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Something good and something bad in R&D teams: Effects of social identification and dysfunctional behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study develops a research model based on social identity theory and emotion regulation research to evaluate the performance development of work teams in technology industry. Empirical testing of this study, by investigating team personnel in high-tech firms, confirms some of the critical hypotheses in our moderated mediation model. The test results find that team performance is influenced by team identification which is affected by inclusive leadership and effort–respect mismatch. Besides, dysfunctional behavior is also influenced by inclusive leadership and effort–respect mismatch. Whereas the relationships between effort–respect mismatch and dysfunctional behavior and between inclusive leadership and team identification are moderated by negative affective tone, the relationship between dysfunctional behavior and team performance is moderated by resource adequacy.

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1. Introduction

Much recent influential research has reiterated the focus on “bad behavior” in work groups and organizations (Cole et al., 2008; Eddleston and Kidwell, 2012; Griffin and Lopez, 2005; Mahlendorf, 2013). Bad behavior of group or organizational members is viewed as any form of intentional action that has the potential to cause damage to a group and/or to hurt its organization (Griffin and Lopez, 2005). Typical sorts of bad behavior in business organizations include manipulation of actual data to avoid unpleasant outcomes, individuals' sabotage through social undermining, excessively politically dictated actions, and antisocial activity against others in the firm (Cole et al., 2008). To complement the majority of previous research that focuses on individuals' bad behavior (from a personal point of view), this study emphasizes collective bad intentional action in teaming contexts as a form of dysfunctional behavior (e.g., Griffin and Lopez, 2005; Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998), which is defined as the collective antisocial actions of a team that intend to hinder innovation or impair its collective functioning. Note that this study uses “dysfunctional behavior” as the umbrella term under which various forms of bad behavior are covered and included, because the term dysfunctional behavior clearly conveys the negative connotations of the associated bad behavior.

Albeit many previous studies have explored dysfunctional behavior and its relevant determinants in terms of teaming (Balthazard et al.,

2006; Diefendorff and Mehta, 2007; Griffin et al., 1998; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007), the mediating role of dysfunctional behavior (i.e., antisocial behavior) in the development of team performance still remains substantially understudied. Meanwhile, it will be too arbitrary to simply justify the sole effect of dysfunctional behavior on team performance without simultaneously including an equally important variable of prosocial and cognitive attachment (i.e., team identification) that strongly supports a team. The social identity theory indeed provides a theoretical backdrop to discuss dysfunctional behavior and team identification as equally important factors in the team performance formation. While team identification is regarded as a prosocial behavioral bond between individuals and their team (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Somech et al., 2009), dysfunctional behavior falls within the broad category of antisocial behavior, which is depicted as motivated behavior that causes harm, or is intended to cause harm, to a team, its members, or stakeholders (Van Fleet and Griffin, 2006). The social identification theory helps explain how a group-level identity emerges (Peteraf and Shanley, 1997) and how the hindering behavior in the group can be constrained (Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010). According to this theory, individuals who identify with a team will commit themselves to actions that protect the team from getting hurt (Cornwell and Coote, 2005).

A dominant theoretical foundation of team identification is social identity theory which symbolizes a social psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in teaming processes, interpersonal relationship, and team membership (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). This theory is clearly framed by a conviction that collective phenomena cannot be

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effectively explained by isolated individual processes alone. Instead, social identity theory embraces interrelated concepts associated with social-cognitive, motivational, social-interactive, and collective facets of work teams. According to social identity theory, social categorization renders employees' own and others' behavior predictable, consequently allowing the employees to avoid harm (e.g., reduced dysfunctional behavior) and to plan positive actions in an active manner to support their team (e.g., increased team identification). While social identity theory argues that the self-concept is composed of a personal identity and a social identity (i.e., the formation of team identification), the theory also helps individuals sense how they should feel and behave and what bad behavior they are not supposed to perform (e.g., dysfunctional behavior).

Given the importance of dysfunctional behavior and team identification, it is important to explore in depth how they are derived from a nomological perspective of team leadership (Zaccaro et al., 2002). Previous literature has suggested that team leadership represents a key characteristic of effective teams' behavior and identification (Zaccaro et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2015). An effective team needs a leader who can define its goals and coordinate its members to perform certain behavior in an inclusive fashion (Zaccaro et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2015). Therefore, the success of leaders in defining their team's directions and organizing the team to maximize progress along such directions with inclusive practices can substantially contribute to team identification and/or dysfunctional behavior (Mitchell et al., 2015; Ryan, 2006). For that reason, this study would argue that inclusive leadership processes represent one of the most critical factors for influencing a team's behavior and identification (Ryan, 2006).

To sum up, without a thorough examination of dysfunctional behavior and team identification together in teaming contexts, our understanding of these constructs will remain limited, and team initiatives directed at boosting team performance will be somewhat biased and based on blind faith. In light of the above gap in the literature, this study discovers what roles dysfunctional behavior and team identification play in the development of team performance and how the formation of team performance is moderated by which potential moderators.

2. Research model and hypotheses

This study develops a research model (see Fig. 1) to elaborate the development of team performance. In the proposed model, team performance is indirectly related to leader inclusiveness and effort–respect mismatch through the full mediation of both dysfunctional behavior and team identification. Resource adequacy moderates the relationships between these two mediators (i.e., dysfunctional behavior and team identification) and team performance. The relationships between these two mediators and their determinants (i.e., inclusive leadership and effort–respect mismatch) are moderated by a negative affective tone.

We propose herein that inclusive leadership and effort–respect mismatch are two key predictors, because they represent two major concerns of team workers: being considerate and supportive of a leader (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Warner, 2007) and being respected owing to their collective efforts (Van Vegchel et al., 2005). Whereas inclusive leadership is defined as positive leadership that shows a team leader's openness, accessibility, and availability in interactions with team members (Carmeli et al., 2010), effort–respect mismatch is defined as the extent to which a team is not treated with enough respect it deserves in the organization based on the efforts it puts forth. Without being supported and respected, teams are likely to show negative behavior and weak identification. In the following, we justify the hypotheses in this study in detail.

Although previous literature has indicated that dysfunctional behavior is highly related to substance abuse, mental illness, verbal/physical abuse, and unethical behavior (Knights and Kennedy, 2007), its direct influence on team performance, however, has been rarely examined. Dysfunctional teams, much like dysfunctional employees, often exhibit markedly lower effectiveness, efficiency, and performance than other teams without dysfunctional issues (Balthazard et al., 2006). Dysfunctional behavior often has a negative impact on people's learning process and positive motivation, due in part to its high connection with anxiety and negative moods, substantially becoming detrimental to team performance (Knights and Kennedy, 2007). Hence, dysfunctional behavior is negatively related to team performance.

Team identification is positively associated with team performance, since team identification represents the “psychological merging” of self and the team, which encourages team members to take the collective's interest as a high level of priority (Turner et al., 1987). Social identity theory argues that team members with high team identification are motivated to comply with collective norms in their thoughts, feelings, and action (e.g., Riantoputra, 2010; Somech et al., 2009). Team identification helps bind team members closely into a powerful psychological entity (Gaertner et al., 1993) and is thus positively related to team performance. Collectively, the first hypothesis is stated as below.

H1. Team performance is negatively related to dysfunctional behavior, but positively related to team identification.

A team leader is considered a key person who influences the internal dynamics of his/her team, such as its learning orientation and workplace climate (Hult et al., 2000; Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006). If a team leader takes an exclusive, peremptory, unsupportive, or egoist stance, then team members will more strongly feel upset and respond with abnormal behavior that is bad for the team. This is understandable, because working professionals are very sensitive to their team leader's inclusiveness, acceptability, and support (Amabile et al., 2004; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2013), and they are less likely to perform dysfunctional behavior that hinders their team's progress, given high degrees

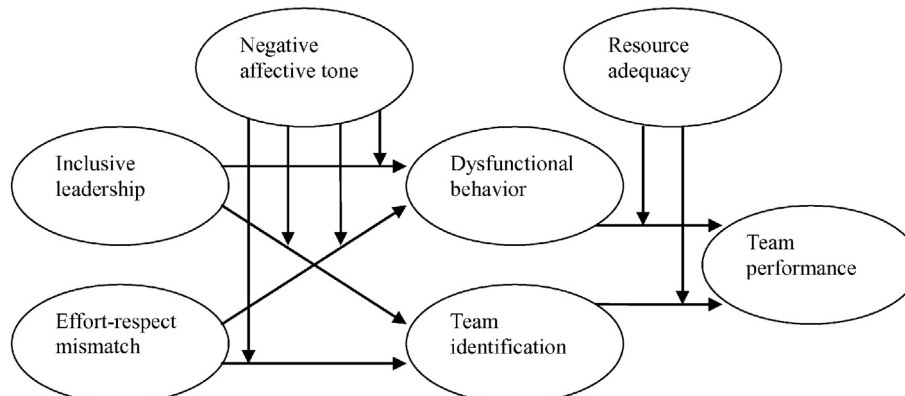


Fig. 1. Research framework.

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