



The shared leadership of teams: A meta-analysis of proximal, distal, and moderating relationships[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The current meta-analysis examines the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. It also assesses the role of team confidence (i.e., collective efficacy and team potency) in this relationship. Mediation analyses supported the hypothesis that team confidence partially mediates the effects of shared leadership on team performance. We also found support for the notion that shared leadership explains unique variance in team performance, over and above that of vertical leadership. Furthermore, a variety of substantive continuous and categorical variables were investigated as moderators of the shared leadership–team performance relationship. Specifically, the relationship between shared leadership and team performance was moderated by task interdependence, team tenure, and whether performance was objectively versus subjectively measured. Finally, results suggest that the approach used when measuring shared leadership can also play a role in the observed validity. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

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Introduction

Organizations have entered an era of information technology and globalization, characterized by dynamic, complex, and competitive environments (Barkema, Baum, & Mannix, 2002; Sirmon, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). In order to effectively navigate such environments, organizations have turned to the implementation of team-based structures (McGrath, Arrow, & Berdahl, 2000; Salas, Goodwin, & Burke, 2009; Sundstrom, McIntyre, Halfhill, & Richards, 2000). Partly underlying this propagation of teams is the evidence that they provide faster and more flexible action, as well as increased informational processing capability than more rigid and centralized organizational structures (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997; Richardson, Vandenberg, Blum, & Roman, 2010). This tendency toward more team-based structures has caused scholars to focus on the identification and investigation of factors that contribute to overall team effectiveness (e.g., Hackman, 1987; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). One factor that has been frequently identified in the literature as being important to team success is the leadership within and of teams (Barling, Christie, & Hopton, 2011; Kozlowski, Watola, Jensen, Kim, & Botero, 2009; Zaccaro, Heinen, & Shuffler, 2009; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001).

Research on leadership in teams includes two different, yet complementary, streams of research (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). The first of these had involved the application of traditional theories of leadership, which places the emphasis on a single individual that is designated to lead the team, and on the relationships that individual leader has with his/her followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975;

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¹ The first author would like to dedicate this paper to his late grandfather, Nikos Sokratous, who passed away while the author was working on this manuscript. He taught us how to share and he will be immensely missed.

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Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; McGrath, 1962). This approach, referred to as vertical leadership (e.g., Pearce & Sims, 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2003), has focused primarily on the behaviors and processes that such individuals use to promote team effectiveness (Burke et al., 2006; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Zaccaro et al., 2009). For example, leaders can help teams by acting as coaches (Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Morgeson, 2005), modeling or displaying affect (Kaplan, Cortina, Ruark, LaPort, & Nicolaidis, 2014; Pirola-Merlo, Hartel, Mann, & Hirst, 2002), and by the managing team boundaries (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003).

Over the last two decades, a second approach has gained traction. In this approach, leadership is seen as emanating not only from a designated leader, but also from team members themselves (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Avolio, Jung, Murry, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Sims, 2000; Yukl, 2007). While this approach has burgeoned in the past decade, its core ideas can be traced to earlier writings (see Follett, 1924; Gibb, 1954). In its contemporary form, this perspective has become known as *shared leadership*.³ According to Pearce and Conger (2003), this type of leadership entails “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence, and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence” (p. 1). Shared leadership is a characteristic of teams that emerges when leadership behaviors are performed by multiple members of the team (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Pearce & Conger, 2003) in a concertive and conjoint manner (Gronn, 2002). Under such a conceptualization of leadership there is a reduced distinction between leader and follower, because team members may fill either of these roles at any given time.

In their recent review of leadership in teams, Morgeson et al. (2010) brought a functionalist perspective to the study of leadership (e.g., Hackman & Walton, 1986; McGrath, 1962), and asserted that the role of team leadership is to satisfy needs that arise during transition and action phases of team performance episodes (see Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). Moreover, they identified four distinct sources of team leadership that can perform 15 specific team leadership functions. According to Morgeson et al. (2010), these sources can be distinguished in a 2 × 2 matrix on the basis of leadership formality (formal versus informal) and locus (internal versus external). They conceptualized shared leadership as leadership influence stemming informally from internal team members. These are members of the team's core that do not have formally prescribed leadership roles. Combining Pearce and Conger (2003) and Morgeson et al. (2010), we define shared leadership as a set of interactive influence processes in which team leadership functions are voluntarily shared among internal team members in the pursuit of team goals.

Despite the increased attention on shared leadership, there are a number of questions that remain unanswered. First, although some studies have reported an overall positive relationship between shared leadership and team performance (see for example studies by Carson et al., 2007; Pearce & Sims, 2002), others have not supported this prediction (see for example studies by Boies, Lvina, & Martens, 2010; Neubert, 1999). Second, and more importantly, although there is theory that proposes boundary conditions and mediating mechanisms of this positive relationship (e.g., Pearce & Conger, 2003) the vast majority of empirical studies have not examined such relationships. That is, there are few primary studies on mediators and moderators of shared leadership's relationship to team performance. In short, given that the shared leadership literature has surged in the past few years, an empirical synthesis of the literature is appropriate. It is also important to note that meta-analysis methods can solve problems contained in primary studies (see Schmidt, 1992) and can organize, frame, and provide a roadmap for the future (Humphrey, 2011).

Relying on prevailing theoretical frameworks (e.g., Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005; Marks et al., 2001), the current paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we meta-analytically examine the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. In doing so, we investigate the contribution by shared leadership to the prediction of team performance over and above vertical leadership. Second, we answer calls by examining a priori continuous and categorical moderators of this relationship (e.g., Barry, 1991; Conger & Pearce, 2003). Third, we examine team confidence as a mediating mechanism through which shared leadership operates to influence team performance. Our meta-analysis follows another recent one (Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014) that examined (a) the relationship between shared leadership and team effectiveness, (b) the incremental validity of shared leadership over vertical leadership, and (c) several of the moderators we included here. However, our study goes further by also analyzing team confidence as a mediator of the effects of shared leadership on team performance, as well as by exploring the roles of team tenure, team size, and whether the team task requires higher levels of behavioral interdependence, information exchange, or both as moderators of this relationship. The examination of a mediator such as team confidence can provide much needed information on the mechanisms through which shared leadership fosters better team performance. In the sections that follow we elaborate on our conceptualization of the emerging process of shared leadership and offer theoretical justifications of its relationship with various team level constructs.

Theory and hypothesis development

The added value of shared leadership to team performance

Shared leadership is a phenomenon that emerges within teams across time. The notion that shared leadership develops within a team through a series of successful team member interactions has been echoed by many (e.g., Barry, 1991; Perry, Pearce, & Sims, 1999). For example, Carson et al. (2007) found that a high-quality internal team environment containing shared purpose, social support, and voice was a critical antecedent of shared leadership. Using the IMOI model (Input–Mediator–Output–Input; Ilgen et al., 2005), the current study conceptualizes shared leadership as an input of other team emergent states (Marks et al., 2001) and outcomes, namely team confidence and team performance. Indeed, Day et al. (2006) suggested that shared leadership can serve as a

³ Other commonly used terms are distributed, collective, and rotated leadership.

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