UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF TEAMS: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND TEAM DIVERSITY

Promoting team effectiveness is one of the most crucial goals of today’s organizations. Both leadership and team diversity have been argued to be key factors for attaining this goal, but evidence from both research streams is less clear than expected. In the pursuit of a clearer picture of leadership’s and team diversity’s influence on team success, I take an integrated approach to examine leadership, diversity, and their interplay as drivers of team effectiveness in this dissertation. At the same time, this research addresses a variety of reasons for inconsistency in prior studies linking leadership as well as team diversity to team effectiveness.

In a series of four empirical studies that are based on organizational and experimental samples, I investigate the question of when and how team success can be promoted by various behaviors, characteristics, and foci of leadership, and leadership together with various forms and conceptualizations of diversity. Findings presented in Chapter 2 show that participative and directive leadership behaviors interact to affect the association between educational level diversity and team effectiveness. This association is most strongly positive when both participative and directive leadership are high opposing to only one being high, or both being low. Moreover, the dissertation comprises the combined study of transformational leadership’s dual-level focus (individual-focused and group-focused transformational leadership) and different diversity conceptualizations (organizational tenure diversity conceptualized as variety of informational differences or as disparity in terms of status differentials). Results presented in Chapter 3 show that transformational leadership’s group-focused facets (fostering the acceptance of group goals, articulating an inspiring vision) enhance team performance, and that this positive effect is further strengthened by organizational tenure diversity when it is conceptualized as disparity, but not as variety. Whereas the individual-focused transformational facet of intellectual stimulation fosters a process and performance at the individual level, differentiation in the individual-focused facet of individualized support yields detrimental effects on processes and performance at the team level. In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, I focus on how a leader’s role, a leader’s trait, and a team’s diversity interact to influence the outcome of diversity training. Findings reveal that training the leader is more conducive to the success of educationally diverse teams when leader learning goal orientation is high. Training the team better promotes diverse teams’ success when leader learning goal orientation is low. Lastly, results presented in
Chapter 5 show that two leadership behaviors (contingent reward and participative leadership) differentially interact with a leader characteristic (younger as compared to older leader age) to influence team effectiveness (turnover). Contingent reward increases, but participative leadership decreases younger leaders’ success in modulating involuntary and voluntary turnover.

Concluding, this dissertation contributes to a deepened understanding of when and how leadership, and its joint effect with diversity, realizes the potential inherent in teams. It reveals that both leadership and diversity are capable of strengthening one another’s impact on team effectiveness. The dissertation’s finding of the relevance of a more integrated approach to leadership and team diversity has important implications for further research in the fields of leadership, diversity, and team effectiveness.