

Chapter 7

Racial Differences in Perceptions of Shared Leadership Among IT Managers

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, leadership researchers have demonstrated greater interest in the concept of shared leadership, perhaps due to increasing globalization and changes in organizational cultures. This leadership style, based on inclusivity, may replace traditional structures of hierarchical leadership, or exist as a complement. Despite potential benefits, unspoken power dynamics may prevent shared leadership from being completely inclusive. Guided by three research questions and explored via an online survey, this quasi-experimental study investigated significant racial differences in the levels of overall shared leadership among IT managers of different races, specifically White, Black, Asian, and other. Descriptive statistics and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to examine the responses of 200 LinkedIn IT managers employed within the United States. Findings revealed that shared leadership did not differ across racial lines, and IT managers who engage in shared leadership may maintain their competitive edge in this ultracompetitive field.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, leadership researchers have demonstrated greater interest in the concept of shared leadership, perhaps due to increasing globalization and changes in organizational cultures. This leadership style, based on inclusivity, may replace or be complimentary to traditional structures of hierarchical leadership.

Shared leadership refers to a dynamic behavioral process depicted by team member influence, collaboration, and group exhibition of leadership (Stagnaro & Piotrowski, 2014). In animated work environments such as IT where the talents and skills of a variety of different workers are crucial to project success, shared leadership may be of particular benefit in increasing organizational performance (Erkutlu, 2012; Fausing et al., 2015; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Hui-Ying & Jian-Peng, 2013; Stagnaro & Piotrowski, 2014; Wang et al., 2014), and, in most cases, drives its utilization.

Although a significant body of research indicates that shared leadership creates increases in organizational performance, little is known about the antecedents of successful shared leadership (Fausing et al., 2015). Such knowledge is critical to understanding how to implement effective shared leadership. In response to this gap in the research, Fausing et al. (2015) conducted a study of 81 knowledge and manufacturing teams employed by a green technology manufacturing company in Denmark. The company's annual performance rating system was used to measure team performance. The performance score represented team leaders' assessments of their employees' and teams' achievement and the processes they employed to achieve goals.

Involved in organizational performance is team performance to which shared leadership has been found to enhance team effectiveness (Perry et al., 1999). Katz and Kahn (1978) found shared leadership to influence the competitive advantage of organizations because of increased commitment and shared resources. In the generation of funding for non-profit organizations, shared leadership is part of the institutionalization of honesty and integrity that in turn generates stakeholder interest (Brown, 2017). Having a culture of shared leadership affects the resiliency and sustainability of organizations (Anwashe, 2020; Routhieaux, 2015).

However, socially engrained power dynamics may prevent shared leadership from being completely inclusive (Lumby & Morrison, 2010). Opponents argued that shared leadership encourages maintaining the status quo for those in power and acts as a tool for forcing increased worker productivity (Coleman, 2012; Harris, 2013; Lumby & Morrison, 2010). Hargreaves and Fink (2008) posited that it may be little more than another way to enforce hierarchical leadership. Still, other scholars opined that within shared leadership, the potential exists for racial, gender, and ethnic biases to prevent inclusiveness across teams (Mendez & Busenbark, 2015; Trenery & Paradies, 2012). Indeed, the silence within the body of literature on shared leadership regarding challenges to inclusion on issues such as race and ethnicity is notable. Within a society still plagued by racial and ethnic inequities, the dialog of power distribution in shared leadership settings is inevitably colored by race.

Notwithstanding the failure to acknowledge fundamental power dynamics related to race, the literature on shared leadership does indicate undeniable organizational benefits for the field of IT (Stagnaro & Piotrowski, 2014). Truly inclusive shared leadership has the potential to improve IT project efficiency. However, due to underlying power and race narratives, understanding the perceptions of shared leadership among racially diverse IT managers is imperative. Racial differences in levels of overall shared leadership may question the inclusiveness of shared leadership in IT and indicate the need for improvements to equality and power distribution within organizations.

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