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Shared Leadership and Team Performance: A Systematic Literature Review of Mechanisms and Contextual Conditions

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ABSTRACT

The increasing complexity, digitalization, and uncertainty of contemporary organizations have heightened the need for leadership approaches that integrate distributed knowledge and expertise. Shared leadership has consequently gained scholarly attention, yet explanations of its relationship with team performance remain fragmented. This review examines the evolution of shared leadership research, proposed mechanisms linking shared leadership to team performance, and relevant contextual conditions. Following PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines, the review synthesizes 26 studies retrieved from Scopus through a conceptual synthesis. The findings identify three shifts: from direct relationships to underlying mechanisms, from variable-based to relational and network perspectives, and toward greater attention to contextual conditions. Interpreted through the Input–Mediator–Output–Input (IMOI) framework, four mechanisms are conceptually identified: relational capability, collective cognition, collective coordination and knowledge integration, and adaptive capability. Relevant contextual conditions include collaborative culture, task interdependence, competency diversity, task complexity, digitalization, virtuality, and environmental uncertainty. The resulting integrative framework positions shared leadership as a potential enabler of organizational capability, connecting distributed knowledge with collective capability, coordinated action, and team performance. The proposed mechanism pathways and contextual configurations represent conceptual synthesis rather than directly tested causal relationships or configurational effects, providing propositions for future empirical investigation.

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in the business environment, there are marked by digitalization, globalization, increasing job complexity, and environmental uncertainty, forcing organizations to change the way they create and manage competitive advantage (Vrontis et al., 2025). Modern organizations are increasingly reliant on individual knowledge, so the completion of tasks can no longer depend on the capacity of a formal leader as the central point for coordination and decision-making (AlQershi & Thurasamy, 2026; Hirschhorn, 1998). The transformation toward knowledge-based organizations, cross-functional teams, project-based organizations, and virtual teams has amplified the need for coordination mechanisms capable of integrating the competencies, experiences, and information possessed by team members (Levi & Askay, 2025; Wei et al., 2026). These changes in organizational characteristics have driven the emergence of shared leadership as one of the leadership paradigms that has received the most attention over the past two decades (Filho, 2020; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Yoon et al., 2023). Unlike vertical leadership, which positions the formal leader as the primary source of authority, shared leadership views

leadership as a process of influence distributed among team members according to their competencies and the demands of the situation (Pearce, 2004). This shift reflects a transformation in leadership structures as organizations manage increasingly dispersed knowledge and address evolving decision making needs. As a result, shared leadership is increasingly being adopted in knowledge-based organizations (Ishikawa, 2025), technology companies (Naghi et al., 2025), startups, project-based organizations, and virtual teams operating in highly complex environments (Zielińska et al., 2026).

Interest in shared leadership is growing because most strategic activities, such as innovation, digital transformation, product development, and project completion is depend on effective teamwork (Ali & Jiang, 2026; Zielińska et al., 2026). A study by Naseer et al. (2026) shows that shared leadership contributes to improved team performance through better coordination, knowledge integration, collective learning, creativity, and the quality of decision-making. This distribution of leadership allows each member to contribute based on their competencies, thereby enabling the team's intellectual resources to be utilized more effectively (Curșeu et al., 2025; Wang & Duan, 2024). Various previous studies have shown that the strength of this relationship varies across different organizational contexts. The Islam & Idris (2025) studies reported a strong positive effect, particularly in knowledge-based organizations, teams with high levels of interdependence, and jobs that require creativity. Conversely, Cerchione et al. (2026); Chouki et al. (2026); Kärreman et al. (2002) founds the effect weakens or is even insignificant in organizations with bureaucratic structures, highly standardized jobs, or teams still in the early stages of development. These variations indicate that the effectiveness of shared leadership is not universal; therefore, the relationship between shared leadership and team performance requires an explanation that goes beyond testing direct relationships between variables. The literature indicates that the relationship between shared leadership and team performance is explained using various theoretical frameworks, such as Social Exchange Theory (SET), Social Identity Theory (SIT), Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), the Input–Mediator–Output–Input (IMOI) framework, Team Effectiveness Theory, and the Resource Based View (RBV) (Du et al., 2024; Gara Bach Ouerdian et al., 2025; Han et al., 2024; Klasmeier & Rowold, 2020). Each theory explains different mechanisms, ranging from the formation of trust, collective identity, team coordination, and knowledge integration to organizational adaptability (Gramchev, 2026; Kurteshi & Almeida, 2026). These theoretical perspectives emphasize different explanatory processes, creating a need to clarify how their contributions can be connected while preserving their conceptual differences. Existing studies provide insights into specific relational, cognitive, coordination, or adaptive processes, but their interrelationships have received comparatively limited integrative attention. The resulting challenge is to explain how these processes may contribute to an integrative team capacity, and how that capacity can be distinguished from the performance outcomes it is expected to support.

Another gap relates to how the literature views contextual factors. Previous research has frequently identified organizational culture, task complexity, team size, team virtuality, and environmental uncertainty as moderators of the relationship between shared leadership and team performance (Hess et al., 2026; Idrissi et al., 2026). These contributions establish the relevance of context and provide a basis for a more specific question: which relational, cognitive, coordination, or adaptive processes does a particular condition enable or constrain? Addressing this question may help interpret variations in empirical findings through differences in the operation of particular mechanisms, alongside differences in the strength of reported associations. On the other hand, although the number of studies on shared leadership continues to increase, systematic reviews that integrate research developments, theoretical perspectives, and contextual conditions remain relatively limited. Existing reviews provide quantitative and conceptual synthesis with different analytical emphases and organizational scopes, leaving room for a focused examination of how mechanisms, contextual conditions, and collective capability can be connected in explanations of team performance. New contextual developments, such as virtual teams, hybrid work, platform-based organizations, and human AI collaboration, have also not been widely addressed in the available literature reviews (Moganadas et al., 2026; Yang & Wang, 2026; Żywiołek & Wolniak, 2026).

A comparison of previous reviews clarifies the fragmentation addressed in this study. D'innocenzo et al. (2016) synthesized shared leadership–team performance relationships and examined variation associated with measurement and study conditions. Zhu et al. (2018) clarified definitions, measurement, antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions through an integrative framework. These contributions establish foundations for examining how different explanatory processes relate to

team performance. Sweeney et al. (2019) reviewed definitions, theoretical frameworks, and performance outcomes in commercial organizations, emphasizing differences from non-commercial settings. Chen and zhang (2023), meanwhile, synthesized 17 studies on adverse consequences for members, formal leaders, and teams. Their review connects shared leadership with power struggles, role stress, and coordination problems. These reviews highlight organizational domain and consequence type as distinct organizing principles. Furthermore, Curșeu et al. (2025) reviewed 56 articles on collaborative and shared leadership in healthcare action teams. Their synthesis integrates leadership functions, team processes, organizational conditions, and performance outcomes within clinical settings. Hess et al. (2026) analyzed 184 empirical articles at the intersection of shared and entrepreneurial leadership, examining new venture conditions, innovation, performance, and reinforcing relationships between antecedents and outcomes. Both reviews already provide integrative explanations, requiring the present study to specify its contribution beyond a general claim of theoretical fragmentation.

This comparison suggests that fragmentation concerns differences in analytical emphasis, contextual scope, and the roles assigned to explanatory constructs. Existing reviews organize findings around effect estimates, general conceptual frameworks, adverse consequences, commercial settings, healthcare functions, or entrepreneurial dynamics. The research opportunity is to connect these different emphases through a focused account of the shared leadership–team performance relationship while preserving contextual differences. This approach asks which processes are proposed, how their theoretical interpretations differ, and under what conditions they may operate across eligible team settings. Its distinctiveness therefore depends on the transparency, precision, and explanatory value of the synthesis rather than the number of studies. Accordingly, the intended novelty of this review lies in connecting three analytical tasks: mapping the characteristics of included studies; distinguishing relational, cognitive, coordination, and adaptive mechanisms; and identifying the contextual conditions relevant to those mechanisms.

The first intended explanatory contribution is to distinguish mechanism families from collective capability. The mechanism families encompass specific enabling states and processes: trust concerns willingness to accept vulnerability and rely on others; collective orientation concerns commitment to shared goals; coordination concerns the alignment of information and interdependent actions; and adaptive processes concern the revision of responses as demands change. Collective capability is proposed as the team's integrative capacity to mobilize and recombine distributed expertise across interdependent tasks and changing demands. This distinction allows the framework to ask how particular states and processes become available for coherent collective action. Conceptually, the presence of trust or shared goals alone does not establish this integrative capacity, which must also remain distinct from the quality or effectiveness of task outputs. Second, intended contribution is to connect contextual conditions to particular mechanisms. The framework asks, for example, whether open communication and decision authority support relational exchange; whether team composition and identification facilitate a shared orientation; whether task interdependence increases the need for knowledge integration; and whether virtuality or environmental uncertainty enables or disrupts adaptive coordination. These connections are analytical questions to be examined through the reviewed evidence, provide a basis for explaining why similar distributions of leadership may be associated with different outcomes when the conditions supporting particular processes differ.

The third intended contribution is to make the basis of integration traceable. The results and discussion will link each proposed connection to the relevant included studies, their research contexts, and the relationships they examined. This presentation will distinguish primary-study findings from the review's cross-study interpretations, allowing readers to assess the evidential basis and limits of the framework. The framework remains a conceptual proposal for empirical examination, without claiming a validated causal sequence or tested combinations of conditions.

This study conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. Building on the contributions of previous reviews, this study connects three perspectives: research developments and methodological characteristics; theoretical perspectives on explanatory mechanisms; and the contextual conditions that may enable or constrain those mechanisms. Furthermore, this study develops an integrative framework that positions shared leadership as a potential enabler of collective capability, through which distributed knowledge may be

mobilized into coordinated action and contribute to team performance. This perspective offers a conceptual contribution by clarifying the relationships among leadership distribution, specific explanatory processes, integrative team capacity, and performance outcomes. Based on these objectives, this study is designed to answer the following three research questions, **RQ1**. How has research on shared leadership evolved in terms of publication trends, methodological characteristics, and the organizational contexts studied? **RQ2**. What theoretical perspectives are used to explain the relationship between shared leadership and team performance, and how does each theory explain the mechanisms underlying this relationship? **RQ3**. Under what contextual conditions can shared leadership improve team performance?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a SLR method in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021). This method was chosen to obtain a comprehensive overview of research developments, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and contextual conditions that influence the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. The SLR approach allows researchers to identify research trends, methodological characteristics, research gaps, and directions for future research through a systematic, transparent, and replicable process of literature search, selection, evaluation, and synthesis. For reporting purposes, the article selection process was organized into four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

1. Identification
   This stage aims to identify all articles relevant to the research topic. Literature search was conducted in the scopus database, as it has a broad coverage of reputable journals and is widely used in systematic review research in the fields of management and organizational behavior. The search was conducted using a combination of keywords based on the two main constructs of the study: shared leadership and team performance. The initial query was "SHARED LEADERSHIP AND TEAM PERFORMANCE", with the entire expression enclosed in one pair of double quotation marks. This initial search identified 717 records. The search strategy focused on the intersection between shared leadership and team performance. Theoretical perspectives and contextual conditions were subsequently extracted from the eligible empirical studies to address RQ2 and RQ3. However, this construct-specific strategy may have omitted relevant studies using alternative terminology, which limits the coverage of the review. The eligibility criteria applied during the selection process were: (1) empirical journal articles; (2) published in english; (3) indexed in scopus; (4) available in full text; and (5) explicitly examining shared leadership and team performance.
2. Screening
   All articles obtained from the identification process were exported to the Mendeley reference management tool to remove duplicate records. The selection record reports 717 identified records, zero duplicate removals, zero exclusions by automation tools, and seven preprints removed before screening. These removals left 710 records for the screening stage. The search was subsequently refined using the query TITLE-ABS-KEY ("SHARED LEADERSHIP" AND "TEAM PERFORMANCE"). Unlike the initial query, this expression enclosed each construct in a separate pair of double quotation marks, connected the two phrases with the boolean operator and, and specified the title, abstract, and keywords fields. This query refinement excluded 563 records from the 710 records entering screening, leaving 147 reports sought for retrieval. The exclusion of these 563 records therefore reflected query refinement rather than manual title and abstract assessment. Articles were selected using the inclusion and exclusion criteria established prior to the search. Inclusion criteria included empirical journal articles discussing the relationship between shared leadership and team performance, published in English, available in full text, and indexed in Scopus. Conversely, review articles, conference proceedings, editorials, book chapters, dissertations, and articles that did not directly discuss the relationship between these two constructs were excluded from the selection process. The 147 reports sought for retrieval, 100 could not be retrieved because their full texts could not be accessed and downloaded. These reports were recorded as not retrieved, rather than as excluded following full-text assessment. Their unavailability represents a potential source of retrieval

bias because their eligibility and findings could not be evaluated.

3. Eligibility
   The remaining 47 reports were further evaluated through a full-text review to ensure their alignment with the study's objectives. The evaluation assessed the appropriateness of the research focus, the clarity of the research methods, the quality of the results reporting, and the relevance of the empirical findings to the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. Following full-text assessment, 21 reports were excluded: two were not published in english, four were ineligible publication types, and fifteen fell outside the publication period specified for this review. These exclusions reduced the number of eligible reports from 47 to 26.
4. Inclusion
   Articles the final corpus comprised 26 empirical studies reported in 26 articles. Data from each article are systematically extracted using a data extraction form that includes information on the authors, year of publication, country of study, theoretical perspective, organizational context, sample characteristics, research methods, data analysis techniques, key findings, and contextual conditions that influence the relationship between shared leadership and team performance. Review articles cited for background, theoretical positioning, or comparison, including Curșeu et al. (2025), are distinct from the 26 empirical studies included in the corpus. These background sources are not counted as included studies and do not constitute primary empirical evidence for the synthesis.

Subsequently, all 26 included empirical studies were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach through a process of coding, theme grouping, and cross-study synthesis. The results of the synthesis were then grouped into three main themes in accordance with the research questions, namely: (1) the development of research on Shared Leadership, (2) theoretical perspectives explaining the relationship between Shared Leadership and Team Performance, and (3) contextual conditions that influence the effectiveness of Shared Leadership in improving Team Performance. The article selection process at each stage is presented in the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram on figure 1 below:

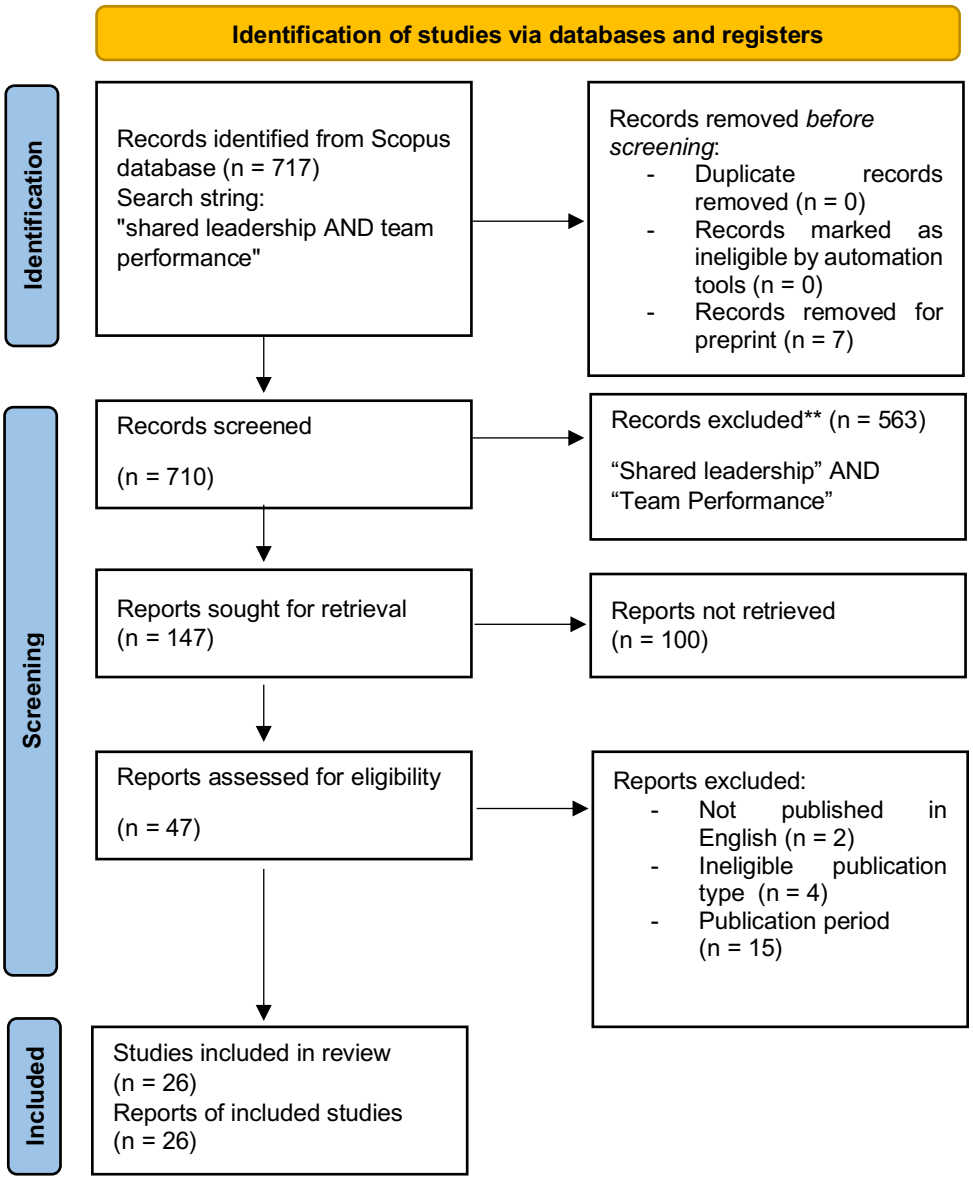


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1. How has research on shared leadership evolved in terms of publication trends, methodological characteristics, and the organizational contexts studied?

There are three fundamental shifts in the development of research on shared leadership: changes in the object of explanation, the method of explanation, and the context of application. These three shifts are illustrated in Table 1, which shows that the field has evolved from validating relationships, to explaining mechanisms, and then to explaining contextual configurations. This pattern indicates that research questions have shifted from "whether shared leadership improves team performance" to "how and under what conditions shared leadership creates team performance". The first change occurred in the object of research explanation. Early articles positioned team performance as a direct consequence of leadership distribution, so research attention was directed toward estimating the magnitude of shared leadership's influence on team performance. Recent literature has moved away from this approach and shifted attention to the internal processes that generate performance. This shift is reflected in the increasing use of constructs such as trust, shared cognition, the transactive memory system, team

learning, psychological safety, and knowledge integration as mechanisms explaining the formation of team performance (Oh, 2026; Wang & Duan, 2024). The research focus has shifted from relationships between variables to the processes of building team capabilities. A second change is evident in the theoretical logic employed. Early research adopted theories to explain why distributed leadership yields better results than vertical leadership (Xu et al., 2022).

Contemporary researchh uses theories to explain the process of transforming collective resources into team performance. This shift has caused the function of theory to evolve from a tool for justifying empirical relationships to a tool for explaining organizational mechanisms. SET explains the formation of trust and reciprocity; SIT explains collective orientation; the IMOI framework explains knowledge integration and coordination; while CLT explains the ability to adapt to environmental changes (Carter et al., 2026; Tran & Vu, 2021). The synthesis shows that these theories do not compete in explaining the same phenomenon but rather explain different stages in the process of collective capability formation. The third change relates to how the organizational context is viewed. Early literature treated context as a research characteristic, whereas recent research positions it as the primary explainer of variation in empirical results (Curșeu et al., 2025). Organizational culture, task complexity, team virtuality, organizational structure, team size, and environmental uncertainty consistently emerge as conditions that determine whether shared leadership mechanisms develop or not. This indicates that the effectiveness of shared leadership is determined by the fit between the distribution of leadership and the configuration of the organizational context, rather than by the mere existence of that leadership distribution. This shift in conceptual orientation has been accompanied by methodological changes. The predominance of cross-sectional surveys in early research suggests that shared leadership was treated as a relatively static construct. The increasing use of Social Network Analysis (SNA), Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling, longitudinal designs, and agent-based modeling reflects a shift in the assumption that shared leadership is a dynamic, emergent phenomenon that evolves through patterns of interaction among team members (Cerchione et al., 2026; Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera, 2024; Shah et al., 2026). This methodological shift mirrors an ontological change regarding the nature from a leadership attribute to an ever evolving social process.

The same evolutionary pattern is evident in the empirical context of the research. Manufacturing organizations and conventional businesses dominated the research in the early phase. More recent articles have focused on knowledge-based organizations, technology companies, project-based organizations, healthcare institutions, startups, virtual teams, and digital work environments (Brugman et al., 2026; Janssens et al., 2020; Jenkins & Throupe, 2026). This shift in context correlates with organizations' growing need for knowledge-based coordination, decentralized decision-making, and rapid adaptability. The evolution of this research field reflects changes in the characteristics of modern organizations more than it does the development of the shared leadership concept itself. This synthesis demonstrates that the evolution of research does not proceed linearly but involves a reconstruction of how phenomena are explained. The research focus has shifted from leadership structure to organizational capability. The basis for the emerging perspective that shared leadership is an organizational mechanism that enables distributed knowledge to be integrated into collective capability, which in turn generates team performance. This perspective serves as the conceptual foundation for the development of the Integrative Framework in this study. Table 1 shows that the relationship between shared leadership and team performance is increasingly understood as a process of organizational capability formation that occurs through social, cognitive, and adaptive mechanisms within a specific context. The shift from "variable–relationship" to "mechanism–configuration" is a key finding of RQ1 because it provides a direct basis for the analysis in RQ2 regarding theoretical mechanisms and in RQ3 regarding the contextual conditions that determine the effectiveness of shared leadership.

Tabel 1. Evolution of Shared Leadership Research

Dimension	Change	Description	Reference
Object	Relationships → Mechanisms → Contextual Configurations	from estimating direct effects to explaining the internal processes and conditions that enable shared leadership to generate team performance	(Chen & Zhang, 2023; Pearce, 2004; Wang & Duan, 2024; Xu et al., 2022)
Theoretical logic	Justification of theory → Explanation of mechanisms	Theory has shifted from explaining empirical relationships to explaining the formation of	(Carter et al., 2026; Curșeu et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2022)

Dimension	Change	Description	Reference
		beliefs, collective identity, the integration of knowledge, and organizational adaptation.	
Methodological Approach	Variables → Relationships → Systems	The shift from SEM to SNA, MSEM, longitudinal, and agent-based modeling reflects a change in the assumption that shared leadership is an emergent phenomenon that develops through team interactions.	(Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera, 2024; Shah et al., 2026)
Unit of analysis	Individual → Team → Leadership network	The analysis expands from individual attributes to the structure of relationships and patterns of influence within the team.	(Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera, 2024; Xu et al., 2022)
Organizational context	Stable organizations → Knowledge-based organizations → Digital organizations	This broader context highlights the growing relevance of Shared Leadership in environments characterized by high levels of complexity, interdependence, and uncertainty.	(Ali & Jiang, 2026; Curşeu et al., 2025; Feng & Lyu, 2025; Karppi et al., 2025; Perlak, 2025; Seok & Lee, 2021; Tseng et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2023)
Stages of development in the field	Validation → Explanation → Configuration	The research field has entered a phase of research maturity, with an emphasis on causal mechanisms and contextual configurations.	Summary of all articles

Source: Processed data (2026)

RQ2. What theoretical perspectives are used to explain the relationship between shared leadership and team performance, and how does each theory explain the mechanisms underlying this relationship?

A synthesis of the reviewed studies identifies four complementary mechanisms through which shared leadership may contribute to team performance: relational mechanisms, collective cognition, collective coordination, and adaptive capability. These mechanisms emerge from different theoretical perspectives and provide complementary explanations of how distributed leadership influence may be associated with team-level processes and performance outcomes. Rather than representing a universally established sequential causal process, the four mechanisms should be understood as interconnected processes and enabling states that may support collective capability formation. Relational processes emphasize trust, reciprocity, and psychological safety; collective cognition concerns shared identity and collective orientation; collective coordination concerns knowledge integration, team learning, and coordinated action; and adaptive capability concerns the ability of teams to respond to changing and complex conditions.

In the proposed framework, collective capability is defined as a team's integrative capacity to mobilize, combine, and reconfigure members' distributed knowledge and expertise across task demands. It is conceptually distinct from the specific states and processes that support its development. Trust concerns members' willingness to accept vulnerability; collective cognition concerns their shared understanding and orientation; coordination concerns the alignment of interdependent contributions; and adaptive processes concern adjustments to changing requirements. Collective capability, in contrast, concerns the team's capacity to bring these contributions into an integrated and repeatable pattern of resource mobilization. Its higher-order character therefore refers to integration at the team level, rather than a simple aggregation of trust, cognition, coordination, and adaptation. For example, members may trust one another and share common goals while still lacking the capacity to combine specialized expertise when task requirements change. This illustrative distinction shows why the presence of individual enabling conditions does not automatically establish an integrative capability. Collective capability is also distinct from team performance: the former concerns what a team is equipped to do, whereas the latter concerns the results it actually achieves. Performance is therefore an outcome to be explained, rather than part of the definition of capability. Together, these mechanisms provide an integrative conceptual explanation of how shared leadership may contribute to the development of collective capability and, ultimately, team performance. This distinction is proposed as an analytical contribution of the review. It does not imply that collective capability has been validated as a second-order latent construct or that the complete pathway has been empirically tested across the

included studies. The evidence for specific relationships must be distinguished from the review's interpretation of how those relationships may fit together.

Articles employing SET consistently identify trust, reciprocity, mutual obligation, and psychological safety as prerequisites for the development of shared leadership demonstrate that leadership distribution emerges when team members have confidence in the competence of other members and are willing to distribute influence based on their respective expertisen. Oh (2026); Yang & Wang (2026) findings show that increased team efficacy occurs after members develop trusting relationships through collaborative learning, while Curșeu et al. (2025); Mansoor et al. (2025) founds that shared leadership in healthcare action teams develops through open communication and mutually supportive professional relationships. This synthesis indicates that SET's primary contribution lies in explaining how the distribution of influence becomes possible, rather than how that distribution leads to team performance. Social relationships serve as the foundation that enables leadership to shift legitimately from one member to another. A mapping of theoretical perspectives, the mechanisms described, the contributions of each theory, and the articles providing empirical evidence is presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Theoretical Mechanisms of Shared Leadership

Mechanisms	Theory perspective	Contribution	Reference
Relational Mechanism	Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Explains how trust, reciprocity, mutual obligation, and psychological safety form the foundation of distributed leadership.	(Fransen et al., 2020; Mojarro-Durán et al., 2026; Oh, 2026)
Collective Cognition	Social Identity Theory (SIT)	Explains the formation of a shared identity, collective orientation, and commitment to common goals that drive the distribution of influence.	(Carter et al., 2026; Chouki et al., 2026; Gara Bach Ouerdian et al., 2025; Han et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2026; Seok & Lee, 2021; Siangchokyoo & Klinger, 2022; Wang & Duan, 2024; Zielińska et al., 2026)
Collective Coordination	IMOI Framework, Team Effectiveness Theory, Transactive Memory System (TMS)	process of knowledge integration, shared mental models, collective learning, coordination, and the utilization of distributed expertise.	(Kurteshi & Almeida, 2026; Porter et al., 2026; Shoukat et al., 2022; Tran & Vu, 2021))
Adaptive Capability	Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), Collective Attention Theory, Job Demands–Resources Theory (JD-R)	a team's ability to delegate decisions, maintain coordination, and adapt to a complex and changing environment.	(Carter et al., 2026; Cho et al., 2021; Hadi & Chaudhary, 2021; Karppi et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2022)
Synthesis Results	Integration of all perspectives	Shared Leadership builds collective capability by fostering relational capability, collective cognition, collective coordination, and adaptive capability, which together enhance team performance.	Synthesis articles

Source: Processed data (2026)

The synthesis suggests that relational mechanisms provide an important foundation for collective cognition, particularly by creating conditions that support a shared orientation toward team goals. The synthesis indicates that leadership distribution requires a shared orientation toward team goals so that dispersed influence can be converted into collective action. This perspective is explained primarily by Social Identity Theory (SIT). Wang and Duan (2025) demonstrate that collective identity strengthens members' ability to manage cognitive conflict, thereby leading to higher levels of team innovation. Shah et al. (2026) show that the distribution of various leadership roles within sports teams is effective only when each member identifies as part of a collective goal, rather than as an individual authority figure. This synthesis indicates that collective identity shifts members' orientation from individual interests toward team success as the primary reference in decision-making. SIT's theoretical contribution lies in explaining why members are willing to take on or accept leadership in rotation based on their competencies. Collective orientation is further translated into collective coordination—that is, a team's ability to integrate knowledge, coordinate activities, and foster shared learning. This mechanism is most commonly explained through the Input–Mediator–Output–Input (IMOI)

framework, Team Effectiveness Theory, and the Transactive Memory System (TMS). Tran and Vu (2021) demonstrate that Shared Leadership enhances team effectiveness by strengthening a cooperative orientation that improves coordination among members. Xu et al. (2022) found that the transactive memory system facilitates the formation of a more decentralized leadership network, thereby allowing for the optimal utilization of distributed expertise. Coluccio and Muñoz-Herrera (2024) demonstrated that leadership network structures yield better performance predictions compared to approaches that measure leadership solely at the individual level. This synthesis indicates that the strategic value of Shared Leadership does not stem from the distribution of leadership roles itself, but rather from the team's capacity to integrate dispersed knowledge into collective coordination. The next layer pertains to adaptive capability that is, the team's ability to respond to environmental changes by delegating decisions to members who possess the most relevant information. This mechanism is explained by CLT, Collective Attention Theory, and JD-R. Carter et al. (2026) demonstrate that the distribution of leadership enables virtual teams to maintain collective attention despite communication delays and geographic separation. Karppi et al. (2025) found that Shared Leadership enhances a team's capacity to address complex job demands through the redistribution of resources and responsibilities among members. Furthermore, Curșeu et al. (2025) demonstrated that healthcare action teams are able to improve the quality of decision-making when leadership evolves adaptively in response to changing clinical conditions. This synthesis demonstrates that CLT's primary contribution lies in explaining how Shared Leadership generates organizational adaptability, particularly in environments characterized by high complexity, interdependence, and uncertainty. A cross-theoretical analysis reveals consistent patterns. SET explains the formation of relational capability, SIT explains the formation of collective orientation, IMOI together with TMS explain the formation of collective coordination, while CLT explains the formation of adaptive capability. These four mechanisms should be understood as complementary and interconnected dimensions rather than as a strictly sequential causal process. Relational processes may facilitate trust and psychological safety; collective cognition may strengthen shared goals and collective orientation; coordination mechanisms may support the integration of distributed knowledge; and adaptive capability may enable teams to respond to changing conditions. This synthesis provides a conceptual foundation that the strategic value of Shared Leadership stems from its ability to build collective capability—that is, the collective capacity that enables teams to transform distributed knowledge into coordinated actions that result in Team Performance. This interpretation expands upon the literature, which has traditionally viewed these theories as standalone perspectives, as the results of this synthesis demonstrate that each theory explains different stages in the mechanism of collective capability formation.

RQ3. Under what contextual conditions can shared leadership improve team performance?

A synthesis of the reviewed studies indicates that the effectiveness of shared leadership varies across organizational, team, task, and environmental conditions. Shared Leadership appears to be particularly relevant when teams face a high need to integrate dispersed knowledge, coordinate interdependent activities, distribute decision-making, and respond to changing conditions. Based on the cross-study synthesis, four contextual dimensions are identified: organizational context, team context, task context, and environmental context. These dimensions represent analytically distinct contextual conditions identified across the reviewed studies rather than empirically tested configurational patterns.

Conversely, when coordination can be achieved through formal procedures, rigid specialization, or hierarchical authority, the contribution of shared leadership becomes smaller (Curșeu et al., 2025; Carter et al., 2026; Karppi et al., 2025). The synthesis identifies four contextual configurations that consistently shape this need for coordination: organizational configuration, team configuration, task configuration, and environmental configuration. These four configurations do not operate independently but rather form an organizational environment that determines whether shared leadership mechanisms will develop. Organizational configuration describes the organization's capacity to provide space for the distribution of leadership. The reviewed articles indicate that a collaborative culture, flexible organizational structures, a high degree of decentralization, and open communication increase the likelihood of developing mutual trust, information exchange, and the distribution of influence among team members (Xu et al., 2022; Curșeu et al., 2025; Wang & Duan, 2025). Conversely, bureaucratic structures narrow the scope for decision-making, limit members' initiative, and perpetuate dependence on formal leaders. The synthesis reveals that organizational culture functions as an institutional enabler—a set of norms that determine the legitimacy of leadership

distribution within an organization. Team configuration relates to the internal characteristics of a team that shape the need for collective coordination. The synthesis indicates that shared leadership develops optimally in teams with high levels of task interdependence, diversity of competencies, and a team size that allows for intensive interaction (Tran & Vu, 2021; Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera, 2024; Shah et al., 2026). Interdependence increases the frequency of information exchange, making it impossible for decisions to be made by a single individual. Diversity of competencies broadens the distribution of knowledge within the team, making leadership distribution a mechanism for accessing dispersed expertise. The synthesis indicates that the contribution of shared leadership increases as the team's need to integrate cross-member knowledge grows. Task configuration emerges as the most consistent condition explaining variations in the effectiveness of shared leadership. Nearly all articles indicate that task complexity increases the need for the integration of diverse perspectives, experimentation, and collective learning (Karppi et al., 2025; Wang & Duan, 2025; Oh, 2026). Complexity amplifies uncertainty regarding the most appropriate solution, causing decision-making authority to shift to members with the most relevant competencies. The synthesis reveals that distributed leadership functions as a mechanism for mobilizing collective intelligence, as decisions are built through the combination of knowledge dispersed among various team members. An opposite pattern is found in routine, procedural work with high operational standards. In such conditions, coordination is governed by formal procedures, thereby limiting the added value of distributed leadership.

Environmental configuration explains the influence of external dynamics on the effectiveness of shared leadership. Study from Carter et al. (2026); Curşeu et al. (2025); Karppi et al. (2025) indicate that digital transformation, virtual teams, technological changes, market competition, and increasing environmental uncertainty heighten organizations' need for adaptive coordination mechanisms. The distribution of leadership allows decision-making to shift dynamically to individuals with access to the latest information, enabling the organization to respond to changes more quickly. This synthesis demonstrates that the strength of shared leadership lies in its ability to distribute adaptive capacity across all team members, rather than concentrating it in formal leaders. Cross-context analysis reveals consistent patterns. All four configurations influence the same mechanism: the organization's need. A cross-context analysis reveals consistent patterns. All four configurations influence the same mechanism: the organization's need for distributed coordination. Organizational configuration determines the legitimacy of leadership distribution; team configuration determines the capacity for knowledge integration; task configuration determines the intensity of coordination required; and environmental configuration determines the organization's need for rapid adaptation. The higher the need for collective coordination across these four configurations, the greater the likelihood that shared leadership will build collective capability that leads to team performance. This pattern explains why the relationship between shared leadership and team performance shows varying strengths across different studies, even when using the same constructs. These variations reflect differences in the contextual configurations in which the shared leadership mechanism develops, rather than inconsistencies in the concept of shared leadership itself.

Tabel 3. Contextual Conditions of Shared Leadership

Context	Conditions	mechanism	Referemsi
Organizational Configuration	Collaborative culture, flexible structure, open communication, decentralization	Support the legitimacy of distributed influence, trust, and information exchange	Xu et al. (2022); Curşeu et al. (2025); Wang & Duan (2025)
Team Configuration	High task interdependence, diversity of competencies, moderate team size	Support knowledge integration and collective coordination when members can exchange and align their contributions	Tran & Vu (2021); Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera (2024); Shah et al. (2026)
Task Configuration	High complexity, non-routine tasks, uncertainty in problem-solving	Increase the need for collective learning, knowledge integration, and expertise-based decision-making	Karppi et al. (2025); Wang & Duan (2025); Oh (2026)
Environmental Configuration	Digitalization, virtual teams, technological dynamics, competition, environmental uncertainty	Increase the need for adaptive coordination and shifts in decision responsibilitie	Carter et al. (2026); Curşeu et al. (2025); Karppi et al. (2025)
Result	Integration of all contextual configurations.		

Context	Conditions	mechanism	Referemsi
	Synthesis interpretation: the four contextual dimensions may shape the need, opportunity, and legitimacy for distributed leadership. Their links with collective capability and team performance are proposed conceptual relationships; their combined effects have not been established by this review.		

Table 3 shows that organizational, team, task, and work environment conditions operate in a configurational manner: the greater the need to integrate dispersed knowledge, coordinate interdependent activities, and respond to change, the more relevant distributed leadership mechanisms become. This pattern reinforces the findings of RQ2 that Shared Leadership generates value through the formation of collective capability. At the same time, RQ3 indicates that this capability develops only when the contextual configuration provides the need, space, and legitimacy for distributed leadership.

Proposed Integrative Framework

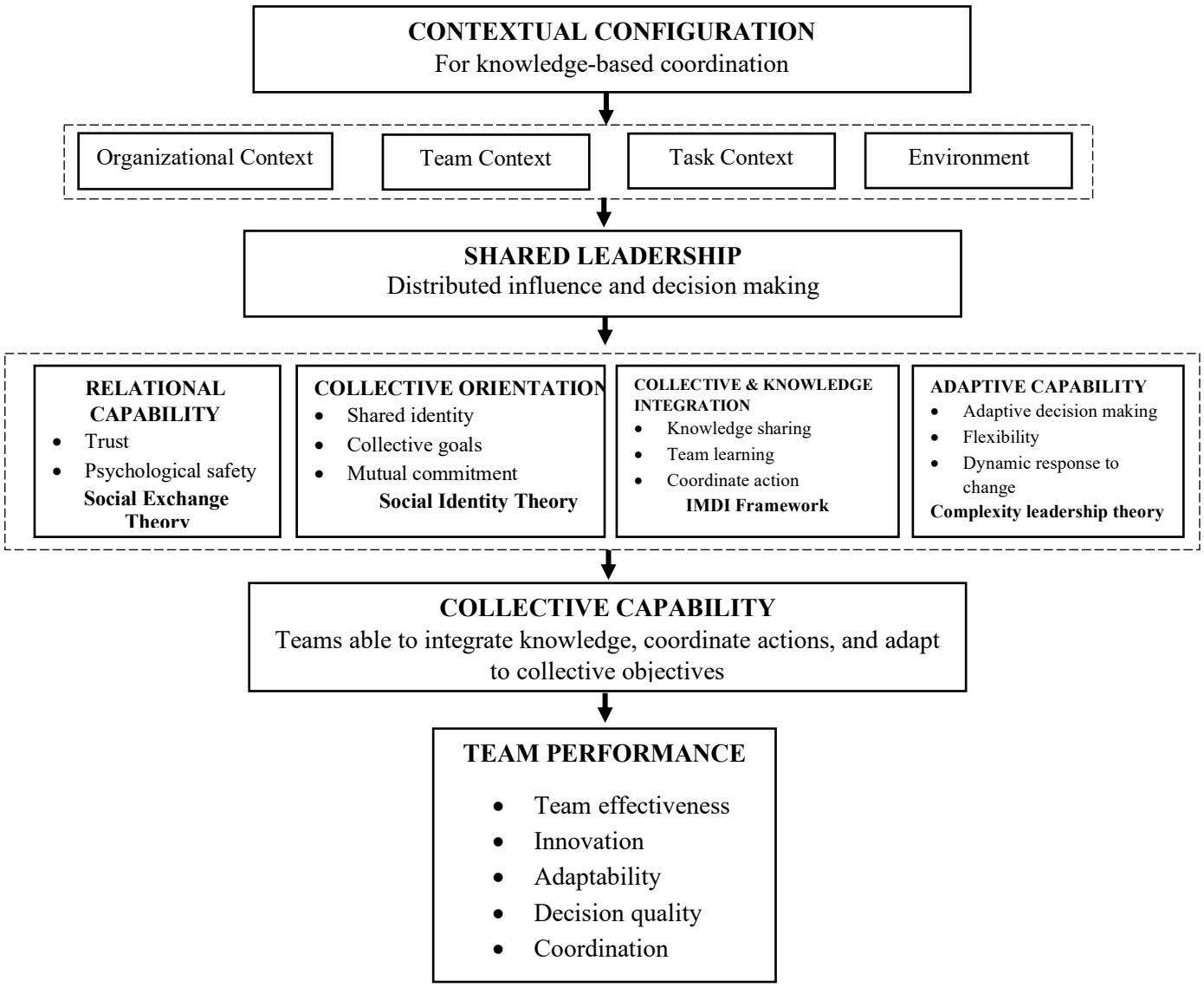


Figure 2. Proposed Integrative Framework

The framework proposed in Figure 2 shows that the effectiveness of shared leadership results from the interaction between leadership distribution, mechanisms for building collective capabilities, and the configuration of the organizational context. This perspective reconceptualizes the view that has long dominated the literature, namely the direct relationship between shared leadership and team performance into an organizational process that unfolds gradually through the development of collective capabilities. Shared leadership functions as an organizational capability enabler that activates four main

mechanisms: relational capability, collective orientation, collective coordination and knowledge integration, and adaptive capability. These four mechanisms stem from a synthesis of various theoretical perspectives that dominate the literature. SET explains the formation of trust, reciprocity, and psychological safety as the foundation for leadership distribution (Xu et al., 2022; Curșeu et al., 2025). Furthermore, the SIT explains the development of a shared identity that directs members toward collective goals (Wang & Duan, 2025; Shah et al., 2026). The IMOI framework, together with the transactive memory system, explains the integration of knowledge, team learning, and coordination of actions (Tran & Vu, 2021; Coluccio & Muñoz-Herrera, 2024). The CLT explains a team's ability to dynamically distribute decision-making in the face of environmental change (Karppi et al., 2025; Carter et al., 2026). The synthesis shows that each theory explains different stages in the process of collective capability formation, so the relationships among the theories are complementary. These mechanisms converge on the formation of collective capability—that is, a team's ability to integrate knowledge, coordinate actions, leverage distributed expertise, and collectively build adaptive capacity. The synthesis indicates that collective capability is the mechanism that most consistently links leadership distribution to improved team performance. This perspective explains the variation in empirical findings across the literature, as the success of shared leadership depends on an organization's ability to transform distributed knowledge into collective action. The synthesis reveals that these four configurations create an organizational need for knowledge-based coordination. A collaborative culture, flexible structures, task interdependence, diversity of competencies, job complexity, digitalization, and environmental uncertainty increase the need for distributed influence and knowledge-based coordination (Curșeu et al., 2025; Karppi et al., 2025; Carter et al., 2026). Conversely, organizations with bureaucratic structures, highly standardized work, and relatively stable environments exhibit a lower need for these mechanisms. This synthesis indicates that variations in the relationship between shared leadership and team performance are better explained by differences in contextual configurations than by differences in the effectiveness of the shared leadership concept.

The framework in Figure 1 integrates the results of the research evolution identified in RQ1. The shift in research orientation from validating empirical relationships toward explaining mechanisms and contextual configurations suggests that shared leadership has evolved from a leadership concept into an organizational mechanism for managing distributed knowledge and building collective capabilities. This evolution explains why recent research increasingly employs leadership network approaches, multilevel analysis, and organizational complexity perspectives rather than approaches based on direct relationships between variables. Based on this synthesis, the study offers three conceptual contributions. First, this study reposition shared leadership as an organizational capability enabler that generates value through the formation of collective capability. Second, this study integrates various theoretical perspectives into a single causal mechanism that explains the process of transforming leadership distribution into team performance. Third, this study introduces contextual configuration as a conceptual foundation for explaining the variations in empirical results previously reported in the literature. The integration of these three elements yields a more comprehensive conceptual framework for explaining when, how, and under what conditions shared leadership can enhance team performance.

CONCLUSION

This study synthesizes the literature on the relationship between shared leadership and team performance through a SLR based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The synthesis indicates that research on Shared Leadership has increasingly shifted from examining direct relationships toward explaining the mechanisms and contextual conditions associated with its effectiveness. Shared leadership creates organizational value when distributed leadership facilitates the development of collective capability, enabling teams to integrate distributed knowledge, coordinate collective action, foster collective learning, and respond to changing conditions. The effectiveness of this process is shaped by contextual conditions, particularly collaborative culture, task interdependence, job complexity, team virtuality, and environmental uncertainty. These findings suggest that the relationship between shared leadership and team performance is not universal, but varies according to the extent to which organizational contexts provide the need, space, and legitimacy for distributed coordination and knowledge integration. The central contribution of this study is the development of an Integrative Framework that positions shared leadership as an enabler of collective capability rather than simply as

a direct antecedent of Team Performance. The framework suggests that the value of distributed leadership lies in its capacity to facilitate complementary relational, cognitive, coordination, and adaptive mechanisms through which collective capability can develop. In this respect, the study offers three theoretical contributions to the shared leadership literature.

First, this study provides a theoretical repositioning of shared leadership from a direct antecedent of team performance to an enabler of collective capability. The synthesis suggests that the value of distributed leadership lies in its capacity to facilitate the development of collective capability, through which teams integrate distributed knowledge, coordinate collective action, leverage distributed expertise, and respond to changing conditions. This perspective shifts the theoretical focus from whether shared leadership improves team performance to how leadership distribution contributes to the development of collective capability. Second, the study provides an integrative theoretical explanation by connecting complementary perspectives that have largely been examined separately in previous research. The SET explains the relational conditions underlying distributed influence; SIT explains collective orientation; the IMOI framework and transactive memory system explain knowledge integration and coordination; and the CLT explains adaptive capability. Rather than treating these theories as competing explanations, the framework positions them as complementary lenses for understanding distinct dimensions of collective capability formation.

Third, the study advances a contextual explanation of variation in the effectiveness of Shared Leadership by synthesizing organizational, team, task, and environmental conditions into a contextual configuration for knowledge-based coordination. This perspective suggests that the relevance of shared leadership depends not simply on the presence of distributed leadership, but on whether the organizational context creates sufficient need, space, and legitimacy for distributed coordination and knowledge integration. Thus, contextual configuration provides a basis for explaining why the contribution of shared leadership to team performance may vary across organizational settings.

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