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Exploring Relational & Diversity Antecedents of Shared Leadership in Teams

Cécile Emery* & Thomas S. Calvard•

**London School of Economics*; • *University of Edinburgh*

Research Objective

In this theoretical paper, we integrate and build on ongoing research efforts identifying the antecedents of shared leadership in work teams. Specifically, we draw on a social network approach to discuss the role of *relational antecedents* in relation to the emergence of shared team leadership, as well as discussing the moderating impact of *team diversity* on the effects of these relational antecedents.

Introduction

Shared leadership allows leadership to be “dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members” (Gronn, 2002: 429). It is envisioned as “an emergent property of a network of interacting individuals” (Bennett, Harvey, Wise, & Woods, 2003: 7). Previous research has linked the extent of shared team leadership positively to team effectiveness (e.g. Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006). However, less research has considered the antecedents of shared leadership. Some general predictors of shared team leadership from recent studies have included a supportive internal team environment, coaching, and functional diversity (Carson et al., 2007; Kukenberger, Mathieu, D’Innocenzo, & Reilly, 2011).

At the team level of analysis, shared leadership can be represented as a team’s social network, in which nodes and ties stand for individual team members and relational leadership perceptions respectively (Carson et al., 2007; Mehra et al., 2006). In aggregate, the configuration of nodes and ties captures the emergent shared leadership. This network representation carries several key advantages over a more generic team-level conceptualization. Specifically, it a) does

not restrict or ignore the precise number of leaders, it b) captures the entire spectrum of possible shared leadership states in a team, ranging from a unique individual (star configuration) through to a fully interconnected network of leadership roles among team members, and finally, it c) clearly incorporates information about higher order hierarchical structures in leadership (Liu & Wei, 2009; Mehra et al., 2006).

Previous research has discussed and studied a variety of social networks influencing leadership, including affective networks, friendship networks, advice networks, and more recently, negative ties such as hindrance networks, involving the thwarting of others' task behaviors (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006; Bono & Anderson, 2005; Boyd & Taylor, 1998; Fernandez, 1991; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Labianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998; Neubert & Taggar, 2004; Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001).

What is missing, and is thus a key contribution of the current paper, is the development of a more systematic theoretical framework to bring these insights together and elaborate upon them. Through this objective, we aim to set a clear agenda to enable social network studies to more comprehensively test how a team's shared leadership is dependent on the existence of various parallel team member networks. This helps to address important unanswered questions around *which* and, more importantly, *what extend* specific types of network ties between team members enhance or impede shared leadership.

A Theoretical Relational Model of Shared Team Leadership

In focusing on the relational antecedents of shared leadership, we bring together three key classes of network ties as predictors of shared team leadership: instrumental or *advice ties*; positive/negative *affective ties*; and *hindrance ties*. Based on prior research, we argue that teams with denser (i.e. more interconnected) advice networks and positive affectivity networks will

exhibit a greater degree of shared leadership due to the trust, helpfulness, and fruitful mutual influence processes these team member ties represent (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ibarra, 1993; Sparrowe et al., 2001; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). In contrast, we argue that teams with stronger and/or more dense negative affectivity and hindrance ties exhibit less shared leadership, due to the social and task interference these team member ties generate (Labianca & Brass, 2006; Nicolau & Birley, 2003; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). Furthermore, we argue that the negative influence of these negative ties on shared team leadership is stronger than the corresponding positive influence of positive ties, due to the robust psychological negativity bias surrounding social interactions in general (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Labianca & Brass, 2006). To quantify the previous assumptions, we will conduct a multiple network study using Exponential Random Graph Models (p^* models) to study to what extent different types of networks shape, support, or undermine shared leadership.

The Moderating Role of Team Diversity

We consider the moderating roles of *surface diversity* (i.e. based on overt, demographic differences) and *deep diversity* (i.e. based on personality, values, and attitudes) across team members (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). We argue that ties between team members diverse on surface attributes will weaken positive influences on shared team leadership and strengthen negative influences, given surface diversity's potential for conflict, misunderstanding, and reduced social integration within the team. In contrast, we argue that ties between team members diverse on deep attributes will enhance shared team leadership, given that here the diversity rationale for shared leadership configurations will be perceived as more enduring, meaningful and genuinely useful. Finally, we propose that general team homogeneity in terms of demography and functional expertise will weaken relational influences on genuine shared

leadership by fostering norms of false consensus and groupthink, with team member similarity negating the true influence that diversity provides (e.g. Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007).

In the remainder of our paper, we also discuss two broader issues arising from the theoretical model as catalysts for future research. The first concerning the interface of social network operationalizations of shared leadership and team diversity research. For example, demographic diversity within teams can give them more external range (e.g. boundary spanning) whilst at the same time, proving an internal threat to the team's density and cohesion (Reagans, Zuckerman, & McEvily, 2004). Trade-offs like this place constraints around the content and form of diverse shared leadership configurations in teams. Secondly, following from this, we discuss how to develop a more precise conceptualization of shared team leadership as emergent team state and process (an outcome in our model). For example, the distinct roles and behaviors enacted by multiple team leader figures might comprise several divisions of labor; in terms of different leaders for different phases of team activity, leaders divided along a relationship-task dichotomy, diversity-based subgroup leaders, or leaders with varying external-internal proximity to the team (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010).

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