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Abstract

Organizations today are increasingly reliant on teams that consist of members that are geographically and culturally dispersed. As highlighted elsewhere in this book, global teams may consist of members who are raised in the democratic (but individualistic) culture of the Global North-West and those raised in the hierarchical (but collectivistic) culture of the Global South-East. Leadership scholars have suggested that effective teamwork requires individuals who are

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able to switch between effective leadership and followership behaviors and roles. However, while the leadership literature is rife with leadership in teams, little attention is paid to the process of switching between leadership and followership behaviors/roles in teams. Consequently, in this chapter, we aim to use research evidence to explain the process of switching between leadership and followership behaviors/roles in teams (i.e., shared leadership), as well as the impact of culture on shared leadership.

Keywords

Leadership in teams · Leader-follower dynamics · Shared leadership · Shared followership · Culture · Global teams

Introduction

On the global stage, world leaders struggle to maintain favorable approval ratings (Gallup, 2021). Even more worrisome are findings that the younger generations are neither motivated nor equipped to lead effectively (Shollen & Gagnon, 2019). The World Economic Forum's survey of global professionals and thought leaders revealed that "86% of respondents think that there is a leadership crisis in the world today" (Shahid, 2015, p. 16). Across all regions of the world, "collaboration" emerges as an essential quality for improved leadership (Gergen, 2015, p. 54). However, our success with improved collaboration and our overall generative capacity may be "limited by our appreciation for what is, imagining what might be, determining what should be, and creating what will be" (Koonce, 2016, p. xvi). Far too often, responses to leadership crises include a call for "strong leadership," which can be contrary to the need for collaboration. As Thomas and Berg (2016) observed: "Leaders need to understand when they need to lead and when they need to follow" (p. 209).

Although collaboration can take many forms, it is commonly experienced in a team setting, and trends in globalization and other contemporary challenges are placing increased attention on team collaboration quality (Boughzala & de Vreede, 2015; Nurius & Kemp, 2019). Caruso and Woolley (2008) argue that "teams need emergent interdependence" – the desire and expectation for synergistic collaboration (p. 245).

Research by Jiang et al. (2021) reveals "team members are more likely to become leaders in a leaderless group context when being exposed to more effective followership (p. 1). At the same time, the researchers acknowledge that "leadership and followership may shift or coexist conditionally in the same person" (Jiang et al., 2021, p. 11). In fact, research on astronaut teams reveals teams perform better when leadership roles are distributed across the team, rather than being the responsibility of one or two team members. "When teams did not distribute the roles, the roles were poorly performed or abandoned altogether by the single or few individuals expected to execute them" (Gokhman, 2021, para 5).

How can we reconcile these different perspectives? Following the advice of Adam Grant (2021), it may be useful for us to engage in some “collective rethinking.”

Considering Leadership Emergence in Student Project Groups

Conventional approaches to leadership suggest that leader emergence is a social process that would occur naturally on its own among any group of people – even in leaderless or self-managed teams (Lacerenza, 2017). For example, Barker’s (1993) study of leaderless teams found that a leader emerged from a team purposely set up to be leaderless, such that after some time, the team began to set their own rules and developed a hierarchy of authority without any external influence. This finding suggests that the centralized leader role (where the team defers to a team leader) might be a natural phenomenon, casting doubt on the legitimacy of shared leadership in teams (where leadership and followership roles are shared). However, a more recent study of self-managed teams found that leader emergence may adversely affect team functioning, due to “reduced cohesion among members and diminished individual well-being” (Markova & Perry, 2014, p. 429).

Within higher education, we see glimpses of potential for rethinking conventional approaches to leadership and followership in teams. For example, at Virginia Tech, in an undergraduate course on “Elements of Team Leadership,” there was a long-standing assumption that individual leaders emerged in student project teams. However, when course instructors sought to investigate the leader emergence process, the student experience revealed some contrarian scenarios.

Case 1. Leader Emergence in Student Project Groups

The “Elements of Team Leadership” class followed a Team-Based Learning (TBL) approach (Kasperbauer & Kaufman, 2009), which made use of in-tact teams throughout an entire 15-week semester. As one student noted, TBL is “more like the real world” and “a good preparation process for the future” (Kaufman, 2010). For the “Elements of Team Leadership” class, team members were randomly assigned to groups, without any designation of a team leader. Even still, there was an assumption that an informal leader would emerge within each group (Norton Jr. et al., 2014). After several iterations of the class, the instructors decided to investigate how and why particular individuals emerged as project group leaders. The research study was titled “Experiences of Emergent Leaders” and initially approved by Virginia Tech’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) with the following description:

The purpose of the study will be to identify how group leaders emerge in a service-learning project, identifying their approach to leadership, and how they handle resistance or conflict in a small team. . . . A typical service-learning project would include a group of students assigned to a specific group with the intent of working together to identify a possible project and then participate in the actual project. A typical group of students working together would often include students with little to no previous working knowledge of the other group members. For the success of the group, service-learning project specific goals, objectives,

and norms must be established; therefore, a leader in the group must emerge to guide the group toward success.

Despite the research study's basic assumption that "a leader in the group must emerge," one-fourth of the student project groups insisted they did not have a leader. There were eight project groups in the class, and six of those groups easily identified a de facto leader for the project. (In one of the six groups, the identified leader tried to claim she was not the leader, yet everyone else agreed she was.) However, two of the groups balked at the request to identify an individual leader. Instead, they insisted the leadership was shared across the membership. Among those two groups, one of them produced a poor product, earning a low grade on the service-learning project. However, much to the surprise of the researchers, the other group had one of the best projects in the class.

For the service-learning project group that performed well with no clear team leader, the members of the group seemed to resist the entire premise that an individual leader was necessary or beneficial. Instead, they reflected a more functional approach to leadership (Morgeson et al., 2010). The group members had a clear understanding of who was doing what to contribute to the project's success, and they were more than willing to answer pragmatic questions, like "who submitted the project report?" However, they argued that such role functions were not an indicator of an individual leader. It was a perfect example of the observation by Morgeson et al. (2010) that "scholars tend to study team leadership from the perspective of a single source (e.g., studies of formal external leadership or emergent leadership) and do not consider the possibility that team leadership can come from multiple sources simultaneously" (p. 9).

Tendencies for Leader Dominance

Case 2. Greg in a Self-Managed Project Team

Conversations with individual group members can be insightful, as demonstrated in the following scenario, observed in the context of a pre-college residential program that involved cooperative learning projects (see Alegbeleye et al., 2018):

Greg can't believe it, "how come nobody listens to me in this team," he said. When asked about the reason for his outburst, Greg went on to share his frustration: "In my high school, I was the leader; but in this team, everybody defers to Lyla, and nobody seems to listen to me. My opinions get ignored, but Lyla's opinion is mostly adopted. Why?" When Greg's teammates were asked why Greg's ideas were disregarded at the expense of Lyla's, they disagreed. They explained that everyone was allowed to give their opinion and the best idea wins. Also, tasks were shared equally among teammates and everyone was in charge of an aspect of the team tasks.

Greg was part of a five-person team, where all the members were high-achieving students. As part of the month-long resident program, students were assigned to a project team of four to five members to solve a major societal issue (e.g., food

insecurity, climate change). Each team was self-managed, with no formally assigned leader. In the end, students were required to submit a final team paper and deliver a presentation on their team findings (Bush et al., 2017).

This case exemplifies the tendency of individuals to dominate in teams, even in self-managed teams. Greg – a leader in his school – struggled with the idea of not being recognized as the leader in his new team. He had grown accustomed to the idea of always being a leader and never a follower. However, when he found himself in a self-managed team where he had equal standing with the rest of the team, he felt powerless and undermined by the group. In Greg’s school where he was the leader, his ideas were always the best and everyone deferred to him. However, in Greg’s new team, which consists of leaders and academically gifted students from various high schools across the state, there was no shortage of great ideas, which means that Greg was no longer the center of attention, leading to a feeling of discontentment.

Greg’s behavior is a symptom of the romance of leaders in our society (Meindl et al., 1985). The romance of leaders – which is partly responsible for the leadership industry boom in the 1980s (Kellerman, 2013) – is still evident in many mainstream leadership books and academic articles today. Everyone is encouraged from a young age to be a leader and not a follower (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019). However, being a leader is only half of the leadership story – the other, equally important, piece, is followership (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2018).

Leader-Centric Views of Leadership

Traditionally, leadership has been viewed through four main lenses: (1) leadership as a person – that is, the traits and skills an individual possess make them a leader; (2) leadership as a position – that is, the position an individual occupies makes them a leader; (3) leadership as results – that is, the result an individual achieves makes them a leader; and (4) leadership as a process – that is, leadership is judged on the merits of the actions one employ while leading (Grint, 2000). These ways of viewing leadership are leader-centered and romanticize the leader. For example, the traits theory of leadership posits that leaders are born, and traits such as intelligence, height, etc. predict one’s ability to lead (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). While most leadership scholars have since moved on from these great man theories (Yukl, 1999), behavioral theories of leadership (Lambert et al., 2012) – which also focus on the leader – are still common today. The behavioral theories of leadership assert that a leader is not born but made. According to these behavioral models, anybody can be taught to be a leader by learning leadership behaviors. Prominent among these behavioral theories is the transformational leadership model by Bass (1985). Under transformational leadership, a leader can learn behaviors (i.e., inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) that would allow him to influence followers to perform beyond expectation. Many traits and behavioral theories abound in the leadership literature, which we will not review in this chapter. However, suffice to say that a recurrent theme across these traditional approaches to leadership is their inordinate focus on the leader.

These approaches describe the follower as a helpless, needful person who requires saving from the leader; such characterization is elitist as it puts the leader on a pedestal (Yukl, 1999). For example, Bass (1985) posits that transformational leaders have an idealized influence on their followers due to their high moral standards and integrity, which makes followers trust and respect them. While this may be true, this theory is silent about the role of the follower in influencing the leader.

Modern discourses on leadership claim that the earlier leadership theories ignore followership as well as the context in which leadership takes place (Kellerman, 2013). However, followership and contexts have implications for the relationship between leadership behaviors and outcomes. According to Zhu et al. (2009), the amount of influence a leader is able to exert is dependent on the characteristics of the followers, such that the follower's characteristics moderate the relationship between leadership and outcome. Those authors found that followers' characteristics of independent critical thinking and active engagement moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and follower work engagement, such that followers would be more engaged in work when they are independent critical thinkers and active engagers. Similarly, research has shown that the effect of transformational leadership on positive outcomes is moderated by followers' characteristics such as self-efficacy, self-actualization needs, and collectivistic orientations (Dvir & Shamir, 2003). Al-Gattan (1985) found that followers with high growth-need-strength would perform better than those with low growth-need-strength even though both have the same active and involved leader.

Relational Views of Leadership and Followership

The relational views of leadership maintain that leadership cannot occur in a vacuum and only occurs in relation to followers and context (Kellerman, 2013); both leadership and followership happen simultaneously in the same space while deriving meaning and essence from each other. For example, followers only get to be identified as followers when there is a leader and leaders only get to be leaders when there are followers. In fact, leader emergence is sometimes based on followers' acknowledgment of a leader, which in turn may be based on whether the leader's behaviors match the preconceived ideal leader image in the mind of followers (Lord et al., 2016). Similarly, followers' rating of leader effectiveness is sometimes based on whether a leader meets their preconceived notion (i.e., implicit theory) about the result a leader should achieve (Lord et al., 2016). The interdependence between leadership and followership, therefore, makes it absurd to conceptualize one concept without the other.

Leader-Member Exchange

The Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory emanated out of the need to better account for the role of the followers in the leadership process. And unlike most

leadership theories that assume a leader's leadership behavior is constant across followers, the LMX emphasizes the dyadic relationship that occurs between the individual leader and individual follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This relationship is unique and personal between a leader and follower. The LMX theory posits that a follower becomes a member of an in-group when there are high-quality leader-member exchanges between the leader and follower while a follower becomes a member of an out-group when there are low-quality leader-member exchanges. Moreover, the LMX hypothesizes that the leader-follower relationship goes through three phases: Phase 1 – the stranger phase, when the relationship just began, and conversations are mostly formal in nature; Phase 2 – the acquaintance phase, when the leader and follower are now familiar with themselves, and conversations are becoming less formal; and Phase 3 – mature phase, when the relationship between the leader and follower is cordial and conversations are informal and friendly (Jackson & Parry, 2011). However, there is no natural progression between these phases, as one can remain in one phase and refuse to progress to the next phase. Research has shown LMX to be related to positive organizational outcomes such as performance, commitment, and citizenship, among others (Northouse, 2018).

The LMX model is a deviation from most leader-centered theories, in that it accounts for some of the complexities inherent in the relationship between leaders and followers. By proposing a dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, this model is more dynamic than most leader-centric theories. Unlike many of the earlier theories on leadership, which gives a heroic status to the leader while followers are powerless and subservient to the demands of their leaders, the LMX grants some power to the follower. In this model, a follower can negotiate their relationship with the leader, and such relationship is unique to them, and for followers that reach the mature phase, the relationship is similar to a partnership. While most orthodox leadership models view followers as recipients of leadership, the LMX views followers as co-producers of leadership and the leader-follower relationship as mutually influencing (Jackson & Parry, 2011).

In short, followers could be expected to decide the terms of exchange in the model. Unlike most leadership theories that assume a leader's leadership behavior is stable across followers, the LMX emphasizes the dyadic relationship that occurs between the individual leader and the individual follower. Overall, this model is very embracing to followership.

However, modern discourses of leadership might disagree with the dyadic relationship proposed by this model. The relationship between followers and leaders is more complex than a two-way relationship between leaders and followers. Modern discourses of leadership advocate for the role of context in leader-follower relationships. Kellerman (2013) posits that the leadership process consists of a three-intersecting circle between the leader, follower, and context. The context might serve as the antecedent of the leader-follower relationship. For example, work characteristics might influence the leader-member exchange.

Distributive Approaches to Leadership

Distributive approaches to leadership, largely founded on the equal standing of leaders and followers, claim that earlier models are replete with elitism and heroism because they characterize the follower as always dependent on the leader (Jackson & Parry, 2011). The characterization of followers as being excessively dependent on the leader may be ignoring the trend in information technology. It used to be that, in organizational settings, only the leaders were privy to important organizational information by virtue of their position, and followers would have to defer to their leaders for guidance. However, with the advancement in information technology (i.e., internet), followers are now better equipped than ever before to find answers to organizational problems on their own (Kellerman, 2013).

Under the distributive approach, leadership is shared and distributed among many stakeholders (Gronn, 2002). This approach also views leadership as a practice, such that anyone who demonstrates leadership is a leader, which makes everyone a potential leader as opposed to traditional discourses that attribute leadership to only those with formal authority and position or those who have special behaviors/characteristics (Gronn, 2002). Distributive approaches include shared leadership, leaderless workgroups, team leadership, eco-leadership, etc. The unifying theme across all these models is the decentralization of power and interdependency.

The eco-leadership model by Western (2010) provides a timeline of progression along the four major leadership discourses: controller, therapist, messiah, and eco-leader. In this model, the eco-leaders are interdependent leaders that share leadership among themselves within an organization, and unlike the messiah (e.g., transformational leader) who is expected to save a helpless follower, the eco-leaders are guided by connectedness, environmental sustainability, and ethics. Some critics of the distributive approach to leadership have argued that many of these models, in a bid to dignify the follower, almost eradicate the follower role, and would rather refer to everyone as a leader (Ford & Harding, 2018). However, as pointed out by Ford and Harding (2018), this argument is semantically flawed as leading derives its meaning from following.

Among all the models of distributive leadership, perhaps the most embracing to followership is the team leadership model by Hill (Northouse, 2018). This model acknowledges both the team leader and members (followers) while giving the freedom for shared leadership among members. Although there is a designated leader in this model, anyone with the requisite knowledge of how to solve a task can be expected to lead the team through such a task. One of the distinctive characteristics of an effective team leader is the ability to collaborate with other members of the team, knowing when to take the lead and when to allow members to take the lead, which indicates that this model is cognizant of the important role of the followers. Moreover, the Hill model recognizes the role of the context on the effectiveness of the team. For example, in the context of an organization, an organization needs to provide resources (e.g., money and equipment) that are needed for a project, and failure to do so would be inimical to the success of such a team. However, there is little empirical evidence regarding this model.

Role-Based Views of Leadership and Followership

While modern discourses of leadership are increasingly moving away from the person-centered approach to leadership and becoming more embracing of the impact of the follower and context (or environment) on leadership, the person-centered conceptualization is still common today. Seeing leadership as a person reinforces a leader-only identity, which precludes people from identifying as followers as soon as they identify as leaders (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019). For example, in Case 2, presented at the start of this chapter, Greg felt he could not be a follower in his new team because he was always a leader in his old team and had developed a leader-only identity over time. However, it is possible for one to identify as both a leader and a follower if we approach leadership and followership from a role perspective (Baker, 2007). From the role perspective, leadership and followership would look like the hats we wear, such that we can choose to wear different hats depending on the situation while also embracing these multiple identities (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019). A clear distinction between the distributive views and role-based views of leadership is that, while the distributive approach views leadership as a person-to-person phenomenon, the role-based approach views leadership as a within-person phenomenon.

The Möbius Strip: A Twist in Thinking about Leader-Follower Relationships

Discovered in 1858, the Möbius strip is one of the most curious shapes in mathematics; it is non-orientable (Buckley, 2007). As can be seen in Fig. 1, “Möbius strips are unique because of their one-sidedness. Rather than having two sides and two edges, with a simple twist, a piece of paper has one side and one edge. Inner and outer become one” (Byrnes, 2012, p. 23).

While the Möbius strip may be best known in mathematics, particularly within the field known as topology (Gunderman & Gunderman, 2018), others have found

Fig. 1 A Möbius strip. (Note. Photo by David Benbennick. Reprinted from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:M%C3%B6bius_strip.jpg). CC BY-SA 3.0)



value in the Möbius strip as a metaphor for relationships that flow into one another. Reflecting upon the curious shape, Parker Palmer (2004) mused:

I have to keep repeating, “what seems to be” because there is no “inside” or “outside” on the Möbius strip—the two apparent sides keep co-creating each other. The mechanics of the Möbius strip are mysterious, but its message is clear; whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives. (p. 47)

Within the context of leadership, one of the more intriguing applications of the Möbius strip is in Hurwitz and Hurwitz’s (2015) description of the complementary relationship between leadership and followership. While individuals may be reluctant to embrace a follower self-concept, the reality is that leadership success depends on flexibility and awareness in leader-to-follower transitions (Falls & Allen, 2020). As noted by Van Vugt et al. (2008), “leader and follower roles may be adopted flexibly by the same individual because in some cases it pays to be a leader and in others to be a follower” (p. 186). Adding to the challenge, Geer (2014) noted that many individuals are faced with the challenge of “simultaneously filling the roles of leader and follower,” resulting in conflicting expectations (p. 156). The relational views of leadership and followership recognize the fluid nature of the experience (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) and conclude that “leadership cannot be studied apart from followership” (Van Vugt et al., 2008, p. 193). Indeed, “if we are going to study the leadership process we need to stop relying on our broad labels of leader and follower and better understand the nature of leading and following” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 96). The Möbius strip can help us recognize and explore this relationship.

Considering the Möbius strip as both a metaphor and physical representation of the leader-follower relationship, it allows us to engage in a sensemaking process for developing the dual leader-follower identity necessary for effectiveness in both leader and follower roles. The seamless flow between a leader role/behavior to a follower role/behavior and vice versa is exemplified by middle managers, who by virtue of their roles function simultaneously as leaders and followers (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Jaser, 2021). The Möbius strip helps demystify how middle managers lead their direct reports and follow their top-level managers.

The metaphor of the Möbius strip is also useful in conceptualizing leadership development. We generally like to think of the leadership development process as existing on a spectrum, where one progresses from a follower to a leader over a period of time, based on some acquired leadership competencies from leadership training and/or experiences. With this unilateral perspective, people tend to believe that leadership precludes them from followership (i.e., they stop being followers once they have become leaders). However, the Möbius strip offers a new way of thinking about the leadership development process. The Möbius strip helps us view the leader and follower as essentially the same entity, who flows from a follower role/behavior to a leader role/behavior and vice versa.

In practice, the Möbius strip was incorporated into an interview presentation by one of the authors as a metaphor to explicate the relationship between leader identity

development and mentoring. The presentation was delivered to a group engaged in a leadership mentoring program, where freshmen and sophomore college students were paired with middle to high school students. The metaphor of the Möbius strip was presented as a contrast to a spectrum. To view leadership (and leadership development) as a spectrum is to suggest that leadership is linear – that is, one progresses from the lower end (i.e., follower or awareness stage; see Komives et al., 2009) to the upper end of the leadership spectrum (mature leader or synthesis stage), with no chance to go back to being a follower again. However, this is devoid of reality, as people are constantly switching between these leader-follower roles/behaviors in real life. In contrast, by conceptualizing leadership (and leadership development) as a Möbius strip, we provide people with the opportunity to be leaders and followers simultaneously, flowing from one role/behavior to the other, depending on the situation. In the case of the mentoring program, a college student mentor can function as both a leader (i.e., mentor) to middle and high schoolers, while also being a follower (i.e., mentee) to their staff mentor.

Shared Leadership (and Followership) in Self-Managed Teams

While different definitions of shared leadership exist in the literature, some scholars have described shared leadership as switching temporarily between leadership and followership roles among team members (Carson et al., 2007; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Ford & Harding, 2018). Although we believe the phenomenon of switching between leadership and followership roles (i.e., shared leadership) among team members occurs in most teams, either explicitly or implicitly, perhaps the most suitable context for studying this occurrence is in self-managed teams. A self-managed team is an autonomous team where “team members are empowered to produce an entire product or service with little or no supervision” (Yang & Shao, 1996, p. 521). Consequently, the lack of an assigned leader in self-managed teams increases the likelihood that leadership and followership are shared among team members (as observed in Case 1, presented at the start of this chapter).

While the concept of shared leadership is popular in the leadership literature, the notion of shared followership is, at best, just gaining traction, which is partly due to the relatively recent interest in followership. On the one hand, some studies have suggested that followership is not possible in teams with shared leadership (since team members should have equal standing and influence; see Gronn, 2002; Vanderslice, 1988). On the other hand, other researchers have suggested clear evidence of followership in shared leadership teams (Carson et al., 2007; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Ford & Harding, 2018). According to Carson et al. (2007), shared leadership, especially in self-managed teams, involves the exchange of influences between team members, who interchangeably act as leaders and followers. Although the leadership literature has mostly focused on the influencer (i.e., the leader), the one that is influenced (i.e., follower) is equally important for the influencing relationship to take place. That is, the follower has to be willing to receive a leader’s influence for influencing to occur. This is captured in Muethel and Hoegl’s (2013)

statement: “Shared leadership effectiveness thus refers to the coincidence of influence exertion by one team member toward a specific fellow team member and the acceptance of that influence attempt by the targeted team member” (p. 424).

To explain shared leadership in self-managed teams, it may be helpful to conceptualize leading and following as temporary roles in which individuals function, such that individuals can switch between leader-follower roles or even occupy both roles simultaneously (Baker et al., 2011; Jaser, 2021). It then follows that team members can be expected to lead at some phases in the team lifecycle while following at other times (Carson et al., 2007; Epitropaki et al., 2017). Muethel and Hoegl (2013) echoed this point:

Although independent professional teams are self-managed and thus do not generally have a formally appointed leader, we argue that each team member can demonstrate leadership behavior and thus temporarily take an influencing (leader) role towards another team member that is influenced (follower). (p. 426)

The idea of shared leadership was exemplified in Greg’s case (in case 2 above), where team tasks were distributed among team members and each member was expected to take the lead in their respective sub-tasks. However, Greg struggled to share leadership, and could not follow his teammates in their sub-tasks, because he was used to everyone deferring to him in his previous teams. As is followership in general, followership in self-managed teams can be passive or active (Kelley, 1988). Alegbeleye (2020) found that both passive and proactive followership were exhibited in self-managed teams, and found proactive followership to denote the team’s collective ability to actively seek feedback on their respective sub-tasks.

The role-sharing perspective is in contrast with traditional conceptualizations of leading and following in team studies, which mostly describe the leaders as different from the followers. In this traditional approach, the leader (who is the designated team leader) is always influencing the followers (who are team members). However, Ford and Harding (2018) maintained that: “In a team where the tasks of leadership are distributed, the tasks of followership must also, it follows, be distributed. Everyone thus becomes both a leader and a follower” (p. 14).

Scholars engaged in team research have highlighted the importance of shared followership to team success:

Besides shared leadership, shared followership is also important to a team’s success. Shared followership, however, is usually ignored by management. Most people overlook the fact that a team member needs to play a role not only as a leader but also as a follower. The shift in role between leader and follower depends on differing situations. (Yang & Shao, 1996, p. 533)

Shared Leadership (and Followership) in Global Teams

Organizations today are increasingly reliant on teams that consist of members that are geographically and culturally dispersed. Achieving high-quality teamwork in

global teams may be harder than normal because of the divergent cultural orientation of its members. Global teams may consist of members who are raised in the democratic (but individualistic) culture of the Global North-West and those raised in the hierarchical (but collectivistic) culture of the Global South-East. Leadership scholars have suggested that effective teamwork requires individuals who are able to switch between effective leadership and followership behaviors and roles. However, while the leadership literature is rife with leadership in teams, little attention is paid to the process of switching between leadership and followership behaviors/roles in teams. Leadership scholars have argued that these leader-centered approaches are not adequate in providing the interdependent and collaborative environment that is required to address complex and adaptive problems (Turner et al., 2018; Western, 2010).

According to the Job Outlook 2019 survey of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2019), between the years 2014 and 2019, employers ranked the ability to work in a team higher (moving from fifth place to third place), while the possession of leadership skills was ranked lower (moving from second place to eighth place). This trend deemphasizes the significance of the individual leader while highlighting the importance of working effectively as a team (McIntyre & Foti, 2013). However, many employers believe that college graduates are inadequately prepared to work effectively with others in a team (Finley, 2021; NACE, 2019). The inability to work effectively in a team seems to be a challenge for both leadership and followership (Ford & Harding, 2018; Townsend, 2002). Teamwork requires team members to switch between both leadership and followership roles – that is, knowing when to lead and when to take a step back and follow (Carson et al., 2007). Consequently, the trends require us to do a better job preparing a workforce and/or citizens equipped with the requisite skills for effective leadership as well as followership in teams/global teams (DeRue, 2011; Epitropaki et al., 2017). To do this, leadership scholars/educators need to examine more deeply how the different individual-level effective leadership behaviors in the literature can be shared at the team level. For example, effective leadership at the individual level is often conceptualized as transformational leadership (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020). However, transformational leadership can also be shared at the team level, and as is the case with transformational leadership at the individual level, shared transformational leadership at the team level consists of four behaviors – inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio et al., 1999). According to Sivasubramaniam et al. (2002), shared transformational leadership refers to the “collective influence of members in a team on each other” (p. 68). Consequently, team members, through shared transformational leadership, would collectively inspire, influence, stimulate, and consider one another.

One of the consequences of globalization is the increasing dependency on virtual teams. Many global teams are virtual and are often self-managed, which makes the concept of shared leadership even more germane to the effectiveness of global teams (Carte et al., 2006). In a study of self-managed virtual teams, Carte et al. (2006) found high-performing teams to display a significantly higher level of shared leadership than low-performing teams, which enabled them to better coordinate

group work. Alegbeleye (2020) conducted a mixed-method study to explore how the transformational leadership and effective followership of a team impact their teamwork. It was found that a relationship exists between the type of transformational leadership exhibited by a team and their teamwork quality, such that centralized transformational leadership is negatively related to teamwork quality, while shared transformational leadership is positively related to teamwork quality. Similarly, findings suggest a relationship between the type of team followership exhibited by a team and their teamwork quality, such that passive team followership is negatively related to teamwork quality, while proactive team followership is positively related to teamwork quality.

Shared Leadership (and Followership) and Culture

There is a large body of research supporting the relationship between leadership and culture (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). Those studies claim that leadership is contingent on culture; that is, what is considered effective leadership varies across cultures. House et al. (2004), in their GLOBE study of culture and leadership, described how ten cultural clusters (i.e., Eastern Europe, Nordic Europe, Latin Europe, Middle East, Germanic Europe, Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Anglo, Confucian Asia, and Latin America) vary in their perception of what constitutes effective leadership. The authors found six leadership dimensions (i.e., charismatic/value-based leadership, team-oriented leadership, autonomous leadership, self-protective leadership, participative leadership, and humane-oriented leadership) to be culturally dependent. However, shared leadership was not among the leadership dimensions explored by the researchers, and it remains to be seen how shared leadership is perceived across cultures. Perhaps the closest leadership dimension to shared leadership explored by House et al. (2004) was team-oriented leadership, which was reported to be generally considered as effective across cultures. However, one could also easily see how shared leadership is closely related to participative leadership, which was found to vary meaningfully in terms of effectiveness across cultures in the GLOBE study (Huang et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014).

House et al. (2004) identified nine cultural values (i.e., performance orientation, power distance, assertiveness, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, future orientation, and humane orientation) that are significantly related to various leadership approaches. The cultural value of in-group collectivism – which refers to the extent to which one is proud of and loyal to their team – was found to be positively associated with team-oriented leadership. One could extrapolate that finding to predict that in-group collectivism would be positively related to shared leadership; that is, for team members to switch between leadership and followership roles in a team, they must be willing to shun their egos and put their team first.

It is also worth noting that the cultural values of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and assertiveness were found to be negatively related to participative

leadership. It is rather clear that those from high power distance societies, which refers to the extent to which members of a society believe that power should be stratified, may find it hard to share leadership with others in a team. Similarly, those who are from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, who tend to prefer structure, may struggle in a team with no formally assigned leader, as is the case in teams with shared leadership. Moreover, Confucian Asians have relatively low alignment with the cultural value of assertiveness when compared to their Anglo counterparts. In a team with no formally assigned leader, those from more-assertive cultures may dominate and push those from less-assertive cultures to the fringes of the team, inhibiting their ability to share leadership. Oftentimes, those from less-assertive cultures are wrongly perceived as lacking in confidence, when in fact they may be simply saving face (Gehrke & Claes, 2014).

Face saving, which is a feature of high-context cultures, refers to the preservation of one's good name, honor, and respect during communication (Gehrke & Claes, 2014). As a result, people from such cultures are often reticent during conversation and may resort to indirect speech in a bid to save their face as well as the face of their interlocutor (Gehrke & Claes, 2014). On the one hand, the act of face-saving helps to promote harmony, a key aspect of Confucian teaching (Hofstede, 2001), which is important for teamwork. On the other hand, face-saving may become a challenge in a team with shared leadership, where everyone must take on an active role – especially if a part of the team comes from low-context cultures, where people prefer to have a frank and candid conversation. For example, those from low-context cultures may be frustrated because their teammates from high-context cultures are not communicative during team meetings and may misconstrue their action (or a lack thereof) for a lack of interest in team tasks, which may lead to conflict.

While research on leadership and culture is prevalent in the literature, the same cannot be said for followership. However, it is plausible to infer from the House et al. (2004) findings that those from high in-group collectivism cultures, in a bid for cohesiveness, may be more inclined to follow even when they find themselves in a leaderless team (or a team with shared leadership), similar to Case 1, presented at the start of this chapter. While active followership is important for teamwork in a team with shared leadership, it is the ability to switch between leadership and followership roles that result in shared leadership (Alegbeleye, 2020). However, if members of a global team are polarized along the lines of leaders and followers, then such a team cannot expect to achieve synergy.

Conclusion

Today, more than ever before, organizations are increasingly reliant on teams that consist of members that are geographically and culturally dispersed (Mell et al., 2021). The divergent cultural orientation of global team members has the potential to impinge teamwork (Gibbs et al., 2021). Leadership scholars have suggested that effective teamwork requires individuals who are able to share leadership by switching between effective leadership and followership behaviors and roles

(Alegbeleye, 2020). The dynamic of switching between leader and follower roles may be more evident in self-managed teams. Global teams, especially global virtual teams, are often self-managed, which makes the concept of shared leadership even more germane to the effectiveness of global teams (Carte et al., 2006). Indeed, effective teams often demonstrate an emergent interdependence among the members (Caruso & Woolley, 2008). However, there is a tendency for individuals to dominate in teams, where one or few individuals take the center stage and others operate on the fringes of the team, which may lead to polarization (Jiang et al., 2021).

A role-based approach to leadership and followership in global teams is germane to mitigating polarization and achieving synergy (Sy & McCoy, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Under this approach, leading and following are seen as temporary roles in which individuals function, such that individuals can switch between leader-follower roles or even occupy both roles simultaneously (Jaser, 2021). Team members display effective leadership by leading on a sub-task of the team's task work, while they exhibit proactive followership by actively seeking feedback on their respective sub-tasks (Alegbeleye, 2020).

Returning to the case examples provided at the beginning of this chapter, it is helpful to recognize the potential for leadership and followership to shift in dynamic ways, rather than assuming the emergence of a leader is destined and/or enduring. In fact, some fluid interdependence – as conveyed in the Möbius strip – can help facilitate effective team problem solving (Gokhman, 2021). However, moving beyond personal biases and implicit leadership theories can be challenging, and the situation is exacerbated by cultural norms and values.

Leadership scholars have suggested that leadership effectiveness is contingent on culture (Furu, 2012). While leadership styles (e.g., charismatic/value-based leadership, team-oriented leadership, participative leadership) have been found to vary across cultures in terms of effectiveness (House et al., 2004), it remains to be seen how shared leadership is perceived across cultures. Perhaps the closest leadership dimension to shared leadership explored by House et al. (2004) was team-oriented leadership, which was reported to be generally considered as effective across cultures. On the flip side, one could also easily see how shared leadership is closely related to participative leadership, which was found to vary meaningfully in terms of effectiveness across cultures in the GLOBE study (Huang et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014).

House et al. (2004) also posited that nine cultural values (i.e., performance orientation, power distance, assertiveness, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, future orientation, and humane orientation) were significantly related to various leadership approaches. For example, the cultural value of in-group collectivism was found to be positively associated with team-oriented leadership. One could extrapolate that finding to predict that in-group collectivism would be positively related to shared leadership. That is, for team members to switch between leadership and followership roles in a team, they must be willing to shun their egos and put their team first. Those authors also found the cultural values of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and assertiveness to be negatively related to participative leadership. By extension, it is

plausible to imagine that those from high power distance societies may find it hard to share leadership with others in a team. Similarly, those who are from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, who tend to prefer structure, may struggle in a team with no formally assigned leader, as is the case in teams with shared leadership. Lastly, in a team with no formally assigned leader, those from more-assertive cultures may dominate and push those from less-assertive cultures to the fringes of the team, inhibiting their ability to share leadership. Understanding the potential impact of culture on shared leadership may help those who work in global teams share leadership more effectively, thereby achieving synergy.

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