Who’s in Charge Here? The Team Leadership Implications of Authority Structure

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ABSTRACT

Although team leadership can be enacted in many ways, a team’s formal authority structure shapes how key leadership functions are fulfilled and by whom. In this chapter, we analyze how specific team leadership challenges and opportunities emerge from whether the team itself or managers hold legitimate authority for four critical team functions (Hackman, 2002): (a) executing the team task, (b) monitoring and managing work processes, (c) designing the team and its context, and (d) setting overall direction for the team. We then use the four resultant team authority structures (i.e. manager-led, self-managing, self-designing, self-governing) to synthesize relevant research, draw implications for the practice of team leadership, and identify directions for future research. We hope this chapter gives practitioners and scholars a way to explore the characteristics of a particular situation that suggest a particular authority structure, and the ways in which members and formal leaders may effectively operate within that structure.

Keywords: team leadership, authority, functional leadership, self-managing teams, self-governing teams, self-designing teams, manager-led teams

Cite as:
While teams accomplish much of the work in modern organizations (Hills, 2007; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995), the meaning of team leadership remains elusive. Two factors contribute to this ambiguity. First, team leadership encompasses a wide variety of activities – it can mean everything from deciding to form a team in the first place, to composing the team, to exhorting members to exert more effort (Burke et al., 2006; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson et al., 2010; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Second, team leadership can be enacted by multiple people; indeed, it would be a tall order for any one individual to provide all the leadership necessary for a well-functioning team. Because team leadership involves a wide variety of behaviors enacted by multiple people, many scholars and practitioners have embraced a functional view of team leadership (Ginnett, 1993; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Wageman & Hackman 2009). In the functional view, team leadership is defined as “to do, or get done, whatever is not being adequately handled for group needs” (McGrath, 1962, p. 5).

Therefore, one critical implication of the functional view is that asking if someone is “team leader” is less helpful than asking who fulfills critical team leadership functions. Leadership functions can be fulfilled by a designated leader with formal authority, but also by team members themselves, or by external coaches with no formal authority over the team. The functional perspective therefore takes as given that team leadership is almost invariably shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003). In other words, anyone can exercise team leadership, and a wide range of activities aimed at creating the conditions for team effectiveness count as acts of leadership. In the functional view, therefore, team design choices such as determining team membership, articulating team purposes clearly, designing team tasks, and establishing its reward
structure all count as acts of team leadership because they are necessary for a group to accomplish its purposes. Indeed, significant research evidence exists to support the view that such design choices are among the most important acts of team leadership because they account for so much of the variance in team effectiveness (Hackman & O’Connor, 2004; Wageman, 2001).

Nonetheless, there are differences in who fulfills critical team leadership functions in different contexts, and these differences are strongly driven by the authority structure within which teams operate (Pearce & Conger, 2003). While front-line team managers typically have the authority to clarify team objectives and to offer hands-on coaching (Zaccaro et al., 2001), for example, they often lack the authority within their organizations to establish the teams’ purposes and structures, or to alter contextual conditions to support a team’s work (Manz, 1992). Those organization-wide elements may lie within the authority of much more senior managers, and may be designed for reasons having little to do with the impact on front-line teams. Leadership functions, in such contexts, are shared among different groups of managers. While, in theory, anyone can exercise leadership for a team, in fact the authority structure in a given context places expectations and constraints on who may legitimately fulfill key leadership functions. Therefore, the location of the authority to alter a team's design features and to manage its work processes is a key determinant both of who fulfills critical team leadership functions, the degree to which those are shared, and whether and how well they are fulfilled (Mannix & Sauer, 2006).

Hackman (2002) proposed four key team functions for which teams themselves or external managers of the teams may have authority. These are: (a) executing the team task, (b) monitoring and managing work processes, (c) designing the team (e.g., choosing members) and its context (e.g., its information system), and (d) setting overall direction for the team.
Teams can be classified into distinct types depending on whether it is the team itself or managers who hold legitimate authority for these critical team functions. As shown in Figure 1, teams that have authority only for the completion of their own tasks are classified as manager-led (because all authority to exercise leadership belongs to managers); those that can monitor and manage their own work processes are self-managing; teams that also have authority to compose the team and shape their own context are termed self-designing; those that have authority over all four functions, including the authority to determine their own purposes, are classified as self-governing.

In this chapter, we use this classification to explore how each type of team authority structure presents different team leadership challenges and opportunities. We summarize and synthesize research relevant to each of these authority structures, draw implications for the practice of team leadership, and identify areas where relatively little is known, offering directions for the future of research. Given several excellent reviews of group processes and functioning in recent years (i.e. Ilgen, et al., 2005; Larson, 2011; Morgeson, et al, 2010; Straus, Parker, & Bruce, 2011; Zaccaro, et al., 2001), we do not review research that focuses primarily on the relationships between specific internal group processes and emergent states (e.g. conflict as a driver of information sharing within a team) and place our focus on research on the influence of team leadership functions on key team processes and outcomes.

Leadership of Manager-led Teams
Many scholars and practitioners think of team leadership in terms of an individual team leader vested with formal authority (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Hackman, 2002). While it is true that many teams have designated individual leaders, not all teams with a formal team leader should be considered “manager-led.” Instead, we define manager-led teams as teams in which members “have authority only for actually executing the task…in such teams, managers manage, workers work, and the two functions are kept as separate as possible” (Hackman, 2002). Manager-led teams are ubiquitous in contexts such as orchestras, surgical teams, airline cockpit crews, assembly line manufacturing, and sports teams. For instance, in cardiac surgery teams, leadership is generally “hierarchical, demanding, and direct” (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2003, p. 704); many surgeons lead the teams by controlling even who speaks during surgery. As one perfusionist said:

Once when we were having trouble with the venous return, and I mentioned it, the surgeon said, ‘Jack, is that you?’ I said yes. He said, "Are you pumping [being the first rather than second, or assisting, perfusionist] this case?" I said, "No I'm assisting." "Well in the future, if you are not pumping the case, I don't want to hear from you." You see it's a very structured communication. (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2003; p. 704).

This kind of tight control of the group process is common in surgery and the medical profession more generally (Nembhardt & Edmonson, 2006). In fact, many surgeons view the team as mere support systems for them as individuals. As one cardiac surgeon said, “Once I get the team set up, I never look up [from the operating field]…it’s they who have to make sure that everything is flowing” (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001, p. 128).

Professional symphony orchestra conductors also tend to tightly control and supervise the process of their work groups (Allmendinger, Hackman, & Lehman, 2006). Like surgeons,
conductor’s work of their team as a mere vehicle for their individual work. Composer/conductor Eberhard Weber described his experience, saying, “I like to create the music I hear in my interior. As a conductor, you have the ability to squeeze the sounds and interpretation you asked for from 50 to 80 people” (Weber, n.d.). Former Boston Symphony Orchestra music director Charles Munsch echoed this view, saying, “The conductor must breathe life into the score. It is you and you alone who must expose it to the understanding, reveal the hidden jewel to the sun at the most flattering angles” (Munsch, 1955).

As the examples above show, manager-led teams exist in contexts in which individual team leaders are expected to exert a great deal of control. While a manager-led structure provides unique opportunities for teams to accomplish certain types of work, this structure also produces some well-evidenced challenges. In the following section, we review these opportunities and challenges. Based on this analysis, we suggest imperatives for leaders of manager-led teams and directions for future research.

**Opportunities for Manager-led Teams**

As one might imagine, opportunities for manager-led teams generally require a highly competent leader. An incompetent leader with control over team design and work processes can easily undermine a team (Wageman, 2001). In contrast, a superb team leader can help develop and improve even the most competent of performing units. Assuming the leader is qualified, we propose two primary opportunities in implementing and maintaining a manager-led authority structure in teams: (a) bridging an expertise gap between the leader and other team members; and (b) to quickly observe and adjust when it is difficult for team members to perceive the whole of the task.
**Bridging an expertise gap.** A common reason to implement and maintain a manager-led structure is that a given leader is significantly more expert than other team members. When a team leader knows a great deal more about a task or decision than does the team, the leader must provide some direction to the team about how to perform the task or what decision to make. For instance, when novice players participate in team sports, the players may know very little about strategies, roles, or even the rules of the game. It is thus incumbent on the head coach to tightly manage the processes and performance strategies until players understand the rules, tasks, and tactics. In the domain of management, Vroom and colleagues have well-developed research that shows that leaders who have more information than their followers are more effective when they use an autocratic style, in which they dictate both the processes and outcomes of decisions (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 1988).

Further, it is well-documented that teams predictably and repeatedly fail to facilitate their own decision-making processes; without direction, most groups fail to pool sufficient decision-relevant information before making a decision. However, a leader who knows how to direct such decision-making processes can mitigate these problems by structuring the team interactions. For instance, Larson and colleagues (1998) found that having a formal leader improved information processing and decision-making when those leaders asked questions and highlighted unique information. Additionally, Peterson (1997) found that leaders who use a directive style to advocate for an inclusive decision process (rather than for a particular alternative) tend to promote more information sharing and better group decisions. Similarly, Eisenhardt’s (1989) study of strategic decisions in the micro-computing industry found that those CEOs that put an emphasis of processing more information, considered more alternatives simultaneously, and imposed processes for sharing information quickly tended to make better quality decisions. In
When leaders used their authority to impose processes that stimulate information processing (rather than to advocate for a particular outcomes), better and faster decisions tended to result.

**Observing the whole team and task.** Beyond the ability to structure and direct processes that groups often find difficult, team leaders may be better positioned than members to observe the complex dynamics of large, fast-moving teams. For instance, in American football, coaches craft and control the strategy and “plays,” which dictate the precise movements of players on the field (Katz & Koenig, 2001; Keidel, 1987). When playing, no one player can monitor all players simultaneously; in fact, players can seldom see more than one or two others at a time. Similarly, orchestral conductors are positioned such that they can hear all the orchestra members simultaneously, while those sitting in the orchestra often hear only those sitting near them as they are playing. When team members cannot monitor their own processes as they perform the work, giving a single leader the authority to monitor and manage the process may be desirable.

**Challenges for Manager-led Teams**

Because manager-led teams require a single individual to fulfill a host of functions, such teams are extremely demanding for individual team leaders (Day, Sin, & Chen, 2004), creating critical leadership challenges. Indeed, much of the literature on manager-led teams has focused on their disadvantages relative to self-managing teams. We view the three most critical leadership challenges for manager-led teams as (a) preventing motivation losses, (b) minimizing evaluative pressure, and (c) avoiding conformity pressure.

**Preventing motivation losses.** The most common problem specified is that team members tend to be less motivated and satisfied than those on self-managed teams (i.e. Cohen &
Ledford, 1994; Goodman, Devadas, & Hughson, 1988), often leading to less productivity (Beekun, 1989; Guzzo, Jette, & Katzell, 1985; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Research on work motivation has shown that, when workers lack autonomy over their own work processes, they feel less responsibility for work outcomes, and are less motivated to work on their tasks (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Grant & Parker, 2009; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Thus, leaders of manager-led teams must often take potent steps to counteract this motivational decrement.

**Minimizing evaluative pressure.** Another structural disadvantage of a manager-led team is that team leaders keep sole authority to monitor and evaluate the team’s work processes. Because team leaders need to observe the team at work to fulfill this function, team members often experience such surveillance as evaluative. Increased evaluative surveillance tends to increase psychological arousal in ways that inhibit learning, experimentation, and performance on novel tasks (i.e. Zajonc, 1965) and may also decrease intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999) and creativity (Amabile, 1983; 1996; Amabile & Fisher, 2009). Further, using talented people in surveillance roles is often an inefficient use of human resources (Pfeffer, 1997); and an under-use of team member knowledge and skills (Allmendinger, Hackman, & Lehman, 1996).

**Avoiding conformity pressures.** Last, while having a leader who can direct decision-making can sometimes be beneficial, it also introduces strong conformity pressures that lead to sub-optimal information processing and decision-making. Because it is often difficult to identify which group members hold decision-relevant knowledge (Gardner, in press; Stasser & Stewart, 1992), formal team leaders often hold influence disproportionate to their expertise, as members often inappropriately use their status as a proxy for task-relevant expertise (Bunderson, 2003; Gardner, in press). Further, when team leaders are also responsible for monitoring and
evaluating member performance, members feel obliged to agree with the leader, which can lead to dysfunctional conformity pressures (Janis, 1982; Leanna, 1985).

**Imperatives for Leaders of Manager-led Teams**

While we can speculate on the advantages of manager-led teams, these advantages have seldom been documented by research. Instead, most extant research documents the advantages of self-management. Therefore, the imperative for those who hold authority over manager-led teams is to minimize the negative effects of such authority in three ways.

**Use manager-led structures sparingly.** The most important choice for leaders of manager-led teams is to decide the degree to which they will maintain a manager-led structure versus promote greater self-management among their members. While manager-led teams prevail in a few industries, they are seldom the structure of choice in modern, knowledge-intensive organizations. Even in unique contexts, such as orchestras or operating rooms, leaders of manager-led teams would be well-served to consider promoting self-management in at least part of the work.

**Promote psychological safety.** Leaders of manager-led teams must balance their function to monitor and evaluate team members with the need for those members to learn from mistakes, ask questions, and exercise their own creativity. One of the most fruitful areas of research along these lines has been research into how leaders create a climate of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; 2003). Psychological safety is “a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 350). When team members fear that others will criticize or ridicule their ideas, members are often hesitant to admit mistakes or make suggestions. Thus, psychological safety has been an important determinant of
learning behavior in a variety of settings, including manufacturing (Edmondson, 1999), cardiac surgery teams (Edmonson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001), and neo-natal care units (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Leaders of teams of all types can promote psychological safety by being accessible to members, explicitly asking for input, and modeling their own fallibility by admitting mistakes as an opportunity for learning (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2003; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

**Avoid over-attention to managing task processes in real time.** Next, leaders must make sure that they use their legitimate authority when necessary. Because leaders of manager-led teams have more responsibility than individuals in teams with different authority structures, it is easy to become overwhelmed and to ignore crucial aspects of team leadership (Wageman & Hackman, 2010). Top management teams are among the most guilty, with CEOs frequently failing to provide adequate direction or boundaries for the team (Wageman, et al., 2008). Even the title of “team leader” has been found to make leaders more directive and intervene more frequently (Fisher, 2010) and to invite more interaction from team members (Cohen and Zhou, 1991), which increases the need for the leader to spend time and attention on managing group process.

Further, leaders of manager-led teams must look to the structure and organizational context of the team to solve problems, rather than simply relying on their authority over task and process. Manager-led teams are most persistent in industries with well-defined task and role structures, as shown in the orchestral, medical, and sports examples earlier in this chapter. Most significantly, leaders in these industries tend to have little control over the task itself. As will be seen in the remainder of this chapter, task design is a critical lever for team effectiveness: In sports, task design cannot account for variations in performance because the basic rules of the
game are predetermined; in health care and the military, many tasks have standard operating procedures that are difficult to change and inflexible roles that support these procedures. Such domains can be hotbeds of manager-led teams because there is little debate about what the task is or which role qualifies one to be a team leader. However, because such practices have become so standardized, the lowest hanging fruits for leaders may be in the structure and context – including the manager-led authority structure itself.

**Directions for Future Research on Manager-led Teams**

Given that manager-led teams have both challenges and opportunities, the obvious question for future research is when best to use them. In other words, under what conditions do the theoretical advantages of manager-led teams outweigh the advantages of increased self-management? As we noted, manager-led teams seem to be most common when the task and role structure of teams is well-defined. Given the dearth of research supporting the use of manager-led teams, is that authority structure truly the optimal strategy in domains such as surgery, orchestras, or sports? Further, it seems likely that institutional forces play a critical role in sustaining leader led teams (Hackman & Wageman, 2005b). Future research should be about manager-led teams should also address how and why manager-led teams have been sustained in the contexts we listed and whether these mechanisms are functional for team performance.

As we noted, manager-led teams also give a great deal of responsibility to the team leader. Most significantly, if a team leader is solely responsible for monitoring and managing the team’s process, he/she must have some skill in diagnosing group processes as they unfold and intervening at opportune moments. While existing research has sketched what team leaders should do to improve group processes, there have been few investigations into when to act (or
when to wait) and how skilled leaders make such assessments. Thus, a crucial area for future research is the diagnostic and interpretive process of team leaders and their relationship to the timing of process interventions (Fisher, 2010; Wageman, Fisher & Hackman, 2009).

Finally, it is clear that many sophisticated team leaders pave the way for their teams to become more self-managing, just as many self-managing teams may voluntarily appoint a team leader that eventually consolidates his or her authority. Thus, two crucial, yet unanswered, questions are: how do manager-led teams become self-managing and how do self-managing teams become manager-led? Indeed, examining the conditions under which manager-led teams increase their level of self-management may be the most crucial area of research for this authority structure.

**Leadership of Self-managing Teams**

Self-managing teams are teams in which members have the authority not only to execute the work, but also to monitor their own performance quality and manage their own processes. In other words, they can make choices, in the absence of managerial instructions, about the main procedures, timing, and sequencing of their own work, as well as their coordination with others groups and individuals. Managing the quality of the work and making decisions about intra-team processes, therefore, are leadership functions that are fulfilled by the team members themselves.

Self-managing teams typically have a formal designated leader who retains authority to provide feedback or rewards to the team, and alter or determine team composition, and who holds responsibility for articulating group purposes (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002; Gersick & Hackman, 1990; Langfred, 2000; Wageman, 2001). Those purposes may originate well above
the teams' immediate leaders, as might other important team design features such as how reward systems are designed and workloads allocated. For example, in customer service settings in which self-managed teams share accountability for an identified set of customers, a front-line supervisor provides hands on coaching and feedback, but team memberships are assigned by higher-level managers, and reward systems are designed at the corporate level. Therefore, the array of individuals fulfilling leadership functions for such teams tends to be broad. Nevertheless, in self-managing teams, unlike in manager-led teams, team members themselves have considerable autonomy to determine their own work processes and therefore have a substantial leadership role themselves.

Examples of some common self-managing teams include multi-disciplinary health care teams, often led by a nurse manager, and composed of nurses, physicians, perhaps physical and occupational therapists, and other health care workers. Such teams do not choose their own members or determine how rewards are distributed, but they have great latitude in how the work is executed for the care of their patients. Team members share responsibility for the wellbeing of patients and for coordinating their activities with each other (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; West, et al., 2003). Other kinds of self-managing teams include production teams, in which quality assurance, production line pace, team member task assignments, and some fabrication processes are determined and executed by the workers themselves, although the teams typically have a supervisor responsible for worker schedules (and therefore team composition), ongoing coaching, and establishing production goals (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Manz & Sims, 1987). Finally, many knowledge-work teams such as product and software development teams also belong to the category of self-managing teams. Though members hold full authority to decide how to deploy their collective resources in
creating a new product, they typically report to a team leader who has additional authorities and responsibilities (such as forming, launching, and coaching the team). Self-managing teams may well be both the largest category of teams in modern workplaces as well as the ones most frequently studied. Many teams that are typically thought of as self-managing but that also have authority over aspects of their own design or context are in fact what we call self-designing teams, a form of team we will address in the next section of this chapter. Here we address the key opportunities and challenges of self-managing teams, and the critical leadership capacities necessary to support their effectiveness.

**Opportunities for Self-managed Teams**

Self-managed teams became common in US organizations during the 1980s because of growing beliefs that they offered certain performance advantages that manager led teams did not, stemming from two trends. First, the competitive losses of American companies to those from Japan led to the explosion of Total Quality Management, a program that relies heavily on frontline workers devising, monitoring and managing improvements in the work processes to enhance quality, and “empowered” work teams that make decisions to address needs of customers in real time. At the same time, manufacturing firms in Europe and Asia had begun altering traditional assembly line designs, creating teams of individuals who shared collective responsibility for the process and quality of building whole subassemblies of automobiles (Adler, 1995; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Sexton, 1994) and other products. These management trends had as their basic underpinnings the assumption that people actually doing the work are best able to figure out better ways to do it. Moreover, scholars of the time observed that managing the quality of one's own work and
interactions with the end users of that work has a powerful motivating effect (thereby enhancing employee engagement and productivity), and that the kinds of structured improvement processes involved in the quality movement produced not only a better process in the short-term but a more capable workforce in the long term (Beekun, 1989; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Pearce & Ravlin, 1987). Self-managing teams have tasks that drive positive internal work motivation to a greater degree than do manager-led teams: (1) they have more autonomy over their work processes, (2) they frequently have greater direct interaction with the users of their work and (3) they often build whole products or share accountability for whole customer territories, rather than perform small and routinized pieces of a larger task (Cohen & Spreitzer, 1994; Cummings, 1981; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). As a consequence, leader intervention to enhance effort is relatively unneeded, with the work itself operating as a “substitute for leadership” (Kerr & Jermier, 1978; Hackman & Wageman, 2005b). The implementation of self-managing teams also involves a major investment in training, thus building the knowledge and skill of team members beyond what they had under manager-led authority structures (Kolodny & Kiggundu, 1980; Wall, Kemp, Jackson & Clegg, 1986). All these benefits bode well for their effectiveness in comparison to manager led teams.

Significant amounts of research have examined the performance impact of implementing self-managing teams in settings that were previously manager-led. While some studies showed performance advantages on key indicators of performance such as customer satisfaction and quality of workmanship (Beekun, 1989; Guzzo, Jette, & Katzell, 1985), attempts to create team self-management just as often result in poor team performance, individualistic behavior, and avoidance of decision-making (Cohen & Ledford, 1994; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Langfred, 2007). As a consequence, much
of the subsequent research undertook to identify the antecedents of self-managing team effectiveness. Among the key such leadership functions identified as major drivers of self-managing team effectiveness are: (1) changes to the existing structures and systems of the firm that elicit, promote, and reward increased interdependence among workers and independent decision making by teams; and (2) changing the behavior of the external leader of the team, most particularly the hands-on coaching of teams' decision processes.

**Altering structures and systems to promote interdependence.** Research has demonstrated that team self-management is facilitated by a supportive organizational climate for teamwork (e.g., Hempel, Zhang & Han, in press), team-based human resources systems such as training, development, and information (e.g., Subramony, 2009; Wageman, 2001), and teams composed of members who welcome working interdependently and embrace the added responsibility for decision making (Cohen & Spreitzer, 1994; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Moreover, team self-management also results in improved performance to the extent that the reward system recognizes and rewards excellent team performance over individual performance (Cohen, Spreitzer, & Ledford, 1996; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Rosenbaum et al, 1980; Shea & Guzzo, 1987; Wageman, 1995; 2001). Finally, self-managing teams benefit from an organizational education system that provides cross-training in multiple skills, or technical consultation for any aspects of the work that members are not themselves competent to handle (Klaus & Glaser, 1970; Liang, Moreland, & Argote, 1995; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hackman & Walton, 1986; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Salas, Cannon-Bowers & Blickensderfer, 1993). In modern workplaces such as professional service firms, where work is typically completed by self-managing teams that have no history of manager-led practice, these same contextual supports also have positive effects.
(Stewart, 2006). In sum, critical leadership functions for developing self-managing teams are predominantly about making significant investments in creating an organizational context that elicits, reinforces, and supports interdependence among peers and collective decision making about work processes.

**Coaching.** Both scholars and practitioners who write about self-managing teams effectiveness focus a great deal of attention on what leaders do in their day-to-day interactions with team members—that is, they focus on hands-on coaching (e.g. Bass, 1957; Berkowitz, 1953; Fiedler, 1958; Jackson, 1953; Likert, 1958; Lippitt, 1940; Manz, 1986; Manz & Sims, 1987; Schlesinger, Jackson, & Butman, 1960). Coaching refers to direct interaction with the team intended to shape team processes to produce good performance. Pervading the literature on team coaching is the view that leader coaching behaviors can directly affect team members' engagement with their task, their ability to work through interpersonal problems that may be impeding progress, and the degree to which members accept collective responsibility for performance outcomes. Manz and Sims (1987) showed that the external leadership of self-managing teams, especially coaching such as eliciting self-observation, self-evaluation and self-reinforcement by members, were a significant differentiator of effective and ineffective self-managing team processes. Similarly, reinforcement by external leaders has been shown to enhance team psychological empowerment (e.g., Cohen & Spreitzer, 1994; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).

At the same time, Cohen, Spreitzer, and Ledford (1996) found that "encouraging behavior" (providing feedback intended to enhance team motivation) from supervisors was negatively associated with team performance as assessed both by managers and by customers, and Beekun (1989) found that self-managing teams that had no coaches significantly
outperformed those that did. Morgeson (2005) showed that leader active interventions had a negative impact on team's perceptions of the leader, though when events were sufficiently routine the impact of those interventions on performance was positive. In sum, existing research evidence suggests that leaders’ coaching in some circumstances fosters team self-management, the quality of members' interpersonal relationships, and member satisfaction with the team and its work. Yet in others it had either negative or neutral effects.

**Challenges for Self-managing Teams**

The main challenges identified in the research literature on self-managing teams are: (1) resistance to change both among team members and among managers in the transition from manager-led to self-managing teams, (2) a concomitant tendency of so-called self-managing teams to devolve into manager-led teams; and (3) an excessive focus by both leaders and team members on teams’ own internal processes.

**Overcoming resistance to shared decision-making.** There are significant challenges to leaders in getting frontline teams to accept managerial responsibilities for the processes and quality of their work, especially in instances where rewards for improved productivity are not shared with the teams themselves (Barker, 1993; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Stewart & Manz, 1995). Moreover, research has shown that organizations face significant challenges in changing the behaviors of those holding supervisory roles to one of coaching rather than supervision. A critical question raised by the conflicting findings of research on the effectiveness of self-managed teams was the degree to which these teams were self-managing in name only.

The difficulties of fostering genuine self-management have been well-documented. These difficulties include inability of managers to release control of work processes to teams...
(Golembiewski, 1995; Hut & Molleman, 1998), as well as to resistance from team members to taking on self-management (Balkema & Molleman, 1999; Wellins, Byham & Wilson, 1991).

Most research on self-managing teams has focused on introducing such teams into formerly manager-led and individualistic frontline environments such as production lines, sales, and customer service. Members of these newly formed teams held a history of working independently of their peers. Moreover, in such highly structured workplaces, work processes had been dictated by supervisors or by the technology of the assembly line itself. In this environment, introducing self-managing teams both increases teams’ authority and accountability for the quality of work processes and increases interdependence with peers, creating a host of leadership challenges. The environments where these changes take place frequently are unionized as well, and therefore have the history of considerable management-worker suspicion and a transactional relationship between the firm and the worker typified by control-type environments (Walton, 2003; Walton & Hackman, 1986).

There is evidence that when teams are given greater accountability for decisions they may view this greater authority as an attempt by the organization to ask them to produce more and take on added responsibility without experiencing the tangible benefits of those changes themselves (Marks & DeMeuse, 2003; Silver, Randolph, & Siebert, 2006). Moreover, workers with strong preferences to work autonomously may continue to pursue their own approaches to the work, resisting the obligations of joint decision-making with their teammates (Wageman, 1995). Organizational culture characteristics such as power distance (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001), which refers to a collective desire for large differences in the authority of leaders and followers to be maintained (Hofstede, 1984), can exacerbate the desire to avoid taking on authority that was previously the domain of managers.
Parallel to these challenges based in the perceptions, values, and motives of workers are similar sources of psychological resistance from leaders. For example, Manz and Sims (1987) showed that front line managers can experience the change of authority toward more team self-management as a direct threat to their value and power in the organization, and they frequently lack the skills to offer coaching and consultation rather than issue orders and set goals (Manz, 1992). Organizational and national culture can influence leader resistance to sharing authority as well. While the high collectivist values of China, for example, make working in teams relatively natural, the dominant leadership style investing all authority in leaders undermines the development of team behavioral self-management (Bell, 2007; Cheng et al., 2004). Thus, the theoretical improvement in worker autonomy intended by a change to self-management can be undermined by the actual behaviors of leaders and teams. For those who would exercise leadership to realize the benefits of team self-management, then, one critical leadership function is creating conditions to prepare team leaders for coaching roles by building their sense of efficacy and providing direct experience of a new way of working with teams (Golembiewski, 1995; Hut & Molleman, 1998; Manz 1986).

**Preventing self-managed teams from becoming de facto manager-led teams.** One common consequence, then, of the less-than-natural transition of manager-led to self-managing teams is for team leaders to recapture control over work processes, making the teams “self-managing” in name only. Research has suggested that the behaviors of teams and leaders are a dynamic, exerting mutual influence over one another. For example, senior leadership teams frequently are initially designed by chief executives to be self-managing—that is, the chief executive intends to hold authority for deciding the purpose and composition of the team, but asks members to take on shared accountability for key decisions affecting the organization. Yet
senior teams are frequently ineffective (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003; Hambrick, 1994; Wageman, et al., 2008). While some writers suggest that their ineffectiveness is a direct result of the leader's unwillingness to share power and create a genuine consensus decision process (Katzenbach, 1997), it may also be the case that leaders take back authority when the team is poor at making decisions together, embroiled instead in turf battles and conflicts (Wageman, et al., 2008). A challenge for leaders of self-managing teams, then, may be exercising self-control at moments when the team is struggling to operate effectively, and avoiding taking over their work. While this pattern has been observed and has sparked commentary, there has yet to be a systematic study of the potentially dynamic relations between team and leader behavior with respect to team authority.

**Promoting adequate external focus.** The necessity to learn how to make team decisions effectively and to monitor and manage the quality of their teammates’ work and work processes can capture much of the attention of self-managing team members. Moreover, significant evidence has accumulated that interpersonal and task-based conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Langfred, 2007), shifts in trust levels, and struggles to manage behavioral interdependence (Langfred, 2004; Porter & Lilly, 1996), can captivate the attention of members—and all at the expense of attention to key external relationships and events such as customer needs and relations with other teams.

Evidence for the importance of external activities to self-managing team performance has been mounting. Ancona and her colleagues have most fully developed this area of research by mapping the range of activities that groups use to engage with their environments, clients, and other external individuals and groups (cf. Gladstein, 1984; Ancona & Caldwell, 1987; Ancona, 1990). She showed that teams who remain relatively isolated from their environments, focused
instead on internal activities, or merely observed the outside environment without actively engaging outsiders were significantly less effective (Ancona, 1990). Similarly, Gersick (1988) showed that project teams that had an external focus at the calendar midpoints of their projects were significantly more likely to complete their tasks effectively.

The main advantages of self-managing teams—enhanced commitment to the work, better performance strategies, and excellent use of team member capabilities—all have been shown to be significantly better when the team actively engages in some form of task-relevant attentiveness to its external environment. At the same time, while the virtues of external focus have been well documented by Ancona and her colleagues (cf. Gladstein, 1984; Ancona & Caldwell, 1987; Ancona, 1990), the leadership functions that promote adequate external focus have not. There is significant variation in self-managing teams' attentiveness to their environments and in their tendency to focus their energies on internal vs. external processes. Relatively little is known about the influences on teams' external activities, or the leadership actions by members and authorities that enable self-managed teams to address this balance effectively.

**Imperatives for Leaders of Self-managing Teams**

What has research shown are the kinds of leader activities that are most critical to enabling self-managing team effectiveness? Two particular patterns emerge with respect to the activities of external leaders and their impact on self-managing teams: (a) the relative influence of designing a team well versus coaching it well and (b) the importance of timing.

**Design before coaching**. Leadership functions divide into two basic conceptual categories: (a) establishing (or influencing) the design features of teams; and (b) providing
hands-on coaching and consultation. In a longitudinal field study of customer service teams, Wageman (2001) directly measured the impact of these two main functions of leaders of self-managing teams. The primary influences on effective self-management were the design choices of front line leaders and their leaders including (a) the design of the task in terms of its interdependence (accomplished in this case by the frontline manager), (b) the clarity of team-level purposes, and (c) rewards for group performance (determined by the manager one level up). Only when these basic design conditions were well-established did front-line leaders' hands-on coaching make a positive difference in the overall effectiveness of self-managing teams.

Moreover, the magnitude of the effect of poor coaching (including taking back authority by identifying the teams' problems for them and asserting the leader's own solutions) was also determined by quality of team design. That is, well-designed teams were more robust – that is, less undermined by poor coaching – than those whose basic design features were shaky.

In this view, leaders have the opportunity to coach a team to higher levels of self-management and superior performance only when the team is relatively well-designed. If design conditions are stacked in favor of good performance, then the team coach can help the team exploit its favorable circumstances. If the team is poorly designed, on the other hand, attempts to foster team effectiveness through hands-on coaching may be futile or even backfire. In such cases, the flawed design may create dysfunctional processes so strong and preoccupying that coaching interventions risk merely adding to the disarray (Woodman & Sherwood, 1980).

**Pay attention to timing.** The efficacy of leaders' interventions may depend not just on their focus but also upon the time in the group's life cycle when a team leader chooses to provide them (Wageman, Fisher, & Hackman, 2009; Hackman & Wageman, 2005). In recent years there has been an outpouring of research findings on temporal aspects of group behavior, much of
which bears directly on team leader decision-making about the timing of interventions (see for example, Ancona & Chong, 1999; Fisher, 2010; Gersick & Hackman, 1990; Langfred, 2000; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). Gersick's (1988) findings are particularly relevant. In a field study of the life histories of a number of self-managing project teams whose performance periods ranged from several days to several months, she found that each of the groups she tracked developed a distinctive approach toward its task as soon as it commenced work, and stayed with that approach until precisely half way between its first meeting and its project deadline. At the midpoint of their lives, almost all teams underwent a major transition. In a concentrated burst of changes, they dropped old patterns of behavior, re-engaged with outside supervisors, and adopted new perspectives on their work. Following the midpoint transition, groups entered a final phase of focus on executing their tasks to the point of completion.

The findings of Gersick (1988) and others raise the possibility that the readiness of self-managing teams for external leaders' interventions changes systematically across their life cycles. Specifically, there are three times in a team's life when members may be especially open to interventions that address each of the three key performance processes: (a) at the beginning, when a team is just starting its work, it is especially open to interventions that focus on the effort members will apply to their work; (b) at the midpoint, when the team has completed about half its work (or half the allotted time has elapsed), it is especially open to interventions that help members reflect on their task performance strategy; and (c) at the end, when the work is finished, the team is ready to entertain interventions aimed at helping members draw on their experiences to build the team's complement of knowledge and skill (Hackman & Wageman, 2005a).

Directions for Future Research on Self-managing Teams
The findings of the scholarly research on self-managing teams raise several intriguing questions and promising avenues for future investigation. These include: (a) the dynamic relationship between team and leader behavior in fulfilling key leadership functions; and (b) the challenges of developing leadership capacity to support self-managing team effectiveness. These are described briefly in turn, below.

**Dynamic relations of team and leader behavior.** Recall that among the challenges of self-managing teams is the difficulty of implementing them *de novo*—and the subsequent risk that external leaders undermine team authority by taking back their decision rights over task processes. There exists the possibility that leaders take over the management of the tasks of *poorly functioning* teams because members themselves are not fulfilling those functions effectively. Feeling accountable for teams' performance, leaders may respond to low team self-management and poor performance by monitoring team performance more closely, by increasing their own interventions in the work of their teams, and by providing fewer cues and rewards for team self-management. This hypothesis is consistent with other research on how follower behavior can shape leader style (e.g., Farris & Lim, 1969; Lowin & Craig, 1968), and it merits additional investigation in the context of self-managing teams.

**Developing the capabilities of self-managing teams' external leaders.** While a great deal is known about the conditions that influence self-managing team effectiveness, the kinds of coaching that do and do not help self-managing teams, and the ways in which predictable times in the life of a group can be used to shape effectiveness, these findings raise important questions relevant to improving the effectiveness of such teams: How and under what conditions are external leaders best able to learn these practices? There are significant conceptual, behavioral, and emotional challenges to learning to lead self-managing teams. For example, understanding
what the basic design features are that such teams need, recognizing the degree to which they are in place, and formulating a strategy for getting them in place are significant conceptual challenges (Wageman & Hackman, 2010). At the same time, refraining from intervening in team process, choosing an effective time to do so, and intervening in ways that encourage self-management can be significant emotional and behavioral challenges (Manz & Sims, 1987).

Almost no research has yet focused on the personal characteristics, leadership development interventions, or organizational conditions that enhance these team leadership capacities, and we suggest this may be a fruitful avenue for additional investigation into the leadership of self-managing teams.

**Leadership of Self-designing Teams**

Self-designing teams are self-managing teams in which members also can determine key features of the team and/or their organizational context, but not their overall purposes. Most often, self-designing teams can alter their own membership, how rewards are distributed, and what information or technical consultation is offered to the team. Because self-designing teams can influence both their structure and their processes, they control many of the key conditions that foster team effectiveness (Hackman, 2002). While the term “self-designing teams” is rare in the research literature (Bennett & Kidwell, 2001), many teams that are referred to in particular studies as “self-managing” also have authority over some aspect of their own design and thus would be called self-designing teams in our terminology.

For instance, many front-line teams have some authority over their own membership and rewards, in addition to managing and monitoring their own work processes. Barker (1993) described how teams at a telecommunications manufacturing facility could interview, hire and
fire their own members, as well as dock members’ pay for violating team norms. Other examples of self-designing teams include task forces charged with leveraging new market opportunities (Gersick, 1990) or identifying the causes of organizational performance problems and proposing solutions (Gabarro & Clawson, 1984), and academic research teams (Bennett & Kidwell, 2001). Self-designing teams may also be more common in flat or entrepreneurial organizations where who holds authority over team design is often ambiguous.

While self-managing teams are often deliberately implemented to boost motivation and productivity, self-designing teams may come about less intentionally. When organizations implement self-managing teams, they often do so to minimize traditional hierarchical leadership (Manz, 1992) and leave as many decisions as possible to the teams. However, because authority and resources are diffused throughout complex matrix or multi-national organizations (Cummings & Haas, in press; Janz, 1999; O’Leary, Mortenson, & Woolley, 2011), teams often have accountabilities they share with other teams and members with diverse goals. Thus, self-managed teams in these organizations may spend much of their time figuring out how to construe the task or engaged in negotiating team design features, gradually taking authority over those design features themselves. In taking a functional view of team leadership, we view all of these activities as an exercise of leadership, regardless of whether they are done by a nominal team leader, other team members, or those external to the team.

**Opportunities for Self-designing Teams**

The opportunities afforded to self-designing teams are simple – their authority over team, task, and/or organizational context gives them a range of ways to adjust their design as task demands shift over time. Because team members are likely to be the most familiar with the task
demands, client needs, and optimal work processes, they theoretically are better positioned to understand the team’s design needs – especially in novel or uncertain tasks with which external leaders have had little experience. Thus, self-designing teams have the opportunity to: (a) adjust their membership to meet task demands, (b) structure rewards to maximize motivation and distributive justice, (c) requisition the information they need in real time, and (d) increase their members’ leadership capacity (Manz, 199; Wageman, et al., 2008).

**Refining team membership.** One specific opportunity for self-designing teams is to recognize the need for additional knowledge or skills, and to add new team members to address it. Because knowledge-intensive tasks are frequently non-routine or uncertain (e.g. Cross et al., 2008; Rulke & Galaskiewicz, 2000), teams may encounter problems that were unanticipated at team launch. Thus, teams with the authority to add people with relevant expertise that the team lacks are best positioned to succeed. For instance, in their study of teams in a design firm, Fisher, Amabile, and Pillemer (2010) found that many senior designers and engineers worked on teams only on an as-needed basis – “project mentors” kept some of their time flexible so that teams could “buy” their hours if their expertise was required. Similarly, Ancona, Bresman, and Caldwell (2009) described how a Microsoft software engineering team self-managed adding and shedding members as the team moved from brainstorming to design. They further proposed that such self-managed membership flexibility is a key characteristic of innovative, externally focused teams.

**Removing members.** Self-designing teams can also use authority over membership to attract more productive individuals and/or to rid themselves of habitual social-loafers (Barker, 1993; Delong, Mody, & Ager, 2003). For instance, teams in C&S Grocer’s distribution warehouse had authority over their membership, such that they could dismiss underperforming
members and all members were free to join other teams. This arrangement led to an intense
internal marketplace for labor. Because the teams were paid based on productivity, extremely
productive individuals could earn more by joining better-performing teams. Top management at
C&S Grocers saw these self-designing teams as the key to the organization’s growing profits and
market share (Delong, Mody, & Ager, 2003). Further, self-designing teams who can dismiss
their own members also have considerable authority to punish those who do not conform to team
norms (Barker, 1993), which can increase their control over member motivation and behavior.

**Distributing rewards and punishments.** Beyond using team membership as a mechanism
for rewarding and punishing members, self-designing teams may also have some control over
performance evaluation or pay distribution. Like the ability to hire and fire members, giving a
team control over its own reward system will give it greater control over the effort members
exert (Barker, 1993). However, giving teams the authority to decide how to evaluate each other
and distribute rewards accordingly presents many difficulties, which are detailed in the next
section on “Challenges.” If self-designing teams are to benefit from authority over their rewards,
they would be well-served to agree on a collective reward. Although rewarding individuals with
recognition, promotions, and money is common in organizations, rewarding the team as a
collective is often more effective at engendering and sustaining collective effort (Druskat &
Kayes, 2000; Lawler III, 2000; Spreitzer, Noble, Mishra, & Cooke, 1999). However, such teams
must be cautious to avoid “hybrid” rewards that simultaneously reward group and individual
performance. In her study of self-managing service technicians at Xerox, Wageman (2001) found
that the pure individual and pure team reward systems led to better performance than did teams
that had a hybrid reward system.

**Obtaining key information.** One of the most over-looked design features that self-
designing teams may have control over is their access to task-relevant information. In order to develop and maintain a task-appropriate work strategy, teams often need up-to-date, trustworthy information about their work environment, including what is happening with customers, supply chains, or other parts of the organization. However, in modern, knowledge-intensive organizations, information is one of the most valuable resources and can be hoarded by the powerful; front-line, self-managing teams may find it difficult to get task-relevant information when management feels such information is too “competitively sensitive” (Hackman, 2002). Thus, a self-designing team with the authority to requisition whatever information it needs, whenever it needs it, will be much better able to make well-considered decisions about its strategy and deliverables.

Building members’ leadership capacity. Last, self-designing teams have a significant opportunity to build members’ capacity for leadership by giving them experience managing membership, rewards, and information systems – tasks often reserved for upper management. In settings such as senior leadership teams, such teams may be a vehicle for leaders of particular areas to think strategically about the whole enterprise, rather than about their particular domain (Hackman & Wageman, 2010; Wageman, et al. 2008). Even at lower levels of organizational bureaucracy, individuals who are asked to think strategically about team structure and environment will be encouraged to learn about the organization and to hone their strategic thinking skills (Manz, 1992; Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), thus building the leadership capacity of the organization.

Challenges for Self-designing Teams

The main challenges for self-designing teams also stem from the broad scope of their
authority: their varied responsibilities can lead to the underuse or misuse of team design. Here, we summarize three of these challenges: (a) managing competing demands for attention, (b) having difficult conversations in a team of equals, and (c) limiting the overuse of authority.

**Managing competing demands for attention.** Self-design inherently invites teams to consider both design and process changes when seeking to improve their teamwork. Many aspects of design – such as bringing in new members or requisitioning information – require a working knowledge of a teams’ external environment (e.g. the skills of others in the organization; where relevant information might be located) (Ancona, Bresman, & Caldwell, 2009. Thus, a self-designing team will need to keep its attention focused in more directions than a self-managing one would. Because attention is a scarce resource in knowledge-intensive organizations (March & Simon, 1958; Hansen & Haas, 2001), teams responsible for their own design may have difficulty both completing their task and attending their own design, especially when improving the design is time-consuming. Such multi-tasking can be especially problematic when team members have many other accountabilities besides the team (Cummings & Haas, in press; O’Leary, et al., 2011) or when it requires the team to increase monitoring of its external environment (Waller, 1997).

**Having difficult conversations in a team of equals.** Even when a self-designing team is attentive to its own structure, it may still be “under-designed” (Ancona & Nadler, 1989) because exercising its authority would be interpersonally difficult. Specifically, research has found that many teams have difficulty managing their own membership or evaluating their teammates because they perceive the costs to them as individuals as greater than the benefits to the team (Peiperl, 1999). For instance, many teams will willingly add new members to address shifting task demands, but do not simultaneously shed members whose expertise is no longer needed.
(Hackman, 2002; Hackman & Wageman, 2010). Many boards of directors and top management teams suffer from this problem (Wageman, et al., 2008), leading to the team becoming too large to have effective discussions or make decisions (Levine & Moreland, 1998; Hackman & Vidmar, 1970). When teams become overlarge, members often become frustrated and begin to complete the work individually or in smaller groups, neutering the original team purpose (Hackman & Wageman, 2008).

Similarly, when a team can distribute rewards to its own members, it requires team members to honestly evaluate each other to distribute them equitably. However, members often distort their evaluations of their peers when those evaluations are used to distribute rewards to individuals (Peiperl, 1999). Often, teams evenly distribute rewards, regardless of merit, rather than have the difficult conversation about whether one member worked slightly harder than another (Hackman, 2002). While the authority to distribute rewards may give teams a mechanism to punish social loafers and reward extraordinary contributors, it may also beget difficult conversations that members wish to avoid. Thus, the intended benefits of peer evaluation and reward distribution are rarely realized (Peiperl, 1999).

Limiting overuse of authority. Another challenge of self-designing teams is that they have more potential to misuse their authority (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Wageman & Mannix, 2003). A number of scholars have wondered whether increasing a team’s autonomy is a way to tighten surveillance and control over individual effort (Barker, 1993; Gryzb, 1984; Sinclair, 1992). For instance, in his ethnography of manufacturing teams with control of team membership and rewards, Barker (1993) found that, over time, some self-designing teams set rules more draconian than any organization would (e.g., “if you’re more than 5 minutes late, you’re docked a day’s pay”: Barker, 1993, p. 428). Because self-designing teams are often more self-contained
and independent, the danger of coercive norms developing is perhaps higher than in self-managing or manager-led teams.

Self-designing teams also face a danger of over-focusing on information search when they have the authority to requisition information and little oversight into whether they achieve their task. When teams have unclear goals or deadlines (Eisenhardt, 1989) or assume a defensive orientation (Woolley, in press) they may request and process information as a substitute for working on the task (Hackman, 2011). Because information takes time to process and there is a seemingly endless supply of it, the authority to requisition information can be a dangerous lure. Further, even when such teams receive relevant information, it may not be in a form convenient for them to process (Hackman, 2002), adding to the time required. Because self-designing teams are likely to requisition information that they do not routinely access, it is more likely to be in a form preferred by others. Thus, self-designing teams should ask for only the information they need and work quickly to make streams of necessary real-time information available and digestible (Eisenhardt, 1989).

**Imperatives for Leaders of Self-Designing Teams**

Overall, self-designing teams have many opportunities to match their design to idiosyncratic tasks demands and member preferences. However, each of aspect of team and task design may present costly problems, which teams must learn to minimize. Formal leaders can play an important role in developing those capacities within teams.

**Support good quality membership choices.** First, leaders of self-designing teams can provide coaching and consultation to help those teams manage well the changeover of membership. Leaders can help self-designing teams to identify potential new members with
task-relevant expertise, while creating norms that allow current members to leave the team without hard feelings or political repercussions.

**Promote excellent self-diagnosis.** Leaders of self-designing teams can support their effectiveness by helping them create structured processes to conduct effective peer review and distribute rewards in ways that create both perceived fairness and performance-contingency. Such reviews have been shown to be most effective when they are tied to collective (rather than individual) rewards and are strongly supported by the organization (Peiperl, 1999). However, for self-designing teams to best realize the learning and motivational benefits of peer evaluation and reward distribution, leaders should encourage a discussion of the most meaningful dimensions of performance to be evaluated.

**Keep the purpose clear.** Last, but most importantly, leaders of self-designing teams can play a critical role in clearly articulating the team’s purpose – and reiterating it frequently. Self-designing teams have many tools at their disposal and risk diffusing member attention or drowning in information. Articulating a clear, challenging, and compelling direction to orient, energize, and motivate such teams is thus one of the most important tasks of leaders of self-designing teams.

**Directions for Future Research**

While the conclusions above about self-designing teams can be gleaned indirectly from the research literature, this body of work is quite underdeveloped. Thus, the next steps in research on self-designing teams are likely to be descriptive, addressing questions such as how prevalent self-designing teams are in organizations, what tasks they are used for, and what design features they most commonly control. From this descriptive platform, further research on the conditions
under which self-managing teams can be given authority over specific design features can be conducted.

**Exploring good uses of self-designing teams.** For what tasks or purposes might self-designing teams be most effective? When is it most useful for a team to have authority over its own membership and when is it counter-productive? Self-designing teams are seldom intended to control all of their own design features. However, it is possible high-functioning self-managing teams would benefit from increased control of their reward structures, membership, and resources. The question, though, is when should self-managing teams be given control over certain design features? Much more research is needed to understand the types of tasks that such teams do well and the conditions under which they thrive. Because it can be very challenging and demanding to have all of the design features under team control, those designing the authority system must be judicious in deciding which design features a team controls and think through why giving the team this authority will help with the task.

**Leadership of Self-governing Teams**

Self-governing teams are teams that convene for their own self-defined purposes and/or who have the authority to define purposes both for themselves and for others. Self-governing teams have authority over their own design, including the membership of the team and the context within which it operates. Examples of self-governing teams include entrepreneurial startup teams in which the team is formed by a partnership of peers who share leadership of the entity that they jointly create. Other kinds of common self-governing teams include worker cooperatives and kibbutzim, small family owned businesses, partnerships in professional service firms, some performing arts groups, some (but not all) boards of directors, and even
revolutionary groups such as teams that might lead a mutiny in an organization, or start a social movement in public life.

Note that many of these above-named teams can and do have less than self-governing authority structures. For example, some entrepreneurial startups can be self-managing or even manager-led teams, depending on the degree of shared authority over team purposes and the team's design. In some cases, an initial inventor convenes a team of members of her or his own choice, and retains authority for devising team purposes, thereby making the leadership team of the enterprise into a self-managing team rather than a self-governing one. Similarly, while there are string quartets and chamber orchestras who share authority over determining their musical repertoire (team purposes), collaborate in selecting new members (team design), and devising their own rehearsal practices (work processes), there are musical ensembles in which all these choices are under the authority of a conductor, making such teams manager-led. Finally, in contexts where the chair of a board of directors also is the chief executive, the other board members have far less authority than the leader, making them more typically self-managing or manager-led entities. Nonetheless, there are many examples of self-governing teams, and, as will be seen, this may be the fastest-growing—and least researched—authority structure for teams.

**Opportunities of self-governing teams**

Teams that hold collective authority over their purposes as well as their composition, context and processes, have significant potential for promoting high levels of collaborative accomplishment. Much of the work on such teams has focused on two key virtues: (a) the fit between members' values and team purposes and the impact that fit has on commitment and viability; and (b) their flexibility and capacity to provide leadership to solve complex multi-
stakeholder problems.

**Enhancing values-purpose fit.** Self-governing teams are especially well-poised, compared to other kinds of teams, to create high levels of values-based commitment to the team and to its purposes, precisely because the team itself has full authority to compose and launch a team expressly for activities of great value to its members. There is some evidence that a modern trend in younger generations toward seeking greater work-values fit is spawning an interest in creating new entities and work opportunities, many of which begin as self-governing teams (Bornstein, 1998; 2004; Boschee, 1995; Smola & Sutton, 2002). The increasing individualism of personal career choices around the globe means that countless more people are crafting unique career paths for themselves, oriented by a determination to find personal meaning and autonomy in what they do. As a consequence, they are not seeking employment in traditional firms. At the same time, digitalization and globalization are creating ready access via technology to many more people, greatly increasing the chances of an individual finding a handful of others that share his or her aims. Indeed, one internet-based organization that supports the self-formation of teams has seen the launch of more than 45,000 self-governing teams in the last few years (Meetup.com, 2011). Nevertheless, it is difficult to find research in organizational behavior, organizational psychology, or social psychology about self-governing teams. Most of the work appears in sociology and political science, where the phenomena of egalitarian and democratic societies, social movements, and citizen voice are of great interest.

Research evidence in support of the commitment advantages of self-governing teams emphasizes the unusual longevity and low turnover of some examples, combined with a long waiting list of candidates who wish to join and high selectivity of induction processes. The research on worker cooperatives, for example, emphasizes the sizeable differences between such
organizations and traditional businesses in worker commitment, and behavioral evidence for such commitment such as low turnover and absenteeism (Oliver, 1984; Rhodes & Steers, 1981). Similarly, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra are member-led performing ensembles of long duration, in which individual commitment and satisfaction are notably elevated above that of similar manager-led ensembles (Judy, 1999; Hackman, 2002; Stearns, 2002).

In each of these instances deeply shared values both around the purposes of the organization and around its determination to maintain democratic practices serves to elevate a lasting commitment to keeping the entity thriving. Research on these groups emphasizes that self-governing entities offer both extensive participation in making critical decisions that affect members’ own lives and work (Bart, 1995; Pearce, Rubenfeld & Morgan, 1991; Whyte, 1991) and offers membership that is based on deeply shared values (Benai, Niremberg & Menachem, 2000; Campbell, Keen, Norman, & Oakshott, 1977; Whyte, 1991).

**Providing leadership for complex societal problems.** Much has been written in sociology about self-governing teams, though not under that term: typically, such groups are part of civic organizations or are leading social movements, or are termed volunteer groups. This research stream emphasizes the prevalence and value of such groups in public life. Self-governing teams have significant benefits, for example, when complex problems require the resources and capabilities of multiple, independent entities, a kind of problem that is increasing in prevalence in the world (Sayles & Chandler, 2009). In the public sector and in civic life, for instance, we are beginning to see an increase in climate-related crises like flooded cities, droughts, severe wildfires, oil spills, and epidemics, which are creating the necessity for cross-entity and cross-sector collaborations with people working together from municipalities, NGOs,
and the private sector, all with critical leadership roles in the process. These multi-stakeholder collaborations require active coordination, and they benefit from shared authority held by members appointed from relevant stakeholder groups. These individuals form complex leadership teams, with shared authority to govern the action (Mendonca, Beroggi, & Wallace, 2001; Sayles & Chandler, 2009; Leonard & Howitt, 2006).

Similarly, self-governing teams are taking on problems in civic life for which there is no single institutional accountability, such as promoting conservation and “green” activity among citizens or protecting shared public lands. Civic associations are entities that have volunteer members, are governed by elected leaders, and pursue public voice as a core organizational outcome (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Many teams operate within large civic associations, but nevertheless hold authority to decide the unique focus of their teams. The volunteer leaders in civic associations fulfill essential functions by mobilizing others both to devise and to implement collective strategies. Leadership tasks include motivating people to work together, dealing strategically with a range of external threats and opportunities, and adapting to the novel and challenging circumstances that accompany the work of advocacy (Campbell, 2005; Day, 2000; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004).

These governance groups have the ability to develop context-specific strategies to solve unique local problems. For example, in a longitudinal study of leadership teams in a U.S. civic association whose purpose is to mobilize volunteers to protect the natural environment, Ganz and Wageman (2008) found that teams that were better able to articulate and define genuinely shared purposes among diverse and independent members were better able to mobilize others to accomplish collective aims. Relatedly, Ostrom's (1990; Ostrom & Gardner, 1994) groundbreaking research identifying the conditions under which communities avoid the tragedy of the
commons shows repeatedly the necessity of community self-governing leadership teams for sustainable agreements. Self-convened, community-authorized and representative leadership teams are a key design principle for using and preserving publicly held goods such as forests, fisheries, and grazing land (Ostrom, 1990).

**Challenges for Self-Governing Teams**

While the great strengths and potential of self-governing teams are compelling, it is also the case that such teams struggle with significant challenges to their effectiveness. In particular, there are three relative weaknesses of such teams compared to those in which individuals hold some authority over purposes and processes: (a) articulating purposes is not a natural team task; (b) emphasis on consensus elicits the worst dysfunctions of group decision making and (c) as a consequence of struggles for clarity and consensus, these teams risk devolving into hierarchies or disbanding.

**Articulating purpose collaboratively.** Clear, shared purpose, which is an essential condition for team effectiveness, is not a strength of this authority structure. Self-governing teams can struggle to arrive at a sharp enough direction statement to guide collective action. Further, defining and clarifying the purpose drawing on multiple perspectives is often a particularly difficult challenge for very diverse groups like the multi-stakeholder leadership teams described above. Articulating purpose is not a function that is well-executed by groups, but is rather done more effectively by individuals with considerable conceptualization ability and dexterity with language (Hackman, 2002, pp. 224-225). In the study of activist teams described earlier (Wageman & Hackman, 2010), clarity of team purpose was significantly lower for the self-governing environmental activist teams than for any other kinds of front-line task
performing teams or for senior leadership teams, all of which typically have purposes established by an individual.

Self-governing teams often have lofty but abstract aspirations and values. This lack of clarity about where the team is headed can spawn an inability of such teams to reach any agreement on key decisions or to make well-coordinated strategic choices when team members are not together. Hackman (2002) describes, for example, a small cooperative newspaper, in which members of the cooperative were personally committed to the values of democracy and wanted to enact those values by involving all members in setting aspirations. In spite of considerable time and energy invested in the debate, they were never able to reach agreement on a sharp collective purpose concrete enough to guide behavior. Because decisions about purpose always involve choosing not to do some things as well as what the team will do, articulating a direction together requires members to forgo goals that some deem personally valuable (Hackman, 2002). The expression “a camel is a horse designed by a committee” is about this very issue: the tendency of peer groups to sand down the sharpest edges of individuals' visions in the interest of including all their personal goals.

In her classic article “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” Freeman (1973) underscores how a norm of organic growth and egalitarianism in self-governing entities may work to counteract the efforts of any individual to create necessary structures that might support collective action. And when the ensuing chaos and disorientation prevent groups from accomplishing their purposes, there can be a sharp inclination to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction, establishing rigid structures and a return to hierarchy as a means of creating clarity.

**Promoting a decision-making repertoire beyond consensus.** Self-governing teams are
much more likely than other kinds of teams to hold ideologies that insist on democratic processes. They are much more insistent on seeking consensus than groups in which some authority is held by an individual (who might, for example, use his or her authority to decide when it is time to acknowledge the impossibility of consensus and call for a majority vote). As a consequence, they are especially vulnerable to the dysfunctions of consensus decision-making processes that are well-documented in teams. Much of the research on groups in the last 50 years has, in one way or another, underscored the problems that arise when groups of peers are asked to make decisions together. Evidence from juries, real or mock, who are obligated by law to reach consensus, (Bray, 1978; MacCoun, 1989; Penrod & Hastie, 1980; Sommers, 2006), and scores of different kinds of problem-solving groups formed in the laboratory (Hollingshead, 1996; Stasser, 1985; Van de Ven & DelBeq, 1974;) all illustrate an array of ways in which the social processes in groups of peers systematically lead them away from the norm of rational decision-making.

Consensus processes can result in phenomena such as group polarization—that is, the tendency for consensus groups to make either riskier or more conservative decisions than is warranted (Isenberg, 1986; Mackie, 1986). They also induce over-attending to shared information at the expense of unique relevant information (Stasser, 1985). They can result in dominance by individuals with higher-status demographic characteristics instead of recognizing most-knowledgeable members (Hollingshead, 1986), and are also vulnerable to some forms of Groupthink (Leana, 1985), which refers to an over-focus on agreement and smoothness of process at the expense of critical evaluation of alternatives.

It is important to note that some studies show that these negative patterns are exacerbated by the presence of a strong leader relative to true self-governing teams (Hollingshead, 1986;
Janis, 1971; Mullen, Anthony, Salas, and Driskell, 1994). The critical relevance of these processes to self-governing teams is not that they are especially dysfunctional for such teams, but rather the special challenges to overcoming them in such authority structures. While each of these dysfunctions of consensus decision-making can be overcome by the introduction of structured processes designed to combat them (Van de Ven & DelBeq, 1974), creating and using a structured decision-making process is not a natural act in peer groups. The presence of an individual authority—absent in self-governing groups—can increase the chances that a team will use a well-structured process. As they grow, many self-governing entities such as kibbutzim, worker cooperatives, and performance ensembles develop electoral processes to create leadership groups that are small enough to make decisions dexterously in comparison to large groups, but they still involve consensus processes within those groups (Hahnel, 2005; Mansbridge, 1980).

How might self-governing groups go about creating for themselves the kinds of structured decision-making processes that help diminish the dysfunctions of natural group processes without resorting to non-democratic processes or removing the interaction among members altogether (as is frequently done in such structured processes as the Nominal Group Technique; Van de Ven & DelBeq, 1974)? One possibility is for individual members to exercise leadership by taking responsibility for proposing such a process. But in the Wageman and Ganz (2008) study cited earlier, the self-governing teams of environmental activists held widely shared norms of equality which militated against members claiming the authority to intervene in team processes. It may be something of an art to act as a peer and still engage the group in enacting effectively structured team processes, neither usurping authority one does not have nor abdicating responsibility for creating the conditions for effective teamwork. It remains an
important and under-researched question how self-governing teams can make collective decisions without losing their self-governing character.

**Preventing devolution into hierarchy.** Some scholars have argued that the very egalitarian nature of self-governing groups is something of an unnatural act for humans. Evolutionary psychology suggests that one product of human biological heritage is the inevitability of hierarchies whenever groups form. The logic is that individuals that win a competition for dominance in groups, though they also pay costs for it, have a better chance to pass their genes on to the next generation. The formation of hierarchies in social species is seen in creatures from insects to primates, and is considerably more common than equality of status among conspecifics (Cowlishaw & Dunbar, 1991; Ellis, 1995). Self-governing teams have all the authority they possibly could need to chart their own course and to shape their own structure and context. But authority dynamics within a team can compromise members’ ability to take concerted collective action. We already have addressed the difficulty of articulating purpose collectively. Observers of social experiments like communes and cooperative business organizations underscore the slow pace of decision making in large groups, and the crisis-management literature emphasizes a powerful tendency for groups to short cut collective processes under stress and rely on individual authority (Boehm, 1989; Burke & Greenstein, 1989; Howitt & Leonard, 2006; Lagadec, 1990; Meyers, 1987; Smart & Stanbury, 1978). Self-governing groups frequently struggle to maintain egalitarian practices that allow the group to fulfill critical leadership functions in a concerted manner. Relatively little research has addressed the conditions under which groups are able to maintain their egalitarian authority structure and make rapid and well-coordinated shifts in action when the environment demands responsiveness. Is a true sharing of power a stable arrangement, or are certain kinds of
asymmetries necessary for groups’ long-term existence? One fruitful avenue for future research, then, is the kinds of collective processes—and the kinds of leadership actions that might develop them—that enable members of self-governing groups to sustain their unique democratic character.

**Imperatives for shared leadership.** The challenges of leadership of self-governing teams are primarily about members developing certain habits and capacities, sharing responsibility for noticing what critical team leadership functions are not yet being fulfilled and taking responsibility to fulfill them. There are two particular aspects of self-governing team functioning that are worth explicit attention by team members, precisely because the automatic processes that emerge in teams of peers around these matters are likely to be ineffective. These are (a) paying explicit attention to what is done by the team as compared with what is attended to by individuals working independently of one another, and (b) creating structured decision processes that support effective shared information processing and democratic decision making.

**Identify what individuals are good for... as well as what teams are good for.** In a field study of student project teams, Wageman & Gordon (2005) showed that teams operate on “autopilot” when it comes to determining what is done as a whole group and what is done by individuals working independently of one another. This automaticity, driven by shared values in the group, frequently resulted in poor task-process fit, in which whole groups, for example, sat around reading materials together in silence, or groups disaggregated writing tasks that required coherence and a single voice. Egalitarian groups in particular were especially likely to miss opportunities to assign to individuals work that is best done independently. The challenge then, for the leadership of self-governing teams and their tendency toward shared responsibilities, is to identify that handful of team functions that are better served by individuals while keeping for the
group those functions—like creative idea generation and generating commitment to strategic choices—that belong to the group. The irony is that all the individuals in a self-convened group must have—or acquire—an understanding of those kinds of choices in order for the group to evolve excellent self-leadership practices. Some writers in political sociology note that among the institutions that best help individuals acquire these skills in public life—civic and religious volunteer organizations—are declining, rather than increasing, in prevalence (Putnam, 1994). It remains an important question how the essential skills of self-governance can be developed and transmitted in ways that enable self-governing teams to be maximally effective in addressing their core purposes.

Create norms of shared accountability for devising and self-assessing structured processes. Well-designed teams develop norms of attentiveness to changes in environmental demands, and they craft and execute task performance strategies that are fully appropriate to their task and situation, rather than fall mindlessly into the execution of habitual routines (Gersick & Hackman, 1994; Wageman, 1995, 2001). Such norms are likely to emerge naturally when the tasks undertaken by the team are meaningful and when team purposes are clear (Wageman, 2001). But self-governing teams need additional attention to norms about behavior to help them deal constructively with the authority dynamics and challenges of democratic processes that make collective decision-making difficult. For self-managing teams, the usefulness of coaching the team process has been well-established. But in such teams the responsibility to introduce and coach effective processes is squarely placed on a clear team leader. For self-governing teams, widely shared norms of equality can militate against members claiming the authority to intervene in team processes. Member coaching of team processes is by no means impossible, but requires explicit conversation, initiated by members themselves, to get
in place. The establishment of shared responsibility for intervening in team processes may be a critical norm to establish at the launch of a self-governing team, increasing the chances that the kinds of interventions typically the domain of a single leader may be taken up by multiple members in turn.

**Directions for Future Research**

The recent explosion in the number of self-governing teams is only beginning to attract the attention of teams researchers. There is much descriptive work to be done on the phenomenon, as well as the development of normative theories of effectiveness. First, it would be intriguing to explore the question of for what kinds of purposes do self-governing groups typically convene. Given the complete authority to form teams for any purpose, what are the arenas in which we see people deciding that more typical organizational arrangements are underserving some need, or offering little opportunity to engage with others for a given purpose?

There are many research frontiers available for studying self-governing teams. We have identified a number of normative questions that are relatively under-explored for such teams: Under what conditions do self-governing teams make excellent collaborative decisions in line with their own self-defined purposes? Under what conditions do such teams revert to hierarchies instead of maintaining collective self-governance, and avoid the perverse consequences of that reversion? Do self-governing teams that develop norms of shared responsibility for intervening in team process at launch outperform and outlast those that don’t? Under what conditions are members able to sustain collective self-governance and create alignment across multiple such teams? What are the critical challenges to self-formed and self-determining teams in developing their own capacity to learn?
If teams researchers are to address these modern phenomena in team formation and leadership, we will need new ways of thinking about different antecedents to their internal processes (e.g., there are no external leaders whose actions or styles we can study, there is no organizational evaluation, reward or training system to assess). And we will need new ways of thinking about team processes, such as team self-formation and launch processes, inter-team governance processes, and multilevel (individual and team) learning processes, to name a few. Finally, we will need to evolve new or less common ways of studying teams—identifying them when they are born online, finding them outside organizational boundaries, observing them in real time—to begin getting a handle on what the future holds for such teams.

**Conclusion**

The teams research literature, when seen through the lens of the authority structure within which teams operate, offers a clearly differentiated set of opportunities and challenges for those who would exercise leadership of teams. As we have seen, authority structure influences the exercise of leadership in teams in two important ways: (a) constraining who can lead, and (b) creating particular virtues and weaknesses in the team that open the door for leadership activity to have important impacts on team effectiveness.

First, authority structure constrains who is likely to be able to have impact on team effectiveness, because it specifies the groups and individuals who have legitimate authority to fulfill certain leadership functions. For example, in manager-led teams, the ability of team members to exercise leadership over some of the most important influences on team effectiveness—such as team membership and the process by which the work gets done—is severely constrained. By contrast, in self-governing teams members have all the authority they
need to influence any aspect of team functioning.

But each of these levels of constraint places specific requirements on those who would exercise leadership. In the first instance, the manager of the team has a particular leadership burden that arises directly from the fact that only he or she can decide work processes, and that is to take steps to manage the motivation losses for the team that are inherent in low-autonomy work. For the self-governing team, a consequence of that shared leadership responsibility is that members have upon them a requirement to exercise leadership around managing the authority dynamics and challenges of democratic processes. In other words, the authority structure itself results in the need to exercise leadership for particular purposes.

We can summarize for each authority structure both the key leadership requirements and the functions that are likely to be in especially good shape, without much intervention, as a result of how authority is partitioned. To do so, it is useful to draw upon three key team processes that together influence the performance effectiveness of teams. Hackman and Wageman (2005) posited that team effectiveness is a joint function of three performance processes: (a) the level of effort group members collectively expend carrying out task work, (b) the appropriateness to the task of the performance strategies the group uses in its work, and (c) the amount of knowledge and skill members bring to bear on the task. In other words, to the degree that the conditions under which a team work elicit and reinforce high levels of collective energy and attention to the work, enable and support superb strategizing, and result in high levels of knowledge and skill being developed and deployed to do the work, they are almost certainly going to perform their work well. The authority structures we have explored in this chapter have some direct effects on these team processes and, as a consequence, direct the leadership needs of the team to particular functions—e.g., enhancing motivation or managing knowledge and skill levels—while others
will be well fulfilled without direct intervention either by a formal leader or by members themselves.

For manager-led teams, the leadership requirements are considerable and constant: acting in ways that can sustain effort, given the low autonomy of such teams, providing the strategic direction for the group, and compensating for and building the capabilities of low-skill members. For self-managing teams, the leadership requirements to manage these processes shifts to members themselves, and the formal team leader can support them through coaching. The increase in work autonomy makes the burden of motivating the group less onerous, but the demand to attend to creating interdependent structures that promote team decision-making, providing hands-on coaching, and promoting a focus on external constituencies grows.

For self-designing teams, the leadership functions demanded of the team members expands to include attentiveness to managing knowledge and skill—understanding the necessary capabilities and resources to do their work well, and developing their own members, because they hold the authority and therefore the responsibility to compose the team and structure its work. At the same time they also tend to have much more impact on their own motivation, because they collectively share responsibility for how rewards, punishments, and other extrinsic consequences are allocated to members. Formal leaders can be especially helpful to such teams in taking off their plates the responsibility to manage all external relations and obtain and synthesize information that the team can use. Perhaps most critically, formal leaders can help keep collective purposes clear while the team members themselves attend to a complex array of leadership functions to support their own work.

Finally, self-governing teams that define their purposes well have little reason to need to exercise leadership deliberately to enhance effort levels—the combination of work autonomy,
shared rewards and purpose-values fit is a recipe for high motivation. They do, however, have the added burden of fulfilling certain key leadership functions collectively—like defining shared purposes and being explicit about their decision rules—at which teams do not often excel. And so appointing particular individuals to take on certain leadership functions for the team at certain times—that is, the internal authority structure—becomes part of their required leadership functions as well.

In this chapter we provide guidance about the tradeoffs inherent in each team authority structure and outline the key demands for leadership that are created by those structures. We hope this chapter gives practitioners and scholars a way to identify both (a) the tradeoffs in a particular situation to choose an authority structure, and (b) the ways in which members and formal leaders may effectively operate within that structure.

There remain three significant research questions identified by this approach that have yet to be addressed. We end by summarizing them here. (1) What are the conditions under which particular authority structures are most effective for conducting collaborative work? We know very little about that question from empirical research. What little research that has been done to directly address it shows that self-managing teams generally produce superior outcomes on all three criteria of effectiveness compared to manager-led teams, at least when the conditions have been created for formerly manager-led teams to operate in a genuinely self-managing fashion. It remains an open question and one worthy of additional research about when each of the types of teams we have addressed here is most effective—*and for what outcomes of interest*. That is, while the demands of functioning in a self-designing teams may be especially enabling of individual team members’ leadership capacities, such authority structures may be less able to promote decision-making speed. This observation suggests a further research question: (2)
Under what conditions are particular authority structures for teams chosen or enacted? How common are each of the types, and in what organizational or societal circumstances? For example, while we suspect that self-designing teams are increasing in prevalence in workplaces, and that that increase almost certainly reflects a perceived need for teams to have more authority over their own membership and context than they have in the past, we know very little about what the underlying challenges are that such teams address. Finally, (3) what is the process by which team authority structures are determined? Our review of the existing literature suggests that authority dynamics in teams are, indeed, dynamic—that is, in many circumstances they represent a complex negotiation and structuration process over time (Poole & McFee, 2005), with formal leaders’ explicit choices, team members’ interactions, and other systemic features all interacting to shape the emergent authority structure under which teams operate.

We hope the framework and analysis provided in this chapter offer a starting point for such explorations and a structure for identifying the conditions under which different team authority structures emerge over time and are especially effective for different purposes.
References


accomplishment. Symposium presented at the meeting of the Academy of Management, Montreal, Quebec.


Figure 1: Levels of Team Authority

From J. Richard Hackman (2002). Leading teams: Setting the stage for great performances.