



Task and person-focused leadership behaviors and team performance: A meta-analysis



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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a meta-analytic review of the relationship between person and task-focused leader behaviors, on the one hand, and team performance, on the other hand. The results, based on 89 independent samples, show a moderate positive ($\rho = 0.33$) association between both types of leadership behaviors and subjective team performance. For objective team performance, the effect sizes are smaller, yet positive ($\rho = 0.19$ for task-focused leadership behaviors and $\rho = 0.18$ for person-focused leadership behaviors). Furthermore, with respect to the methodological moderators, the analyses show that the relationships were stronger when leadership behaviors were rated by the leaders themselves, rather than by others, and the association was stronger when the correlations were estimated at the individual level, as opposed to the team level of analysis. Concerning conceptual moderators, team type was identified as a significant moderator, and correlations between a person-focused leadership behavior and team performance were stronger for service and project teams than for action/performing teams. Task interdependence was another moderator tested in our meta-analysis, yet our results show no clear moderating effect of task interdependence on the relationship between leadership behavior and team performance.

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1. Introduction

Leadership is one of the most prolific research areas within the field of organizational behavior, as leadership has important implications for individual, team and organizational performance. The interest in exploring the team level influences of leadership behaviors increased steadily in the last two decades (DeChurch, Hiller, Murase, Doty, & Salas, 2010) and empirical research on the effect of leadership behaviors on team outcomes was integrated in narrative reviews (Kozlowski, Chao, & Mak, 2016; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010) as well as in meta-analytic investigations (Burke et al., 2006).

The main claim of the leadership behavior theories is that leaders' patterns of behaviors or behavioral tendencies influence the followers' actions and team functioning. In a functional perspective, team leaders have to manage personnel resources and the progression toward the task accomplishment in order to foster team performance (Morgeson et al., 2010). In their meta-analysis, Burke et al. (2006) show that both person and task-focused leader behaviors are positively related to team performance.

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The aim of our meta-analysis is to further advance the understanding of the influence of person and task-focused leadership behaviors on team performance.

By conducting this meta-analysis, we intend to extend the insights reported in [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#) in three ways. First, as the empirical literature exploring the team level outcomes of leadership increased after 2005 ([DeChurch et al., 2010](#)), we aim to review a substantially larger body of new empirical evidence that explores the association between leadership behaviors and team performance. Second, as the project based organization increased in importance ([Bakker, 2010](#)) so did the reliance on project teams. Although in general, various types of teams are building blocks in most modern organizations ([Hollenbeck, Beersma & Schouten, 2012](#)) with nearly two thirds of the Fortune 500 organizations using some form of teamwork in their midst ([Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002](#)) we intend to take into account team typology as a moderator in our meta-analysis. We argue that different types of teams perform different tasks and that the function of person and task-focused leadership is likely to vary across different types of teams. Therefore, we extend the contributions of [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#) by testing the moderating effect of team types and task interdependence (as conceptual moderators) as well as level of analysis and method used to evaluate leadership behaviors (as methodological moderators) in the relationship between leadership behaviors and team performance. Finally, as the meta-analytic framework we use the method presented in [Schmidt and Hunter \(2015\)](#) that allows an estimation of true correlations by correcting for sampling error, unreliability and dichotomization of a criterion variable. We continue by summarizing the conceptual framework for our meta-analysis, namely the integrated model of leadership functions and team performance ([Burke et al., 2006](#)). For comparative reasons, we organize our conceptual discussion along the same categorization of leadership behaviors used in the original meta-analysis. We then describe the meta-analytic procedures, the results and we conclude with the discussion of our findings.

1.1. Leadership behaviors and team performance

Research on leadership behaviors explores a wealth of behaviors through which leaders influence team dynamics and performance. Using a functional perspective on leadership, [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#) argue that specific leadership behaviors can be clustered in two main categories, depending on their target. They can focus on task accomplishment and/or on the team members and their interaction. This categorization into task directed and person directed leadership behaviors is also consistent with previous theoretical analyses of leadership behaviors ([Fleishman et al., 1991](#)) and the meta-analytical results reported in [Burke and colleagues](#) show that both behaviors are conducive to team performance. A first aim of our paper is to extend the number of papers analyzed and to replicate the findings reported in [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#) using a different meta-analytic approach, namely the procedure described by [Schmidt and Hunter \(2015\)](#).

Reducing relevant leadership behaviors to just two categories, however, could lead to a loss of information. [Stewart \(2006\)](#) claims that one of the purposes of meta-analysis is to determine the extent to which different measures can be grouped together to form a broader construct that has consistent relationships with other variables. However, [Schmidt and Hunter \(2015\)](#) suggest that if the variance across primary studies stays even after the corrections for artifacts, it might be a sign of improper grouping. Based on these views, we first analyzed the two broad categories of leadership behaviors and then examined the criterion and predictor relations for more specific leadership behaviors after correcting for artifacts. In the next sections, we present the specific leadership behaviors considered in our meta-analysis.

1.2. Person-focused leadership behaviors

In line with previous research on leadership behaviors (e.g. [Burke et al., 2006](#); [Savelsbergh, Poell, & van der Heijden, 2015](#); [Tyssen, Wald, & Heidenreich, 2014](#)) we subsumed the following six types of leadership behaviors to the person-focused type: transformational leadership, empowering leadership, consideration, emotionally intelligent leadership, coaching focused leadership and charismatic leadership. The last three leadership behaviors are additions to the person-focused behaviors analyzed in [Burke et al. \(2006\)](#). All these specific leadership behaviors focus on the satisfaction of the social and esteem needs of the individual team members as well as on creating a positive relational climate within the team.

Transformational leaders, transform followers' values, needs and beliefs ([Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987](#)) and inspire them to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of the team ([Avolio & Bass, 2004](#)) by engaging in behaviors that trigger admiration and respect in their followers ([Bass, 1985](#)). Transformational leaders motivate followers to achieve out-of-range goals ([Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003](#)) by heightening their awareness with the vision they create ([Avolio & Bass, 2004](#); [Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman, 1997](#)) and they stimulate the intellectual capacity of followers by motivating them to engage in creative thinking and problem solving ([Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004](#)).

Charismatic leaders, with their personal abilities and personal power, are capable of having profound and extraordinary effects on their followers ([Conger & Kanungo, 1987](#)) by using articulation and impression management skills to formulate their visions. They are sensitive to environmental constraints and to follower needs.

Empowering leadership is defined as "sharing power with subordinates and raising their level of autonomy and responsibility" ([Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims, 2013, p. 573](#)). Accordingly, empowering leaders promote participative management practices by allowing their followers to be involved in the decision-making processes. They encourage them to take on personally challenging demanding tasks, to solve problems and produce innovative ideas and solutions ([Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005](#)).

Coaching focused leadership focuses on developing the follower's capabilities and skills. Coaching focused leaders are supportive and provide non-defensive responses to questions and challenges ([Savelsbergh et al., 2015](#)). They invest time and effort in guiding

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