

# Tensions Between Diversity and Shared Leadership: The Role of Team Political Skill

Small Group Research

2019, Vol. 50(4) 507–538

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DOI: 10.1177/1046496419840432

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## Abstract

Maintaining workplace diversity is an important legal and ethical issue in modern organizations. However, demographic heterogeneity might discourage the development of shared leadership in work teams as individuals are inherently not inclined to share leadership roles with dissimilar others. The present study is designed to investigate how political skill assists team members to overcome interpersonal dissimilarities and become engaged in mutual influence with their peers. By studying 63 student project teams using multiwave, multisource surveys, we find that team demographic faultlines on gender and race are negatively associated with shared leadership magnitude and therefore discourage team task performance. However, such destructive direct (on shared leadership magnitude) and indirect (on team performance) effects of team demographic faultlines can be mitigated when the team is staffed with many politically skilled members. Our findings bring important implications for organizations in building and encouraging shared leadership, especially in newly formed professional work teams.

## Keywords

team demographic faultlines, political skill, shared leadership

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Defined as “a condition of mutual influence embedded in the interactions among team members” (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007, p. 1218), shared leadership has been suggested to be a key driver of team effectiveness (see D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014, for recent meta-analyses). Due to increasing task complexity and environmental dynamism, team members must proactively provide leadership support to their peers, such as facilitating planning and organizing and/or offering personal support or consideration to improve overall team performance (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). When more members are engaging in leadership activities and mutual influence, a team can better utilize the informational and social resources of its members, and thus advance its effectiveness (Chiu, Owens, & Tesluk, 2016).

Seen as a form of interactive structure within teams, shared leadership is rooted and embedded in the frequent social interactions among team members (DeRue, 2011). Literature also suggests that group identification (DeRue, Nahrgang, & Ashford, 2015) and shared value/purpose (Carson et al., 2007) are two important facilitators of shared leadership because they serve as the fundamental motivations that drive individuals to engage in leadership interactions (DeRue et al., 2015). In this vein, group homogeneity should promote the occurrence of shared leadership because individuals are inclined to form a strong group identification and shared value with those who possess similar gender, age, or race (e.g., Cox, Pearce, & Perry, 2003; Gates & Mark, 2012). Although keeping teams demographically homogeneous might make it easier for developing shared leadership (Cox et al., 2003), retaining demographic diversity at workplace is an inevitable issue in organizations due to legal and ethical requirements (Bond & Haynes, 2014). More importantly, organizations can eventually achieve competitive advantages if they manage demographic diversity well (Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). Thus, to encourage shared leadership in a demographically diverse work environment, team supervisors and human resource (HR) professionals need to understand the potential negative impact of demographic diversity and help members effectively manage it. Surprisingly, few scholars have empirically investigated the possible tensions between team demographic diversity and shared leadership, or how teams can eliminate such tensions, if any, to realize the advantages of diversity and shared leadership.

The present study is designed to investigate what could help to mitigate the potential destructive impacts of team demographic diversity on the development of shared leadership and eventually improved team performance. First, we conceptualize and capture team diversity by using demographic faultlines, representing the “hypothetical dividing lines that split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes” (Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto,

2003, p. 219). Conceptualizing demographic diversity as group faultlines has several advantages over conventional diversity constructs (e.g., Blau's index; Blau, 1977). For instance, demographic faultlines allow us to examine the effects of multiple demographic characteristics simultaneously (e.g., race, gender) and take into account possible interactive effects, especially in current organizations when diversity is not manifested on only one characteristic (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). Furthermore, conceptualizing diversity as faultlines aligns with our theorizing on how diversity affects the development of shared leadership, specifically through categorizing team members into different subgroups. Then, we explore how team demographic faultlines are associated with shared leadership magnitude, defined as the overall "amount of leading and following acts being exhibited and reciprocated within a group" (DeRue, 2011, p. 132). Group heterogeneity on demographics is a form of relation-oriented diversity usually negatively associated with group identification (van Knippenberg, Haslam, & Platow, 2007), which is theoretically compatible with the development of shared leadership magnitude in teams (DeRue et al., 2015). The focus on shared leadership magnitude has important theoretical and practical implications, as it is a function of how willing and motivated group members are to lead each other (DeRue et al., 2015). The impact of demographic diversity (e.g., race, gender) is usually stronger in newly formed teams than other forms of group diversity (e.g., personality, values) because people tend to use the salient characteristics to make judgment about others in the early stage of social interactions (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Thus, focusing on shared leadership magnitude, reflecting the amount of leading–following interactions, should bring important insights for organizations to build new professional work teams.

Moreover, because shared leadership is embedded in social interactions and relationships among team members (DeRue, 2011), team members' capability of overcoming visible interpersonal differences and making quality connections with one another becomes critical for work teams to mitigate the possible negative effect of team demographic heterogeneity on the development of shared leadership (Cox et al., 2003). As such, we propose that team political skill, defined as the team-level capability to effectively understand others, wield social influence, and make interpersonal connections (Lvina, Johns, & Vandenberghe, 2018; Lvina, Maher, & Harris, 2017; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015), is a theoretical fit and should help to alleviate the potential destructive impact of team demographic faultlines on the development of shared leadership. Previous studies (e.g., Breland, Seitz, Treadway, Lovelace, & Gazdag, 2017; Brouer, Duke, Treadway, & Ferris, 2009) have reported that political skill helps individuals to overcome interpersonal dissimilarities on demographics and build quality social relationships, as

politically skilled individuals are more sensitive about interpersonal differences and have a better ability to respond to dissimilar others appropriately and effectively (E. L. J. Bell & Nkomo, 2003). When a team is staffed with various politically skilled individuals (i.e., high team political skill), members have a higher willingness and better ability to shorten any perceived interpersonal distance between each other and make close social connections (Brouer et al., 2009). This helps to develop strong group identification (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006) and create shared values (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998) within the team, which, in turn, buffer the negative impact of demographic faultlines on shared leadership magnitude.

Our study should contribute to the present literature in the following manner. First, we theoretically justify and empirically identify an impediment, team demographic faultlines, to the development of shared leadership magnitude. In addition, our study contributes to the literature of political skill by systematically assessing how team political skill attenuates the negative effects of demographic faultlines at the team level. Importantly, because political skill is reported to be a learnable social competence (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005), investigating the role of team political skill also contributes to HR practices regarding the issue of recruiting and training employees to manage diversity in work teams.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### *Shared Leadership in Teams*

Research indicates that any individual who can satisfy the needs of others and the group is reasonably viewed as a source of leadership (Morgeson et al., 2010; Neubert & Taggar, 2004). For teams coping with complicated assignments, having more members engage in necessary leadership functions is especially critical, as these functions are essential for these teams to be responsive and effective in performing complex tasks (Pearce & Manz, 2005). Thus, shared leadership, the collective influence generated from team members providing support to team goals (Carson et al., 2007), becomes vital to determining team success.

Unlike the traditional aggregation-based view, which assumes that shared leadership emerges via accumulated leadership demonstrations at the individual level (e.g., Gupta, Huang, & Yayla, 2011), the social network approach, which conceptualizes shared leadership as a function of the influence relationships among individuals, can better capture the dynamic, interactive, and relationship-driven nature of shared leadership (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016). According to adaptive leadership theory (DeRue, 2011; DeRue & Ashford,

2010), leadership is constructed when one actively claims a leadership role, and this claim is accepted by one's peers (i.e., granting leadership identity; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Over time, shared leadership at the team level occurs when multiple members engage in leadership functions by displaying various actions that might benefit the group, such as proactively taking charge or making suggestions, and other team members follow these directions. Accordingly, shared leadership in teams is strongly embedded in the social ties among individuals, where they connect to each other for continuously leading–following interactions.

Depending on how much leadership function is displayed and where these leadership functions reside, leadership structures can vary according to magnitude and dispersion (DeRue, 2011). DeRue and colleagues (2015) have illustrated how shared leadership magnitude and dispersion are formed through different mechanisms. The magnitude of team shared leadership, manifested by leadership density, reflects the motivation and willingness of team members to exert leadership influence toward the accomplishment of common goals (DeRue et al., 2015). The more individuals identify with their team, the more they engage in leadership functions simultaneously and the higher the magnitude of team shared leadership formed (DeRue, 2011; DeRue et al., 2015). The dispersion of team shared leadership, however, indicated by leadership centralization, reflects the extent to which leadership influence is concentrated in a few people or distributed equally among all team members (DeRue, 2011) and is a result of perceived competence and differentiation of expertise (DeRue et al., 2015). In short, although relational closeness and group identification reflect the *motivation* to engage in shared leadership and, thus, determine the magnitude of shared leadership, intra-group competence distribution indicates the *ability* to share leadership and therefore predicts the leadership structure dispersion (DeRue et al., 2015).

In the present study, we focus mainly on how team demographic faultlines relate to shared leadership magnitude. From the theoretical standpoint, group demographic heterogeneity usually inhibits the development of group identification due to the social categorization process (Chatman & Flynn, 2001): As individuals are more inclined to build relationships with those who share similar demographics or backgrounds, people are more likely to identify with homogeneous teams (Crisp & Hewstone, 1999; van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). As stated earlier, the potential effect of team heterogeneity on group identification is more theoretically compatible with the motivation to engage in leadership interactions, which eventually determines the overall magnitude of shared leadership (DeRue et al., 2015). Thus, we are particularly interested in factors that affect team members' motivation and willingness to contribute leadership in teams (i.e., the magnitude of shared

leadership). However, we do have leadership dispersion taken into consideration (as a control variable) to accurately model the effects of team heterogeneity on the total amount of leadership engagement in teams.

### *Team Demographic Faultlines and Shared Leadership Magnitude*

Team diversity is defined as a group-level property that reflects the dispersion of one or more personal attributes among members (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003). Because we consider shared leadership as a social process that involves extensive interpersonal relationships (DeRue, 2011), we focus on relation-oriented diversity because social interactions usually start with judgments based on salient and observable characteristics, such as gender and race (Altman & Taylor, 1973). We conceptualize gender and race diversity as the extent to which team members differ along these two attributes. According to Harrison and Klein's (2007) framework of diversity, such a conceptualization of diversity is defined as *separation*, which primarily captures the compositional differences or disagreement on certain attributes in teams. For instance, when all team members belong to the same gender group, diversity is considered the lowest, whereas when half of the team are female and the other half are male, diversity is considered the highest. Because race and gender are categorical variables, along with the conceptualization of diversity as separation, we operationalize the race and gender diversity as team demographic faultlines that consider both gender and race simultaneously. Defining team demographic diversity as faultlines also aligns with the social categorization perspective in the dual-effect process of diversity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). People tend to form first impressions and categorize one another based on these observable characteristics. More importantly, such categorizations based on race and gender are fairly consistent and also resistant to short-term manipulations designed to decrease social categorization (Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992). Thus, we focus exclusively on team demographic faultlines on race and gender due to their salient effects and argue that a high level of team faultlines would reduce team members' motivation to contribute to team goals by engaging in leadership due to the lack of identification with the team (DeRue et al., 2015).

When the level of team demographic faultlines is low, individuals perceive that they are similar or socially close with one another. In turn, they develop their social identity as a member of the same group, and further identify with the group (Hogg & Turner, 1985). As a result of this identification, individuals are more likely to be committed to their group (Cheney &

Tompkins, 1987; J. P. Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004), consider group goals as their goals, and act on behalf of the group (van Knippenberg, 2000). Thus, individuals are motivated to contribute to the group by engaging in leadership behaviors and respecting others' leadership attempts when others claim leader roles (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The accumulation of these processes will result in a dense leadership structure at a team level (high shared leadership magnitude; DeRue et al., 2015). Similarly, low demographic faultlines also contribute to value congruence among team members (cf. Gates & Mark, 2012). The effect of in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) makes it easier for demographically similar people to share information, engage in effective communication, and have an agreement on their shared value and purpose. Possessing congruent values and a shared purpose is critical for the development of shared leadership magnitude (Carson et al., 2007), because the shared values/purpose serve as fundamental motivations that drive team members to better engage in leading-following activities in their teams (Hsu, Li, & Sun, 2017).

On the contrary, when the level of team demographic faultlines is high, people tend to categorize each other into different groups according to salient demographic characteristics (Turner, 1987). Once social categorization takes place, individuals feel a sense of belongingness to their own subgroup (i.e., membership) and develop salient social identities representing their subgroup, which become the basis of their self-concept. Individuals then become motivated to develop more positive opinions of their own subgroup (i.e., in-groups) and negative views of other subgroups (i.e., out-groups). In-group stereotypical and normative perceptions increase perceived differences across subgroups, and the presence of several identity subgroups enhances perceived differences within the entire team. Furthermore, team members will identify with their own subgroups rather than identifying with the entire group because they see people from different subgroups are distant and dissimilar. The lack of identification with the entire group will lead to reduced commitment to the group and motivation to act on behalf of the entire group (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; J. P. Meyer et al., 2004; van Knippenberg, 2000). Thus, team members will be less likely to be willing to contribute leadership to the group (DeRue et al., 2015). At a group level, this creates a less dense leadership structure (low shared leadership magnitude; DeRue, 2011; DeRue et al., 2015). Moreover, high heterogeneity on demographics also discourages effective communication and development of shared values (Gates & Mark, 2012), which, in turn, lowers the shared leadership magnitude because group members will have no motivation or commitment to take extra responsibilities to lead their peers (Hsu et al., 2017).

**H1:** Team demographic faultlines are negatively related to the magnitude of team shared leadership.

### *Team Political Skill as a Buffer of the Faultline Effect*

Political skill was initially developed as an individual-level construct and was defined as “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005, p. 127). Politically skilled individuals are better able to understand social interactions and adjust their behavior to the social context. When enacting these behaviors, they appear genuine, and this authenticity allows them to build trust in others (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005) and thus establish broader and stronger social networks.

Recent scholars have alluded to the importance of political skill in team environments, specifically as it relates to leadership and social networks (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Fang, Chi, Chen, & Baron, 2015). Team political skill is conceptualized as a team-level construct that is defined “via the additive composition of individual team members’ political skill” (Lvina et al., 2018, p. 3). The additive nature suggests that political skill at the team level is a summation of the lower level units (i.e., individual level) regardless of the variance among the units (Chan, 1998), and a deficit of one team member’s political skill can be compensated by a high level of another (Lvina et al., 2018). We suggest that it is similar to other deep-level composition variables of teams, such as team personality (Gonzalez-Mulé, DeGeest, McCormick, Seong, & Brown, 2014) or team competence (Mathieu, Kukenberger, D’Innocenzo, & Reilly, 2015). These team attributes reflect the unique team-specific characteristics via the aggregation of members’ traits or abilities, and they are functionally isomorphic to individual-level constructs (Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2014). In addition, based on Steiner’s (1974) typology of teamwork independency, the composition of team member attributes should match task types. When accomplishment of the team’s tasks requires inputs and application of each team member’s knowledge, skills, and abilities, the use of mean or sum of individual characteristics (e.g., personality or cognitive ability) is the most appropriate approach (e.g., S. T. Bell, 2007; Chiu et al., 2016; Tesluk, Zaccaro, Marks, & Mathieu, 1997). Accordingly, team political skill is a form of team capability and resources that reflects the collective social abilities and effectiveness of the members.

We expect that team political skill will buffer the negative effects of team demographic faultlines on shared leadership magnitude due to the following reasons. First, team political skill can help team members, even



with dissimilar demographic characteristics, to develop a strong identification with the entire group through forming close social relationships with dissimilar team members. Politically skilled individuals are competent at developing and using diverse networks of people and are aware that people in networks are valuable assets who are important to personal and collective functioning; as a result, these individuals tend to communicate with and tie directly to numerous individuals, regardless of their identity group membership (Ferris et al., 2007). For example, women in male-dominated workplaces have been able to overcome being the *other* and achieve more powerful positions when they were highly politically skilled (Watkins & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, politically skilled individuals' sincere and genuine style of interaction facilitates social connections and group cohesiveness (Treadway et al., 2013), which should lead people to perceive one another as warm and friendly. Friendly interactions and interpersonal liking among team members should result in greater identification with the group (Hogg & Turner, 1985). Ultimately, these politically skilled teams should lead to stronger motivation among team members to act on behalf of the team (van Knippenberg, 2000). The sincere and warm interactional styles would also make people believe other team members are group oriented and have a strong identification with the group. Thus, team members should be more motivated to contribute to the group (DeRue et al., 2015; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007).

Second, team political skill can help team members focus more on deep-level similarity and further develop shared values. Politically skilled individuals are socially astute and have a better ability to respond to others more appropriately and effectively (E. L. J. Bell & Nkomo, 2003). Combined with their sincerity in interactions, they are able to win others' trust in the workplace. With the formation of trust-based strong ties, politically skilled people are able to make people focus on deep-level characteristics, and accurately and quickly identify deep-level similarities on personality or values that facilitate further bonding and connecting among team members (e.g., Breland et al., 2017). This reduction in perceived salience of surface-level characteristics and augmentation in perceived deep-level similarity facilitate group cohesiveness, which may counteract the negative effects caused by team demographic faultlines and eliminate in-group–out-group differences. Thus, it is easier for team members to agree on their shared values and purposes. Possessing congruent values and shared purposes is critical for the development of shared leadership magnitude (Carson et al., 2007) because shared values and purposes serve as fundamental motivations that drive team members to better lead each other in their teams (Hsu et al., 2017). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H2:** The relationship between team demographic faultlines and the magnitude of team shared leadership is moderated by team political skill, such that the negative impact of team demographic faultlines on the magnitude of team shared leadership is attenuated when the team is staffed with many politically skilled members.

### *Mitigating the Negative Effects of Demographic Faultlines: An Integrative Model*

From the functional team leadership perspective (Morgeson et al., 2010), encouraging members to take leadership roles is beneficial to team effectiveness because this leadership engagement helps to fulfill a variety of team needs. When more individuals contribute to team leadership functions, they experience higher commitment and bring greater personal and organizational resources, which, in turn, advance team performance (Carson et al., 2007). Moreover, because shared leadership is determined by members' engagement in leading-following double interactions (DeRue, 2011), accumulated engagements in these leadership interactions offer ample opportunities for members to access informational and social resources in their team (Chiu et al., 2016). These frequent interactions also help team members to coordinate and utilize intragroup resources, which accentuates team performance and effectiveness (Wang et al., 2014). A recent meta-analysis (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016) reports that the magnitude of shared leadership (i.e., leadership network density) is positively related to team performance (weighted  $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In short, shared leadership, as an intangible team property developed through network interaction and mutual influence among team members, is likely to be positively related to team performance (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2014).

As we stated in the H1, high demographic faultlines could impede shared leadership magnitude as they may discourage members to engage in leadership activities or respond to others' leadership attempts. When no one or very few people take informal leadership roles in a team, it is less likely that all important team leadership functions are fulfilled, inhibiting the team's capability to cope with complex and difficult team tasks (Carson et al., 2007; Morgeson et al., 2010). Our H2 suggests that when a team is staffed with many politically skilled individuals (i.e., high team political skill), the negative effects of team demographic faultlines on the magnitude of team shared leadership would be mitigated, as team political skill helps individuals to better build interpersonal connections. Taken together, we expect that team political skill could also buffer the potential negative indirect effect of team

demographic faultlines on team performance via shared leadership magnitude. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H3:** The indirect effect of team demographic faultlines on team performance via the magnitude of team shared leadership is moderated by team political skill, such that the negative indirect effect is attenuated when the team is staffed with many politically skilled members.

## Method

### *Research Design and Participants*

We initiated a three-wave survey in a public northeastern university in the United States. We targeted 298 undergraduate students who enrolled in a 16-week, junior-level human resource management (HRM) class across six sessions. These students were randomly divided into 68 small teams (four to six people per team) and asked to complete team-based activities and assignments throughout the whole semester. Each student team was also required to complete a major case study in which the members needed to jointly make strategic plans to solve HR-related problems and submit a team report before the final week. These teams were fully self-managing, as the class instructors did not assign any formal leader to each team. The first survey was administered in the sixth week of the semester so that participants should have had enough time to get familiar with their teammates. In this wave, we collected the information about their demographics and the initial friendship network within the teams. In the 10th week, we administered the second survey, in which participants were asked to assess the political skill of each teammate. Finally, after participants submitted their final team report (in the 15th week), we conducted the third survey to capture the intragroup leadership network.

The assigned team project required the student teams to apply their learned knowledge and concepts to solve the HRM-related problems stated in the case. Each student team played the role of the HR team of a hypothetical company and was challenged to revise and rebuild its performance appraisal system. To generate high team performance, the members needed to work interdependently and frequently interact with their peers to discuss the appropriate practical solutions. This task required the students to actively connect with their teammates to initiate and maintain constructive communications and coordination throughout the whole semester. Thus, sharing their thoughts, influence, and leadership became extremely critical in determining the quality of team outputs. In addition, every member in the same team received the same grade on the project, so they had to assist and motivate their peers for

better task completion. Accordingly, although some tasks such as writing the assignment could be divided and done individually, the nature of this team project was interdependent.

After the three-wave survey administration, we removed five teams because of the incomplete responses and low within-group response rate. A series of *t* tests revealed that the removed teams were not significantly different from the remaining teams regarding their demographic background such as gender, race, or age. The final sample contained 276 participants in 63 student teams, which meets the typical threshold of at least an 80% participation used in research involving social network analysis (Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001). In the final sample, 61% of the students were male. About 60% of the students were Caucasian Americans; 30% were Asians/Asian Americans. The remaining 10% of students comprised African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Others. The mean age was 22 years ( $SD = 3.16$ ).

## Measures

*Team demographic faultlines.* We captured team demographic faultlines based on participants' *gender* (male/female) and *race* (Caucasians/Asians/Minorities) because they are the most salient demographic characteristic in our research context (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). According to Thatcher and Patel (2012), gender, race, and age are three commonly studied social characteristics in faultline research. We did not consider participants' age because in the surveyed student teams more than 95% of the participants were 21 or 22, which did not offer sufficient variation for analyses.

We operationalized team demographic faultlines as the multiplicative product of faultline strength (Thatcher et al., 2003) and distance (Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, & Thatcher, 2009). We first adopted Thatcher and colleagues' (2003) faultline algorithm to calculate faultline strength, which represents "the percent of total variation in overall group characteristics accounted for by the strongest group split" (Bezrukova et al., 2009, p. 41). The possible value of faultline strength ranged from 0 to 1, with larger values representing greater strength. Then, we computed faultline distance relying on the Euclidean distance between vectors of characteristic means for the identified two subgroups, capturing "the extent to which subgroups formed across faultlines diverge, or in other words, how far apart they are from each other on social category" (Bezrukova et al., 2009, p. 41). The convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity of this multiplicative measure has been confirmed in previous studies (e.g., Bezrukova, Spell, Caldwell, & Burger, 2016, but see B. Meyer & Glenz, 2013, for a criticism), and the measure is highly

recommended by recent faultline research (e.g., Ou, Seo, Choi, & Hom, 2017). By incorporating both faultline strength and distance, we are able to capture both the attribute alignments within subgroups and attribute differences between subgroups, which also aligns with our theoretical arguments on the negative effects of demographic diversity on shared leadership magnitude.

**Team political skill level.** We asked the participants to rate each of their teammates' political skill.<sup>1</sup> Because we adopted round-robin assessments, it was unrealistic to use the original 18-item scale of Political Skill Inventory (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Accordingly, we followed the stepwise procedure of Widaman, Little, Preacher, and Sawalani (2011) to generate a shortened version of the political skill scale for the present study. First, we selected four items with the highest factor loadings reported in the empirical study of Ferris, Treadway, and colleagues (2005). The chosen items (5-point scale; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) included "this person spends a lot of time and effort networking with others" (networking ability); "when communicating with others, this person tries to be genuine in what he or she says and does" (apparent sincerity); "this person always seems to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others" (social astuteness); and "this person is able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around him or her" (interpersonal influence). The scale's reliability alpha was .85. Then, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to confirm that the four-item scale had a strong convergent validity— $\chi^2 = 14.87$ ,  $df = 2$ , comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .93, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .03—and the average variance extracted (AVE) was .61.

Consistent with Lvina and associates (2018), we calculated team political skill level values by averaging peer-rating scores. Conceptually, team political skill level follows the additive composition model (Chan, 1998), and thus, reporting the aggregation indices is not necessary (Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite, & Brown, 2013; Lvina et al., 2018). However, the ICC values still provide important information from a construct validity perspective, as it reflects the extent to which these team composition variables are distinct across different groups.<sup>2</sup> ICC<sub>1</sub> and ICC<sub>2</sub> were .44 and .80, respectively, and were significant ( $F = 4.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ), justifying the aggregation.

**Shared leadership magnitude.** We operationalized shared leadership following the social network approach (Carson et al., 2007). Each individual was provided with a full list of his or her teammates and responded to the question,

“To what extent your team relies on this person for leadership?” (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *to a great extent*). Shared leadership magnitude was captured by the network density for a team, which is the aggregated scores of the actual responses divided by the total possible responses within team (Carson et al., 2007; Chiu et al., 2016; Mathieu et al., 2015).<sup>3</sup>

**Control variables.** Several control variables<sup>4</sup> were considered when we performed data analyses. We controlled for team size because previous studies show that it is associated with the formation and development of network configuration in teams (e.g., Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). We included the mean values of *members' GPA* (grade point average), because individuals' GPA was a proximal indicator reflecting their task-related competence, which might influence the emergence of shared leadership in teams (Mathieu et al., 2015) and team performance (Chiu et al., 2016). We also controlled for several network configuration indications. *Friendship network density* was considered because preexisting interpersonal familiarity and intimacy might potentially influence the subsequent development of shared leadership (Seers, Keller, & Wilkerson, 2003). We collected friendship data at Time 1. Following a social network design, we provided participants with a full list of their team members and asked them to respond to the question, “To what extent you see this person as your friend” (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *to a great extent*). Moreover, due to the fact that shared leadership can be studied on the basis of network density and centralization (DeRue, 2011), we included *leadership network centralization* in our analysis as a control variable. We employed Freeman's (1978-1979) formula of network centralization to capture the dispersion of members' out-degree centrality (DeRue, 2011). Finally, the dispersion of team political skill, measured by the *standard deviation (SD) of political skill* scores across individuals in a team, was considered as a control because it may have a confounding influence with the mean level of team political skill on team processes and outcomes (Lvina et al., 2018).

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities for all variables. As shown in the table, team demographic faultlines were negatively associated with shared leadership magnitude ( $r = -.25, p < .05$ ), and shared leadership magnitude was significantly and positively related to team performance ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ). These results offered preliminary support to our hypotheses.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations ( $N = 63$ ).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Team size	4.38	0.83	—							
2. Team GPA	3.23	0.24	.40**	—						
3. Friendship network density	0.63	0.12	-.09	.04	—					
4. Shared leadership centralization	0.20	0.10	.08	.02	-.29*	—				
5. Team political skill ( <i>SD</i> )	0.39	0.16	.04	.03	-.20	-.12	—			
6. Team demographic faultlines	0.74	0.52	-.46**	-.17	.11	-.09	-.16	—		
7. Team political skill	3.41	0.43	.34**	.40**	.38**	-.12	.05	-.32*	<b>(.85)</b>	
8. Shared leadership magnitude	0.70	0.10	.02	.28*	-.34**	-.31*	.11	-.25*	.51**	—
9. Team performance	90.20	4.61	.34**	.47**	-.02	.01	.14	-.28*	.35**	.34**

Note. Scale reliabilities are in parentheses along the diagonal. GPA = grade point average.

† $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed test).

## Hypothesis Testing

We tested H1 and H2 using multiple regressions and summarized the results in the Table 2. In H1, we expected team demographic faultlines would be negatively associated with shared leadership magnitude, and this hypothesis was supported by the regression result ( $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Model 2). In H2, we anticipated that the negative association proposed in H1 would be mitigated by a high level of team political skill. As shown in the Table 2 (see Model 4), the interaction term was significantly associated with shared leadership magnitude ( $B = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We further plotted the interactions, conducted simple slopes tests, and presented the result in the Figure 1. The simple slope analyses demonstrated that team demographic faultlines were significantly associated with shared leadership magnitude when there was a low political skill level ( $-1 SD$ ;  $B = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ), yet this negative association became insignificant when political skill level was high ( $+1 SD$ ;  $B = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $ns$ ). Thus, we concluded that these results supported our H1 and H2.

In H3, we argue that team political skill would moderate the indirect effect of team faultlines on team performance via shared leadership magnitude. We adopted the PROCESS syntax in SPSS (PROCESS Model 7; Hayes, 2012) to test H3. We used PROCESS because it offered a direct estimate of moderated mediation with a bootstrapping technique. The results (see Table 3) suggested that there was a significant moderated mediation effect (index of moderated mediation = 1.65,  $p < .05$ , 95% confidence interval [CI] = [0.18, 5.07]): When there was a low level of team political skill ( $-1 SD$ ), the indirect effect through shared leadership magnitude was significant ( $B = -1.03$ , 95% CI = [-2.53, -0.10]); in contrast, when there was a high level of team political skill ( $+1 SD$ ), the indirect effect became insignificant ( $B = 0.38$ , 95% CI = [-0.23, 2.30]), suggesting that our H3 was supported.

## Post Hoc Analysis

DeRue and colleagues (2015) suggest that shared leadership dispersion (i.e., network centralization) could be an important team mediator, along with shared leadership magnitude, to predict team performance. As such, we conducted a post hoc analysis to examine the potential mediation effect of shared leadership centralization. We replicated our analyses by using the PROCESS Model 7 where two parallel mediators (shared leadership magnitude and centralization) were considered. The result suggested that the moderated mediation effect was significant through shared leadership magnitude (index = 1.81,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI = [0.25, 5.16]) but not through shared leadership

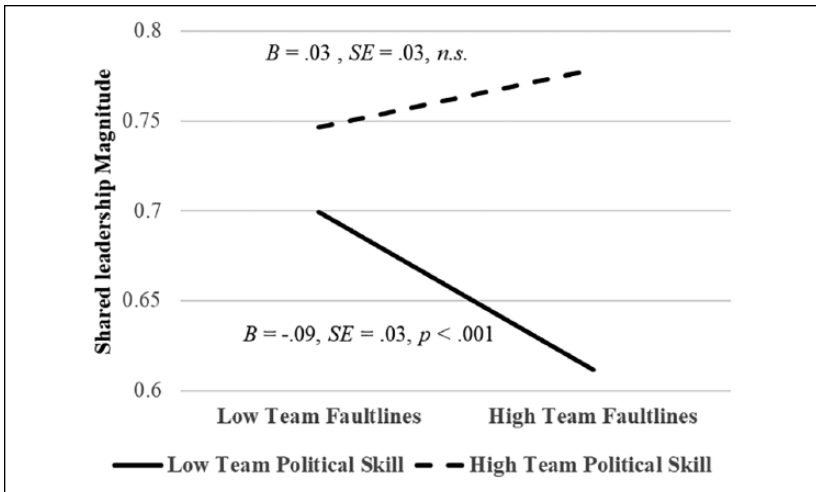


**Table 2.** Regression Results ( $N = 63$ ).

Variables	DV: Shared leadership magnitude											
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE	VIF	B	SE	VIF	B	SE	VIF	B	SE	VIF
Control variables												
Team size	-0.01	0.01	1.21	-0.02	0.02	1.52	-0.03*	0.02	1.59	-0.03*	0.02	1.60
Team GPA	0.12*	0.05	1.20	0.12*	0.05	1.21	0.08†	0.05	1.33	0.07	0.04	1.33
Friendship network density	0.22*	0.10	1.18	0.17†	0.10	1.26	0.05	0.10	1.50	0.06	0.10	1.50
Shared leadership centralization	-0.21†	0.12	1.14	-0.25*	0.12	1.17	-0.24*	0.12	1.17	-0.20†	0.11	1.20
Team political skill (SD)	0.08	0.07	1.08	0.05	0.07	1.14	0.03	0.07	1.16	0.06	0.09	1.16
Independent variables												
Team demographic faultlines				-0.05*	0.02	1.39	-0.04†	0.02	1.42	-0.03	0.02	1.49
Team political skill							0.09**	0.03	1.61	0.13**	0.03	1.94
Interaction term												
Team Demographic Faultlines × Team Political Skill										0.14*	0.05	1.31
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted		.20**		.24**			.34**			.41**		
R <sup>2</sup> change				.09**			.09**			.07*		

Note. DV = dependent variable; VIF = variance inflation factor; GPA = grade point average.

† $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed test).



**Figure 1.** Plotted interaction.

**Table 3.** Results of Moderated Mediation (PROCESS Model 7;  $N = 63$ ).

Mediator model	Mediator: Shared leadership magnitude				
	B	SE	T	Bootstrapping 95% CI	
				LL	UL
Team size	-0.03*	0.01	-2.43	-0.05	-0.01
Team GPA	0.07	0.05	1.48	-0.03	0.17
Friendship network density	0.06	0.08	0.68	-0.11	0.23
Shared leadership centralization	-0.20*	0.10	-2.02	-0.39	-0.002
Team political skill (SD)	0.03	0.07	0.65	-0.10	0.16
Team demographic faultlines	-0.03	0.02	-1.18	-0.07	0.02
Team political skill	0.13**	0.03	4.80	-0.07	0.18
Interaction term	0.14**	0.05	2.72	0.04	0.24

Outcome model	Dependent variable: Team performance				
	B	SE	t	Bootstrapping 95% CI	
				LL	UL
Team size	0.85	1.00	0.85	-1.16	2.86
Team GPA	6.07*	2.43	2.50	1.20	10.94

(continued)

**Table 3. (continued)**

Dependent variable: Team performance					
Outcome model	B	SE	t	Bootstrapping 95% CI	
				LL	UL
Friendship network density	-3.20	4.73	-0.68	-12.67	6.28
Shared leadership centralization	1.90	7.07	0.26	-12.28	16.07
Team political skill (SD)	2.09	3.39	0.54	-4.71	8.89
Team demographic faultlines	-0.80	1.19	0.50	-3.17	1.58
Shared leadership magnitude	12.16 <sup>†</sup>	6.61	1.84	-1.09	25.40
Index of moderated mediation	Moderators		Indirect effects		
Index = 1.65*, 95% CI = [0.18, 5.07]	Low team political skill (-1 SD)		B = -1.03*, 95% CI = [-2.53, -0.010]		
	Mean team political skill		B = -0.33, 95% CI = [-1.48, 0.08]		
	High team political skill (+1 SD)		B = -0.38, 95% CI = [-0.23, 2.30]		

Note. Bootstrapping  $n = 5,000$ . CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; GPA = grade point average.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed test).

centralization (index = 0.13, 95% CI = [-2.89, 0.80]). This result is also consistent with the findings of DeRue and colleagues (2015) that shared leadership magnitude is more associated with relational-based factors (e.g., team demographic faultlines), whereas shared leadership dispersion is more related to competence-relevant variables.

## Discussion

Although team diversity and shared leadership, when managed properly, each can benefit work teams in organizations, our study provides evidence that there is a tension between team demographic diversity and shared leadership magnitude in teams. Specifically, team demographic faultlines inhibit team members from engaging in greater leadership functions (i.e., high shared leadership magnitude) in heterogeneous teams, which, in turn, impedes team performance. However, our results also indicate that teams with high levels of political skill are able to neutralize the detrimental impact

of demographic faultlines on team outcomes. Specifically, when a team is staffed with many politically skilled members, the negative influence of team demographic faultlines becomes less likely to affect the magnitude of team shared leadership. This is in direct contrast to teams with little cumulative political skill in which the damaging effect of demographic faultlines could hinder engagement in shared leadership, which, in turn, brings down the team performance. These findings have several important implications for research in the areas of demographic diversity, shared leadership, and political skill, as well as clear implications for practitioners.

### *Theoretical Contributions*

Among our several contributions, the one related to understanding the effect of team composition on the development of shared leadership in teams may be the most clearly articulated by our findings. Although research has suggested that team heterogeneity can benefit teams due to the extensive knowledge and information exchange (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007) and shared leadership can promote team performance because of the increased team social capital (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004), we are still not sure whether and how the shared leadership can be facilitated in heterogeneous teams in current diversified organizations. We make an attempt to investigate the relationship between team demographic diversity and shared leadership magnitude, and our results demonstrate that increased demographic diversity actually discourages members' engagement in sharing leadership and further hinders collective performance in teams. Whereas recent research examined the role of functional diversity (i.e., expertise-related factors) on power transition within teams (Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014), our study is the first to empirically investigate demographic diversity (i.e., relationship-based factors) and shared leadership development. When our results are combined with Aime and colleague's (2014) conclusions, we see that diverse interpersonal backgrounds may have differing impacts on shared leadership formation and development, with task-focused diversity promoting shared leadership and affecting more on dispersion of leadership and relation-focused diversity inhibiting shared leadership and affecting more on magnitude of leadership.

Another contribution to diversity research is that we examine the effects of gender and race diversity simultaneously by using faultlines measures. The use of demographic faultlines theoretically and methodologically matches our conceptualization of team demographic diversity as separation (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Because gender and race are categorical variables, previous research on gender and race diversity usually operationalized it by

using Blau's index, which reflects the number of represented categories team members belong to. However, operationalization of demographic diversity by Blau's index does not match the theoretical foundations of its effects on team outcomes (S. T. Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011), reducing the validity of these research findings. Moreover, our study also sheds light on current inconclusive effects of diversity on team outcomes. According to the categorization–elaboration model of diversity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004), diversity can either damage team outcomes by categorizing its members into different subgroups based on their characteristics or promote team outcomes by enhancing knowledge and information exchange in teams. The findings of our study suggest a possible way to flip the negative mechanism through redirecting team members' attention on salient surface-level differences to tapping into deep-level attributes that can contribute to team's performance, when team political skill is high.

Acknowledging the potential positive impacts of both diversity and shared leadership to team processes and outcomes, our research also contributes to the literature of political skill by showing that the detrimental effects of team diversity can be neutralized by the collective political skill and talents of team members. Scholars have shown that the internal team environment facilitates the development of shared leadership, and also shown that several factors affect this process, including a shared understanding of team objectives, social support of each other, participation, and involvement (Carson et al., 2007). Thus, our inclusion of the social effectiveness construct of political skill is not only noteworthy but also intuitive, given political skill's demonstrated positive impact on interpersonal relationship (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007) and leadership emergence processes (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006; Treadway et al., 2005), both of which are important elements of shared leadership.

In team environments, political skill has enhanced formal leadership effectiveness (Ahearn et al., 2004; Semadar et al., 2006). Our research reports that political skill extends beyond the team's formal leaders and facilitates the development of informal leadership networks and structures (i.e., shared leadership) in teams. This finding directly addresses the previously untested, yet commonly touted, benefits of political skill in building positive and beneficial intrateam or intraorganizational networks (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). Furthermore, we expand on the notion of political skill as an aggregate construct in teams. To date, only Lvina and her colleagues (2018) have tested political skill as such a construct despite other research (e.g., Ahearn et al., 2004) and theory (e.g., Treadway, Douglas,

Ellen, Summers, & Ferris, 2014) that points to the importance of political skill in formal leadership roles in team settings.

### *Practical Implications*

The mitigating effects of political skill on team diversity found in our study also have practical implications for management practitioners. Current HRM systems stress the value of workplace diversity to achieve competitive advantage (Ferris, Frink, & Galang, 1993; Scott, Heathcote, & Gruman, 2011). However, research shows that workplace diversity is indeed a double-edged sword; it can not only lead to the effective utilization of the entire workforce's competencies and talents but also result in negative outcomes failing to utilize the available talents (Ferris et al., 1993). From this standpoint, HR managers may take steps to circumvent the occurrence of negative outcomes by incorporating assessment of employee candidates' political skill into their selection system.

Moreover, researchers have suggested that political skill can be shaped or trained (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris et al., 2007); For instance, coaching and feedback-giving, such as 360-degree feedback, can increase employees' social astuteness (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005). Organizational mentoring is another effective way to build political skill in employees. Through behavioral modeling (Bandura, 1986), good mentors can help employees develop a richer and deeper understanding of the work environment, increasing employees' interpersonal competencies and networking skills (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005). Finally, communication styles that emphasize a charismatic, truthful, and genuine manner can be learned and practiced by employees to increase sincerity during their interactions in the workplace. Thus, organizations can increase employee political skill through selection and training. Improved employee political skill would be beneficial not only to employee's performance and career advancement but also to organizational success (Ferris et al., 1993).

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Despite being a multisource, longitudinal, and incorporating network methodology, our study is not without limitations, and additional research is needed to refine and extend our findings. First, this study is a survey conducted on a student sample where the members are relatively homogeneous (e.g., young college students with same or similar majors). This limits our investigation of team diversity to gender and race. To further investigate the association between team diversity and shared leadership, a replication of our

results in a field setting in the future would be certainly needed by incorporating other demographic diversity characteristics such as age and tenure diversity. Moreover, a future field study could also examine the impact of task-related team diversity on shared leadership, as recommended by Carson and colleagues (2007). Theoretically, diverse expertise and talents should benefit the formation of shared leadership, but few studies have empirically investigated this proposition. We suggest the future research could compare different or similar impacts of task-related and demographic team diversity on shared leadership.

Moreover, in the present study, we only discuss team task performance as a team outcome. Indeed, other outcome criteria could be also important for teams to cope with complex task requirements. For instance, team learning is one of the three essential team outcomes, along with team productivity (task performance) and attitudinal (viability) performance because it reflects how members keep improving their abilities to adopt and provide new solutions for future challenges (Hackman & Wageman, 2005). Similarly, Griffin, Neal, and Parker (2007) propose that team proactive and adaptive performances are equally important to team proficiency performance (i.e., task performance), as these two criteria predict the team's capability of making changes and taking future-orientated actions to sustain long-term success. Because shared leadership is proposed to be beneficial to teams to deal with rapidly changing task environments (e.g., Wang et al., 2014), future studies could investigate how team shared leadership may support a variety of outcomes.

We examined political skill as a moderator to eliminate negative effects of team heterogeneity on shared leadership magnitude. However, team political skill may have a direct effect on promoting the amount of leadership functions exerted in the team because people with high levels of political skill are good at knowing how and when to influence others and accept influence from others. Although previous studies (e.g., Shaughnessy, Treadway, Breland, & Perrewé, 2017) suggest that individuals' political will is a stronger predictor of informal leadership emergence and effectiveness than their political skill, because people need fundamental motivation to drive them to engage in leadership activities, we are not denying the probability that political skill could serve as a predictor of shared leadership in teams. Future studies could look into the direct impact of political skill on the development of shared leadership structure and other possible moderators to have better understandings of the relationship between political skill and shared leadership. In addition, because political will focuses more on the motivation for power, whereas political skill taps into more on people's abilities to influence (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005), future research might investigate the interactive effects of political will and skill. For instance, when individuals are driven by

their personal achievement instead of collective goals (e.g., high levels of political will), how does political skill affect the effects of diversity on shared leadership? We expect more research attention be placed on this interesting topic.

Finally, given that we measured political skill using round-robin method, individuals might favor similar others and give high ratings to those in their own subgroups. Although team demographics faultlines and team political skills are only correlated at a moderate to low level ( $r = -.32$ ) in our study, and although the variance inflation factor (VIF) values suggest that collinearity concern in our analysis should be minimal (i.e.,  $VIF < 5$ ; James, Witten, Hastie, & Tibshirani, 2013), future studies could investigate this possibility further and its potential impacts on team processes and outcomes.

## Conclusion

Our findings contribute to shared leadership theory and political skill literature by demonstrating a potential inhibitor of shared leadership magnitude, that is, team demographic faultlines, and the moderating effect of teams' political skill. Specifically, these results show that team-level political skill reduces the negative effects of demographic faultlines on shared leadership magnitude. In practical terms, this study offers evidence supporting employees' development of, and selection for, political skill to manage the negative consequences of demographic diversity in the workplace. We hope our study will inspire future research that can help us update our theories and understanding of team-level political skill and its effects on intrateam network structure and dynamics.

## Authors' Note

A prior version of this article was presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California.

## Acknowledgment

We thank Carol Kulik for the comments on the article.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research is supported through a




postdoctoral fellowship to the first author from the Center for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness, School of Management, University at Buffalo.

## Notes

1. Meurs, Gallagher, and Perrewé (2010) have discussed the use of self- and other-reported political skill in organization studies. In general, political skill has both intrapsychic (i.e., on the self) and interpersonal impacts (i.e., on others) in organizations. They further suggested that when researchers explore the association between political skill and a self-relevant construct (e.g., self-reported strain), it is more appropriate to use self-reported data. In contrast, if researchers target other-relevant constructs such as supervisor-rated performance, the use of other-reported political skill is recommended. As such, because we explore the moderating effect of team political skill on members' rated leadership associations, we used other-reported political skill in the present study.
2. We appreciate this recommendation from one anonymous reviewer.
3. Because we use a 5-point scale to capture leadership network density in teams, the original possible values of leadership density start from 0.20 (all responses are "1") instead of zero. However, as Lemoine, Koseoglu, Ghahremani, and Blum (2018) recommend, network measures should have a meaningful zero for researchers to better interpret the analysis results. Accordingly, we recode the density value by subtracting the minimum possible values (for instance, 1 on a 1-5 scale; Lemoine et al., 2018). As a result, the minimum possible values for leadership density in our sample is zero. We apply the same treatment to the control variable of friendship density.
4. In an earlier version of this article, we also controlled for mean individual work orientation, defined as the propensity to work along, rather than cooperate with others (cf., Driskell, Salas, & Hughes, 2010), because it reflects the team's aggregated preference about sharing the workload, which might influence the configuration of shared leadership (DeRue, 2011). However, given that including this variable did not influence our research conclusion, we decide to remove it from the current article for the sake of parsimony. We appreciate the comment from one anonymous reviewer.

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