Collectivistic Leadership Approaches:
Putting the “We” in Leadership Science and Practice

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Abstract
We introduce the notion of “we” or collectivistic leadership. A general collectivistic approach to leadership is developed and contrasted with traditional and contemporary approaches to leadership. An overview of five collectivistic leadership approaches—team, network, shared, complexity, and collective leadership—is then presented. Key notions, constructs, and levels of analysis; the role of a focal leader; operationalizations and empirical results; and implications for leadership development, assessment, and practice of each approach are summarized. Common themes across, and our perspective on, the approaches and future directions for collectivistic leadership science and practice are discussed.

Leadership theory and research is vast and diverse with numerous implications for professional practice (e.g., Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2009). However, traditional and contemporary leadership work, both science and practice, has focused primarily on the leader as an individual and has been limited to leader-to-follower interactions in small groups, teams, and sometimes dyads. Given the increasing demands of the work environment, new approaches to leadership are required that go beyond a hierarchical leader-focused view, acknowledge the role of higher levels of analysis, both formal (e.g., team) and informal (e.g., network), and involve more extensive interactions among multiple individuals (e.g., Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008, 2009).

In this case, leadership is viewed as a “we” or collectivistic phenomena that involves multiple individuals assuming (and perhaps divesting themselves) of leadership roles over time in both formal and informal relationships. The formal relationships can occur not only in large and small groups and teams, and dyads, but also in larger collectives such as departments, functional areas, strategic business units, networks of various types, and multiteam systems. The informal relationships can involve personal networks and connections both within the unit and organization, but also...
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those that bridge organizational boundaries. Moreover, these formal and informal multi-level structures, relationships, and roles cannot be viewed as static, but rather are fluid and dynamic in nature and depend on organizational and environmental demands and requirements.

We believe that these new collectivistic leadership approaches are an important development for both science and practice in the leadership field. However, we also see the need to be cautious regarding these “we” approaches to leadership due to the limited empirical work to date supporting the approaches. And because a number of different models of collectivistic leadership have emerged in recent years, we think it is time to take stock and examine the central tenets, practical implications, and gaps in these approaches—both individually and as a group.

In this focal article, we provide some basic elements and issues related to an understanding of this new genre of “we” or collectivistic leadership and its differences from more traditional and contemporary leadership approaches. An overview of five approaches to collectivistic leadership is then presented—team leadership (e.g., Burke, DiazGranados, & Salas, 2011; Burke et al., 2006; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004; Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; Mathieu, Marks, & Zaccaro, 2002; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001), network leadership (e.g., Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005), shared leadership (e.g., Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce, Manz, & Sims, 2008), complexity leadership (e.g., Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007), and collective leadership (e.g., Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark, & Mumford, 2009; Yammarino et al., 2010a, 2010b). For each approach, primary notions and elements, key constructs and levels of analysis, the role of a focal leader, major operationalizations and empirical results, and implications for leadership development, assessment, and practice are summarized. We then discuss common themes across, and our perspective on, the five approaches and future directions for the realm of collectivistic leadership science and practice.

Traditional and Contemporary Leadership Approaches

To summarize traditional and contemporary leadership science and practice in a small space is a challenge, to say the least, as numerous books (e.g., Yukl, 2009), handbooks (e.g., Bass, 2008), comprehensive review articles (e.g., Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005), and entire journals (e.g., Leadership Quarterly) are devoted to the topic. Nevertheless, across these multiple sources, leadership is typically viewed as a leader-follower interaction process in small groups and teams, and sometimes dyads, that occurs in a particular situation (context) where a leader (e.g., superior, supervisor) and followers (e.g., subordinates, direct reports) share a purpose (vision, mission) and jointly accomplish things (e.g., goals, objectives, tasks). As such, leadership is often viewed as an interaction between individuals where there is some type of authority structure or power differences (e.g., superior-subordinate, supervisor-direct report).

A general way to view the leadership process, typically endorsed by most leadership approaches, is that antecedents determine leadership, which in turn leads to consequences in various contexts (cf., Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2009). Most traditional and contemporary approaches consider similar antecedents, or precursors, of leadership which are essentially underlying fundamental human processes (e.g., affect, cognition, and personality; attraction and exchange). Consequences, or outcomes, of leadership are essentially leadership effectiveness indicators, both soft (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, cohesion) and hard (e.g., performance, absenteeism, turnover, stress, safety) for leaders, followers, and their units. In addition, this general leadership process occurs within a context that includes, for
example, the unit’s norms and climate as well as the organization’s culture and values and, at times, various environmental factors (see Bass, 2008; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2009; Yukl, 2009).

As such, in traditional and contemporary work, leadership science and practice have generally focused on the behaviors of, and the perceptions of those behaviors for, individual leaders (see Yukl, 2009). In today’s organizations, however, whether business, military, governmental, or not-for-profit organizations, the pace of technological change, increased complexity, competitive demands, challenging economics, and risks involved in decision-making have made it difficult for one individual acting alone, or even with limited interactions in formal units, to exert and display effective leadership. In particular, broader based and more comprehensive leadership approaches that include formal and informal higher levels of analysis (i.e., collectives) and that involve more extensive multi-person interactions are imperative. We call these approaches to leadership “collectivistic.”

**Collectivistic or “We” Approaches to Leadership**

Collectivistic leadership approaches, as a new genre, are offered in contrast to earlier theories and models of leadership, both traditional and contemporary, that focused primarily on the efforts and effects of a sole leader on team, unit, and sometimes organizational outcomes. Cultural bias toward heroic individuals (see Campbell, 1949, 2008) and mistaken assumptions often made about the actual level of power wielded by a given leader (see Bass, 2008) led to a focus on how a leader affects change in an outcome of interest (Yukl, 2009). In contrast, in the newer approaches reviewed here, leadership is viewed as a collectivistic phenomenon that involves putting the “we” in leadership where multiple individuals interact, through a variety of formal and informal structures, broadly defined, and take on a variety of leadership roles, both formally and informally, over time. Also, in collectivistic leadership approaches, traditional power and authority structures are often ignored, downplayed, bypassed, or redefined.

These leadership roles occur not only in formal groups, teams, and dyads, but also in larger, formal collectivistic structures such as departments, functional areas, strategic business units, networks of various types, and multiteam systems. In addition, the roles can include multiple informal relationships, networks, and connections that involve personal contacts both within the unit and organization, but also that span the organization’s boundaries. Moreover, these formal and informal multi-level structures, relationships, and roles can change rather dramatically over time. As a result, they are not necessarily static and linear in nature, but rather are dynamic and non-linear and contingent on organizational and environmental demands and the players involved. These new collectivistic leadership approaches also may require new types of leadership operationalizations, methods, interventions, and assessments for understanding and enhancing leadership science and practice.

Five collectivistic leadership approaches are now highlighted. While there may be other viable approaches that can be considered collectivistic, the five we have chosen for review serve to represent the range of possibilities, as well as the breadth and depth of current work in the genre of collectivistic or “we” approaches to leadership.

**Team Leadership Science**

Developed from the more general research literature on teams (e.g., Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005), team leadership (e.g., Burke et al., 2011; Day et al., 2004; Morgeson et al., 2010; Zaccaro et al., 2001) is the process of identifying necessary functions to ensure team effectiveness, whether it is completed by one or
multiple members. It involves a team shared mental model or complimentary mental model, social influencing of team members, multiteam systems within and across organizations, and team processes over time (e.g., Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Mathieu et al., 2002). A key assumption is that “teams as leaders” can accomplish things that individual leaders cannot. Team leadership, as presented by Day et al. (2004), takes a unique approach in that they propose that leadership is an outcome of team processes rather than only an input to team processes. Not only does leadership, via the focal leader’s particular capacities (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities), impact teamwork and team learning, but teamwork and team learning influence how the leadership process is manifested within the team. Specifically, team processes ultimately influence team leadership via the leadership role that is both shared and distributed.

To develop the team leadership approach, Day et al. (2004) use the IMOI (inputs-moderators-outputs-inputs) feedback loop model summarized in Ilgen et al. (2005) which expands the typical inputs-process-outputs (IPO) of teamwork. The IMOI approach is different in that potential moderators and mediators are explicitly considered, and it recognizes that outputs can ultimately become inputs into the process. In terms of team leadership, this view allows for the consideration that leadership processes can be both an outcome and an input to team processes.

For team leadership, especially in high-performing teams, there is a strong reliance on shared mental models, as well as shared knowledge and cognitions within the team (Burke, Fiore, & Salas, 2003; Day et al., 2004). Through team processes of communication, face-to-face interaction, and collaboration, there is considerable knowledge acquisition and sharing in teams. Knowledge and information sharing lead to cognitive elaboration where new knowledge structures are created and old structures are modified (Yammarino, Mumford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010). Over time, cognitive convergence occurs where team members gradually acquire enhanced overlap among their cognitive structures. Shared cognitive structures and knowledge, or shared mental models, can then reduce variance in team performance, enhance cohesiveness, build a positive team climate, and promote successful goal accomplishment.

An extension of team leadership that goes beyond the team level per se is multiteam systems, which can emerge when complex collective interactions are required (e.g., Marks et al., 2001; Mathieu et al., 2002). Particularly in situations that are non-routine, unpredictable, involve rapidly changing events, high decision urgency, and inadequate information, leaders need to leverage collectives that are ill-defined and involve high levels of interdependence both within and among various teams often representing multiple embedding organizations (see DeChurch et al., 2011). In this case, multiteam systems are collectives that represent the level of analysis above the team level and below the organizational level, but can span the boundaries of multiple organizations.

Multiteam systems are a network of teams working toward one or more common or collective goals (DeChurch & Mathieu, 2008; Marks, DeChurch, Mathieu, Panzer, & Alonso, 2005), often require coordinated efforts among previously unacquainted teams, and demand skill sets and expertise that reside at the boundaries of established teams brought together to handle a unique challenge. As such, multiteam systems are complex entities that involve complex interactions, and vary in terms of levels and configurations of interdependence, temporal pacing, proximal goals, and team permeability. These complexities of multiteam systems thus present both challenges and opportunities for better understanding team leadership (DeChurch et al., 2011; Mathieu et al., 2002; Zaccaro et al., 2001).

There is a considerable amount of empirical research in support of team leadership approaches in general, and
some emerging empirical research supportive of multiteam systems. The significant base of empirical studies on team leadership indicate a strong linkage between this type of leadership and outcome variables such as empowerment (Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006), potency (Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002), team learning (Burke et al., 2006), satisfaction and efficacy (Kumpfer, Turner, Hopkins, & Librett, 1993), members’ motivational states and commitment (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, & Farh, 2010), team effectiveness and performance (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006), and the role of training on the accuracy of multiteam system mental models, inter-team coordination, and multiteam system performance (e.g., DeChurch & Marks, 2006). Although results suggest that the composition of individual capabilities of team members can translate into higher effectiveness (Millikin, Hom, & Manz, 2010), within-team and especially cross-team processes have been emphasized as essential determinants of multiteam system performance (DeChurch et al., 2011; Marks et al., 2005). Burke et al. (2011) provide a recent comprehensive review of team and multiteam systems leadership, as well as future research guidance in this area.

Practice

Given the extensive empirical work on teams and multiteam systems, there are some implications of the team leadership approach for leadership practice. In terms of professional practice, managers should understand that they can increase team performance by using distinct strategies to enhance individual and team empowerment (Millikin et al., 2010). Literature suggests that the role of leadership in a team context is to guide team experiences that facilitate the development of teamwork skills, use natural variations in team tasks to create learning experiences for team members (Kozlowski et al., 1996), and shape certain aspects of the work environment (Mathieu et al., 2006).

Because development and mentoring activities are essential to team success, leaders may serve as coaches to teams, as well as promote the idea of internal team members fulfilling team leadership needs (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). More experienced team members in general, regardless of formal work status, should be encouraged to exchange advice, teach skills, and be role models for others. Empirical studies on multiteam systems also suggest that leaders operating in such environments would benefit from understanding how to integrate the overall system with the external environment and how to apply different types of functional behaviors as a basis for leader training (DeChurch et al., 2011). Moreover, there are cases when interventions on team leadership effectiveness are required, so it would be useful for practitioners to identify the particular contexts in which their interventions would bring desirable effects (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2002). As such, practice implications from prior studies are relevant for areas such as team and multiteam based standard operating procedures, selection, assessment, as well as training and development.

Further, from a multiteam systems perspective, it is also important from a practical standpoint to consider that there may be multiple leaders involved in system performance. Multiteam systems composed of several component teams may have both a system-level leader as well as component team leaders who must decide how to coordinate leadership responsibilities to achieve both component team and system-level goals (Zaccaro & DeChurch, in press). Thus, different forms of leadership may emerge, such as the rotation of leadership among individuals, the simultaneous enactment of different leadership behaviors, or the distribution of responsibilities to different leaders. In practice, these different leadership forms may be challenging to coordinate and, therefore, should be addressed early and be
Collectivistic leadership approaches based upon multiteam system attributes and needs.

What’s Missing?

In terms of conceptual implications and future directions derived from the empirical literature on team leadership, including teams and multiteam systems, exploring “team leadership theories” as opposed to “theories of leadership” applied in team settings seems important. As such, scholars should not be “transporting” traditional theories of leadership from the individual to the team level. Moreover, since few multi-level theories of team leadership have been advanced thus far, future studies should focus on addressing this issue and more explicit multi-level designs and analyses should be employed. It is also important to identify new dimensions of team leadership and explore the coherence of team mental models.

In addition, the findings from prior research suggest that the area of multiteam systems leadership is in an infancy stage and the construct of multiteam systems itself is still being shaped and refined. However, the field is gradually moving forward and currently emphasizes the importance of a dual focus of multiteam systems leaders on performance management as well as developmental activities. Research has begun to examine these challenges and how they can be mitigated, as well as to identify the areas in which multiteam systems leadership is different from the broader team leadership literature.

Network Leadership

Network theory and analysis (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Brass, 1984; Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004) provides a perspective on leadership as it occurs within the context of a social system. Network theory addresses the process by which leadership emerges and operates within a social system, and asserts propositions about a leader’s ability to perceive and interpret characteristics of a social network and the relevant outcomes of this social cognition (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Balkundi & Harrison, 2006). A key assumption is that leadership emerges from a relatively stable network of social exchanges. Network theory, however, is primarily developed as a leader-centric approach since the antecedents are viewed relative to the leader’s perceptions of the network and position in the network, and the outcomes are a result of the leader operating within the social network. Moreover, the network is typically assumed to be static (see Brass, 1984; Brass et al., 2004).

In developing their model, Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) begin with a micro perspective, focusing on the leader’s social cognition (network acuity), and then move outward to evaluate the leader’s personal network (ego network), the leader’s position within the organizational network (organizational network), and ultimately the leader’s position within networks external to the organization (inter-organizational network). These four levels of network factors then can impact leader effectiveness expressed in terms of various outcomes at the organizational level (survival, growth, and innovation) and intra-organizational level (coalition building, mentoring distributed leadership or developing the social networks and distributed leadership abilities of others, and brokering).

Three characteristics of the individual leader’s close or ego network are proposed by Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) to influence outcomes—density of the network, range of individuals within the network, and degree of cohesion within the network. The leader’s centrality position within the organizational network is also proposed to have an impact on outcomes (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). An assumption underlying this characteristic is that there is only one main node within the network that the leader occupies. With regard to the inter-organizational network, the leader alters the network by engaging in boundary-spanning
or representation of the organization to the community of organizations, connecting previously unconnected links. Moreover, the leader may further develop the network by engaging in alliances with others outside of the organization. These behaviors related to the operation within, and development of, the social network are thought to result in organizational and intra-organizational outcomes.

There is considerable empirical research in support of the network theory and analyses in general and some empirical support for network leadership. Several studies have revealed that network structure is related to team effectiveness and performance (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006). Densely configured interpersonal ties lead to better attainment of goals as well as higher commitment of the team members to stay together. Moreover, Brass et al. (2004) have indicated the relative positions of employees (leaders) within communication, friendship and workflow networks are strongly related to individual perceptions of influence. Other research has established the relationship between leadership emergence in team networks and individual characteristics such as team member network centrality (e.g., Neubert & Taggar, 2004). Studies suggest that teams with leaders central in teams’ intra-group networks and teams central in inter-group networks attain higher performance (e.g., Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008).

At the individual level of analysis, some authors have analyzed the linkage between structural position within the organization and influence (e.g., Brass et al., 2004), while others have focused on the emergence of leadership in team networks and how it relates to individual characteristics such as team member network centrality (e.g., Neubert & Taggar, 2004). At the team level of analysis, social network analysis has been used to examine how team effectiveness relates to members’ and leaders’ social network structures (e.g., Brass, 1984), how the network structure of leadership perceptions is linked to performance, and how distributed leadership, depending on structural characteristics, can help or hinder team performance (e.g., Mehra et al., 2006). Kilduff and Balkundi (2011) provide a recent review of these and related issues for network leadership.

**Practice**

Empirical research on network theory and analysis has revealed interesting findings that are likely to have an echo in the managerial world. While the network approach may lack some of the collectivistic qualities of the other types of leadership analyzed (e.g., networks are assumed to exist, remain stable over time, and are based on the assumption that there is a single leader acting within the network), network theory could be useful in selecting the best candidates for inclusion in a collectivistic leadership effort and for interpreting the process by which social relationships are established and developed within groups, teams, and networks. This may include determining which leaders most accurately perceive network characteristics (particularly perceptions of the structural patterning), would augment the network structure (e.g., bridge cleavages), and are the hubs or in positions of centrality within the organization. This would identify leaders that represented distinct networks, provide access to unique information and social capital, add to the range of network connections, and would help reduce the adverse effects of cohesion (e.g., group think). For instance, if a cleavage, or schism, is observed within an organization, it may be beneficial for leaders that represent each faction to be included in the larger collective effort.

The range of the leader’s ego network is also an important concept because utilizing a collectivistic approach can essentially increase the range of the leadership role in much the same way as increasing the range of the network for an individual leader. Similarly, in increasing the range and breadth of individuals and individual perspectives that may influence the leadership role fulfilled by a collective, the pressures of a cohesive social network may be reduced. In other
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words, the decision making pressures and restrictions that result from a tight network that reinforces a single perspective would be relieved via the implementation of a collectivistic view that employed leaders from varying networks. Likewise, it may be beneficial to use leaders from multiple areas of centrality within the organization, should they exist.

If additional empirical research is supportive of network leadership, there are some additional implications for leadership practice. In particular, there are several characteristics of individuals within networks that are relevant for managing network change. Actor characteristics (e.g., personality, work unit) can have an impact on changes in interpersonal, inter-unit and inter-organizational networks; some actors are critical for some functions and ties; and networks change as critical actors come and go. Also, gender has a significant impact on different types of networks in relation to team members’ centrality to leadership.

Beyond network members’ characteristics, managers should also take into consideration several task related characteristics (e.g., degree of task uncertainty and task structure) as well as organizational ones (e.g., resources) that can be sources of change in networks. Furthermore, it is important from a practical perspective to consider that leadership may come from either the formal leadership network or emergent informal leadership networks. Managers must be aware that these informal networks can serve to support an organization and provide additional backup support to formal leaders, and that these support systems can enhance performance. However, they can also undermine the authority of formal leaders if there is disconnect regarding how tasks should be performed. These notions are thus relevant for areas such as leader and network based standard operating procedures, selection, assessment, and training and development.

What’s Missing?

In terms of future research suggestions for network leadership, it is important to highlight the role of time in social networks, cross-level network change, team performance, and the need for more longitudinal research exploring changes in interaction patterns. From a levels-of-analysis perspective, many of the general network empirical studies and the few studies of network leadership have typically explored constructs and relationships at individual and team levels. Clearly, beyond these levels, a recommended avenue for future network leadership studies is to incorporate a network level of analysis per se into this research stream. Moreover, exploring relationships at multiple levels is recommended for network leadership theory as well, looking at cross-level effects, for example, of individual actors on the collective.

Other directions for network leadership include building theory that simultaneously accounts for attribute and structural influences on team or network effectiveness, as well as analyzing how certain network structures (e.g., centrality) moderate the effects of other network properties (e.g., network density). Additional directions for future research could include team or network size and various substitutes for leadership that may also influence the link between the structure of leadership networks within a team and the team’s performance. Moreover, understanding how the network of leadership perceptions looks within a team could provide valuable information for the design of necessary interventions (e.g., encouragement of formal team leaders to find ways of sharing leadership or allocating resources and decision rights within a team).

Shared Leadership

Science

Shared leadership (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce et al., 2008) is an approach that views leadership as a shared responsibility among team members, where a team is viewed quite broadly, both formally
and informally. A key assumption is that leadership is a set of role functions that can be accomplished by a variety of individuals in various ways. Shared leadership suggests that leadership might be distributed around the team equally, unilaterally, or in any number of ways; and decisions and actions made by the team are not the result of a single leader acting toward the team. In this way, leadership cannot be separated from its social system dynamics (Gronn, 2002).

Given the lack of prior work, the extent to which leadership can be shared, the conditions facilitating the success of shared leadership, and the implications these two unknowns have for organizational structure are currently unknown. While more theory development and research is necessary to answer such questions, initial attempts to develop models of shared leadership show promise (Gronn, 2002; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce et al., 2008). Shared leadership has been successfully applied to self-managed teams, executive teams, and democratic organizations. Aspects of shared and distributed leadership have also appeared in research on followership, as well as organizational change. Leadership as a shared process is also being studied in the context of social systems.

Shared leadership includes several key variables, one of which is team empowerment. While complete control of power cannot often be relinquished in the chain of command, it may be of interest to at least consider how much, when, and how members might be empowered to complete tasks. This shift of power is inherent in the definition of shared leadership. The makeup of teams is another important construct because shared leadership concerns all people in a team. Special attention must be paid to who holds what knowledge, skills, abilities, and expertise in what position of what team. The right people need to be tapped at the right time in the correct manner in order for a team to be successful. If the requisite team member or resource is unavailable at that critical moment, shared leadership will not be able to overcome such adversity.

In addition, shared leadership necessitates sharing information in an accurate and timely manner, something of paramount importance when operating in dynamic environments and shifting power among team members. Also, the distribution of cultural values can have an effect on how well information is shared and when that occurs. Expending extra effort communicating cultural values in an effort to ensure similar values across an organization may be of value when implementing shared leadership. Doing this will eliminate problems associated with diverse values interfering with daily operations. Likewise, tasks that are inflexible or uninteresting will make shared leadership unnecessary or irrelevant. Tasks may need to be designed in such a way to allow for the shifting of responsibilities as situational constraints and cues dictate.

There is some limited empirical research in support of the shared leadership approach. The majority of this research is at the team level of analysis, as this type of leadership is viewed as a team-based collective phenomenon, and has the recurring theme of examining shared leadership in comparison to traditional models of hierarchical or vertical leadership (e.g., Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006; Pearce & Sims, 2002). These studies typically look at management teams and the outcomes generated by either hierarchical or shared leadership. Outcomes of shared leadership that have been examined include performance and effectiveness (Ensley et al., 2006; Pearce & Sims, 2002); use of leadership behavior, autonomy, and patient outcomes (George et al., 2002); and reliability of performance and novice team member skills (Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006). Less research has been conducted on antecedents to shared leadership. Carson et al. (2007) examined internal team environment, shared purpose, social support, voice (or input into how the team carries out its purpose), and external coaching. These antecedents were found to be
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predictors of shared leadership emergence within a team. Pearce and Conger (2003) and Pearce (2004) offer reviews of shared leadership which address many of the theory’s dimensions and current state.

Practice

If additional empirical research is supportive of the shared leadership approach, there are some implications for leadership practice. In terms of professional practice, the current literature supports the idea that the use of shared leadership is a good predictor of desirable outcomes, such as increased team performance and effectiveness. Current organizations may wish to rethink their organizational structure in light of such evidence (e.g., creating social democratic organizations); and new organizations may make use of shared leadership as well, as it seems that shared leadership may play an even greater role in new ventures (e.g., entrepreneurial and dotcom organizations).

Organizations may also want to consider combining vertical or hierarchical and shared leadership structures, as these two together have been shown to positively impact performance in particular. Other proponents of using shared leadership will be interested in its use as a deterrent of corruption among leaders (Pearce et al., 2008), something very critical in today’s organizations. In switching to a structure of shared leadership, certain factors, such as role complementarities (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2007; O’Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002; Perry, Pearce, & Sims, 1999), can also increase the possibility of success for a combination of leaders.

What’s Missing?

In terms of future research on shared leadership, there is a need for additional research in general. Very few empirical studies exist in this area and more are required in order to expand knowledge on the subject. One important aspect of this future research will be to shift from focusing on leaders per se to focusing on collective leadership activities. Specifically, research is needed on how shared leadership is developed and for what boundary conditions is it considered effective. Given that hierarchical or vertical leadership and shared leadership are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there is a need for future work on the interaction between these two types of leadership.

Complexity Leadership

Science

Complexity leadership (e.g., Lichenstein, et al., 2006; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009) is a non-linear dynamics based approach which cuts across a variety of complex dimensions and interactions over time. A key assumption is that leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon. This approach appears to be a natural progression from relational leadership (see Uhl-Bien, 2006). Taking a relational perspective, Uhl-Bien (2006) views leadership as a social construction process, or a social influence process, through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced. In this case, social reality lies in the context of relationships (e.g., relational constructionism); and relationships are both an outcome of the process and a context for action. Consideration of relational dynamics over time could then lead one to more complex interactions and relations.

As such, the complexity approach, as proposed by Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), asserts that leadership takes on several forms in a complex system of interactions and the desired outcome is organizational adaptability, learning, and creativity. At the foundation of the approach are complex adaptive systems which are dynamic, open systems of connections between agents that are interdependent and bound by a common goal or need. There are interactions or engagements between agents that cause information to flow between individuals; and interdependency creates pressure on
those agents to act on the information and exchange knowledge.

Emerging out of these complex adaptive systems and the flow of information and knowledge are three forms of leadership (see Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). First, adaptive leadership is defined as an informal process that emerges out of the interaction of agents with different knowledge, goals, values, beliefs, and perceptions. Second, enabling leadership is a set of behaviors or actions taken to encourage the interaction of agents to increase coordination and interdependence between agents with relevant knowledge. Third, administrative leadership is the more conventional, formal version of leadership. Enabling leadership is proposed to serve as moderator between administrative and adaptive leadership by modifying some of the authoritative “top-down” control to allow for the more organic flow of information and interaction that gives rise to adaptive leadership.

Ultimately, adaptive leadership should lead to an open flow of ideas and knowledge which allow the organization to be more adaptable, have a greater learning capacity, and increased creativity. While this approach proposes that an open, complex system will foster greater creativity, research on creativity consistently indicates that creativity is more likely in a system with structure and a foundation on which to build. Moreover, it may be very difficult to measure and assess elements of this approach overall, but assessment of subprocesses may be possible, especially if a methodology that is particularly amenable to testing this approach is developed. This is particularly important as the complexity leadership approach considers longitudinal and shifting aspects of the leadership process. Nevertheless, in terms of complexity leadership, the concept of an interactive system in which information and knowledge is exchanged to attain a common goal is relevant given that collectivistic leadership requires and will be more effective in contexts in which there is more frequent interaction and high interdependence among members.

To date, there are no published empirical studies of the complexity leadership approach, but there are some preliminary suggestions of how to proceed with testing this approach. Such research will need to focus on the dynamic patterns that exist among and within organizational systems and on the mechanisms by which change occurs. The patterns, as well as possible pattern of patterns, to which organizational complex adaptive systems gravitate may yield a wealth of new information. From these patterns, research such as determining what factors contribute to a particular type of complex adaptive system can be conducted. Research into the mechanisms of change also will shed some light on how a system moves from one stable pattern to another (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Practice

If empirical studies are ultimately conducted that are supportive of the complexity leadership approach, then there would be some implications for leadership practice. In terms of professional practice, one aspect that organizations may find difficult in switching to an organizational structure that uses complexity leadership is the idea of “managed chaos.” This notion represents the tension between the need for structure and the desire for creative chaos. The notion of chaos, in general, is uncomfortable to many people and organizations because of the inherent lack of control. However, complexity leadership theory aims to aid organizations by helping them find this balance (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

Another uncomfortable realization to some will be that leadership is not a person or even a formal role, but is actually a collective phenomenon of a complex adaptive system that may be socially constructed (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2003). Organizations requiring adaptation for success may therefore need to come to terms with this concept and adjust organizational climate and culture accordingly to accommodate such a perspective. Moreover, this adjustment,
Collectivistic leadership approaches will likely require a considerable degree of agreement or consensus, often difficult to achieve, for the “social construct” to be viable, endorsed, and become the basis for collective action and practice.

What’s Missing?

In terms of future research on complexity leadership, there is much to be done due to the current lack of empirical research. Preliminary suggestions of how to proceed with testing complexity leadership revolve around two methodological strategies, which can be proposed to accurately capture the nature of these mechanisms. The first strategy uses qualitative procedures, which have been used in other complexity studies and allows temporal evaluations. The second strategy uses computer modeling and simulation procedures, such as agent-based modeling and systems dynamic modeling, which other complexity studies have also utilized. In performing such modeling procedures, common practice is to determine certain characteristics of a collective and to use that data as the initial conditions of a simulation.

To collect such data, complexity theory researchers will need to make detailed observations over a period of time of multiple complex interactions. As such, there are many directions that future research could take, and many questions posed by the current literature could be answered using the aforementioned research strategies. A majority of the future research areas could revolve around patterns and mechanisms as well as the emergence of new types of social structures and new nodes in a social network from a leadership event, dynamic organizational capabilities, and the use of new organizational strategies.

Collective Leadership

Science

Collective leadership (e.g., Friedrich et al., 2009; Yammarino et al., 2010a, 2010b) is a team- and network-based cognitive approach that involves formal and informal levels of analysis and shifts of these multiple entities over time. A key assumption is that leadership is a given where leaders direct adaptive responses to change or crises through others. Collective leadership focuses on units, teams and networks, rather than solely on the skills of individual leaders, and is the utilization of expertise from multiple sources in a timely fashion to arrive at an effective resolution of unique, rapidly emerging problems. Such leadership requires adaptability and the pooling of information and skills to accomplish missions; leadership becomes a collective or team- and network-based organization-wide enterprise.

Collective leadership is a dynamic leadership process in which a defined or focal leader, or set of leaders, selectively utilize skills and expertise within a network, and across levels of analysis and hierarchical levels, effectively distributing elements of the leadership role as the situation or problem at hand requires. Leaders seek to create and exploit a network of personal relationships and relationships established by the members of their team and network. These formal and informal networks of relationships provide the leader, and associated team members, with enhanced expertise. In complex environments subject to rapid change, multiple leaders operating in a collective fashion and with team- and network-based approaches are critical to unit and organizational performance.

Beyond merely multiple individuals taking on different roles, sharing responsibilities and behavioral integration (including information exchange, collaboration, and joint decision making), based on selective use of expertise within a broader network, are important components of collective leadership. The collective leadership model includes four primary sets of constructs (Friedrich et al., 2009; Yammarino et al., 2010a). First, there are the key collective leadership constructs: leader skills (e.g., managing resources and interdependencies; accuracy and schemas), leader
network (e.g., embeddedness, patterning, centrality, alliances), leader-team exchange (e.g., empowerment, collaboration, social capital), communication (e.g., directions, feedback, meaning making), problem setting, team performance parameters (e.g., conflict management, clarifying objectives, autonomy, information sharing), team affective climate (e.g., justice perceptions), and team network (e.g., embeddedness, patterning, centrality). Second, there are the base-line leadership processes of leader structuring and maintenance of group, mission, and team processes per se (e.g., cohesion, commitment, collaborative problem solving). Third, there are outcomes, both immediate (e.g., product and process innovation, follower satisfaction and trust, goal accomplishment) and long-term (e.g., loyalty to leader and organization, wellbeing, survival), as well as team performance capabilities (e.g., team efficacy and potency, conflict resolution, team collaboration). Fourth, there is the organizational setting and context which includes the professionalism and expertise of workforce, organizational structure, and work flow.

Because the exchange elements of the leadership role require familiarity with others in a network and the regular exchange of information, communication is the currency of collective leadership. Leaders exchange information with their teams and networks, which helps to develop team and network parameters and affective climate and performance. Leaders involved could be formal or informal; teams involved may be formal or ad hoc; networks identified could be official (professional) or unofficial (personal or social). In collective leadership, there is meaning in the way information flows through specific patterns of team and network members; and it is conceivable that a team, network, or organization could develop their collective leadership capabilities such that the appropriate collective could be assembled rapidly in various situations.

As such, the collective leadership approach can be viewed as an analog of a flexible, multi-level, neuro-cognitive system where neurons (people) can be activated as the situation demands. Moreover, measures for the fundamental bases of collective leadership, collective leadership per se, and elements in its nomological network have been developed (Yammarino et al., 2010a, 2010b). In this approach, effective performance is held to depend not only on characteristics of the leader’s and team’s networks, but also effective communication by the leader, within the team, and from the team to the leader, along with understanding team performance parameters, formation of a positive affective climate, and a viable, organic, exchange between team members and between leaders and team members to shape team performance capabilities.

Empirical research related to collective leadership is somewhat limited. Preliminary results in support of the approach are developed and provided by Yammarino et al. (2010a, 2010b). A comprehensive test of the model, with strong supporting empirical evidence, is presented in the work of Vessey et al. (2011). This study used historiometric analysis to appraise the collective leadership model, and results showed that performance at multiple levels was predicted by the model and that the structure of the model may be plausible in explaining the effect that collective leadership has on leaders, teams and the collective’s performance. A more in depth presentation and review of the collective leadership model and the methods used to analyze it are also presented by Vessey et al. (2011).

Practice

If empirical results regarding the collective leadership approach continue to be supportive, then there are some implications for leadership practice. In terms of professional practice, there are many areas in which organizations attempting to foster collective leadership could stage interventions to aid in that process. One such intervention would involve the understanding of networks (both formal and informal) and the abilities and skills that those in the networks
Collectivistic leadership approaches 395

could provide. An increased awareness of networks of leaders, teams, and the organization itself would facilitate collective leadership development.

As communication is a key to collective leadership, another effective intervention would be the increase of communication skills throughout the organization so that leaders, teams, networks, and various collectives could access an individuals’ unique and collective expertise and assign leadership roles accordingly. Finally, leaders and team and collective members should have an understanding of the leader-team exchange processes to aid in the distribution of the leadership role (Friedrich et al., 2009). Without these appropriate and negotiated exchanges, both formal and informal, within and among leaders, teams and networks, collective leadership cannot succeed.

What’s Missing?

In terms of future research on collective leadership, empirical work on certain components involved in the collective leadership model should be addressed to enhance continued research on the general construct itself. Key topics include communication, social networks, leader-team exchange and the relations between them. Other areas that need further research are key situational moderators between collective leadership and collective performance, possible interventions to facilitate collective leadership, the effects of team networks and their interactions on collective leadership, followers’ unique skills and abilities, team processes, the relationships between leaders and teams, and focal leader’s (leaders’) cognitive skills.

Perspective on Collectivistic or “We” Leadership

To provide a fuller perspective and some speculation on the collectivistic or “we” approaches to leadership, we offer a brief summary of the current state of the five highlighted approaches. Then, looking across the approaches, we offer some commonalities about the collectivistic leadership approaches that include both their strengths and weaknesses in terms of science and practice.

Summary of Science and Practice

As a summary of our perspective on the current state of collectivistic leadership, key features of the five approaches are presented in Table 1. As shown in the table, each of the collectivistic leadership approaches has a number of unique features and aspects in terms of the primary constructs and levels of analysis of interest, the role of a focal leader in the approach, the extent of empirical research to date about the approach, and the focus of the approach for managerial and professional practice.

What seems equally clear from the table, however, are the key communalities and themes shared by these collectivistic leadership approaches which suggest several new directions for future research and professional practice. In particular, all of the collectivistic leadership approaches are not solely or primarily leader-centric, not constrained by formal power and authority structure and relationships, not limited to leader-to-follower interactions in small groups and teams, involve more than typical leader behaviors or team skills, incorporate a variety of formal and informal organizational and extra-organizational arrangements, tend to be dynamic and non-linear in nature, and strive to be responsive to complex, rapidly changing and uncertain problems and environments.

Strengths and Weaknesses in General

Collectivistic or “we” approaches to leadership may result in some real shifts in our understanding of leadership and in attempts to intervene to improve the performance and development of leaders, teams, and organizations. Although we do not believe collectivistic leadership is faddish, we think these views of leadership should
Table 1. *Summary of Collectivistic ("We") Leadership Approaches*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership approach</th>
<th>Key notions &amp; constructs</th>
<th>Levels of analysis&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Focal leader role</th>
<th>Empirical support</th>
<th>Practice implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Shared mental models, team values, team work, team member resources, team leadership capacity, team learning, network of teams</td>
<td>Leader, team, multiteam system, multi-level &amp; cross-level</td>
<td>Team member &amp; coordinator of team(s)</td>
<td>Considerable on teams and some on team leadership &amp; multiteam systems—a few empirical studies</td>
<td>Team &amp; multiteam based SOP, selection, assessment, and T &amp; D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Network acuity, ego network, organizational network, inter-organizational network</td>
<td>Individual (leader), team &amp; network</td>
<td>Node in network(s)</td>
<td>Considerable on networks but limited on network leadership—a few empirical studies</td>
<td>Leader &amp; network based SOP, selection, assessment, and T &amp; D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Mutual and shared responsibility, task interdependence, team empowerment</td>
<td>Leader, team member &amp; team</td>
<td>Team member</td>
<td>Some—a few empirical studies</td>
<td>Team based SOP, selection, assessment, and T &amp; D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>Complex non-linear interactions, complex adaptive systems; enabling, administrative, &amp; adaptive leadership</td>
<td>Relational, relations per se &amp; system</td>
<td>Element of system or relation</td>
<td>None—no empirical studies</td>
<td>System or relation based SOP, selection, assessment, and T &amp; D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Expertise-based cognitive, complex social problem solving; leader skills &amp; network, team network &amp; processes, communication, leader-team exchange</td>
<td>Leader, team, network, multi level &amp; cross-level</td>
<td>Hub or core of multiple collectives</td>
<td>Some—a few empirical studies</td>
<td>Leader &amp; collective based SOP, selection, assessment, and T &amp; D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Collective level as well as those listed.

*Note.* SOP = standard operating procedures; T & D = training and development.
be approached with caution because much more empirical research validating them is needed before they become the basis for professional practice. From our discussion above, and given empirical studies to date, it should be clear that some approaches (i.e., team and perhaps network leadership) have more currently established validity than others (i.e., collective and perhaps shared leadership); while others are essentially non-tested to date (i.e., complexity leadership).

The conceptualizations of collectivistic leadership are promising and, as is typical, are ahead of the empirical research and a full understanding of the implications for professional practice. Moreover, the relevance and application for these approaches might be greater in some contexts (e.g., organic, flatter, social democratic and newer organizations) or environments (e.g., rapidly changing and dynamic ones like military and high technology settings) than in others (e.g., traditional hierarchical, bureaucratic, mechanistic and established organizations). As such, we do not see collectivistic or “we” leadership approaches as replacing, always and everywhere, more traditional or contemporary leadership approaches. Rather, collectivistic leadership approaches can complement or substitute for these other approaches in particular contexts (as suggested above) or at various times (e.g., crisis situations).

In addition, the integration of elements or aspects of these various collectivistic leadership approaches may be possible for a more comprehensive view of “we” leadership and practice. In this way, the weaknesses of one approach can be offset by the strengths of another. This may also provide a way to address some key limitations of collectivistic approaches in general (e.g., emotions, collectivistic and otherwise, are typically unaccounted for; and processes for collective cognition formation are underdeveloped) and enhance their applicability for professional practice. Table 1 displays some commonalities and overlaps as well as differences that may provide a starting point for such an integration of collectivistic leadership approaches.

**Strengths and Weaknesses in Science**

There are some other common themes which hold across the collectivistic leadership approaches from a future research standpoint as well. For example, current or traditional leadership models tend to focus more on short-term outcomes, both soft and hard, for a formal leader and his/her direct reports or immediate followers and for a specific or limited situation. The potential of these collectivistic leadership approaches is to add to or augment these associations and also to predict a variety of short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes, both soft and hard, for the leader, informal leaders, team and larger collective, as well as for informal units, and for a multitude of non-routine and unpredictable situations.

Beyond the leader network or team as in traditional or contemporary leadership approaches, there is a potential of the collectivistic leadership approaches to help better understand the team network, informal networks, and leader-team-informal network interactions. For example, a leader with a strong formal network may strengthen the team formal network and vice-versa; and these may be enhanced or inhibited by various informal leader and team networks. Leaders may use their own formal networks to expand their teams’ formal networks, and may use their teams’ formal networks to expand their own formal network; informal networks can then help or hurt these activities and processes.

In addition, these collectivistic leadership approaches are the result of several processes, are dynamic and shifting, and there is not a single pathway by which collectivistic leadership may emerge. As such, a single causal model or approach to collectivistic leadership does not appear to exist; and, as a result, it may be useful to view collectivistic leadership in general and these approaches in particular as a lens through which various processes that may lead to a
leader, or team of leaders, networks, and a network of networks selectively distributing the leadership role as required based on needs and expertise for a given problem or situation. Thus, there are multiple pathways with an array of the causal relationships for future testing within the frameworks of collectivistic leadership reviewed here.

Another interesting issue for all collectivistic leadership approaches deals with the role of a focal (or formal) leader; and this notion has implications for both science and practice. In terms of research, a question to pursue conceptually and empirically would be: Does discussion of a focal leader per se or the role of a focal leader even make sense when a collectivistic leadership approach is involved? At the extreme, it could be argued that in a complete collectivistic approach, everything operates at the collective level of analysis, whether for formal or informal collectives; and so any single focal leader homogenizes into the collectives in which he/she is a member. It is only the collective that matters and single leaders “disappear” so to speak. Another way to think about such a set of effects is that they hold across levels of analysis, from the individual to the collective; and thus parsimoniously we observe the collective rather than lower levels. In terms of professional practice, this view would suggest that managerial operating procedures as well as selection, assessment, and development could be targeted successfully and economically at the collective rather than at an individual leader or set of leaders. Clearly, the role of the leader in collectivistic leadership requires additional exploration.

In general, levels of analysis issues, in both theory building and theory testing for collectivistic leadership approaches, require further attention. Given the number and types (both formal and informal) of levels potentially involved (e.g., individual/leader, group/team, network, organization, multiteam system), as well as cross-level and multi-level effects, the complexities of collectivistic leadership can be extensive and even overwhelming, especially for a novice in the area.

Conceptualization and rigorous operationalization and testing that explicitly incorporate levels of analysis and multi-level notions are keys to clarifying and advancing the literature on collectivistic leadership. Insights gained from such research will ultimately impact the practice and development of collectivistic leadership approaches at various levels, whether viewed formally or informally, in and across organizations.

**Strengths and Weaknesses in Practice**

If these collectivistic leadership approaches are important (empirically supported) and (at least sometimes) augment, complement, or substitute for traditional and contemporary leadership approaches, then current individualistic approaches to selection, training and development, and performance assessment in organizations may be inadequate and incomplete. The shift from leader-centric to collectivistic leadership may require collectivistic selection, collectivistic training and development, and collectivistic performance assessment systems to be implemented for successful and effective performance of individuals, teams, and organizations. There are several overarching professional practice themes that apply regardless of which theoretical approach is considered. Furthermore, these issues must also be considered when both traditional vertical or hierarchical and collectivistic leadership are enacted together (e.g., a formal leader is supported by a team of individuals who also take on leadership responsibilities).

In terms of selection, it may no longer be relevant to only select a leader, but instead, given the dynamic nature of work environments, selecting multiple leaders or individuals with leadership potential may be most critical to organizational success. As work environments become increasingly distributed, diverse, and reliant upon virtual technology, work is often accomplished by teams or units that have members fully or partially distributed across many locations (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007). Because of
Collectivistic leadership approaches

this, teams may need multiple individuals in these different locations to take on leadership responsibilities. Therefore, it may be necessary to consider selecting multiple leaders in advance to accommodate these types of work situations. Alternatively, as informal leadership networks may arise depending upon dynamics such as membership change, task type, or member expertise, a more fluid leadership structure may be necessary so that leadership responsibility can be transferred or reassigned based on team needs.

Furthermore, the selection criteria for leaders may be different for collectivistic leadership environments. “Lone wolf” individuals who want to have the sole responsibility of leading and who have difficulty sharing these responsibilities may in fact hurt collective performance more than help it (Foushee, 1984). Individual differences in characteristics such as collective orientation, or a preference for working with others (Salas, Guthrie, Wilson, Priest, & Burke, 2005), may therefore need to be considered when selecting individuals for situations that may involve collectivistic leadership. Additionally, individuals who are skilled at boundary spanning and empowering teams may also be best for collectivistic leadership assignments, as these can help create the enabling conditions necessary for effective sharing of leadership responsibilities, especially across both formal and informal leadership networks (Marrone, 2010; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010).

Finally, a holistic approach may also be necessary for selecting individuals to operate in collectivistic leadership situations. Collectivistic leadership may be best performed by groups or teams with a blend of expertise and traits that can contribute to both the task-related and relationship-based leadership behaviors necessary for successful performance (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Thus, similar to team composition (LePine, Buckman, Crawford, & Methot, 2011), it may be necessary to select individuals with complementary knowledge, skills, and abilities to create the most effective environment for collectivistic leadership.

Once individuals are selected for collectivistic leadership assignments or positions, there are also several practical implications for the development and assessment of such individuals. First, it is important to consider whether these individuals should be developed individually or as a group or team, collectively. Traditionally, leadership development and assessment has focused on developing leaders as individuals. However, as previously mentioned, it is important to consider the implications of operating in collectivistic leadership environments and how this may influence developmental needs. Team development interventions such as team building and team training (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) may need to be considered for collectives that need to work closely together to enact leadership behaviors. Such interventions can enhance shared mental models and transactive memory systems among members, and can help to foster the cohesive climate that is necessary for individuals to cooperate effectively in collectively leading (Klein et al., 2009; Salas et al., 2008). While these interventions are traditionally targeted at improving teamwork and not necessarily leadership abilities, having the effective teamwork competencies in place should help to foster climates where collectivistic leadership may be enacted successfully. Further, from a practical standpoint, it is important to consider the interaction of traditional vertical leadership and collectivistic leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

Moreover, the assessment of leadership at the collective level should also be considered by practitioners. Traditional assessments of leadership may not be effective, as they may not fully capture the dynamics and behaviors necessary in collectivistic leadership environments, such as the rotating of leadership responsibilities among members (Zaccaro & DeChurch, in press). Furthermore, when informal leadership is enacted by one or several individuals to compensate for necessary leadership behaviors not being performed
by a formal leader, traditional assessments may not appropriately give credit to these individuals acting as informal leaders. To capture a more systemic understanding of leadership as enacted by a collective, a mix of individual and collective assessments may therefore be necessary. Additionally, the use of network metrics discussed previously may better reveal how leadership is structured and how it may change over time, providing a better picture than more traditional approaches.

Conclusion

The lack of rigorous empirical research on collectivistic leadership in general and on several aspects of the particular approaches reviewed here, is the primary scientific concern at this time. Theory in most (if not all) fields is ahead of data. This is clearly the case in the literature on collectivistic leadership. We have many more ideas than well-tested ideas. Nevertheless, ideas must be fully developed in a testable fashion in order to build a more comprehensive and integrative theory of collectivistic leadership. There are several areas within these collectivistic leadership approaches (e.g., communication and information flows, leader-team and team-team exchanges, social networks and inter-network connections, role of informal units, and the relationships among these elements) that are lacking in empirical research and should be explored in future work. Moreover, established measurement and operationalizations of collectivistic leadership notions, that display sound psychometric qualities, are rather limited. After some initial measurement and testing work is completed, and then further validated and replicated, these results could form the basis of enhanced managerial and professional practice procedures as well as the selection, assessment, and training and development applications relevant for collectivistic leadership approaches. In these ways, and given our work here, we hope to encourage both scientists and practitioners to put the “we” in future leadership science and practice.

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