

# **A Multilevel Study of Shared Leadership, Performance and Job Satisfaction**

## **The Mediating Effect of Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

This research is to explore how and why shared leadership affect performance and job satisfaction both individual and team level. We tested empowerment as a mediator with multilevel perspective of 297 valid questionnaires affiliated with 51 teams. The results showed that shared leadership had positive relations with team performance and job satisfaction. Furthermore, shared leadership was related to team performance partially through team empowerment. Shared leadership was related to job satisfaction fully through empowerment both at individual and team level. The contributions of shared leadership theory, research, and practices are discussed.

### **Introduction**

The increasing use of work teams as divisions of labor within organizations is in response to a dynamic and increasingly complex and competitive environment. Interest has grown within practices and academics in how teams process and how to lead teams (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006). Some studies on team leadership have discussed the role of formal, external, individual leadership on a team's efforts to achieve the objectives of an organization (Kirkman & Rosen,

1999; Morgeson & Derue, 2006), whereas others have focused on the influence of informal, collective, shared, and distributed leadership by team members on a team's efforts to fulfill organizational objectives (Brown & Gioia, 2002; Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002). In an era characterized by intense competition, rapid changes in the market environment, and a growing focus on knowledge economy, it is vital that teams become more coordinated and interdependent (Fitzsimons, James, Denyer, 2011). In other words, the operation of a team should depend not on the leader but on the collaboration of all members (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007). Such an informal form of leadership may have a greater influence on a team's operation than does formal leadership (Pearce & Sims, 2002; Ensley, Hmieleski & Pearce, 2006). However, few studies have explored informal leadership, a literature gap that remains to be filled.

Shared and distributed forms of leadership are two types of informal team leadership, although distributed leadership is discussed more frequently among educationists than among management scientists (Fitzsimons et al., 2010). Therefore, this study focused on shared leadership. Shared leadership refers to leadership that is assumed collectively by all the members of a team and which depends on the interaction among the members, rather than on one particular leader. This form of leadership is known as horizontal or collective leadership, in which the influencer and influenced are typically co-workers (Carson et al., 2007; Pearce & Sims, 2002). As knowledge economy continues to prevail in the 21st century, making it necessary for the members of a team to use their expertise and solve problems on their own, it has become increasingly important for a team to operate collaboratively (Carson et al., 2007).

Previous studies have suggested that leadership behavior differs at both team and individual levels and influences a team differently than it does individual members. This underscores the need to elucidate the influence of leadership behavior at both levels (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). For example, Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen (2007) discussed the effects of an empowering leadership climate on empowerment and performance at both team and individual levels. Kirkman & Rosen (1999) conducted a similar investigation at the team level and suggested that future studies examine the influence of team empowerment on a team and on an individual member to determine how the team and that member can be optimally empowered.

Leadership and empowerment are most common factors that used to discuss the effects on the team performance (Perry, Pearce, & Sims Jr., 1999). Empowerment is a multilevel concept. It is widely believed that team and psychological empowerment share similar dimensions and the same antecedent and outcome variables (Chen et al., 2007). Team and psychological empowerment have been extensively used as mediators to examine the relationships between various antecedent variables and performance at both team and individual levels (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Chen et al., 2007). Many studies have discussed the influence

of formal leadership on empowerment and performance. Research on shared leadership have focused more on the role of shared leadership in team performance (Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002; Ensley et al., 2006) or on the antecedents of shared leadership than on how and why shared leadership influences team performance (Carson et al., 2007; Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006). There is also a dearth of research on the influence that team members' shared leadership behavior has on empowerment, performance, or attitudes at team and individual levels. To address these literature gaps, the present study proposed that shared leadership behaviors (characterized by mutually shared visions and objectives) and a tendency to improve each other's capabilities, resolve problems collaboratively, and encourage each other) can foster the ability to work independently as well as attitudes that favor this type of working (i.e., team and psychological empowerment) at both team and individual levels, thereby contributing to performance and satisfaction at both levels.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

Shared leadership emphasizes that “everyone is a leader” (Fitzimons et al., 2010) and that a team is led by all members rather than by any appointed individual. While formal leadership depends on a single leader and operates on a top-down basis, shared leadership hinges on all members and operates through collaboration (Ensley et al., 2006). In a team that is headed by a formal leader but also characterized by shared leadership, members can engage in self-leadership and lead each other through interaction (Fitzimons et al., 2010).

A substantial amount of research has verified the relationship between shared leadership and team performance (e.g. Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002; Ensley et al., 2006). Specifically, team members who are empowered with a sense of responsibility and ownership typically exhibit high performance because they tend to have greater motivation to work, perform that work diligently, constantly improve their work processes, and consistently seek innovative solutions (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Hempel, Zhang, & Han, 2012).

Leadership and empowerment are distinct concepts. Seibert, Wang & Courtright(2011) indicated that high-performance managerial practice, social-political support, leadership, and work design characteristics are the predictors of empowerment instead of as empowerment itself. Leadership and empowerment are the two critical factors to understand how they affect team effectiveness. Most studies had shown the effect of leadership on team empowerment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Chen et al., 2007) Seiber et al. (2011) had shown that the effect of leadership on empowerment existed not only for individual team members but also team as a whole. Therefore, shared leadership may be the predictors of psychological and team empowerment.

Kirkman & Rosen (1999) discussed the mediating role of team empowerment in the relationship between empowering leadership and team performance suggested that further decentralization from external managers, an emphasis on self-control among team members, the formulation of team objectives, self-management, high team expectations, and trust in team are all associated with enhanced team empowerment, team performance, and teamwork satisfaction.

Shared leadership is a kind of social-structure empowerment (Pearce et al., 1999), and social structure empowerment lead to employee perception of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008). When all team members engaged in the leadership of team, setting the team goal, motivating the members, developing the team members, and making the decisions through collective, interactive influence, let increase intrinsic the team members need fulfill, positive attitude to their team and their work roles, thus enhancing team members more satisfied with their jobs at shared sense, and higher performance of team. We propose that team empowerment affect team performance and team-level job satisfaction through team empowerment.

H1: Team empowerment mediates the relationship between shared leadership and team performance.

H2: Team empowerment mediates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction.

Psychological empowerment is a sense of control over their work (Spreitzer, 2008). Yeatts & Hyten (1998) found that if the formal team leader exhibited a higher power and decision-making within team, the team members showed lower satisfaction with their jobs. The team members do not have the opportunities to decide how to work, and make decisions with applying their knowledge and abilities. Past studies have also showed that leadership enhances the perception of psychological empowerment via meta-analysis. (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 2008). When employees feel psychological empowerment, they are more satisfied with their jobs (Seibert, et al., 2011). Therefore, we propose that shared leadership may affect individual job satisfaction through psychological empowerment. Therefore, we propose that shared leadership may affect individual job satisfaction through psychological empowerment.

H3: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction.

## **Method**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The subjects of this study were teams from quality management, production management, information management, R & D, and manufacturing departments in the high-tech

and traditional manufacturing industry. Pearce (2004) argues that shared leadership occurs in the context of interdependence, task complexity, and the need for creative teams. The subjects of this study meet these three characteristics. Human Resource managers or functional managers were contacted to help distribute questionnaires to their employees in teams. Teams with response rates of less than 50% were excluded from this study. We administered questionnaires to all the 350 employees, including 51 teams in 15 companies. Of them, 297 valid questionnaires affiliated with 51 teams were returned, resulting in response rates of 85% at individual level. The final sample had an average number of 6.78 people on each team, an average tenure of 80.1% were male; 42.1% were engineers, 30% were technicians; 54.6% were 26-35 years old.

## **Measures**

All measures except for the measure of shared leadership, team empowerment and psychological empowerment were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Shared leadership was measured with the 18-item scale developed by Wood (2005) (1=strong disagree, 4=strong agree). Team empowerment was assessed with four dimensions of team potency, team meaningfulness, team autonomy, and team impact. Scale was developed by Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk & Gibson (2004), each dimension was measured by 3 items respectively. Psychological empowerment was measured with 12-item developed by Spreitzer (1995) This scale is comprised of four dimensions similar as team empowerment (1=strong disagree, 7=strong agree). Team performance was using 7-point scale with 5 items developed by Edmondson (1999). Team satisfaction was used 12-item scale develop by Mason & Griffin (2003). Our study adopted Job Satisfaction Index Scale develop Brayfield & Rothe(1951), which is composed of 18 items (1=strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). In addition to the substantive measures, we also included team size, task complexity and task independence as control variables. Past research indicated that task interdependence, task complexity (Perry et al., 1999), and team size (e.g. Ancona & Caldwell, 1992) affect team performance. We assessed task interdependence using 3-item scale developed by Campion, Medsker & Higgs(1993). Task complexity was measured with 3-item scale developed by Van der Vegt et al.(2000), ranging from 1 (strong disagree) to 5 (strong agree).

## **Results**

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses in LISREL for each variable to confirm that how well our data fit for the hypothesized measurement model. The results indicated that each measure fit our data well (Table 1). Further, we conducted a series of CFAs to confirm the distinctiveness of all the team level variables in the study, including shared leadership, team

empowerment, team performance, and team satisfaction. The results showed that the hypothesized four-factor model fit the data best, as comparing to other alternative models (Table 2).

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Variable	GFI	CFI	NFI	SRMR	RMSEA	Composite Reliability
Task independence	0.97		0.91		0.088	0.6208
Task complexity	0.97		0.91		0.088	0.62
Shared leadership	0.88		0.94		0.095	0.9029
Team empowerment	0.92		0.97		0.08	0.7622~0.9254
Team performance	0.98	0.97	0.97	0.046	0.084	0.6176
Team satisfaction	0.88	0.90	0.92		0.093	0.7739
Psychological empowerment	0.91	0.98	0.97	0.057	0.094	0.8702~0.9305
Job satisfaction	0.87		0.93		0.092	0.9024

Table 2: Comparison of Measurement Models

Model		X <sup>2</sup>	df	ΔX <sup>2</sup>
Model 1	One factor model	4273.86	665	2446.13**
Model 2	Two factors Model	4047.16~2639.39	664	1588.38~226.70**
Model 3	Three factors model	3681.30~2158.75	662	2115.11~592.56**
Baseline model	Four factors model	1827.73	659	

\*\* : p<0.01

### Level of Analysis and Aggregation

In order to aggregating the individual responses to the group level, we calculated inter-rater agreement using two indices. First, we assessed within-group agreement by means of the Rwg index (James, Demaree, and Wolf 1993). Then we estimated the between-group variability by computing the intra-class correlation coefficient ICC(1) (Bliese 2000). The results were showed as Table 3. The averages R<sub>wg</sub> for these five variables (task interdependence, task complexity, shared leadership, team empowerment, and team satisfaction) range from 0.866 to 0.966. These figures showed adequate agreement among group members. The ICC(1) values for these five variables range from 0.135-0.188. Given these statistics, we aggregated these five variables up to the group level.

Table 3: Results of Rwg(j) and ICC(1)

Variables	Mean Rwg (j)	ICC(1)	F value
<b>Task interdependence</b>	0.898	0.135	1.912***
<b>Task complexity</b>	0.866	0.180	2.271***
<b>Shared leadership</b>	0.966	0.185	2.321***
<b>Team empowerment</b>	0.950	0.188	2.343***
<b>Team satisfaction</b>	0.952	0.153	2.055***

\*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations, and the correlations used in the study. The statistics in the upper portion of the table pertain to the team level of analysis. The data in the lower portion pertain to the correlations among group-level variables.

Table 4: Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix among variable <sup>a</sup>

Variable	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Group level</b>								
<b>1.Task interdependence</b>	3.90	0.31	1					
<b>2.Task complexity</b>	3.83	0.35	0.51**	1				
<b>3.Shared leadership</b>	3.01	0.21	0.17	0.07	1			
<b>4.Team empowerment</b>	5.30	0.45	0.03	0.06	0.65**	1		
<b>5.Team satisfaction</b>	3.38	0.24	0.08	0.17	0.53**	0.60**	1	
<b>6.Team performance</b>	3.73	0.52	0.03	-0.02	0.60**	0.57**	0.53**	1
<b>Individual level</b>								
<b>1. Psychological empowerment</b>	4.95	0.87	1					
<b>2. Job satisfaction</b>	3.07	0.49	0.47**	1				

Note: <sup>a</sup>n=297 for level variables and 51 for level 2 variables.

\* $p < 0.05$  ; \*\* $p < 0.01$  ; N = 297

## Hypotheses Tests

To test mediation effects of team empowerment (Hypotheses 1 and 2), we used hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, we entered all of the control variables. In step 2, we entered shared leadership into model. In step 3, we entered both shared leadership and team empowerment into model. Table 5 presents these results. In Model 2 and 4, shared leadership had positive associations with team empowerment ( $\beta=0.594, p < 0.001$ ) and team performance

( $\beta=0.579$   $p < 0.001$ ) respectively. In model 5 further revealed that team empowerment was significantly related to team performance ( $\beta=0.311$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and shared leadership remained significantly related to team performance but the effect was less in model 5 than in model 4 ( $\beta=0.395$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, team empowerment partially mediated the relationship between shared leadership and team performance, providing support to H1.

For team satisfaction, model 7 revealed that shared leadership had a significant relationship with team satisfaction ( $\beta=0.459$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In model 8, we found team empowerment was significantly related to team satisfaction ( $\beta=0.334$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), while shared leadership became not significantly related to team satisfaction ( $\beta=0.261$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The results showed that team empowerment fully mediated the relationship between shared leadership and team satisfaction, providing support to H2.

Table 5: Results of Regression Analyses

	Team Empowerment		Team Performance			Team Satisfaction		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<b>Step 1</b>								
Task Interdependence	-0.074	-0.156	0.006	-0.073	-0.025	-0.087	-0.150	-0.098
Task Complexity	-0.005	0.032	-0.082	-0.046	-0.056	0.110	0.139	0.128
Team Size	-0.428**	-0.272	-0.247	-0.095	-0.010	-0.438**	-0.317	-0.226
<b>Step 2</b>								
Shared Leadership		0.594***		0.579***	0.395*		0.459***	0.261
<b>Step 3</b>								
Team Empowerment					0.311*			0.334*
F	3.277	11.151***	0.973	6.548***	6.304***	4.067*	7.576***	7.475***
$\Delta F$	0.029	0.000	0.413	0.000	0.059	0.012	0.000	0.036
R <sup>2</sup>	0.173	0.492	0.058	0.363	0.412	0.206	0.397	0.454
$\Delta R^2$	0.173	0.319	0.058	0.304	0.059	0.206	0.191	0.057

\*:  $p < .05$  ; \*\*:  $p < .01$  ; \*\*\*:  $p < .001$

H3 predicted psychological empowerment mediate the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction, which consist of constructs spanning both individual level and group level, we applied hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) analyses with software HLM 6.06 to test our hypothesis. We first ran null models with no predictors but psychological empowerment

or job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The test results show significant between-team variances in psychological empowerment ( $\chi^2=79.015$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $ICC1=0.149$ , indicating 14.9% of variance residing in between teams) and job satisfaction ( $X^2 = 76.944$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $ICC1 =0.334$ ), indicating 33.4% of variance residing in between teams), justifying HLM as the appropriate analytic technique.

The results of model 1 in Table 6 showed that shared leadership ( $\gamma=0.599$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) were significantly related to psychological empowerment. In addition, shared leadership were significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\gamma=0.346$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) as shown by the results of model 2 in Table 6. Model 3 in Table 6 further revealed that psychological empowerment was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\gamma=0.251$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), while shared leadership became not significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\gamma=0.196$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The results indicated that the indirect effects of shared leadership on job satisfaction via psychological empowerment were significant. Therefore, Hypotheses 3 was supported.

Table 6: HLM Results

Variables	Psychological empowerment,		Job satisfaction, Phase 2	
	Phase 1			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Intercept( $\gamma_{00}$ )	4.990***	3.087***	3.076***	
<b>Level 2</b>				
Shared leadership ( $\gamma_{01}$ )	0.599**	0.346*	0.196	
Team size( $\gamma_{02}$ )	-0.037	-0.014	-0.005	
<b>Level 1</b>				
Psychological empowerment ( $\gamma_{10}$ )	-	-	0.251***	
$\tau_{00}$	0.073	0.022	0.017	
$\sigma^2$	0.644	0.211	0.171	
Deviance	744.788	415.893	356.057	

Note: .n=297 at individual level, n=51 at team level.

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

Our primary objective for this study was to understand whether and how shared leadership affects teams and individuals outcomes. From a multilevel perspective, this study

explored the relationship of shared leadership with team empowerment, team performance, and teamwork satisfaction at the team level, and the relationship among shared leadership, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction at individual level. The results of this study generate several valuable insights with interesting theoretical and managerial implications.

The findings are as follows. First, team empowerment partially mediated the relationships between shared leadership and team performance. Team performance can be enhanced through interactive influence of all team members. In addition, team empowerment helps explain the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. Specifically, shared leadership also improves team performance by enabling team empowerment to be perceived among the members of a team. Moreover, when a team is guided through the interaction between team members, the members can perceive the meaning, impact, and autonomy of their jobs, which boosts the team's overall performance.

Second, empowerment was found to fully mediate the relationship between shared leadership and job satisfaction both at individual and team levels. In short, shared leadership strengthens employees' satisfaction with job only via psychological and team empowerment. Teams empowered with setting team's goal, interactive motivating, constantly refining their work processes, seeking innovative solutions, and consistently improving products or services, enabling them to understand the meaning of their jobs and their right of choice, self-efficacy, and impact, from which they can experience satisfaction from their work and maintain positive emotions at work, thereby improving the job satisfaction of individual and team as a whole.

Managers should foster self-leadership among team members, by encouraging them to assume leadership, entrusting them to formulate decisions, and showing confidence in their problem-solving abilities. These actions empower employees and negate the need for managers to assume command and control on all matters. Through shared leadership, organizations can empower a team with the right to decision-making, improving team processes, and resolving team problems. This enables them to understand the meaning of their jobs within the team and enhances the performance of the team as a whole. Moreover, teamwork satisfaction can be improved by having team members appreciate the significance and value of the tasks they have undertaken and understand the influence of their team experiences on the organization.

### **Limitation**

One limitation of this study was that it adopted a cross-sectional design to survey a sample in a specific timeframe. As a result, the causal relationships among the variables cannot be not strictly admissible. However, these findings can be verified in the future through a longitudinal study that examines shared leadership, team performance, and job satisfaction in a

sample over different periods of time. Second, we used a sample of 297 employees in 51 teams, the sample size was adequate for team research, the significant results obtained for all of our hypotheses. However, larger data sets help to raise statistic power to find true relationship and test more complex causal models. This study also only used task interdependence, task complexity, and team size as control variables. More control variables should be utilized in future research to expand understanding of the topic explored in this study.

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