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When Women Lead Together: The Dynamics of Shared Leadership in Community Based Enterprises.

Author 1 : Liji James,

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode,

Kunnamangalam, India

Pincode: 673570

Email Id: james.liji88@gmail.com

lijij10fpm@iimk.ac.in

Author 2 : Prof. Priya Nair Rajeev,

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode,

Kunnamangalam, India

Pincode: 673570

Email Id: priya@iimk.ac.in

Abstract: *Organizations are witnessing a major shift in how work is being performed, necessitating alternate forms of decision-making, interdependence and shared management that traditional approaches of leadership are unable to accommodate (Gronn 2002) or explain. Community-based enterprises (CBEs) are one such organizational form in which members have equal ownership and interest in the enterprise and contribute to furthering the shared purpose without a formal hierarchy. Kudumbashree is a poverty eradication program that started in the state of Kerala in India. It has poor women as its main beneficiaries, wherein members were encouraged and enabled in setting up micro-enterprises (MEs) collectively. The members have equal ownership and interest in the enterprise and contribute to furthering its purpose without a formal hierarchy. Using a qualitative approach, the study examines the emergence and process of shared leadership. Through a qualitative study, we tried to understand the emergence and nature of shared leadership.*

[Note: Kindly consider this paper as a work-in-progress. We look forward to your feedback for developing it further. Kindly do not cite this work without consulting the authors.]

Introduction

Economic and social changes in the last decade have brought forth new forms of economic organization. One such form that has gained predominance has been community based enterprises, which are being used by women to earn a livelihood, get empowered and gain an enhanced social status in their community. Community based enterprise (CBE) comprises of a community of members who act together both as 'entrepreneur and enterprise in pursuit of the common good*' (Peredo and Chrisman 2006, p. 310). The community is 'completely endogenous to enterprise and entrepreneurial process' (Peredo and Chrisman 2006, p. 310). Community acts as an entrepreneur when its members act as owners, managers, and workers etc., collaboratively trying to identify or create a market. They work as an enterprise when they come together to produce goods and services using the social structure they are embedded in. Several of these community based enterprises though predominantly set up out of an economic necessity, have also brought forth fruitful outcomes beyond being a source of income. Such benefits include opportunities for capability building in functional areas of work, decision making and leadership and consequent improvements in communication skills and enhanced self-confidence.

The focus on macro level growth and structural inequality led to the emergence of collective rather than individual entrepreneurship. The development of such a collective enterprise is rooted in *shared responsibility*. While the main aim of a CBE is income generation for its members, particularly women, its success is dependent on collective achievement. For example, group based credit ensures equal accountability thereby minimizing risk. Consequently, CBEs shifts *focus away from individual achievement to that of group achievement*. Failure is *not individual* in this case. If one fails to deliver, it impacts the outcome of the group as a whole. The members of such communities *share a common struggle* which is the one of the main motivating factor for them to seek business development as an opportunity to overcome that struggle. In such scenario, where the focus is on collective achievement and the motivation is driven by shared understanding of a common struggle, leadership practices/role may be carried out by more than one individual. This study aims to study the emergence and nature of shared leadership in community based enterprise- Kudumbashree.

Kudumbashree is a poverty eradication and women empowerment program implemented by Kerala State government (Kerala is one of the southern states in India) in 1997. The program adopted a participatory approach to the design and development of initiatives. Today, Kudumbashree has evolved into a social movement impacting around 5 million poor women in two decades. An important arm of the movement is the micro enterprise initiative that encourages and facilitates the setting up of micro enterprises run by groups of women as a vehicle of economic empowerment and social transformation. Women are the co-owners, managers and the employees of their micro enterprise, thereby creating a venture that is collectively ideated, set up and managed. In a resource constrained context, micro enterprises have opened up opportunities for poor women with minimal education and exposure to

business to pool their skills and expertise in setting up profitable ventures and thereby participate in the mainstream market. Initially, the micro enterprises were set up as low capital, low risk ventures which held the promise of sustainable self-employment with a reasonable income for the members. Collective responsibility and consequently shared leadership is therefore crucial for survival, growth and sustainability of these enterprises.

Research Context

Women from lower socioeconomic strata in Kerala deal with lot of challenges. Firstly belonging to lower economic strata they miss out on higher education, consequently lack vocational or professional skill. Further, patriarchy entraps them within the four walls of their household, stunting their capability to venture out and find income generation opportunities. Their families therefore are dependent on the sole male breadwinner's income. The Kudumbashree mission aims to empower women economically, socially and politically. Family is considered as the basic unit and women the *light* and *prosperity* of their family. Organizing them, providing them with entrepreneurial opportunities and building a community of women was foreseen as a way of empowering them.

Community based organization (CBO) was seen as a medium to organize the poor women and provide them a platform. As a CBO, Kudumbashree has a three tier structure with the neighborhood group (NHG) at the grassroots level, Area development Society at the middle level and Community development society at the local government level. In each NHG there are 15-40 families from whom five woman volunteers are elected as representatives. This is often the first opportunity to be in a leadership role. At present each NHG has at least one micro-enterprise which is set up by a group of at least five women. The women get guidance from Kudumbashree consultants who help them in ideating and setting up an enterprise. Initial training in product development, accounting etc. are provided.

Through active participation in Kudumbashree, women have learned to set up successful micro-enterprises and in doing so they are now able to provide their families with stable source of income. This has not only improved the economic status of the families but empowered women in every aspect. It can be argued that the besides alleviating absolute poverty the other major success of the movement has been changes in societal norms. Women have managed to enter into mainstream economic activity and create their own space in the market. With a community network which is now spread across the entire state, women have been able to make their presence felt in economic and social spheres of activity.

Background Literature

Pearce (2004), defined shared leadership as a *process* of simultaneous, ongoing and mutual influence within a team which results in *serial emergence* of formal as well as informal leaders. Collective influence is the central tenet of shared leadership. He

explains that the main objective of mutual influence is to maximize the potential of the team and that shared leadership takes place when all the members are fully engaged in leadership of team. Moreover, when each member of the team is fully engaged in this influence process he or she is participating in leadership. Thus, the leadership responsibility here is to guide and influence others (and also get influenced by others as well) thereby engage in leadership process. The conditions which advance the process of shared leadership include intra group trust, confidence in each other's skills and commitment to the group goals. (Bligh, Pearce and Kohles, 2006).

Three factors make an important case for the application of shared leadership in CBE- shared goal and vision of a CBE, its dependence on community participation and the role of social capital. Predictors of shared leadership in extant literature have found to be related to these factors. Team Trust is argued as one of the antecedent for shared leadership (Bligh, Pearce & Kohles 2006).Carson, Tesluk and Marrone (2007) found in their study that shared purpose and social support were antecedent of shared leadership in consulting teams. Small and Rentsch (2011), found that collectivism and intra-group trust were significant predictors of team leadership in work groups. Zang, Walman and Wang (2012) found that shared vision of the team was a significant antecedent of informal leadership emergence in formal work teams which leads to shared leadership. Fausing, Joensson and Lewandowski (2015), found goal interdependence as one of the predictors for shared leadership in formal work teams. Pearce (2004) proposed that shared leadership is dependent on the type of task. The task should be highly interdependent which require a great deal of creativity and are complex. Thus so far, team trust/intra group trust, shared purpose, shared vision, social support, collectivism and goal interdependence are found or proposed as predictors of shared leadership. Also shared leadership is proposed to be effective only when the task involved is highly interdependent require a great deal of creativity and are complex (Pearce 2004). There are two key relational aspects inherent of shared leadership. First is that shared leadership emerges in settings where focus is on shared responsibility, collective achievement and teamwork. Second is characteristic of social process in which shared leadership occurs. The kind of social interactions where ideally shared leadership will occur consists of mutual learning and shared understanding.

Kudumbashree makes a fertile context to study the emergence and nature of shared leadership. Structurally, micro-enterprise are set up to share accountability of the organizations. It was designed in a manner that each member of the group would develop entrepreneurial skills. Given the context, it would seem that shared leadership would be the process that would eventually emerge in the group. However, it is not always necessary. In some MEs informally a leader might emerge and in some shared leadership might emerge. This makes an excellent case to understand the factors which might lead to shared leadership in a group. Moreover, studying these groups may also help us understand the nature of shared leadership.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to observe the interactions of group members sharing responsibilities of the micro enterprise, identify and describe the emergence as well as the nature of shared leadership. Five micro-enterprises were selected for the study. All data was collected via data semi structured interviews and participant observation. 15 in-depth interviews (ranging from 30 to 120 minutes) were conducted. Through these conversations we tried to understand the emergence and nature of shared leadership.

Data collection

Our data collection was conducted in two stages. Stage one began with the investigators calling up MEs and introducing them to the study and gradually attaining a level of comfort that would enable participants open up freely. This was followed by a focus group discussion and in-depth interviews of the women that spanned over a month. Stage two consisted of participant observation. In this stage the investigator was a silent observer of the organization.

Stage One- At first, the MEs were called through phone. It was very important to establish a comfortable environment before reaching their organizations. Due to cultural factors and sometimes the rural settings, participants might be hesitant to open up. Also, it was important to understand their working environment so as to place the investigators at the right time for interviews. This was followed by in-depth interviews of 15 women from 5 MEs. Semi-structured, open ended questions were used. Each interview lasted between 30 to 120 minutes. All conversations were in the local language (Malayalam) and the recordings were transcribed and translated into English by a professional translator.

Stage two- After collecting the transcript we observed the members of the organization in their settings. Three out of five organization agreed for participant observation. The investigators were silent observers who spent a whole day observing the daily activity of the organization. This was done to note the interactions among the team members.

Organization and Participant Profile

To protect the privacy of the participants, the name of the MEs and participants have been coded. Table 1, shows the profile of the organizations and table 2 shows profile of the core members of the organization. Core members are the one who have joined together to start an enterprise. There can be more employees in a MEs other than the core members.

Table 1: Company Profile

Micro- Enterprise Coded Name	Profile	Number of core Members	Number of employees other than core members
A	Printing and Binding Unit	5	1
B	Ayurveda product manufacturing Unit	5	1
C	Gymnasium	3	0
D	Restaurant	5	20
E	Jewellery manufacturing Unit	5	0

Table 2: Participant Profile

Organization's Coded name	Core member's coded name	Age
A	A1	41
	A2	39
	A3	42
	A4	39
	A5	48
B	B1	46
	B2	43
	B3	55
	B4	50
	B5	56
C	C1	44
	C2	51

	C3	51
D	D1	43
	D2	38
	D3	46
	D4	41
	D5	45
E	E1	48
	E2	39
	E3	46
	E4	48
	E5	48

Data Analysis

Thematic coding of interview transcripts was done (Miles & Huberman, 1984) . Open codes were iteratively collapsed into thematic categories. At the end of the process two distinct themes emerged. Table 3 shows the data structure.

Table 3: Data Structure

First level Coding:	Second Level coding	Emergent Themes
Collective processes - structural Collective processes - Cognitive Individual processes Structural Individual processes Cognitive	Decision making process Alignment Beliefs Commitment beliefs Direction beliefs	Shared Vision

Management styles Leadership behaviors	Leadership beliefs	Feminine Leadership

Findings

Shared Vision

Women join Kudumbashree with a purpose of finding a livelihood. There are several opportunities that Kudumbashree provides for employment and livelihood. Among them is the micro-enterprise initiative. These women have come together because of common needs. Two main reasons emerged, one was the need to earn livelihood, and the other was the desire to start a business of their own because of their keen interest in the said field.

C1- "I always wanted to go to gym when I was younger. I wanted to be fit. But I didn't know women could go to gym. I so wished to go back then. When I saw this opportunity then I thought there would be so many women like me."

D3- "Everybody here has the same reason. We needed some source of income. We have never gone for any kind of work. This was the first one…"

Though they come together because of a common need, it is not necessary that they may collectively envision the future for the ME. It was observed that in the MEs where the vision of the company is collectively created by everyone in the group, leadership functions are shared more.

It was found that when the vision of the organization is not developed collectively, it is led by one person's vision and that person often leads the group. For example, in Micro-enterprise B, B1 leads the group. B1 has a vision about the organization which did not resonate with everyone in the organization as strongly as it did for her. B1 has a prior experience in producing herbal products. She has been involved with it since her childhood. She learned this skill from her father, who used to own a business of selling these products on a commercial scale. Due to unfortunate circumstances, her family lost the business. After her marriage, when she was associated with Kudumbashree, she saw an opportunity to start the same business which her family lost when she was a young adult. Such an attachment is missing in other members. The other members joined B1 as they saw this as a good opportunity for earning livelihood. The future what B1 envisions for the ME is surely shared with the others through her but others do not feel so strongly as B1 does. B1 naturally is proactive in working towards the future she has imagined for the ME.

B1- "Actually this organization is yet to reach its potential. We started with herbal product. But we are surviving because of Amritam project (government project). We cannot rely on that solely…but it is not enough. Not enough for here. I have many dreams . We bought this up like a baby. Sometimes I don't sleep at night thinking how can I save up and bring in by product and diversify …..We want to take this forwards, scale up so that the next generation can take it forward." (B1's vision)

Interviewer- "Does everyone has same kind of commitment."

B1- "No. No one goes out like me. Even though my daughter was sick I went to ADS office. I manage everything make food at home make food. I have gone out after I completed my work at home."

Interviewer - "Do they follow what you say."

B1- "It should not be like that. We should not say it. It should come from within. They work I am not saying they do not. But I cannot manage everything. I went to ADS office to just ask if I can get one more person who can run around like me not as much as me but can run around….they do not feel it is their own. If I am doing it they think let me do it."

As the vision was not created mutually, the sharing of responsibilities is affected. It leads to other members seeking out the leader for advice, support and instructions. An informal leader emerges in the group. The vision is shared by that person to the group and in turn they look up to that person

Interviewer - ". Who's ideas are you most confident about."

B2- "Chechi (sister)…..I always listen to what B1 chechi has to say. I believe in her."

On the other hand when the future of the organization is envisioned by everyone in the organization, shared leadership emerges in the group. For example in A, the vision emerged due to the common struggle they have faced during the initial stages of setting up the enterprise. They faced a common struggle when they approached banks and clients. As women, they were not seen as suitable candidate for business. This formed the basis of a collective vision they have created for the future, i.e. to build a successful enterprise which is legitimate in the eyes of others. They want be seen as serious mainstream business whom the clients and banks can depend on.

A2- "…but at first it was nothing like this. I have experienced myself. Whenever I went to an office, they had doubts and they questioned our abilities. You are all women, will you be able to finish the work, let us see your past work, show us our products and then we will decide. We want to show women can run a successful business. Business equally big and dependable as that of men"

A1- "…..Earlier, ,some people gave us orders like one sir, in order to help us out because we are two Muslim women who need help. ……..At first, some were hesitant to give us work. When they come to know that we are from Kudumbashree. They skeptical that if they gave orders to us women will we be able to do the work. I have heard comments…… I decided I will prove myself to these people. Subhash sir was DMC at that time. We went to him and said and that we have start our business and have to prove ourselves to others who don't think we can do it."

Interviewer - "So that motivated all of you."

A1- "Yes. At my house they ask me why do you toil so much. You know tailoring you can easily start something of your own withing the house. But I wanted something more. What today we have, the name and the contacts, I can never have that with tailoring. Moreover, people never expected we could run a whole enterprise. Tailoring is something that is expected from us i.e. to remain inside the house and work."

A1- "I want that when others hear organization's name A, trust should be the word that should come to their mind."

It was found in this study that when the future was collectively envisioned by the members it became an important aspect for emergence of shared leadership. However, when the vision is created by one member and even though shared in the team, the group is led by that member. A clear vision, towards which the members will be working, is required run to a sustainable organization. The vision of what the organization should become in future will motivate the group members to share responsibilities. As the group members require to be the owners, managers and employees, every aspect of the each of these roles has to be shared and shared vision makes an important aspect of shared leadership emergence.

Feminine Leadership

The study investigated the perception of group members regarding management style when it comes to decision making. For example in organization C, leadership belief is that, control has to be with few people in the group who have experience and others should follow the direction. The organization C had a clear perspective on how important decisions had to be taken.

E1 - "Every organization has a management side to it. … They do not have an experience of marketing or how to sell products, so we sit together and discuss and later give them the directions for …"

Interviewer - How are the decisions of budget and bonuses done?

E1- "The mainstream ones take.:

Interviewer - What do you mean by that ?

E1- "We both have been in the mainstream and we decide the budget, pricing bonus etc. We then discuss with them the cost is this much if we sell at this much, this much would be the profit. We decide and discuss with them."

Contrary to this, one of the characteristic of shared leadership is about creating an environment where mutual and collective learning can take place(Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003).As opposed to masculine form of leadership which depends on an individual's ability to lean and question assumptions, shared leadership is more of a feminine approach where collective learning can take place It was observed in our study that when the perception of how management should be carried on organization was communal, the members believed that responsibilities of the group should be undertaken by all the members.

Interviewer - Does anyone take lead here in directing work.

A3- "No no"

A1- "No one here waits for someone else to direct. Even that is a quality needed. No one here has to initiate anything. Everyone knows and is proactive."

Interviewer - What factors are required for running an enterprise according to you?

A 1 – "Unity, Collectivism"

A3 – "Collective decision making, mutual trust"

Though the organization B was being led by one individual, B1 had the perception that shared leadership is the way for MEs and for that to happen management style has to be corroborative Organization B took guidance from an external person. They relied on him for crucial purposes like accounting. Though B1 was internally leading the group, she realized that she and other members should have overseen the accounts work and should not have relied on an external person for leading the accounts department. This has affected their confidence for managing accounts and finances. Though B1 is confident in her skills to manage risks and stakeholders, she is doubtful about how she would manage accounts and finance.

B3 - "That is one problem here. There was Suresh (name changed), *who used to guide us. And till then, it was fine. Everything was in order till that time. Everybody listened. "*

B1 - "It is our fault we relied on him entirely. We did not take the initiative to learn how to manage accounts. There was one women employed by suresh to look after accounts. He did not let us do it saying we might do it wrong.We learned a lesson from this. Everyone should learn everything. When accounts were being prepared everyone should have taken the initiative to learn. But we did not."

B1 - "You said right if there are problems among us. For instance, you are a member of this unit. Everyone has different skills and abilities. If you are educated enough to do ledgers you should check that the ledgers done by the hired person is correct or not. We need to share our abilities. You are working here and earning from this establishment."

It is seen here that when an environment of mutual and collective learning not present, one individual takes the lead. It may be because the experience learned while enacting leadership responsibilities is very crucial. When only few learn in this process, the group then looks up to them as they already has dealt with a critical situation. On the contrary, when there is an environment where everyone can learn from leadership responsibilities, they become adept to handle critical situations in future because of their learning experience. It can be said that shared leadership requires a feminine approach to leadership which focuses on everyone's growth.

Discussion and Conclusion

We found that shared vision is an important facilitator for emergence of shared leadership. Vision is defined as a "mental state of a future process, a group, or an organization' (Nanus,1992, p.25) whereas shared vision is defined as a " common mental model of the future state of the team or its tasks that provides the basis for action within the team" (Pearce and Ensley, 2004,p 260). The former definition focus on an individual single who creates a vision and communicates it to the team on the other hand, latter definition is about team's shared cognitive process of mutually developing and creating a vision collectively (Cox, Pearce and Perry, 2003). Vision content is found to be related to leadership styles and contextual variables of the organization (Berson, Shamir, Avolio and Popper, 2001) . We found in this study that when the vision was collectively created, in this case due to a common struggle, it played a key role in emergence of shared leadership. Each member has the vision of proving that women can own a legitimate successful business. A business which would becomes synonym of trust. Studies have shown that vision forms the basis of group member's motivation and group's planning and goal setting (e.g. Pearce and Ensley, 2004). Thus, this collective vision may become the basis of motivation of everyone on the group to participate in leadership.

The study also found that hared leadership requires a feminine approach to leadership. The construction of leadership has been in a masculine frame of reference historically. (Billing and Alvesson 2000). For example, in the extant literature, traits associated with traditional, heroic leadership like individualism, control, assertiveness and skills of advocacy and domination are basically masculine (e.g. Acker, 1990; Collinson & Hearn 1996). The traits themselves are understood as masculine and both men and women can display them. Femininity is conceptualized in 'complementary and corresponding terms to masculinity.' (Billing and Alvesson 2000, p. 147). Feminine values are characterized by traits like cooperation, acceptance, interdependence, merging, receptivity, awareness of patterns, wholes and contexts etc. (Marshall 1993). Feminine approach to management might

During recent times, work context has increasingly become non-hierarchical, group-oriented, flexible and participatory. Micro-enterprise run by Kudumbashree is one such context. This has called for viewing leadership in an alternate collective perspective. Fletcher (2004) calls this alternate perspective as post heroic forms of leadership. He explains that post heroic leadership has three characteristic in common which distinguishes them from individualistic models. Firstly leadership is conceptualized as set shared of practices that can be enacted by all the members in the group. Secondly leadership is viewed as a social process and is seen as dynamic,

muti-directional and collective activity. The nature of leadership is more *egalitarian, collaborative and fluid.* And thirdly, leadership of this kind fosters *collective learning* and growth for the organization and its members. Here, leadership is about creating a collective learning environment.

Shared leadership is a post-heroic form of leadership associated with a more collaborative form of leadership as it calls for influencing and also being influenced by others. In other words, leading and following become 'two sides of the same set of relational skills that everyone in an organization needs in order to work in a context of interdependence' (Fletcher 2004 p. 648). Fletcher (1994) argues that the traits associated with new, post-heroic leadership like are feminine in nature. Fletcher (2004) calls for shift in belief system to one in which feminine images and wisdom about how to "grow people" dominate. We have observed in our study as well that when the perception of members was communal they believed that collective processes are required. A feminine management approach is required whereby conditions are created where mutual influence process can take place, where people can learn, grow, achieve, and produce together. Feminine approach might aid in bringing in a relational stance.

Kudumbashree MEs are run by women from lower socioeconomic strata of the society. Coming from grassroots such organizations do not have a traditional hierarchy or formal template structure. Though they come under the purview of informal economy, they make an immense contribution in promoting entrepreneurial abilities of woman. Most of such organization consists of five to six women core members running an enterprise. There are no formal roles which decide who will lead the group. As, it is a leaderless group, the kind of leadership they develop is very critical for sustainability of the organization. Future studies can try to investigate how different type of leadership approaches affects the performance and sustainability of the organization.

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