

What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis

C. Shawn Burke ^{a,*}, Kevin C. Stagl ^a, Cameron Klein ^a, Gerald F. Goodwin ^b,
Eduardo Salas ^a, Stanley M. Halpin ^b

^a *Department of Psychology and Institute for Simulation and Training, 3100 Technology Parkway, University of Central Florida,
Orlando, FL 32825-0544, USA*

^b *Leader Development Research Unit, Army Research Institute, USA*

Abstract

Despite the increased work on leadership in teams, there is a lack of integration concerning the relationship between leader behaviors and team performance outcomes. A framework depicting the relationship between leadership functions, specific leadership behaviors, and conditions which enable team performance was created. Using this framework, a meta-analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between leadership behavior in teams and behaviorally-based team performance outcomes. Results suggest the use of task-focused behaviors is moderately related to perceived team effectiveness and team productivity (.333, .203). Person-focused behaviors were related to perceived team effectiveness (.360), team productivity (.284), and team learning (.560). Sub-group analyses indicated that the specific leadership behaviors investigated were generally related to team performance outcomes. Most notably, empowerment behaviors accounted for nearly 30% of the variance in team learning. Finally, moderator analyses investigating the level of task interdependence were conducted. Study limitations, practical implications, and directions for research are also outlined.

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Within the last twenty-five years there has been an explosion of theoretical and empirical work conducted on team effectiveness. Partially driven by the rise of teams within organizations, this work has sought to better understand the antecedents, processes, and emergent states which facilitate effective team outcomes. An emerging area within this work is the role that leaders occupy in facilitating effective, adaptive teams. Specifically, while it has long been argued that leaders play a key role in enabling individual and organizational performance (Bass, 1990; Follett, 1926), work has recently expanded to examine the role that team leaders occupy in promoting, developing, and maintaining team effectiveness (e.g., Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, et al., 1996; Serfaty, Entin, & Deckert, 1994; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001).

Despite the growing body of work, there has been a lack of integration concerning the relationship between specific leader behaviors and team performance outcomes. Meta-analyses have examined the relationship between team

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 407 882 1326; fax: +1 407 882 1550.

E-mail address: sburke@ist.ucf.edu (C.S. Burke).

leadership behavior and affective outcomes (Foels, Driskell, Mullen, & Salas, 2000; Mullen, Symons, Hu, & Salas, 1989), but few have sought to integrate the work on leadership behaviors and behavioral or cognitive team performance outcomes. The current endeavor was undertaken in part to expand this knowledge base by using meta-analysis to investigate the relationship between team leader behaviors and behaviorally-based team performance outcomes (i.e., perceived team effectiveness, team productivity, and team learning).

1. Team leadership

Many of the researchers who are investigating leadership in teams do so from a functional approach where “[the leader’s] main job is to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs” (McGrath, 1962, as cited in Hackman & Walton, 1986, p. 5). Within this approach the leader is effective to the degree that he/she ensures that all functions critical to task and team maintenance are completed. While it is not necessary that the leadership functions be accomplished by a single person (i.e., it may be distributed throughout the team), the leader is responsible for ensuring that these functions are accomplished. Under this approach, team leadership can be described as a dynamic process of social problem solving accomplished through generic responses to social problems. These generic responses are captured in four broad categories: (1) information search and structuring, (2) information use in problem solving, (3) managing personnel resources, and (4) managing material resources (Fleishman et al., 1991, see Table 1).

Taking a slightly different approach is the work by Hackman and colleagues. This body of work does not focus on leadership functions, but on identifying conditions that leaders can create to facilitate team effectiveness. Hackman (2002) argued for the following conditions: teams must be real, have compelling direction, an enabling structure (core conditions), a supportive organizational context, and expert coaching (enabling conditions). A real team is one in which there is a team task, clear boundaries, specified authority to manage work processes, and some degree of membership stability (Hackman, 2002). Compelling direction, the second condition, refers to direction which is seen as challenging, clear, and consequential (Hackman, 2002). The grounding of this direction is gained from the enactment of the first two leadership functions identified by Fleishman et al. (1991), information search and structure and information use in problem solving. Information collected within the search process serves to inform the leader as to the current situation and situational contingencies. This information is then used to decide upon a course of action during the cognitive processes reflected within ‘information use in problem solving’. Once a course of action and/or strategy is decided upon, direction flows from this content and should provide members with a sense of what is expected and why it is important in relation to the team’s common goal. Direction given according to the above guidance should serve to motivate team members, align strategy, and promote the full use of the team’s capabilities (i.e., effective management of personnel and material resources).

Leaders also manage personnel resources by creating the third condition for team effectiveness, an enabling structure. An enabling structure is created through the manner in which work is designed, the promotion of core norms of conduct, and team composition is organized (Hackman, 2002). For example, norms that encourage team members to capitalize on the diversity of resources that often exist within teams can assist in creating an enabling structure. Norms that promote real time adjustment of strategy, environmental scanning, and team self-correction can also promote an enabling structure. In addition, designing work such that members identify with the task and see it as meaningful, experience a sense of autonomy, and are able to obtain some degree of feedback from the work itself, serves to provide a structure that enables team effectiveness by increasing member motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Finally, the

Table 1
Leadership functions (adapted from Fleishman et al., 1991)

Leadership functions	Definition
Information search and structure	“Systematic search, acquisition, evaluation, and organization of information regarding team goals and operations” (Zaccaro et al., 2001, p. 455).
Information use in problem solving	Using information gained from boundary spanning activities towards solving the problem at hand.
Managing personnel resources	Obtaining, allocating, developing, and motivating personnel resources as well as utilizing these resources to enact the developed plan and monitor progress.
Managing material resources	Obtaining and allocating material resources as well as utilizing these resources to enact the developed plan and monitor progress.

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