

## ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

# The Relationships between Professors' Super-Leadership, Self-Leadership, and Career Preparation Behavior in College Students

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the structural relationship among professors' super-leadership, students' self-leadership, and students' career preparation behavior in students majoring in physical education in South Korea. The results of analysis of the final 232 responses using SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 23.0 statistical programs were as follows. The modeling, goal setting, and encouragement and guidance of super-leadership of university physical education professors improved the behavioral strategies of students' self-leadership. In addition, the modeling and goal setting were found to improve cognitive strategies. Other sub-factors were not statistically significant. Lastly, the behavioral and cognitive strategies of students' self-leadership increased their career preparation behavior. The results of the present study are expected to be useful not only for professors who guide students but also students in these days of a low youth employment rate.

**Key words:** *super-leadership, self-leadership, career preparation, college students*

## Introduction

### *Need and purpose of research*

The financial crisis triggered by the bankruptcy of the investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008 drove the global economic situation into secular stagnation. The low economic growth rate has still not readily recovered and causes serious unemployment problems. According to the "employment trends report" published by Statistics Korea (2017), the unemployment rate of youth is almost 9.3% while the unemployment rate of the economically active population is only 3.6% with 1,003,000 unemployed out of 27,828,000. In particular, the increase in the number of unemployed people in the second half of their 20s (25–29 years) was the highest since 2000 when statistical indicators were formalized. It appears that first employment age is delayed due to students building up their qualifications or a phenomenon of rapid increase in the number of so-called "young job applicants" who are not successful in getting a job. Such a condition can be considered to reveal an aspect of the seriousness of unemployment problems

among young people in present society.

College students must perform effective career preparation behaviors such as building up qualifications and having various experiences considering their abilities and aptitudes to successfully settle in society after graduation. The government is creating various policy programs to help them. Universities have also been making efforts to resolve serious employment problems by helping students to connect with corporations through opening courses and employment counseling centers or holding job fairs needed for employment. Considering such reality, not many people will raise objections to the fact that not only the help of the government or educational institutions but also one's own will or effort are more important than anything else to establish the first bridgehead for successful advancement in society.

College students must break away from the passive form of life in which they were instructed or modelled by others during their adolescence and have self-management behavior so they can control their own thoughts or behavior to accom-



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plish their goals (Shim, & Lee, 2011). At that time, professors' leadership behavior will greatly influence not only teaching students well but also students' active thinking and behavior (Seok, & Joo, 2016). Super-leadership among various leadership forms is a theory in which the team or leader emphasizes a horizontal hierarchical structure where followers are made to think and behave by themselves (Manz, & Sims, 2001). Most of all, self-leadership allows followers to establish efficient cognitive and behavioral strategies to increase their competence and quality by revealing the potential inherent in them (Manz, & Sims, 2001). The self-leadership strategies that allow one to behave based on "autonomous power" for efficient self-management have been reported to be helpful in producing high achievements (Manz, & Sims, 2001). Accordingly, previous studies have reported that self-leadership significantly influences career preparation behavior eventually (Bae, & Sung, 2016; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). For that reason, the importance of developing self-leadership for students is also emphasized constantly (Manz, 2015).

The scholars who started to analyze "common characteristics of successful leaders" in the early days of leadership research contended that leadership is an inherited trait based on trait theory (Chelladurai, 2006). Through consistent research, however, it was found that leadership can also be acquired by learning (Johns, & Moser, 2001). Furthermore, Manz and Sims (2001) argued that the best time to acquire self-leadership through super-leadership is during college when students become adults, and this was found to be applicable in education as well. Bae and Sung (2016), however, stated that more research on the efficiency of such leadership is needed since it is unduly insufficient in the field of education. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of professors' super-leadership behavior on the formation of students' self-leadership and to empirically analyze the structural relationship between self-leadership and career preparation behavior.

#### *Theoretical background and hypothesis setting*

Super-leadership is defined as leaders making followers into self-leaders who think and behave by themselves rather than in response to others (Manz, & Sims, 1990). The theory emerged through the argument that traditional leadership that completely relies on the leader alone to lead an organization is inevitably limited in the rapidly changing structural environment of society (Manz, & Sims, 1991). Accordingly, the goal of super-leadership is that the leader of a group motivates followers in the process of achieving their goals and helps them to autonomously judge and behave (Manz, & Sims, 2001).

Super-leaders emphasize that followers act as the principal agent in the process of achieving a goal while traditional leaders want followers to conform to their orders by exerting direct influences on followers (Manz & Sims, 1990). When the behavior of super-leaders is strengthened, followers become the principal agents and develop into effective self-leaders rather than following orders due to pressure or by calculated behavior (Manz, & Sims, 1990). According to such context, previous studies have shown that the super-leadership behavior of leaders ultimately helps followers significantly in equipping them with self-leadership (Manz, & Sims, 1991). Considering the findings of previous studies, the present study focused on setting up and analyzing the following research hypothesis.

Self-leadership is a concept based on social cognitive psy-

chology and intrinsic motivation theory, and many scholars agree that it is the behavioral adjustment of one's own thought patterns and behaviors to the desirable direction by establishing cognitive and behavioral strategies to achieve a goal based on "autonomy" (Houghton, & Neck, 2002; Manz, & Sims, 1990). From this perspective, self-leadership can be considered self-directed efforts to realize goals and raise one's competence. Self-leadership began to emerge when it was recognized that changes in leadership were needed to fit today's people since they are a new generation, and the possibility of decreasing their desire and efficiency in work is high if they are severely controlled in the atmosphere of a vertical organizational culture (Manz, & Sims, 1980). Accordingly, since self-leadership is based on autonomous control, it has been reported that the efficiency is bound to be higher than when taking orders or instructions by the authoritative behavior or coercion of other leaders (Neck, & Manz, 1996). The following hypothesis was established after reviewing these existing studies.

*Hypothesis 1:* The super-leadership of the professors in physical education will positively influence students' self-leadership.

Self-leadership strategies are largely divided into behavior-focused and cognitive strategies (Manz, 1986), and some scholars subdivide cognitive strategy into natural reward and constructive thought strategies (Houghton, & Neck, 2002). First, behavior-focused strategy refers to observing and evaluating one's own behavior and modifying that which interferes with achieving goals in the desirable direction (Manz, & Sims, 2001). Constructive thought is the conversion of one's own thought into a positive direction in performing a given task (Manz, & Neck, 2004). Natural reward strategy is the logic in which rewards are received from the task one is performing, and it leads to motivation (Houghton, & Neck, 2002).

The self-leadership of professors in education sites maximizes learning flow and achievement through students' self-thinking and self-learning by guaranteeing autonomous learning and helping them to explore and choose the career that matches their competence and aptitude (Kim, Joo, & Park, 2016). In addition, Land and Greene (2000) contended that self-leadership also helps to develop self-directed learning. Even though self-leadership has been found to be helpful in preparation for one's career (Bae, & Sung, 2016) in this context, research analyzing theoretical relationships among these variables is in its infancy. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the effect of the self-leadership on career preparation behavior.

*Hypothesis 2:* Students' self-leadership will positively influence career preparation behavior.

Since career preparation helps students to explore and find their occupation, it will allow them to take a successful first step into society after their graduation (Koivisto, Vinokur, & Vuori, 2011). Nonetheless, the framework of and research into career development have been continuing over the past half-century (Bartley, & Robitschek, 2000), and the term "career preparation" may be unfamiliar. Regarding the difference between career preparation and career exploratory behavior, the former is inclusive of not only exploring careers to choose one that matches one's competence and aptitude but also a series of preparation processes, and the former is a super ordinate concept that includes the latter.

Kim and Kim (1997) observed career preparation behavior from two perspectives in terms of career development and ca-

reer counseling theory. The first is exploring the areas of career appropriate for oneself through counseling with recruiting experts and aptitude tests. The second is carrying out specific actions actually needed for employment. The action includes, for example, preparation for certificates, employment tests, or job interviews. Accordingly, the present study investigated the structural relationships among super-leadership, self-leadership, and career preparation behavior based on previous studies discussed above.

**Method**

*Participants*

The participants in the present study were college students majoring in physical education in South Korean universities in 2017. The reason for using physical education majors was that their employment rate was even lower than the average of other majors with 61.6% according to the survey of the Korean Educational Development Institute (2016), which shows the seriousness of the issue. The survey was conducted among students in classrooms after their classes in three universities located in Gyeonggi-do for about one month after September of 2017, and participation was voluntary.

*Measurement*

A total of three instruments for professors’ super-leadership, students’ self-leadership, and students’ career preparation behavior were used in the present study. The items in all questionnaires were on a scale from one point for “strongly disagree” to five points for “strongly agree,” and higher scores indicated a high level of specific behavior. First, to measure the level of professors’ super-leadership perceived by students, an instrument used by Kim (2013) based on the Self-Management Leader Questionnaire (SMLQ) developed by Manz and Sims (1987) was modified for the present study. The instrument is composed of a total of 16 items including modeling (four items), goal setting (four items), encouragement and guidance (four items), and rewards and reprimands (four items). Second, to measure students’ self-leadership, a questionnaire developed by Manz (1998), the Self-Leadership Questionnaire

(SLQ), and translated by Kim (2007) was used. The questionnaire has a total of 10 items of self-leadership sub-factors including behavioral strategy (five items) and cognitive strategy (five items). Lastly, for career preparation behavior, an instrument used by Song (2013) and many researchers in Korea was modified for the present study. The instrument is composed of a total of six single-factor items asking about exploratory behavior and a series of preparation behaviors afterward to choose careers considering their competence and aptitude.

*Data analysis*

The data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 23.0 programs. Frequency analysis was used to investigate the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to determine how well the measured variables presented a unidimensional construct. Also, Cronbach’s alpha was used to prove reliability. Additionally, after correlation analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) was run to determine whether the research hypotheses were accepted or not. Goodness-of-fit indices in the study included the comparative fit index (CFI), Turker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square residual (RMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

**Results**

*Confirmatory factor analysis*

CFA of the measurement factors is summarized in Table 1. The fit of the measurement model was as follows ( $\chi^2=580.258$ ,  $DF=384$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df=1.511$ ,  $CFI=.952$ ,  $TLI=.945$ ,  $RMR=.059$  and  $RMSEA=.047$ ). The Construct reliability (CR) values ranged from .824 to .914, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .540 to .680, respectively. Thus, convergent validity was confirmed. Additionally, because the AVE values were smaller than the squared correlation coefficients, discriminant validity was confirmed. Cronbach’s alpha values ranged from .866 to .912; thus, internal consistency among the items used in this study was considered excellent.

**Table 1.** The Confirmatory factor Analysis, Average Variance Extracted, and Construct Reliability of Independent Variables

Variable	Esti.	S.E.	C.R.	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
Modeling 1	1					
Modeling 2	1.207	.098	12.279	.833	.556	.870
Modeling 3	1.017	.088	11.569			
Modeling 5	.993	.086	11.488			
Goal-setting 1	1					
Goal-setting 2	1.049	.080	13.077			
Goal-setting 3	1.051	.079	13.364	.851	.588	.878
Goal-setting 4	.939	.082	11.444			
Encouragement & guidance 1	1					
Encouragement & guidance 2	1.378	.126	10.973			
Encouragement & guidance 3	1.296	.121	10.711	.824	.540	.866
Encouragement & guidance 4	1.299	.123	10.526			
Rewards & reprimands 1	1					
Rewards & reprimands 2	.918	.069	13.236			
Rewards & reprimands 3	.954	.069	13.906	.855	.597	.884
Rewards & reprimands 4	.944	.067	14.158			

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Variable	Esti.	S.E.	C.R.	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
Behavioral strategy 1	1					
Behavioral strategy 2	1.148	.068	16.945			
Behavioral strategy 3	1.075	.068	15.793	.914	.680	.912
Behavioral strategy 4	.996	.072	13.798			
Behavioral strategy 5	1.025	.078	13.085			
Cognitive strategy 1	1					
Cognitive strategy 2	1.106	.079	13.966			
Cognitive strategy 3	1.139	.075	15.153	.876	.639	.898
Cognitive strategy 4	1.007	.071	14.092			
Career preparation behavior 1	1					
Career preparation behavior 2	1.083	.065	16.664			
Career preparation behavior 3	.846	.076	11.189	.902	.651	.876
Career preparation behavior 5	.869	.073	11.829			
Career preparation behavior 6	.949	.079	12.030			

Correlation analysis and hypothesis testing

As shown in Table 2, the coefficients of correlation were smaller than .80; thus, there was no multicollinearity. The goodness-of-

fit values for this study model were:  $\chi^2=586.919$ ,  $DF=389$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df=1.509$ ,  $CFI=.951$ ,  $TLI=.946$ ,  $RMR=.065$ ,  $RMSEA=.047$ .

**Table 2.** The Correlations between Measuring Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1					
2	.160*	1				
3	-.008	.152*	1			
4	.008	.101	.126	1		
5	.221**	.311**	.425**	.099	1	
6	.204**	.321**	.073	.051	.257**	1
7	.174**	.236**	.094	.148*	.289**	.353**

Legend: 1=modeling, 2=goal-setting, 3=encouragement & guidance, 4=rewards & reprimands, 5=behavioral strategy, 6=Cognitive strategy, 7=career preparation behavior  
\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$

The results of research hypothesis set up in the present study are shown in Table 3. First, the modeling (C.R.=3.310,  $p<.001$ ), goal setting (C.R.=3.058,  $p<.01$ ), and encouragement

and guidance (C.R.=5.971,  $p<.001$ ) of the super-leadership of the professors in physical education were found to positively influence students' behavioral strategy, which is a part of

**Table 3.** The Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis Testing	Esti.	S.E.	C.R.	P
Modeling → Behavioral strategy	.194	.059	3.310	***
Goal-setting → Behavioral strategy	.175	.057	3.058	**
Encouragement & guidance → Behavioral strategy	.459	.077	5.971	***
Rewards & reprimands → Behavioral strategy	.036	.051	.708	.479
Modeling → Cognitive strategy	.183	.072	2.544	*
Goal-setting → Cognitive strategy	.311	.073	4.237	***
Encouragement & guidance → Cognitive strategy	.021	.083	.258	.796
Rewards & reprimands → Cognitive strategy	.028	.063	.437	.655
Behavioral strategy → Career preparation	.181	.061	2.982	**
Cognitive strategy → Career preparation	.286	.056	5.056	***

Legend: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

self-leadership. Rewards and reprimands, however, were statistically non-significant. In addition, the modeling (C.R.=2.544,  $p<.05$ ), and goal setting (C.R.=4.237,  $p<.001$ ) of super-leadership improved the cognitive strategy of self-leadership. On the other hand, other factors were statistically non-significant. Accordingly, hypothesis 1 was partially supported. Second, both behavioral strategy (C.R.=2.982,  $p<.01$ ) and cognitive strategy (C.R.=5.056,  $p<.001$ ) of students' self-leadership were found to positively influence career preparation behavior. Therefore, research hypothesis 2 was supported.

## Discussion

The present study empirically analyzed the influence of the super-leadership of physical education professors on the formation of students' self-leadership and the relationship between the strategies of self-leadership and career preparation behavior. The following discussion is based on the results above.

First, the modeling, goal setting, and encouragement and guidance of professors' super-leadership perceived by students in physical education were found to improve the behavioral strategy of students' self-leadership. In addition, the modeling and goal setting of super-leadership improved the cognitive strategy of self-leadership. The influence of other sub-factors was found to be statistically non-significant. These results are supported by previous studies that concluded that super-leadership significantly influences followers in establishing self-leadership (Manz, & Sims, 1991).

It is necessary to examine the basic question of "Why does super-leadership help self-leadership?" Mans and Sims (1990) explained the characteristics of the behavior of super-leaders as follows. First, leaders constantly strive for followers to learn and acquire desirable thinking and behavior by making themselves an ideal model by acting rather than saying. Second, leaders help followers to set challenging but achievable specific goals with considerations given to followers' own competence. Third, leaders constantly encourage and guide followers so that their performance improves more. These factors were found to help college students to strengthen their self-leadership behavior in the present study as well. Unlike the findings of previous studies (i.e., Mans, & Sims, 1995), however, the present study found that the influence of rewards and reprimands, which are the last factors of super-leader behavior, on the behavioral and cognitive strategies of college students' self-leadership was non-significant. It shows that rewards and reprimands used to promote the thinking and behavior of today's young generation do not appeal to them anymore.

Second, the present study found that the behavioral and cognitive strategies of self-leadership of students majoring in physical education positively influence their career preparation behavior. Previous studies (Bae, & Sung, 2016; Mayer et al., 2004) reported that self-leadership improved career preparation behavior, and it is consistent with the results of the present study. Generally, because leadership influences the behavior of not only individuals but also groups, the large influence of leadership on them is accepted as an accomplished fact (Lussier, & Achua, 2001). That is, as for leadership, the members of a group or organization follow the control or order of the supervisor to efficiently accomplish goals (Sharma, 2010).

Since the current generation is well educated, and each individual's personality or subjectivity is distinct, however, people prefer horizontal communication that occurs in equal rela-

tionships to vertical communication in which communication occurs top to bottom within the organization (Manz, & Sims, 1980). Accordingly, as a new leadership paradigm, self-leadership based on one's "autonomy" rather than acting upon a superior's control or command emerged (Neck, & Manz, 2010).

The core of self-leadership is thinking and behaving according to one's own will rather than by somebody else's (Manz, & Sims, 2001). Those who have established self-leadership make autonomous efforts in the process of accomplishing goals due to stronger intrinsic motivation than others (Manz, 1986). A previous study reported that people who perform specific tasks or participate in activities are bound to show the tendency of focusing more on their work due to such reasons (Neck, & Houghton, 2006). Accordingly, self-leadership can be explained as yet another form of self-management.

In particular, there has been research reporting that college students with self-leadership have the propensity of self-directedness and show active preparation behavior to search for and determine their career (Bae, & Sung, 2016). In light of these findings, it can be inferred that students majoring in physical education with self-leadership have strong tendency to actively choose and prepare for their careers, and they have autonomously motivated themselves and absorbed more to achieve their goals. Previous studies also have shown that self-leadership will derive good results in efficiency and outcomes because it makes individuals adjust their behavior and act according to their motivation (Manz, & Sims, 2001; Neck, & Houghton, 2006).

The present study found that the modeling, goal setting, encouraging, and guiding of super-leadership of university physical education professors improved the behavioral strategies of students' self-leadership, and modeling and goal setting improved cognitive strategies. Furthermore, the behavioral and cognitive strategies of students' self-leadership increased their career preparation behavior. Eventually, the results of this study may be helpful for professors to guide students preparing for employment efficiently.

The limitations of the present study are as follows. Since the present study did not consider variables such as gender difference and grade, an in-depth study considering these variables is suggested. In addition, since youth unemployment is emerging as a serious problem these days, it is necessary to conduct a study that compares and analyzes the issue not only for physical education major students but also other students in various majors.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interest.

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