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Distributed Leadership: Systematic Literature Review

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Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is relatively new approach in the field of leadership. Consequently, detailed research outside academic or educational sector is not available as of yet. Leithwood et al. (2009) further defined distributed leadership framework as a planful alignment in which guidance, resources and roles are assigned to the individuals or groups that are effectively placed to accomplish a function or task. In this paper an overview of distributed leadership is presented by conducting a systematic literature review which allows us to demarcate certain attributes of distributed leadership. Four themes of distributed leadership are identified by the systematic literature review, which include, behavioural perspective, context perspective, benefits and attributes, and performance perspective. Light is thrown upon the benefits and challenges of distributed leadership at the end of this paper.

Word Count: 7000

Introduction

There are varying definitions of distributed leadership. However, there is no consensus on a specific definition since each researcher defines the term differently. Additionally, most of the definitions are inclined to the perspectives from the education sector (Gronn, 2000; Hulpia et al., 2009; MacBeath, 2005; Mayrowetz, 2008) where more research on distributed leadership has been conducted.

Distributed leadership in the education sector may be most aptly defined as:

"Anarchic misalignment: where leaders pursue their own goals independently of one another and there is 'active rejection, on the part of some or many organizational leaders, of influence from others about what they should be doing in their own sphere of influence." (Leithwood et al., 2006:344).

The term 'distributed leadership' has been used interchangeably with terms such as shared leadership, team leadership, participative leadership and democratic leadership by some researchers (Duif et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Jones, 2014; Harrison, 2018).

Gunter et al. (2015) formulates an explicitly descriptive approach of distributed leadership and considers distributed leadership an analytical framework that helps to articulate the way leaders have been distributed in the firm. According to Spillane (2005), the definition of distributed leadership encompasses social and situational contexts as well as aspects of language, physical environment, and organizational systems. This situated nature of leadership is seen as constitutive of leadership practice and hence demand identification of leadership acts in greater ways (Edwards, 2011; Göksoy, 2015; Supovitz and Tognatta, 2013).

Bolden (2011) greatly emphasised on process and systems to formulate three kinds of distributed leadership including collaborated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated distribution. Collaborated distribution as denoted by Bolden (2011) includes two or more people working together in the same place and time following the same leadership activity. Collective distribution works individually or separately but depends on each other to enact a particular leadership routine. Bolden (2011) further stated that the coordinated distribution includes two or greater than two individuals that work in a structured and sequenced way to accomplish a particular leadership routine.

Brownell (2010) suggested that despite variation in the distributed leadership definition, three main factors must be considered. It includes an assumption that leadership is a prominent aspect of a group or network of individuals interacting requiring openness in terms of boundaries of leadership and the various distributed leaders. So, Bennett, et al. (2003) asserted that distributed leadership is dynamic, relational, inclusive, collaborative and contextually situated. Educational institutions greatly promote distributed leadership as it involves the perception of parents, students, local community, teachers and governors (Carter & Dechurch, 2012). Thus, distributed leadership is considered to be a constructive process that is collective and collaborated in such a way to share beliefs, knowledge, new understanding, and new ideas (Angelle, 2010; Beirne, 2017; Harris, 2013; Jain, 2016; Hairon and Goh, 2015; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Mascall et al., 2008).

Leithwood et al. (2007) further defined distributed leadership framework as a planned alignment in which guidance, resources and roles are assigned to individuals or groups that are effectively placed to accomplish a particular function or task. It may also be spontaneous alignment in which

the leadership activities and functions are distributed randomly via intuitions (Cleveland-Innes, 2014; Mayrowetz, 2008). Mayrowetz (2008) argues that distributed leadership may lead to less fortuitous results due to spontaneous misalignment of activities.

Among all the conceptual models, Gronn (2000) distributed leadership model is more comprehensive and apt. Each of the models uses the activity theory in which distributed leadership interlinks agency and structure and action and distributed cognition. MacBeath (2005) defines six kinds of distributed leadership approaches, namely, formal, pragmatic, incremental, and opportunistic strategic, and cultural. The most appropriate among them would depend on the situation at hand (Currie et al, 2009).

This paper, after introducing the distributed leadership, throws light on various aspects of distributed leadership which emerged after the systematic literature review. The aspects which came to light were attributes of distributed leadership, themes that emerge from the study of distributed leadership, benefits and challenges of distributed leadership.

Systematic Literature Review

Budgen and Brereton (2006) regards SLR as a literature review approach that uses systematic approaches in the collection of secondary data, synthesize the studies and critically appraise the studies. The purpose of SLR is to offer an exhaustive summary of present evidence to answer a specific research question. The SLR approach is more beneficial than the traditional narrative approach since the systematic reviewers evaluate the quality of the studies in which poor quality studies are discarded (Mulrow, 1994). The study adopts a systematic literature review, which Harrison et al. (2016) allude that it is an acknowledged approach for developing reliable knowledge through an evidence-based strategy. According to Tranfield et al. (2003), SLR entails a strategic approach that entails identifying keywords and search terms that shape the scope of the study. It also includes drawing insights from both published and unpublished sources to develop a comprehensive account. The SLR was employed through a three-stage approach presented by Tranfield et al. (2003) which are: planning the review, conducting the review and the final stage, reporting and dissemination.

Before engaging in the research, comprehensive discussions and consultations were held with experts in leadership to ensure the review was conducted appropriately. This was important to draw the focus on the research on specific sources of knowledge and concepts about distributed leadership. Subsequently, the trends in the literature review were identified and the entry criteria for the studies involved in the SLR was determined.

The following questions were considered in conducting the review:
- What is Distributed Leadership?
- What are the attributes of Distributed Leadership?
- What themes have emerged from the study of distributed leadership?
- What are the benefits of Distributed Leadership?
- What are the challenges of distributed leadership?

An evaluation was also established to ensure only high-quality sources were incorporated.

The inclusion criteria
- Peer-reviewed and published in the English language.
- Other articles were identified from credible sources.
- Distributed Leadership introduced in abstract
- The paper should focus specifically on distributed leadership
- The paper informs about one or more of the review questions

The exclusion criteria
- Papers lacking references and citations.
- Unpublished works.
- Paper not informing about one or more of the review questions.
- Papers offering insights on general leadership ideologies.
- Papers missing full texts.
- Papers with proper citations but missing in the reference page.

Table 1: Table for Search Strings Used

Search String	Key Word(s)
Search String 01: define AND distributed leadership	Define, distributed leadership
Search String 02: challenges AND distributed leadership	Challenges, distributed leadership
Search String 03: attributes, benefits OR competence OR ability AND distributed leadership	Attributes, benefits, competence, ability, distributed leadership
Search String 04: Attributes, benefits perspective OR personality perspective OR performance perspective OR context perspective OR behavioural perspective AND distributed leadership	Attributes and benefits perspective, personality perspective, performance perspective, context perspective, behavioural perspective, distributed leadership

Number of Papers by Five-year Interval

The studies reviewed were categorised into five groups including those published between 1995 and 1999 (3), 2000 and 2004 (9), 2005 and 2009 (23), 2010-2014 (44) and 2015-2019 (26). This is because it is only at the turn of the millennium that the distributed leadership concept has been widely researched and thus, they served as references for later research on the concept (Bolden, 2011). Also, of the research scholars who have tried to develop a distributed leadership model, Gronn (2000) and Spillane et al. (2004) are the most comprehensive. The researchers applied the activity theory to understand distributed leadership. Also, Hermann (2016) reports that the distributed leadership concept originated in the early 2000s within the anthropological, sociological, physiological and cognitive theories.

Upon successful application of SLR, 105 articles were finalized from the total of 528 articles which were initially considered. The SLR gave us great insights about distributed leadership. Four definitive attributes of distributed leadership emerged. These include, a culture of autonomy, increased cooperation, collaborative relationship and delegation of responsibilities, cycles of activity and collaboration. Moreover, four categories of themes were identified from the review of the 105 papers. These include behavioural perspective, context perspective, benefits and attributes, and performance perspective. The many benefits of distributed leadership can be broadly classified in 5 categories. The benefits are such that, it creates the potential for a substantive change in the organisation, it gives everyone a chance to serve, it retains elements of the traditional chain-of-command and it emphasises honesty and provides opportunities for mutual learning.

Among the 105 papers short listed through SLR, 29 papers highlighted the challenges of distributed leadership. The challenges included were, cultural and administration challenges, decision-making challenges, challenges associated with the hierarchical structure, coordination and communication challenges.

The detailed description of the findings which we got are shared with you in the entailing paragraphs.

The Attributes of Distributed Leadership

For articulation of the variety of ways that distributed leadership can occur, various authors have developed taxonomies where each of the frameworks is derived from previous research and thus applied in various contexts. Gronn (2002) and Spillane (2006) focussed on the interpersonal dynamics and the types of collaborations that people can have for achievement of shared outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2006) and MacBeath et al. (2004) put more focus on the different distributed leadership forms with more specificity to a school context which may have been observed elsewhere as well. These frameworks give an indication of the degree of variation into which distributed leadership is institutionalized within working practices and the organization's overall culture.

Gronn (2002) highlights the attributes of *spontaneous collaboration* where groups of individuals with different knowledge, capabilities and skills come together to complete a project, *intuitive working relation*s for two or more individuals to develop close working relations, and *institutionalized practice* where organizational structures that endure facilitate individual

collaboration. Spillane (2006) indicates the attributes of *collaborated distribution* where two or more people work together in place and time executing similar leadership routines, *collective distribution* for individuals to work separately but interdependently in enacting a leadership routine, and *coordinated distribution* where the individuals work in sequence to complete the routine. MacBeath et al. (2004) indicates the presence of *formal distribution* where there is intentional delegation or devolution of leadership, *strategic distribution* where new people with specific knowledge, skills or resource access meet particular needs of leadership, *pragmatic distribution* where the roles and responsibilities of leadership are divided and negotiated, *incremental distribution* to acquire leadership responsibilities progressively, *opportunistic distribution* to take on additional responsibilities, and *cultural distribution* to naturally share between the individuals. Thus, they do not suggest that one or more forms of distribution could be more effective or desirable that others. However, Leithwood et al. (2006) brings forth a look at how certain forms can contribute towards organizational productivity. The suggestion is that they could lead to; *planful and spontaneous alignment* contributing towards short-term organizational productivity, *spontaneous misalignment* and *anarchaic alignments* leading to negative effects on long-term and short-term organizational productivity, and *planful alignment* contributing towards long-term organizational productivity. Through these frameworks, it becomes possible to come up with relatable attributes of distributed leadership as defined through various organizational settings.

Planful alignment

According to Leithwood et al. (2006), distributed leadership creates an environment where resources and responsibilities are deliberately distributed among people or groups that are best placed to accomplish particular functions or tasks. This highlights the capacity of distributed leadership to reinforce the managerial principles by the increasing autonomy of how individuals engage in the workplace and use their skills and knowledge to meet organisational objectives. Mehra, Smith, Dixon, and Robertson (2006) allude that distributed leadership highlights the phenomenon that leadership theories are susceptible to new theoretical conceptions that label leadership in different organisational contexts. This implies that individuals who exhibit skills and knowledge in particular issues can be engaged in leadership roles. Gronn (2009) argues that distributed leadership offers an opportunity for leaders to sprout across different sectors in the organisation. Many researchers have explored the different patterns employed in distributed leadership by establishing how they impact organisational outcomes and the success of implementing change (Spillane and Camburn, 2006; Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007; Mayrowetz et al., 2009). Insights emerging from research by Leithwood et al. (2009) show that upholding distribution leadership in how leadership is distributed in particular patterns has higher positive effects compared to employee productivity and organisational performance. According to MacBeath et al. (2004), distributed leadership facilitates the strategic distribution of new employees with autonomy, which enables them to use the skills and knowledge or access resources that can help to accomplish certain leadership needs. Nevertheless, Harris (2008) established that distributed leadership has a substantial bearing on organisational growth in situations that structural and cultural barricades are appropriately addressed. This implies that the organisation needs to accommodate diversity that is influenced by distributed leadership. Subsequently, the autonomy influenced by distributed leadership can influence how individuals remain engaged and committed to their responsibilities and how new employees adapt to the new setting. These insights are in line with the concept presented by Iandoli and Zollo (2008a), showing that managerial

practices are inherent in developing the potential of distributed leadership by positively influencing organisational changes. With effective management of change, distributed leadership enables the organisation to effectively utilise the skills and knowledge available among the workers and identify gaps that might require certain leadership capabilities.

Acceptance of change

Studies by an array of researchers show that the growing interest in distributed management can be accredited to the link it presents in organisational change (Manz and Sims Jr., 1993; Gronn, 2002; Burke et al., 2003). This is supported by the studies that show there is a positive relationship between practising distributed leadership and organisational change due to its ability to foster a cooperative environment across all sectors of the organisation (Graetz, 2000). Findings made by Graetz (2000) show that most successful organisations in adopting change where there are complex working relationships emerge when there is effectiveness in leadership distribution among the top managers. Insights by Graetz (2000) show that this can be attributed to the trust that emerges among the people in the organisation. The attribute of acceptance of change is largely reflected in the research by Gronn (2002), which shows that distributed leadership leads to institutionalised practice. In this context, there is the development of enduring organisational structures, which is facilitated by the engagement of individuals, teams, and committees to foster collaboration among the people in the organisation. Also, Gold et al. (2002) research in the education sector found that leadership was a key element in defining organisational success, which is defined as effective management of change. According to Glickman et al. (2001), success in educational institutions is premised on the sustained improvement of the students learning outcomes as well as the capacity to engage the different stakeholders in change initiatives that are strategic to the organisation. The positive association between distributed leadership and change in the education system emerges from the ability of this form of leadership to accommodate different stakeholders in decision-making and share responsibilities in the change process. Research by Little (1990) established that the collective approach of decision-making was characterised by the ability of the different stakeholders engaging and sharing ideas to develop a leadership approach that is focused on making the necessary improvements. The cooperation achieved through distributed leadership is also reflected by the study conducted by Rosenholtz (1989), which shows that the collaboration achieved is inherent in developing an effective implementation of the values, norms, and behaviours that link people in the organisational setting. The engagement of different stakeholders increases the likelihood of accepting change considering that their interests and opinions are taken to account.

A context of trust

Distributed leadership revolves around trust in the expertise and capabilities of other people in the world environment rather than the traditional influence by the managerial authority. Nevertheless, distributed leadership does not impede on the regulations and formal leadership roles in organisations. MacBeath et al. (2004) highlight that distributed leadership facilitates formal distribution, where the leaders intentionally share their responsibilities through delegation or devolution as well as pragmatic distribution, where the leadership roles and responsibilities are shared among different actors. This highlights the significance of trust in accomplishing leadership objectives. Arguably, the trust influenced by distributed leadership serves to develop institutional leadership capacity by ensuring the participation of different people within the organisation. According to reviews by Louis and Marks (1998), distributed leadership is substantially featured

in studies focusing on professional learning communities by highlighting that this form of leadership has a momentous influence on how these individuals contributed to the student learning achievements. Similarly, a study by Morrisey (2000) found that sharing leadership responsibilities beyond the principle is imperative in enhancing the achievements made by individuals in different professional learning communities. Louis (2007) also alludes that professional learning communities are sustainable when distributed leadership is employed. This highlights the capacity of distributed leadership to shape how professionals engage with each other and in their responsibilities. Fundamentally, it highlights the trust associated with distributed leadership in sustaining the relationships that emerge among individuals within an organisational setting. This is central to ensuring sustainable cooperation and improvements of the subordinates.

Although there are numerous positive attributes associated with distributed leadership, there are findings that show there are some inefficiencies that hurt team performance. Suggestively, having fewer leaders is sometimes more appropriate compared to adopting dispersed leadership. According to Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007), engaging fewer leaders conducting informal duties has a positive correlation with improved task efficiency over time. According to Leithwood et al. (2006), distributed leadership can result in spontaneous misalignment, where the leadership responsibilities are shared in an unplanned manner. Consequently, there is reduced organisational performance and misalignment of leadership roles. This is likely to happen in situations where trust is compromised limiting the ability of leaders to select the right individuals for particular tasks. Despite this, research by Robinson (2008) shows that fewer informal leaders contributed to the increased social validity among the people engaged in a particular task. This implies that the elimination of informal leaders that emerge in distributed leadership creates the notion of equality, which is imperative in motivating people in the work environment by showing that they can be trusted with responsibilities.

Continuous learning

The success of an organisation is premised on its ability to learn and improve. In this context, there is a need to engage in cycles of planning, gathering information, observing, and reflecting to ensure that the knowledge gathered can be shared and used to meet the organisational objectives. Distributed leadership facilitates an environment that encourages reflection on the previous experiences, which helps to identify and subsequently engage the critical success factors that are inherent to the organisational objectives. Harris (2008) proposes that distributed leadership is one of the impediments that impact on the effectiveness of team performance. These insights are reflected in the studies by Storey (2004) and Timperley (2005) that show there are attributes of distributed leadership that impact on how leadership is accomplished within schools. These difficulties are attributed to the conflict of interests that might emerge among different stakeholders, including differing priorities and timing of various activities. Timperley (2005) adds that even in situations where individuals are engaged in distributed leadership following nominations by their colleagues within the organisation might lack to maximise their potential or make substantial achievements in their responsibilities if the criteria used to select such individuals does not raise expectations or opportunities for the leaders to deliver on their roles. Nevertheless, MacBeath et al. (2004) show that distributed leadership offers an opportunity for continuous learning by drawing insights from previous experiences. In this context, MacBeath et al. (2004) allude that there is incremental distribution through distributed leadership by enabling people to acquire leadership experience in a progressive manner. MacBeath et al. (2004) also recognize that there is opportunistic distribution, which is influenced by previous experiences leading individuals

to willingly take up additional responsibilities in a voluntary manner. Additionally, MacBeath et al. (2004) show that there is cultural distribution, which implies that the leadership experience gained over time leads to the development of leadership naturally among the people and it is organically shared within groups and organisations. Through progressive learning, there is an opportunity to limit the detrimental aspects that might affect the outcomes of distributed leadership, and also facilitate a clear understanding of what is necessary for all people within the organisation to accept and support the leadership roles.

Distributed Leadership Themes identified in Literature

Four categories of themes were identified from the review of the papers. These include behavioural perspective, context perspective, benefits and attributes, and performance perspective. The categories cover a wide range of distributed leadership aspects and as such lead to an in-depth understanding of the state of distributed leadership. A discussion of the themes is presented in this section.

Behavioural perspective

With regard to the behavioural perspective, distributed leadership is based on social interactions to understand the actions of leaders. The leadership approaches are seen as actions done by leaders in collaboration with the subordinate staff in achieving a common goal. According to Bennett et al. (2003), distributed leadership denotes leadership that is situated and pursues a social process in which there is an intersection between leaders, situations and followers. Spillane (2005) reports that distributed leadership encompasses social contexts as well as aspects of language, physical environment, and organizational systems. This social nature of leadership is seen as constitutive of leadership practice and hence demands identification of leadership acts in greater ways (Edwards, 2011; Göksoy, 2015; Supovitz and Tognatta, 2013). According to Spillane (2005), distributed leadership is seen as a process and a combination of systems that support collaborated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated distribution.

Bennett, et al. (2003) views distributed leadership as a dynamic, relational, inclusive, collaborative and contextually situated leadership. In schools, distributed leadership involves the collaboration of parents, students, local community, teachers and governors (Carter & Dechurch, 2012). Thus, distributed leadership is a socially constructive process that is also collective to promote shared beliefs, new understanding, as well as new ideas (Angelle, 2010). Research on the behavioural perspective of distributed leadership has been highlighted in the literature (Bolden, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Göksoy, 2015; Supovitz and Tognatta, 2013). This makes it an important area of study to establish differences and similarities.

Context Perspective

Among the studies short listed in the SLR for this paper, studies on distributed leadership conducted in the UK were (24) followed by the USA with (23), and Malaysia (4), Australia (4), New Zealand (2), Germany (2), Turkey (1), Singapore (1), Belgium (1), Denmark (1), Canada (3). This indicates that significant studies on distributed leadership have been conducted in developed nations. However, few of the studies have been conducted in the Asian context.

Many of studies on distributed leadership have been conducted in the education sector. For instance, Angelle (2010) conducted a study in middle school and found that principals delegate duties to the teachers. Similarly, in the educational management, principals were also found by Lumby (2013) to be using a distributed leadership approach whereby they delegate unnecessary duties to teachers. This resulted in poor teamwork and overall management outcomes. Additionally, MacBeath (2005) found out that school leaders are practising distributed leadership in different capacities. For instance, the study highlighted that principals delegate management duties to different teachers heading various departments as well as student leaders (MacBeath, 2005). This indicates that the students and teachers leading department help principals in managing the school.

Likewise, Bolden et al. (2015) found that shared leadership in higher education can be developed if leaders continuously share some of their roles to their subjects and promote teamwork. The study concluded that leaders sharing their roles will ensure that a sharing culture facilitating teamwork is retained in the future. Cleveland-Innes (2014) while investigating distributed leadership in open and distance learning environment established that collaboration between leaders and subjects is key. Collaboration was also identified by Harris et al. (2013) to be a key aspect of distributed leadership. This denotes teamwork that improves leadership outcomes since all stakeholders' views and perceptions are taken into consideration. On the same note, the study by Harris (2013) revealed that collaborative learning is supported by distributed leadership if honesty and teamwork are encouraged. Additionally, Duif et al. (2013) studied distributed leadership in European schools and found that achievement of equity and learning can only be attained if duties and roles are delegated without bias. Lastly, Gronn (2000) concluded that distributed properties of leadership including sharing of duties and roles and promoting teamwork enhance administration of educational institutions.

Hermann (2016) also investigated distributed leadership in light of the role of the principal in school and found out that principals' role in a school's settings is sharing duties among departmental teachers. Each and every department plays a distinct role within institutions that support the school management. Similarly, Hulpia et al. (2009) revealed that distributed leadership in the secondary school context involves principals delegating roles associated with school management. Some of the roles delegated by principles as noted in the review include heads of departments. As found by Mayrowetz (2008), it can be tedious for the school principal to be head of departments as well and may result in poor outcomes. Distributed leadership can be effective if trust is paramount among leaders and subjects in online school communities (Jameson, 2014). Leithwood et al. (2007) on the other hand established that DL helps school leaders in making the schools better. When different teachers are tasked to lead departments, each tries to make their department better and, in the end,, the entire school becomes improved. Improvement of school when distributed leadership is applied was also supported (Mascall et al., 2008; Naicker and Mestry (2011). In this view, distributed leadership in public schools promoting delegation of roles at departmental levels help in the administration of schools. This is because distributed leadership facilitates sharing of responsibility among different administrators leading to better outcomes. Park and Datnow (2009) also highlighted that distributed leadership helps in enhancing decision-making in the administration of districts or schools improving the outcomes.

Few studies have been conducted in other sectors including the health and tourism sectors. In healthcare, Beirne (2017) conducted a study to examine distributed leadership for healthcare management and identified teamwork as the key aspect of proper management. Also, Jain (2016)

explored distributed leadership in relation to job satisfaction and identified that leaders delegating duties increase employee satisfaction. Additionally, a study by McKee et al. (2013) examined the quality and safety of distributed leadership in healthcare and revealed that collaboration and information sharing enhance quality and safety in this setting.

In the tourism sector, Benson and Blackman (2011) examined distributed leadership from the islands and found that teamwork and sharing of vital information increase tourism visits. Also, Zach (2016) investigated leadership for collaboration in tourism organisations. the study concluded that delegation of specific duties to the subordinate staff increases efficiency in the management decisions. Another study by Haven-Tang and Jones (2012) also indicated that distributed leadership in the tourism industry improves management decisions thus increasing tourist visits. Moreover, José Valente et al. (2014) examined leadership capacity and concluded that notions about transformational leadership are closely related to those of distributed leadership. Finally, Pechlaner et al. (2014) explored distributed leadership and found that the aspect of distributed leadership entails collaboration between leadership departments overseeing marketing and resource-based strategies. The few studies on distributed leadership in the tourism industry are inclined to views from western nations and America. None of these studies has examined the views of experienced people from Asia in particular. This implies that knowledge on distributed leadership from Asian tourism sector is minimal. Therefore, it is worthy to understand the concept in the Asian tourism sector.

Performance perspective

This section examines studies on the performance of distributed leadership in different organisations. The performance of distributed leadership depends on strategies employed in managing challenges encountered in the workplace (Klar et al., 2012). A study on distributive leadership by Dinham (2005) indicated that distributive leadership leads to outstanding educational outcomes when utilised effectively. This implies that distributed leadership which supports excellent sharing of information as well as teamwork increases the satisfaction of teachers. As such, this enhances their commitment to their duties and in the end, educational outcomes are greatly improved. On the other hand, Harris et al. (2007) found that effective distributed leadership results in the accomplishment of the organisational change goals. When the leaders in the distributed teams use practices promoting teamwork, it is more likely that players will be motivated both individually and collectively to meet common goals. Similarly, a quantitative study by Mascall et al. (2008) revealed that distributed leadership is positively related to teachers' optimism about teaching. When teachers are given the opportunity to participate in management decisions, they become motivated and optimistic in accomplishing their roles. This is because experiences and perceptions of teachers associated with school administration are improved as noted by Naicker and Mestry (2011).

Similarly, there is an increase in collaborative learning when distributed leadership practices such as information sharing are used (Harris et al., 2013). This implies that when there is an increase in information sharing the level of collaborating learning is also increased. On the same note, secondary schools and educators' and educator leaders' satisfaction on the job, as well as their organizational commitment, is greatly improved when principals use distributed leadership skills (Hulpia et al., 2009). In this regard, principals give all stakeholders roles and duties that will motivate them to stay committed to the institution. Also, Jain (2016) established that distributed leadership is positively related to job satisfaction among the workers. Distributed leadership that

supports delegation of roles and teamwork increases the sense of satisfaction on work engagement among subordinates and subjects. Moreover, Jameson (2014) found that distributed leadership affects school effectiveness positively as well as improves learning outcomes. Finally, Feng et al. (2017) found that distributed leadership leads to improved team effectiveness if teamwork is supported by the current distributed leadership. Since potential benefits of distributed leadership have been highlighted in the education sector, there is a need to examine how it influences other sectors.

The Benefits of Distributed Leadership

Change management

According to Timperley (2005), the notion of developing single and heroic leaders in a challenging and complex environment is increasingly becoming obsolete, which has made distributed leadership an essential approach in running organisations. Leadership in modern organisations is characterised by a high demand for leaders to engage in managerial tasks, instructional monitoring, ensuring accountability, budget oversights, and addressing issues associated with the subordinates. This is substantially evident within the education system, where principles, headteachers, and other top leaders have diverse responsibilities that have influenced the need for distributed leadership in such settings (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009). Drawing from arguments made by Fitzgerald and Gunter (2007), distributed leadership has offered an opportunity to divert from the hierarchical relationships that exist within organisations if it is implemented appropriately. Suggestively, distributed leadership has influenced the idea that formal positions are not the principle considerations in fostering the dynamics of organisational success; rather, it is subject to the interactions that emerge from the individuals engaged in leadership, the followers, and the situations they experience. This offers organisations the opportunity to take advantage of the combined expertise and ideas from different individuals in the organisational setting with the intent of pursuing a common goal that might be challenging if it was the responsibility of a solitary person (Spillane, 2005). Additionally, through distributed leadership, there is the development of knowledge and skills among the individuals engaged in the system, which contributes to the enrichment of human capacity. This is vital in how individuals within the organisation are engaged and contribute to the achievement of the organisational objectives. According to Harris (2005), distributed leadership is also beneficial due to its capacity to develop a system that links mutually interdependent aspects of the organisation to ensure that there is efficiency in organisational productivity, relationships, and accountability in the collective outcomes achieved.

Develops leadership capacity

Distributed leadership is characterised by the emergence of a cooperative environment where all individuals pursue a common objective, which offers all individuals a chance to serve in leadership roles. The cooperation among individuals involved leads to the development of a team structure that fosters interdisciplinary and interdepartmental cooperation. The development of teams leads to the creation of a learning community that can effectively lead to improved achievements. According to findings made by Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers (2007), the creation of teams also contributes to leadership development and the emergence of professional learning communities. The unique organisational features that are presented by distributed leadership allow the allotment of leadership actions, which reduces the burden carried by a single individual in

various responsibilities. Drawing from motivational theories, this is important to empower the staff, which contributes to their productivity and increased organisational performance. Although distributed leadership lacks on delivering formal authority, its application enables individuals to achieve some form of power that contributes to how they engage in decision-making and autonomy in decision-making. According to Bolden et al. (2009), although the top leaders might hold the authoritative power, the usage of distributed leadership leads to the emergence of spontaneous leadership strategies among different people in the organisation. In this context, the individuals involved have a control that is in some situations beneath or parallel to those who are in top leadership positions. With the capability to engage different people in leadership roles, the delegation of responsibilities can be extended to different sectors. For instance, teachers can delegate responsibilities to students, which facilitates the development of the leadership capacity in the organisational setting and the achievement of long-term objectives (Harris, 2008). The ability of power to spread in different directions within the organisation is beneficial in ensuring compliance with inherent policies and guaranteeing the effective flow of information.

Reduced leadership responsibilities

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) and Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) established that distributed leadership facilitated increased efficiency in how principals engaged the staff in the improvement of public education. This is achieved by addressing the challenges associated with the bureaucratic models that are adopted in schools where the teachers are perceived to be workers, and administrators carry the leadership responsibilities. Through distributed leadership, the principals can develop and inspire a culture of teacher leadership, which contributes to their increased engagement in organisational activities without necessarily changing the chain-of-command (Barth, 2001). This is achieved through the delegation of responsibilities and the engagement of different individuals in decision making. In the education setting, this is attributed to the ability of distributed leadership, enabling those in leadership positions to influence educational practices in a manner that leads to student development through a consensus (Leithwood and Jantzi,1990; Leithwood and Jantzi (1999). Notably, Diamond (2007) notes that the primary objective of distributed leadership is to create a collaborative environment where the team members can share leadership responsibilities. Additionally, Diamond (2007) adds that it is different from the delegation of responsibilities because distributed leadership is more than undertaking leadership practices through actions and beliefs a single individual in a position of power. This is evident in the capacity of distributed leadership to foster the interaction of top management and other stakeholders in influencing organisational activities.

Honesty

Although distributed leadership presents various conflicts due to varying leadership approaches and interests among the people involved, it also offers a more straightforward approach in addressing the conflicts by ensuring the engagement of all stakeholders in decision-making. Suggestively, it encourages individuals to be honest and learning from their experiences and those of colleagues. This is achieved through increased efficiency in sharing information and knowledge. This does not only help to address the conflicts that might emerge in the organisational setting but also increase efficiency in facilitation and collaboration among different stakeholders. According to Harris (2004), this is attributed to the willingness and capacity of people within the organisation to improve how they engage in the practice. Distributed leadership is perceived to be a participative approach, which creates a social environment where the burden of leadership shared, and there is

a high regard for supporting organisational initiatives beyond the role played by top managers. With the engagement of different individuals across all parts of the organisation, there is an opportunity to use these avenues to gather innovative and transformative ideas that can be implemented to address different challenges in organisations (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009). Such considerations are essential in reducing and managing resistance to change, considering that the recommendations and suggestions from different people are taken to account in decision-making.

Challenges of Distributed Leadership identified in the Literature

After completing the SLR process, 29 papers specifically highlighted the challenges faced by distributed leadership. The challenges identified are discussed in this section.

Cultural and administrative challenges

Distributed leadership in different sectors face various challenges while practising their leadership roles. For instance, Benson and Blackman (2011) report that there are cultural challenges in distributed leadership positions. According to Ocker et al. (2011), leaders face different challenges as a result of cultural differences and varying working environments. Van Meter et al (2016) also investigated distributed leadership and identified leadership administrative challenges associated with the absence of clarity and lack of specification in domain and construction of knowledge. Various researchers have investigated distributed leadership in different sectors and realised that just like any other leadership approach, leaders also face employee resistance (Jones, 2014; Park & Datnow, 2009; Bennett et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001; Mehra et al., 2006; Oborn et al., 2013). Distributed leadership is highly necessary for the improvement of different departments as well as different fields. It was observed by Klar et al (2016) that distributed leadership plays an effective role in the growth and development of organisations in different aspects including innovation and employee productivity. Therefore, distributed leadership face resistance challenges while managing innovation and employee productivity to ensure such organizational issues are addressed amicably (Klar et al., 2016; Woods et al., 2004). It is perceived by Ocker et al. (2011) that employees with increased workloads and responsibilities can be challenging to manage by distributed leadership who seek to create employees with higher competency in organisations.

Decision-making challenges

According to Supovitz and Tognatta (2015), one of the major challenges faced by distributed leadership is associated with inclusive decision making. In this regard, it is necessary for the leaders to apply critical knowledge to understand the importance of decision making for solving different issues in the organization. There are different organisational parameters that require organisational leaders to accept collaboration with different people to promote decision-making for purposes of firm growth. However, it has been proved that in most cases of distributed leadership the subject is ignored when it comes to making vital decisions and in the process attract employee resistance (Wood, 2005; Pechlaner et al., 2014; Nezakati et al., 2015; Oborn et al., 2013). These issues restrict the distributed leadership in increasing the overall performance of the firm (Oborn et al., 2013). Also, it has been argued by Thorpe et al. (2011) that distributed leadership face issues related to poor human resource management during decision making. These issues are

generally associated with a lack of involvement of the employees, which makes them have a sense of isolation (Tourish, 2014).

Challenges associated with the hierarchical structure

Timperley (2005) argue that the hierarchical structure of the organization is the biggest challenge that is faced by distributed leadership. In this view, the flow of information and orders are violated and results in conflicts among the distributed leadership. The bottom-up or the top-down approach in the organization creates conflicts to the distributed leadership as they carry on with their leadership duties (Woods et al., 2004). Additionally, Klar et al. (2016) report that the authoritarian leadership structure is a determinant of poor decision making in organisations and due to limited power among distributed leadership. According to Supovitz and Tognatta (2015), there are different factors of the organizational structure and hierarchy that affect the decision making of the leaders in the organization. It is argued that hierarchical structures often trigger differences in competency among distributed leadership, which in most cases trigger a conflict of interest resulting in a poor working environment. According to Thorpe et al. (2011), the issues related to hierarchical structure and processes create differences in employees who may decline instructions from the leaders in the organization. This affects the employees' productivity and overall firm output. Mehra et al. (2014) say that distributed leadership is required to have a strong network of developed leaders to address particular challenges to enhance organisational growth, but the hierarchical structure of management hinders the overall outcome. According to Pechlaner et al. (2014), the destination network is necessary to be communicated properly for the analysis of the destination and the stakeholder's returns of the individuals as a whole.

Coordination and communication challenges

The concept of the destination network and destination planning creates the concept of destination marketing and management (Pechlaner et al., 2014). This includes a vast knowledge and application of distributed leadership skills obtained from the leadership network (Woods et al., 2004). According to Pechlaner et al. (2014), there is a relationship between destination development and the existence of common practices embracing coordination. Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) report that due to a lack of employee commitment in organizations, leaders fail to coordinate employees. This results in poor coordination that leads to failed organisational or team goals (Spillane et al., 2001). Challenges of distributed leadership have been highlighted in the previous literature (Nezakati et al., 2015; Oborn et al., 2013; Pechlaner et al., 2014; Spillane et al., 2001; Timperley, 2005; Wood, 2005).

This indicates that distributed leadership is affected by different factors that lead to failed efforts in meeting organisational goals. This makes it an important area of study to investigate the distributed leadership challenges in a specific sector or setting. More research on distributed leadership challenges has been done in the education sector implying that there is little knowledge on the challenges of distributed leadership in other sectors including health, telecommunication and tourism sectors.

Conclusion

Evidence associated with SLR has indicated that distributed leadership is important in the management of human resources to meet organisational objectives. The findings of the literature review highlighted the definitions and challenges associated with distributed leadership. Different authors have a different understanding of distributed leadership. Some call it shared leadership while others call it team leadership, participative leadership or democratic leadership. Despite being beneficial, distributed leadership faces some challenges. First, cultural and administrative challenges as a result of cultural differences and varying working environments. Second, decision-making challenges as a result of poor human resource management during decision making. Third, challenges associated with the hierarchical structure of organisations resulting in conflicts among leaders. Finally, coordination and communication challenges leading to poor failed efforts to meet organisational goals.

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