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# **The Impact of Leadership on Team Creativity: A Team Dynamics Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Integrating creativity, leadership theories and a team dynamics perspectives, this study aims to investigate the relative effectiveness of two types of leadership on team creativity in hospitality sector in the context of an economy in transition stage. It specifically aims to explore the possible differences in empowering and transformational leadership styles in terms of their influence on team creativity via collective efficacy, team identification, knowledge sharing. We posit that team leaders' behaviour can produce intermediate outcomes such as team identity, team efficacy, and knowledge sharing. These intermediate outcomes may positively affect team creative performance. We develop a conceptual framework to study and examine the critical role of two leadership styles and team dynamics as enablers for team creativity.

## **1. Introduction**

Innovation through creativity has potentially beneficial effects on an organisation. It may improve productivity, showcase unique qualities, help the organisation to meet rapidly changing customer demands, and make companies more competitive (Amabile, 1988; Martins & Terblanche, 2003; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Furthermore, capitalising on the benefits of creativity may be a condition beneficial to the survival and long-term success of an organisation (Yoshida et al., 2014; George & Zhou, 2001). Considering the above-mentioned consequences, literature argues that creativity is not only a means of resolving challenges but also an important vehicle in organisational innovation (Sutton & Hargadon, 1996).

To achieve outcomes such as creativity and innovation, attention has been afforded to how employees are enablers of creative and innovative outputs (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Bass et al., 2003). While the capability of organisations to become innovative must start from employees' creative efforts, individual creativity in itself is insufficient (Hirst & Cooper, 2014).

Additionally, the rapid pace of enhancing products, processes, and services has yielded tasks that prove too complex and time-consuming for individual completion (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Swezey & Salas, 1992). Many organisations have turned to team-based work systems to increase responsiveness and the ability to foster innovation (Tongo, 2015; Mohoman, Cohen, & Mohrman, 1995). By employing team creativity as a tool, the basis for an organisation to be innovative may be constructed (Sutton & Hargadon, 1996; Salas & Gelfand, 2013). Furthermore, leadership, by its nature, plays a critical role in the team. Leaders are central to the team context, creating visionary scenarios and facilitating employees to enact the shared vision, further fostering workplace creativity. Though the link between leadership behaviour, for instance in the capacity as a CEO, and individual creativity has been widely documented (Li, Zhao & Begely, 2015; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Carmeli et al., 2010), the relationship between team leaders' behaviour and team creativity has received little attention in research (Bryant, 2003; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Li, Zhao & Begely, 2015). Given the widespread use of team-based structures in all types of organisations (Mathieu et al., 2000), team creativity, as an aggregate concept, should not be misplaced from an applied perspective. This paper aims to fill this gap by integrating team creativity and leadership theories.

To pinpoint the micro-dynamics underlying leadership influence, this research focuses on two types of leadership styles, namely empowering and transformational leadership. In the teamwork context, focusing on empowering and transformational leadership is key for several reasons. Firstly, these two types of leadership may be associated with higher levels of team performance or more positive outcomes (Sagie et al., 2002; Bai, Lin & Li, 2016; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009a; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Soliciting novel ideas as a result of supervisors providing autonomy to team members (Cheong et al, 2016) and, establishing clear clues or rules provides directions for behaviour and action to teams (Li, Zhao & Begley, 2015). In addition, a comparative study of empowering and transformational leadership styles can form the basis for examining more complex leadership impacts on teamwork, both empowering and transforming leaders can encourage employees to work efficiently as part of a team (Sagie et al., 2002; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2003), but through different mechanisms.

Framed by the above, this research aims to answer the following overarching question:

How does leadership affect team creativity in the Chinese organisational context?

The research takes a multiple stage approach to address the objectives of the study by answering sub-questions to elaborate further on the research question stated above:

- 1) To what extent do transformational and empowering leadership styles diverge and converge in their influences on enhancing team creativity?
- 2) How does leadership influence (enhance or inhibit) team creativity through team processes?

## **2. Theoretical Background and Main Concepts**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research aims to explore the two types of leadership, transformational and empowering, in terms of their underlying mechanisms to determine how this leadership can enhance team creativity. Furthermore, by investigating different types of roles in enhancing team creativity, this research aims to provide insights and outcomes to identify factors that enhance the leader's role in improving team creativity and differentiating between two different styles of leadership to achieve the desired outcomes.

### **2.2 Workplace creativity**

The concept of creativity as a team output is not a new notion. As noted by Amabile et al (2004) “workplace creativity is characterised as the capabilities to perceive the status quo in a new or different way, turning useful and novel ideas into practical solutions”. Therefore, team creativity refers to the production of practical and novel ideas concerning processes, procedures, services, and products by a group of individuals working together (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2007). By constructing team creativeness, organisational innovation and excellence in operations may be guaranteed.

### **2.3 Creativity and leadership relationship**

Driven by the assumption that creativity is beneficial for work outcomes, researchers have attempted to comprehend the factors that shape workplace creativity, such as job complexity, individual characteristics, resources, and leadership attempts (Shalley et al., 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009a; Mumford et al., 2002). Creativity researchers have adopted an interactional approach in arguing that situational and personal factors both have a strong influence on creativity (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; George & Zhou, 2001; Woodman

et al., 1993). Leadership, in particular, has been closely associated with followers' creativity on an individual level (Shin & Zhou, 2003; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Research on the link between leadership and creativity has attracted attention because it is based on explicit and implicit claims, which are both linked to organisational performance (Zhou & Shalley, 2007; Mumford, 2013, 2017). Though the link between leadership behaviour and individual creativity has been widely documented (Lee et al., 2010; Xue, Bradley, & Liang, 2011), the relationship between team leaders' behaviour and team creativity has received little attention in research (Bryant, 2003; Carmeli, Atwater, & Levi, 2011). Similarly, though reliance on teams has increased significantly since the early 1980s, research surrounding team functioning has not been able to meet the growing need to understand how teams can develop greater creativity. (Yoon et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2006; Rickards & Moger, 2000; Paulus & Yang, 2000).

#### **2.4 The two leadership styles: Empowering and Transformational**

While the links between different leadership style and creativity have been examined independently, only a few studies have investigated different types of leadership simultaneously and the subsequent impacts on creativity. In this present research, two types of leadership style are chosen – 1. Transformational leadership, which could be defined as the leaders providing his or her followers with structures or a framework for initiate actions, making decisions and in alignment with the supervisors' vision (Bass et al, 2003; Stogdill 1974; Fiedler 1995; Jung, Chow & Wu, 2008). 2. Empowering leadership, which is defined as joint decision making and the leaders sharing influence, autonomy and responsibility with his or her followers (Ahearne, Mathieu & Rapp, 2005; Martin, Liao & Campbell, 2013). These two leadership types can both be associated with higher levels of team performance or outcomes (Sagie et al., 2002; Tung & Chang, 2011). High performance could be achieved, for instance, via soliciting novel ideas as a result of supervisors providing autonomy to team members or via establishing clear clues or rules, providing directions for behaviour and action to teams (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003; Carmeli, Schaubroeck & Tishler, 2011). Despite prior research primarily focused on positive outcomes resulting from both transformational and empowering leadership behaviour, scant work in this realm has questioned and examined whether, in the context of an economy in transition stage (e.g., China), specific leadership is associated with more desirable outcomes (Cheong et al, 2016; Kark, Shamir & Chen,2003; Shalley & Gilson 2004).

Research on team performance and leadership has increasingly flourished over the last decades, it is now an appropriate time for the integration of team creativity and leadership theories. (Burke et al., 2006; Atwater & Bass, 1994; Chi & Huang, 2014). In addition, a comparative study of these two different styles of leadership, making it possible to investigate the linkage between creativity and leadership in a new way, which, responds to a call in the creativity literature that move from the traditional 'either / or' to a 'both /and' approach.

## **2.5 Leadership and team dynamics**

Given the dominant role of leaders in a team context (Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999; Redmond, Mumford, & Teach, 1993; Scott & Bruce, 1994), leadership has been linked to team functioning and performance (Wang et al., 2011; Burke et al., 2006). Existing studies have linked leadership with various aspects of team performance. Bass & Avolio (1994) discussed improving team decision-making skills through transformational leadership. Additionally, Kahai et al. (2010) demonstrated that transformational leaders are more likely to enhance group performance because they are instrumental in overcoming social loafing among group members.

To understand why leadership may foster team functioning, existing research has focused on intermediate team states, such as team empowerment, commitment, and communication (Lehmann et al., 2015; Harter et al., 2002; Jung & Sosik, 2002; Wu, Tsui, & Kinicki, 2010). These states benefit from leadership, which, in turn, positively affects team social interaction and functioning (Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004). However, currently missing from literature is the mechanism underlying the beneficial effects of team leaders' behaviour on team creativity. The potential effects of leadership on creativity are compelling given the focus of leaders' impacts on team norms and values (Liu & Phillips, 2011). Atwater & Bass (1994) presented a general conceptualisation of how leadership may interact with team factors, such as cohesion and conflict management, but they did not offer testable propositions. Creativity on a team level is a result of the interactions between team dynamics and leadership attempts. Leadership does not affect team creativity directly but, rather, through team dynamics (Chi & Huang 2014). This research contends that leadership stimulates functioning, such as team identity and team efficacy, which, in turn, leads members to form judgements about teammates' trustworthiness and competence. The information

contained in the team processes form the basis for the exchange of distributed knowledge (knowledge sharing), leading to enhanced team creative performance.

## **2.6 Towards a conceptual framework: Creativity and leadership, from a team dynamic perspective**

Teamwork processes refer to the interaction patterns among team members. Scholars have claimed that team processes are one of the vital determining factors that influence team performance and output in the input-process-output (IPO) model (Shalley et al., 2004; Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Jehn & Shah, 1997). However, empirical research on team processes and creativity is still in an initial stage, and only a handful studies has examined the role of team processes on creative performance. Some scholars have examined the impact of “team composition” (team diversity, members’ knowledge, ability, and personality) on creativity (West, Borrill, & Unsworth, 1998). One study attempted to link individual creative performance to teams’ creative outcomes to demonstrate that teams’ creative performance was highest when teams had the highest ratings of creative relevant processes (team citizenship) and individual creativity (Taggar, 2002). Furthermore, leadership has been proposed as one of the most important components in team processes (Mumford, Connelly, & Gaddis 2003). Previous studies have shown that leadership enhances team innovation through cooperation (Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2003), effective communication (Taggar, 2002), and exchanges of information (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Therefore, information and knowledge sharing within a team may enhance creative performance. However, knowledge sharing does not occur automatically within the team nor is it either exclusively initiated by the leaders. Instead, knowledge sharing among team members is the result of interactions of team dynamics and leadership attempts. Researchers have identified a set of factors influenced by leaders, which, in turn, impacts team creativity. For example, team members’ perceptions of their capabilities to produce creative outcomes as a whole (i.e., collective efficacy) and team social process (Bai, Lin & Li, 2016; Chen et al., 2012) influence creativity. As such, leadership may affect group dynamics through its influence on individuals within the team and the team as a whole (Wu, Tsui, & Kinicki, 2010; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Additionally, in a team context, conflict is inevitable and may play as moderator between leadership and team processes (Hempel, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2009; De Dreu & Weingart 2003). Furthermore, given that the climate

within work groups influences team members' cognitions, motivations, and behaviour, it may shape the individual team members' behavioural tendencies toward others in the team and the team as a whole, directing the team to influence its outcomes (Oldham & Cummings 1996; Mumford 2000; Mumford et al., 2002). Thus, the below conceptual framework is proposed to investigate the two leadership styles for their influence on team creativity whilst accounting for the role of team process as expressed by team efficacy, team identification and knowledge sharing within the team. We do not intend to ignore the role of team conflict and the supportive climate in the environment to enhance the relationship between leadership behaviour and team creativity.

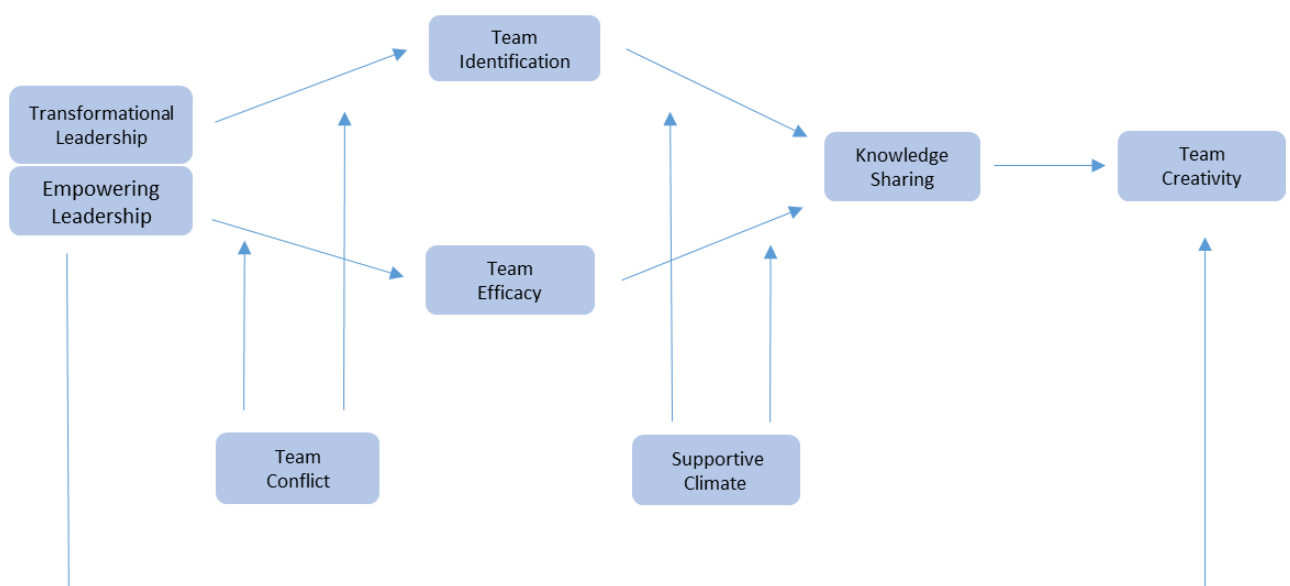


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



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