

Leadership and Team Cohesion in the Medico-social Sector

Jean Weidmann*, Ph.D., Mario Konishi, Ph.D.

University of Applied Sciences, Western Switzerland (HES-SO), Yverdon-les-Bains
Jean.weidmann@heig-vd.ch, Mario.konishi@heig-vd.ch

Abstract

In this paper, we study team cohesion and leadership style of staff and managers working in a retirement home. We used two well-known questionnaires, the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which we translated in French and validated. The GEQ and the MLQ were submitted respectively to the employees and the team leaders of the retirement home. Findings show that there is a significant link between a combined transformational-transactional leadership style and task cohesion in a team. On the other hand, there is no correlation between the leadership style and the team social cohesion. This suggests that appropriate leaders can help improving cohesion between members of the team in performing their tasks but are not sufficient to strengthen the friendly ties within the team.

Team cohesion

Cohesion is moderately and positively correlated with group performance, as evidenced by multiple meta-analyses (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Chiocchio & Essiembre, 2009; Evans & Dion, 1991; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995). As such, it is an interesting concept in order to understand group performance or effectiveness.

Team cohesion is not unanimously defined in literature. For some authors, it is "a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives" (Carron, 1982, 124). For others, team cohesion can be understood as a synonym to team chemistry or team unity (Carron, Burke, & Shapcott, 2009). Festinger (1950) proposes a multi-dimensional definition of cohesion with three factors: (1) attraction to the group, (2) commitment to the task and (3) group pride. Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley (1985) operationalize team cohesion through two dimensions: individual/collective and social-related cohesion/task-related cohesion. This results in four factors: (1) Individual Attraction to Group-Social (ATGS) refers to individual members' feelings about being involved in social interactions within the group; (2) Individual Attraction to Group-Task (ATGT) reflects individual members' feelings about being committed to the group's goals and objectives; (3) Group Integration-Social (GIS) relates to individual team member's perceptions on closeness, similarity and bonding regarding the overall team's social activities; (4) Group Integration-Task (GIT) represents individual team member's perceptions on closeness, similarity and bonding regarding the overall team's goals and objectives (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985; Carless & De Paola, 2000).

Leadership and team cohesion

Leadership is qualified as transactional when leaders focus on tasks, when they clarify expectations and offer recognition when goals are achieved (Bass, 1985). It is qualified as transformational when leaders focus on individuals, when they show charisma and create pride, respect, trust, and a vision. Transformational leadership is composed of four dimensions (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999): *idealized influence*, which refers to a leader who considers followers' needs over his or her own, who shares risks with them and who is consistent with underlying principles, ethics and values, *inspirational motivation*, which refers to a leader who provides meaning and challenge, who displays enthusiasm and optimism, *intellectual stimulation*, which refers to a leader who questions assumptions, reframes problems and who asks for creative solutions, *individualized consideration*, which refers to a leader who pays attention to each individual's needs and who acts as a coach or mentor for development. Leadership can also be qualified as *passive-avoidant*, which refers to a leader who waits for problems to arise or who does not take action (Bass et al., 2003).

Relations between leadership and team processes or states are not yet well known: "While the relationships between leadership behaviour and performance in business have received substantial attention, the number of studies dealing with the leadership style of project managers and its contribution to project success is rather scarce" (Yang, Huang, & Wu, 2011, 260).

Among the few studies about leadership and team cohesion, it has been shown that either transactional or transformational leaderships is needed to improve teamwork (team communication, collaboration and cohesiveness). Yang et al. (2011) use a composite measure of leadership that includes both the transactional and transformational dimensions. Their finding show that what they simply call "leadership" (ie. high scores on either transactional or transformational or both dimensions) has a stronger impact on teamwork than what they call "poor leadership" (ie. low scores on both dimensions; Yang et al., 2011, 260, 263). In the present paper, we will make a distinction between active and passive leadership instead of "leadership" and "poor leadership". Active leadership refers to high scores on either transactional or transformational leadership styles as they were operationalized by Bass & Avolio (1995). Passive leadership refers to low scores on both leadership styles. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1a Active leadership is positively correlated with team cohesion.

According to others scholars, transformational leaders are more able than transactional leaders to develop a shared vision and goals among members of their team and consequently, to build team cohesion (Jung & Sosik, 2002). We therefore propose that:

H1b Transformational leadership is positively correlated with team cohesion.

Finally, Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler (2004) propose a model where team cohesion is a mediating variable between leadership style and team performance. They posit that the "charismatic component of transformational leadership", namely idealized influence and inspirational motivation, has an impact on team cohesion (2004, 183-84). According to their model, idealized influence fosters a team shared vision, while inspirational motivation improves team commitment. Both in turn lead to a more cohesive team. Team cohesion is viewed as a mediator variable between these variables and team performance. In contrast, the other two dimensions of transformational leadership are directly related to team

performance and team cohesion is not a mediator variable. Individualized consideration from the leader helps establishing a better communication with team members, which leads to a better team performance. Intellectual stimulation develops problem-solving abilities and consequently, conflict management abilities, which in turn are related to team performance (Dionne et al. 2004, 184-87). That brings us to the following hypotheses:

H1c Charismatic leadership is positively correlated with team cohesion

Charismatic leaders are those who score high on idealized influence and inspirational motivation. Non-charismatic leaders score low on either the first dimension or the last or both.

Methods

The organization surveyed

We studied leadership and team cohesion with ND, a retirement home based in Geneva. ND hosts 131 elderly residents who cannot live in their house anymore. ND was created in 1921. It has 2 sites in the centre of Geneva and will open a third one next year. ND employs 183 persons. ND employs nurses, assistant nurses, coordinators of sociocultural activities, laundry operators, room cleaning employees, cooks and meal service staff, technical (building maintenance) and administration staff (finance, HR, management). Except for administration, staff members serve residents to make them comfortable, be it for food, health, cleaning, sociocultural activities and communication with family or external persons. Work is interdependent between staff categories as residents benefit from several services in the same time or during the same day. Coordination between teams is therefore important, in particular to inform colleagues about the resident's wishes and state of health. Coordination within teams is also key, in particular for nurses or assistant nurses. Residents are managed with an electronic filing system.

Resident's well-being is the main mission of ND. The institution promotes cooperation between team members but has not yet formalised a management process in this area. This is why ND is now implementing a collective staff performance management process through which individuals will be encouraged to cooperate more. Team objectives will be given to each teams as of 2017, along with individual objectives. The goal of this new process is to push teams to work together, find a common interest, and focus on what matters most for the organization: resident's well-being. A collective management process is needed mainly because the organization is experiencing collaboration and communication issues within and between teams.

Team cohesion

Team cohesion was measured by the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985). These items were originally designed to assess cohesion in sport teams and were further adapted for work teams (Carless & De Paola, 2000). We used this version of the GEQ and submit it to a process of double translation (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, & Ferraz, 2000). Like the original, our French version contains 18 items and encompasses the four dimensions of team cohesion, namely the respondent's social-related attraction to the group (ATGS; 5 items), the respondent's task-related attraction to the group (ATGT; 4 items), the social-related group integration as perceived by the respondent (GIS; 4 items) and the task-related group integration as perceived by the respondent (GIT; 5 items). Sample items are "Some of my best friends are in this team" (ATGS-5), "This team does not give me enough opportunities to improve my personal performance" (ATGT-6, reverse scored), "Our team would like to spend time together outside of work hours" (GIS-15)

and “Our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance” (GIT-10). The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The questionnaire was put online and four computers were at disposal at the retirement home for the employees to complete it. Two of the authors of this paper were present during the pre-determined survey days in order to brief the staff and answer the questions. The questionnaire was completed by 148 employees out of the 170 working in the retirement home, resulting in a high response rate (87%).

Leadership

In order to assess the leadership styles of the managers of ND we used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1995). In the MLQ, the transformational leader is characterized by the “four I’s”, namely Idealized Influence (eg. “I act in ways that build others’ respect for me”), Inspirational Motivation (“I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished”), Intellectual Stimulation (“I get others to look at problems from many different angles”) and Individualized Consideration (“I treat others as individuals rather than just as a member of a group”). Transactional leadership has two dimensions: Contingent Reward (“I provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts”) and Active Management-by-Exception (“I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards”). Finally, passive-avoidant leadership style encompasses Passive Management-by-Exception (“I fail to interfere until problems become serious”) and Laissez-faire (“I avoid getting involved when important issues arise”).

Existing translations of the MLQ in French did not meet our requirements in terms of validity and clarity. We therefore elaborated our own version by applying the process of double translation again to the 45 items of the MLQ. We put the final version online for the 11 managers of ND to be completed. This includes the General Director, the Quality Manager, the Chief of the Nursing Department and two Nurse Leaders, the manager of the administration, as well as those of the hotel service (cafeteria, laundry, cleaning) (2 managers), the restaurant kitchen, the socio-cultural activities and the technical maintenance departments. All of them filled out the questionnaire.

Results

Sample characteristics

Half of the employees are 45 years old or over. Women represent the overwhelming majority, which is fairly common in the field of nursing and health care. Only 25% of the staff is Swiss and another 20% is French. Geneva being located on the border, a large number of French nationals is working in the city. Portuguese represent 17% of the personnel. The rest is coming mainly from Balkan and African French-speaking countries.

The main activity of the retirement home is nursing care. More than half of the respondents are working in this area (53%). A large number of the employees are also working in “hotel services” (cafeteria, laundry and cleaners; 33%). Assistant nurses and hotel staff usually does not have any professional qualifications, and mostly comes from abroad. Nurses, socio-cultural coordinators and administration staff usually benefit from a university or professional certification. For a large majority of the respondents (67%), it is a relatively new job, as they are holding their position for less than five years.

Team cohesion

Our first step was to check the validity of the GEQ with our data. We ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with STATA 12.1 (maximum likelihood method). Results showed that the model with four dimensions proposed by Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley (1985), namely ATGS, ATGT, GIS and GIT, did not fit our data at a satisfactory level. Given these results, our next step was to run several exploratory factor analyses (maximum likelihood, orthogonal, Varimax) and look for the most « clear-cut » solutions, i.e. the ones with high loadings, and less cross-loadings or single loadings. The solution with two factors, social cohesion and task cohesion was chosen according to these criterions. Two items were removed because of cross-loadings: “Members of our work team would rather go out on their own than get together as a team” and ”I’m not happy with the amount of teamwork involvement I have within the work team”. The fit of this final model was subsequently tested. CFA showed that the model fits the data in an acceptable manner ($\text{RMSEA}=.05$; $\text{CFI}=.92$; $\text{SRMR}=.08$). These results are in line with previous analyses which also confirm the model with two factors, namely task cohesion and social cohesion (Carless & De Paola, 2000). We therefore computed two scores for each respondent: one for social cohesion (Cronbach’s alpha=0.71; 8 items) and another one for task cohesion (alpha=0.81; 8 items).

Leadership

The procedure with the GEQ could not be replicated with the MLQ. The number of cases is too limited ($n=11$), particularly when compared to the number of items ($n=36$). The small sample size does not allow for CFA, EFA or even reliability tests. We therefore took into account all MLQ items and computed mean scores of transformational and transactional leadership for each manager. Mean scores for passive-avoidant leadership were finally not used, as there was little variation between the managers (scores range from 0.13 to 1.13). We considered as a high value any mean score superior or equal to 3, given the scale of the MLQ (0=not at all, 1=once in a while, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often and 4=frequently, if not always).

Leadership and team cohesion

For the following analysis, we chose seven out of the eleven managers, as they are directly leading a team, without intermediate between them and their staff. We then compared the mean scores of these seven teams for task and social cohesion.

One-Way ANOVA shows no overall significant differences between teams led by managers who score high on idealized influence and/or inspirational motivation and the other teams (Task cohesion: $F(3,144)=1.20$, $p=0.31$; Social cohesion: $F(3,144)=0.68$, $p=0.56$). However, the means are significantly different, at least for task cohesion, when it comes to transactional leadership and transformational leadership (Task cohesion: $F(2,145)=3.30$; $p=0.04$; Social cohesion: $F(2,145)=1.24$; $p=0.29$).

The post-hoc analysis shows significant differences in task cohesion in terms of transactional and transformational leadership styles (Table 1). It should be noted that the category “Low transformational/high transactional leadership” is not represented among the managers of the retirement home. Results indicate that the teams working under the supervision of managers with both low transactional and transformational leadership levels are less cohesive than teams led by marked transformational and transactional leaders. The level of team cohesion (scale from 1 to 5) decreases of an average of 0.36 points from the first type of leadership to the second one. In contrast, there is no significant difference in task cohesion between transformational/non-transactional leaders and non-transformational/non-transactional leaders ($p=0.84$). This suggests that only a combined

transformational/transactional leadership has an impact on team cohesion and that a transformational leadership only is not sufficient to make a team more cohesive.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA (Tukey HSD)

	Leadership (I)	Leadership (J)	Mean Diff. (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Conf. interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dep. Variable: Task cohesion	High TF, high TA	High TF, low TA	0.23	0.24	0.59	-0.32	0.79
	High TF, high TA	Low TF, low TA	0.36	0.14	0.03	0.03	0.68
	High TF, low TA	Low TF, low TA	0.12	0.23	0.84	-0.39	0.64

Note: TF= transformational leadership style; TA= transactional leadership style

Discussion

Firstly, our data provide only partial support for hypothesis H1a which states that an active leadership (either transformational, transactional or a combination of both styles) has an impact on team cohesion (Yang et al., 2011). We found that it takes a combination of both leadership styles (high transformational and high transactional) for the teams of the retirement home to be more cohesive. Transactional leadership alone does not affect team cohesion, contrary to what we assumed. Nor does transformational leadership alone. This last result is also inconsistent with our second hypothesis H1b, according to which transformational leaders promote a shared vision and goals among their team which leads to a better team cohesion than with transactional leaders (Jung & Sosik, 2002). Finally, Dionne et al. (2004) hypothesize that charismatic aspects of transformational leadership help reinforcing team cohesion. Idealized influence and inspirational motivation contribute to develop a shared vision in the team as well as commitment to the leader, the team and the objectives. This, in turn, leads to a more cohesive team. However, our analysis does not show significant differences in team cohesion between managers who often exert idealized influence and inspirational motivation on their staff and the others. Our hypothesis H1c is therefore not confirmed.

Furthermore, we found that this combined leadership style affects only task-oriented cohesion and not social-oriented cohesion. It could be that social cohesion among the staff of a retirement home depends on some additional factors which are out of control of the team leader (eg. team member personalities, time team members have been working together, etc.)

Conclusion

Our findings show that Idealized Influence and/or Inspirational Motivation do not significantly influence team cohesion, which does not confirm Dionne and colleagues' model (2004). Apparently, these two leadership dimensions alone are not sufficient to contribute significantly to task and social cohesion.

Our findings indicate that both transactional and transformational leadership styles are needed to positively impact team cohesion. They confirm Yang et al. (2011) findings, but go a bit further as we find that leadership styles influence task cohesion only. Transformational and transactional styles lead to better task cohesion but not necessarily to social cohesion. Social cohesion comes from other factors, in particular team composition and team members'

relationships. Leadership is one factor in the list but not the major one. Perhaps other leadership styles are needed to impact both task and social team cohesion. In particular, authentic leadership (Avolio, 2005) might be an interesting variable to study. Perhaps it is that leaders need to have transactional, transformational *and* authentic leadership styles in order to influence both task and social cohesion, and as a consequence, team work quality and quantity. The question of authenticity yet poses some ethical questions, in particular regarding the requirement that it involves in the area of emotion sharing in the work place, which is another subject that might be further studied.

Against the IMO model (Mathieu et al., 2008), leadership style is an Input that affects a Mediator-Emergent state (task cohesion) and ultimately the team Outcome. Our results however show that leadership style influences task cohesion only. Social cohesion comes from a combination of leadership styles with other Inputs and Mediators and Outputs.

Leaders have an impact on team cohesion for the task if they are both transactional and transformational. As such, they play an important role for team members to feel close and to be willing to complete the task. They however do not play a key role for social cohesion. The question remains to know whether task and social cohesion are linked or if each of them can develop separately. Is there a certain point at which one cannot develop without the other? Is one coming before the other? Further research on the links between these constructs would be needed.

Our results indicate that task cohesion can be improved through two leadership styles. Organizations may consider training their leaders with a focus on transformational and transactional styles. But this is linked to only one part of the desired result. Social cohesion comes from other elements. To address this other part of team cohesion, organizations may invite their leaders to develop good relations within the team through regular meetings, group work, and any other event for team members to meet and share. They may also value equity and individual consideration and place teamwork and team relations as a key responsibility for managers.

Our study was done in the health care sector where task cohesion matters much. The staff members of the retirement home we studied need to combine their inputs for the satisfaction of the residents. Employees do not always work together given morning, afternoon and night shifts. This may explain why social cohesion does not come as being linked to leadership styles. Cohesion for the task matters but not necessarily good relations between team members. Research with other professional sectors may lead to other findings, such as Dionne and colleagues (2004). It would be interesting to replicate our work with a quite different environment.

The teams we surveyed are rather new (0-4 years in majority). This may explain why we do not find a significant impact on social cohesion. A longer service seniority within the team may lead to other results. Team cohesion evolves over time. Observation across different times may provide richer results. This is why we intend to replicate our survey both in 1 and 2 years. We hope to find interesting results related to team seniority.

Team cohesion is the result of many Inputs and Outputs. We wanted to isolate one of them - leadership style - in order to verify its significance. We hope to have the opportunity to observe other determining factors in the future, in particular team service seniority,

organizational values, management training, type of task, HR practices and the economic environment, to name a few of them.

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