



RESPONSE

Putting the “We” in Leadership: Continuing the Dialogue to Advance Our Science and Practice

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Abstract

This article addresses the insightful and diverse commentaries received regarding our focal article examining collectivistic leadership approaches from both a scientific and practical perspective. In our response, we attend to four emergent themes: the interdisciplinary and historic nature of collectivistic approaches to leadership, the need for studying the nature of collectivistic leadership as a unique phenomenon, the benefits and vulnerabilities associated with this leadership perspective, and the importance of understanding from a holistic perspective what influences collectivistic leadership and how to develop it. For each theme, we integrate feedback from the commentaries and provide our perspective in terms of how to continue the dialogue on collectivistic leadership for scientific and practical advancement.

We appreciate the numerous insightful responses regarding our focal article (Yammarino, Salas, Serban, Shirreffs, & Shuffler, 2012) examining collectivistic leadership approaches from both a scientific and practical perspective. The commentaries offer a range of well-developed perspectives and rich information that we believe provides additional support to the argument that collectivistic leadership approaches are indeed worthy of attention. Furthermore, we appreciate the attempts to expand the literature base presented in our article as well as the attention brought to specific aspects of the issues addressed. In addition, we would like to thank several of the authors for pointing out aspects of the collectivistic leadership

literature that we were unable to address within the constraints of our initial article.

Viewing the commentaries as a whole, we believe there are several themes that have emerged and should be further discussed. Our response therefore is centered on expanding upon these themes and addressing their relevance in terms of advancing our science and practice. Specifically, we address: (a) the interdisciplinary and historic nature of collectivistic approaches to leadership, (b) the need for studying the nature of collectivistic leadership as a unique phenomenon, (c) the benefits and vulnerabilities associated with this leadership perspective, and (d) the importance of understanding from a holistic perspective what influences collectivistic leadership and how to develop it. For each theme, we integrate feedback from the commentaries and provide our perspective on how to continue the dialogue on collectivistic leadership for scientific and practical advancement.

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Interdisciplinary and Historic Nature of Collectivistic Leadership

As was noted in a few commentaries and elsewhere (e.g., Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012), the study of leadership from a “we” perspective is not new, and it was not our intention to frame it as such. Indeed, collectivistic approaches to leadership have existed for quite some time (e.g., Gibb, 1954), and over the past half century, multiple theories have been developed to explain how and why such leadership can exist. Our purpose with the focal article was to highlight the fact that, although theories of collectivistic leadership may have existed for some time, attention has recently come back to this idea due to the needs of organizations, providing us with the motivation to delve further to identify similarities, differences, and practical applications for some of the more recent approaches.

In addition to the historical nature of collectivistic leadership, it is also important to acknowledge that the study of this type of leadership does indeed span disciplinary boundaries. “We” approaches to leadership have been studied in sociology, organizational behavior, education, and psychology. They have also been influenced by areas such as political science, organizational communication, and even computer science, whereby understanding aspects, such as the underlying networks of systems and modalities of communication, can inform our understanding of what leadership structures may look like in today’s technology-driven organizations. Given our audience, we chose to focus our article on five theories that represent organizational behavior and psychological approaches to collectivistic leadership. We mention, however, in the focal article that there may be other viable approaches that can be considered collectivistic, and we believe that the perspectives offered in other disciplines provide a rich source of information that can and should be incorporated into future thinking regarding collectivistic approaches to leadership.

Thus, it is important that both academics and practitioners alike take this historic and interdisciplinary approach to collectivistic leadership into account as we move forward with research and practice in this area. Although collectivistic leadership may be seeing a surge in interest given changing organizational demands, this does not mean that previous theories do not have merit in terms of providing insight to our understanding of this phenomenon. Instead, we encourage academics and practitioners alike to continue integrating the different perspectives presented both in our focal article as well as in the commentaries, such as leadership in the plural (Sergi, Denis, & Langley, 2012), dyadic leadership (Hunter, Cushenbery, & Fairchild, 2012), and democratic leadership (Wegge, Jeppesen, & Weber, 2012). Models such as the collective leadership model presented by Friedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark, and Mumford (2009) and further discussed in detail by Mumford, Friedrich, Vessey, and Ruark (2012) provide one such way in which different theories have been integrated, as they discuss in their commentary. Furthermore, as specifically highlighted by Sergi and colleagues (2012), utilizing theories of collectivistic leadership presented by different disciplines can help to build a richer perspective on this phenomenon as well. We would thus like to thank Sergi and colleagues for the historical perspective and additional views from other disciplines, particularly their own view of collectivistic leadership.

Study of Collectivistic Leadership as a Unique Phenomenon

Another emergent theme across several commentaries was the discussion of how to study collectivistic leadership. Certainly, the dynamics of collectivistic leadership may not always lend themselves to traditional studies and metrics. Indeed, there has already been debate within the shared and collectivistic leadership literature regarding how to best capture this phenomenon at a group level, such as through the use

of network measures to gather individual responses or through creating team-level metrics (Avolio, Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Jung, & Garger, 2003; Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006; Gockel & Werth, 2010). Furthermore, more qualitative approaches such as the case studies presented by Cullen, Palus, Chrobot-Mason, and Appaneal (2012) in their commentary can provide additional richness that may be missed by purely quantitative methods. Overall, there emerges a critical issue to be addressed by both academics and practitioners alike in terms of understanding collectivistic leadership: How do we capture the uniqueness of this construct in an effective and efficient manner that matches our theory?

In terms of the metric aspect of collectivistic leadership, there is no simple answer to this question, given the complex nature of collectivistic leadership and the many forms it may take. However, it is critical that researchers begin to think in new ways that may provide depth and understanding. For example, in their commentary, Carter and DeChurch (2012) note the value of applying network analysis as a means for understanding the complex structural issues that arise when leadership is shared within a collective. We agree that this approach indeed has merit as a potential way for measuring this phenomenon, and in fact the use of such social network analysis has already begun to emerge within the collectivistic leadership literature as a means for collecting such data (Carson, Tesluk & Marrone, 2007; Gockel & Werth, 2010). We would thus like to thank Carter and DeChurch (2012) for the expansion of the network-based ideas of collectivistic leadership.

However, social network analysis is not the only way that we can effectively capture collectivistic leadership. As research in this area continues, it is important that our operationalizations of what we mean by collectivistic leadership match our theoretical underpinnings. Thus, although in some cases short metrics such as those found in social network approaches may be appropriate, at other times more detailed metrics such as Avolio and colleagues' (2003) Team

Leadership Questionnaire may be more appropriate, as this may explore the construct at a greater depth than a single-item sociometric questionnaire. Furthermore, it may be appropriate to merge methodologies to produce appropriate metrics. For example, it has been proposed that collectivistic leadership is not just about the structure of the network but also about the types of behaviors being performed by individuals, as individuals sharing leadership may take on performing one or more leadership behaviors within a collective (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). Instead of asking the broad question of "To what degree does your team rely on this individual for leadership?" that has previously been used to calculate social network metrics of density (Carson et al., 2007), it may be necessary to create questions more specific to the types of behaviors that can be performed by leaders, such as planning, problem solving, and offering support (Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006). In addition, to accommodate samples that may have limited time yet can provide us with a unique perspective in regards to this type of leadership (e.g., military, disaster response, global virtual teams), the development of unobtrusive measures (e.g., via email communications, videoconferences, sociometric badges) may also provide unique and novel means for capturing and operationalizing collectivistic leadership.

In addition to exploring metrics, the use of qualitative methodologies can also provide us with additional information regarding this phenomenon. Both Cullen and colleagues (2012) and Hunter and colleagues (2012) provide case study examples in their commentaries, with Hunter et al. (2012) specifically calling for the use of case illustrations to provide additional depth and understanding to collectivistic leadership. We agree that this type of qualitative information can provide novel perspectives for organizational issues such as collectivistic leadership that have unique qualities and characteristics that may be different from traditional perspectives. The use of qualitative data and case

studies can help researchers to build more grounded approaches whereby the phenomenon drives theory development as opposed to theories from more traditional approaches being applied at a different level of analysis. For example, this type of qualitative approach has been used to study leadership in multiteam systems, or teams of teams working together towards a common goal (DeChurch et al., 2011). We would like to thank Hunter et al. (2012) and Cullen et al. (2012) for the case-based examples of a dyadic (dual) approach to collectivistic leadership and case-based examples of collectivistic leadership development, respectively.

In a historiometric qualitative review of real world multiteam systems (i.e., provincial reconstruction teams, disaster response systems), DeChurch and colleagues (2011) elicited a new theoretical perspective of leadership forms and behaviors necessary for effective multiteam system operations. This perspective would not have developed had the authors tried to simply apply team-level theories of leadership to the multiteam system level, as the novel characteristics of multiteam systems and their influence on leadership would not have been understood. Thus, qualitative research regarding collectivistic leadership may also be necessary to achieve a holistic understanding of collectivistic leadership as a unique phenomenon in the leadership literature.

In sum, collectivistic leadership is theoretically and practically different from what we know about traditional, individualistic approaches to leadership and therefore requires its own set of methodologies and metrics for study. We need to be creative in how we approach the study of collectivistic leadership and develop appropriate techniques that may look very different from traditional leadership studies. If we simply try to adjust traditional leadership studies to accommodate collectivistic leadership, we likely will miss the nuances of collectivistic leadership that occur in real world situations and therefore will not be as effective in

terms of developing theory as well as practical solutions for ensuring the effectiveness of “we” leadership.

Benefits and Vulnerabilities of Collectivistic Leadership

A third emergent theme is that of the need to address the benefits and vulnerabilities of collectivistic leadership as a construct. As we discussed in our focal article, collectivistic forms of leadership are dynamic and shifting, with numerous factors impacting how well it is enacted, when it should be enacted, and how followers may respond to this type of leadership. Indeed, one of the reasons why there are multiple theories and models of collectivistic leadership is likely due to the wide number of factors that appear to influence the structure and nature of collectivistic leadership. As such, there are both benefits and vulnerabilities in terms of when and how collectivistic leadership may or may not be effective.

First, as discussed in our focal article, there are benefits to utilizing collectivistic forms of leadership, especially given the challenges faced in the workplace today. Although additional rigorous empirical research is needed to better establish this claim, initial research conducted has illustrated the positive influences of sharing leadership on outcomes such as team performance (Hiller et al., 2006; Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006) and that it has influences above and beyond traditional vertical leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Within the commentaries, both Mumford and colleagues (2012) and Dust and Ziegert (2012) acknowledge that there are multiple factors contributing in terms of when collectivistic leadership can be effective. Dust and Ziegert (2012) specifically focus on the idea that having multiple leaders to coenact roles can reduce the chances of missing environmental cues and can serve to ensure that someone is always available to meet the leadership needs of a collective. We would like to thank Dust and Ziegert (2012) for bringing this perspective and highlighting

the complexities of distribution (multiple leaders) and context (complex environment) issues for collectivistic leadership.

Mumford and colleagues (2012) expand on their original model and discuss the conditions that lead to the possibility of enacting collective leadership. One specific factor highlighted here is the possession of expertise by individuals, which can be used to facilitate the sharing of leadership based on who holds expertise at a given point in time. Space precluded us from presenting the details of their model in our focal article, but we would like to thank Mumford and colleagues (2012) for providing them. Drawing upon these commentaries and our focal article, we want to reiterate the point that there are certain factors that appear to be critical to the success of collectivistic leadership. However, additional empirical research is sorely needed to better understand the differing conditions necessary for facilitating the benefits of collectivistic leadership. Indeed, this is particularly true as there are differing perspectives on the influences of certain factors and how they may work together. For example, it may be the case that both coenactment of roles and expertise are necessary for facilitating effective collectivistic leadership, such that coenactment is best managed when individuals with different types of expertise step up to take on leadership roles based on their expertise. For example, having one or more individuals who can take on relationship-oriented behaviors (e.g., developing a supportive climate, managing conflict) as well as one or more individuals who can take on task-oriented behaviors (e.g., planning, setting goals) may optimize collectivistic leadership by addressing multiple needed behaviors for collective success.

Although collectivistic leadership appears to have benefits, there are also vulnerabilities that must be acknowledged. Although in theory collectivistic leadership seems very promising, again the lack of empirical evidence means that we also do not understand all of the factors that may contribute to the ineffectiveness of such leadership. Several commentaries noted that, in particular,

the issue of followership in connection to collectivistic leadership is one area that is certainly in need of attention. For example, O'Shea (2012) argues that followers can restrain the sharing of leadership functions throughout an organization, in that followers may resist structured attempts to share leadership. O'Shea proposes that leaders must be proactive in their desire to form shared leadership structures and take appropriate actions to communicate with followers regarding how to best establish this form of leadership. We would like to thank the author for providing this new perspective and expanding ideas about followers' roles in resistance or igniting collectivistic leadership.

Wegge and colleagues (2012) also note that caution must be taken not to "romanticize" collectivistic leadership as always being a positive for groups and organizations, as has been done at times in the past with traditional leadership. As such, they suggest acknowledging destructive forms of collectivistic leadership as well and laissez-faire leadership behavior in the analysis of shared leadership. We would like to thank Wegge and colleagues as well for revealing another missing piece in the collectivistic leadership realm by highlighting destructive and democratic aspects of it.

In addition to acknowledging that collectivistic leadership has both benefits and vulnerabilities, it is also necessary to note that research is needed to make clarifications where researchers have contradictory perspectives regarding when a condition may have a positive or a negative influence on collectivistic leadership. For example, Dust and Ziegert (2012) argue that collectivistic leadership may be effective when time is short, while Mumford and colleagues (2012) propose that such leadership is more beneficial when there is ample time to develop appropriate cognitions. Thus, as we begin to shape our future study of collectivistic leadership, integrating theories and perspectives is necessary in order to test the conditions under which such issues can be addressed. This is especially critical from

a practical perspective as we look to make recommendations regarding how and when collectivistic leadership should be developed and maintained.

In sum, collectivistic leadership has potential to serve as a benefit to teams, systems, and organizations, yet there are also potential vulnerabilities that need to be acknowledged. "More" collectivistic leadership is not always the correct solution, and thus we must turn towards advancing our research to provide us with evidence regarding when such leadership is and is not appropriate.

Approaching Collectivistic Leadership Holistically

The final theme that we would like to highlight is the need to address collectivistic leadership from a holistic perspective. What we mean by this is that future research must address the antecedents, processes, moderators, outcomes, and developmental aspects of collectivistic leadership. The models and research presented in our focal article as well as the commentaries provide some initial perspectives on multiple aspects of these components, but we want to strongly reiterate that as a relatively unexplored phenomenon, we need to ensure that future empirical work focuses on all aspects and not simply those that are easy to assess or "hot topics."

In terms of specific directions, our previous theme touched on the need to address the moderating factors that set the conditions under which collectivistic leadership may be effective or ineffective, such as time, followership, expertise, and coenactment. Two additional areas that are especially in need of attention as we move forward include the antecedents of collectivistic leadership and the development of collectivistic leadership. These two aspects are closely linked together because as we begin to determine antecedents of shared and collectivistic leadership, we can also begin to create developmental interventions built around these antecedents. Venus, Mao, Lanaj, and Johnson (2012) provide one such

antecedent in their discussion of collective identity as a predictor of collectivistic leadership. We would like to thank Venus and colleagues (2012) for highlighting this key construct (antecedent) of collectivistic leadership. Other antecedents that have been previously proposed or empirically examined include leadership skills and abilities of individuals comprising the collective (Friedrich et al., 2009), internal team environment (Carson et al., 2007), and team, task, and environmental attributes such as team commitment, task complexity, and organizational support systems (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Given these many antecedents, it is critical that we investigate not only their individual influences but also the combined effects they may have on the development of collectivistic leadership in different situations.

The exploration of these antecedents, along with the processes they influence and the conditions under which they maximize collectivistic leadership effectiveness, can provide a solid grounding for the development of interventions aimed at creating effective collectivistic leadership. We applaud the work of Cullen and colleagues (2012) in beginning to address collectivistic leadership development, as evidenced by the case studies they discuss in their commentary. However, we acknowledge as they do the need for additional theory and research so that we do not purely rely upon traditional leadership theory and best practices to inform our development of collectivistic leadership. As discussed previously, the uniqueness of collectivistic leadership demands research that examines all aspects of this construct in order to build a more complete understanding of how different facets contribute to its development and maintenance.

Conclusion

We are pleased to see the range of responses to our focal article, as they provide new and interesting perspectives regarding the study of collectivistic leadership from both practical and scientific approaches. Although

there are many questions left to be explored in this area, we hope that along with the focal article and commentaries, the themes presented within this response will provide additional guidance regarding specific areas of focus needed in terms of better understanding collectivistic leadership. We look forward to watching the research and practice in this area grow and develop as we gain a clearer understanding of the conditions under which collectivistic leadership is best developed, facilitated, and maintained as the dialogue regarding collectivistic leadership continues.

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