

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR MOVING ORGANISATIONAL TEAMS TOWARDS SHARED LEADERSHIP

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—Abstract —

The challenges facing organisations today require an exhaustive review of the strategic role of leadership. The complex and ambiguous situations encountered by the contemporary organisation make it difficult for a single external leader to perform all leadership functions successfully. In this regard, it is necessary to explore new types of leadership capable of providing an effective response to new needs. A solution to this problem in the form of shared leadership and engaging the potential of entire organisations has been identified. Therefore, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to identify and map factors that support the development of shared leadership in organisations. Antecedent factors that are likely to influence the development of shared leadership are the internal team environment, comprising a shared purpose, social support, voice, and the components of shared leadership. An integrative literature approach was conducted to review, critique and express what the literature says about the antecedent factors that influence shared leadership emergence in organisations. Based on the reviews, this paper makes a valuable contribution to the literature on shared leadership by proposing a five-step sequential staircase framework consisting of conditions and actions that would be required to move teams in organisations towards shared leadership. The proposed framework gives a relatively clear indication of the organisational environment that needs to be established for effective implementation of shared leadership. From the researcher's perspective, the value of knowing the operational conditions, the implications of and the existing critique of shared leadership could constitute a foundation from which to conduct new research.

Key Words: *Shared leadership, team approach, implementation, performance*

JEL Classification: I20, I21, I29

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a pivotal issue that influences either the success or failure of every type of organisation, and the complexity of today's business environment makes leadership even more challenging. It is becoming increasingly difficult for any single individual to possess all of the skills and abilities required to competently lead organisations today (Kocolowski, 2010). In this context, shared leadership is considered a promising concept that responds to the increasing density and complexity of work processes in which a single leader may not be able to fulfil all leadership functions (Pearce & Manz, 2005; Small & Rentsch, 2010). However, most existing research on team leadership has focused narrowly on the influence of an individual team leader (usually a manager external to the team) while largely neglecting leadership provided by team members (Kozłowski & Bell, 2003). As suggested by a literature review (Kocolowski, 2010; Conger & Pearce, 2003; Pearce, Wassenaar & Manz, 2014; Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007), shared leadership can be defined as a dynamic, collaborative process in which influence is distributed among a plurality of networked individuals, often referred to as teams, for the purpose of achieving beneficial outcomes for the organisation. Characteristics of shared leadership teams include decentralized interaction, collective task completion, reciprocal support and skill development, shared purpose and a unified voice, all enhanced via social interaction that involves mutual accountability, partnership, equity, and ownership (Kocolowski, 2010; Wellman, 2011). Shared leadership differs from the conventional paradigm (referred to as "vertical leadership" by Pearce and Sims (2002), which emphasises the role of the manager who is positioned hierarchically above and external to the team, has formal authority over the team, and is responsible for the team's processes and outcomes (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Kozłowski et al., 1996).

Although research indicates that shared leadership has its challenges and can be difficult to implement (Pearce & Wassenaar, 2014; Cawthorne, 2010; Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006; Miles & Watkins, 2007), overall, the benefits of shared leadership are remarkable. Research findings have revealed the positive effect of shared leadership on performance measures such as financial growth (Grille, Schulte & Kauffeld, 2015); increased knowledge sharing, which in turn stimulates

higher creativity and group performance (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Lee et al., 2015); increased acceptance among team members, which fosters trust (Drescher et al., 2014; Bergman et al., 2012); effectiveness and overall team performance (Wang et al., 2014; Manz, Pearce and Sims, 2009); creativity and innovation (Hoch, 2014), as well as increased personal development and team learning (Liu et al., 2014). In addition to increased acceptance, trust, creativity, knowledge-sharing, effectiveness and overall performance, there are other positive side effects of shared leadership. Small and Rentsch (2010) argue that shared leadership could reduce the risk of corruption in top management teams, and to some extent could also prevent corrupt and immoral leadership actions. In summing up, Perry, Pearce and Sims (1999) argue that if shared leadership is successfully implemented, it can lead to better attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, which can be essential for reaching team objectives. Given these promising outcomes of shared leadership, this literature review/conceptual paper investigates conditions and actions that would be required to move organisations towards adopting a shared leadership approach in their environments. The present study therefore contributes to the existing literature by proposing a framework for moving teams in organisations towards shared leadership.

2. CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY

Organisational studies investigating shared leadership reveal many dimensions, components and factors that affect shared leadership. Therefore, the conceptual underpinning which guided this study included relevant literature which focused on the internal team environment, consisting of three dimensions that enable shared leadership, namely *shared purpose*, *social support* and *voice*, and factors and components of shared leadership (Carson et al., 2007; Mielonen, 2011). These three dimensions, together with the factors and components of shared leadership, assisted in achieving the purpose of this study, which was the development of a framework able to support teams in organisations in their movement towards shared leadership.

2.1. Internal team environment

Carson et al. (2007:1222) propose that “shared leadership is facilitated by an overall team environment that consists of three dimensions: shared purpose, social

support and voice”. Mielonen (2011:59) refers to these dimensions collectively as the “internal team environment”. These three dimensions are mutually reinforcing and complementary (Carson et al., 2007). When team members are able to speak up and get involved (*voice*), the likelihood that many of them will exercise leadership increases greatly. The opportunity for voice also facilitates shared leadership by strengthening both a common sense of direction and the potential for positive interpersonal support within the team. When teams are focused on collective goals (*shared purpose*), there is a greater sense of meaning and increased motivation for team members to both speak up and invest themselves in providing leadership to the team and to respond to the leadership of others. The motivation to participate and provide input into common goals and purpose can also be reinforced by an encouraging and supportive climate. When team members feel recognised and supported within the team (*social support*) they are more willing to share responsibility, cooperate, and commit to the team’s collective goals. Thus, these three dimensions work together to create an internal team environment that is characterised by a shared understanding about purpose and goals, a sense of recognition and importance, and high levels of involvement, challenge, and cooperation. Mielonen (2011) further argues that for shared leadership to emerge, the following two sets of activities must occur: 1) members of a team must offer leadership and seek to influence the direction, motivation, and support of the group; and 2) the team as a whole must be willing to rely on leadership exhibited by multiple team members.

Expounding on each of the three dimensions identified by Carson et al. (2007), these authors argue that *shared purpose* exists when the team members have a similar understanding of their team’s primary objectives and take conscious steps to ensure a focus on collective goals. Sharing the same sentiments, Morgeson, DeRue and Karam (2010) argue that team members who have a common sense of purpose and agreed-upon goals are more likely to feel motivated, empowered, and committed to their team and work. Furthermore, team members with these characteristics are likely to accept and support one another. Locke and Latham (2002), who share a similar view, identify at least the following three reasons why the leadership function of creating shared purpose or establishing common goals is essential: 1) at the *individual level*, goal setting theory suggests that clear and challenging goals are essential for directing individual action and motivating

individuals to achieve performance targets; 2) at the *team level*, the goal-setting process can help team members form a common identity and enhance the team's commitment to the team goals, and 3) at the *organisation level*, the active participation of team members in the goal-setting process stimulates commitment to team goals, and a team acts as a more cohesive unit.

The second dimension that supports shared leadership is *social support*, which, according to Carson et al. (2007), is defined as the team members' efforts to provide one another with emotional and psychological strength. The team members support one another through the encouragement and recognition of individual and team contributions and accomplishments. This helps to create an environment in which team members feel that their inputs are valued and appreciated. Liu et al. (2014) make the observation that individuals and team members will not participate openly in discussions in an intimidating environment. These authors maintain that team members are more likely to work cooperatively and develop a sense of shared responsibility in a psychologically safe climate.

The third dimension is *voice*, which, according to Carson et al. (2007), is defined as the degree to which team members have inputs into how the team carries out its mandate. Seers, Keller and Wilkerson (2003) associate *voice* with interaction or participative behaviours in teams, and they maintain that these types of behaviours can result in higher levels of social influence among the team members through increased engagement and involvement. In addition, DeRue et al. (2010) associate *voice* with participation in decision-making and constructive discussion and debate relating to alternative approaches to team goals, tasks and procedures, which can improve the degree of collective influence, involvement, and commitment relative to important team decisions. Thus, the presence of high levels of voice in a team should create an environment where people engage in mutual leadership by being committed to and becoming proactively involved in helping the team achieve its goals and objectives and, challenging one another constructively in the pursuit of group goals (Carson et al., 2007).

2.2. Factors and components of shared leadership

During the past few decades, researchers have presented a number of theoretical models, frameworks, and factors in the hope of explaining the shared leadership phenomenon. For example, in a study focusing on top management teams in churches with three or more pastors, Wood (2005) undertook to identify the factors most significant to shared leadership management teams. He found that empowering team behaviours related positively with shared leadership, and that the development of shared leadership in a management team depends largely on the increasing behaviours that team members experience. Surprisingly, team structure (horizontal) did not have a significant effect on leadership. Wood (2005:76) also indicates that shared leadership exhibits four distinct dimensions that contribute to team effectiveness, namely: joint completion of tasks, mutual skill development, decentralized interaction among personnel, and emotional support. In a qualitative study involving 69 individuals working at St. Joseph's Health Care Hospital, Jackson (2000:168) determined that four constructs vital to the understanding of shared leadership highlight the significance of its relational aspects, namely accountability, partnership, equity, and ownership.

Another shared leadership issue to consider relates to the culture of an organisation (O'Toole et al., 2002). The culture of an organisation consists of a set of assumptions about team members' shared beliefs and values that are stable and passed down to new members (Schein, 1992). The values that are communicated through the organisation's culture can, ultimately, have a significant impact on the behaviour of individuals within the organisation (Ostroff et al., 2003). Therefore, to foster shared leadership, an organisation may need to create specific organisational conditions that communicate that different elements of the shared leadership process are valued. For instance, it is important that the organisation value collaboration, interacting with one another, sharing information, understanding one another's networks and roles, and understanding that a formal leader may not always be the highest level of authority within a team (Friedrich et al., 2009). External leadership has also been hypothesised as playing a key role in creating the conditions necessary for the emergence of shared leadership (Kocolowski, 2010). When discussing the role of an external leader, researchers have frequently stressed the importance of coaching behaviours, which Hackman and Wageman (2005:269) define as external team leaders' "direct interaction with

a team intended to help team members make coordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's task".

Other research also points to competencies that are said to foster shared leadership. For example, an examination of the role theory literature by Carson et al. (2007) indicated four roles (navigator, engineer, social integrator, and liaison) which conferred utility on team members without a formal title or position of authority, as is often the case with shared leadership. When these roles manifest within a team, there appears to be a clear team direction and purpose (navigator), structuring of team roles, functions, and responsibilities (engineer), development and maintenance of team coherence (social integrator), and development of relationships with key external stakeholders (liaison). In an examination of these roles within teams, Carson et al. (2007) found that shared leadership was positively related to performance.

Pearce and Manz (2005) propose five factors influencing the conditions under which shared leadership may emerge. These factors are the level of urgency, the importance of employee commitment, the need for creativity and innovation, the level of interdependence, and the degree of complexity. Walker, Smither, and Waldman (2008) identified the following leadership indicators in teams in a three-year qualitative study of 68 regional bank branch managers that set them apart from vertical leadership: (a) the work team resolves differences in order to reach agreement, (b) work is distributed properly to take advantage of members' unique skills, (c) information about the company and its strategy is shared, (d) teamwork is promoted with the team itself, and (e) the team works together to identify opportunities to improve productivity and efficiency. Chen, Kanfer, Kirkman, Allen, and Rosen (2007:343) sampled 445 members from 62 teams in 31 stores of a national home improvement company, and asserted that in order to empower team leadership, "team leaders should ensure they delegate enough autonomy and responsibility to all members in their team, involve the team in decision making, and encourage the team to self-manage its performance to the extent possible". Abiding by such principles gives teams a better chance of success. McIntyre (1999:40) insists that emerging leadership teams become effective only when they are characterised by "strategic goals, extensive networks, collaborative relationships, effective information processing, and focused action".

Besides work on the dimensions, factors and components of shared leadership, research has delineated some conditions which may influence the emergence of shared leadership. For example, Conger and Pearce (2003) discuss conditions such as geographic dispersion, demographic heterogeneity, team size, skill heterogeneity, and maturity. Geographic dispersion, large team size, and demographic heterogeneity are expected to have a negative impact on the likelihood of shared leadership emerging as coordination and communication. Conversely, skill heterogeneity should facilitate the emergence of shared leadership, as different skills are often needed during the life cycle of the team. Teams with breadth in their abilities are more likely to be able to engage effectively in shared leadership, given the right climate and the members being comfortable with and cognizant of the possession of different skills. This suggests that time is required in team development.

3. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR MOVING ORGANISATIONAL TEAMS TOWARDS SHARED LEADERSHIP

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework derived from the literature which focused on the three dimensions that enable shared leadership (shared purpose, social support and voice), collectively referred to as the internal team environment, and factors and components of shared leadership. Based on the literature review, the following five steps with the potential to move an organisational team towards shared leadership are proposed: Step 1 – Knowledge and Mutual Understanding; Step 2 – Safe Environment Climate and Trust; Step 3 – Openness and Information Sharing; Step 4 – Sense of “We” and Motivation, and Step 5 – Shared Leadership and Innovation. Interestingly, these steps could also be associated with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Kenrick et al., 2010). Maslow identifies various steps and needs that should be met on the path to self-actualisation. Moving a team through these steps could be challenging, which is why Ensley, Hmieleski and Pearce (2006) suggest the involvement of external leaders to initiate the process. However, the services of external leaders should not be prolonged; instead, they should be reduced gradually as the team progresses upwards through the different steps. Discussion of the proposed steps together with the reviewed literature on internal team environment dimensions and the

factors and components of shared leadership provided the basis for the implementation of the proposed framework for moving organisational teams towards shared leadership.

Figure-1: Framework for moving organisational teams towards shared leadership



(Adapted from Somehagen and Johansson (2015:45))

The discussion below is a suggested way to integrate theory into practice in order to move an organisational team towards shared leadership.

3.1 Step 1: Knowledge and Mutual Understanding

Shared leadership demands high levels of knowledge and leadership attributes (Carson et al., 2007). Researchers studying shared leadership propose factors influencing conditions under which shared leadership may emerge (Hoch, 2014; Ensley, Hmieleski & Pearce, 2006; Pearce & Manz, 2005). One of the elements necessary is the identification and combination of the right mix of people with the skills, abilities and expertise to form a team so that they are able to assist in

performing the task at hand (Pearce, Wassenaar & Manz, 2014). These authors argue that teams with broad abilities are more likely to be able to engage effectively in shared leadership, given the right climate and with the members being comfortable with and cognizant of having different skills. However, there needs to be a mutual understanding of each person's expertise (Carson et al., 2007). Expanding on the same theme, these authors argue that in order to move an organisational team towards shared leadership, it is crucial that the people involved in projects or teams have similar perceptions and a similar understanding of their team's primary objectives and, take steps to ensure a focus on collective goals. Research has demonstrated that team members who have a common sense of purpose and agreed-upon goals are more likely to feel motivated, empowered, and committed to their team and work (Morgeson, DeRue & Karam 2010; Knight, Durham & Locke 2001). Sometimes it may be difficult for the team to achieve or create sufficient understanding of the team's objectives on their own, and in that case an external leader from the organisational hierarchy may intervene (D'Innocenzo, Mathieu & Kukenberger, 2014). However, once understanding of the task at hand has been achieved, the external leader's services can be disengaged and the team can move on to the next step on their path towards shared leadership.

3.2. Step 2: Safe Environment Climate and Trust

After having assembled a team with knowledge whose members also exhibit similar perceptions and understanding of objectives, the next step is to ensure that the team operates in a safe environment climate (Liu et al., 2014). This view is supported by Slantcheva-Durst (2014), who argues that individuals will not openly participate in questioning, discussions and reflections, and neither will they seek or give feedback, if they do not feel psychologically safe in a team or organisation. Associated with a safe environment climate is trust (Bergman et al., 2012; Drescher et al., 2014). Trust is defined as an individual or group's belief that another individual or group will make an effort to uphold commitments, will be honest, and will not take advantage, given the opportunity (Bergman et al., 2012). Therefore, an individual who does not feel that the other team members uphold commitments or are honest, or feels that he or she might be taken advantage of if he or she allows himself or herself to be influenced by peers, is unlikely to accept the influence of others, as to do so would involve an unacceptable level of risk. In addition, it is important during this step to foster a team culture that does not

apportion blame on individual team members for mistakes or for questioning, and does not discourage critical feedback (Day, 2007).

3.3. Step 3: Openness and Information Sharing

Once the team or organisation has created a safe environment climate where trust and a culture of tolerance prevail, it can progress to the next step, which is openness. According to Schein (2010), and McLeod and MacDonell (2011), openness may be described as the level of transparency in sharing task-relevant information. Openness facilitates the alignment of goals and expectations and helps team members to achieve a common and mutual understanding of the project scope. Sharing the same view, Zidane et al. (2016) argue that open and adequate communication helps to develop a shared understanding, improves the atmosphere of the relationship, fosters commitment, ensures that deadlines are respected, and enhances trust between the partners. In addition, openness reduces mistrust and conflict of interest and improves project performance (Turner & Müller, 2004). Openness may also be linked to a type of trust termed affective-based trust (Carson et al., 2007). In a context of affective-based trust, individuals develop strong links of personal values and emotional ties toward one another. This improves their understanding of one another as individual team members create a climate of emotional openness in which individuals are less concerned about their own vulnerabilities or fears that other members may exploit them for individual outcomes (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles, 2006). Therefore, organisations or teams should have an organisational culture that supports individual efforts and ensures that the required information is shared and that there is direct communication among all members of the team (Cserhádi & Szabó, 2014). Sharing information, ideas and solutions openly and often moves the team or organisation to the next step, where people will see their achievements as those of the team and not purely those of an individual. Therefore, a sense of “we” rather than “I”, which is the next step, becomes possible.

3.4. Step 4: Sense of “We” and Motivation

Having created a safe environment characterised by openness where team members can share information and express their views freely, people would start to see themselves as part of something bigger (experience a sense of “we”)

(Wellman, 2011). When team members are encouraged to lead themselves and share influence with their peers in defining problems, making decisions, solving problems and identifying opportunities and challenges both now and in the future, a sense of “we” is likely to result (Erkutlu, 2012). From a shared leadership perspective, establishing the sense of “we” is important, as it leads to more motivated team members. Team members start to think of their accomplishments as the group’s accomplishments, not individual accomplishments. In addition, a sense of “we” increases an individual’s commitment to the team and the organisation (Yammarino, et al., 2012), and it is reasonable to assume that this level of commitment and sense of “we” moves the team closer to shared leadership, creativity and higher performance, which is the final step of a proposed sequential staircase framework towards shared leadership.

3.5. Step 5: Shared Leadership and Innovation

During this final step of the proposed framework for moving an organisational team towards shared leadership, shared leadership is considered to have been achieved. This step is characterised by greater creativity, innovation, effectiveness and productivity and the emergence of multiple leaders within the team (McIntyre & Foti, 2013). Each step that the team takes towards shared leadership not only enables progression to the next step, but reinforces the steps already taken on the lower levels as well. Step five not only increases the team’s effectiveness, output and performance, but also strengthens interdependence and organisational knowledge and understanding, and creates a safe environment climate, a culture of trust, organisational openness and sharing, and a sense of “we” and motivation.

4. CONCLUSION

The research purpose of this literature review study was to identify and map factors that support the development of shared leadership in organisations and to critically examine the potential outcomes of shared leadership and how an organisational team could move towards adopting a shared leadership approach, including which steps, conditions and actions would be required. Using the integrative literature approach focusing on the dimensions and factors that influence the development of shared leadership, five steps, as illustrated in figure 1, were identified and subsequently provided direction for implementing shared leadership in an organisational team. However, the limitation of this proposed

framework is that its applicability is restricted to a single organisation. These steps have yet to be studied and tested rigorously for effectiveness and applicability; however, they may afford practitioners the possibility of better understanding what shared leadership is, and what kind of favourable conditions and steps are needed in order to implement shared leadership effectively in an organisation. Therefore, this conceptual paper contributes to the existing literature by proposing the five-step sequential staircase framework for moving organisational teams towards shared leadership.

While most of the researchers in the field are enthusiastic about the fact that, if undertaken genuinely and effectively, shared leadership will tend to transform organisations into more inclusive places through synergistic, dynamic processes of active engagement in the vision and values of leadership while being empowered with knowledge, authority, responsibility and goal-directed problem solving to find flexibility and quick response capabilities necessary to stay competitive in their business, research is nevertheless still needed to increase the validity and reliability of the area. From a researcher's perspective, the value of knowing the operational conditions, implications, and existing critique of shared leadership could provide a foundation from which to conduct new research.

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