The Language of Leadership Networks in Multiteam Systems

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Introduction

Collective Pronouns Trigger Identity Formation

Individuals establish their leader/follower relational identities by speaking group-related language.

Leaders tend to speak on behalf of those they seek to organize. (Stefans & Haslam, 2013)

Followers respond to collective language use. (Molenberghs, Prochilo, Steffens, Zacher, & Haslam, 2015)

Leader Emergence is an Identity Construction Process

Leadership identity formation

Claiming & Granting Leadership Across Teams

MTSs are “teams of teams” with both subordinate (team) goals and superordinate (MTS) goals.

Intergroup relations suppress the formation of leadership ties across teams in MTS; ties that are needed for the MTS to work toward superordinate goals.

Using collective pronouns to reference superordinate goals may trigger the leader-follower identity formation process to build bridges across teams.

Hypothesis 1: Individual’s use of MTS-referencing collective pronouns positively predicts leadership claiming.

Hypothesis 2: Individual’s use of MTS-referencing collective pronouns positively predicts leadership granting.

Procedure

- Task: Build a well on Mars using online simulation and collaboration tool
- 3 hour task simulation (training, simulation, and surveys)
- 12-person multi-disciplinary distributed MTS
  - Mars Spaceship Crew in NASA’s Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA): 4-member team
  - Mission Control (in the lab): 8-members
- Sample size: 10 MTS (N=120)
- Between-team communication through online chat interface; Within-team communication was unmediated

The Project RED Multiteam System

Measures

Collective Pronouns – All forms of “we”, “our”, and “us”
- Collective language coded as MTS, Discipline Team, or Function Team
- Three coders, alpha = .86

Leadership Claiming – Sociometric response: To whom did you provide leadership?

Leadership Granting – Sociometric response: Who did you rely on for leadership?

Collective Pronouns (MTS Referent)

Pronouns Predict Leadership Claiming

(H1 Supported)

1.09** times more likely

To Claim MTS Leadership

Collective Pronouns (All Other Referents)

Pronouns Predict Leadership Granting

(H2 Supported)

1.02 (ns)

To Be Granted MTS Leadership

Analytic Approach

Exponential Random Graph Modeling (ERGM) used to assess how increased use of collective pronouns predicted the formation of an observed leader-follower tie.

- Controlled for edges, reciprocity, GWESP, GWDSP, team membership, HERA membership, and word count

Key Takeaways

Individuals’ use of collective pronouns referring to the “MTS” predict leadership emergence in multiteam systems – pronouns affect creation of both leadership and followership identities.

Followers discern collective language referents – it is not just what you say, but also what you mean.

Language offers researchers a noninvasive method for investigating behavior.

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