

Is it Me?: Virtual Team Leader Self-Attribution & Responsibility Bias

1. Citation:

Weems-Landingham, V. (2009). Is it Me?: Virtual Team Leader Self-Attribution & Responsibility Bias. *International Journal Of Learning*, 16(5), 469-479.

2. **Type of Article:** This article is a conceptual or theoretical piece. From the abstract, "Four main propositions, derived from self-management behaviors exhibited within virtual team research, are put forth to facilitate an exploration of the question: Is it me?..." (p. 469).

3. **Purpose of the Article:** The purpose of the article was the first statement in the Abstract. "This paper looks at self-attribution and responsibility bias in attempts to understand virtual leaders' acceptance of responsibility for team performances regardless of outcome" (p. 469).

4. Summary of the Article:

The author wrote this paper as a means to give ideas on how to explore specific questions and give specific propositions for working in virtual teams. When working in teams, "at the end of every project comes the moment of truth – the determination of success or failure and the attribution of the cause" (p. 469). The author goes into further analysis of specific questions and tries to understand how and why leaders need to be aware of specifics while leading virtual teams versus those of teams all located in the same physical location. The author states that when teams are not physically in the same location, they are "less likely to see the group as a collective, less invested, and less apt to demonstrate responsibility bias" (p. 471). When this happens, the author talks about how teams who are virtual in location do not always show responsibility. Leadership then has to be more cognizant of this issue and be more focused on those not in the manager's location to manage those entities.

When leadership takes the stance of the team member self-managing themselves, there tends to be performance issues. The leaders of teams need to provide guidance to their team members, allowing them the ability to grow and learn from the leader and the team. Part of the process of being in a team is allowing the team members to grow. Within the team setting, it is important for the leader to set goals for each of the members. “Research on self-management KSA required for teamwork highlights the importance of goal setting, performance management, planning, and task coordination to the achievement of interdependent performance objectives” (p. 471). Without the ability of the individual to learn from the project, they cannot grow for future projects.

The author presents many propositions for requirements of virtual team leaders. The end result of these propositions is the question posed in the Type of Article section above. “Is it me?...”(p. 469). Without the leaders being able to follow propositions such as these for their team members, the individuals would not be able to learn from the current project they completed to enable them to move on to a new project. Even though there are sub-propositions listed in the paper, here are the main four propositions:

Proposition 1: Virtual team leaders accept responsibility for establishing goals regardless of outcome (p. 473). **Proposition 2:** Virtual team leaders do not accept responsibility for monitoring, evaluating, and providing feedback regardless of outcome (p. 474).

Proposition 3: Virtual leaders accept responsibility for coordinating and synchronizing activities, information, and tasks between virtual members when trusting relations exist. Virtual leaders do not accept responsibility for coordinating and synchronizing activities, information, and tasks when trusting relations do not exist (p. 475). **Proposition 4:** Virtual leaders accept responsibility for establishing task and role assignments and proper workload balancing regardless of outcome (p. 475).

5. Strengths and Weaknesses:

I don't believe there were many weaknesses within this paper, not many at all as a matter of fact. To start with, the layout of the information contained within the paper was quite

good. As I was reading the paper, I could see where I have been on projects and understood where the managers needed to ask questions like were referred to within this writing. To start off with, as a member of various project teams, I always see myself asking this question, “Did my behavior impact the team’s performance?” (p. 269). Depending on the outcome of the project, whether the project ended favorable or not, did my actions cause the problems if the project ended badly? This writing allowed me to see both sides of the team aspect, that of both the team member AND the manager. Ultimately, everyone involved in the project has to be responsible for their tasks to make the project a success. If the project fails, then the team has failed.

6. Recommendations:

I would definitely recommend this article for the company where I work, Ridge Tool Company (RIDGID Branded Products). Being that we have been working at becoming a truly global company, with divisions located around the globe, we have been required to build virtual teams. An example of this projects is that our new threading tools that are currently being developed. The main core Product Engineering team and management is located in Elyria, Ohio at the headquarters. The manufacturing team and the individuals who are building the components of the new tools are located at our engineering locations in Cluj, Romania, along with buyout components located in Shanghai, China. All of these individuals have to answer to local management within each of the locations. And the managers have to answer to the product management managers located in Elyria, Ohio. With the additional modularization of our products, where components are being built (or bought out) at various facilities around the globe, there is an urgent need for understanding how virtual teams work and is required by all individuals, not just the management.