Coming to Make Decisions Together: Theoretical Themes, Proximal Antecedents, and Outcomes of Shared Leadership

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Abstract

While many leadership scholars emphasize the importance and value of shared leadership, a dearth of research exists as to what precisely constitutes shared leadership (e.g., content) within a team context and as to why certain teams exhibit more effective shared leadership than others. Through in-depth interviews with 30 management consultants and seven non-participant observations of team meetings, this study examines theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and outcomes of shared leadership. The preliminary evidence shows that shared leadership includes team members’ autonomously making a decision, taking a proactive initiative, engaging in extra-role behaviors, horizontally making joint decisions, and vertically making joint decisions. We also found various proximal antecedents, including holding a core team evaluation, showing team trust, and creating an open communication climate, for nurturing shared leadership. Finally, we discovered that shared leadership has unique short- and long-term outcomes on individuals and teams.

*Keywords:* shared leadership, group decision making, qualitative research, consulting teams
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An old proverb says, “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” Thus, if a cook is regarded as a decision maker, multiple cooks or decision makers in a team might result in less-than-ideal team outcomes. If so, can this proverb still be applied to today’s teams and organizations? Recent management trends and research show that this might not be necessarily true in today’s increasingly competitive business environment. According to Ancona and Bresman (2007), X-teams, in which participative decision-making procedures exist and leadership roles are distributed, achieve higher levels of performance and success. Therefore, many organizations have paid increasing attention to these types of teams. Previous research has shown group decision making is superior to individual decision making (e.g., Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Sego, Hedlund, Major, & Phillips, 1995; Vroom & Jago, 1988) because the latter contains some inherent limitations, such as subjectivity and partiality. Group decision making, however, often brings about quality and creative team outcomes (e.g., De Dreu & West, 2001; Stasser & Birchmeier, 2003).

Although the individual approach to examining leadership has cast light on understanding leadership dynamics within a team, it also contains some inherent limitations because this approach only considers the relationship between single leaders and their followers (Yukl, 2010). Over the last decade, scholars have begun to take collectivistic approaches to studying leadership (Bolden, 2011; Carter, DeChurch, Braun, & Contractor, 2015), which generated three meta-analyses studies (D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). However, shared leadership is still a nascent field of organizational
behavior and management (Pearce, Hoch, Jeppesen, & Wegge, 2010), and the structure and content of shared leadership are not yet fully understood (Pearce, Conger, & Locke, 2008).

Yukl (2010) stressed that proper content of a particular leadership style should be determined if the leadership style denotes a specialized role or if there is a process of influence. To meet this requirement and to present a concrete behavioral form and clarification of shared leadership, more research is necessary to develop a robust theoretical foregrounding on shared leadership. Pearce and Sims (2000) also emphasized the concrete multidimensional nature of the construct of shared leadership. To conclude, there are considerable theoretical necessities and important practical implications to explore further the content and structure of shared leadership (D’Innocenzo et al., 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Pearce et al., 2008).

Yet not much is known to answer the question of which type of leadership can be shared (Yammarino, Salas, Serbian, Sheriffs, & Shuffler, 2012) or what is to be shared among team members. Most studies examining shared leadership used traditional hierarchical or vertical approaches to leadership. Some studies have used the existing scales of transformational, transactional, directive, and empowering leadership behaviors (Ensley, Hmielecki, & Pearce, 2006; Hoch, 2013; Pearce & Sims, 2002) to measure shared leadership. Specifically, Wang et al. (2014) introduced three types of shared leadership elements to categorize previous studies for meta-analysis: (a) shared traditional leadership, (b) shared new-genre leadership, and (c) cumulative, overall shared leadership. Shared traditional leadership refers to what extent traditional leadership behaviors (e.g., transactional leadership, participative leadership, supportive leadership) are shared in a team. In the same vein, shared new-genre leadership refers to what extent new-genre leadership behaviors (e.g., transformational leadership, visionary leadership, empowering leadership) are shared in a team. This approach to measuring shared
leadership based on the extant leadership styles might not be able to capture the complexity and breadth of the full domain of shared leadership.

Little research aspired to identify the contextual antecedents of shared leadership (e.g., Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Small & Rentsch, 2010), such as situational factors (e.g., team environment, task characteristics; Carson et al., 2007; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2013). Shared leadership is “a collective social influence process shared by team members” (Hoch, Pearce, and Welzel, 2010, p. 105) and “how members of a group evaluate the influence of the group” (Sivasubramanium, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002, p. 68). Nonetheless, it is important to go beyond this focus on situational factors and to investigate proximal determinants (i.e., individual traits, attitudes, and behaviors) of team members (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2013; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003) of shared leadership.

Meta-analysis studies indicated shared leadership has a positive relationship with team performance (D’Innocenzo et al., 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014). However, relatively little is known about what outcomes shared leadership brings out except the performance (Carson et al., 2007; Hoch, 2013). Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark, and Mumford (2009) suggested that outcomes of collective leadership include team performance capabilities, immediate outcomes, and long-term outcomes. However, prior studies did not identify that outcomes of shared leadership can be interactive among positive/negative, short-term/long-term, and individual-level/team-level, an approach critical to reaching a more complete understanding of shared leadership effectiveness (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). Hence, in this study, we also attempt to explore whether shared leadership can bring about various outcomes beyond team job performance.
Qualitative studies provide detailed and exploratory information on how individuals perceive a specific phenomenon (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop, 2014) such as shared leadership (Ramthun & Matkin, 2014). Because this study aims to explore theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and multiple outcomes of shared leadership, a construct that still lacks theoretical and conceptual clarity, it is appropriate to use a qualitative method. Leadership is highly sensitive to contextual factors (Bryman, Stephen, & à Campo, 1996; Conger, 1998). Parry, Mumford, Bower, and Watts (2014) also emphasized that qualitative research is suitable for revealing context-specific forces of leadership and can provide new insights into the dynamics of leadership.

**Literature Review and Research Questions**

**Shared Leadership**

Previous studies have commonly defined shared leadership as a process of reciprocal and collective influence, with each team member sharing the leadership function (Pearce & Sims, 2002). For example, Pearce and Conger (2003) defined it as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (p. 1). Carson et al. (2007) defined it as “an emergent team property that results from the distribution of leadership influence across multiple team members” (p. 1218). Nicolaides et al. (2014) defined it as “a set of interactive influence processes in which team leadership functions are voluntarily shared among internal team members in the pursuit of team goals” (p. 924).

Previous definitions of shared leadership are slightly different from each other; however, they share keywords such as interactive influence process, team property, and group goals. More research is encouraged to explore the content of shared leadership (Bligh, Pearce, & Kohles,
The concept of shared leadership also needs to be distinguished from other seemingly relevant team constructs. Yammarino et al. (2012) elaborated on the differences between shared leadership and other collective approaches to leadership (e.g., team leadership, network leadership, complexity leadership, collective leadership), and Carson et al. (2007) discussed the differences between shared leadership and similar constructs, such as team autonomy, team empowerment, cooperation, and team cognition. Based on the earlier research, we have determined that shared leadership is a distinct form of leadership that possesses a unique theoretical theme and content (Carson et al., 2007).

**Antecedents of Shared Leadership**

As noted above, previous research has demonstrated particular situational predictors, such as internal team environment (e.g., shared purpose, social support, and voice) and external coaching (Carson et al., 2007), team size and task complexity (Conger & Pearce, 2003), support factors, vertical leadership, team characteristics and composition (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2013), and team collectivism and intragroup trust (Small & Rentsch, 2010). However, these studies do not arrive at a crystal-clear consensus about what shapes shared leadership (e.g., Bergman, Rentsch, Small, Davenport, & Bergman, 2012). Yammarino et al. (2012) also commented that the missing point for shared leadership is “how shared leadership is developed and for what boundary conditions is it considered effective” (p. 391).

In addition, prior studies did not attempt to distinguish the proximal and distal antecedents to shared leadership. We expect that distal antecedents (i.e., situational factors such as team context and task characteristics) partially lead to proximal antecedents (i.e., team members’ traits, attitudes, and behaviors), which in turn lead to shared leadership in teams. Most prior studies mainly focused on distal antecedents of shared leadership. Although Small and
Rentsch (2010) examined team collectivism and intragroup trust as antecedents of shared leadership, to our knowledge, no research has directly investigated its proximal antecedents, which exert a direct influence on shared leadership. Accordingly, in this paper, we only focus on proximal antecedents to explore which factors directly influence the development of shared leadership in teams.

According to Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, and Gilson (2008), the team environment affects team members, who, in turn, influence team processes such as interpersonal process and transition process. Since shared leadership is a team process (Ensley et al., 2006; Small & Rentsch, 2010) involving individuals, it is important to investigate what individual traits, beliefs, and attitudes of team members influence shared leadership. Carson et al. (2007) proposed reciprocal interaction, influential exchanges between team members, and team empowerment as potential antecedents of shared leadership. Burke, Fiore, and Salas (2003) also posited that four types of shared cognition of a team (e.g., shared mental model, shared attitudes, shared metacognition, and shared situation assessment) together generate shared leadership in teams.

**Outcomes of Shared Leadership**

Previous studies have illustrated positive relationships between shared leadership and team performance (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Ensley et al., 2006; Hoch et al., 2010; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006; Pearce & Sims 2002; Sivasubramanium et al., 2002; Small & Rentsch, 2010). Researchers have suggested that teams with shared leadership present higher performance versus teams with vertical leadership (e.g., Ensley et al., 2006; Pearce & Sims, 2002). Meanwhile, studies have also identified team performance and effectiveness (Carson et al., 2007; Ensley et al., 2006; Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006), team-member skills (Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006), and team member satisfaction
(Avolio, Jung, Murry, & Sivasubramania, 1996; Bergman et al., 2012; Mehra et al., 2006) as outcomes of shared leadership. However, these prior studies did not differentiate outcomes of shared leadership between short-term and long-term or across individual and group levels.

Some (e.g., Conger, 2003) noted that shared leadership does not always cause positive performance. For example, Boies, Lvina, and Martens (2010) found that shared transformational leadership has a positive effect on team potency and trust but not on team performance. Pearce (2008) and more recently Fausing, Jeppesen, Jønsson, Lewandowski, and Bligh (2013) did not find a direct link between shared leadership and team performance. This suggests that more studies are needed to understand outcome complexity of shared leadership, including its types, directionality, and time dimensionality.

To summarize, in this study we aim to explore theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and multiple outcomes of shared leadership. To put it concretely, first, we attribute a discernible characteristic to shared leadership through exploring the specific behavioral forms and constructs of shared leadership (D’Innocenzo et al., 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Pearce et al., 2008). We also investigate the proximal antecedents of shared leadership to contribute to a better understanding of the nomological network of shared leadership (Cullen & Yammarino, 2014; Yammarino et al., 2012). We also intend to investigate more specific outcomes of shared leadership to disclose the multi-facet, cross-level, and longitudinal perspective of shared leadership outcomes (Carter & DeChurch, 2012; Hmiesleski, Cole, & Baron, 2012).

**Methods**

We chose a qualitative methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which is suitable to revealing context-specific forces of leadership and can provide new insights into the dynamics of leadership (Bryman et al., 1996; Conger, 1998; Parry et al., 2014). The qualitative
method enables researchers to attain more detailed and exploratory information on how individuals perceive specific situations (Treviño et al., 2014). It also permits exploration of open-ended research questions for nascent and emerging constructs such as shared leadership (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

**Research Context**

Effectiveness of shared leadership might depend on the nature of the work and the features of the teams (Wang et al., 2014). Nicolaides et al. (2014) tested the influence of team features, such as team tenure, size, and type, on the relationship between shared leadership and team outcomes. They found that, out of three team features, only team tenure interacts with shared leadership in predicting team performance. Further, Pearce and Manz (2005) revealed that shared leadership can function well when team members have relatively equal status and work on complicated tasks and when team tasks require certain levels of creativity and interdependency. Yet more work is needed to know what facilitates the emergence of shared leadership.

The consulting project team is a suitable context to investigate shared leadership for the following reasons. First, a consulting project team is one kind of self-managing team, as all consultants must work within the project team as specialists and have their own responsibility for determining personal goals, which then are aligned with the teams’ goals. According to Carson et al. (2007), self-managing teams contribute to shared leadership by increasing group collaboration and positive group outcomes, such as trust and autonomy, within a team. Individual consultants in self-managing teams are more likely to demonstrate shared leadership, which can be derived from autonomy (Carson et al., 2007; Janz, Colquitt, & Noe, 1997).
A consulting context is characterized by task interdependence and complexity (Hoch et al., 2010). Consultants’ tasks are interdependent among team members (Malhotra & Morris, 2009) because they collaborate with others to produce an integrated team output, even though individual consultants are in charge of specific areas. In addition, today’s consulting projects are increasingly complex because they are driven by the needs of the clients, who demand more contextualized solutions in more demanding environments (Kim & Lee, 2012). Prior research suggested that shared leadership enhances performance in task-interdependent contexts (Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014) and when conducting more complex work (Wang et al., 2014). We expect that such team characteristics of consulting project teams play a role as a distal antecedent of shared leadership.

For these reasons, many studies on shared leadership were conducted among knowledge workers (e.g., Ensley et al., 2006; Erkutlu, 2012; Pearce & Ensley, 2004; Pearce & Sims, 2002), including consulting teams (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Hoch et al., 2010). Team-based knowledge workers, such as management consultants, engage in knowledge-sharing activities in teams (Reinhardt, Schmidt, Sloep, & Drachsler, 2011). Thus, we believe that a consulting project team, as a form of a self-managing team, is a specialized and suitable context for investigating shared leadership (Carson et al., 2007; Hoch et al., 2010; Pearce, 2004). We have employed a qualitative approach in conducting one-on-one in-depth interviews with consultants to explore shared leadership.

Furthermore, according to Rousseau and Fried (2001), contextualization of organizational research is becoming more important because researchers must consider the diversity of work settings in different cultural contexts. As noted above, most prior studies on shared leadership were conducted in Western cultures (Ishikawa, 2012), in which individualistic orientation might
cause some resistance to shared leadership (Pearce, 2008). Accordingly, this calls for more research in cultural contexts different from Western cultures to understand better the importance of culture in shaping and developing shared leadership.

Hoch et al. (2010) suggested that there is a theoretical need to examine shared leadership in cultural contexts different from Western cultures (see also Ishikawa, 2012; Liu, Hu, Li, Wang, & Lin, 2014). For this reason, we conducted this study focusing on an East Asian country, South Korea, which represents a culture with collectivistic and high power-distance orientations (Hofstede, 1991). Because collectivist cultures place group goals and needs above those of individuals (Earley, 1994), people of those cultures are more likely to feel shared responsibility on team tasks and missions and thus are more likely to accept shared leadership than those in individualist cultures (Wagner, 1995). For example, Carson (2005) suggested shared leadership is more likely to flourish in collectivist cultures. Indeed, Hiller et al. (2006) found that shared leadership is positively related to the mean level of team members’ collectivism. Hence, studying shared leadership in an eastern culture such as South Korea is not only complementary to those studies conducted in Western contexts, but is also helpful in exploring and extending the extant theory and construct of shared leadership.

**Sampling and Recruitment**

Thirty Korean employees, who were currently working or had worked as consultants for four prestigious management-consulting firms in South Korea, participated in interviews. We recruited the subjects by contacting the human resources (HR) team managers of five consulting firms located in Seoul. Three consulting firms agreed to participate in this project. Following the theoretical sampling methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), we determined two dimensions of importance in influencing the informants’ ability to answer our questions. The consultants must
(a) have been engaged in real project teams in management consulting firms and (b) have at least two years of consulting experience. Therefore, participants were purposefully selected to ensure the inclusion of employees with direct or indirect experience working on a team with shared leadership. We purposely included only South Korean employees to control for the confounding effect of national culture on shared leadership. To recruit participants with experience related to shared leadership, we used a snowball-sampling strategy, in which informants recommended others who were information-rich (Patton, 2002). The final sample consisted of 30 management consultants who were working or had worked in one of four management consulting firms in Seoul. Twenty-four of 30 participants were male. Twenty-one (70%) participants were aged 30–39. Fourteen participants had experience as a project leader. All four consulting firms were Korean branches of global consulting firms whose headquarters were located in the United States. Twenty-two participants held master’s degrees or above in the related field. The participants averaged 6.2 years as consultants. The more detailed sample characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Data Collection

All data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Twenty-six interviews were conducted face-to-face, and four were conducted via phone. Two researchers conducted the interviews. All interviews were conducted in Korean and tape-recorded after obtaining consent from each informant. The interviews were guided by several open-ended questions. We provided a brief description of the concept of shared leadership to help the participants understand this concept. Our interview protocol consisted of
open-ended questions such as, “Please provide any specific examples of shared leadership phenomena you experienced or observed”; “What exactly did the team do when it had shared leadership?”; “How are shared leadership behaviors manifested in a project team?”; “How is shared leadership developed or promoted within a team?”; and “What can shared leadership phenomena bring to the entire team or team members?” The researchers spontaneously added probes following the informants’ answers as needed to elicit discourse on behaviors and situational conditions to the extent that these additional questions did not distort respondents’ answers. These probes helped the researchers to elaborate, explore, and verify the responses from the informants (Sandberg, 2000). We also collected observational data on site. One author participated in team meetings seven times and wrote notes about behaviors, interactions, and remarks of team members involved in shared leadership. In the observations, we focused on the process of how decisions were made during team meetings, such as whether decisions were made horizontally through all members’ participation or vertically through hierarchical order. By conducting observations, we support and fortify our interview findings for identifying theoretical themes of shared leadership. Triangulating the data made us become more confident in the accuracy of our judgments (Jick, 1979).

Results

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded in English. Each transcript has an average length of five single-spaced pages, totaling 146 pages for all 30 interviews. Observational data were used to consolidate these emerging concepts of theoretical themes of shared leadership obtained by interviews (see Table 2).
We conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We used a thematic analysis because the purpose of this study is to develop a nomological network of shared leadership based on in-depth interviews by finding themes within interview transcripts rather than to interpret patterns across qualitative data such as discourse analysis and grounded theory. We initially sorted interview transcripts into a rough umbrella of theoretical themes and the direct proximal precursors and outcomes of shared leadership in order to search for themes (Boyatzis, 1998).

We followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases for thematic analysis; we especially put much effort in the initial coding process before defining our themes. Multiple iteration processes between interview transcripts and emerging concepts were conducted for the initial coding process until theoretical saturation was reached (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). The initial coding was conducted after the first few interviews were completed. Based on the transcripts of these first few interviews, we created a draft version of a coding dictionary. We developed several exploring concepts related to shared leadership and included those concepts in the interview protocol for the next interviews to provide better examination. This process was employed to narrow down emergent concepts from an early understanding of the data and to ensure further theoretical saturation (Alvesson, 2003; Corley & Gioia, 2004). After each interview, we repeated this iterative coding process, including initial coding and comparison between new codes and existing codes; the coding dictionary evolved throughout this iterative process. After coding 27 interviews, first independently and then jointly, we could not find any new codes to add to the dictionary, demonstrating that theoretical saturation is achieved when “subsequent data incidents that are examined provide no new information” (Locke, 2001, p. 53). This is also consistent with other leadership studies that used a qualitative method to find
meaningful concepts by interviewing around 30 participants (Brown & Gioia, 2002; Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010; Galanes, 2003; Murphy & Ensher, 2008).

Therefore, we are confident that our sample is reasonably large enough to achieve the theoretical saturation of examining the construct of shared leadership. Explored codes are provided in Figure 1.

Moreover, we followed a two-step coding system to ensure inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2013). In the first step, two coders independently read and coded all the transcripts. The coders read designated transcripts multiple times to discover patterns of description. Then codes were created and grouped around common conceptual meanings using first-order codes. In the second step, the two coders had a joint session to compare each code and group and agreed on which codes would be used for the final coding dictionary. At this session, we grouped or ungrouped concepts to reach a close inter-rater agreement of codes, themes, and decisions (Morse, 2004). In addition, we maintained contact with some respondents after the interview process was completed. We presented the preliminary findings to these respondents to seek their feedback on our earlier interpretation of the interview data (Sandberg, 2000).

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Based on the completed coding dictionary, we moved from the initial coding phase to searching, reviewing, defining, and naming theme phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to proceed, we wrote memos to move the dictionary codes to conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014) and drew a model showing the theoretical themes, the proximal precursors, and the outcomes of shared leadership. Based on the coding dictionary and memos, we conducted a theoretical integration session to move first-order codes directly created from the raw data into a
more abstract level of second-order themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). We also conducted reflexive interpretations of first-order codes to consolidate them into more theoretical themes based on the authors’ prolonged engagement with the subjects and deep understanding of the leadership field (Alvesson, 2003). Then, we grouped, ungrouped, and refined second-order themes in order to consolidate final categories based on distinctions between them (Locke, 2001). By doing this, we identified and revealed different theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and outcomes of shared leadership.

We used a data structure diagram (see Figure 1) to visually demonstrate the structure and progression of this analysis. Tables 2 and 3 provide representative quotes for each of the second-order concepts that emerged from the analysis. The quotes provide clear examples of direct ties between the answers from our informants and the concepts that emerged from the analysis. Additional quotes are provided in this section.

Through analyzing participants’ responses, we investigated three aspects that are relevant to shared leadership: (a) what behaviors are demonstrated when a team has shared leadership (i.e., content), (b) what factors facilitate shared leadership (i.e., antecedents), and (c) what kind of outcomes are caused by shared leadership. The first aspect is about the theoretical themes of shared leadership. We found that the theoretical themes of shared leadership meaningfully fit into five general conceptual themes: (a) autonomously make a decision, (b) take a proactive initiative, (c) engage in extra-role behaviors, (d) horizontally make a joint decision, and (e) collectively make a joint decision. The second aspect is about the direct proximal precursors to shared leadership, which include (a) holding core team evaluation, (b) showing team trust, and (c) creating an open communication climate. The third aspect is regarding shared leadership
outcomes: (a) learning and growth, (b) innovative outcomes, (c) performance, (d) engagement, (e) sense of accomplishment, and (f) potential inefficiency, which will be elaborated on below.

Theoretical Themes of Shared Leadership

Table 2 displays sample quotes from participants to depict each theoretical theme.

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**Autonomously make a decision.** Foremost, the first theoretical theme of shared leadership involves team members’ autonomy in decision-making. When a team is allowed leeway to freely make the decisions leading to this action, participants identify it as a state of shared leadership. For example, an interviewee responded, “We can make a decision by ourselves and proceed with that work in our own way” (Interview no. 21). When autonomy and authorization are extended to individuals, and not to just the team as a whole, this is a sign of shared leadership. Although Hoch and Duleborn (2013) suggested that autonomy is a necessary precondition for shared leadership to unfold, we identified that autonomy in decision-making is a feature of shared leadership behavior. Autonomy in decision making by individual team members positively affects their participation in the team as seen in the following excerpt: “Each individual had decision-making power and leadership on his or her own task. So everyone participated in the project actively” (Interview no. 26).

**Take a proactive initiative.** Team members’ taking a proactive initiative is another distinctive theme of shared leadership, as members of teams with high levels of shared leadership ardently perform tasks, even though they are not the formal leaders. As a case in point, one interviewee noted that “Each team member took the initiative in thinking out new ideas and doing work for the project team’s outcome although they were not officially nominated to a
Engage in extra-role behaviors. The third theme of shared leadership involves team members’ extra effort, which can be interpreted as extra-role behavior, or the lengths individuals are willing to strive to in order to deliver good results (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Personal extra effort from individual team members is seen in a shared leadership setting. A participant presented as an example that “I took more work not just for my performance but for the whole team and better team performance even though it was not easy” (Interview no. 12). A project leader said, “When you start thinking from the perspective of the team as a whole, and other team members instead of only focusing on your own personal specified duties, you can both complete your own work and assist others” (Interview no. 23). This response affirms that individuals can engage in extra-role behaviors to demonstrate shared leadership within the team because each member holds a positive impression of aspirations for the team as a whole.

Horizontally make a joint decision. The fourth theme of shared leadership is termed horizontally make a joint decision, which refers to team members sharing decision-making power in determining team affairs. Making collective decisions horizontally signifies democratic decision making. Examples include: “The critical agenda or issues of a project team were decided by all team members, whereas they managed their own affairs in the case of minor work issues” (Interview no. 28); “Since we did not know well about the project topic, we collected each other’s opinions to complete the task. We reached a consensus decision horizontally and collectively” (Interview no. 11). Thus, it is evident that horizontally making a joint decision is an
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attempt by team members to disperse leadership among themselves by actively participating in a team (Bergman et al., 2012).

Vertically make a joint decision. The fifth theme of shared leadership is termed vertically make a joint decision, which means that team members reach a consensus in decision making after discussions between team members and the team leader. Thus, an appointed team leader does not play the role of sole decision maker in the team. For example, one participant stated, “The project leader didn’t play a role as a decision maker but as an advisor. That is, he plays a role as a coach. So, he shared opinions at the same level with team members and made a decision together.” (Interview no. 8). The direction of influence and decision making for shared leadership diverges thoroughly from that of traditional models of leadership, for it does not unilaterally fall top-down (Pearce & Conger, 2003). In alignment with this finding, many participants emphasized the process of making collective decision as an axiomatic theoretical theme of shared leadership. In effect, team members jointly exercise the right to make decisions to exhibit shared leadership in contrast with the traditional model where one formal leader alone holds decision-making power. One participant said “We did not just follow a project leader’s demand, but we voiced out our opinion for better project output. Although those opinions were different from the original ones, we discussed everything and made a decision with all members including project leader,” (Interview no. 23).

We note that these five themes of shared leadership can be categorized into three categories, which include individual-level shared leadership behaviors, interpersonal-level shared leadership behaviors, and group-level shared leadership behaviors, as shown in Figure 2. The first category, individual-level behavior of shared leadership, refers to individual team members’ shared leadership behaviors in managing their own tasks and contributing to the effectiveness of
the whole team. This category includes (a) make a decision autonomously, (b) take a proactive initiative, and (c) engage in extra-role behaviors. Second, horizontally make a joint decision falls under the interpersonal-level shared leadership behavior category, meaning that team members aspire to develop interpersonal relationships with each other in collective decision-making. The third team-oriented category of shared leadership behaviors includes vertically make a joint decision, representing collective behavior between team members and the leader in jointly making decisions and improving team effectiveness. This categorization matrix demonstrates that shared leadership behavior can exist or manifest in forms of multiple-level behaviors (i.e., individual, interpersonal/relational, and group-level) while more clearly conceptualizing the multilevel features of the construct of shared leadership.

Proximal Antecedents of Shared Leadership

Comprehensive discussion during the interview sessions provided an opportunity for interviewees to deliberate on the many antecedents that influence the emergence of shared leadership. By posing questions on factors necessitating the introduction, development, and promotion of shared leadership within a project team, we were subtly able to direct the discussion to cover the proximal antecedents for the emergence of shared leadership. We must elaborate on which individual differences related factors, traits, and behaviors generate shared leadership in teams because shared leadership involves not a single, designated leader but all team members (Ensley et al., 2006). Thus, we only focused on the proximal personal antecedents that directly influence shared leadership. We conceptualized them as proximal antecedents
because one of our objectives is to shed light on individual traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are within the individual members and that influence shared leadership, as noted earlier.

Upon analysis of the diverse responses, we then subsequently categorized them into the following three types of proximal antecedents based on conceptual similarity: holding core team evaluation, showing team trust, and creating an open communication climate. Table 3 presents sample quotes illustrating each proximal antecedent.

Holding core team evaluation. The first proximal antecedent of shared leadership, *holding core team evaluation*, refers to the extent that team members have a sound judgment of their team, such as being confident in the team and knowing its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, holding core team evaluation consists of all team member having a positive evaluation of their team. The new proximal antecedent reflects the individual level concept of core self-evaluation (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) from which it extends; henceforth, it serves as an umbrella term that encompasses team members’ (a) team awareness, (b) team esteem, and (c) collective efficacy.

The first component of holding core team evaluation is team awareness. Because self-awareness is understood to be people’s in-depth perception of their own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and other factors relevant to their general state of being (Schein, 1978), we define team awareness as a similar collective perception by individual team members as one collective entity, meaning that team members understand the strengths and weaknesses of the team. Shared leadership provides an outlet for team members to be aware of and honestly accept both the strengths and weaknesses of themselves and their team. For example, an interviewee
responded, “We all recognized that everyone could be wrong. So, we were not afraid of recognizing mistakes, revising them, or completely changing them” (Interview no. 2). Another participant recounted, “Since I knew the field that I am good at, I could express my opinion more often about that field. Also, I recognized the field that I am not good at” (Interview no. 30). The occurrence of self-aware individuals flocking together to form an integrative team-awareness can thus influence shared leadership.

Individual self-esteem is defined as the overall value people place on themselves as people (Harter, 1990). In the same vein, team esteem refers to team members’ overall evaluation of the team’s value and worth. If team members believe that “our team is worthy,” there is a higher level of team esteem. An example is in the following testimony: “I firmly believed that all of my teammates, and myself included, possessed a certain amount of aptitude. It appeared that other consultants other than myself also believed this” (Interview no. 30). Many participants also touched upon the topic of what is identifiable as team esteem. One of them commented, “I take a pride of my team and myself. This is because the CEO of that company acknowledged what my team has done so far” (Interview no. 22).

As a proximal antecedent of shared leadership, holding core team evaluation also possesses the team behavioral characteristic of collective efficacy, which is the collective faith of a group that it can orchestrate viable actions for concrete results (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). For example, one interviewee noted: “We all strongly believed that we would make a qualified output at the end of the project, clients would be satisfied with it, and it would be embedded in client’s organization as a best practice” (Interview no. 30). Shared leadership enables teams to overcome obstacles and achieve goals because they possess collective efficacy. One participant described a personal experience resembling this phenomenon, stating, “My team was given a
difficult assignment, but we were triumphant in the end. This was because all the members already knew through prior experience that if everyone worked together, we could find the optimal solution” (Interview no. 23).

**Showing team trust.** The second proximal antecedent of shared leadership is showing team trust, which means that team members show trust in each other. Thus, showing team trust refers to every team member’s showing strong mutual trust in other team members. A considerable number of participants spoke of the emergence of team trust in a manner similar to the following: “We were able to trust each other because we understood each other’s strengths and weaknesses” (Interview no. 17); “I think mutual trust among project team members is very important. At the time, we had very strong trust in each other’s abilities and expertise” (Interview no. 23). Like this, many opined that strong and trusting relationships come from acceptance and respect between team members and can create a certain level of shared leadership.

**Creating open communication climate.** We found that the third proximal antecedent of shared leadership is creating open communication climate, which refers to encouraging open expression of ideas and opinions among team members. A large percentage of interviewees mentioned an open communication climate when discussing the topic of preconditions for shared leadership. We created a wide definition of creating an open communication climate to accommodate the effective communication of various teams, including (a) sharing ideas and information, (b) active listening, and (c) constructive criticism. The respective example citations for these three subthemes are: (a) “We vigorously shared ideas with team members. I think that was the means to seeking mutual advice” (Interview no. 10); (b) “We expressed our opinion more actively and listened actively to any opinion” (Interview no. 8); (c) “I think we should get
used to debating more. So, if others challenge my opinion, I shouldn’t think that it is a personal attack, but merely a necessary part of the process for achieving better team outcomes” (Interview no. 19).

In fact, the concept of creating an open communication climate is in line with Hoch et al. (2010), who stated that shared leadership is followed by ameliorated communication and sharing information. Pearce and Ensley (2004) also reported that communication is a behavioral context that nurtures shared leadership when team members share development, creation, communication, and reinforcement of a common vision. Here, open and transparent communication is a vital proximal precursor of shared leadership.

**Outcomes of Shared Leadership**

In this phase of the study, through coding the interviews, we found some novel and occasionally counterintuitive results regarding the outcome of shared leadership. Friedrich et al. (2009) pointed out that individuals and teams gain not only immediate performance and interpersonal outcomes but also long-term benefits such as innovation and growth when the leadership role is shared in teams. Hmiesleski et al. (2012) also proposed that future studies should consider the short-term versus long-term consequences of shared leadership. In addition, Carter and DeChurch (2012) suggested that future research on leadership should distinguish group-level or individual-level outcomes.

We asked interviewees to clarify (a) whether the outcomes they mentioned were short-term or long-term effects, (b) whether the outcomes mainly benefit individual members or the entire team, and (c) what is the strength of the effect (i.e., high, medium, low) for each outcome across different levels (individual vs. team) and time periods (short-term or long-term). Intriguingly, we categorized each of the outcomes presented by participants into short-term vs.
long-term and individual vs. group outcomes according to the substance and connotations of the responses. As shown in Table 4, the outcomes may belong to more than one category. For example, learning and growth were simultaneously filed under short-term and long-term outcome and were also determined to be applicable to both the outcome of individual members and the outcome of a group. In addition, it was possible to identify the degree of the effect (i.e., high vs. low) shared leadership had on individuals and teams, short- and long-term, by analyzing the interviews. In the case of performance, responses conceded that while long-term performance was anticipated (degree of effect: high), those with short-term were not promising (degree of effect: low). Along a similar vein, it was deduced that the effect of team performance (degree of effect: high) was weightier than individual performance (degree of effect: low) because more participants emphasized team performance as an outcome of shared leadership. Table 4 displays each category and its degree of effect, additionally supplied with sample quotes.

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Insert Table 4 about here
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**Learning and growth.** Interviewees described the progression of shared leadership behavior in a team as an environment where learning and growth were notable by team members’ absorbing each other’s talent and knowledge, characterized by factors such as executing team agency and creating an open communication climate (see Interview no. 2, Table 4). Aside from mutual learning, growth of individuals also appears to flourish from the surplus of responsibility their experiences in leadership roles provides (Andrews & Lewis, 2012). On a more comprehensive level, shared leadership behaviors affect the entire team as a unity and in its development. Collective development is also confirmed in the following response: “In regard to
learning effects, my team learned a lot by studying together and each sharing different ideas rather than networking” (Interview no. 7, Table 4).

**Innovative outcomes.** In a traditional project setting, the role of the senior consultant as project leader is heavy because project leaders pioneer development of new practices or solutions for clients (Kim & Lee, 2012). The limitation of this structure is that one individual has to take on the entire responsibility for team output (see Interview no. 10, Table 4). Thus, shared leadership may lead to more creative and innovative outcomes when all members are involved than when single project leaders attempt to powerhouse all the ideas on their own.

**Performance.** In parallel to research supporting the promotion of team performance through shared leadership (e.g., D’Innocenzo et al., 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014), many participants discussed individual and team performance. However, more participants emphasized the performance of long-term as opposed to that of short-term performance. For example, the reason for this discrepancy was alluded to by one participant as the work characteristic of consultancy or, more specifically, sharp deadlines and flagging project timeframes within the contracted period: “For the most part, consulting projects are under time constraint so it is not easy to exercise shared leadership. Consultants are asked to produce rapid results, but I think shared leadership would be effective in cases without this constraint. In a three-month project [the average length for a project], mistakes are fatal and you risk losing trust from clients” (Interview no. 18). Nevertheless, shared leadership influences both individual and group performance from a long-term perspective as conveyed in the following statement: “If someone once experiences shared leadership, s/he definitely knows how the team can better perform. Therefore, his or her team can improve its performance at least starting from the next project onwards” (Interview no. 30).
Job engagement. Yet another outcome of shared leadership that participants identified was an increase in job engagement and motivation. One interviewee said, “Shared leadership will be necessary for motivation for every member to remain continuously engaged with the project for long-term performance” (Interview no. 1), further stressing that the motivation snowballs under shared leadership and creates a better long-term performance. Hoch and Duleborn (2013) proposed that shared leadership positively affects team motivational processes, which enhances team performance. This motivational mechanism results in positive effects on both the short-term and long-term outcomes.

Sense of accomplishment. Shared leadership provides a foundation for team members to experience high levels of satisfaction because members are able to exercise leadership and exert influence. This experience is highly correlated with the development of self-esteem for project team members. An interviewee said, “Shared leadership aids the accomplishments of members, as well as nurtures them. This boosts their confidence to undertake tasks with ownership and achieve goals” (Interview no. 16). At times, a sense of accomplishment appears to be unrelated to external evaluations on the outcome of the project (i.e., assessment by the client or the assigned project leader).

Potential inefficiency. Often defined as lateral influence among peers, shared leadership indicates lateral inter-member relationships and active dynamics existing within a team (Cox, Pearce, & Perry, 2003). Despite its multiple benefits, this structure of interaction can present unintended side effects, including inefficiency or time delay in communication. One interviewee noted:

“In a vertical relationship among team members, project leaders or senior consultants feel more comfortable giving honest feedback on what they think is incorrect. However, this
is difficult in a horizontal team structure or shared leadership situation. Even though someone’s idea was not good, I could only say ‘it looks . . . nice, not bad.’ This inefficiency put us behind schedule. (Interview no. 7)”

A number of interviewees also said it was difficult for shared leadership to happen and take effects for short-term projects with strict time constraints. Some went so far as to criticize the failure of shared leadership in time management, leading to undesirable outcomes. We note that this result is preliminary, and more research endeavor is needed to further cast light on the preliminary finding. Nevertheless, we believe this preliminary finding is intriguing and novel. It has not been uncovered in prior studies.

Discussion

The study commences with the intent of better understanding shared leadership in teams in response to recent reports showing the need for further scrutiny of the topic (Cullen & Yammarino, 2014; Yammarino et al., 2012). Our qualitative results highlight the various theoretical themes of proximal antecedents to and multi-faceted outcomes of shared leadership. In this section, we deliberate the implications of a shared leadership construct and, consequently, the anticipated contributions to existing leadership theory and practice. This is followed by a brief listing of the research limitations, along with some future recommendations.

Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this study is to fill the theoretical gap in existing literature on shared leadership under the scope of management and organizational studies. Compared to previous reports contemplating the definition and importance of shared leadership, we initiate the novel approach of documenting accounts of theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and consequences of shared leadership from primary sources. In spite of accruing current research,
little is known about the behaviors and psychological states of individuals operating in a team with shared leadership. Therefore, aside from divulging the reality of the phenomenon on-site, we ascertained that the main contribution of our study is our model outlining what exactly shared among team members is.

Many empirical studies on shared leadership use the concept of traditional hierarchical or vertical leadership instead of uncovering new demonstrative cases of shared leadership behavior (e.g., Ensley et al., 2006; Hoch, 2013; Hoch et al., 2010; Pearce & Sims, 2002). However, behavioral demonstrations of entire teams or individual team members appear to differ based on the underlying nature and structure of leadership. That is, the construct of shared leadership is special, indicating a likelihood of distinction between shared leadership and other leadership styles. The qualitative method was implemented to understand better the theoretical themes of shared leadership and to avoid the misuse of concepts through inductive exploration, rather than deductive hypothesis testing. Our findings from in-depth interviews complement the apertures in previous literature and locate theoretical themes and proximal antecedents of shared leadership.

Above all, we found five specific manifestation behaviors of shared leadership in teams, extending earlier work on shared leadership, such as Drescher, Korsgaard, Welpe, Picot, and Wigand (2014), Hiller et al. (2006), and Manz, Shipper, and Stewart, (2009), who have mentioned some aspects of these dimensions in various degrees. For example, a horizontally made joint decision and a collectively made joint decision, which we found as shared leadership behaviors, are associated with the collective decision-making process of a team. As we explained above, we discovered that making a democratic decision by the entire team members (horizontally make a joint decision) is one of the behavioral demonstrations of shared leadership. In addition, we also found that reaching consensus in the decision-making process after having a
discussion between team members and the team leader (collectively make a joint decision) is another behavioral demonstration. There are few teams without an appointed leader in most of today’s organizations. A team leader is usually assigned even in teams with horizontal or a more flat structure. Therefore, to collectively make a joint decision, which emphasizes the role of a formal leader in order to exhibit shared leadership, has its value on both practical and theoretical sides.

Our primary goal with this research is to delineate further the positioning of shared leadership in the larger nomological network of both proximal antecedent and diverse outcomes to further understand and advance the construct of shared leadership. Above all, because we assumed that the psychological states of individuals directly affect their behaviors (Bandura, 1986), we then considered the roles of individual traits, attitudes, and behaviors of team members’ acting as proximal antecedents of shared leadership. Because existing studies on exploring antecedents of shared leadership have primarily focused on distal antecedents such as team context, the current study investigated immediate antecedents, which, in turn, contributes to expanding the nomological network of shared leadership. Specifically, we revealed that group members’ showing team trust, as another proximal antecedent of shared leadership, extends previous studies on shared leadership that suggested that team trust is only an outcome of shared leadership (e.g., Avolio et al., 1996; Bergman et al., 2012; Boies et al., 2010) or a contingency condition creating shared leadership (e.g., Small & Rentsch, 2010). We encourage future researchers to further test the nomological validity of shared leadership with the quantitative data of the proximal antecedents that we revealed. In addition, we developed the nomological network of shared leadership by further exploring various and multi-faceted outcomes of shared leadership.
Most of the prior studies tend to highlight the positive effects of shared leadership (D’Innocenzo et al., 2014; Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). In this study, through various types of qualitative methods, we identified the negative outcomes of shared leadership such as inefficiency, which provides a unique understanding of the multi-faceted nature of shared leadership outcomes. More interestingly, we found that the negative nature of a specific outcome of shared leadership could vary across the time dimension. For example, when we added a time dimension (i.e., short-term vs. long-term) to outcomes, we found that potential inefficiency as a negative outcome of shared leadership exists only at a short-term level and might disappear at a long-term level. This curious finding shows that it is necessary to consider the time dimension of an outcome of shared leadership. In this regard, a longitudinal research design is able to cast a brighter light onto understanding the complexity and dynamics of the shared leadership phenomenon, which we highly recommend for future studies on shared leadership.

In addition, we found that shared leadership has a stronger effect on team-level innovative outcomes than on individual-level innovative outcomes. This suggests that it is necessary to consider the differential effects of shared leadership on the same outcome across different levels. In general, we found that shared leadership has a stronger effect on team-level outcomes than on individual-level outcomes even if they are of the same type (i.e., innovation). We suggest that future studies on shared leadership should examine the potential similar and differentiated effects on the same outcome variables across different levels (e.g., individual and group). Studies of this type will better integrate the level issues into studying shared leadership, and thus contribute to a better understanding of the shared leadership effect across levels.

To summarize, we suggest that future studies on shared leadership should consider the multi-faceted, multi-time-point, and multi-level nature of shared leadership outcomes and
effectiveness in order to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of shared leadership and its nomological network.

**Practical Implications**

Our study presents some important practical implications. Based on our findings, we foresee that there is a higher chance of achieving team performance when shared leadership exists on a project team. Innovative outcomes, sense of accomplishment, job engagement, and learning and growth are other benefits of shared leadership. Accordingly, for training and development programs for consulting project teams, the study findings maybe a useful reference for designing curricula that promote shared leadership based on the five theoretical themes and three proximal antecedents. In an interesting result, this study shows that shared leadership can be ineffective in a short-term, but can turn into better team-level performance in the long term. Besides, shared leadership can be more effective in delivering individual-level job engagement in the long term than in the short term. Therefore, team leaders and members should recognize this phenomenon and stay patient about using shared leadership in the implementation and training of shared leadership. For example, despite there being no remarkable short-term effects or even initial negative outcomes after implementing shared leadership in teams, organizations should patiently wait for some time to leverage shared leadership, enough time, at least, to generate positive outcomes across a long-term period.

Our results suggest that three immediate antecedents—holding core team evaluation, showing team trust, and creating an open communication climate—can facilitate the development of shared leadership. Therefore, team leaders should establish strong shared climates in which all team members identify and evaluate their team positively, show strong trust in each other, and actively share and listen to each other’s ideas and opinions to promote shared
leadership. Human resources professionals and managers may further ensure these conditions by introducing and developing various training programs targeting not only team leaders but all team members. Because shared leadership involves every team member in leading (Wang et al., 2014) within a team, it is important to promote awareness of the value and conditions of shared leadership to every team member rather than targeting only team leaders.

Limitations and Recommendations

Upon finding a paucity of research on the theoretical themes, antecedents, and outcomes of shared leadership (Yammarino et al., 2012), we chose to tackle the issue using a qualitative approach investigating behavioral demonstrations and proximal antecedents of the important phenomenon of shared leadership. The products of this inductive process are rich with new insights regarding the concept of shared leadership. However, we also recognize the investigation is not without inherent limitations.

The use of a qualitative approach is a subjective process dependent on the researchers’ discernment, which is on par with any type of constructivist approach. In an effort to maintain rigorous methodological standards, we abided by the practices of Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2014). Nonetheless, we are not so naïve as to ignore the possibility of researcher bias in influencing the interpretation of data. To counter this hazard, we endeavored to ensure trustworthiness in our findings by triangulating methods through interviews and observation and by employing more than one coder for data analysis and interpretation (Cox & Hassard, 2005). We also cross-checked findings for any reports a coder shared with the participant group as a form of coder checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The second limitation is commonplace for most qualitative research: the impossibility of obtaining omniscient awareness on the frequency and prevalence of the phenomenon under
investigation. To best offset this deficiency, we encourage future studies to convert previously non-quantified elements, such as theoretical themes of shared leadership, into quantifiable measurements. A quantitative approach may be more effective in determining the pervasiveness of the defining characteristics within sample organizations under observation, creating more accurate predictions of their impact on the effectiveness of shared leadership.

The third limitation of our study is the restricted sample collection. The age ranges of the consultant project teams we interviewed were narrow, possibly oppressing external validity more than if the study had been conducted with professionals from more diverse settings or age groups, since age impacts values, norms, attitudes, and other relevant variables (Hoch et al., 2010). We suggest that future research use a more age-heterogeneous sample to explore the external validity of this study. This also applies to other demographic variables, such as gender, tenure, or cultural background, as well as other types of teams.

In addition, we did not investigate the boundary condition of shared leadership. However, we do believe there is a need to consider contextual and situational factors of shared leadership, despite that some studies have begun to explore this issue (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Small & Rentsch, 2010) to contribute to a better understanding of the boundary conditions, effects, and overall value of shared leadership. Future research should explore more various types of antecedents and multiple contextual factors to provide insight into the contingency conditions that nurture the proliferation of shared leadership. For example, formal leader traits and behaviors are likely important antecedents of shared leadership (Hoch & Dullebohn, 2013). Most teams today have an appointed leader regardless of the existence or degree of shared leadership, and their influence on the entire team in terms of creating an effective environment for shared leadership cannot be ignored.
Finally, we encourage future research to develop a more sophisticated understanding of shared leadership. Although we developed theoretical themes, proximal antecedents, and outcomes of shared leadership in this study, we were not able to find clear links among these three components because we did not ask interviewees to identify which proximal antecedents directly related to particular shared leadership behaviors or which particular shared leadership behaviors led to a specific outcome. Nonetheless, some of our findings provided some clues. For example, one interviewee mentioned, “When employees experienced that team decision-making process is participative and democratic, they become more engaged” (Interview no. 30). Thus, we expect that “horizontally mak[ing] a joint decision” is positively associated with “job engagement.” Therefore, we recommend future studies to further explore the interlocking relationships among antecedents, shared leadership, and outcomes to develop a more elaborated theory of shared leadership.

Despite the above limitations, this study presents a novel methodology to provide constructive insights on the shared leadership phenomenon through a comprehensive understanding of shared leadership based on a qualitative data analysis of individuals with firsthand shared leadership experience. We hope this study will stimulate more interest and research efforts in examining shared leadership in team contexts.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.12.005


http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.6.1191


http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.80.2.292


Table 1

*Sample Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 29 years</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 39 years</td>
<td>21 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 49 years</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 59 years</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project leader</td>
<td>14 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project member</td>
<td>16 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>22 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>8 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenure as a consultant</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>16 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 9 years</td>
<td>8 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Evidence for Theoretical Themes of Shared Leadership Construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID #</th>
<th>Theoretical themes</th>
<th>Sample quotes #1</th>
<th>Sample quotes #2</th>
<th>Sample quotes #3</th>
<th>Sample observed events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Autonomously make a decision</td>
<td>I can create and revise the report by myself based on my own decision before reporting to a leader, so I can create a better outcome. (Interview no. 30)</td>
<td>Team members finally reached the consensus based on their own decision after each member had enough time to consider. Then they consulted the project leader and other members for permission. (Interview no. 5)</td>
<td>Since the members of the project are well-prepared, most team members are decision-makers within the topics they are in charge of. (Interview no. 12)</td>
<td>Each team member advances an independent viewpoint, and takes bold decisive action without others’ demands. (Meeting no. 1 &amp; 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taking a proactive initiative</td>
<td>Because of his expertise (and increasing positive atmosphere), he showed unexpected good performance in his assignment, and led and helped other team members as well. (Interview no. 29)</td>
<td>All team members are energetic and passionate under the atmosphere in which members are competitive in good faith and encourage each other to volunteer. (Interview no. 6)</td>
<td>All the team members are passionate and eager to participate in the discussion voluntarily without prompting. (Interview no. 3)</td>
<td>Team members proactively say “Yes, I will do” before being asked (i.e., forced by team leader) or before the situation necessitates an action. (Meeting no. 3, 4, &amp; 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Engaging extra-role behaviors</td>
<td>All team members had high self-esteem as a consultant. They not only simply did his or her own work, but also worked really hard in order to create a better outcome. We used to work overtime frequently. (Interview no. 30)</td>
<td>As long as the project is ongoing, no one would go home earlier although one had completed the give task already. The members who finished their task helped with others task, and worked together accordingly. (Interview no. 11)</td>
<td>Until the team project reached the finish line, each individual member’s work is not complete. Each task is inter-related closely so all members collaborated together closely. On occasion, I worked on documents which are not my duty in order to help others. (Interview no. 24)</td>
<td>Most team members are involved in others’ work, which require unusual extra efforts. (Meeting no. 2, 3, &amp; 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Horizontally make a joint decision</td>
<td>We had a communication process to actively share the information with each other horizontally and to consider whether the information is applicable or not, although decisions made by this process might not be used. (Interview no. 23)</td>
<td>Our project team had a decision making process which makes a conclusion by team discussion rather than making arbitrary decision by disregarding team members' opinions. (Interview no. 23)</td>
<td>Project team members listened to each other often, and tried to make a decision in a democratic way. (Interview no. 4)</td>
<td>A team makes decisions and renders judgments together after considering every team members’ situations and opinions. (Meeting no. 3 &amp; 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID #</th>
<th>Theoretical themes</th>
<th>Sample quotes #1</th>
<th>Sample quotes #2</th>
<th>Sample quotes #3</th>
<th>Sample observed events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Collectively make a joint decision</td>
<td>It is important for a team leader to guide as a coach. But my team leader was not a final decision maker. He discussed and shared ideas and opinions as one member of the team. (Interview no. 10)</td>
<td>All team members discussed together and eventually came to the conclusion, and team leader also agreed with the decision made by team members. (Interview no. 30)</td>
<td>We discussed a lot with the project leader. Then I feel he listens to my opinion closely and reflects my opinion as well. That project leader is different from other project leaders in that way. (Interview no. 1)</td>
<td>A team leader encourages voluntary participation in decision making by team members. He also supports and acts in accordance with final group decisions. (Meeting no. 2 &amp; 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Evidence for Proximal Antecedents of Shared Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID #</th>
<th>Proximal antecedents</th>
<th>Sample quotes #1</th>
<th>Sample quotes #2</th>
<th>Sample quotes #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holding core team evaluation 1.1. Team awareness</td>
<td>We worked together for quite a long time, so we knew each other quite well. If one member disagreed or went in a different direction, we understood s/he did that for a reason. (Interview no. 8)</td>
<td>It was not easy to reach the agreement because every team member had different experience, expertise, and background. However, we had no serious conflict because we know each other very well. (Interview no. 7)</td>
<td>Every team member recognized what kinds of strengths each individual has. They also perceived that what would be a critical weakness if they formed a team. (Interview no. 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holding core team evaluation 1.2. Team esteem</td>
<td>I did not have confidence whether I could do it or not for the first time. But after observing how project leader did as an exemplary, I could have confidence and proceed with the work. (Interview no. 21)</td>
<td>We need patience about something vague and unpredictable, but what is really needed for everyone is self-esteem and that minimizes that uncertainty to conduct the project. (Interview no. 3)</td>
<td>We felt really great because we know that our team was selected from the entire consulting firm in order to work on a special project. (Interview 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holding core team evaluation 1.3. Collective efficacy</td>
<td>He always emphasized that “This is a project team that consists of expert consultants, both individual and team can create value added output.” Team members come up to this expectation. (Interview no.29)</td>
<td>All members have strong confidence of success because they already have best experience on a similar project in which all members participated. (Interview no.12)</td>
<td>Since every team member never failed in a similar type of project, we were sure that we would not give up when facing challenging tasks. (Interview no. 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Showing team trust</td>
<td>I believed that I am working with capable members. I do not have any doubt that my team members are competent. (Interview no. 4)</td>
<td>We created a positive atmosphere of mutual respect and rejected aggressive debating. (Interview no. 8)</td>
<td>I think open mindedness is to accept others based on strong trust among us, I am sure that every member had a certain level of open mindedness. (Interview no. 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Creating open communication climate</td>
<td>We were able to discuss each other’s various opinions within a comfortable climate. Thus, we were able to share feedback more frankly as well. (Interview no. 10)</td>
<td>Since we spent a lot of time working together, an atmosphere for exchanging feedback was established. As we built more in-depth relationships, a comfortable environment for sharing each other’s opinion was created. (Interview no. 5)</td>
<td>Communication is very important. So, a culture that facilitates communication should be established in advance. Since we had very active communication, we could have synergetic energy. (Interview no. 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID #</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Category / Degree of effect</td>
<td>Sample quotes</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>I</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning and growth</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Innovative outcomes</td>
<td>***</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Performance</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Job engagement</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Sense of accomplishment</td>
<td>**</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Potential inefficiency</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>NA</td>
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Note. For categorizing the outcomes of shared leadership, S = short-term outcomes; L = long-term outcomes; I = individual outcomes; G = group outcomes / For estimating the degree of effect from shared leadership * = low; ** = middle; *** high
Figure 1. The data structure.
Figure 2. Classification of theoretical themes of shared leadership.