Theses and Dissertations

2023

Exploring the intersection of self-talk and decision-making

Chris M. Lewis

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF SELF-TALK

AND DECISION-MAKING

A Research Project

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graziadio Business School

Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

In

Organization Development

---

by

Chris M. Lewis

August 2023

This research project, completed by

CHRIS M. LEWIS

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been

submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2023

Faculty Committee

_____

Committee Chair, Darren Good, Ph. D.

_____

Committee Member, Miriam Y. Lacey, Ph. D.

_____

Deborah Crown, Ph.D., Dean
The Graziadio Business School

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the intersection of self-talk and decision-making. Leaders in today's world face increasing volume and complexity of decisions. Using a phenomenological approach to understanding the experiences of people managers in the United States, this research conducted interviews to understand the role self-talk plays in a people manager's decision-making processes and to what extent self-talk influences people managers to avoid making a decision. Findings suggest that self-talk is a foundational component of decision-making. A manager's awareness of how to best leverage and manage self-talk may increase an organization's capacity for strong decision-making.

Keywords: self-talk, decision-making, inner speech, self-leadership

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend gratitude and appreciation for the amazing Pepperdine University MSOD faculty and Learning Group Consultants: Dr. Darren Good, Dr. Gary Mangiofico, Dr. Ann Feyerham, Dr. Christopher Worley, Dr. Miriam Lacey, Dr. Mark Tribbet, Dr. Kent Rhodes, Dr. Terri Egan, Anita Bhasin, John Childers, Jon Mullican, Deborah Rainier, and Lisa Woodward. The Long Grey Line continues due to your wisdom, dedication, and compassion.

Through the support and tough love of my Alpha Secunde cohort, I was able to overcome amazing obstacles and learn from each and every one of you.

Jessica, Kelsey, Rebecca, and Jeremy, this has been one heck of an adventure.

Anita, words cannot describe how much your encouragement and support has meant to me.

To my husband, Matt Lewis, for your unwavering support, humor, love, and fortitude that enabled me to make this journey, I am forever grateful. Through sickness and health, better or worse, you are my rock. I love you.

To my son, Tilt, you inspire and challenge me every day. I am so proud of the young man you are becoming. I love you to the moon and back.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

To lead or not to lead. To lead is a decision every people manager must make to clear the path for their team's success. Decision-making is a non-negotiable responsibility of every leader. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing." Roosevelt's quote represents the paradoxical simplicity and complexity managers face daily with navigating the volume of choices required to lead in today's demanding environment. The cognitive strain stirred from anticipated emotion due to the volume or impact of decisions creates an environment ripe for the introduction of either constructive or dysfunctional self-talk (e.g., Houghton and Jinkerson, 2007; Neck & Manz, 1992). Vygotsky (1934, 1987) hypothesized that inner speech, defined as an internal monologue or dialogue reflecting upon inner experience (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015), increases linearly as task difficulty increases. Establishing constructive thought patterns through self-talk is an approach versus an avoidance coping style that allows the individual to proactively mitigate demands and work to solve the source of the strain (Dolbier et al., 2001). Yet, we do not yet know empirically when and how self-talk shows up in a leader's decision-making process. Scant research or empirical evidence exists that explores the interplay between the cognitive behavioral phenomena of self-talk and decision-making.

Study Purpose and Significance

This study aims to examine U.S. people manager's propensity to leverage self-talk, also referred to as inner speech, throughout their decision-making processes.

Moreover, it explored where the mechanics of self-talk and decision-making intersect. Two research questions were studied:

- What role does self-talk play in the decision-making processes of people managers?
- To what extent does self-talk influence people manager's choice to make or avoid decisions?

The study is significant because, at the time of writing, it appears to be the first empirical study to explore self-talk and decision-making as the central phenomena under investigation. The results of this study support several practical applications. First and foremost, the research lays the foundation for future studies by delivering a phenomenological view into a sub-category of thought self-leadership as it relates to decision-making, a people skill required for organizational effectiveness (Neck & Manz, 1992). The findings could benefit managers by raising awareness of how self-talk interacts with their decision-making, thus creating a condition for behavioral change.

Study Outline

This qualitative study will seek to understand the lived experiences of U.S. people managers. Chapter 2 reviews the existing empirical literature related to the research questions and phenomena. Chapter 3 summarizes the chosen methodology including approaches to design, participant sample, data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 4, the qualitative findings are described and summarized. Chapter 5 concludes the study by discussing the key themes, limitations of the research, and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review presented in this study first examined decision-making and self-talk as separate phenomena in the behavioral psychology and leadership domains given the limited research exploring a relationship between the two. One study did include phenomena of self-talk and decision-making but was restricted to exploring the relationship between vocalized self-talk as a decision-making strategy and cognitive decline. Johnson (1993) used vocalized self-talk to streamline participants' strategy selection process and measure performance across two subgroups: young adults and older adults. Performance was a temporal measure used to assess potential cognitive decline (Johnson, 1993). The decision-making strategy utilized within the study focused specifically on vocalized self-talk referred to as thinking aloud as a condition hypothesized to reduce cognitive load decision-making strategies.

Self-Talk

The theory of self-talk is a centuries-old phenomenon. Self-talk as a concept within developmental psychology is described within the literature most prominently as a component of Vygotsky's (1934, 1987) theory of cognitive development with contrasting and less accepted theories such as Watson's (1913) behaviorism, a mechanical reductionist view of inner speech. Vygotsky's view of self-talk is that of progressing cognitive transitions from vocalized, private to inner speech or dialogue. The peak of development is reached when behavior-regulating thoughts learned by the caregiver(s) are expressed internally (Vygotsky, 1934, 1987). A second dimension to this theory includes a progression of semantic transformations whereby the public meaning of

language takes on a redacted and personalized form. Alderson-Day and Fernyhough (2015) extended the concept of semantic transformation by introducing condensed and expanded inner speech where condensed represents the redacted 'thinking in meaning' dialogic quality and expanded favors a more public-facing internal dialogue. Expanded inner speech has a positive relationship to stress and cognitive challenges which aligned with Vygotsky's (1934, 1987) finding that as task complexity increases so does self-talk.

The literature continued to evolve with the addition of empirical research and theory focused on dynamic self-processes (Morin, 2021). Within the realm of self-processes, self-talk (Vygotsky, 1934, 1987) is a common self-regulatory process in response to positive and negative events. The recognition that self-processes are at the heart of behavioral tendencies has led to the proliferation of self-talk research across multiple domains such as sports performance and sport, clinical, addiction, and development psychology, extending into modern management and leadership (Neck & Manz, 1992; Rogelberg et al., 2013). Moreover, management and psychology researchers expanded their work into a strand of theory and research related to self-leadership. (Manz, 1992).

It is suggested that self-leadership is a normative model of self-influence that operates within the framework of more descriptive and deductive theories such as self-regulation and social cognitive theory. Specifically, thought self-leadership is a subcategory hypothesizing that behavior and related performance outcomes are mediated by self-regulation, constructive self-talk utilization, and the role of the external environment (Neck & Manz, 1992). While numerous researcher's expansion into thought

self-leadership indicates the acknowledgment of the potential for self-talk to improve leader effectiveness, the variables studied are limited to high-order categories such as creativity/originality, the leadership of others, job strain, and positive/negative self-talk (Rogelberg et al, 2013).

Latinjak et al. (2023) reviewed 100 peer-reviewed publications studying the self-talk phenomenon and synthesized the content into a transdisciplinary model that posits a common taxonomy and key relationships between categories of self-talk. An integrated definition of self-talk continues to be debated. To differentiate the research from its predecessors (Alderson-Day & Ferynough, 2015), Latijunk et al. (2023) state that the review is based on a conceptualization of self-talk that differs from private or inner speech due to "differences in the role of articulation, development, controlled processing, and interventionist control" (p. 2) Latinjak et al. (2023) cites Hurlburt et al. (2013) to support the suggestion that self-talk differs from private or inner speech. Upon review of Hurlburt et al. (2013), Latinjak et al. (2023) defined self-talk as overt speech and inner speech as silent speech, which is inconsistent with most of the self-talk literature. Despite this confusion, the findings presented a much-needed taxonomy for future research across the numerous domains in which self-talk is explored. Proposed self-talk labels include organic self-talk and strategic self-talk. Organic self-talk includes two subtypes that are differentiated by whether the inner speech is spontaneous or goal-directed. Frequently used in athletic performance (Latinjak et al., 2019), strategic self-talk is defined as inner speech that is predetermined and uses cue words to instruct or motivate the self toward a desired behavior (Alderson-Day & Fernyough, 2015; Latijink, 2023). For this study,

self-talk is defined herein as inner dialogue which may be overtly or covertly expressed and is organic in nature that may be used interchangeably with inner speech.

Decision-Making

A search limited to scholarly peer-reviewed articles from the previous 20 years with the keyword 'decision-making' results in over 100,000 peer-reviewed publications. Decision-making has been studied extensively across normative and descriptive theories. Normative theory asserts how a person should behave when making a decision (Morelli et al., 2022). Research indicated a progressive shift starting with the work of Tversky and Kahneman (1986) to favoring descriptive over normative theory to make sense of decision-making and the ultimate choices made by the decision-maker. Expected Utility Theory (Morelli et al., 2022; Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) is one prescription for reaching an optimal decision and offers four principles of decision-making strategy. Theorists continue to observe violations of these axioms through experimentation (Galotti, 2002; Moreira, 2018; Morelli et al., 2022). Cognition was not considered in developing normative theory (Morelli et al., 2022). Tversky and Kahneman's (1986) prospect theory addressed the failures of normative theory by demonstrating that experience is a driver of decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Morelli et al., 2022).

Decision-Making as a Process

Of particular interest in framing this study is the process described within each descriptive theory. Using prospect theory as an example, the first phase aggregates and edits information to ascertain a proposed list of options. The second phase evaluates which option would return the highest value outcome (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986;

Morelli et al., 2022). Morelli et al. (2022) presents the phases and respective neural correlates of the decision-making process which act as a ground truth representation across accepted descriptive theories.

As people managers do not always have the luxury of taking their time to make decisions, cognition becomes relevant as the conscious and unconscious process of heuristic shortcuts (André et al., 2002; Morelli et al., 2022; Payne et al., 1993) and dual-process theory (Kahneman 2003; Morelli et al., 2022; Petracca, 2020) are cognitive processes engaged to reduce the effort required to decide, optimize, and assess the results (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011; Morelli et al., 2022).

While theories and processes create the basis for understanding self-talk and decision-making, what appears to be missing is the experiential component at the intersection of the processes. This study will build upon this research by exploring what role self-talk plays within these processes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the role self-talk might play in people manager's decision-making process. Heavey et al. (2010) wrote, "The attempt to apprehend human experience the way it presents itself, undistorted by pre-suppositions and unencumbered by arbitrary measurement operations, is a center of gravity of the heterogeneous collection of methods known as phenomenological or qualitative psychology" (p. 345). A phenomenological qualitative methodology was selected to elicit the lived experiences of participants. This chapter describes the research design, participant sample, data collection, and analysis. In addition, study assumptions, methodological challenges, and limitations are presented.

Research Design

Phenomenological research employs interview questions to evoke participants' experiences within a given situation (Creswell, 2018). An inductive logic approach was used to develop a generalized theory based on themes discovered during analysis (Creswell, 2018; Punch, 2014). An interview script including 11 open-ended questions was developed to maintain consistency across interviews. Appendix A shows research and interview question correlation and Appendix B shows the interview questions.

Participant Sample

The target population included professionals in the U.S. who have at least 10 years of experience, of which at least one year was managing people. Experienced professionals were sought out to ensure participants had a significant career timeframe in which to reflect upon. Participants represented a purposive sample recruited from my

professional and collegiate network. Due to the qualitative phenomenological nature of this study, the target sample size, based on Creswell's (2018) recommendation, was between 3-10 individuals. Nine participants completed the interview. Participants had experience managing a team of between 2-10 direct reports. All participants were knowledge workers as defined by their titles and roles and, per the inclusion guidelines for the study, had at least 10 years of professional experience. Participants represented a wide variety of disciplines and domains including, but not limited to, technology ($n = 3$), advertising ($n = 1$), consulting services ($n = 3$), and human resources ($n = 2$).

Procedures

The study convened with recruitment. Email invitations were sent and posted on social media groups to communicate the opportunity to potential subjects who met the inclusion criteria. Candidates were provided a link via a scheduling software tool that provided details of the study and a link to review and download the informed consent document. Candidates requested a mutually agreeable date and time for the interview. Prior to the interview, the signed informed consent document was received from each participant for inclusion in the study and to permit an audio recording of the interview. In total, 60-minute interviews were conducted via video conferencing. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that all the information would remain confidential, securely stored, and destroyed upon the completion of transcription. Participants were urged to refrain from sharing any personally identifiable information. Interview audio was recorded, transcribed, and imported into a qualitative coding tool in preparation for data analysis. To achieve higher transcription quality, each interview

audio recording and transcription were reviewed in parallel to ensure a word-for-word account of each participant's responses. Once quality assurance was complete, audio recordings were destroyed.

Data Analysis and Coding

Data analysis was conducted to label and analyze the data for themes. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was followed to make sense of the participants' experiences maintaining a person-in-context perspective (Larkin et al., 2006). Three coding passes were completed, beginning with verbatim coding to reduce researcher bias or interpretation. "The objective during this initial stage is simply to produce a coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description, which tries to get as 'close' to the participant's view as is possible" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104). Next, a top-down coding cycle was conducted to interpret the verbatim results through the researcher's lens by coding objects of concern and experiential claims. The third and final coding round involved thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across participants' lived experiences. The last step in IPA assessed the identified patterns to develop a generalized theory based on the themes discovered.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study sought to explore the role self-talk plays in the decision-making process of U.S. people managers. Table 1 presents examples of participants' reported self-talk. Verbatim examples are categorized by whether they met the definition of spontaneous, occurring automatically or reflexively, or goal-directed, used intentionally for self-regulation, self-control, and problem-solving (Latijink et al., 2023).

Table 1

Self-Talk by Category

Category	Subcategories	Verbatim Examples
Organic	Spontaneous	"what the fudge is going on" // "will this be a disaster?" "oh, why did you leave that industry?" "hey, am I giving everybody a fair chance and fair opportunity?" "if you've never done this before, what if you screw it up you know, do you really want to blow your 401k" "you're never, you'll never meet your meet your expectations" "Am I doing the right thing?" // "who's that decision going to affect?" "what are you going to do" "how are you going to make it, you've got a family that is depending on you" "I can be so successful, but I'm not" // "so where does this align? "what values do we want to uphold or maximize or stay true to?" "What's that icky feeling in my stomach and what might that be telling me? Who am I afraid to talk to about this?"
	Goal-Directed	"okay, but what's, what's my role here? Okay, and what's the highest purpose that I'm trying to fulfill right now?" "kind of playing it back and forth and like maybe I can try this. Maybe I can do that." "take a beat. Take a couple of breaths….you don't need to respond in the moment" "what is one thing I can fix?" "Should I, should we frame this in a certain way?" "okay, okay, so they did this thing, and it was incredibly stupid. So all right. Now what do you want to do? "oh, okay, take a breath. Let's step back and think about this."

Table 2 presents the types of decisions participants reported that they make or have made in the past as part of being a people manager.

Table 2

Decision-Making by Category

Category	Subcategories	Verbatim Examples
People Management	Hiring, firing, career growth investing, conflict management	"Ratings..picking people who you think will fall in that [the one who is doing the least good] category" "[with regard to] layoffs - figuring out how to balance, to be true to my own ethics about wanting to be transparent letting people know as soon as possible"
Portfolio, Product or Program Management	Roadmaps, sequencing of delivery/work, resource allocation, prioritization	"what's the right thing in the long term for this product, even though the leadership is looking at short term results" "weigh priorities and schedules" "decide the direction of the company"
Personal Influence	Colleague perceptions, career development	"how much do I want to share with those people who've worked with me" "[whether to act on] advice I'm being given….adjust my personality to fit a situation, but show up completely contrary to who I am"
Wellbeing	Parental work/life balance, anxiety	"the most difficult emotionally to choose between that work and [being a mom]"

Research Question 1

Three themes emerged which answered the first research question: "What role does self-talk play in a people manager's decision-making process?"

Self-Talk as a Decision-Making Process

A pattern emerged illustrating the participants' conscious ($n = 1$) and subconscious ($n = 4$) use of self-talk as a facilitator of their decision-making process. Participants mentioned engaging in self-talk to process decisions ($n = 9$), evaluate options ($n = 6$), and regulate their thoughts and emotions ($n = 5$). Self-talk was experienced as a tool for considering different scenarios, assessing gut feelings, and determining the best course of action ($n = 5$). In some cases, spontaneous constructive or negative self-talk was an antecedent for the participant to gain self-awareness about sentiment relating to a specific decision and an indicator that there was a need for more thoughtful exploration before reaching a decision ($n = 8$). Goal-directed self-talk follows ($n = 8$) by providing self-regulation (e.g., "take a pause," "deep breath," and "I catch myself") as participant examples illustrate. Goal-directed self-talk included internally developing a plan to move forward toward a goal or decision. This is highlighted by the following participant:

> There's a warning light on the dashboard where it's like, 'oh, problem, let me okay, here's our problem solving process' or, 'Oh, there's conflict. Let me…' or 'Oh, my normal, my normal, wonderful self isn't winning the day here? What do I need to do differently?'

Another participant used the analogy of a smoke signal numerous times to indicate self-talk as an early warning mechanism:

> So, self talk can either, you know, be the smoke under the hood, kind of situation to say, 'Oh, wow', like I'll notice if I'm like, 'Oh, you really don't want to make a decision about that, huh?' Like, that means something. There's some smoke there, something matters.

> Something feels overwhelming or something you're resisting something, you know, whatever. So again, the negative self-talk can actually be a very useful signal in that case.

The inner dialogue as a process approach to decision-making also appeared, just as self-talk appeared as a mechanism for keeping values (i.e., "to be true to my own ethics") top of mind when identifying decision options and selecting a final option ($n = 8$). Participants shared that values are at the forefront of their decision making: "I kind of first go to values. How does this decision align? Or, how do these options of this decision align with my values? And I think one of the values for me would be how does this work for those impacted by the decision?"

The tone and reflection in the voices of the participants had a dream, almost idealistic feeling, about their conviction around values. For example, one participant said, "I think there's something some of that is about my own sort of value set or perspective on the world." Another echoed the sentiment, "Maybe that's just the way I'm wired but there's always a values piece that comes into the decision making."

Emotion as an Antecedent

Participants acknowledged that emotion is an antecedent for self-talk ($n = 6$) and self-talk as a self-regulation strategy ($n = 7$), highlighted by the sense of feeling hijacked. One participant shared how the emotions took over and spontaneous goal-directed self-talk appeared: "Usually the biggest thing that prompts it [self-talk] is when I start feeling hijacked emotionally, by something that happens and I felt like 'whoa, I gotta reign in myself back here.'" Another participant provided the lens through which they view the importance of redirecting self-talk that is not serving them once emotion takes over:

> The ability to catch it, acknowledge it and redirect it is I can't emphasize enough how important that is to my ability to just sort of have peace of mind and mental well being and to be able to be present in situations without just getting completely hijacked.

Automatic versus Reflective Tension

Experiences of self-talk illustrated a natural tension between the automatic initial inner speech and the thoughtful responses that question and validate the intuition of the first internal speaker. While the spontaneous self-talk is reported to appear in conjunction with an emotional trigger ($n = 6$), participants also shared experiences that mimicked dialogue between two spontaneous self-talk voices where an initial voice quickly speaks and then a second voice offers a more reflective logical opinion ($n = 8$) as illustrated in the following quote:

> The interesting thing is when I said 'oh, we should do it' that it triggered this other part to say 'well, if you're doing it for that person…..we need to think about how it will impact these others" So it was kind of dialogue going on, like two part dialogue. It definitely helped it. It caught, like the second voice caught, you know, pretty significant risk that if we didn't address it ahead of time would have caused all kinds of problems. So in that sense, it's very good.

One participant described almost a sense of relief in the recognition during the interview that talking through the decision-making process they were experiencing had helped them slow down and realize the automatic reactions are a pattern. This was the sentiment expressed by most of the participants ($n = 6$) when they described the nature of the debate that occurred internally as self-talk. Participants who reported significant self-improvement work and awareness of the impact of negative self-talk over their career shared reduced or modified automatic self-talk akin to rumination ($n = 6$).

Research Question 2

"To what extent does self-talk influence people manager's choice to make or avoid decisions?" Deferring or avoiding decisions can prevent teams and organizations from making sufficient progress against goals thus impacting employee morale and results. Two themes emerged during analysis that assist in answering this question: a values-based sense of responsibility and the benefits of procrastination.

Values-Based Sense of Responsibility

Seven of the nine participants focused heavily on their desire to ensure decisions were aligned with their values and ethics. To not decide went against values which alluded to a sense of responsibility participants felt towards others who relied on their decision-making ($n = 7$). For example, one participant said, "I think there's some abdication of accountability for not making a decision." This theme also highlighted an internal sense of responsibility to self based on the participants' values ($n = 4$). One participant mentioned, "So to say I'm not making a choice just feels like, like, giving up on life, you know?"

In addition to values shaping self-talk dialogue to determines what ultimate choice is made to achieve a given desired outcome, they appear in a decision maker's translation from spontaneous self-talk to externally verbalized speech ($n = 5$). For example, one participant said, "I could never say this out loud to that person in that way."

Benefits of Procrastination

Participants were not in favor of avoiding decisions, given their values-based sense of responsibility what did emerge was the idea that procrastination is beneficial to decision-making ($n = 6$). While the term procrastination was used, it became clear that what the participants were describing was not procrastination in the truest definition of the word. Participants expressed an intentional pause or additional actions to take to better inform their decision and acknowledge the need to be flexible ($n = 6$). One participant said, "Sometimes procrastination is helpful. Sometimes not deciding is helpful. If you're upset or tired or angry, procrastination is the right choice. Things are not in your control. Just go with the waves." Five of the six participants citing the intention to pause did so to minimize the emotional impact of the decision on others. One outlier shared concern over delaying decision-making as expressed in their comment:

> ...if you keep delaying it [a decision] you're just impacting it negatively anyways.
> So whatever information you have right now, based on that, pick the best choice
> that will positively impact people in the future and keep room open for changes.
> Because, right, the market is so dynamic that things change very fast.

Summary

All participants in the study reported both self-talk in isolation and as a central aspect of their decision-making processes. Participants appeared to make sense of

self-talk as a decision-making process, a tool for self-regulation, and a supporting

cognitive process within their decision-making framework.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of this study suggest an inseparable connection between self-talk and decision-making. Perceived experiences of this sample of U.S. people managers indicate that self-talk, whether it is triggered by emotion-stirred stimuli or simply a pragmatic exercise of choice, functions as a self-regulation mechanism, process facilitator, and ethical stalwart.

The study findings suggest that emotion is an antecedent of the self-talk theme and extends the thought self-leadership model (Neck & Manz, 1992) by contributing to the understanding of thought self-leadership in new ways as illustrated in Figure 1. Emotion appears to both precede self-talk and follow self-talk. In addition, thought patterns appear to precede performance or return to self-talk. This study found that emotive stimuli may play a role in the appearance of spontaneous self-talk, which is consistent with the concept of primary inducers in the Somatic Hypothesis Marker theory of decision-making (Damasio & Bechara, 2005). Another proposed update to the thought self-leadership model is presented by a connection between the thought patterns and beliefs as observed in participants' experiences of holding values in their minds as the self-talk occurred.

Figure 1

Extended Thought Self Leadership Model
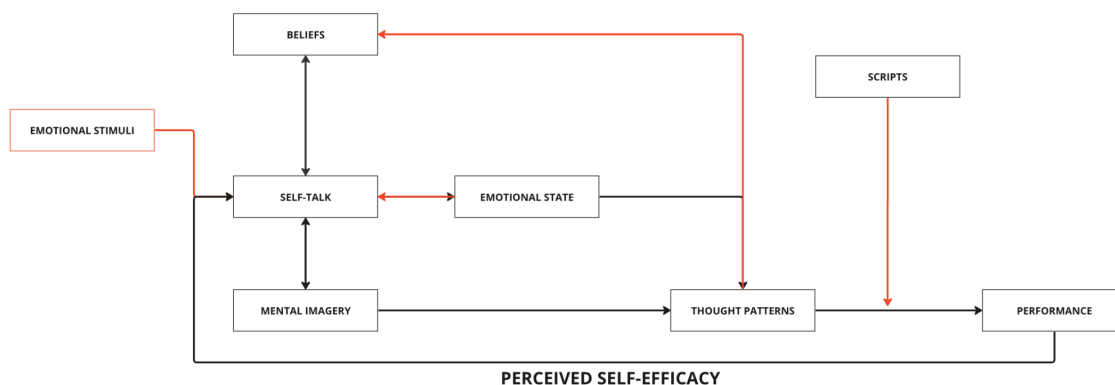
COMPONENTS IN RED DENOTE STUDY FINDINGS PROPOSED ADDITIONS TO THE (NECK
& MANZ, 1992) THOUGHT SELF LEADERSHIP MODEL

Of interest to the behavioral science research community, and those focused on
self-process and decision-making, is the finding that organic self-talk appears to be an
internal verbalization of system 1 (spontaneous) and system 2 (spontaneous and goal
directed), dual processing theory (Latinjak et al., 2023; Morin, 2021; Petracca, 2020).
Three conditions seem to engage system 1 verbalization: a) abrupt or strong emotion, b)
lived experience or narrative which has become an embedded pattern, and/or c)
introduction of a decision or choice that does not align with a person's values. It appears
that system 1 gives a quick almost subconscious gut reaction and then system 2 enables
people to take a step back and question their reaction. Participants shared experiences
may highlight the negotiation between an internal voice or multiple voices, system 1, and
another voice or multiple voices representing system 2 (Petracca, 2020).

The findings seem to stress the importance of focusing on self-awareness and self-regulation strategies that will increase the development of healthy self-talk patterns in order to positively impact the efficiency and effectiveness of a U.S. people manager's decision-making processes.

Implications for Future Scholarship

The prominent takeaway from the changes to the thought self-leadership model suggests a shift to the centrality and interplay of self-talk within the overall model. This discovery has implications for future research where this adapted model could be validated in several ways, including the verbalization of inner dialogue while engaging in a dynamic decision-making simulation (Good, 2014).

A fMRI study to determine if spontaneous self-talk is the verbalization of system 1 and system 2 processing could support the development of interventions for rewiring thought processes. Deeper exploration to test for a correlation between verbalization and neural processing could also generate data for therapeutic techniques aimed at helping those with brain injuries invoke self-talk as a tool for handling decision-making (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

Implications for Practice

Learning and development professionals can utilize the understanding of the role self-talk plays within a people manager's decision-making process to develop more targeted programs that include modules that create awareness around the use of self-talk and how that is influencing behavior and decision-making.

Proprioceptive writing is an example of an activity that would stimulate self-reflection. Upon completion of the writing exercise, attendees could be asked to further reflect on their writing by answering questions such as:

- "What was the tone of your self-reflection?"

- "Was your stream of consciousness constructive and motivational or critical and judgmental?"

Next, attendees could write a strategic self-talk script to be used when the critical or judgmental inner dialogue appears during decision-making.

Limitations

There are three limitations to consider. First, qualitative studies are empirical by nature, yet not intended to be statistically significant. Therefore, it would benefit future research to use a larger mixed-method study. This phenomenological study includes a small sample size ($n = 9$). Methodological challenges exist for validating the accuracy of qualitative studies exploring self-talk (Brintauft et al., 2009). Researchers assert Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) is a valid instrument for capturing pristine inner experiences (Heavey et al., 2010). In this study, the aim of capturing both self-talk and decision-making reduced the applicability of using DES. While assessment of the accuracy of the self-talk Scale (STS; Brinthaupt et al., 2009) psychometric instrument suggests reasonable accounts of self-reported self-talk, this survey was not included as the instrument measures whether people notice inner speech and frequency recall. Thus, a limitation of this study is the accuracy of the experiential accounts due to the temporal nature of the design. Asking participants to recall both decision making and inner

speaking events requires reconstruction of memory which lacks consistency across

individuals and accuracy is reduced (Murr & Dross, 2015).

References

Alderson-Day, B., & Fernyhough, C. (2015). Inner Speech: Development, Cognitive Functions, Phenomenology, and Neurobiology. *Psychological Bulletin*, *141*(5), 931–965.

Anderson, C. J. (2003). The Psychology of Doing Nothing: Forms of Decision Avoidance Result From Reason and Emotion. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(1), 139 –167.

Alderson-Day, B., Mitrenga, K.,Wilkinson, S., McCarthy-Jones, S., & Fernyhough, C. (2018). The varieties of inner speech questionnaire – Revised (VISQ-R): Replicating and refining links between inner speech and psychopathology. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *65*, 48-58.

Brinthaupt, T. M., Hein, M. B., & Kramer, T. E. (2009). The Self-Talk Scale: development, factor analysis, and validation. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *91*, 82–92.

Creswell., J. W. C. & J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Damasio, A.R. & Bechara, A. (2005). The somatic marker hypothesis: A neural theory of economic decision. *Games and Economic Behavior*, *52*, 336–372.

Dolbier, C.L., Soderstrom, M., & Steinhardt, M.A. (2001). The Relationships Between Self-Leadership and Enhanced Psychological, Health, and Work Outcomes. *The Journal of Psychology*, *135*(5), 469-485.

Good, D. (2014). Predicting real-time adaptive performance in a dynamic decision-making context. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 20(6), 715-732.

Heavey, C.L., Hurlburt, R.T., & Lefforge, N.L. (2010). Descriptive Experience Sampling: A Method for Exploring Momentary Inner Experience. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *7*, 345–368.

Hurlburt, R.T., Heavey, C.L., & Kelsey, J.M. (2013). Toward a phenomenology of inner speaking. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *22*(4), 1477–1494.

Johnson, M.S. (1993). Thinking about strategies during, before, and after making a decision. *Psychology and Aging*, *8*(2), 231-241.

Kahneman, D. (2003). A Perspective on Judgment and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality. *American Psychologist*, *58*(9), 697–720.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 102-120.

Latinjak, A. T., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Comoutos, N., & Hardy, J. (2019). Speaking clearly... 10 years on: The case for an integrative perspective of self-talk in sport. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, *8*(4), 353-367.

Latinjak, A. T., Morin, A., Brinthaupt, T. M., Hardy, J., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Kendall, P. C., ... & Winsler, A. (2023). Self-Talk: An Interdisciplinary Review and Transdisciplinary Model. *Review of General Psychology*, 10892680231170263.

Manz, C. C., Adsit, D., Campbell, S., & Mathison-Hance, M. (1988). Managerial thought patterns and performance: A study of perceptual patterns of performance hindrances for higher and lower performing managers. *Human Relations*, *41*(6), 447-465.

Morelli, M., Casagrande, M., & Forte, G. (2022). Decision making: A theoretical review. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, *56*(3), 609-629.

Morin, A. (2021). Handbook of personality dynamics and processes. pp. 366-381. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813995-0.00015-7

Neck, C.P. & Manz, C.C. (1992). Thought self-leadership: The influence of self-talk and mental imagery on performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *13*, 681-699.

Petracca, E. (2020). Two and a half systems: The sensory-motor system in dual-process judgment and decision-making. *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics*, *13*(1), 1–18.

Punch, K. (2014). Introduction to social research: Quantitative & qualitative approaches. SAGE.

Rogelberg, S.G., Justice, L., Braddy, P.W., Paustian‑Underdahl, S.C., Heggestad, E., Shanock, L., Baran, B.E., Beck, T., Long, S., Andrew, A., Altman, D.G. and Fleenor, J.W. (2013). The executive mind: leader self-talk, effectiveness and strain. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *28*(2), 183-201.

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1986). Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions. *The Journal of Business*, *59*(4), S251-S278.

Uttl, B., Morin, A. & Hamper, B. (2011). Are inner speech self-report questionnaires reliable and valid? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *30*, 1719 – 1723.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1934/1987). Thinking and speech. The collected works of Lev Vygotsky (Vol. 1). Plenum Press.

Appendix A: Research and Interview Question Correlation

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
What role does self-talk play in the decision-making processes of people managers?	Q3. Can you share as many examples you can recall of your own self-talk over the past 2 weeks? Q5. Can you provide me with a few examples of the decisions you make as a manager in your organization? Q6. What is the most difficult decision you had to make within the last 3-6 months? Q7. Can you walk me through your decision-making process? Imagine you are teaching someone who has never had to make a decision before. Q8. At any point during the decision-making process, do you recall experiencing self-talk? Q9. If you reported self-talk during the decision-making process, can you describe the inner dialogue? Did it help or hinder you? Q11. What do you believe is the most important consideration for a leader facing a decision?
To what extent does self-talk influence people manager's choice to make or avoid decisions?	Q4. How does self-talk help or hinder you? Q11. Out of all of the decisions you've faced over the previous 3-6 months, how many did you make versus how many did you avoid?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Please state your name, job title and your role within your organization.

2. How many people do you manage?

3. The definition of self-talk in this research is "the inner dialogue whereby you talk to yourself." Often self-talk occurs when self-regulating, problem solving or decision-making. It can be constructive or critical. Can you share as many examples you can recall of your own self-talk over the past 2 weeks?

4. How does self-talk help or hinder you?

5. Can you provide me with a few examples of the types of decisions you make as a manager in your organization?

6. What is the most difficult decision you had to make within the last 3-6 months?

7. Can you walk me through your decision-making process? Imagine you are teaching someone who has never had to make a decision before.

8. At any point during the decision-making process, do you recall experiencing self-talk?

9. If you reported self-talk during the decision-making process, can you describe the inner dialogue? Did it help or hinder you?

10. Out of all of the decisions you've faced over the previous 3-6 months, how many did you make versus how many did you avoid?

11. What do you believe is the most important consideration for a leader facing a decision?