

The Influence of the Leaders' Selection Method on Team Performance

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Abstract. Leadership impacts team performance. More effective leadership at the workplace may improve team performance and, consequently, increase both employees and employers work satisfaction. There is a wide array of studies on effective leadership, but the influence of the way the leader is selected on team performance is not yet clear. We discuss the relationship between the methods used to select the leader and team performance. A study was conducted with a sample of 112 bachelor students working in 17 teams during an 8-week long class project. Team performance was measured by the sub-scale Perceived Team Collaboration of the instrument Team Collaborator Evaluator (TCE) and also by the final project grade given by the instructors. Results show that teams have higher performances when their members unanimously choose the leader. Practical implications for the selection of team leaders are discussed.

Introduction

Identifying relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities of team players can affect the entire job placement process, impacting how organizations select, train, and retain their employees (Stevens & Campion, 1994). Enhancing more effective teams may improve team performance, but also both employees and employers satisfaction levels (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Pacheco, 2015). Team leadership influences

individual learning, team performance, and the perception of team collaboration (Edmondson, 1999; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002).

According to Robbins, Judge, and Campbell (2010, p. 316), “leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals”. Leaders can emerge from the group or be formally appointed (Robbins et al., 2010). Trait theories and behavioral theories try to determine effective versus ineffective leaders, but context plays an important role in leader’s success (Robbins et al., 2010). It has been shown that leadership is usually reserved for the most skilled and committed team player, accepted by all members (Fransen, 2012; Heckman et al., 2007; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Although researchers associate situational factors to predict performance (Fiedler, 1996; Robbins et al., 2010), it has been shown that the reinforcement of the team cohesion by the leader has a positive effect on performance (Fransen, 2012; Robbins et al., 2010).

In educational settings, it is frequent to have individuals working in teams (Pacheco, 2015). This learning method allows students to experience cooperation, group decision making, team leadership, and team communication (Fransen, 2012; Pacheco & Soares, 2017; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Considering the literature, we hypothesize that teams perform higher when the team members unanimously choose their leader.

Method

A convenience sample was chosen, comprised of 112 bachelor students, from two different classes, in a University in Southern Europe. Participants worked an 8-week long class project. Instructors asked the students to form teams with a minimum of 4 members (team size range = 4-8, $M=5.79$, $SD=.89$). A total of 17 teams were created.

Participants had the chance to work together on the project for one week to get to know each other. Then instructors asked students to appoint a team leader. Participants ($n=99$, 46% females) filled a paper-and-pencil survey that included questions about their demographics and also a question on how the leader was appointed (Elected by all members; Elected by the majority of members; Self-volunteer; Random choice; or Other methods).

At the end of the semester, students evaluated their teams’ performance using the sub-scale Perceived Team Effectiveness (PTE; 3 items, $\alpha=.89$; rated using a 1 to 10 scale 1=*Low/Almost Never True* to 10=*High/Almost Always True*, e.g. “The extent to which you are satisfied about the quality of collaboration within your team.”) of the instrument Team Collaborator Evaluator (TCE; Fransen, 2012). This study also considered the final project grade given by the instructors (assessed on a 20-point scale; 1=*does do not comply with any objective*, 20=*objectives achieved entirely*) as a factor to evaluate team performance.

Findings & Discussion

The relationship between the leader's selection method and team performance was investigated using an ANOVA. An interaction effect [$F(3,79)=6.1, p<.01$] with an effect size ($\eta^2=.19$) was visible, linking the leaders' selection method to the final project grade. Also correlating these two variables was found a main effect [$F(4,79)=4.01, p<.01$], with effect size ($\eta^2=.17$). *Post-hoc comparisons* using the *Tukey HSD test* indicated that the mean score for the leaders' selection method "Elected by all members" ($M=17.86, SD=1.48$) was superior (Mean difference=1.19, $SD=.35, p<.01$) to the selection method "Elected by the majority of members" ($M=16.67, SD=1.93$).

A main effect [$F(4,79)=6.17, p<.01$], with an effect size ($\eta^2=.24$) was uncovered, connecting the leaders' selection method to PTE. *Post-hoc comparisons* using the *Tukey HSD test* indicated that the mean score for the leaders' selection method "Elected by all members" ($M=8.77, SD=1.09$) was superior (Mean difference=1.04, $SD=.24, p<.01$) to the selection method "Elected by the majority of members" ($M=7.73, SD=1.25$).

The relationships between the other leaders' selection methods (e.g., Self-volunteer or Random choice) and both the final project grade and the TCE were statistically non-significant.

Data shows that teams which unanimously choose their leader get higher performance levels. It confirms the literature that has found that leaders unanimously elected are more likely to democratically lead their teams, which seems to reinforce their cohesion and, consequently, speeds up team performance (Fransen, 2012; Robbins et al., 2010). The higher team collaboration level and the democratic leadership might have led team members to commit to the success of group discussions, that later was translated into increased team performance. This higher performance will contribute to boosting both employees and employers satisfaction (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Pacheco, 2015).

Findings also corroborate that leadership can have a positive effect on team performance (Edmondson, 1999; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2002). Our results confirm that leaders with a team player attitude and that are accepted by all members, manage to lead their teams to better team collaboration and performance (Fransen, 2012; Heckman et al., 2007; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

Conclusion

Findings show that leaders unanimously choose predict higher team performance, both on the self-perceived team collaboration levels and on team performance evaluated by experts. Therefore, teams should be encouraged to select their leader unanimously, as it was shown to create higher satisfaction levels that frequently

translate to more commitment to the team success and better team performances. Further research should explore the relationship between team performance and the selection method of the leader controlling for other factors, like leadership styles and the leaders' individual characteristics.

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