

# **Short Report on the EAWOP Small Group Meeting: Distributed leadership and participation in organizations**

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Julia Hoch, Juergen Wegge (TU Dresden, Germany) and Hans Jeppe Jeppesen  
(University of Aarhus, Denmark)

## **Relevance of the topic**

Team-based work forms are more flexible and enable faster decisions making and information flow compared to more traditional work forms. Thus, teams have become the “primary building-blocks of organizations” (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). In particular self-regulated team work allows an effective adaptation to rapidly changing work situations (e.g., Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Rasmussen & Jeppesen, 2006; Pearce, & Manz, 2005). As a consequence, the focus on leadership in organizations also has changed. Today, research on leadership is investigating how to successfully lead teams (compared to individuals; Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas, & Halpin, 2006; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Wegge, 2004) and how to strengthen and develop the self-management and shared-leadership competencies of employees working in teams (e.g., Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003). The most prominent assumption in leadership research is that modern team leadership should be conceptualized as distributed leadership (e.g., Day et al., 2006; Gronn, 2003) integrating different levels and perspectives, e.g. the behaviour of supervisors as well as team members. The main goal of our small group meeting was to summarize and discuss what is known about the usefulness of different forms of distributed leadership in organizations. In the following, we first define the most prominent research approaches for distributed leadership and then give a brief summary of the content and results of our meeting.

## **Definition of main constructs**

Distributed forms of leadership recommend a division of labour and leadership tasks between different people at several levels of the organization (Gronn, 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2003). At least the following three forms of distributed leadership in organization can be differentiated: Organisational democracy, participative leadership and shared leadership. Organizational democracy describes an organizational climate of on-going, broad-based and institutionalized employee participation (Weber, Unterrainer, & Höge, in press). Participative leadership refers to a process, where “influence is shared among superiors and sole subordinates or whole teams” (Haslam, Wegge & Postmes, 2009, Wegge, 2000). In participative leadership, power and influence, as well as decision making and responsibility are shared by supervisors and employees (Yukl, 2002). Finally, shared leadership describes “a group process in which leadership is shared among, and stems from, team members” (Pearce & Sims, 2002, p.172) and leadership is seen as a “collaborative, emergent process of group interaction whereby group members jointly enact leadership functions while working together” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p.53).

## **Important Questions**

While our knowledge on the concepts of shared leadership from a theoretical viewpoint but also from the practitioner side has grown in recent years, systematic investigations of the potential antecedents, processes, and contingencies of shared leadership are still rare (cf. Avolio, Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Jung, & Garger, 2003; Pearce, 2008; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2000). For example we still don't know...

- What are the antecedents, mediating processes and the different outcome variables of shared leadership?
- How can we measure shared leadership? Do we find alternative results with alternative methods?
- Given that shared leadership is of positive impact on employee's health and wellbeing, performance and satisfaction - how we can increase shared leadership in organizations?
- How important is empowerment and participation to encourage shared leadership?

In the same vein, many questions regarding organizational democracy and participative leadership are still unanswered, for example:

- What are the most important outcomes of organizational democracy and participative leadership? How do organizational democracy and participative leadership relate to each other?
- Does shared leadership increase organizational democracy or participative leadership effectiveness?
- Is there differential effectiveness of organizational democracy, participative leadership and shared leadership with regard to cultural background?
- What are important barriers and disadvantages of organizational democracy, participative leadership in today's organizations?

Work and Organizational Psychology can contribute in producing the knowledge needed to answer these questions. Indeed, in several countries, the topic of shared and distributed leadership already received considerable attention in research by Work and Organizational Psychologists. In addition, professional Work and Organizational Psychologists are increasingly involved in counseling individuals on shared leadership and participation, implementing long-term organizational strategies and trying to anticipate and prevent future problems associated with the changes in the workplace.

### **The small group meeting**

The aim of the small group meeting was to bring together the knowledge and expertise of European researchers to exchange research results and discuss future directions for research regarding these questions. The small group meeting was organized by Jürgen Wegge and Julia Hoch from the Technical University of Dresden (Germany) and Hans Jeppe Jeppesen from Aarhus University (Denmark). The meeting was sponsored by EAWOP, DFG, and Technical University of Dresden.

During the three days of the conference 35 participants, active researchers with expertise on leadership and participation and a background in work and organizational psychology from Austria, Denmark, Germany, Iran, Portugal, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and USA presented and discussed their research. The meeting was structured to have ample room for discussion about each paper presentation. In addition, both central themes of the small group meeting were

discussed in depth. Those two themes were: (I) Shared leadership in Teams and (II) Participation and Organizational Democracy. The following papers were presented at the meeting:

### ***Session I: Shared Leadership***

**Keynote Speaker: Prof. Craig L. Pearce (USA), Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, U.S.A.** In his keynote speech entitled “Shared Leadership as a Mechanism the Full Engagement of Human Potential” Prof. Pearce introduced the historical development of shared leadership and outlined its possible future directions. Further, he discussed important antecedents, mediating and moderating variables and outlined the importance of shared leadership for training and the HR development in organizations.

- **Felfe, J. and colleagues** (Germany). Influences of level and consensus of transformational leadership.
- **Muck, P. M. and colleagues** (Germany). “I take you at your word” – Participative leadership from a communication perspective.
- **Hoch, J. E.** (Germany). Shared leadership: Ways to compensate for lower performance in virtual teams.
- **Künzle, B., and colleagues** (Switzerland). Leadership in anaesthesia teams: The most effective leadership is shared.
- **Manheim, N., and colleagues** (The Netherlands). Shared leadership: The effects of shared and vertical leadership behaviors on team effectiveness.
- **Wolf, S. and colleagues** (Germany). The impact of organizational structure on shared and vertical leadership effectiveness.
- **van der Heijden, B.I.J.M.** (The Netherlands). Can we buffer age-related stereotyping at the workplace? A study into interpersonal work context characteristics as moderators for supervisor-subordinate age dissimilarity effects.
- **Hoch, J. E. and colleagues** (Germany). Why is shared leadership effective? The impact of shared leadership and shared mental models on team performance in age diverse teams.
- **Pundt, A. and colleagues** (Germany). Empowering leader behaviour and delegation – a key to organizational culture of participation?
- **Bienefeld, N. and colleagues** (Switzerland). Shared Leadership in airline crews.

### ***Session II: Participation in Organizations***

**Keynote Speaker: Prof. Wolfgang G. Weber, University of Innsbruck, Austria** In his keynote speech entitled “Sociomoral Atmosphere and Prosocial and Democratic Value Orientations in Enterprises with Different Levels of Structurally Anchored Participation” Prof. Weber differentiated aspects and forms of organizational participation and democracy and their implications for leadership and management of teams. He outlined the historical development and the importance of organizational participation for organizations.

- **Jeppesen, H. J. and colleagues** (Danmark). Employee perspectives on the distributed leadership.

- **van Dick, R. and colleagues** (Germany). Leader-follower identity transfer as a route for organizational democracy.
- **Silva, S.** (Portugal). Safety shared responsibilities and promoting safety participation.
- **Fuhrmann, H. and colleagues** (Germany). The ProMES approach to work group effectivity: Lessons learned for participative leadership.
- **van der Geer, E. and colleagues** (The Netherlands). Task uncertainty as a moderator for feedback effectiveness: A meta-analysis.
- **Hinrichs and colleagues** (Germany). New forms of work control and their implications for the health of supervisors and employees - the perspective of the Socio-Technical System Approach.
- **Danae, H.** (Iran). Survey of relation between organizational culture and decision style and presentation an optimal model.

### **The results of the meeting**

The meeting was productive, interesting, and it had a very cooperative atmosphere. The participants were motivated, enthusiastic and participated in lively discussions even during lunch, dinner, and until late in the evening. Moreover, the results of the meeting will be summarized in a joint “position paper” that includes recommendations for further research and implications for research development.

The small group meeting brought together a group of European Work and Organizational psychologists who are active in the field of research on leadership and teams and organizational participation. We hope that the meeting will foster future cooperation between these scientists and stimulate further (joint) research in this important area. As a brief summary, we present below some results and conclusions. The first section, lessons learned, summarizes main learning points that came up in the papers presented and the discussions during the small group meeting. This is a summary of what the work and organizational psychologists who were present at the meeting saw as an important knowledge base and starting point for practical measures. The second part, research agenda, summarizes important areas for future research in the field of shared leadership and participation.

### **Lessons learned**

1. Employee identification could be an important indicator for shared leadership effectiveness in organizations.
2. The consistency of homogeneity of perception of leadership within team is an indicator for shared leadership; consistency increases employee health and satisfaction.
3. Communication quality and patterns within team and towards the supervisor are important correlates of shared leadership.
4. Team trustworthiness is a potential moderators of the effectiveness of shared leadership.
5. Work load and quality of the task are important moderating variables for shared leadership effectiveness.
6. Shared leadership is differentially related to objective team outcomes versus affective and emotional aspects.
7. Organizational context (e.g., in terms of the specific climate within organization or hierarchical or vertical structure) are important antecedents and moderators of the effectiveness of shared leadership and organizational participation.

8. Age diversity, age differences and other socio-demographic variables are important when it comes to shared leadership effectiveness.
9. There is differential effectiveness for shared leadership in different cultures. For example, in Iran there is a different preference for shared leadership compared to Western European cultures.
10. It is important to establish possibilities for the employees to acquire the necessary competences for being able to apply the conditions for employee influence.
11. An interaction between the employees' experienced influence and desires for which organizational actors to have most influence can be found.
12. That employee participative activities and strategies are decisive conditions for handling health and safety issues.
13. The importance of possibilities for acquiring competences for being able to apply the conditions for employee influence.

### **Research Agenda**

1. What moderates the relationship of antecedent variables to shared leadership? Do things such as culture or team size, etc. moderate the relationships?
2. What role do self-management skills or proactivity of the members play?
3. How do we measure shared leadership? Do we find alternative results with alternative methods?
4. How can hierarchical leaders strengthen and encourage shared leadership?
5. How does team composition (e.g., diversity in terms of members' personality or other aspects) relate to or interact with shared leadership?
6. How important and how effective is shared leadership in "virtual" workplaces?
7. Does shared leadership reduce employee turnover?
8. Does shared leadership have only positive consequences or are there also possible caveats? What might be important hindrances of shared leadership effectiveness?
9. How important is the availability of resources for shared leadership emergence and effectiveness?

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