When and Why does Power Asymmetry Affect Team Performance?

By

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All interested are welcome
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ABSTRACT

Past research has strongly suggested that power asymmetries within a team have a stifling effect on team learning behaviors by discouraging open dialogue and by fostering politics and status games. This is troubling since power asymmetry is likely to exist in all teams, and particularly in those teams where opportunities to learn through member differences are the greatest. I will present the results of two studies in which we investigated the effects of power differences in teams. The first study examined the effects of power asymmetries due to differences in expertise between team members, and suggested that teams in which the more powerful help the less powerful perform at higher levels. The second study examined the effects of power asymmetries resulting from differences in task dependence between team members. The results of this study showed that the extent to which the more powerful help the less powerful is partly determined by the way teams are provided with feedback. These findings indicate that power asymmetry is not just an obstacle to team learning and performance but might sometimes be a resource for teams.

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