



## Assessing and Developing Entrepreneurs' Self-Leadership and Super-Leadership

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### Abstract

What processes do entrepreneurs use for leading themselves during the challenging times of building and growing a business? This article presents an assessment tool called DSLK that measures entrepreneurs' use of self- and super-leadership. The questionnaire measures the four foci of self-leadership (1) constructive thoughts; (2) natural rewards; (3) effective behaviors; and (4) Vitality and the super-leadership foci (1) coaching and communicative support and (2) facilitation of personal autonomy and responsibility. Reliability coefficients for the long and a short version of the DSLK are described. Implications for entrepreneurial assessment and training of self-leadership and super-leadership are discussed.

**Keywords:** Self-leadership; Super-leadership; Entrepreneurship

### Introduction

#### Entrepreneurs' self-leadership and super-leadership

The share of people under age 30 who own private businesses has reached a 24-year-low, underscoring financial challenges and a low tolerance for risk among young Americans [1]. Roughly 3.6% of households headed by adults younger than 30 owned stakes in private companies, according to an analysis by The Wall Street Journal of recently released Federal Reserve data from 2013. That compares with 10.6% in 1989. The recent, sharp decline in business ownership among young U.S. adults, even when taking into account the aging population, is of concern.

It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for the decline of entrepreneurial businesses among young Americans. One reason for the decline may be that young entrepreneurs face more post-recession challenges raising money. Fast-growing sectors as energy and health care likely require a significant access to credit or capital [1].

The second reason for the decline in entrepreneurial businesses may reflect a generation struggling to find a spot in the workforce. Some would-be entrepreneurs may be concerned about stiff competition in the Internet age: the broad use of the Web seems to increase the level of skills that are required to establish a business. According to the [2], the proportion of young adults who start a business each month dropped in 2013 to its lowest level in at least 17 years. People ages 20 to 34 accounted for 22.7% of new entrepreneurs in 2013, a decrease from 26.4% in 2003. Despite of a slow reversion of the U.S. startup activity from the downward trend in 2010 to 2015, the Annual Kauffman Index reports that startup activity is still below historic norms. A third reason for the decline in entrepreneurial businesses may be that younger workers may have difficulties gaining the skills and experience that can be helpful in starting a business.

However, modern economies increasingly depend on individuals with skills and experiences that induce creative developments [3]. State that "virtually all organizations – new startups, major corporations, and alliances among global partners - are striving to exploit product-market opportunities through innovative and proactive behavior". Innovation and proactivity are essential facets of successful entrepreneurial behavior [4]. Even companies in industries with little volatility need to constantly seize new business opportunities to remain viable [5].

Thus, the current study proposes a tool to assess and develop entrepreneurial leadership capacities. In particular, assessing

entrepreneurs' ability to lead themselves (i.e., use self-leadership) and lead others (i.e., use super-leadership) will help identify entrepreneurs' strengths and areas of growth. Based on the assessment, trainings for entrepreneurs can be customized to provide the necessary growth in entrepreneurial self-leadership and super-leadership. This growth in skills should enhance entrepreneurs' skills to effectively deal with job related challenges.

Furthermore, that growth in skills should not only increase the likelihood of entrepreneurs' job success, but also have a positive impact on their employees' job satisfaction. In addition, existing studies show that entrepreneurs' well-developed self-leadership and super-leadership may compensate for the negative effects in the workplace (e.g., a centralized organizational structure may negatively impact the employees' work enjoyment [6,7]). Therefore, the first part of this article discusses the concepts of self-leadership and super-leadership and their relevance for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial success. The second part of this article presents a European assessment tool that deserves cross-validation in the United States to serve U.S. entrepreneurs' assessment of self-leadership and super-leadership. The third part of the article discusses how assessment outcomes can be used to customize trainings of entrepreneurs' self-leadership and super-leadership. An increase in self-leadership and super-leadership should enhance entrepreneurs' abilities to start and run a successful business.

The concept of self-leadership was first developed and proposed by [8,9], as an extension of self-management theory [10,11]. According to current research, self-leadership includes four different types or foci of strategies to improve personal experiences and effectiveness: (1) constructive thoughts; (2) natural rewards; (3) effective behaviors; (4) physical vitality [12-15], lists the four self-leadership foci and associated self-leadership strategies (Table 1).

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The following section discusses the relevance of self-leadership foci and associated strategies for entrepreneurs.

**Constructive thoughts:** Examples of constructive thought self-leadership are (1) replacing negative self-talk and mental imaging by positive beliefs and expectations [11,12,16], (2) intentionally activating and directing will-power and volition and (3) using mental imagery of successful task performance [17-19], argued that using constructive thought strategies should help entrepreneurs to have a more optimistic outlook on future challenges of their business. In addition, it should be helpful for entrepreneurs to envision ways to successfully accomplish their goals and how to deal with obstacles that might obstruct the attainment of desired goals [17]. The empirical validity of these assumptions, however, has not yet been established for U.S. entrepreneurs.

**Natural rewards:** Through natural reward self-leadership individuals create situations in which they are motivated by self-conduct or rewarded by inherently enjoyable aspects of the task or activity [12,20]. Examples of natural reward self-leadership are

(1) To build more pleasant and enjoyable [12,20], features into a given activity so that the activity itself became more attractive and enjoyable (2) To re-attribute physiological arousal in positive terms (e.g., excitement, challenge) and utilize its proactive effects [21]. Natural rewards can be detected by an open-minded exploration of tasks and performance situations on the job [15,19], speculated that by using natural reward self-leadership entrepreneurs should create a work environment that leads to more satisfying and interesting business ideas and thereby increase the likelihood of being-economically and psychologically- successful. Recent research by Georgianna supported D'Intino speculations German entrepreneurs' made significant use of natural reward self-leadership, which, in turn, empowered them to lead their employees and experience job satisfaction. This finding has not yet been replicated with U.S. entrepreneurs.

**Effective behaviors:** Behavioral self-leadership targets individuals' self-awareness and planning activities accordingly [4,19]. Examples of behavioral self-leadership are (1) to systematically observe one's behavior during goal attainment [12,10,20,22]; (2) to observe role-models who show successful ways of problem solving [23], and (3) to adapt one's behaviors to situational change [16].

A recent study with German entrepreneurs found that if entrepreneurs used significant behavioral self-leadership, they empowered their employees through super-leadership behaviors and reported an increase in job satisfaction Georgianna, Will this also be found in U.S. entrepreneurs?

**Physical vitality:** Physical vitality self-leadership targets individuals' intentions to participate in programs that improve physical health and fitness [24]. One example of physical vitality self-leadership is to monitor one's diet by keeping records of daily food intake and associated times, settings, reasons, and feelings [15,25]. The use of physical vitality strategies was found to result in more physiological energy, psychological well-being, and potential to perform [26]. Entrepreneurs should benefit from using physical vitality self-leadership since their work is physically and mentally often more stressful than serving in a business [27]. German entrepreneurs used physical vitality self-leadership, which enabled them to empower their employees through super-leadership and report significant job satisfaction Georgianna Entrepreneurs' use of vitality self-leadership has not yet been empirically studied in U.S. entrepreneurs.

Super-leadership is described as a person's capacity to empower others [28,29], coined the term "super-leadership" to describe leadership behaviors as commonly shared within the organization and widely allocated among the entire workforce.

The German self-leadership questionnaires designed in studies by [15,16,30,31], served as a starting point for research on super-leadership in Germany. Items of the self-leadership questionnaire were screened, selected, and reformulated with reference to overt and observable super-leadership behavior. The resulting German super-leadership questionnaire consisting of 42 items was given to 175 employees from industry, services; education, sales, and administration [32]. In contrast to the four self-leadership foci (Table 1), exploratory factor analyses of super-leadership yielded two foci or factors (Table 2). One focus of super-leadership could be interpreted as "coaching and communicative support" (mostly items from scales 1 to 5), the second foci as "facilitation of personal autonomy and responsibility" (mostly items from scale 6) (Table 2) lists the two foci of super-leadership and the respective strategies.

The concept super-leadership consisting of two foci was supported by Manz and Sims conclusion that leaders need to become coaches and facilitators to help subordinates leading themselves. Support is also provided by Arnold et al. questionnaire of super-leadership that yielded a main focus called "Coaching".

Recent studies confirmed that "coaching and communicative support" was a distinct focus or dimension of super-leadership in autonomous work teams as well as in more centralized structured work settings Arnold et al. [33-35]. As documented by these studies, super-leadership was practiced within entrepreneurial teams as well as in firms led by single entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs who show super-

Self-Leadership Focus	Self-Leadership Strategies
<b>Constructive Thoughts</b>	Cognitive Strategy # 1 (i.e., to use positive self-talk and mental images for replacing negative thoughts with positive beliefs and expectations)
	Constructive Thoughts Cognitive Strategy # 2 (i.e., to form implementation intentions)
	Cognitive Strategy # 3 (i.e., to mentally contrast past and future successful behaviors) Table 1: Self-Leadership Foci and Associated Self-Leadership Strategies.
<b>Natural Rewards</b>	Reward Strategy # 1 (i.e., to be mindful that certain circumstances can trigger negative emotions)
	Reward Strategy # 2 (i.e., re-appraise stressful events as a learning experience)
	Reward Strategy # 3 (i.e., to actively create circumstances that raise positive feelings such as joy, pride or satisfaction)
<b>Effective Behavior</b>	Behavioral Strategy # 1 (i.e., to systematically observe one's behavior through journaling or other forms of record keeping)
	Behavioral Strategy # 2 (i.e., to actively find and imitate positive role-models)
	Behavioral Strategy # 3 (i.e., to practice healthy behaviors in real life situations)
<b>Physical Vitality</b>	Vitality Strategy #1 (i.e., to use techniques that increase mental and physical relaxation)
	Vitality Strategy #2 (i.e., to exercise)
	Vitality Strategy # 3 (i.e., to monitor eating patterns)

Table 1: Self-Leadership Foci and Associated Self-Leadership Strategies.

Super-leadership Foci	Super-Leadership Strategies
<b>Coaching and Communicative Support (CCS)</b>	CCS Strategy # 1 (i.e., to encourage employees to pay attention to which tasks may look attractive to them) CCS Strategy # 2 (i.e., to comment positively when employees create stimulating work settings) CCS Strategy # 3 (i.e., to encourage employees to feel comfortable during task accomplishment) CCS Strategy # 4 (i.e., to support employees' reflections of their course of actions when employees tackle new tasks) CCS Strategy # 5 (i.e., to encourage employees to let him/her know which tasks they would like to focus on) CCS Strategy # 6 (i.e., to ask employees what they can learn from their mistakes) CCS Strategy # 7 (i.e., to inform employees about the consequences of their decisions) CCS Strategy # 8 (i.e., to give feedback to support the employees' pursuit of work-related goals) CCS Strategy # 9 (i.e., to emphasize how important it is to realistically judge ones' abilities) CCS Strategy # 10 (i.e., to encourage employees to derive opportunities of growth to get over their weaknesses) CCS Strategy # 11 (i.e., to talk about possible obstacles when setting own performance goals) CCS Strategy # 12 (i.e., to recommend celebrating the attainment of intermediate goals during long-term goal- attainment)
<b>Facilitation of Personal Autonomy and Responsibility (FPAR)</b>	FPAR Strategy # 1 (i.e., to allow employees to make their own decisions in their area of work) FPAR Strategy # 2 (i.e., to positively comment when employees take the initiative) FPAR Strategy # 3 (i.e., to provide free space to get the job done according to the employees' agenda) FPAR Strategy # 4 (i.e., to offers opportunities for the employees to learn and try out new FPAR Strategy # 5 (i.e., to welcome when employees take responsibility in their area of work) FPAR Strategy # 6 (i.e., to praises me when employees overcome obstacles during goal-striving)

**Table 2:** Super-Leadership Foci and Associated Super-Leadership Strategies.

leadership may be perceived by their employees as helpful coaches, facilitators of communication, personal autonomy, and positive role-models.

When leaders used coaching and communicative support and facilitated employees' personal autonomy and responsibility, employees reported greater organizational commitment and felt empowered to lead themselves toward set goals [34]. Furthermore, employees of empowering leaders were more satisfied with their job [33], felt more accomplished, and reported enhanced well-being on the job than employees in traditional work settings [36-38]. The question remains if this finding is replicable with U.S. entrepreneurs.

### Current self-leadership and super-leadership measures

Fragebogen zur Diagnose Individueller Selbstführungskompetenz (FDSK) (Questionnaire to Diagnose Individual Self-leadership).

The first version of the German Self-leadership Questionnaire FDSK (The acronym standing for Questionnaire to Diagnose Individual Self-leadership in German) was partially based on Anderson and Prussia's [14].

Self-Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) and was extended to measure Müller's concept of self-leadership. Müller's concept of self-leadership included the following four aspects or foci of self-leadership: (1) constructive thought focus; (2) natural reward focus; (3) behavioral focus; and (4) vitality focus. The foci have continuously received empirically validation [4,15,31,32,39,40]. Consequently, the FDSK is currently available in its' fourth edition. The resulting 100 items were validated using a representative sample of several hundred participants. Either participants had recently entered the workforce or were preparing to enter the workforce [40]. Self-leadership is measured in terms of a person's competency to intuitively master professional and personal challenges [33]. In our understanding, intuitive self-leadership competencies have been acquired through trial and error or another systematic variation of behavior. Intuitive competencies, however, do not equip the individual to know why they successfully (or unsuccessfully) dealt with the arising challenge. Success is increased if individuals are aware of the strategies that they used to successfully master the arising challenges.

### FDSK format

The FDSK consists of five modules. The FDSK Module 1 measures individual's competencies and thereby increases individuals' awareness of their self-leadership competencies. Reliability for each focus ranges

from 0.69 to 0.89 (internal consistencies), and between 0.72 and 0.78 (test-retest coefficients). A short version of the FDSK exists. That is, each focus is measured by five items. The reduced number of items yielded lower reliability scores of the short scales than found for the scales of the standard version (i.e., constructive thought  $\lambda$  strategies:  $(2) = 0.63$ ; natural  $\lambda$  reward strategies:  $(2) = 0.79$ ; behavioral strategies:  $(2) = 0.70$ ; physical  $\lambda$  vitality strategies:  $(2) = 0.72$ ).

The FDSK Modules 2-4 describe the participants' extent of self-leadership for each self-leadership focus (strong vs. medium vs. low). Recommendation for self-leadership development can be made accordingly. Self-leadership scores are compared to percentile ranks that exist for each self-leadership focus (separated by gender). Using percentile ranks to diagnose self-leadership allows the participant to quickly gauge the extent of self-leadership development.

The FSDK Module 5 measures super-leadership by means of the Coaching and Communicative Support (CCS) and Facilitation of Personal Autonomy and Responsibility (FPAR) scales (Table 2). The items are answered on a Likert-type rating scale ranging from "0" ("describes my own leadership behavior not at all") to "3" ("describes my own leadership behavior very well"). The internal consistency of the original scale was satisfactory (for detailed information, [40]). A short scale version of the FSDK with five items measuring super-leadership yielded  $\alpha = 0.91$  [33].

### Implications for self-leadership and super-leadership assessment

Who wants to become an effective super-leader in organizations needs to become a competent self-leader first [11,41]. Research by [40] has shown that self-leadership is closely related to entrepreneurial trait potential and the ability to successfully start an own business. It seems plausible to assume that without a proactive mindset and personality entrepreneurial aspirations and initiatives would be hard to realize [42].

Contrary what sometimes is proposed as beneficial outcome of qualifying managers in organization [43], a mere training of coaching and communication techniques might not be of similar value for improving entrepreneurial leadership behavior. Although entrepreneurs may also benefit from competencies to coach and advice employees, benefits for entrepreneurs seem to hinge on entrepreneurs' competencies of self-leadership. Thus, diagnosing and training entrepreneurs' self-leadership competencies prior to teaching them coaching and communication techniques seems beneficial.



During the process of self-leadership and super-leadership skill acquisition, Modules 1 and 5 of the FSDK may be used to assess existing self-leadership and super-leadership, while Modules 2-4 may be used to determine areas of training and to monitor the effectiveness of training programs. The FSDK can be used to train super-leadership similarly to [43], so called coaching manager approach. The coaching manager approach describes a program of super-leadership development that teaches the use of problem-focused advice, non-directive questioning, intrinsically motivating feedback, and constructive dialogue with subordinates. In those trainings, the entrepreneurs' leadership capacities are expanded from self-leadership to super-leadership [33,34,43]. The FSDK approach to super-leadership development consists of training leaders in their use of coaching and effective communication skills as well as their ability to facilitate employees' growth of personal autonomy and responsibility. While the FSDK has been used extensively in Germany, no research exists on how U.S. entrepreneurs can benefit from this type of super-leadership development.

### Implications for self-leadership and super-leadership practice

Existing studies showed that the use of self-leadership and the application of super-leadership moderated the negative effects of a highly centralized organizational structure on employees' enjoyment of work [6,34], found that supervisors' super-leadership might compensate for the negative effects of a centralized organizational structure on the work enjoyment of subordinates [7]. However, in highly decentralized organizations, the positive effects of coaching and communicative support tended to reverse. In other words, coaching and communicative support does serve employees in highly centralized organizations but may impair them in highly decentralized settings. Thus, to optimize super-leadership, one needs to combine skill training and organizational development.

Last but not least, job satisfaction is one of the major subjective indicators of successful entrepreneurship. It is related to life satisfaction, happiness, presence of positive affect or absence of negative affect, respectively, and general well-being at work [38,44]. Entrepreneurs were more satisfied with their job and general lifestyle if their aptitude potential for mastering challenges of occupational independence was developed [45]. Entrepreneurial aptitude potential not only correlated with entrepreneurs' job satisfaction but also with entrepreneurs' self-leadership [40]. If entrepreneurs were able to activate a proactive mindset and engage in self-leadership, their use of super-leadership behavior yielded personal job satisfaction [22].

### Results and Conclusion

The FSDK has been proved useful and reliable to assess entrepreneurs' existing self-leadership and super-leadership in Europe. During the process of self-leadership trainings, the FSDK can be used to monitor the effectiveness of training programs. Effective self-leadership and super-leadership can positively impact organizational limitations and create job satisfaction in entrepreneurs and their employees. Validation of the FSDK in the United States is recommended so that U.S. entrepreneurs are able to benefit from the assessment and development of self-leadership and super-leadership like their European colleagues.

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