciprocity). It emphasizes the complementary roles of self-efficacy – the individual perception of their competence – and cognitive processes in decision-making and behavior, resulting in initiative in learning and implementing strategies and then evaluating and adjusting those strategies to achieve goals

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(Neck and Houghton, 2006). In social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy impacts aspirations and efforts (Bandura, 2006).

Bandura (1999) also highlighted emotions as automatic responses to external stimuli, influenced by the cognitive processes of perception, interpretation and evaluation of situations. The ability to regulate emotions is strengthened by self-reflection, beliefs in their abilities (e.g. self-efficacy) and the utilization of coping strategies (Bandura, 1999). Self-leadership strategies in the context of social interactions and personal experiences foster awareness and effective emotion regulation. Going beyond the conventional emphasis on behavioral and cognitive processes, Manz (2015) proposed emotional self-leadership, explaining how individuals can use emotions productively in organizations for individual and group well-being (Manz *et al.*, 2016).

#### *Self-determination*

Self-determination theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), situates motivation in fulfilling psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Individuals can fully function when engaging voluntarily in activities, leading to improved performance (Ryan *et al.*, 2021). Autonomy is linked to self-motivation, with intrinsic motivation particularly promoting behaviors for well-being and job satisfaction (Goldsby *et al.*, 2021).

SDT suggests human motivation is multidimensional, varying in level and source. Intrinsic motivation generally facilitates greater self-direction than extrinsic motivation, and interestingly, extrinsic motivation can become more intrinsic over time, a process Ryan *et al.* (2021) term internalization. Unlike self-management, which highlights extrinsic rewards (e.g. praise and recognition), self-leadership accentuates intrinsic motivation (e.g. a sense of satisfaction) and carefully uses extrinsic motivation to allow some autonomy and drive feelings of competence (Stewart *et al.*, 2019), despite both motivations playing complementary roles in promoting individual performance.

#### **Self-leadership strategies**

Self-leadership includes three broad categories of cognitive and behavioral strategies that enhance individuals' effectiveness (Neck *et al.*, 2019): behavior-focused, natural reward and constructive thoughts. These strategies use self-influence capabilities to improve employees' accomplishment of organizational and career goals (Harari *et al.*, 2021).

Behavior-focused strategies, consisting of self-goal setting, self-rewarding and self-punishment, increase individuals' self-awareness to motivate themselves toward their goals (Manz, 2015; Uzman and Maya, 2019). For instance, setting challenging goals can promote performance, and participating in favorite activities as self-rewards can encourage positive behaviors (Manz and Sims, 2001). Meanwhile, self-correcting feedback on mistakes facilitates individual learning and adjustment strategies (Harari *et al.*, 2021).

Natural reward strategies involve leveraging intrinsic motivations that allow employees to focus on the beneficial elements of their work (Harari *et al.*, 2021). These rewards are closely related to the pleasure and satisfaction derived from achieving goals, influencing positive work attitudes and better performance (Manz, 2015). The strategies include self-talk, imagery and mental rehearsal, helping people stay motivated before important tasks.

Constructive thoughts center on forming positive thinking patterns by transforming nonfunctional thoughts into functional ways (Uzman and Maya, 2019). The strategy of positive construction aids in attaining work-related goals (Singh *et al.*, 2017). Individuals can use positive affirmations to cultivate a positive mindset and a sense of personal control in professional endeavors (Harari *et al.*, 2021).

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Based on the literature review, we offer four insights into self-leadership. First, self-leadership is a key element of self-influence, highlighting individuals' ability to direct themselves. Second, self-leadership encompasses multifaceted concepts that include cognitive, behavioral and affective approaches. Third, strategies of self-leadership contribute to both individual and organizational performance. Finally, a significant alignment exists between self-leadership and HRD goals, both of which prioritize people's development through diverse strategies and interventions. In the subsequent section, we examine the applications of self-leadership in HRD practice with three real-life case examples.

### **Self-leadership in practice: case examples**

The three illustrative cases represent three different organizational contexts: Disney, Amazon and Chipotle. They were intentionally selected because they are examples of successfully borrowing the concept and strategies of self-leadership to promote individual and organizational development. Their selection is not an endorsement of all HR practices adopted by these companies; however, following the case descriptions, we will describe how self-leadership can be integrated into the three core domains of HRD practice – T&D, OD and CD.

#### **Case example 1: Disney Aspire**

The Walt Disney Company, a global entertainment media corporation, launched Disney Aspire in 2018 with a \$150m investment to provide self-development opportunities for hourly employees (Disney, 2018). This program aims to encourage employees' contributions to the success of Disney's brands by leveraging diverse learning experiences, regardless of their roles and positions within the organization (Disney, 2019a). Disney Aspire covers tuition fees and class material costs, which removes financial barriers to employee development. The program's distinctive feature is its flexibility, which grants employees the freedom to choose their growth areas based on self-evaluation, even if the areas are not aligned with their current job (Schiavo, 2023).

Through Disney Aspire, employees are able to obtain diplomas or certifications from 11 educational institutions that offer more than 300 academic paths (Disney, 2019a). Within five years of its inception, the enrollment in programs had reached nearly 15,000 employees in 2023 (Schiavo, 2023). The participants have access to personalized coaching, which has nurtured a learning culture and attracted talent, with 25% of job applicants indicating their decision to apply was influenced by the program (Disney, 2019b; Schiavo, 2023).

With a market capitalization of \$167bn in 2024, Disney is now the world's 69th most valuable company (see companiesmarketcap.com). Its Disney Aspire initiative is an example of the company's commitment to employee development and has yielded multiple benefits to Disney, such as a positive work culture, increased employee satisfaction and high-quality applicants.

#### **Case example 2: Amazon's career choice**

Amazon is one of the major American information technology corporations, providing online retail and web services. To promote continuous learning and career advancement, Amazon committed to investing \$1.2bn by 2025 in educational opportunities for over 300,000 employees worldwide (Amazon, 2021). Toward this goal, Career Choice was introduced, particularly for frontline employees to pursue high school, college, certificates and English as a Second Language (ESL) education. One specific program within Career Choice is Upskilling 2025, which helps employees build qualifications for high-paying and

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in-demand careers, such as IT skills and data analysis in aviation, computer science, automotive and medicine (Amazon, 2023a).

Aligning with Amazon's overarching goal and vision to be the "Earth's Best Employer" and "Earth's Safest Place to Work" (Amazon, 2021), the Career Choice initiative promotes individual development by allowing employees to establish their own learning goals and receive funding, regardless of their years of employment within the company. Hourly employees are eligible to participate in the Career Choice program after 90 days and can receive full tuition reimbursement if employed in the USA and 95% tuition coverage if working outside the country (Amazon, 2021).

As of 2024, Amazon is the world's 5th most valuable company, with a market capitalization of \$1.540tn (see [companiesmarketcap.com](https://companiesmarketcap.com)). Since its inception in 2012, over 110,000 employees have participated in the Career Choice program to acquire new skills for professional development, career progression and future career prospects beyond their current roles (Amazon, 2023b). In addition to skill acquisition, Career Choice has also benefited Amazon employees financially by giving them more opportunities to earn higher salaries (see <https://pathstream.com/amazon-career-choice-program>).

### **Case example 3: Chipotle's Cultivate Education**

Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc. is a US-based fast-food chain with around 3,000 restaurants across the USA and other international locations, such as Canada and European countries, reporting a market capitalization of \$61.37bn (Companiesmarketcap.com, 2023). Since 2016, Chipotle has partnered with education to support its employees in obtaining college credits and degrees through the Cultivate Education Benefits Program. This initiative offers post-secondary and ESL education reimbursement of up to over \$5,000 annually, along with 100% coverage for specific degree programs related to fields such as agriculture, culinary and hospitality, with eligibility for employees with 120 days of Chipotle employment (Chipotle, 2021). One unique aspect of the program is that employees, including apprentices, staff and managers, can earn up to 44 transfer credits from on-the-job training (Businesswire, 2016). Alongside providing hands-on opportunities to build practical skills, participants can choose from over 100 degrees from universities, with the added support of personal advisers throughout their course of study (Chipotle, 2021).

This Chipotle Cultivate Education promotes the professional growth and success of employees, aligning with Chipotle's mission of contributing to the world through sustainable food sourcing (Businesswire, 2016). The program has improved employee retention and advancement, with 85% of participating crew members being 3.5 times more likely to stay employed and 7.5 times more likely to be promoted to management roles (Chipotle, 2021). With these positive outcomes, Chipotle reported that they continue to invest in the development and retention of top talent by offering educational choices (Chipotle, 2021).

### **Self-leadership in human resource development practices**

The three cases demonstrate how the concept of self-leadership has been incorporated into organizational strategies for the purpose of employee development. Drawing lessons from the three case examples, we discuss how self-leadership can be adopted to promote T&D, OD and CD, three core domains of HRD practice.

### **Self-leadership in training and development**

T&D is a vital process of enhancing individuals' knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve performance at personal, team and organizational levels (Darwin, 2017). Through training interventions, employees acquire the competencies essential to their current and future jobs.



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In the three cases, each company has effectively applied the concept of self-leadership to behavior-focused strategies (e.g. self-observation and self-goal setting) by providing employees with self-directed learning and development opportunities driven by the company's missions.

Disney incorporated self-leadership strategies into its employee development plan, strategically aligning them with its mission of enhancing branding growth – by providing educational opportunities to employees to cultivate new and diverse perspectives. Similarly, Amazon provides upskilling training to equip its employees with advanced knowledge and skills, ensuring their competitiveness for both current and future job demands. Chipotle, leveraging networks with educational institutions, promotes the development of employees' skills, irrespective of their positions.

Despite variations in training and education programs, all three companies emphasize employee development through learning-based interventions. They foster employee engagement by giving them autonomy and flexibility along with necessary resources, such as coaching and financial support. These practices are consistent with self-leadership principles – empowering individuals to set their developmental goals and to reflect, practice, evaluate and reward their own actions (Manz, 2015). In this sense, all three cases reflect the fundamental value of self-leadership, where employees are encouraged to take the lead in shaping their own learning experiences, likely leading to a more voluntary and collaborative relationship with the company.

Additionally, the companies extended their learning platforms from formal to informal settings by providing individualized mentoring. Mentoring is known for increasing organizational commitment through support from colleagues, promoting learning abilities and strengthening networks within the organization (Curtis and Taylor, 2018). Access to both formal and informal learning enables employees to pursue their goals at their own pace, optimizing time and saving costs (Pereira *et al.*, 2015).

These three cases exemplify the education-based and self-engagement programs that nurture employee self-leadership. By engaging in necessary educational, training and mentoring opportunities, employees can enhance their competencies, aligning with the training and education purposes of organizations. Through self-leadership programs, companies have empowered employees to take charge of their own learning and development, resulting in a more engaged, motivated and productive workforce (Schiavo, 2023).

### **Self-leadership in organization development**

OD aims to enhance organizational effectiveness through employee development (Brown and Harvey, 2021). From the perspective of OD, it is clear that all three companies have heavily invested in robust learning systems and forged partnerships to drive employee development and enhance organizational outcomes. These investments have the potential to yield various benefits, such as fostering a learning culture that supports employee growth and enhancing employee commitment to the company (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

For instance, Chipotle has provided employees with an education benefit, offering financial assistance along with practice opportunities and incentives for job advancement and promotion upon program completion. The company reported that the Chipotle Cultivate Education program has improved employee retention and participants' promotion rates to management roles. Disney and Amazon, through their extensive education programs, not only nurtured the corporate learning culture but also enhanced their brand values (Disney, 2019b). These initiatives have contributed to the building of a supportive workplace and a

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strong company brand. They have also had a positive impact on talent acquisition and retention (Schiavo, 2023).

As revealed by the three case examples, having supportive organizational systems in place empowers employees to proactively pursue learning and growth, thereby embodying the role of self-leaders (Ghosh, 2015). It is worth noting that each company has extended learning and development opportunities to part-time and hourly paid workers who are relatively disadvantaged in terms of company support and promotion opportunities. This endeavor yielded multiple positive returns, including attracting more high-quality job applicants; retaining existing employees with increased job commitment; and nurturing potential leaders within the organization (Fuller and Raman, 2023). As these cases showed, organization-level interventions that aim to promote employee self-leadership can generate mutually beneficial results.

### **Self-leadership in career development**

CD is a continual process that involves strategic planning and taking action to achieve one's career goals (McDonald and Hite, 2015). Organizations can support employees in reaching their career aspirations by offering essential educational and training opportunities (Elnaga and Imran, 2013). In three cases, the self-leadership programs played a prominent role in shaping employees' career goals. Traditionally, organizations have been expected to assume career-building responsibility; however, current career trends (e.g. protean, boundaryless and borderless careers) highlight individuals' active role in developing their careers (Moon *et al.*, 2019). In the world of work that is full of uncertainty and change, employees' capabilities to make progress toward their career goals using existing resources and strategies – career resilience – have become more important than ever before (Seibert *et al.*, 2016). The three cases shed light on how organizations' educational programs could serve as a critical resource for enhancing employees' career resilience.

Chipotle's education program is designed to develop the knowledge and practical skills of employees, with a focus on cultivating future leaders in their field of business. Amazon's Career Choice has expanded beyond equipping frontline workers with skills for their current job to developing new skill sets for future careers in promising fields. Disney Aspire has expanded the company's support for its employees by providing necessary education opportunities aligned with individual career goals, regardless of their current roles within the company.

From a self-leadership perspective, these CD interventions are valuable in helping employees discover their identities and career opportunities through meaningful self-reflection (Manz, 2015). While engaging employees in their own career design and development process is critical, it is equally important to provide organization-level support that will increase the likelihood of career goal attainment. The learning-based interventions identified in the three cases promoted employees' career-building, enabling them to develop job-related skills and be better prepared for future careers. All three case examples illuminated the value of self-leadership strategies in CD, providing additional evidence of the relevance of self-leadership to HRD.

### **Opportunities for future human resource development research**

With recognized benefits for both employers and employees, self-leadership presents an exciting promise to the field of HRD. As one of the first attempts to introduce self-leadership principles and practices to HRD, we hope to stimulate further scholarly inquiry. First, given its "newness" to the HRD academic community, more systematic investigations about self-leadership and its application in the organizational context are needed to create a holistic baseline knowledge for HRD scholars and practitioners. In addition, we call for more interdisciplinary research collaborations and knowledge sharing among researchers in

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HRD, management, education, applied psychology and positive psychology. By comparing and synthesizing the findings of self-leadership studies conducted in different disciplines, scholars will likely gain fresh insights that may advance our current understanding of self-leadership. This article demonstrates one such example. It is our intent to add the concept of self-leadership to the HRD research agenda.

Using the three purposefully selected real-world cases for illustration, we provided some initial evidence to show the positive contributions of self-leadership strategies to HRD interventions. This is a meaningful effort given the values and goals shared between self-leadership and HRD, as well as the fact that self-leadership has received very little attention as a research topic in the field of HRD. Our case-based approach revealed a viable relationship between self-leadership strategies and HRD practices. This finding not only expands the horizon of leadership research in the field of HRD, but also reinforces the value of HRD to individuals and organizations. Thus, this article may open doors to innovative and transdisciplinary research in some uncharted territories. With this call to action, we propose six questions derived from our research for further inquiry. Answers to these questions will generate additional insights into self-leadership, a concept that is highly relevant to HRD practice, yet not well understood by HRD professionals:

- Does self-leadership enhance the effectiveness of HRD strategies? If so, how?
- What self-leadership frameworks can be used to guide the design of HRD interventions?
- What does the self-leadership approach involve when it combines insights from organizational leadership and HRD?
- What additional evidence is available to demonstrate the value of self-leadership for HRD practices?
- What competencies are required for HRD practitioners to integrate self-leadership into HRD interventions?
- How can HRD contribute to the development of self-leadership competencies?

Finally, in this article, we hope to draw the attention of HRD scholars to four questions posed by other researchers. They are beyond the scope of this research; however, answers to these questions will both broaden and deepen our knowledge of self-leadership. Such enhanced knowledge will benefit both HRD researchers and scholars as they engage in self-leadership research and practice in their respective work:

- How can self-leadership strategies be used in a virtual or hybrid work environment (Costantini and Weintraub, 2022)?
- Is self-leadership a team or group-level construct, in addition to being an individual-level construct? If so, how is it different from (related to) collective efficacy? (Quinteiro *et al.*, 2016; Yaakobi and Weisberg, 2018).
- How does self-leadership operate (and what does it look like) in various cultures (Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2005) and within various organizational structures (Mintzberg, 2007)?
- What are the organizational antecedents to self-leadership (Su *et al.*, 2022)?

## Conclusion

In this article, we explored the relationship between self-leadership and HRD and the potential of using self-leadership to address HRD issues within organizations. By studying

three selected cases in the real world, we demonstrated the positive contributions of self-leadership interventions to T&D, OD and CD, all core domains of HRD practice. Therefore, we propose self-leadership as a value-added strategy for HRD. In addition, we call for more interdisciplinary research collaborations and interest from the HRD scholarly community in initiating self-leadership studies in response to the list of questions we posed. Efforts in this direction will not only enhance our understanding of self-leadership, but also advance HRD scholarship and broaden the HRD impact in the world of practice.

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### Corresponding author

Kyung Nam Kim can be contacted at: [chriskim0202@gmail.com](mailto:chriskim0202@gmail.com)

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