

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY IN DEVELOPING ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERS

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Abstract

Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in his or her ability to take action, engage in tasks and achieve goals. It enhances career engagement, which is the proactive development of one's career through demonstrating career management behaviors. Leadership self-efficacy is defined as someone's confidence in leading groups and regulating group functioning towards goal accomplishment (McCormick, 2001). This study investigates the relationship between leadership self-efficacy and career engagement.

Primary data was collected in 2021 using a cross-sectional survey. Participants (n = 330) from the United Kingdom and the Middle East, predominantly Egypt, completed a questionnaire which included: the *Multidimensional Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale (LSE)* (Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009); the *Career Engagement Scale* (Hirschi, Freund, & Herrmann, 2014); and a set of demographic questions. To the researchers' knowledge, it was the first time that these psychometric instruments were administered in the Middle East region. Both scales showed very good reliability ($\alpha = .93$ and $\alpha = .90$, respectively).

Results showed that there was a moderate positive correlation between leadership self-efficacy and career engagement ($r = .38$, $p < .001$). More specifically, higher levels of leadership self-efficacy were interrelated with higher levels of career engagement.

This study, which is a part of a research project applying an intersectional lens on leadership, highlighted the value of leadership self-efficacy in promoting career engagement. A positive interrelation between the two theoretical constructs was confirmed, reiterating their importance and usefulness for academic research and practical interventions.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, leadership self-efficacy, career engagement, career management behavior.*

1. Introduction

Successful performance in leadership roles has been associated with a perceived sense of high self-efficacy and an increased amount of effort as well as perseverance in the face of challenges (McCormick, Tanguma, & Lopez-Forment, 2002). Self-efficacy, a theoretical concept developed by Bandura (1977), refers to an individual's beliefs and expectations about his or her abilities, which influence the likelihood that this person will try and succeed in a given task or activity.

Self-efficacy enhances career engagement as people feel empowered through their achievements (Norman, Gardner, & Pierce, 2015). Ultimately, it predicts career success (Smidt, Kammermeyer, Roux, Theisen, & Weber, 2018). Hirschi, Freund, and Herrmann (2014) have defined career engagement as the proactive development of one's career through engaging in and applying a variety of career behaviors such as career planning, career self-exploration, environmental career exploration, networking, voluntary human capital development, and positioning behavior. Early career engagement has been related to more positive career outcomes in the longer term (Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2001). Therefore, it may be of strategic importance for one's professional pathway to positions of higher responsibility.

Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) has been broadly described as a form of confident judgment of one's competence in assuming a leadership role in a group, and demonstrating effective leadership behaviors (Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009; Paglis, 2010). According to Paglis and Green (2002, p. 217), "LSE is a person's judgment that he or she can successfully exert leadership by setting a direction for the work group, building relationships with followers in order to gain their commitment to change goals, and working with them to overcome obstacles to change". Leaders with reasonably high LSE not only accomplish their role successfully but they also drive collective efficacy and can be perceived as influential role models (Paglis, 2010).

Although there are mixed research findings, a number of studies show that there are gender differences in self-reported LSE, with women reporting lower scores and fewer leadership experiences (Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009; McCormick, 2001; McCormick et al., 2002). In addition, females tend to attribute their successes to external rather than internal causes (Huszczko & Endres, 2017). Further research is required to gain a deeper understanding of the underrepresentation of women in top-level positions (Samuelson, Levine, Barth, Wessel, & Grand, 2019) and also, to support the development and refinement of tailored interventions.

2. Objectives

This study explores the relationship between Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) and Career Engagement (CE). It also investigates possible gender differences for both LSE and CE. The hypotheses are outlined below.

- *Hypothesis 1:* LSE is significantly and positively related to CE; LSE promotes CE.
- *Hypothesis 2:* There are significant differences between the LSE means of males and females; it is expected that females will have lower LSE scores.
- *Hypothesis 3:* There are significant differences between the CE means of males and females; it is expected that females will have lower CE scores.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and procedure

Primary data was collected in 2021 using a cross-sectional survey. The sample comprised 330 university students and adults who were working or seeking employment. The majority of respondents were based in the Middle East, predominantly Egypt, and the United Kingdom. Participants were professionals, academics, researchers and (mainly postgraduate) students. While this was a convenience sample, it was largely representative of a diverse community of students and also, of adults with an expressed interest in career development.

Most people who completed the survey received an e-mail invitation which contained a link to the online questionnaire. They were provided with a full written briefing of the research. They were asked for their consent and were informed about their right to withdraw at any time. Moreover, they were reminded that a good command of the English language was necessary to complete the survey. Questionnaires were available in an electronic format as well as in paper form, to facilitate inclusion. The survey was voluntary and anonymous, and it took approximately ten minutes to complete. Ethical approval was obtained by Kingston University (United Kingdom).

3.2. Instruments

Participants completed the Career Behaviors Survey on Qualtrics or in-person. The full questionnaire included: the *Multidimensional Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale (LSE)* (full version); the *Career Engagement Scale* (full version); and a set of demographic questions e.g. location, gender, ethnicity/ethnic group, age, level of education, long-standing health condition or disability etc. Both scales are valid and reliable.

The *Multidimensional Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale (LSE)* (A. Bobbio, personal communication, May 10, 2021; Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009), which assesses a general self-perception of LSE, was firstly administered to 372 university students and 323 non-student adults. The first version was created in Italian and it was then adapted to English. The scale contains 21 items and six facets with an acceptable factorial structure, measured with a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *absolutely false* to *absolutely true*. The six facets are: starting and leading change processes in groups; choosing effective followers and delegating responsibilities; building and managing interpersonal relationship within the group; showing self-awareness and self-confidence; motivating people; and gaining consensus of group members. An example item reads: "I am able to change things in a group even if they are not completely under my control". For the computation of the total LSE score, each individual's item scores are summed and divided by the total number of items in the scale. Higher scores represent higher LSE.

The *Career Engagement Scale* (Hirschi et al., 2014) measures diverse self-directed career management behaviors and contains 9 items. Items were administered using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *not much* to *a great deal*, used to indicate the extent to which someone was engaged in a career-related activity during the past six months. An example item is: "Actively sought to design your professional future". For the computation of the total CE score, each individual's item scores are summed and divided by the total number of items in the scale. Higher scores represent higher CE.

4. Results

4.1. Main descriptive statistics

Nearly two-thirds of the participants were women (Gender: Female 62%, Male 36%). Half of the sample consisted of Arab people (Ethnicity: Arab 52%, White 25%, Asian 11%, Mixed 7%, Black 3%). There was a good representation of all age groups, with around 59% of people aged 40 and above (Age group: 18-29y 25%, 30-39y 17%, 40-49y 25%, 50-59y 31%, 60-77y 3%). More than 90% had completed at least one academic degree (Level of Education: High School 5%, Diploma 3%, Bachelor's degree 44%, Master's degree 39%, PhD or higher 8%). Almost 8% declared a long-standing health condition or disability (Health condition/Disability: No 90%, Yes 8%). The aforementioned proportions may not total 100 due to not including the results for responses such as "Other" and "Prefer not to say".

4.2. Reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha)

The reliability of each scale was tested. The LSE scale showed very good reliability ($\alpha = .93$) and so did the CE scale ($\alpha = .90$).

4.3. Factor analysis (principal components analysis)

Factor analysis with oblique rotation (oblimin) was conducted on the scales to examine factor loadings, i.e. the relationship between each item and each expected factor, and to confirm consistency with previous research in other countries. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, both for LSE (KMO = .94) and for career engagement (KMO = .92). The analysis indicated satisfactory dimensionality for LSE (eigenvalues of three distinct factors = 8.59, 1.45, 1.10 and proportion of explained variance = 53%). A uni-dimensional factor structure was confirmed for CE (eigenvalue = 5.10 and proportion of explained variance = 57%).

4.4. Hypothesis testing

Results for *Hypothesis 1*: There is a significant and positive interrelation between LSE and CE ($r = .38, p < .001$). Higher levels of LSE are interrelated with higher levels of CE.

Table 1. Correlations: Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) and Career Engagement (CE).

Variable		LSE Total	CE Total
LSE Total	Pearson Correlation	1	.383**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	330	330
CE Total	Pearson Correlation	.383**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	330	330

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Results for *Hypothesis 2*: There is not a significant difference between males ($M = 5.73, SD = .61$) and females ($M = 5.68, SD = .64$) concerning their LSE.

Table 2. T-test: Gender and Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) – Descriptives.

Variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
LSE Total	Man	118	5.7337	.61688	.05679
	Woman	206	5.6798	.64559	.04498

Table 3. T-test: Gender and Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) – Analysis.

		Levene's Test for Equality of variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
LSE Total	Equal variances assumed	.316	.574	.734	322	.464	.05381	.07335	.09049	.19811
	Equal variances not assumed			.743	253.019	.458	.05381	.07244	.08886	.19648

Results for *Hypothesis 3*: There is not a significant difference between males ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .76$) and females ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .91$) regarding their CE.

Table 4. T-test: Gender and Career Engagement (CE) – Descriptives.

Variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CE Total	Man	118	3.6337	.75908	.06988
	Woman	206	3.5119	.90697	.06319

Table 5. T-test: Gender and Career Engagement (CE) – Analysis.

		Levene's Test for Equality of variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
CE Total	Equal variances assumed	3.945	.048	1.233	322	.219	.12184	.09885	-.07263	.31631
	Equal variances not assumed			1.293	279.806	.197	.12184	.09421	-.06361	.30730

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the role of LSE in CE. A positive interrelation between these theoretical constructs was confirmed, indicating their importance and usefulness for research and practice. LSE can facilitate career engagement and consequently, career development and success. LSE beliefs are domain-specific, therefore they can be amended through carefully designed learning experiences, as evidenced by particular programmes with positive results (Isaac, Kaatz, Lee, & Carnes, 2012). LSE can be enhanced through career counselling, mentoring and training.

According to these preliminary findings, there was no significant difference between men and women regarding their LSE or CE. This may be explained by the participants' characteristics. A good number of them were well educated; had a mature profile (40 years old and above); and were or had been supported by experienced consultants who specialize in leadership roles.

It is important to continue conducting research on the factors affecting women's journey to the upper echelons of an organization and to investigate what helps them to lead fulfilling and balanced lives. Women usually have more life goals compared to men and they may consider more negative outcomes when pursuing a high-level position, e.g. sacrificing family time for work, which make these positions less desirable (Gino, Wilmuth, & Brooks, 2015).

A rigorous systematic review (Kalaitzi, Czabanowska, Fowler-Davis, & Brand, 2017) identified 26 barriers encountered by female leaders and aspiring female leaders in different work environments. The prevailing barriers were gender gap; limited opportunities for career advancement; stereotypes; work-life balance; absence of mentoring; and inflexible work setting. Studies in Non-Western settings

also highlight the social, cultural, religious and organizational challenges faced by female executives and academics (Hodges, 2017; Mousa, 2021).

Limitations that affect the generalizability of results include the use of a cross-sectional design; the reliance on self-report data; and the profile characteristics of many participants in the sample. Further analysis will consider more individual difference variables.

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