

Understanding teamwork and leadership: the role of self-construal

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Dr Ben Voyer discusses his latest research on how self-construals affect behaviour.

In my research, I study how self-construal can help us to understand how we behave in teams or act as leaders or followers. Self-construal is concerned with how individuals perceive themselves as being psychologically independent or interdependent from others. This tension between a desire to be unique, and to belong to groups, is at the heart of social and organisational psychology.



Over the last years, my research has focused on investigating how the status of an individual can shape an individual's self-construal, and subsequently affect behaviours. For instance, in a study published in 2013 in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (Voyer & Reader, 2013), we measured, for the first time, the self-construal of 102 doctors and nurses. Our findings show that doctors report a dominant independent self-construal, whereas nurses do not report a dominant self-construal. Interestingly, male and female medical and nursing staff also differ in terms of their interdependent self-construal. For men, status – i.e. being a doctor vs. a nurse – tends to decrease perception of interdependence, whereas the opposite is true for women.

These differences in terms of self-construal can in return affect teamwork. Individuals with a dominant interdependent self-construal are typically more likely to share their opinions and be open to new ideas. Conversely, individuals with a dominant independent self-construal are more likely to enjoy working alone and be closed to new ideas. Hence, developing innovative training to foster interdependence in medical staff can be a way to counterbalance the effect of organisational role and status on self-perception (Voyer, 2014).

To find out more about this topic and about my research, you can read [an interview I gave to The Economist](#).



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