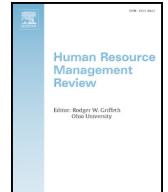


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# The impact of implicit collective leadership theories on the emergence and effectiveness of leadership networks in teams

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership in today's high-performing teams is a relational process best understood from a multilevel emergent perspective. Implicit theories of leadership and followership play an important role in predicting leader emergence in more traditional hierarchical structures, but are inadequate for understanding and predicting leadership as networks in teams, as they do not consider the complex dynamics of leading and following activities inherent in such structures. To address this theoretical gap, we propose the concept of Implicit Leadership Network Theories (ILNTs) that integrates implicit leadership and followership theories with contemporary social network perspectives of leadership in teams to predict the shape and structure of leadership network emergence and subsequent team outcomes. More specifically, we propose that the combination of team member self-ILNTs (i.e., expectations regarding one's own role within a leadership network) and network-ILNTs (i.e., expectations regarding the prototypical team leadership structure) will shape the emergence and effectiveness of leadership in teams. We describe several prototypical team configurations of ILNTs and discuss implications for future research and human resource management.

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## 1. Introduction

Huge shifts in cultural expectations and organizational structure have swept global enterprises, and today the majority of work is performed in teams. Reports suggest that upwards of 80% of companies with over 100 employees rely on teams to complete everyday work and solve complex problems (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Peterson, Mitchell, Thompson, & Burr, 2000), and successful team performance has become a key driver of organizational success (Ernst & Young, 2013). Thus, optimizing team performance has become an imperative for organizations.

Effective team leadership is one of the most influential factors in developing high-performance teams (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). However, over the past decade, both organizations and researchers have begun to move away from viewing leadership in terms of traditional hierarchical formal roles. Organizations today are deconstructing these outdated models of leadership, and are being reinvented to operate as flatter networks of teams cooperating to keep pace with unpredictable, fluid challenges (McDowell, Agarwal, Miller, Okamoto, & Page, 2016). Today, organizations are concerned with building the social capital (i.e., connections and interactions among individuals) and overall leadership capacity of our workforces more than ever (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). To fully realize the benefits of building the leadership capacity, organizations must expand beyond the constraining focus on single, formal leaders and high potentials, whose span of influence will be limited.

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Rather, organizations must identify ways to enhance the capacity for leadership behaviors and leadership influence shared between every member of these teams.

This concept, most commonly referred to as shared leadership, but more recently and accurately described as “leadership as networks” (Carter, DeChurch, Braun, & Contractor, 2015, p.1), is especially beneficial for teams making complex decisions or performing knowledge-based work (Fausing, Jeppesen, Jønsson, Lewandowski, & Bligh, 2013). Sharing leadership responsibilities within the team can provide performance improvements even in teams with formal leaders (Nicolaidis, LaPort, Chen, Tomassetti, Weis, Zaccaro, & Cortina, 2014; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). However, little is currently known regarding the specific factors that best enable patterned leadership networks to emerge (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; Paunova, 2015), and this lack of knowledge limits the ability of researchers and organizations to directly encourage the development of leadership as networks in teams.

While researchers have shown that individual competencies and personality traits predict individual leadership development (e.g., Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Judge et al., 2009), implicit theories of leadership and followership also have a powerful impact on the emergence and development of individual leadership (e.g., DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). The impact of implicit theories on the process of emergence and development of leadership is often overlooked at the team level, however. This is unfortunate given that implicit theories of leadership suggest that emergent leadership is co-constructed not only by the leading and following behaviors people engage in, but also by the cognitive structures which guide the perception and facilitation of those behaviors. Historically, these theories focus on the perceptions held by individuals regarding the expected prototypes of leadership and followership and how these perceptions impact leader-follower relationships. However, as they exist now, they do not consider the dynamic interchange of leadership and followership roles that could co-exist in any member of a leadership network. As a result, current implicit theories are inadequate in explaining the emergence of leadership networks in teams.

This knowledge gap makes it difficult to fully understand leadership network emergence and its subsequent effects on emergent team processes and outcomes. This gap in our knowledge also makes it more challenging for organizations to grow or even to identify the leadership capacity at any higher level of analysis within the organization. Furthermore, without a clear understanding of individuals' implicit theories of leadership structure among members of a network, we cannot clearly select or intervene to induce the pattern of leadership network desired to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Thus, to address this need for implicit theories relating to leadership networks in teams, we propose a synthesis of implicit theories and contemporary perspectives of leadership as networks aimed at predicting leadership network emergence in teams. Towards this goal, the paper will (1) review current research on leadership as networks, implicit leadership theories, and implicit followership theories, (2) integrate these theories into a multilevel implicit leadership network theory (ILNT), and (3) propose how various team compositions of ILNTs impact patterns of leadership emergence and team functioning. In addition, this paper will provide testable research propositions meant to stimulate a paradigm shift in team leadership research, along with a few thoughts regarding potential practical applications of this framework.

## 2. Leadership from a network perspective

For centuries, philosophical and scholarly attention has focused on leaders (Galton, 1869), but in recent decades, scientists have come to understand that leadership is not a static state, as traditional models have suggested, but rather a complex emergent process rooted in the dynamic interaction between leaders and followers (Pearce, Conger & Locke, 2008a). The role of members in many modern teams has become fluid in that one could be taking on leadership roles and responsibilities in one situation or at one time and then switch to a followership role in another situation or time. In addition, leadership has become less hierarchically structured in many organizations, minimizing the differences in power and status between members. This can be true even in teams with a formally assigned team leader, as modern teams often reduce hierarchy to ensure higher levels of collaboration. In other words, hierarchical structures within organizations no longer match the expectations of highly skilled employees nor facilitate the development of innovative solutions to the increasingly complex and interconnected challenges that organizations face. As a result, contemporary leadership models have begun moving towards the perspective of leadership as a team-level relational process in which leader and follower become fluid roles that any member could take on in a given situation (Carter et al., 2015; Nicolaidis et al., 2014; Pearce, Manz & Sims, 2008b).

Historically, researchers have used a variety of terms to describe these emerging non-hierarchical perspectives of leadership in teams such as shared leadership (e.g., Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; D'Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2014; Nicolaidis et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014), distributed leadership (e.g., Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2012), and collective leadership (e.g., Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter, & Keegan, 2012; Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark, & Mumford, 2009; Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006). However, because all of these perspectives share commonalities in that they assume leadership in teams is relational, patterned, situated within the context, and can be formal or informal, we suggest they can all be subsumed under, and in fact are more accurately described as, the “leadership as networks” paradigm (Carter et al., 2015; Crawford & LePine, 2013). Therefore, we opt to use network terminology throughout the remainder of the paper.

Leadership as networks can be defined as an emergent relational process of mutual influence between team members, and can be conceptualized as a property of the whole system (Carter et al., 2015; Carson et al., 2007; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004; Small & Rentsch, 2011). This new model of leadership is inherently multilevel in that actors (i.e., team members) interact via dynamic leader-follower exchanges within a broader network of leader-follower relationships (Carter et al., 2015). The mutual influence process of leadership is context-bound and inseparable from the social norms, implicit theories, and situations within which these actors operate. It is patterned among the actors within the network because the relationships between various dyads are unique. The unique patterns of mutual influence that emerge within teams are simultaneously shaped by top-down contextual

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