

SELF-HANDICAPPING IN LEADERSHIP: A CALL FOR RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Self-Handicapping is the process by which individuals attempt to externalize a potential failure by means of an excuse (claimed), reduced effort, or creating obstacles (behavioral). This concept has been studied in the psychology and education literatures but remains relatively absent from the business or leadership literatures. The present paper posits that individuals and businesses would be well served by increased attention and research on self-handicapping in business and leadership. We outline a taxonomy that includes antecedents, internal and external factors, personality characteristics, and the process as well as the positive and negative outcomes of self-handicapping. We also provide several research questions to begin the conversation about self-handicapping leadership.

Keywords: self-handicapping; leadership; self-sabotage; goal orientation

INTRODUCTION

Manz (2015) suggests that leaders recognizing and learning from setbacks and short-term failures is a critical element of self-leadership. Doing this pays off in the form of learning, personal growth, skill development, courage, persistence, and a host of other desirable outcomes. He suggests optimal self-leadership is unlikely without confronting personal failures in a way that provides preparation for greater success. Habitually explaining away short-term failures by making excuses and covering one's tracks to create an illusion of continual success may stunt meaningful self-leadership development. Furthermore, Adkins (2015) says that most leaders know what is required to be effective, but Gallup research shows that only one in ten consistently practice those behaviors.

Manz (2015) defines higher-level self-leadership as leadership practices that reflect personal authenticity, responsibility, and expanded capacity. He suggests that business researchers have only just begun exploration of the vast potential of self-leadership. He believes there are many new self-leadership insights and strategies left to be discovered. This article is intended to explore one of those avenues and open up new areas of research for those interested in business and the work place.

Employees witness leader self-sabotaging behavior on a daily bases from their leaders – not confronting wayward employees, inconsistency, poor hiring methods, being a control freak, and not accepting accountability for their own actions. We posit that this results in apathy, lack of motivation, and a lack of employee engagement. The effects of employee engagement and well-being have been demonstrated to be significant when predicting turnover, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). It follows that when employee engagement and well-being are diminished by leadership (whether intentional or not), turnover, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability suffer. There are obvious

causes for diminished employee engagement, but an often-overlooked cause is impression management by their leaders.

Impression management causes poor leadership because leaders practicing it are uncertain and rely on “face-saving” strategies rather than innovative solutions (Hoffman, 2007). Leaders let the excuses that are used to manage how others view them lead to reduced effort and learning (Higgins & Berglas, 1990; Snyder, 1990). Because the excuses work in the short term (Higgins & Berglas, 1990), leaders are reinforced for using them, and use them time and time again – while neglecting addressing the issue causing uncertainty and growing from it. This reduced effort ultimately leads to poor leadership behaviors that causes negative employee outcomes (Jones & Berglas, 1978). This slippery slope is called self-handicapping.

Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping is the process where “people withdraw effort, create obstacles to success, or make excuses so they can maintain a public or self-image of competence” (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Self-handicapping is an extension of attribution theory into leadership (See Harvey, et. al., 2014). By self-handicapping, an individual produces an a priori explanation for a potential failure. Self-handicapping can also enhance attributes of the individual because of subsequent increased personal credit for success when success was not expected (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Ryska, 2002). Self-handicapping is a strategy with two variants: claimed – using excuses to explain potential failure, and behavioral –reducing effort or creating obstacles as an explanation (Leary & Shepperd, 1986). Both claimed and behavioral self-handicapping can be internal or external to the self-handicapper (“tiredness” is internal while “lack of support” is external). Examples of claimed self-handicapping in business include: claiming anxiety, lack of time, task difficulty, lack of authority, and lack of resources. Behavioral self-handicapping business examples include: setting unrealistic goals, avoiding accountability, and reducing effort – such as avoiding needed employee confrontations. Self-handicapping influences impressions of others by two processes: (1) lowering expectations (before the task) (Burns, 2005), and (2) changing attributions about the individual (after the task) (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Park & Brown, 2014). Post-performance, it may also discount and externalize the blame ordinarily associated with failure (Crant & Bateman, 1993). People tend to self-handicap more when others are watching (Snyder, 1990). While self-handicapping has been examined in the psychology, exercise science, and education literatures, it remains relatively unresearched in the business literature (Crant & Bateman, 1993; Ishida, 2012; McElroy & Crant, 2008; Siegel & Brockner, 2005, and Flanagan, 2015). Additionally, Chadwick, I. C. & Raver, J. L. (2015) discuss goal orientation in organizational learning.

Self-Handicapping in Business Research

The aim of this paper is to start a business and leadership self-handicapping research discussion. Self-handicapping can create situations of poor team building, crucial conversations, performance management, and coaching. Self-handicapping is almost always hidden, subtle, and hard to nail down—often denied by the individual and undiscussable by the crowd (Noonan, 2007). Business leaders may also be uncomfortable dealing with or discussing human issues (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Consequently, leaders often avoid the very things that are likely their

core problems in not achieving their mission – solving “people problems.” But ignoring self-handicapping will not make it magically go away.

There is virtually no research about self-handicapping in business. Simply put, there is no conversation about self-handicapping in business education or research—especially about overcoming it. When this conversation is started, researchers may begin to see “leadership” in a different light and find new avenues for research and education of business students. This research may help managers reverse their impression management self-handicapping behaviors, find more time to master their job, remove the obstacles they place on the workers and themselves, and see significant improvement in their area of responsibility.

To facilitate any meaningful change, a common language is needed (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999) and there is currently no vocabulary for talking about self-handicapping in business. Research in self-handicapping by managers and leaders can change that. Traditionally, self-handicapping has often been viewed by executives as trait-based (Tubek, 1993) or a personality defect which is too difficult to address head-on. Moreover, it is noteworthy how many leaders see it in others, while being blind to their own impression management and self-handicapping (Decker & Mitchell, 2016).

Consequences of Self-Handicapping

There are both positive (short-term) and negative (long-term) consequences of self-handicapping. In the short term, self-handicapping can discount blame (Crant & Bateman, 1993), reduce negative attributions (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Martin, Marsh, Williamson, & Debus, 2003), support better performance in low self-esteem individuals (Ryska, 2002), reduce impacts to self-esteem (McCrea & Hirt, 2001), and cause less punitive sanctions for failure (Rhodewalt, Morf, Hazlett, & Fairfield, 1991). These are all relatively positive outcomes and can reinforce further use of self-handicapping.

A meta-analysis on academic self-handicapping and achievement from Schwinger et al (2014) suggests that self-handicapping is maladaptive for academic performance. They also posit a “vicious cycle” of low performance and self-handicapping that students enter into after singular handicapping situations. This is echoed by Zuckerman et al (1998), who reported that impaired performance negatively effects self-perceptions of ability, which reinforces self-protection through self-handicapping.

The negative effects of self-handicapping (which are mostly long-term) have been documented in several studies. These include: poor attributions from others (Jones & Berglas, 1978) , lack of socialization (Snyder, Smith, Augelli, & Ingram, 1985), poor performance (Zuckerman et al., 1998) , poor health (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994) , low satisfaction (Eroneni, Nurmit, & Salmela-Arot, 1998) , cheating (Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield, 1998) , and continued self-handicapping (Rhodewalt & Davison Jr., 1986).

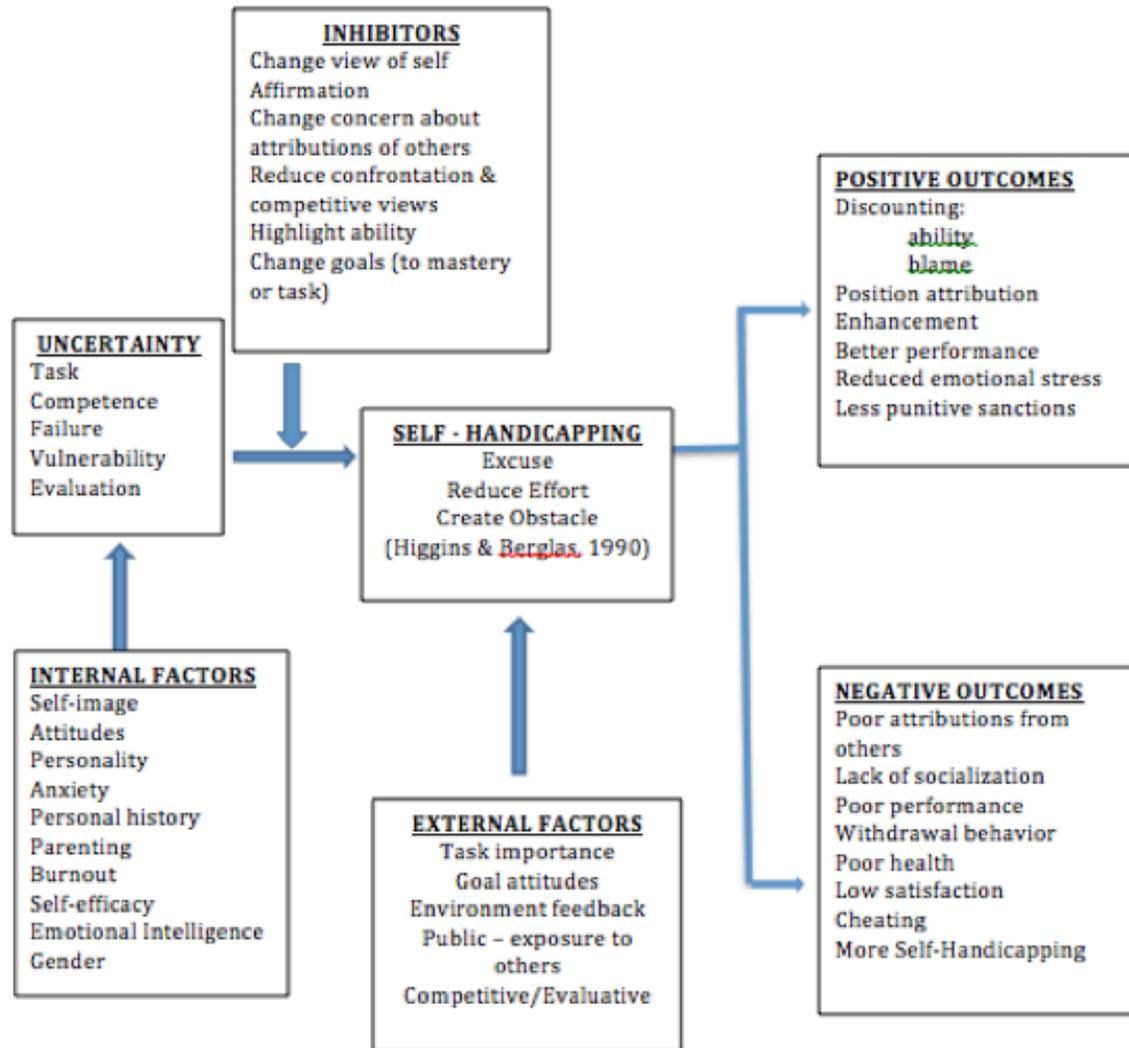
A leader who self-handicaps may also reinforce a workforce to self-handicap - such as a team not confronting peers or bosses (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Business research and education in self-handicapping may help leaders understand and overcome claimed handicaps and then take the high road to eliminating the behavioral handicaps he/she and the workforce may be using.

Self-handicapping may also contribute to organizational change initiative failure (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Employees overvalue their old habits and what they currently gain from them—status and a comfort zone—while leadership overvalues the new strategy and potential

long-term results without helping the employees navigate the road to the new. Research in self-handicapping may lead to breakthroughs in the areas of engagement, organizational culture change, and others. There is a focus on “overcoming resistance to change” in business but those very words are self-handicapping. They imply that the leader must do something to employees, but that can create an obstacle—more resistance. A leader who says, “What rewards can I offer employees to make the change willingly?” and “How can I help my employees retain their status in this change?” (WHAT and HOW Questions) possibly removes those obstacles and allows the employees to want to move toward the change. Future research should focus on developing solutions to overcome this type of self-handicapping in the workplace and a particular emphasis should be placed on how to instill a culture of learning and growing – mastery oriented leaders and employees (Chadwick & Raver, 2015).

A Self-Handicapping Taxonomy

Figure 1 – A Taxonomy of Factors Affecting and Effected by Self-Handicapping



Much is known about the antecedents and consequences of self-handicapping in academics and sports. Less is known about the process and inhibitors of self-handicapping. Extensive research (see Figure 1) promotes variants of self-worth being an antecedent of self-handicapping. Self-consciousness and self-worth (Midgley & Urdan, 1995; Thompson & Dinnel, 2007), ambiguity, anxiety, and fear of failure (Burns, 2005; De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013; Handelsman & And Others, 1985; Thompson & Hepburn, 2003), burnout (Akin, 2012), and self-efficacy (Arazzini Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014; Ferguson & Dorman, 2002) are all internal factors that have been positively associated with self-handicapping. Attitude and personal history also pay a part (Garcia, T, 1996; Leonardelli, Lakin,

& Arkin, 2007). In essence, those with high self-esteem and low self-esteem do not self-handicap because they are not uncertain. High self-esteem fosters confidence in success while low self-esteem fosters confidence in failure. Only those with uncertainty self-handicap.

There is evidence that types of parenting and family attributes are also associated with self-handicapping (Ross, Canada, & Rausch, 2002). Authoritarian parenting (Shields, 2008), lack of parental involvement (Hwang, 2013; Want & Kleitman, 2006), lack of family traditions and rituals (Hardy & Hill-Chapman, 2013), and low family emotional intelligence (Yang & Mao, 2009) all were positively associated with self-handicapping.

Finally, basic personality traits have been shown to be associated with self-handicapping; these include being narcissistic (Bassak-Nejad, 2009; Rhodewalt, Tragakis, & Finnerty, 2006), not feeling a purpose in life (Kinon & Murray, 2007), conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Bobo, Whitaker, & Strunk, 2013), pessimism (Mitsunami, 2011), and depression (Levey, 1985).

Goal orientation has been shown to be an important determinate of self-handicapping. *Mastery goal orientation* focuses on learning and developing one's competencies, while leaders with *performance orientation* consider their performance relative to others (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Hulleman, Schrage, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010; Nicholls, 1984). Performance orientation can be subdivided into *performance approach* (demonstrate superiority in relation to others) and *performance-avoidance* (avoiding looking less able than others -- avoiding mistakes) (A. J. Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Hulleman et al., 2010; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). Schwinger and Stiensmeier-Pelster (2011) found that leaders with a mastery orientation avoid self-handicapping because they view failure as an opportunity for personal growth and as a modifiable and controllable outcome. We believe business researchers may therefore find that humility may be a predictor of lower self-handicapping.

Research concerning gender differences in self-handicapping research has shown mixed results. While there are many studies that show a gender difference in self-handicapping (Kimble & Hirt, 2005; Kuczka & Treasure, 2005), there are as many showing no gender differences (Cui, Liu, Zhang, & Zheng, 2007; Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000). There are several studies that try to explain the differences: women are more punitive in their evaluations of others that use self-handicaps (Hirt & McCrea, 2009), women place more importance on effort than men (S. M. McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix, Milner, & Steele, 2008), and gender differences may be caused by differences in independence (Eddings, 2003). In a recent meta-analysis, Schwinger et al (2014) found that gender was not a significant moderator of self-handicapping, but they posited that it is plausible that women are somewhat "smarter" about the degree in which they self-handicap – they do not reduce effort more than necessary. More research is needed in this area.

Excuses, Reduced Effort, Obstacles – A Vicious Cycle

Zuckerman et al. (1998) suggested that uncertain people are prone to experience a vicious cycle. They start with reacting to threats to their self-esteem by self-handicapping. However, self-handicapping leads to lower performance, which subsequently decreases one's self-esteem and therefore increases the probability to self-handicap again. Taken together, the empirical evidence suggests that lower self-esteem individuals cope significantly worse with self-threatening events – and thus self-handicap more frequently – compared to higher self-esteem individuals (see VanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, (2011), for a recent meta-analysis).

After studying self-handicapping across several sciences, we have concluded that self-handicapping could be a slippery slope to poor leadership (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Excuses used for impression management are the start of a vicious cycle leading to reduced effort to increase competence. Impression management is used rather than facing the possibility of or occurrence of failures and then learning from them. This may lead to self-defeating behavior (Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007) that seriously hinders attempts to positively influence employees and customers. We believe a leader who continually self-handicaps does not typically improve the impressions of his boss, peers, or employees over time, make himself happier, increase his/her competence, engage his/her employees, or move a team forward to the mission of the organization. Business research in self-handicapping can prove these propositions.

Self-handicapping excuses can quickly become habitual due to reinforcement (Kimble & Hirt, 2005). By doing this, impressions are shifted away from the individual and on to an external agent. This keeps peers and bosses from blaming the self-handicapper, and reduces any sanctions for failure they may impose. If the self-handicapper performs well after claiming a self-handicap, attributions may be enhanced (Tice, 1991). The self-handicapping “vicious cycle” as described in Schwinger et al and Zuckerman et al (1998) can be expanded into business and leadership. Moreover, that continued use of self-handicapping will lead to self-sabotage and poor leadership. This progression is seen below in Figure 2.

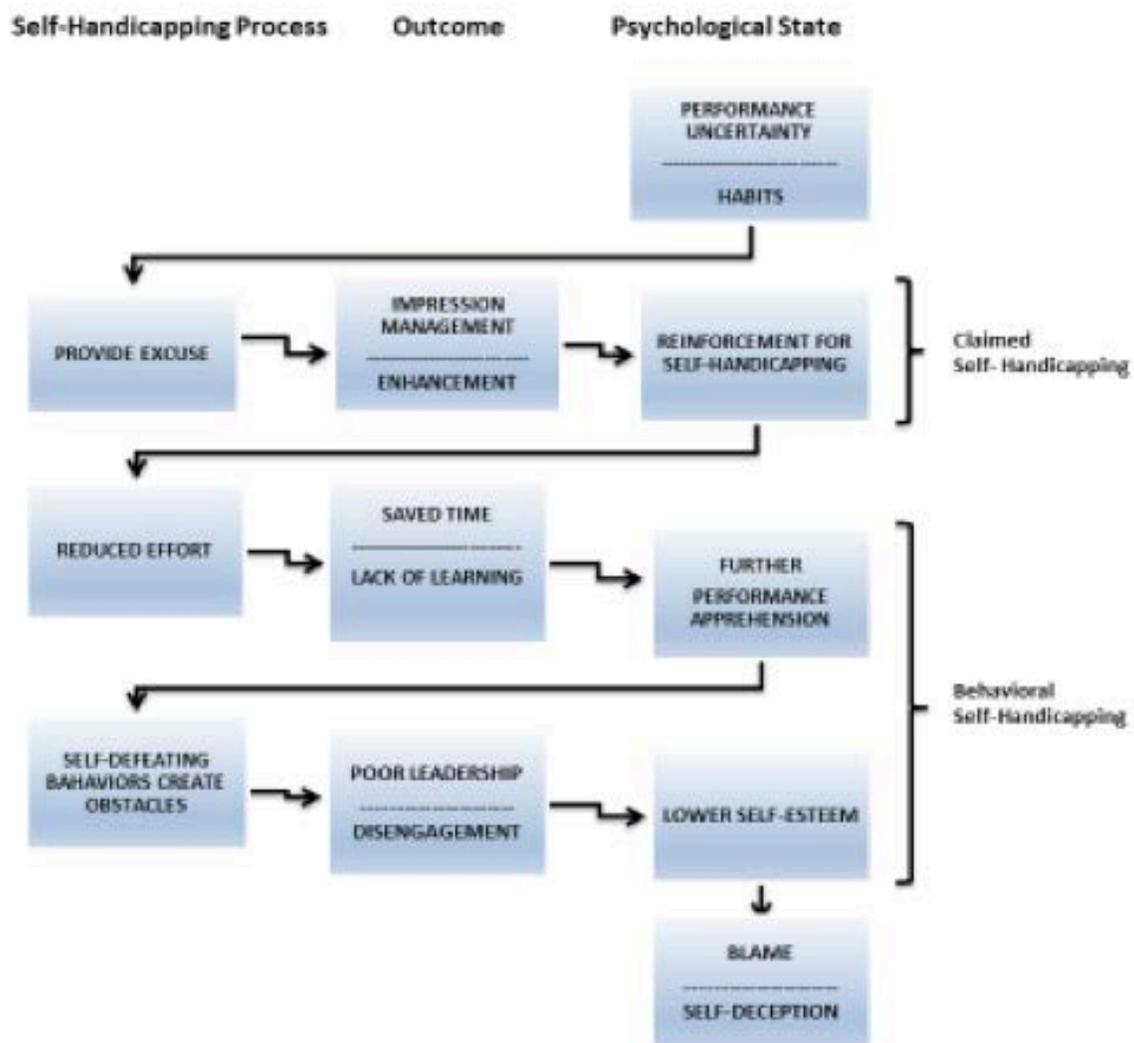
Figure 2. Excuse-Reduced Effort-Obstacle (ERO) Spiral



The reason leaders can get stuck in this vicious cycle is due to three possibilities: 1) it is difficult to admit one’s self-defeating behavior, 2) it is a habit that is reinforced, or 3) the individual has suppressed knowledge of their behavior and is in denial.

This hypothesized process of self-handicapping in business situations is expanded below. As shown in Figure 3, uncertainty in competitive, evaluative situations leads to habitual use of

excuses as a self-handicapping strategy. These excuses prevent peers and bosses thinking failure is due to incompetence, lessens blame for failure, or enhances their attributions if one succeeds. This is reinforcing, so a leader will use the strategy again. And, then reduce effort—spending less time in preparation or getting the necessary education for future attempts. He or she doesn't gain further competence. Furthermore, concentrating on performance goals (goals of avoiding error or meeting a standard) because of the demands of an organizational performance management system further enhance this problem). Continued, this will cause obstacles either because employees, peers, or bosses get tired of the self-handicapping or more likely the leader's skills erode due to lack of learning and growth. We posit that reduced effort causes poor leadership behavior; poor leadership causes unmotivated, disengaged, poorly trained and equipped, and non-accountable employees. This further increases the leader's performance apprehension and may lead to a situation where a leader blames all of his/her problems on others (e.g., employees) -- at minimum, it starts the cycle over again. Further research in business settings is needed to verify this hypothesized process.

Figure 3– A Proposed Self-Handicapping Process

When self-handicapping has been used for years without intervention, a leader may begin to deny what he is doing and its consequences. When in such self-deception, leaders consistently blame others for their problems (The Arbinger Institute, 2010). When a leader places blame on employees, the employees may blame back and the cycle builds and continues.

Prevention of Self-Handicapping

There are several points of intervention with the self-handicapping process: the leader, the situation, his/her excuses, his/her behavior, and dealing with any self-deception (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Changing how individuals think about themselves and how individuals react to others' impressions of them helps reduce self-handicapping (Siegel & Brockner, 2005). When a

leader is taught to recognize uncertainty, know that it can trigger self-handicapping, and defer his/her reactions to it, he/she may have the power to overcome self-handicapping (Decker & Mitchell, 2016).

Self-handicapping can become a habit and habits are caused by triggers, not motivation (Neal, Wood, Labrecque, & Lally, 2012). No one in business wants to look incompetent – so they can unconsciously self-handicap with impression management to avoid possible embarrassment. When we are uncertain, self-handicapping can begin with a simple excuse designed to protect our self-esteem and self-worth (Harris & Snyder, 1986; Thompson & Hepburn, 2003). We believe that when those in business organizations try to recognize and acknowledge their self-handicapping, they must first analyze these triggers: expediency, avoidance, apprehension, and self-deception. We also believe that self-handicapping can be avoided or overcome by simple strategies to address the trigger that is causing it: expediency (practice deliberate action), avoidance (build self-efficacy), apprehension (build self-efficacy and face the fear), and self-deception (listening to others and being sensitive to nonverbal communication) (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). These hypotheses have not been tested in business settings.

Another method to prevent more advanced self-handicapping is to focus on attitude. Increasing self-esteem (Martin et al., 2003), addressing prevention-focused orientations (Leonardelli, Lakin, & Arkin, 2007), entity views of intelligence (Rhodewalt, 1994), and fear of failure (Elliot & Church, 2003) have been associated with lower self-handicapping. However, these interventions may not be realistic in business practice due to leaders being uncomfortable with managing human issues or executives unwilling to fund efforts at raising managerial self-esteem. Other self-handicapping preventative interventions reported to be effective include: cognitive behavioral therapy (Kearns, Forbes, & Gardiner, 2007), positive self-talk (S. McCrea M. & Flamm, 2012), decreasing hyper-competitive environments (Šimek & Grum, 2010), autonomy support (Shih, 2013), and group cohesion (Carron, Prapavessis, & Grove, 1994). All may be difficult to implement in business settings.

Goal orientation has been shown to be related to self-handicapping (Akin, 2014). Schwinger and Stiensmeier-Pelster (2011) have shown that students with a mastery orientation avoid self-handicapping because they view failure as an opportunity for personal growth and as a modifiable and controllable outcome. It is our proposition that when performance management tools place emphasis on performance goals, employees worry about meeting standards, outperforming one another, or not looking incompetent – all triggers for uncertainty and the resultant self-handicapping. Conversely, by emphasizing mastery goals in performance management, employees may have an invitation to focus on learning from failure, growing, and owning their own competence. By conveying an activity's meaning in terms of adding value for the customer, the process would shift focus away from the department or "pleasing the boss" to the employee mastering his/her contribution to the customer. Mastery-oriented employees should also, over time, acquire accountability for their own competence. Consequently, we believe performance management systems can be redefined in terms of improvement and learning, rather than not making mistakes and being "better than someone else." This has not been examined in business and may have major implications for business systems.

Current Self-Handicapping Business Literature

Business literature regarding self-handicapping is limited. Siegel and Brockner (2005) examined external and internal self-handicaps presented in the annual letters of CEOs to shareholders. When CEO performance was negative, external handicaps negatively affected the valuation of the firm, while not affecting CEO compensation. This illustrates how claiming external handicaps can deflect blame away from the CEO. Crant and Bateman (1993) in a study of 120 accountants showed that external self-handicaps diminished blame for failure but did not affect assignment of credit for success. McElroy and Crant (2008) showed that repeated use of handicapping created considerable risk for the handicapper, in the form of perceived credibility. Ishida (2012) showed mathematically that the standard tradeoff between risk and incentives may break down when leaders are uncertain about their self-esteem and when they use self-handicapping. Lastly, Flanagan (2015) examined the impact of stereotype threat on self-assessment of management skills of female business students.

Clearly, compared to the very large amount of research on students and student athletes (see the authors for a complete bibliography of over 375 studies), there has been little focus on the effects of self-handicapping on workers, managers, or organizations. We believe this phenomenon should be studied by business researchers. We also think that understanding self-handicapping will have impact on how we educate our future business students. Creating a mastery goal orientation in the business classroom may significantly change how we build future leaders.

A Call for More Research

Because of the detrimental long-term effects of self-handicapping, a greater focus on self-handicapping is warranted in the business and leadership literatures. Due to the lack of business and leadership literature of self-handicapping, we believe that there are several opportunities for contributions. While we believe that self-handicapping can start with an excuse that leads to reduced effort and obstacles, this has not been substantiated in the management/leadership literature. Listed below are propositions that we believe will guide future self-handicapping research in business and leadership:

- 1) Self-handicapping is an impression management technique designed to change peers' attributions (provide a reason for failure or enhancement with success) and lessen blame for failure which is frequently used in business settings;
- 2) Managers use excuses and reduced effort to self-handicap;
- 3) Self-handicapping will reduce learning, studying, or preparing which over time will reduce leadership competence and effectiveness;
- 4) Self-handicapping is increased in environments that emphasize performance goals—to win, show competence, or not make mistakes;
- 5) Self-handicapping is reinforced for several reasons - it relieves some of the stress of evaluation that causes leaders to concentrate on the task and creates positive attributions;
- 6) Self-handicapping causes negative consequences - it can result in poor attributions from others with long-term use, and excuses can lead to self-defeating behaviors which can cause serious employee obstacles;
- 7) Continued self-handicapping by a manager leads to reduced effort, less engagement, and self-handicapping among employees;

- 8) Self-handicapping negatively impacts customers;
- 9) The focus in self-handicapping is on protecting the self, not on adding value to customers and solving their problems.
- 10) Leader self-handicapping can be reduced by increasing leaders' judgments of their own self-worth, reducing leaders' attention and reliance on peers' opinions of them, and moving leaders from performance goal orientation to mastery goal orientation.
- 11) Business systems such as performance management can be redesigned to reduce performance orientation and increase mastery orientation.
- 12) Business students who are exposed to the self-handicapping process and how to avoid/overcome it will be better leaders.
- 13) Business classrooms focused on mastery orientation rather than performance orientation will increase the number of leaders produced.

Self-handicapping may be a major drag on the mission of many organizations and business schools (Decker & Mitchell, 2016) and deserves intense study. Additionally, business students are taught in a performance goal environment and learn to self-handicap in business school or earlier. To reduce self-handicapping in management and leadership, we must reduce the self-handicapping done in business school and show our students how detrimental it may be to their future careers.

Specifically, future research is needed to answer:

- 1) ***How much self-handicapping occurs in business:*** The majority of the self-handicapping research in psychology and education deals with antecedents in induced settings and there have been few studies examining self-handicapping prevalence in any population.
- 2) ***Based on the nine categories of self-handicapping suggested by Decker & Mitchell (Decker & Mitchell, 2016), how does self-handicapping manifest in the workplace:*** Are their differences in the triggers that cause self-handicapping across different categories? If so, what are some sample interventions targeting the specific triggers?
- 3) ***Are there differences in prevalence rates between claimed and behavioral self-handicapping in business:*** Do business people and leaders have a tendency to use one, or is it a progression from claimed to behavioral handicapping?
- 4) ***Are there industry-specific outcomes of self-handicapping (positive and negative):*** Are certain industries more likely to tolerate self-handicapping?
- 5) ***Why would a manager choose self-handicapping over other impression management techniques:*** Does self-handicapping offer benefits that other impression management strategies do not offer?
- 6) ***What causes self-handicapping in business – person, situational, and organizational-level variables:*** What influences self-handicapping at different levels? Is there a hierarchical effect?
- 7) ***Is the ERO spiral valid – excuses to reduced effort to obstacles:*** Using time-series, is the progression valid or can a person skip to behavioral self-handicapping and skip claimed?
- 8) ***Are there gender or race differences in business:*** Based on prevalence, preferred self-handicapping strategy, or likelihood of overcoming it?
- 9) ***What reduces self-handicapping in the work environment (personally, situational, organizational or cultural variables):*** What can individuals, teams, and organizations do to limit self-handicapping?

10) ***Do mastery goals reduce self-handicapping in the work environment:*** and if so, how can individuals, teams, and organizations promote mastery-orientation? How can business educators promote mastery orientation?

11) ***How can mastery goal orientation be increased or taught to manager, employee, and business student populations?*** If mastery goals decrease self-handicapping and increase adding value for customers, how can they become the norm on business?

12) ***How can organizations incentivize mastery goal orientation, as opposed to performance-orientation:*** What are the structural and procedural elements in an organization that incentives mastery goal orientation?

13) ***What are the implications of self-handicapping in performance management and talent development?*** We believe case studies, time-series, or cross-sectional studies examining self-handicapping and business outcomes can examine these.

CONCLUSION

Self-handicapping has been studied since 1978 in the areas of psychology and later in education. Recently, self-handicapping has seen a very modest introduction in business and leadership. This paper extends the work of Manz (2015) and emphasizes the importance of understanding self-handicapping as a means to confronting failures and mistakes in order to learn and grow from them (mastery goal orientation) rather than hiding from them. In the present paper, we have outlined the self-handicapping literature in terms of antecedents -- internal and external, process, inhibitors, positive and negative outcomes, as well as presented potential methods to overcome it. Several research questions have been presented that may guide future research in business and leadership. Self-handicapping is prevalent in business education and removing it and moving more to mastery goal orientation in our classrooms and workplaces will be extremely beneficial to our students and future managers. This new line of research in business has the potential to help many recognize their own self-handicapping behavior, admit to the impact it has, and adjust to learn better methods of operating to help attain exceptional leadership. It could change how researchers and practitioners look at leadership.

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