

Editorial

New Forms of Management Shared and Distributed Leadership in Organizations

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Historically, the primary focus of the study of leadership has been on hierarchical leadership: The relationship of leaders to their followers, their style of control, how productive their group is under their guidance, as well as various other individual, group, and organizational outcomes (Bass & Bass, 2008). Recently, however, there has been a movement away from simply focusing on the leader to an increased interest in understanding those around the leader (Hoch, Pearce, & Welzel, 2010; Pearce, 2008; Wassenaar, Pearce, Hoch, & Wegge, 2010; Yukl, 2002), the followers (Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008), and how they interact with the leader and each other. This has opened a new avenue for conceptualizing leadership beyond that of a simple hierarchical role to an unfolding social process most commonly termed shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), yet similar terms such as collective, collaborative, and distributed leadership have also entered the lexicon, along with long-standing terms such as involvement, participation, and organizational democracy (Wegge et al., 2010). Shared leadership is defined as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). The initial work on shared leadership has demonstrated that it can have a powerful influence on group attitudes, behavior, cognition, and performance (see Wassenaar & Pearce, in press a, b, for reviews). Much work, nonetheless, needs to be done to advance the study of shared leadership.

Accordingly, the purpose of this special issue is to provide a forum to further our understanding of shared leadership and related constructs. In the past few decades, this particular form of leadership has gained in relevance both

in its practical application in the workplace and in scientific research, due to the increased importance of knowledge work (Drucker, 1968; Pearce, 2010).

Shared leadership occurs when group members actively and intentionally shift the role of leader to one another as necessitated by the environment or circumstances in which the group operates. Clearly, this type of leadership is a departure from the traditional understanding of the hierarchical leader where the influence and decision making travel downstream from the vertical leader to the followers (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004, 2006; Day & O'Connor, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2000, 2002). With shared leadership, the role of leadership does not rest in one person's hands, but rather, in the group's arms as they move together toward common objectives.

Pearce and Conger (2003) have indicated that there has been a shift in the scholarly community where some have taken to the notion that leadership is actually a process that can be taught, shared, distributed, and collectively enacted. These scholars have also begun to popularize the view that leadership does not have to solely originate from a hierarchical leader but, rather, can derive from any member of a group or social system, depending on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of those involved and the demands of the task at hand.

The authors of the six articles in this special issue tackle a wide scope of issues that are critical to moving forward the study of shared leadership theory. Some articles are conceptual while others are empirical. Of the conceptual articles, one provides a broad comprehensive overview while the other focuses specifically on methods for the study of shared leadership. Of the empirical articles, two use qualitative

analysis, one uses multiple regression and one uses social network analysis and multiple regression. Together, these articles place a firm stake in the ground on the state-of-the-art thinking in shared leadership theory.

Overview of the Articles in This Special Issue

The lead article in this special issue by Wegge and colleagues (2010) is broad and encompassing. The authors provide an extremely comprehensive review of the various mechanisms through which employees can be engaged and involved in leadership processes in organizations. Their review ranges from employee participation practices to organizational democracy, and it identifies a panoply of paths for creating more humane, engaging, and satisfying work environments. It is a foundational piece from which much future research can draw.

Next, Gockel and Werth (2010) provide a helpful description of the various methods that have been used and offer an alternative approach to measure shared leadership in organizations. Their description of current methods is accurate and informative. Their ideas on alternative approaches are proactive. Surely new insights can be gained from their stimulating overview.

Weibler and Rohn-Endres (2010) then provide a grounded theory development paper. In their research they hone in on social networks to discover that a focus on "learning conversations" is critical to the development of shared leadership. They integrate their findings with work on shared leadership and offer future researchers a platform from which to conduct new studies on shared leadership in organizational networks.

Moving into quantitatively testing shared leadership theory, Boies, Lvina, and Martens (2010) examine the effects of shared transformational, as well as shared passive avoidant, leadership in a business simulation. They report that trust and potency are positively related to shared transformational leadership while being negatively related to shared passive avoidant leadership, and that shared passive avoidant leadership is negatively related to team performance. This study serves to further fix the research gap that exists in shared leadership theory.

Next, Small and Rentsch (2010) explore the importance of the distribution of shared leadership in social networks. Their work sheds important light on the finer dynamics of shared leadership. Moreover, their work is longitudinal, enhancing our ability to draw causal interpretations. They provide an excellent example of work that gives keen insight into the dynamics of shared leadership. Much can be built on this example of quantitative analysis of shared leadership.

Finally, Manz, Manz, Adams, and Shipper (2010) report on a rich qualitative investigation of shared leadership at an innovative furniture manufacturer more noted for the company's values-based approach to the organization. Through their in-depth study, the authors develop an interesting grounded research-based model of how shared leadership,

shared values, and sustained performance are inextricably linked. It is an intriguing model that should form the basis of future quantitative research.

The Future of Organizational Leadership

As we forge further into the knowledge era, our models of leadership will continue to evolve to embrace the paradigmatic shift away from leadership as merely a hierarchical role to leadership as an unfolding social process, that is, a shared leadership-type perspective (Wassenaar et al., 2010). Is shared leadership a panacea? No. There will nearly always be some call for hierarchical leadership in our modern organizations (Leavitt, 2005). As documented by several rigorous studies (e.g., Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006; Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2002; Shamir & Lapidot, 2003), shared and hierarchical leadership work synergistically to effect individual, group, and organizational outcomes.

Developing true shared leadership, however, is challenging. That said, we believe that nearly all people are capable of being both leaders and followers and these new leadership approaches are imperative for the age of knowledge work (Pearce, 2010). Although there are circumstances where shared leadership approaches might not work, the research demonstrates shared leadership can positively affect a group's attitudes, cognition, behavior, and effectiveness.

Understanding all of this still does not mean that shared leadership is the proper path for all circumstances. It may, for example, not be appropriate for certain types of tasks. Additionally, organizational members need to be receptive to the idea or concept of sharing leadership if it is to succeed. Some resistance to shared leadership may, for instance, be cultural (Pearce, 2008). As an example, the cultural attribute of power distance (Hofstede, 1980) can affect how likely group members are to embrace the concept of shared leadership: People who hail from cultures high in power distance are less likely to be able to easily grasp the notion of shared leadership, yet this is something that would benefit from future research. Also, shared leadership will not work if those in the group simply do not understand how to perform the tasks required of them. This could be the case for a variety of reasons, such as newness to the project, training level, or even perhaps member disposition. These are just a few of the possible limitations to the development of shared leadership in organizations.

While this special issue clearly tills new ground when it comes to understanding shared leadership, it is equally clear that far more research is sorely needed, not only on shared leadership outcomes but also on its antecedents and moderators. While some of the articles presented here present additional evidence, others provide new tools to facilitate future scientific inquiry. As this research continues to expand our knowledge of how people interact and build new forms of influence, the results of these investigations will yield further insights for the organizations of tomorrow.

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