

Shared Leadership between Teammates

Who Is Influencing Whom While Doing What?

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Abstract

Over the past fifteen years, part of leadership research has moved towards a shared and collective vision of this phenomenon. The research at hand aims to study shared leadership with its two main conceptualizations: sharing influence and sharing leadership functions. We studied three on-site project teams of knowledge workers (engineers, computer scientists and technicians) who carry out different types of projects, mainly in engineering and IT. We collected our data after three months of collaboration between teammates. We also performed a social network analysis and qualitative analysis of leadership functions as suggested by Morgeson and colleagues [1]. To our knowledge, no study has to date explored these two conceptualizations of shared leadership together, which is an original aspect of our research.

Introduction

Since 2000, we have been seeing a shift in leadership research. Traditionally seen as individual, this concept has become a group-based phenomenon, involving dynamic interaction between several people [2]. Indeed, leadership is now viewed as a process of mutual influence [3] that occurs between at least two individuals who have interdependent roles [4]. Recently, Dinh *et al.* [5] identified 66 different theoretical areas of leadership to illustrate the complexity and the vast extent of this fascinating field of research. However, consensus is beginning to form around the definition of leadership as a process of influence shared between several leaders rather than focused on only one leader [6].

Literature Review

Shared leadership

Over the past fifteen years, part of leadership research has been geared towards the study of collective or shared leadership, what Denis *et al.* [7] call “leadership in the plural”. In this study, shared leadership refers to the first aspect raised by these researchers, that is, mutual leadership shared in order to improve team efficiency. This complex and dynamic social phenomenon develops with time [8], emerging from the individual level before appearing in a group level (bottom-up). Contractor *et al.* [9] highlight three key aspects of shared leadership: 1) people, namely leaders, subordinates and their relationships; 2) roles, namely leadership functions; and 3) time, namely the dynamic process. Instead of the formal leader being the focus, the interdependence between teammates and their interactions becomes the center of interest. This phenomenon is a collectivist vision of leadership, whereby several individuals contribute

different leadership roles [10]. Thus, this phenomenon can mobilize the strengths (knowledge, skills, expertise, attitudes, perspectives, contacts and availability) of all teammates, not just those of the formal leader [11].

Researchers' interest in shared leadership and managers' enthusiasm for this phenomenon stem mainly from the alleged, increasingly demonstrated links between shared leadership and better team performance. Pearce and Sims [12] were among the first researchers to demonstrate that shared leadership is an excellent predictor of a team's effectiveness, beyond vertical leadership. Many studies then followed over the next decade, obtaining similar results. These include [13-18]. In addition to performance improvement, the various collaborative processes involved have been investigated through other research. For example, the study by Solansky [19] showed that members whose teams share leadership are more confident and happier, and have a greater sense of belonging because they are closely involved in the creation process aimed at achieving given objectives. Bergman *et al.* [20] conclude that teams that showed shared leadership also improved how their team functioned (fewer conflicts, greater consensus on decisions, more confidence and cohesion between them). Drescher *et al.* [21] find that the more leadership functions are distributed among teammates, the more confidence grows between them, as does team performance. *"There is sufficient evidence in these and similar studies to argue that teams in which leadership is shared are considered effective"* [22].

Two conceptualizations of shared leadership

In the literature, shared leadership is presented in the form of two main conceptualizations that refer to what is shared between teammates: 1) sharing influence, and 2) sharing leadership functions.

First conceptualization: sharing influence

Shared influence between teammates fits on a continuum between two extremes: 1) the formal leader is the only source of influence, so there is no sharing; and 2) several teammates are a source of influence on the team, in addition to the formal leader [13]. In this case, leadership can come from many emerging leaders [23, 24], although no formal leadership had been assigned to them in advance. In fact, sharing of influence is generally considered in terms of an asymmetric distribution between teammates, since each has his or her own leadership skills and a special status on the team [6].

Second conceptualization: sharing leadership functions

The sharing of leadership functions, sometimes called "behaviours," "roles" or "leadership activities," comes from the individual actions of some team members, amplified by their interactions [25]. Seibert *et al.* [6] argue that teammates do not necessarily end up sharing leadership functions equally, which is also the case when sharing influence. Therefore, the degree to which leadership duties are divided is asymmetrical between teammates according to their skills, the personality of the leader, needs and organization, and depending on the context. As with sharing influence, this phenomenon grows over time [13]. The current literature shows a wide variation in leadership functions, without a dominant typology to represent them [9, 21].

Simultaneous measurement of both conceptualizations

In the literature published thus far, we found only one study in which the two conceptualizations of shared leadership (sharing influence and sharing functions) are measured simultaneously. It is a doctoral thesis [26] whose results do not appear to have been subsequently published. The objective of our research is to examine the two conceptualizations of shared leadership together to improve our understanding of this phenomenon. Thus, this study aims to answer two questions: What type of teammates influence their colleagues most within a project team? And, what leadership functions do these influential members perform?

Population Studied

We know that shared leadership is particularly suitable for teams whose members have a high level of expertise and extensive experience, and who seek to work autonomously, in other words, knowledge workers [8]. In order to maximize our opportunity to witness the emergence and development of shared leadership within the teams studied, we recruited teams of this type, which are representative of most project teams [27]. These teams are from a large Montréal organization that employs thousands of people carrying out hundreds of projects annually, mostly in engineering and IT. Data were collected from three project teams, with the continuous presence of the main researcher on each team over the course of three months. In this study, we followed the advice of Avolio *et al.* [28], who suggest measuring shared leadership after a few months of interaction between teammates. They did indeed observe that the more teammates work together, the more they agree on a collective assessment of team leadership. Therefore, the data were measured after three months of collaboration between teammates for each of the three teams studied. The data presented in this study are part of a bigger research project conducted by the principal investigator.

Data Analysis

In order to measure both conceptualizations of this phenomenon, we first performed a social network analysis to see the distribution of influence within teams using a network sociogram [29]. In addition, we conducted a qualitative analysis of leadership functions suggested by Morgeson *et al.* [1] in Table 1.

Results

This is merely a *short abstract*. The final document will contain the results we obtained as part of this research. It will be submitted to the 2016 IAMB Conference by March 27, 2016, as required.

Table 1 : 15 Team Leadership Functions - Morgeson, DeRue and Karam (2010)

Transition Phase	Action Phase
Compose team	Monitor team
Define mission	Manage team boundaries
Establish expectations and goals	Challenge team
Structure and plan	Perform team task
Train and develop team	Solve problems
Sensemaking	Provide resources
Provide feedback	Encourage team self-management
-	Support social climate

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