

**Primus inter pares – The role of a
formal leader in a shared leadership team**

Full article

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Abstract

The role of leaders in the age of digital transformation is characterized by complexity and ambiguity. Consequently, leadership finds itself at a crossroads where hierarchy no longer seems to be the path to success. On the one hand, employees desire more autonomy and participation. On the other hand, leaders are compelled to relinquish and distribute power. Therefore, new directions and contemporary concepts are necessary, ones that enable non-hierarchical organizational and leadership models that go beyond the traditional Great Man Theory, which focuses on a single leader. In this vein, shared leadership emerges as an alternative to hierarchical leadership, emphasizing not the individual leader but the skills and expertise of all team members. Therefore, this approach relieves the formal leader and allows for the distribution of responsibilities. Indeed, this raises the question of the relevance of the formal leader in a team with shared leadership. Which role does the formal leader play in a shared leadership team? Drawing on a qualitative study this paper identifies personality, leadership mindset, and leadership tasks as main leadership categories, and uncovers the four leadership types enabler, connector, ambassador, and organizer. Adding to the leadership-as-practice literature (Alvehus, 2019; Raelin, 2018), our findings contribute to the development of shared leadership programs.

Keywords: shared Leadership, role formal leader, shared leadership role model, identity leadership, prototypical leadership, relational leadership

Introduction

The era of digital transformation demands new forms of leadership as hierarchical leadership reaches its limits. A study conducted in Austria reveals that more than a fifth of employees quit due to dissatisfaction with their leaders (Mohr, 2022). Undoubtedly, leadership is at a crossroads and requires a reorientation, as the Great Man Theory doesn't fit any more (Schwarzmüller et al., 2017). Nowadays, employees demand participation and autonomy. Indeed, shared leadership is a concept reflecting this trend by considering leadership as a distributed phenomenon (Alvehus, 2019). Moreover, numerous studies demonstrate a positive correlation between team performance, increased innovation, creativity, and shared leadership behavior (Carson et al., 2007; Hoch, 2013; Nicolaidis et al., 2014; Wu & Cormican, 2016) leading to a competitive advantage.

Shared leadership is primarily practiced in innovative and knowledge-oriented environments. Specifically, it occurs in self-organized project teams, post-hierarchical organizations, virtual teams or sports teams (Endres & Weibler, 2019; Fransen et al., 2015; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). In this context, leadership responsibilities are distributed among multiple individuals, and all team members take on leadership tasks. Thus, leadership becomes a dynamic collective influence process occurring in all directions: from bottom to top, top to bottom, and peer to peer. Furthermore, all team members pursue a common goal (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Therefore, leadership is not bound to a formal role or title but is socially constructed (Salovaara & Bathurst, 2016). Specifically, leadership is not viewed as a phenomenon revolving around individuals but as an understanding of how social action unfolds (Salovaara, 2011). In this sense, we must rethink the development of leadership (Smolović Jones et al., 2016)

However, in shared leadership teams, there is often an officially appointed leader who supports shared leadership by creating the necessary framework that fosters collective organizational identification (Bruch & Barton, 2021). Additionally, they provide learning and development opportunities for skill acquisition (Klasmeier et al., 2021). Yet, there are scarce empirical studies examining the role of formal leaders within a shared leadership team. Therefore, our research aims to provide new insights into this gap and to present the results at the Herbstworkshop 2024, Kommission Personal.

The research design of this study is based on a qualitative design to offer a deeper understanding of how the formal leader operates in a team with shared leadership. This study is part of a larger research project grounded in mixed-methods analysis. Within the context of leadership-as-practice research (Alvehus, 2019; Raelin, 2018), our findings contribute substantive insights to the development of shared leadership programs.

Theoretical background

Shared Leadership

Shared Leadership is based on the theoretical concepts of contingency and social exchange theories (Hernandez et al., 2011). Perhaps one of the earliest engagements with the origins of shared leadership was by Mary Parker Follet, concerning her concept of the Law of the Situation. She advocated that a leader should direct employees to listen to the person with the best knowledge in the given situation (Follet, 1924). Furthermore, the Human Relations movement also influenced shared leadership as it focused on the employee (Mayo, 1933). Other origins of shared leadership include Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1974), Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and the concept of self-management as a substitute for leadership (Manz & Sims, 1980). Additionally, shared leadership is linked with the concepts of self-leadership and super-leadership (Sims & Manz, 1991).

Shared leadership is classified as relational leadership, focusing on human processes (Murrell, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Yukl, 1998). While leadership is practiced in all directions (Rost, 1991), activities within the group are characterized by relationships (Bennett et al., 2003). Moreover, network theory is also related to shared leadership as it focuses on relationships between people (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006). There is no need to distinguish between leaders and followers since shared leadership signifies a collective influence process (Endres & Weibler, 2019). Thus, shared leadership refers to a characteristic within the leadership structure and does not represent a leadership style (Werther, 2016).

A crucial prerequisite for the success of shared leadership is individuals' willingness to share power (Hernandez et al., 2011). In addition, shared leadership complements vertical leadership (Grille & Kauffeld, 2015) as formal leaders provide the ideal framework for teamwork and participation. Moreover, they create an environment for innovative thinking (Carson et al., 2007). Additionally, formal leaders point out the meaning context at work and build trust (Moe et al., 2009). Ideally, leaders fully delegate leadership, and team members lead depending on the situation (Gerpott & Kerscheiter, 2021). Thus, formal leaders play an important role in the emergence of shared leadership (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).

The definition of shared leadership used in this paper is based on Pearce & Conger (2003):

"A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another with the aim of leading each other to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral influence, and at other times, involves upward or downward hierarchical influence" (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1).

Role of the leader

Social systems are structured by the division of tasks and power. This leads to the creation of jobs, regardless of the job holder. Therefore, each job has a specific position in a hierarchical ranking and is linked to specific competencies. Moreover, this position is associated with a certain status that reflects the reputation and prestige within the system. In this paper, the term role is defined according to Steiger & Lippmann (2013): Members of a social system, such as superiors, employees and customers, attach certain expectations to the behavior of the job holder. They behave accordingly. Therefore, roles are complementary and complement each other, as they are dependent on each other. Thus, the tasks of employees in an organization arise from a multitude of roles and the

associated responsibilities. Stogdill (1974) empirically investigated the behavior of leaders. He distinguishes between ten leadership roles, associating traits with leadership success.

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) describes that a part of our identity stems from group membership. These groups can exist on various levels, from family and work to national or cultural affiliations. Moreover, our belonging to these groups influences our self-concept and self-perception. Thus, a central aspect of this theory is the distinction between personal identity and social identity. Therefore, personal identity refers to the individual traits and characteristics that make a person unique, while social identity refers to the identity derived from belonging to social groups.

Another important concept is the comparison between in-group (the group to which one belongs) and out-group (groups to which one does not belong). People tend to evaluate members of their own group more positively and identify with them, while often negatively evaluating members of out-groups. Tajfel et al. (1979) demonstrated these findings in their Minimal Group Studies. To summarize, they identified three variables that contribute to favouring the in-group: Firstly, the extent to which group members identify with it and internalize their membership in their self-concept. Secondly, the extent to which differentiation into different groups is possible in the respective context. And thirdly, the perceived relevance of distinguishing from the out-group, which in turn depends on the status of the in-group.

Self-Categorization Theory

The self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) is an extension of the social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). The theory describes how people identify themselves in social groups and how this identification influences their behavior. Thus, the core idea of the self-categorization theory is that people do not only see themselves as individual personalities but also as members of social groups. When people feel belonging to a group, they begin to categorize themselves in relation to that group, and their individual characteristics are pushed into the background. This process is called self-categorization. In addition, the self-categorization theory explains that people adjust their behavior according to the norms and values of their group once they identify with it. However, this can lead to increased group conformity and a sense of belonging.

The behavior of an individual is determined by either a social or a personal identity process, depending on the significance of the situation for each identity. Therefore, the theory deals with the formation and significance of self-created social categories and prototypes, as well as depersonalization resulting from the assignment to a category (Turner et al., 1994). However, assignment to a category depends on the accessibility and fit of the category, which can, in turn, be manipulated by conscious behaviors, symbols, and behavioral strategies (Hogg & Terry, 2014).

To summarize, the social identity theory and the self-categorization theory differ in their consideration of social and personal identity. While the social identity theory describes a continuum from interpersonal behavior to intergroup behavior, the self-categorization theory postulates that both the social and personal identity processes can be active simultaneously (Trepte, 2013).

Method

This research is part of a larger study which is based on a mixed-methods approach. The strategy follows a sequential explanatory design, in which a quantitative study is followed by a qualitative one (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), integrating both an online survey and focus groups. Thus, this approach is anchored in a functionally and objectively view regarding the quantitative study as well as in a subjectivist-interpretative view concerning the qualitative study (Burrell et al., 1979). The advantage of this method is to combine the strengths of both approaches in order to obtain a more complete picture and improve the validity of the results (Döring & Bortz, 2016). The qualitative study presented here is addressing the following research question:

Which role does the formal leader play in a shared leadership team?

In November 2023, three focus groups were conducted in various settings (see table 1).

Table 1: Overview focus groups

Number and field	date	duration	composition
1: industry (technicians): company has implemented shared leadership officially in addition to hierarchical structures	7.11.2023	2:13 hours	6 men
2: professional cycling sport (members of different teams): a mix of experienced professionals in the World Tour and under-23-riders on the leap to the top of the world	8.11.2023	1:58 hours	5 men
3: research group of university: team was chosen as they had a high score in shared leadership in the quantitative study	21.11.2023	2:17 hours	8 men, 3 women

The data was analyzed according to the qualitative content analysis method proposed by Kuckartz (2012), as this allows for the construction of categories both deductive and inductive procedure during the process. Besides, the software program MAXQDA was used for content-structuring data analysis. Initially, significant passages in the text were highlighted and memos were written. In the second step, main thematic categories were developed, followed by coding the material with the main categories. Subsequently, all coded text passages were merged with the same main categories. In the next step, inductively determined subcategories were coded onto the material, and finally, the entire material was coded with the category system (Kuckartz, 2012). Both a codebook and a coding guideline were created. Furthermore, the coding guideline names the category, describes it in the definition, provides an anchor example, and explains the coding rule.

Subsequently, the categories were examined from a metaperspective in order to define different roles of the formal leader through further condensing of the categories. Within this step, four overarching categories were defined for the leadership roles, according to the category formation of Kuckartz (2012). Thus, this heuristic anticipation led to the depiction of a role model of the formal leader in a shared leadership team and is intended to stimulate theoretical discussion.

For this study, attention was paid to the quality criteria of qualitative research according to Kuckartz (2012). On one side, internal study quality encompasses reliability, credibility, and dependability as criteria. On the other side, external study quality describes transferability and generalizability. Besides, transparency was ensured by accurately documenting the research process. Moreover, interreliability was examined using a sample from the coded text. For this purpose, intercoder agreement at the segment level was calculated according to (Brennan & Prediger, 1981) to verify the consistency of code assignment (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019).

For calculating Kappa (see figure 1), the coding units of the personality category with the subcodes were predetermined, and the same segments from case 3 were recoded by another person. To summarize, the result shows an agreement of 82 percent. The random-adjusted Kappa value according to Brennan & Prediger (1981) is 78 percent. Indeed, these values can be considered as good.

Figure 1: Calculation Kappa according to Brennan & Prediger (1981)

		Person 1		
		1	0	
Person 2	1	a = 23	b = 5	28
	0	c = 0	0	0
		23	5	28

$$P(\text{observed}) = P_o = a / (a + b + c) = 0.82$$

$$P(\text{chance}) = P_c = 1 / \text{number of codes} = 1 / 5 = 0.20$$

$$\text{Kappa} = (P_o - P_c) / (1 - P_c) = 0.78$$

Deviations between the two codes were found in "learning on the job" and "leadership development" (see table 2). Therefore, the analysis indicates that these subcodes are not distinct enough from each other and could be merged. However, the result is relativized by the fact that both subcodes belong to the "still learning" code.

Table 2: Intercode agreement of codes

code	accordance	mismatch	overall	percent
character and traits	2	0	2	100,00
can let go, trusts other	3	0	3	100,00
learning at work	5	1	6	83,33
leadership development	11	4	15	73,33
coaching	2	0	2	100,00
total	23	5	28	82,14

Results

Category System

With regards to the research question concerning the role of the formal leader in the shared leadership team, table 3 presents the developed category system with the three main categories personality, leadership mindset, and leadership tasks, along with their codes and subcodes.

Table 3: Codesystem

Codesystem	220
Personality (47)	
Character and traits	2
Motivation	4
Intrinsically motivated	3
Can let go, trusts others	5
Role Model	2
No assertiveness required	2
Still learning	
Learning on the job	7
Leadership development	15
Coaching	2
Leadership mindset (98)	
Values diversity in the team	10
Can handle differences	11
Decision making	24
Requires assumption of responsibility	5
Failure culture	4
General attitude towards hierarchical leadership (Mindset)	
Hierarchy as safety net	3
Challenges hierarchical leadership	10
Positions oneself in the middle (relinquishing power)	7
Leads and is led	7
Requires self-leadership	2
Requires self-responsibility, high trust	10
Leadership tasks (86)	
Maintains overview	4
Vision, strategy and goals	8
Organizational tasks, project management	5
Communication	
Building trust	3
Communicates with everyone in the team	4
Appreciation	6
Eye-to-eye	2
Provides feedback	2
Networking and public relations	7
Conflict situations	2
Listens	4
Representative	5
Shielding upwards, corporate politics	5
Creating framework conditions	4
Keeps unpleasantness	2
Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the team	4
Introduces mentoring system	6
Competencies	10
Allocates roles of team members	2

In total, 220 codes were formed. Thus, for case 1, this resulted in 81 codes, for case 2 the number was 44, and for case 3, 95 codes were created. More detailed, the category personality presents seven subcodes and an additional three subcategories of one subcode. In total, the category Personality comprises 47 codes. Moreover, the main category leadership mindset is composed of six subcodes, each with an additional six subcategories. Besides, the mindset category consists of 98 codes. Finally, the main category leadership tasks exhibits four subcodes, each with 15 additional subcodes, and one additional subcategory of one of these subcodes. Thus, the leadership tasks category comprises 86 codes in total.

The main category “personality” of the leader in the shared leadership team describes a person who is open and interested, flexible, and enjoys working with people. The formal leader can handle different opinions and is not solely focused on asserting his/her own ideas. S/he is intrinsically motivated and can motivate others. The following statement has been given by a formal leader during the interviews:

A: But how do you see your tasks then?

T: I only do what I think is good and important. According to the motto, I am intrinsically motivated. I want something to move forward in terms of content and there are people who do that with me and are happy to do it.

Case 1, 477

Formal leaders in shared leadership teams can let go and show great trust in others (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). They serve as a role model in terms of their character and personality. They listen not only to the loudest voices in the team; all individuals are heard and given opportunities. The following statement of a team member illustrates this:

"I think you have to be very loud in other contexts, I say. And have a bit of an elbow and pull it out. I have the feeling that you don't have to do that here. Here, you get noticed even if you're not always the loudest person or say I'm the best at it. If you simply get the opportunity to try it out."

Case 1, 166

The formal leaders learn constantly, either through hands-on work or in leadership development programs. Additionally, they receive support through accompanying coaching (Carson et al., 2007). This is supported by the following statement:

"I mean, of course we already have good support from X there. [...], also with the divisional coaching."

X = organizational development of the company

Case 3, 281

Leadership development programs include topics on collaborative decision-making, encouraging employee ownership through asking questions, and using psychological tools to understand how things work. Moreover, these programs facilitate networking and exchange among leaders. They raise awareness for certain issues, such as dealing with different cultures, but it's only through practical application or stepping out of the comfort zone that the learning effect truly occurs.

The category "leadership mindset" focuses on how the attitude and actions of the leader look within the framework of shared leadership. The leader values diversity in team composition to integrate various perspectives. Moreover, they possess the ability to handle diverse personalities and opinions and develop intercultural competencies to gain a better understanding of others. Hence, this occurs through direct experiences as well as learning from books, but direct contact with different cultures is essential for effective learning. The following statement of a formal leader underpins this opinion:

"I believe that this is already a key to success, to say: How do we put the teams together? What are the different types like?"

Case 3, 139

Decisions within the team are made collectively, enhancing motivation and enabling team members to take ownership. This fosters the development of decision-making skills among team members while simultaneously relieving the leader. The following statement of a formal leader shows this view:

"Deciding, well, in the end, the decision is there, but it actually always happens together. I always have the feeling that it's a joint decision."

Case 1, 60

Open communication and the ability to prepare and present recommendations well are crucial for this process. The leader acknowledges, often not to have all the necessary information and therefore involves the team in decision-making, as the following statement proves.

"I have a lot of decisions to make anyway. Do I have to make these too? I think you can make them well as an employee. And you have enough experience. And if I have the feeling that you're handling it responsibly, then make the decision."

Case 3, 129

They promote a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and are analyzed together to learn from them as the following statement confirms:

"But even if things don't go well, you know that you can make mistakes."

Case 3, 90

Hierarchical structures serve as a safety net when the team encounters obstacles, but traditional hierarchical leadership is not favoured by the leader. The following statement of a formal leader confirms this mindset:

"Well, I don't lead, everyone leads. In my projects, everyone leads and if nobody does anything, nobody does anything. And then the question is, how do I deal with that? Do I suddenly have to take on the leadership role and really delegate or are there other options? I think there are."

Case 1, 252

Even if difficulties occur during a project, the formal leader does not apply hierarchical leadership. He proposes the following:

"So I think you have to adapt the project, adapt the roles, but not suddenly take on the leadership role and delegate someone."

Case 1, 266

Shared leadership is based on shared power, with all team members both leading and being led. This requires a common understanding and a willingness for self-leadership and assuming responsibility. However, it is important for the leader to support the team and show trust in the members' abilities, while the members must also take on responsibility. This represents the following statement of a team member:

"[...] you immediately have the feeling that you can get involved. You can simply contribute your own ideas or be heard, you are respected right from the start. I can totally confirm this leap of faith. And on the other hand, you're thrown in at the deep end - what do I do now? You're given a task straight away, but yes, there are these things to do, do you have any ideas? [...]. That's great. A lot of personal responsibility right from the start."

Case 1, 170

The main category „tasks of the formal leader" highlights that formal leader play a crucial role in organizing and leading projects by keeping an overview, setting the direction, and taking the next steps. They consider the resources, competencies, and interests of team members and coordinate processes and financing. They also handle bureaucratic tasks and knowledge management. The leader always keeps the organization's strategy and vision in mind and sets goals together with the team. The following statement of a team member underpins this view.

"You need someone who has an overview."

Case 1, 463

Formal leaders act as role models and motivate the team by addressing individual needs and goals. Additionally, they observe the team and intervene if individuals are overburdened. Moreover, communication within the team is crucial, and the leader creates conditions for open and trusting collaboration. Furthermore, they also contribute to networking with partners and stakeholders and represent the department externally. The following statement confirms this.

"I think it's very important [...] that the sporting director, i.e. the head of the team, communicates with all the riders. That he talks to everyone. What is your goal in the race? And that he then tries to see the big picture."

Case 2, 232

Formal leaders recognize and resolve conflicts within the team and ensure a pleasant working atmosphere. Thus, the formal leader identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the team and leverages strengths effectively. In addition, they implement a mentoring system so that the inexperienced can learn from the experienced. The expertise of both the leader and team members is a key success factor. Moreover, the formal leader is also responsible for assigning roles to team members, thus creating a clear structure for collaboration. The following statement of a formal leader points this opinion out:

"Well, if I wasn't a professional, I could turn the lights off."
Case 3, 456

Shared leadership roles

In the next step, the categories were examined from a metaperspective. The goal was to define various roles of the formal leader through a refined synthesis of these categories. Following the inductive category formation according to Kuckartz (2012), four overarching categories were defined, each corresponding to a distinct leadership role. This heuristic approach led to the development of a role model for the formal leader in a shared leadership team.

Based on the code system (see table 3) and the condensed description the following four roles of the leader in shared leadership were identified: the enabler, the connector, the ambassador, and the organizer (see table 4).

Table 4: Overview of the four roles of the formal leader in the shared leadership team

Main category	Codes	Condensing	Role
mindset (98)	Values diversity in the team Can handle differences Decision making Requires assumption of responsibility Failure culture General attitude towards hierarchical leadership (Mindset) Hierarchy as safety net Challenges hierarchical leadership Positions oneself in the middle (relinquishing power) Leads and is led Requires self-leadership Requires self-responsibility, high trust	Does not want to lead hierarchically, leads and is led, makes decisions together, good error culture, pays attention to diversity in the team, can deal with differences in the team, renounces power and places himself in the middle	Enabler
personality (32)	Character and trait Motivation Intrinsically motivated Can let go, trusts others Role Model No assertiveness required Still learning Learning on the job Leadership development Coaching	Open, flexible, authentic, intrinsically motivated and motivates others, trustworthy, role model, permanent learning path	
communication (30)	Building trust Communicates with everyone in the team Appreciation Eye-to-eye Provides feedback Networking and public relations Conflict situations Listens	Creates trust in the team, communicates with everyone, communicates appreciatively and at eye level, gives feedback, resolves conflicts, listens, conducts public relations work, acts as a networker	Connector

representation (10)	Representative Shielding upwards, corporate politics	Represents the team within the organization at the same level, at a higher level and externally. Acts as contact person	Ambassador
framework (28)	Creating framework conditions Keeps unpleasantness Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the team Introduces mentoring system Competencies Allocates roles of team members	Creates favourable conditions, keeps unpleasantness away from the team, knows the strengths and weaknesses of team members and assigns roles accordingly, possesses high expertise themselves and recruits a team with high expertise, introduces a mentoring system	Organizer
overview (17)	Maintains overview Vision, strategy and goals Organizational tasks, project management	Keeps an eye on strategy, vision and goals, handles project management and organizational matters	

Figure 2 shows table 4 in a graphical overview. It summarizes the main categories and the subcodes in the role designation. The number of codes is shown in brackets.

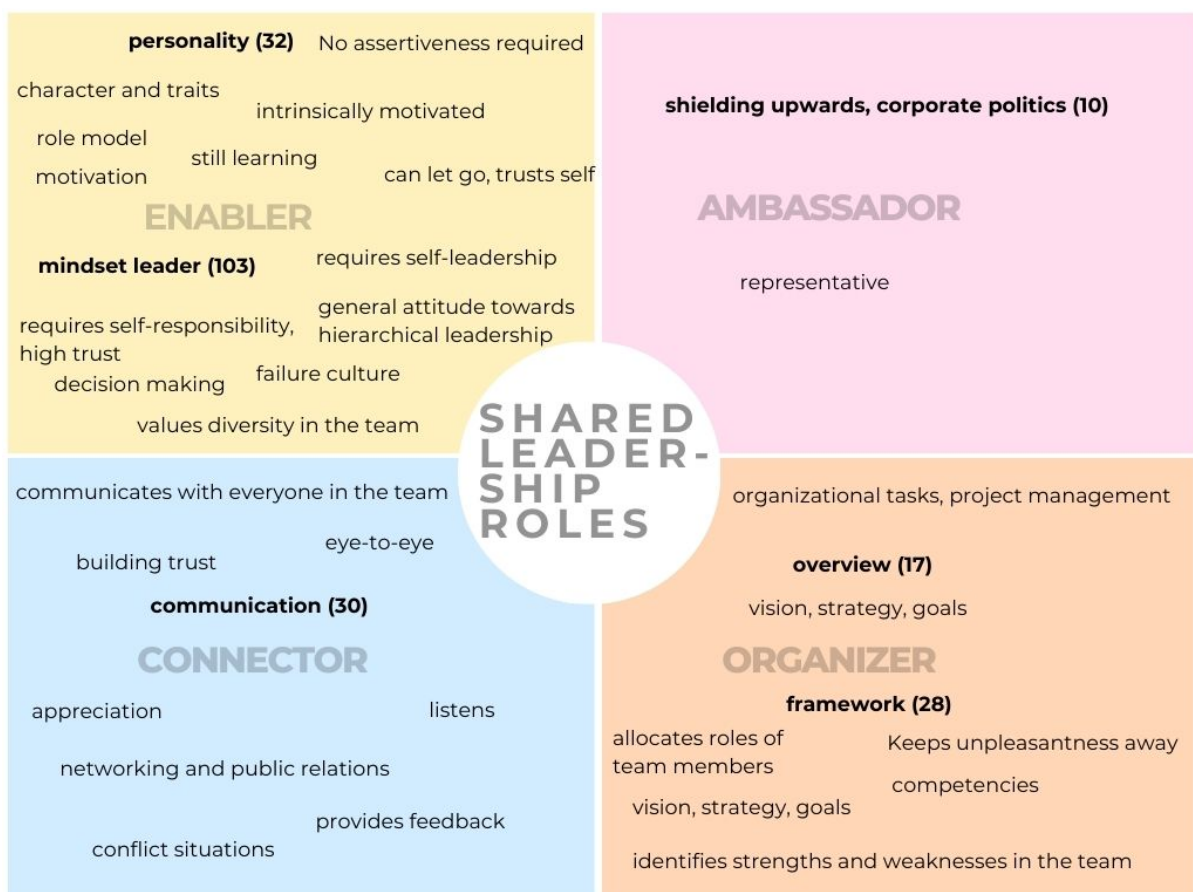


Figure 2: The four roles of a formal leader in the shared leadership team (own illustration).

The Enabler

The enabler requires both individual responsibility and self-leadership while also offering significant trust in team members. Furthermore, decisions are made collectively, fostering a culture where mistakes are allowed. Besides, the leader also values diversity in the team, believing that different perspectives and ways of thinking enrich everyone's development. However, the enabler inherently questions hierarchical leadership and refuses to adopt a hierarchical leadership role. Instead, they position themselves in the middle of the team, being led and leading as circumstances demand. Moreover, the enabler excels at motivating others and is intrinsically motivated him/herself. In addition, they act as role model, being open, flexible, authentic, enjoying working with people, and adept at handling diverse opinions. Together with the team, the enabler aims to advance and achieve goals. Instead of relying on forceful imposition, they prefer trust and letting go. Furthermore, continuous learning is their companion, achieved through daily work, internal and external leadership training, and personal coaching.

The Connector

The connector possesses strong communication skills and fosters connections. Moreover, formal leaders communicate respectfully and on equal footing, providing constructive feedback and regularly engaging with all team members. Furthermore, they excel at listening and intervene soothingly in conflict situations. In addition the connector builds significant trust within the team and has knowledge in public relations and networking. Besides, they facilitate connections among the right partners to drive project progress and strategically position the team internally and externally through public relations.

The Ambassador

The ambassador represents the team externally and serves as its spokesperson. Thus, formal leaders act as the primary point of contact in communication with higher hierarchical levels while also shielding the team from "corporate politics" from the higher echelons.

The Organizer

The organizer maintains an overview and always keeps the vision, strategy, and goals in mind. Furthermore, formal leaders handle project management and bureaucracy, creating optimal conditions for all team members to work effectively. On one hand they shield the team from unpleasantness and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members, which they use to allocate roles. On the other hand, the organizer brings significant expertise themselves and assembles a team with high levels of expertise.

These four roles of the enabler, connector, ambassador and organizer complement each other and can vary in prominence. However, in a shared leadership team, the foundation is always the relinquishment of power by the formal leader, with the role of the enabler being of utmost importance. This is evident in the highest number of codes, totalling 135 in the summary, with 103 attributed to mindset and 32 to the leader's personality. Out of a total of 220 codes, this constitutes a percentage of 61%.

Discussion

The qualitative study identifies the roles of the enabler, connector, ambassador and organizer of a formal leader in a shared leadership team. Thus, the enabler fosters accountability and self-leadership within the team and demonstrates significant trust in its members. Moreover, decisions are made collaboratively, and failure is allowed to foster an open culture. In addition, diversity is valued and seen as an opportunity for development. However, hierarchical leadership is questioned, and instead, a flexible role is assumed. Thus, the enabler is someone who understands how to motivate others. Besides, he/she is open to different opinions and works together with the team towards goals. Rather than relying on forcefulness, building trust is central. Finally, continuous learning on the job, through training, and additional coaching accompany the journey.

The enabler encompasses the categories of personality and mindset. A study by Hoch & Dulebohn (2017) demonstrates that personality traits such as agreeableness, openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability positively correlate with shared leadership. This aligns with the findings of this qualitative study, where the formal leader is described as interested, flexible, open, authentic, and trustworthy. Additionally, they enjoy working with people and are not solely focused on asserting their own ideas. Moreover, the leader can let go and demonstrates significant trust in the team members. Besides, they can handle situations where solutions may not align with their preferences.

Another strength of the formal leader is the ability to motivate others. Thus, they create team spirit and make team members feel valued. Additionally, the element of fun should not be overlooked. Moreover, humor is described in the literature as a "social lubricant" (Hausendorf, 2019, p. 109). Furthermore, the leader is intrinsically motivated and does what he/she considers as good and important.

Decisions are made collectively within the team, and there is an open culture regarding mistakes. Moreover, the formal leader has significant trust in team members but also demands self-leadership and the assumption of responsibility. Thus, the formal leaders are described as role models for other team members in their behavior. According to the Social Identity Model of Leadership, the influence on a group is greater, the more the leader represents it. This so-called prototypicality, in the sense of "being one of us" (Van Dick et al., 2021, S. 18), is manifested not only through physical and objective characteristics but also through attitudes and opinions. Besides, the theoretical background is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1987).

Leaders shape group identity and thus exert influence. However, the results of the qualitative study show that the leader does not stand in front of the group but is part of it and stands up for it (Haslam et al., 2020). Therefore, they are prototypical for the group. Endres & Weibler (2019) also emphasize that in shared leadership teams, the division into leaders and followers is unnecessary. Thus, this is evident in the mindset of the leader in the qualitative investigation. Moreover, they position themselves in the middle and relinquish power. In addition, they lead themselves and are led. Thus, by being equal with the group, the leader strengthens prototypicality. According to the philosopher Bertrand Russell, the fundamental concept in social science is power, comparable to energy in physics (Russell, 2004). Those who have power can change the social world (Haslam et al., 2020). Moreover, studies confirm that the more prototypical the leader is for the group, the greater their influence on others (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003).

In addition to prototypicality, Haslam et al. (2020) point out three other characteristics through which leaders can shape their influence: Identity Advancement (doing it for us), Identity Entrepreneurship (crafting a sense of us), and Identity Impressarioship (making us matter).

Identity Advancement describes what leaders do to gain acceptance within the group and increase their influence. Besides, it involves activating the energy of team members and channelling it into the implementation of shared goals and projects. To promote group interests, leaders need to understand the norms and values that constitute the group's social identity. Thus, they must know the group's culture in order to lead it. Haslam et al. (2020) emphasize that leaders ideally should be seen by the team as working hard for the group and promoting the group's interests.

Identity Entrepreneurship involves creating a sense of purpose for the group. Haslam et al. (2020) points out identity formation to increase the leader's influence and power. The basis for this builds the creation of social identities, including differentiation from others. Moreover, the leader and their proposals embody the beliefs and values of the group. Furthermore, the key message is that effective leaders are entrepreneurs of identity. Subsequently, a team with a shared identity coordinates its actions better and thus has more power than a group without this identity. Thus, creating an identity is the most important of all resources for the leader. To sum up, social identity makes a difference because it clarifies how we are connected to others, whom we can rely on and who we cannot, and how they operate in the world. Based on our social identity, we move things as part of a group (Jetten et al., 2002).

Identity Impressarioship illustrates how leaders convincingly shape their constructions of social identity and thereby influence others' behavior. In addition, it requires alignment of their self-image, actions,

and group identity. However, the power of identity and the importance of controlling identity definitions are significant and influence social processes. Moreover, those who have excellent knowledge of the group's culture and know how to use language and communication effectively have an advantage. Haslam et al. (2020, p. 192) describe leaders as "artists, empresarios and engineers of identity".

In summary, both the personality and mindset of the formal leader exert a significant influence on the group, as prototypicality is strongly pronounced. In addition, they promote group interests through Identity Advancement, form a group identity through Identity Entrepreneurship, and convincingly embody social identity in their daily actions through Identity Impressarioship (Haslam et al., 2020). Therefore, the leader does not rely on a formal source of power, as it is the case in traditional leadership settings (Van Dick & Fink, 2018). Thus, power is not exercised through hierarchy but through identity formation.

The role of the ambassador illustrates that the leader represents the interests of the group by acting as a shield "upwards" and representing externally. By taking on these tasks, the ambassador promotes the interests of the group, thereby strengthening Identity Advancement (Haslam et al., 2020). Moreover, Grille & Kauffeld (2015) define micropolitical leadership orientation as a dimension of shared leadership behavior. Stogdill (1974) also refers to the leader as a representative. Thus, he also defines another task as maintaining good relationships with superiors to increase influence.

The role of the connector requires highly developed communication skills and the ability to build good relationships. Thus, they communicate respectfully, provide constructive feedback, and maintain regular exchanges within the team. Furthermore, they listen and assist in conflicts. Additional strengths include networking and public relations to advance a project and position the team. The central concept of the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is based on the long-term relationship building of the involved individuals. Moreover, leadership within the relational leadership theory occurs through the formation of effective relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, within the LMX theory, the relationship with a select group of employees is emphasized (Van Dick & Fink, 2018). In addition, the qualitative study shows, that the formal leader should maintain good relationships and be in communication with all team members.

In strengthening identity advancement, fairness plays a significant role. Thus, leaders who treat people equally or unequally delineate the boundaries of group membership (Haslam et al., 2020). Moreover, Grille & Kauffeld (2015) describe relationship-oriented leadership as an aspect of shared leadership behavior. Also Rost (1995) views leadership as multidirectional influence through relationships in all directions and with all actors, not just individuals. Furthermore, he links relationship-based leadership with shared leadership: "If leadership is what the relationship is, then both collaborators and leaders are all doing leadership. There is no such thing as followership" (Rost, 1995, p. 133).

Drath (2001) points out the relational dialogue. Thus, leadership arises from involving several people to meet complex demands. Additionally, the relational dialogue enables the system to handle leadership tasks. Moreover, leadership occurs when people engage in collaborative thinking and action. However, different perspectives, values, beliefs, cultures, or worldviews are no obstacles. So, the following assumptions are necessary: 1) Leadership is a characteristic of a social system. 2) Individuals do not possess leadership; leadership occurs when people participate in communal forms of thinking and acting. 3) If there is an individual leadership personality, the actions of that person are an aspect of participating in the leadership process (Drath, 2001). Thus, the role of the connector necessitates a mindset of the leader that leadership is not associated with hierarchy. Therefore, the role of the enabler can be considered the basis for the role of the connector.

The organizer keeps the vision, strategy, and goals in mind. Furthermore, the formal leaders as organizers take care of project management and bureaucracy. They create ideal conditions for all team members to work well. Moreover, they keep unpleasant things away and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members. Based on this analysis, they assign roles. In addition, the organizer brings a high level of expertise themselves and assembles a team that also has high expertise. Moreover, the commonality of highly developed expertise contributes to strengthening the prototypicality of the leader (Haslam et al., 2020). Already, Stogdill (1974) describes in traditional leadership literature the introduction of structure as a leadership task. This includes a clear definition of one's own role and informing team members of what is expected of them. Grille & Kauffeld (2015)

count task management as a dimension of shared leadership behavior. Therefore, the role of the organizer is present in both hierarchical and shared leadership.

Implications for research and practice

Formal leaders are supposed to craft ideal frameworks for their team (Carson et al., 2007). This study contributes to the research gap, which additional role the formal leader plays in a shared leadership team. The results encourage to conduct further studies in the context of shared leadership and identity creation. Moreover, researchers can test hypothesis concerning the roles of the enabler, connector, ambassador and organizer and shared leadership behavior.

The study's results lead to the following recommendations for practice regarding the role of the leader in a shared leadership Team. When recruiting leaders, HR professionals should ensure that personality traits such as agreeableness, openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are strongly pronounced. These traits serve as foundational pillars for shared leadership within organizations. Drath (2001) posits a paradigm shift in the understanding of leadership, emphasizing the centrality of relational dialogue. Thus, shared Leadership arises from collaborative interactions and shared learning endeavors aimed at achieving collective objectives. Consequently, leadership training initiatives foster a mindset conducive to shared leadership, collective social identity and relationships.

Within the framework of shared leadership, the understanding of leadership is based on the belief that hierarchical leadership is not necessary. Thus, leadership occurs through the formation of identity and relationships and is not vested in a single individual. Moreover, the foundation for this formation lies in leaders knowing their own identity and self-concept, requiring ongoing self-reflection. Additionally, they understand how identity is created within a group, the obstacles involved, and the prerequisites for it. Developing communication skills is a necessary foundation for shared leadership. Moreover, this includes tools for building trust, fostering an open error culture, establishing good relationships, and expanding and nurturing networks. Different perspectives, values, beliefs, and cultures do not pose obstacles to collaboration. Thus, leadership training includes the skills to handle various personalities and cultures.

Leaders learn to promote self-responsibility within the team by asking the right questions. In addition, this supports the self-leadership of team members and enhances their decision-making competence. Leaders benefit from coaching and, in turn, act as coaches themselves. Thus, they should acquire basic coaching skills. Moreover, leaders are required to have project management competencies and effectively manage bureaucratic requirements. Therefore, this necessitates knowledge of effective tools. Furthermore, leaders need the competencies to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of team members and, based on this, clearly define and assign roles within the team. Hence, psychological fundamentals support them in improving their understanding of people. In addition, formal leaders in a shared leadership team continuously develop themselves, as they, like their team members, require high levels of expertise.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study is subject to limitations, which in turn serve as a starting point for future research projects. As the investigation was conducted in the DACH region with three focused group discussions (n=22) in the fields of industry, research, and elite sports, conducting surveys with additional, potentially contrasting groups, is recommended to validate the findings. Moreover, studies in other fields and work contexts may have revealed additional categories. Thus, generalization of the qualitative study is not assured (Döring & Bortz, 2016). Although the results provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of shared leadership and the role of the formal leader, the model of the four roles is not based on typology formation (Kuckartz, 2012) but on a heuristic model. Therefore, further studies are needed to validate the model. Another limitation is that social desirability bias in the group interviews may have influenced the respondents' answer behavior. Moreover, we did not address the topic, that shared leadership is not suitable for every team, every context and every situation, e.g. in a crisis.

Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to clarify the research question which role the formal leader plays in a shared leadership team. Our findings, supplemented with literature in the field of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), Identity Formation (Van Dick et al., 2021), and Relational Leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006), have yielded the four-roles model. To summarize, the formal leader fulfills the roles of enabler, ambassador, connector, and organizer. Additionally, the study demonstrates that the role of the enabler is crucial for establishing and cultivating shared leadership within a team. Moreover, the mindset and personality of the leader are prototypical for the entire team. However, shared leadership succeeds only when the leader is an authentic role model. Building on this, the formal leader, as a connector, brings strong communication skills to build good relationships. Furthermore, the role of the ambassador in promoting the group's interests. To complete the profile, the role of the organizer is creating ideal conditions for the team.

The results provide important insights for HR professionals regarding what to consider when recruiting formal leaders for shared leadership teams. Additionally, the categories summarized in the four roles (see figure 2) provide impulses for the development of shared leadership development programs in organizations, universities, and colleges. On one hand, formal leaders in shared leadership teams understand their self-concept and their own identity and authentically embody it in their daily actions. On the other hand, they possess the competence to create a social identity within the group. Furthermore, social skills such as communication ability and the formation and maintenance of relationships are essential for the cultivation of shared leadership. Thus, formal leaders in shared leadership teams do not exercise power through hierarchy but through identity formation and building strong relationships (Tajfel et al., 1979; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The results of this qualitative study provide a basis for the development of training programs concerning leadership development for shared leadership teams. However, we recommend further research to validate the study results, measuring the effectiveness of training programs based on these findings. Instruments, such as the Shared Professional Leadership Inventory Tool (SPLIT) by Grille & Kauffeld (2015) could be used for this purpose. For example, this instrument could assess shared leadership behavior before and after training and highlight differences. Moreover, further studies could investigate how leaders in shared leadership teams create social identity. Additionally, questions related to power and relationship, as well as power and identity in the workplace context, offer avenues for exploration.

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