

The Significance of Team Leadership on Increasingly Complex Tasks, Globalization, and the Flattening of Organizational Structures

Pako Mokgwane^{1*}
Alabi-Sessou Omobonike²

Adventist University of Africa^{1,2}

Abstract

The authors explored the significance of team leadership in organizations as they face complex tasks, globalization, and their response to changes that necessitate the flattening of their structures. Secondary sources, particularly scholarly articles or peer-reviewed literature from the past five years, were reviewed. The biblical foundation for team leadership was examined, showing that the Bible is replete with examples and narratives of team leadership, with unity among the team members as very paramount. Three important theories served as the study's bedrocks: team leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, and participative leadership theory. The article explains that effective team leadership that equips, empowers, and harmonizes teamwork will enhance the team members' high performance and collaborations, resulting in prompt complex problem-solving and the achievement of the organizational goals. As such, authentic relationships among team members are needed to get the organizational machinery in full swing for complex tasks to be achieved. In this way, globalization becomes an accelerated agenda.

Keywords: *Team Leadership Theory, globalization, complex tasks, organizational structures, leadership*

Introduction

The rise of complex tasks in the wake of a pandemic is like climbing Mount Everest alone. There is no doubt that the world of business, as we know it, has changed. Furthermore, it has become more compound and more interconnected (Perez, 2018). Businesses have to morph because the environment is changing too. This evolving change has made it mandatory for organizations to consider their structural relevance. It is not surprising that team leadership is emerging as a pertinent subject and a vehicle through which complex tasks can be addressed. The heightened need for team leadership adds impetus to the globalization agenda. Competition among organizations and the demand for creativity in navigating through complex issues is on the rise. However, according to Hebles et al.

(2019), organizations that structure their operations around team-based models are better placed to thrive and survive. Therefore, teams' health must be at optimum levels for the leadership process, trade, and technological advancement to be seamless (Maskudi et al., 2019).

Not many organizations are taking advantage of team leadership. Hierarchical organizational structures require a lot of money to sustain, their decision-making process is slow, and they breed dominance and more supervision. Such structures also encounter communication glitches since information is passed through several management layers causing the data to be distorted, puffed up, or deflated. Yet, complex tasks warrant clear communication and timeous action. The globalization agenda is slowed down when organizations are not

*Corresponding Author: Pako Mokgwane
Adventist University of Africa
E-mail: mokgwane@aua.ac.ke

able to deal with complex problems. This paper aims to establish the significance of team leadership on increasingly complex tasks, globalization, and the flattening of organizational structures. As such, the significance of team leadership is a worthy exploration. This paper has reviewed secondary sources, particularly scholarly articles or peer-reviewed literature from the past five years.

It is interesting to discover that the Bible and other Christian literature contain the principle of team leadership. The Bible is replete with examples and narratives of team leadership. At the center of team leadership is the idea of unity (Krispin, 2017) across organizations. The biblical teaching of the trinity doctrine, whereby the Godhead is composed of three co-eternal persons, demonstrates the principle of united team leadership. The creation account in Genesis Chapter 1 and the creation of man in Genesis chapter 2 reveal the team activity of the Godhead. Besides, team leadership examples are found throughout the scripture when leaders work with a group of people to achieve God-giving goals. Nehemiah built a team to complete the construction of the Jerusalem wall (Nehemiah chapters 2 & 3, NKJV).

One of the critical aspects of team leadership from a Christian perspective is tapping on the effects of teams. Bowers (2016) asserts that team leadership brings life to both the leader and the team members. His main thrust is that all members get involved, and the value of participation is enriched. Without such participation, the fabric of organizational or institutional belonging is eroded since participation is a platform for spiritual gifts to be used and developed. Moreover, teamwork provides learning opportunities and enacts organizational synergy (Skačkauskienė et al., 2017). The church's mission would be dented by the lack of unity of the church at large and the teams of leadership.

The Bible and Christian worldview support the fact that teamwork and team leadership procure great benefits to achieve the mission of the team. Mattis (2018) highlights a few of these benefits as more strengths to achieve the goals; lightening workload, providing more safety, reducing unjust criticism, effective transitioning, and more collaborations. The success of any team depends on its leadership, and the success of the team is the success of the entire ministry. The primary work of team leaders is to "develop unity of purpose among team members" (Anderson, 2018, p.31), to help the team focus on the objective to achieve.

The Explanation of Team Leadership Phenomena Through Relevant Theories

With respect to theories, localization of perspectives on philosophy and a better understanding of matters is enhanced. Therefore, this study's tone will be set by three theories that will explore the team leadership phenomena

Team Leadership Theory

The initial theory of consideration is team leadership. It is relevant in many situations. For this paper, it is the bedrock of the theoretical foundation. According to Northouse (2019), team leadership theory is highly effective and is a comprehensive approach to dealing with complex problems. The team can either be physical or virtual. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the robust transcendence of physical teams to virtual ones to pursue collaborative effort towards meeting goals, solving problems, greater innovation and creativity, quality decisions and better services. The underlying notion of team leadership is that the leader and the team members diagnose organizational problems (Gaviria-Rivera & López-Zapata, 2019) and quickly take appropriate action to correct them, evincing the importance of teams.

*Corresponding Author: Pako Mokgwane
Adventist University of Africa
E-mail: mokgwane@aua.ac.ke

Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed leadership theory has become fashionable and desirable. It was popularized by Spillane (2006), the educationist, who built on the initial work of Elmore (2000). Bush and Ashley Yoon (2019) and Hartley (2018) boldly highlight the fashionable theory by promulgating its strengths and relevance. In addition, Tian, Risku, and Collin's (2015) discourse regarding distributed leadership is premised on organizational operations and responsibilities that are shared among leaders and followers; thus, less effort is expended with greater output. The theory plays down the great man syndrome and highlights the incorporation of activities by multiple groups and individuals. Therefore, distributed leadership is fashionable and desirable because of its capacity-building attribute and the interaction of various people in an organization to fulfill tasks.

Participative Leadership Theory

Since decision-making is a critical element in teams, participative leadership theory (Likert, 1967) emerges as a construct to build on both team leadership and distributed leadership. Fatima, Safdar, and Jahanzeb (2017) posit that in participative leadership, employees participate in the process of organizational decisions and problem-solving whereas Wazir and Khan (2018) delineate the consultative process. It is reasonable to expect a high level of responsibility and sharing of ideas by followers in the workplace. Complex tasks warrant effective and efficient teams, in which followers are free to participate and where roles are distributed equitably among team members.

Complex Tasks

We imagine that the more complex the task, the more human and technological resources are expended. The beauty of

teamwork lies in the fact that knowledge, skills and abilities, communication and sharing of information, grouped together, help to attend complex tasks. Complex tasks should be viewed as an opportunity to improve teams' quality (Bornay-Barrachina and Herrero, 2018). They challenge and motivate members to develop their potential and focus on the problem, thus relegating or pushing back any negative vibes. Mao et al. (2016) take it a step further. They assert that complex tasks improve teams' quality and ultimately increase organizational performance, even though D'Innocenzo et al. (2016) found the opposite. Therefore, the leader alone cannot contend with complex problems; more human capital must be used to address the complex assignment effectively.

It is not surprising that numerous organizations have resorted to team leadership because of complex challenges and uncertainty. For this approach to be efficient, teams must focus on interaction and collaboration (Hedman, 2016). Open communication lines for feedback are of utmost importance—the degree of cohesion and interaction in the team moderates the output. According to Olson and Kalinski (2017), collaboration and interaction can be increased by the initial process of team formation. They discovered that teams with similar personality types are more competent in dealing with complex tasks. For example, extroverted teams outperformed introverted teams in complex assignments. The clamoring of team leadership by organizations is thus understandable.

While complex tasks are in their nature demanding, the perceived attitude towards the complex task makes all the difference. Müller et al. (2018) present complex challenges in a positive sense. Their study reveals that errors are reduced when team members perceive that the task is complex. Complex tasks raise the level of risk. As such, team members avoid

*Corresponding Author: Pako Mokgwane
Adventist University of Africa
E-mail: mokgwane@aua.ac.ke

unnecessary errors by exercising precision. For complex tasks to be resolved quickly, precision must be enhanced by decentralizing influence and teams' knowledge (Bunderson et al., 2016). Hence, it is advisable that both subjective and objective task complexity should be put into perspective at the formation of the team assigned with the complex task.

Globalization and Team Leadership

Globalization has become a reality that shapes every facet of human life in the twenty-first century. It denotes the "growing interdependence of the world's economics, cultures, and populations" (Peterson Institute for International Economy, 2018, p.1), which is fueled by international communication and travel and driven by "better technology" (O'Rourke, 2019). Globalization "seems to be necessary for the economic system" (Paganetto & Scandizo, 2020). Therefore, it impacts the organization, including teams within the organization, how they communicate, and how they support each other since team members differ in their capacity to respond to the changes that come with globalization.

Impacts of Globalization on the Organization

Globalization has a profound impact on the organization. It provides an opportunity for international trade and investment and influences world economies to become integrated (Perrine, 2018). Globalization impacts organizations positively by opening new doors for growth. Rizescu and Tileaga (2017, p.135) explain that globalization is a "breakthrough, an exchange of information, and economy without borders and political implications." Globalization encourages creativity due to the high competitiveness brought about by the international markets. Therefore, it behooves each organization to tap into these opportunities for its success.

Globalization has impacted how organizations reshape their approach to business and create strategies to achieve their organizational goals. Organizations that thrive under the new dispensation of globalization have developed "a more complex economic strategy" and "better communication skills" (Perrine, 2018, p.42). Globalization has the potentiality of producing organizational change, which may include the redefining of the mission and vision of the organization, change in organizational structures, formulation and implementation of new strategies as well as the creation of a more appropriate system of management led by the original objectives (Rizescu & Tileaga, 2017). Thus, there is a need for strong team leadership.

The Significance of Team Leadership on Globalization

Due to globalization, it is imperative for today's leaders to develop a global mindset to succeed and achieve their goals (Khan, 2017). This implies that diverse individuals are needed to work collectively with the leaders to achieve common goals, thereby creating the necessity for teamwork and effective team leadership at a global level (Perez, 2018). To achieve and increase organizational performance, it is expedient for the leaders to build trust and respect among team members (Matthews & Mclees, 2015). The organization's success depends on how the team leadership coordinates and harmonizes the teamwork to achieve the set goals.

Leading today's global teams requires specific characteristics. Globalization has caused multicultural diversity among the global team members; different languages are spoken within the team, which can positively impact the organization as different clients from different cultural backgrounds can be assessed. Therefore, team leadership includes sensitivity to cultural differences, making cross-cultural communication competence

*Corresponding Author: Pako Mokgwane
Adventist University of Africa
E-mail: mokgwane@aua.ac.ke

particularly important to boost teamwork (Biermeier-Hanson et al., 2015). Team leadership competencies are necessary for the success of teamwork in a global setting.

Effective Team leadership is needed to boost teamwork and to help the organization thrive in a global context. The performance of individual team members eventually leads to the organization's overall performance, and this is driven by capable team leadership (Wisankosol, & Chavez, 2016). Effective team leadership includes the empowerment of the team members with the creation of a "harmonious environment which minimizes workplace conflict" (Perez, 2018). Each team member feels part of the team and is motivated to contribute meaningfully to the team's overall goal.

Team Leadership and the Flattening of the Organizational Structure

Flattening organizational structures is needed to provide employees with the flexibility and empowerment needed to achieve the organizational goals. Flattening is the removal of layers in the hierarchy of a firm's organization and the expansion of the manager's span of control (Chassagnon, & Hollandts, 2019). Employees at the lower-level positions benefit from flattening because it gives them the chance to participate in the organization's decision-making process. The effective team-based structure resulting from the flattening of organizational structure provides desirable outcomes such as greater productivity, better effective use of resources, and greater innovation and creativity (Northhouse, 2018). Employees at different levels develop to use their potentialities to achieve organizational goals.

Flattening of the organization leads to team building, which necessitates effective team leadership to develop collaborative skills needed for effective teamwork. Team leaders are responsible for creating conditions

that allow the employee to control their work, keeping in mind the overall common goals. George (2016) emphasizes the importance of an organization's success when there is mutual trust between the leaders and the employees; the followers trust the leadership, and the leadership trusts the followers. This is a prerequisite for any team leadership to succeed.

Conclusion

The significance of team leadership in an organization can never be overemphasized. Nowadays, when organizations are faced with complex tasks due to globalization, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other situations that impose changes such as the flattening of the organizational structure, it is evident that teamwork is necessary for the organization to thrive. Teams that were once foremost physical are transforming into virtual ones due to the effect of COVID-19 and also globalization that enables team members to live in different geographical locations. Effective team leadership is paramount as the basic need to foster growth and high organizational performance. Team members may be multinational, with different potentials; this necessitates effective team leadership competencies to motivate each team member to give their best in the organization's interest.

Team leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, and participative leadership theory have laid the foundation for the significance of team leadership for any organization that aims to thrive in a complex environment with new realities that constantly test organizations' viability. We recommend that trust between the leadership and followers should be strengthened. It is necessary for mutual understanding and collaboration. Trust can emerge stronger when leaders of organizations are authentic and place a high value on people rather the business. Followers naturally respond

*Corresponding Author: *Pako Mokgwane*
Adventist University of Africa
E-mail: *mokgwane@aua.ac.ke*

positively to leaders who are honest and caring. Also, interaction with followers helps the leaders to know their followers more. In so doing, the leaders can assign the right tasks to each follower in the team. Such an arrangement oils the organizational machinery for maximum organizational objectives realization. A well - equipped,

empowered, and properly coordinated team through efficient leadership will be able to work together harmoniously and promptly to solve complex problems, contribute meaningfully to the organization's overall growth, and achieve the set goals. Thus, effectively flattening the organizational structure.

References

- Anderson, D. L. (2018). Developing team leadership. *Growing Christian Leaders Series, Manual 10*. Norwalk, CA: American Indian Bible Institute.
- Biermeier-Hanson B., Lui, M., & Dickson, M. W. (2015). Alternate views of global leadership: Applying global leadership perspectives to leading global teams. In: Wildman J., Griffith R. (Eds) *Leading global teams*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Bornay-Barrachina, M., & Herrero, I. (2018). Team creative environment as a mediator between CWX and R&D team performance and moderating boundary conditions. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 33(2), 311-323.
- Bowers, J. R. (2016). The creativity behind creation: The trinity in genesis 1:1–2:3 and group creativity. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 10(2), 24-36.
- Bunderson, J.S., van der Vegt, G.S., Cantimur, Y. & Rink, F. (2016). Different views of hierarchy and why they matter: Hierarchy as inequality or as cascading influence. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), 1265-1289.
- Bush, T., & Ashley Yoon, M. N. (2019). Distributed leadership and the Malaysia education blueprint. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(3), 279-295.
- Chassagnon, V. & Hollandts, X. (2019). Human capital and the pluralistic governance of the modern firm: The emergence of flattened hierarchies at work. *Revue d'Economie Industrielle*, 168(4), 79-102.
- D'Innocenzo, L., Mathieu, J.E. and Kukenberger, M.R. (2016), A Meta-analysis of different forms of shared leadership-team performance relations. *Journal of Management*, 42(7), 1964-1991.
- Dumistrescu, C. I., Lie, I. R., & Dobrescu, R. M. (2014). Leading multicultural teams. *FAIMA Business & Management Journal*, 2(4), 43-54.
- Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*. Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute & American Federation of Teachers.
- Fatima, T., Safdar, S., & Jahanzeb, S. (2017). Participative leadership and employee creativity: Moderating role of need for achievement. *NUML International Journal of Business & Management*, 12(1), 1-14.
- Gaviria-Rivera, J., & López-Zapata, E. (2019). Transformational leadership, organizational climate and job satisfaction in work teams. *European Research Studies*, 22(3), 68-82.
- George, D. (2016). *Trust & growth in the workplace: An analysis of leadership in flat organizations*. University Honors Theses, 353. doi:10.15760/honors.341.
- Hartley, J. (2018). Ten propositions about public leadership. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 14(4), 202-217.
- Hebles, M., Yaniz-Álvarez-de-Eulate, C., & Jara, M. (2019). Impact of cooperative learning on teamwork competence. *Academia*, 32(1), 93-106.

- Hedman, E. (2016). Leadership team tool for better meaning making: Developing leadership team communication and reflexivity. *The Journal of Management Development*, 35(5), 592-605.
- Khan, H. A. (2018). *Globalization and leadership challenges*. In *Globalization and the challenges of public administration*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-69587-7_4
- Krispin, K.R., Jr. (2017). Strengthening ministry teams: Facilitating unity and cohesiveness. *Christian Education Journal*, 14(1), 42-51.
- Likert, R. (1967). *The Human Organization: Its Management and Value*. McGraw-Hill: New York.
- Mao, A., Winter, M., Suri, S., & Watts, D. J. (2016). An experimental study of team size and performance on a complex task. *PLoS One*, 11(4). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0153048
- Maskudi, Dwiatmadja, C., & Yuniawan, A. (2019). The mediating effect of commitment team goals and team solidarity capital in the team cohesiveness toward team performance: At book publishing company in central java and special region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Acces la success. *Calitatea*, 20(168), 97-102.
- Matthews, R., & Mclees, J. (2015). Building effective projects teams and teamwork. *Journal of Information Technology and Economic Development*, 6(2), 20-30.
- Mesmer-Magnus, J., Niler, A. A., Plummer, G., Larson, L. E., & DeChurch, L. A. (2017). The cognitive underpinnings of effective teamwork: A continuation. *Career Development International*, 22(5), 507-519.
- Müller, E., Pintor, S., & Wegge, J. (2018). Shared leadership effectiveness: Perceived task complexity as moderator. *Team Performance Management*, 24(5), 298-315.
- O'Rourke, K. (2019). Economic history and contemporary challenges to globalization. *The Journal of Economic History*, 79(2), 356-382.
- Olson, J., & Kalinski, R. (2017). Making student online teams work. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 18(4), 1-22,86.
- Paganetto L., Scandizzo P.L. (2020). Is globalization sustainable? In: Paganetto L. (Eds) *Capitalism, Global Change and Sustainable Development*. Springer *Proceedings in Business and Economics*. Cham: Springer.
- Perez, J. R. (2018). An exploration of global leadership: Culture, ethics, and conflict management. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 15(3), 122-133.
- Perrine, M. (2018). Effects of globalization on an organization. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 1(2), 41-47.
- Peterson Institute for International Economics. (2018). *What is globalization? And how has the global economy shaped the United States*. Retrieved from <https://www.piie.com/microsites/globalization/what-is-globalization>. 20 August 2020.
- Rizescu, A., & Tileaga, C. (2017). The effects of globalization on the transformation of organizational management. *Journal of Defense Resources Management*, 1(14). 135-140.
- Skačkusienė, I., Kazlauskienė, E., & Katinienė, A. (2017). Modelling knowledge synergy evaluation. *Montenegrin Journal of Economics*, 13(1), 35-49.
- Tian, M., Risku, M., & Collin, K. (2015). A meta-analysis of distributed leadership from 2002 to 2013: Theory development, empirical evidence and future research focus. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(1), 146.

- Wazir, A. K., & Khan, H. G. A. (2018). Impact of participative leadership and employee voice through conscientiousness on organizational effectiveness: 3-time lagged study on banking sector of Pakistan. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 23(3), 1-23.
- Wisankosol, P., & Chavez, G. (2016). Developing cross-cultural leadership skills and cross-cultural teamworking skills through organization development intervention: A case study of a multinational enterprise (MNE) in Thailand. *ABAC ODI JOURNAL Vision. Action. Outcome*, 3(2).