

Shared leadership: An empirical
investigation of its dimensionality,
antecedents, and application

Xu Cong

Abstract

The current global environment changes rapidly, and the intricacy of knowledge work grows exponentially. Meanwhile, global challenges are highly interlinked and complex and require a great deal of creativity. These new trends and issues demand input from multiple individuals in management. However, the old leadership models dominated by top-down and bureaucratic paradigms assume that the success of an organization depends on a heroic leader on the top. It is problematic given that it is difficult for a person to quickly gain all information and competencies needed in an economy where predictability and standardization no longer exist. This dissertation argues that the shared leadership model has agility and flexibility, suited for collaboration and leadership, to help teams find innovative ways to stay competitive in the knowledge era. Shared leadership opens the possibility that leadership roles in a team do not solely rely on formal designation and team members share leadership influence and exercise leadership collaboratively.

Responding to the research gaps and limitations in the existing literature, this dissertation has five contributions. First, it clarifies the conceptual ambiguities regarding shared leadership, building on a comprehensive literature review. Second, drawing on emergence theory and social exchange theory (SET), a 3Cs model of shared leadership is proposed, namely, collective achievement leadership, cohesive support leadership, and complementary expertise leadership. A mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies is applied to empirically test the theoretical construct and to develop a corresponding measuring scale. Both qualitative and quantitative study results confirm the three-dimensional construct of shared leadership, and a corresponding 12-item measuring scale of shared leadership is newly developed and validated. This multidimensional framework integrates the perspectives of shared leadership as a compositional form (i.e., team members perform homogeneous leadership behaviors) and a compilational form (i.e., team members perform heterogeneous

leadership behaviors), thus generating a new direction for how shared leadership should be understood.

Third, this dissertation explores how masculine and feminine attributes influence the proposed three dimensions of shared leadership. Masculinity helps develop collective achievement leadership and complementary expertise leadership, whereas femininity helps develop collective achievement leadership and cohesive support leadership. These findings imply the importance of understanding the influence of gender-role identity on shared leadership and provide intriguing evidence that problematizes the dominating role of masculinity in leadership development.

Fourth, this dissertation examines how three types of performance-based organizational cultures (i.e., innovation orientation, outcome orientation, and detail orientation) affect the three dimensions of shared leadership by considering the boundary conditions of ownership and geography for Chinese enterprises. The research results indicate the importance of the performance-based organizational culture to shared leadership. Nevertheless, the moderating effects of firm ownership and geography are not as strong as the author expected, suggesting a research underestimation of the complexity in the Chinese economy.

Moreover, this dissertation presents an application of shared leadership theory to entrepreneurship and leadership training programs, combined with ILO's activity-based learning approaches. The practical application of shared leadership introduces the possibility and advantage of exercising shared leadership in learning teams. Managerial implications and future directions are further discussed.