

Collaborative leadership can advance participation and inclusion

Shabnam A. Shaikh, Suvi Heikkinen & Anna-Maija Lämsä
Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics JSBE, Finland

The role of a 'leader' occupies a significant position in achieving the organizational wide objectives such as increasing employee motivation, minimizing employee turnover as well as advancing equality and fairness in the organization. Generally speaking, leadership is not a 'one-size-fits-all' phenomenon since there is no universally accepted definition or style. Nonetheless, with increasing workplace diversity in the 21st-century organizations as well as fast deployment and adoption of interactive communication channels, the role of the leadership is changing and considered more challenging and demanding. It is assumed that every organization is diverse rather than monolithic, where people with diversified cultural & educational background, gender, and skill-sets provide immense learning and growth opportunities. This workforce diversity in 21st-century organizations with advanced interactive communication channels motivates the development of new leadership styles to meet the variant organizational needs and requirements. Among these evolving leadership styles, collaborative leadership occupies a key position.

Working collaboratively in any organization drives the concept of a shared vision to develop a new kind of leadership. This collective approach, in turn, motivates the leaders, employees, stakeholders, and other organizational agencies to interact in thought-provoking dialogues in order to find the best possible answers and solutions collectively, rather than producing heroic or a "great person approach". Therefore, it is safe to argue that collaborative leadership style disrupts the traditional or bureaucratic approaches and triggers the idea of shared, distributed, network, relational, transformational, and horizontal leadership approaches that create the synergetic attitudes of collaborative leaders and promising high impact over the organizational performance.

A key feature of collaborative leadership is diverse people's participation in leadership processes. Values such as empowerment, openness, integrity and being responsive to feedback from others are conceived crucial aspects in this decentralized leadership idea. It is widely believed that collaborative leadership style performs distinctly by establishing new rules and laws for joint actions, strengthening the fragile relationship between and among the different organizational hierarchy, and accelerating the search for novel ideas to resolve conflicts in the organizational performance. Empowerment – a crucial aspect in collaborative leadership – can

promote change in people's, such as women's who have been traditionally discriminated in working life, opportunities and promote them to have real influence over their decision-making concerning organizational issues as well as their career and life in general. Collaborative leadership can advance diverse people to have agency so that they can maximize their capabilities now and in the future.

Despite these immense benefits of working collectively, sharing power is a major constraint in developing collaboration which somehow creates a lack of trust. Those in power positions in organizations are not usually very willing to share power. In addition, collaborative leadership style is found to be not working effectively at the time of making quick strategic decisions.

In diverse workforce organizations, similar values and social norms are difficult to maintain in a collaborative environment. Societal & cultural forces, language barrier and organizational structure can be a hindrance in demonstrating the collaborative leadership practices successfully. Yet, collaborative leadership, when exercised in a context-sensitive way, can be a valuable leadership approach in supporting diverse people's opportunities to meaningful and productive work, and consequently, better organizational performance. Collaborative leadership has the potential to advance inclusion and equality in organizational life.

Authors

M.Sc. Shabnam Shaikh is a full-time doctoral student in Management and Leadership at the Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics JSBE, Finland.

Dr. Suvi Heikkinen is a Postdoctoral Researcher at University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Dr. Anna-Maija Lämsä is Professor of Human Resource Management and Vice Dean at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

The previous version of this text was published as a blog 'Collaborative Leadership – Effectiveness & Constraints' at the WeAll official website. WeAll Consortium, known as Social and Economic Sustainability of Future Working Life is a research project funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) of the Academy of Finland Society (WeAll project, 292883). It is part of the Academy programme Equality in Society. WeAll Consortium is a stakeholder of the Rainbow project. WeAll aims at addressing critical issues on how age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, demographics as well as organizational and management practices, make an impact on the working life of the diverse group.