

## MANAGING FROM THE BOUNDARY: THE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OF SELF-MANAGING WORK TEAMS

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We used in-depth critical incident interviews with the external leaders of self-managing work teams and their team members, and interviews and surveys provided by managers, to understand how effective leader behaviors and strategies unfold over time. Content analyses of the data produced a process model showing that effective external leaders move back and forth across boundaries to build relationships, scout necessary information, persuade their teams and outside constituents to support one another, and empower their teams to achieve success.

I think the longer you are a [traditional] supervisor, the harder it is to let go; to let your constituents [that is, team members] make the decisions. The hardest part is that you're held accountable. For 20 years, I always made the decisions and I felt I made the right decisions. But to now turn it over to an hourly person and say, "You go ahead and make this decision." I was so afraid they would make the wrong decision that I wouldn't let them sometimes. They went to higher management and said, "He won't let me do...."

George, external leader of five self-managing work teams

At first pass, it appears paradoxical that a *self-managing* work team would require a leader. However, those studying these teams agree that the actions of the leader to whom a team reports, known as the *external team leader*, can make or break the team's success (Cohen, Chang, & Ledford, 1997; Hackman, 1986; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). But, to date, little theory or research has focused on identifying what external leaders should do to best support the success of self-managing work teams and their members.

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What is known is that leading a team that manages itself requires a unique approach to leadership (Courtright, Fairhurst, & Rogers, 1989; Manz & Sims, 1987). Research has also shown that the lack of legitimate control over team actions and decisions, and the large number of teams for which an external leader is responsible, makes the role more complex and demanding than that of traditional team leadership (Beyerlein, Johnson, & Beyerlein, 1996; Hackman, 1986). Moreover, the uniqueness and complexity of the external leader role enhance its ambiguity, especially if an external leader has held a leadership position in a traditional work environment (Klein, 1984; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986; Walton, 1982). The role ambiguity evident in the quote at the start of this article underscores the need to determine what external leaders can do to support team success. It also typifies what we've heard lately from external leaders and scholars: Research that develops a comprehensive picture of this unique and complex role is sorely needed (Beyerlein et al., 1996; Cohen et al., 1997; Nygren & Levine, 1996).

The study that follows was designed to develop a comprehensive model of the external leader role. We were particularly interested in investigating the persistent proposal that "boundary-spanning" activities are fundamental for success in the role (see Cohen et al., 1997; Cordery & Wall, 1985; Cummings, 1978; Hackman, 1986). This proposal is rooted in the idea that an external leader is positioned at the team-organization boundary, enabling him or her to develop a strategic link between the team and the organization that can supply the team with resources and support. Yet, to our knowledge, the role of boundary-spanning activities in the self-

managing work team context and their relevance to team effectiveness have never been examined.

Our objectives were to increase understanding of the role of external leader and to contribute to theory on the external leader behaviors that support self-managing work team success. Using Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan's (1994) argument that leadership research should focus on what effective, rather than typical, leaders do, we aimed at developing a model of the actions and strategies that distinguish the performance of the best-performing external leaders—that is, the leaders who develop truly self-managing teams with high performance. Specifically, we compare how highly effective external leaders manage the role with how average external leaders manage the role, paying particular attention to the role of boundary spanning.

To identify unanswered questions about the external leadership role, we start by reviewing theory and research that lend insight into how external leadership is similar to or different from traditional leadership. We then present a study designed to address these questions and determine how effective external leaders manage the role to achieve self-managing work team success.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

External leaders of self-managing work teams face a very different situation than do traditional team leaders. Both are responsible for the performance of their teams. Yet traditional leaders are expected to lead by monitoring and managing those teams, while external leaders are expected to lead by delegating the monitoring and managing back to their teams. In a comprehensive taxonomy of leader behavior, Yukl (1989) proposed that leadership involves these elements: influencing people, building relationships, giving and seeking information, and making decisions. We now use these categories to examine what is known about external leadership and how it differs from traditional leadership.

### How Do Leaders Influence a Team and Others in an Organization?

According to Yukl (1989), influencing involves recognizing, rewarding, and motivating employees. Research comparing the influence styles of traditional team leaders with those of the external leaders of self-managing work teams shows that for traditional leaders, the flow of influence is more top-down and that for external leaders, it is more bottom-up (Courtright et al., 1989). That is, traditional leaders significantly more often engage in "one-down" moves such as issuing commands and

talking over team members, while external leaders more often engage in a hands-off consultative form of influence in which they ask questions, provide information, and give advice (Courtright et al., 1989). In the bottom-up self-managing work team environment, influence appears to come less from power in the role, and more from a leader's ability to persuade members to talk, listen, and accept advice.

In their widely cited study, Manz and Sims (1987) also found external leaders influence through hands-off consultation, and they identified six "encouraging" behaviors that were the most common behaviors used by external leaders: encouraging self-reinforcement, encouraging self-criticism, encouraging self-goal setting, encouraging self-observation/evaluation, encouraging self-expectation, and encouraging rehearsal. All were linked to leader effectiveness.

Ancona and Caldwell (1992) found that for traditional team leaders, influence must extend outside of the team they lead. In their study, product development team performance was linked to leader and team external boundary activities, especially "ambassadorial activities" involving actively persuading outsiders to support the team, protecting the team from outside pressure, and lobbying for resources. Experts on self-managing teams have long argued that external leaders should take on the role of persuading others in their organizations to support their self-managing work teams (Cummings, 1978; Hackman, 1986). Since no research has examined this assumption, our first guiding research question was:

*Research Question 1. What do highly effective external leaders do to influence those inside and outside their teams, and how do these forms of influence facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness?*

### How and with Whom Do Leaders Build Relationships?

According to Yukl (1989), building relationships involves managing conflict, team building, supporting, and networking. Building relationships with subordinates has been considered fundamental to effective leadership by modern leadership theorists since the 1950s, when the Personnel Research Board at Ohio State University presented the results of a decade-long program of research on leadership behavior that examined subordinate perceptions of leaders. This research showed that "consideration," or relationship building (for instance, helping employees and looking out for their

welfare), was most often predictive of subordinate satisfaction and sometimes predictive of leader effectiveness (see Fleishman, 1953; Stogdill & Coons, 1957). A few decades later, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) argued that the behavior required of traditional leaders depends on the experience level and motivation of employees. They proposed that experienced and motivated employees who are delegated responsibility require independence and have little need for the caretaking inherent in relationship building.

The relevance of relationship building to effective external leadership has never been studied. Steckler and Fondas (1995) argued that building relationships with team members may allow external leaders to build influence and team member commitment. Since they cannot rely on formal power over team actions and decisions, external leaders may need to rely on relating to or understanding the perspectives of team members to gain influence.

Research also suggests that traditional leaders who build relationships with members of the larger organization are likely to obtain resources that improve their employees' performance (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). A focus on building external relationships has also been said to be important for external leaders because self-managing work teams tend to have limited control over their environments and limited opportunity to develop relationships with organization members who hold resources (Cummings, 1978). We were led to the following research question:

*Research Question 2. Do highly effective external leaders place an emphasis on building relationships inside and/or outside their teams, and if so, how do these relationships facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness?*

### **Who Seeks and Clarifies Information?**

Teams in traditional environments that do not continually receive and share information with sources in their larger organizations run the risk of becoming overbounded, or too insular in their actions and decisions to succeed within the organizations (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Tushman & Katz, 1980). However, when team members scout for information in their organizations, they score lower on measures of internal team dynamics (including effective internal team processes, and cohesiveness) (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992).

Because team self-management requires a large amount of team member interaction, the link between internal team dynamics and performance is

known to be stronger in self-managing work teams than in traditional teams (Cohen, Ledford, & Spreitzer, 1996; Polly & Van Dyne, 1994). Therefore, the benefit of having a leader, rather than team members, scout and disseminate information may be particularly useful in self-managing work teams. Moreover, the position an external leader occupies at the interface of multiple teams and their organization seems ideal for enabling the scouting and dissemination of information. Since ease of access has been linked to the effectiveness of scouting behavior (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981), we asked:

*Research Question 3. Do highly effective external leaders scout and disseminate information among teams and their broader organization, and if so, how does this facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness?*

### **Who Makes Decisions?**

Leadership is synonymous with decision responsibility. In traditional environments, making decisions includes behaviors like problem solving, planning, and delegating (Yukl, 1989). A question traditional team leaders must answer is whether to empower team members to make their own decisions and, if so, how much decision authority to delegate. Argyris (1998) argued that leaders love empowerment in theory, but mostly engage in command and control behaviors because it is what they know best.

By definition, self-managing work teams are empowered to make their own decisions. Yet research suggests that there is inconsistency within organizations in how much authority is actually delegated to self-managing work teams (Klein, 1984; Manz & Sims, 1984; Wall et al., 1986). Recent research reveals that empowerment is linked to higher levels of self-managing work team productivity, customer and job satisfaction, and organizational and team commitment (Burpitt & Bigoness, 1997; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). It also shows that, by itself, autonomy over decisions is not linked to these positive outcomes. Instead, positive outcomes are linked to what Kirkman and Rosen (1999) referred to as "team empowerment," which includes autonomy, team efficacy, and a team's sense that its decisions have meaning and impact. This formulation suggests that the external leader role involves much more than delegation—it also involves setting the team up for success in decision making. Since it is unclear how this is best done, we asked:

*Research Question 4. What strategies do highly effective external leaders use to empower their*

*teams, and how do they ensure team decisions and actions that support team effectiveness?*

## What Is the Process of Effective Leadership?

Leadership is a dynamic process that does not reside solely within a given person or a given situation; rather, situations create an interplay of needs, and effective leaders work to continually identify and meet them (Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; Pierce & Newstrom, 2000). Taxonomies of leader behavior like Yukl's provide information about what leaders do. Yet there exists little theory or research providing information about how these behaviors combine to create the dynamic process of leadership that meets situational needs. In this study, our goal was to develop a model of effective external leadership that reveals the process through which leader behaviors combine to facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness. The benefits of such a model lie in the questions it can answer about effective external leadership and in the new questions it can surface. Hence:

*Research Question 5. How do the behaviors and strategies of effective external leaders combine to facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness?*

## METHODS

We conducted an inductive theory-building study that focused primarily on external leaders' perspectives but that also used the perspectives of the leaders' constituents (team members and managers) to gain understanding of the interplay of situational needs that influence leader behavior. We chose to build theory because theoretical perspectives on external leadership are "relatively rare and underdeveloped" (Cohen et al., 1997: 276). Using inductive methods allowed us to obtain and integrate rich descriptive information and to uncover unanticipated clues.

## Setting and Overview of the Research Design

The research site was a *Fortune 500* durable consumer goods manufacturing plant in the midwestern United States with 3,500 employees. It had transitioned to self-managing work teams five years prior to data collection. Sixty-six external leaders, referred to as team advisors, led 300 teams. Advisors were responsible for five to eight teams, with the variation depending on the tasks performed by the teams. We selected this organization because its

size gave us a large pool of external leaders of self-managing work teams in one location, which allowed us to study leader behavior while controlling for organizational culture and context.

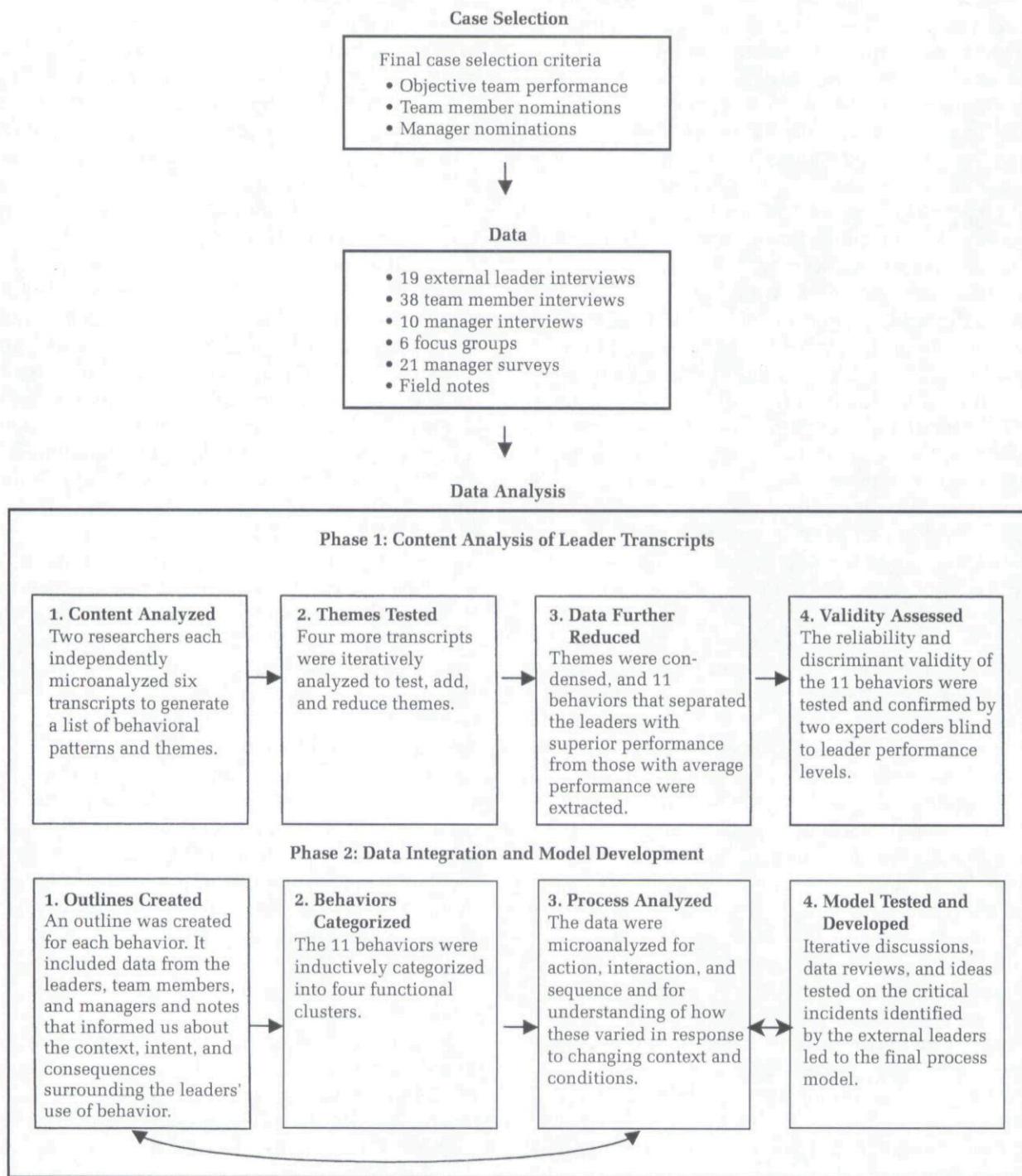
We used the comparative multiple case study method (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994) because it fit our objectives and has been shown useful for identifying effective leader behavior (see Boyatzis, 1982; Howell & Higgins, 1990; Komaki, 1986). Following Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt (1989), we carried out this method in three stages: (1) selecting two theoretically relevant samples of cases for comparison (in this study, a sample of external leaders with superior performance and a sample of external leaders with average performance), (2) collecting data for each case, and (3) analyzing data to determine differences between the two samples. Following Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) suggestion for analyzing qualitative data, we conducted the data analyses in two phases. First, we content-analyzed the data to generate a list of behaviors that differentiated the two samples. To eliminate the possibility of researcher bias, we also used expert coders who were blind to the study's purpose to code the data and determine the interrater agreement and reliability of the behaviors we identified. In phase 2, we interpreted and reconstructed the data to identify relationships among the behaviors and build theory about the process through which leader behaviors combine to facilitate team self-management and team effectiveness. Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of the data gathering and data analysis stages.

## Case Sample Selection

As noted above, to meet our objective of identifying the behaviors and strategies that characterize and distinguish the performance of the best-performing external leaders, we chose cases falling into two samples: those with average and those with superior performance. We chose to compare superior performers to average rather than to poor performers because our objective was to identify the behaviors and strategies distinguishing superior performance—that is, the behaviors and strategies consistently displayed by superior performers and not often displayed by average performers. Comparing poor performers to superior ones would have produced a model of behaviors and strategies supporting performance levels ranging anywhere from below-average to superior.

We wanted the superior performers to be considered outstanding leaders according to both objective criteria and the assessments of the managers and team members with whom they worked. Thus,

**FIGURE 1**  
**A Graphic Illustration of the Data Gathering and Data Analysis Stages**



we used three criteria to select our final sample from the pool of 66 external leaders in the plant (7 of whom were women): (1) objective team performance, (2) team member nominations for outstanding leaders, and (3) manager nominations for outstanding leaders. Objective team performance was based on the percentage of specific team produc-

tion goals met for the year (which had just ended). A graduate assistant retrieved these percentages directly from external leader performance appraisal forms.

Following McClelland (1976), to obtain team member and manager perspectives, we used a nomination process in which we asked team members

and managers to identify the most "outstanding" leaders in the plant. Team member nominations were obtained through the use of focus groups. Sixty-six team members (one led by each external leader) were randomly selected by a member of the organization's human resources department to participate in one of six 2-hour focus groups about the external leader role; 52 individuals (79 percent of those invited) attended a focus group. At the end of each group discussion, we explained that we would be interviewing team leaders and wanted to interview those the focus group members thought were the very best in the plant. We passed out a ballot listing the names of all 66 external leaders and asked the team members to check off those they knew well enough to assess and to then circle the names of those they felt were outstanding leaders. Nominations were received from all 52 team members who attended the focus groups. Manager nominations were obtained through ballots, mailed directly to all plant managers and directors, containing the same instructions outlined above. Nominations were received from all 21 managers and directors.

So that we could remain blind to the performance status of each leader in the final sample, a graduate assistant compiled the selection criteria, and a colleague experienced with comparative case study methods selected the final sample. This sample included ten superior performers, defined as individuals who were in the top 15 percent on all criteria, and nine average performers, individuals who had average objective performance scores and no nominations (see Sandberg [2000] for a discussion of how small samples have been consistently found adequate for understanding work role approaches in inductive qualitative research).

Leaders in the final sample were each responsible for five to eight teams. The two subsamples were demographically comparable in age (superior leaders, mean = 45.4, s.d. = 6.8; average leaders, mean = 42.1, s.d. = 7.7;  $t_{17} = 0.98$ , n.s.); years at the company (superior leaders, mean = 24.0, s.d. = 5.2; average leaders, mean = 22.7, s.d. = 8.0;  $t_{17} = 0.42$ , n.s.); years as leader of their current teams (superior leaders, mean = 2.3, s.d. = 1.5; average leaders, mean = 2.4, s.d. = 1.4;  $t_{17} = 0.20$ , n.s.); and years in a leadership role (superior leaders, mean = 14.6, s.d. = 6.1; average leaders, mean = 8.7, s.d. = 6.7;  $t_{17} = 2.01$ , n.s.). One superior performer and one average performer were women.

## Data Collection

Data were collected from multiple sources: 67 individuals were interviewed (19 external leaders, 38 team members, and 10 managers); 52 team mem-

bers were consulted in our six focus groups; and 21 managers and directors were surveyed. Specifics are detailed below.

We conducted three-hour interviews with each of the 19 external leaders in our final sample using the critical incident interview technique (CIIT; see Flanagan, 1954). Although it has not proven to be of great use in attitude research (House & Wigdor, 1967), the CIIT has been shown to be a useful, reliable, and valid method for obtaining descriptions of work behavior (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974).

The CIIT format involves asking interviewees to alternate between describing incidents on the job in which they felt effective and incidents in which they felt ineffective (McClelland & Dailey, 1972). The role of the CIIT interviewer, for which we have both taken formal training, is to obtain detailed descriptions of events while remaining as unobtrusive as possible in order to avoid leading interviewees. Toward that end, interviewer questions are limited to the following: "What led up to the event?" "Who did and said what to whom?" "What happened next?" "What were you thinking or feeling at that moment?" and "What was the outcome?" Because the interviewer probes for thought processes that occurred while interviewees were engaging in specific behaviors, the CIIT uncovers information that may not be directly observable. Despite the retrospective nature of the accounts of events that are thus obtained, the validity and reliability levels of these descriptions are strong (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974), because events are limited to those occurring within approximately the past year; further, a very high level of detail is sought, and the interviewee selects the events. Events discussed in this study included specific team meetings, times when production goals were met or not met under adverse conditions, production and equipment changes, and other events of these types.

To gain understanding of the interplay of situational needs and concerns that influence when and why leaders use specific behaviors, we observed the teams' production processes, read newsletters and brochures, and collected data from the team members and managers. We spoke with team members through two venues: We audiotaped the six focus groups described earlier, in which 52 team members discussed what they wanted and didn't want from their external leaders. We also conducted one-hour individual audiotaped interviews with 2 team members from each of the 19 leaders' teams, including: (1) a current assistant to the leader (the assistantship was a rotating position that involved getting supplies and compiling re-

ports) and (2) any team member who was available at the interview time. Here, we used an adapted CIIT format in which interviewees described events involving the team and the leader.

To obtain manager views, we interviewed the ten managers to whom the 19 leaders reported. We asked them what mattered most for success in the external leader role. We also sent open-ended surveys to all 21 managers and directors in the plant, asking them to tell us the behaviors and strategies required of advisors if they were to become outstanding performers. Seventeen were returned, a number that constituted an 81 percent response rate.

### Phase 1 Data Analysis: Content Analysis of Leader Transcripts

**Content analyzed.** The leader interviews were transcribed verbatim (for superior leaders, the mean number of pages was 61.4, and for the average leaders, it was 60.8). We then content-analyzed the transcripts with the objective of creating a list of behaviors described as consistently used by superior performers and not described as consistently used by average performers (Boyatzis, 1998; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Thus, at this point we had a list showing which leaders in our sample were superior performers and which were average performers. With that information in hand, we began our content analysis by each selecting a random sample of six transcripts (three superior performers and three average; see Figure 1). Working independently, we microanalyzed each transcript through a detailed line-by-line exploration with the goal of becoming intimately familiar with each leader's described actions and modes of operation (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We took thorough running notes on each leader and compiled a summary for each that listed specific behavioral themes and supporting quotes. Because we were interested in boundary-spanning activities, we separated behaviors enacted inside a team from those enacted outside a team. We then used our summaries to compare and to contrast leaders and to search for and produce lists of similarities, differences, and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, we met to compare our detailed notes and summaries and to separate themes appearing on both our lists from those appearing on one list only. We also created an initial list of the themes described more often by superior performers.

**Themes tested and data further reduced.** We then independently examined two more random transcripts (one superior and one average) to search for the behaviors already on our lists and to look for

new behaviors. We met again to discuss the following: adding behaviors we now thought should be kept on the list, dropping behaviors we now thought were more idiosyncratic than common, the accuracy of the labels for the themes, and condensing similar themes. For example, at this point we chose to combine a theme we had labeled "giving feedback" with another we labeled "coaching" and kept the coaching label. We also continued to discuss our emerging list of the behaviors seen more often in the transcripts of the superior performers than in those of the average ones.

We then used these results to code and examine two more transcripts. After making a few more changes, we agreed that we had reached a point of saturation, a point at which no new behaviors were emerging from the data. A table identifying the behaviors and giving definitions and examples for each was then created and subsequently reduced by again combining similar behaviors. The final list was turned into a codebook of 11 behaviors that had been described as used consistently by superior performers and were not as often described as used by the average performers. Table 1 presents the 11 behaviors, their definitions, and sample quotes showing how these behaviors were discussed as exhibited by superior performers and how they were mentioned or not mentioned by team leaders, team members, and managers.

**Discriminant validity and interrater reliability assessed.** Two expert coders, who were blind to our hypotheses and to previous codings, coded the leader transcripts to determine coding reliability and to obtain frequency counts of how often each leader discussed displaying each behavior. The interview was the unit of analysis. Intercoder reliabilities were calculated for each code as the percent agreement between coders for all transcripts (mean = .92, median = .94, range = .78 to 1.0). After reliabilities had been calculated, the coders discussed and reached agreement on each coding discrepancy.

We checked discriminant validity using Mann-Whitney *U* comparisons to examine differences in the frequencies with which the superior and the average performers were coded as exhibiting each behavior. Table 2 presents frequencies and comparison statistics for the subsamples. All the behaviors, except diagnosing member behavior, were coded more frequently for the superior performers.

### Phase 2 Data Analysis: Data Integration and Model Development

**Outlines created.** At this point, we reviewed, integrated, and interpreted our data from all

**TABLE 1**  
**Definitions and Examples of Leader Behaviors within Each Function Taken from Interviews, Focus Groups, and Surveys**

Function and Behaviors	Outstanding Leaders	Average Leaders	Team Members	Managers
<b>Relating Social and political awareness</b> Demonstrated when a leader shows political understanding of power relationships in the organization or social understanding of the concerns and interests of members of important constituent groups, such as management, engineering, and maintenance.	"I do a lot of politicking . . . and I go out of my way to praise those guys [e.g., maintenance and engineering]. As a matter of fact, we [he and his team] even give those guys pins or has for doing a good job . . . I know their likes and dislikes." "I've got a good rapport with all those groups [peers, engineers, maintenance], and most of the things I ask for get done."	"This person [another advisor with a lot of clout with whom the interviewee had a poor relationship] sends a note to my manager, and to my manager, and to my colleagues that I directly work with saying, 'since when did this policy change? It wasn't a problem until ineffective supervision came into effect' [referring to the advisor being interviewed]. He used my name, mentioning 'ineffective supervision' numerous times . . . it's a career killer for me." "So, I guess my priorities aren't . . . in some people's mind, aren't set for [company name]. But that's the way I feel. So, I told them that right off the bat."	"The advisors should . . . talk with engineers." "The advisors should understand the big picture and the little picture." "Advisors must be well respected by their peers."	"Advisors must be viewed as fair and honest by their work teams." "Advisors must be trustworthy and well respected by their workforce."
<b>Building team trust (in the leader)</b> Demonstrated when a leader takes actions to let the team know he or she is fair, honest, reliable, and focused on the team's best interests.	"[Team member] said 'You guys paid 23K for this system. Even though it doesn't work right why would you want to do this for us?' [I said] 'Well, whatever it costs, if you guys aren't happy with it, we'll get another system . . . and make you guys happy, because you're the ones who are gonna have to work with it.'" "When you are out there [on the production floor], they talk to you, and they have problems, and I try to get back with them right away, even though it's hard because I've got [to watch] the whole line."	To the team: "Hey, if you don't want me, I don't want you." "To superior performance: "If you don't want me, I don't want you."	A team member of one leader with average performance stated, "We haven't seen [our advisor] in three months." A team member of an advisor with superior performance said, "If he's out there walking around and you need something, he'll stop what he's doing and he'll take care of it right then."	A team member of one leader with average performance stated, "We haven't seen [our advisor] in three months." A team member of an advisor with superior performance said, "He's here to help the people more than make himself look good."
<b>Caring about team members</b> Demonstrated when a leader engages in caring actions that validate team members and their individual needs and concerns.	This person had five or six days of absences that was actually charged against her attendance . . . when in fact they were days that should have been counted as unpaid leave of absence allowed by law! And it was a matter of getting with the right people. I had to call our insurance department . . . and we had to verify doctor's excuses . . . it was not a big problem, but it was big to her." "So, I talked to her about it . . . You know, what's more important—money or your kid? I said, 'I hope you're not abusing it [the family leave benefit].'" I said, 'As far as I know, you're not abusing it, and I'm gonna back you up as much as I can.'"	"So, I talked to her about it . . . You know, what's more important—money or your kid? I said, 'I hope you're not abusing it [the family leave benefit].'" I said, 'As far as I know, you're not abusing it, and I'm gonna back you up as much as I can.'"	A team member of an advisor with superior performance said, "He's here to help the people more than make himself look good."	A team member of one leader with average performance stated, "We haven't seen [our advisor] in three months." A team member of an advisor with superior performance said, "If he's out there walking around and you need something, he'll stop what he's doing and he'll take care of it right then."
<b>Scouting information from managers, peers, and specialists</b> Demonstrated when a leader makes an effort to contact someone in the organization to obtain information rather than settling for his or her current knowledge or understanding of an issue.	One team wanted to ignore a hiring policy so that it could hire a friend. The leader wanted to support the team's fight to make its own decision but wanted the team to do what was best for the organization. He scouted to clarify policies and seek advice. "So I talked to [HR representative], and asked what was kosher and what wasn't. I talked to advisors on the other two [production] lines out here as to how they fill their jobs . . . I talked to [manager], and got all the information on how this thing came about and what his opinion was. I went back and talked to [the person the team wanted to hire]."	"[Advisors have] contact with upper management and information . . . and can bring back information that we always need." "A good advisor gets new input [from the organization]." "A good advisor gets information from below and above."	"Advisors should do their homework to grasp understanding of an issue." "Advisors must have excellent business knowledge . . . and consider the impact of decisions on the entire system."	"Advisors should do their homework to grasp understanding of an issue." "Advisors must be well respected by their peers."

### **Diagnosing member behavior**

Demonstrated when a leader displays a diagnostic understanding of team or member behavior through analyzing verbal or nonverbal behavior.

"I said, you got knocked down this time because they deemed that the timing isn't right, but continue pumping away, it's gonna change. . . . Let's show them that we can do it." . . . You could see they thought I was full of you-know-what . . . you could see it in their eyes [the feeling that] they [management] knocked this down, they don't want us to do anything. You could see it in their body language."

"I have people that walk around with masks . . . like this guy. He's a big guy . . . got a soft heart, but he wants everybody to think he's a big tough . . . and he's not. Once you know him, he is a likable guy—real likable . . . he wants everybody to think he's this big macho man and it'll be my way or no way. He's really not that way at all."

### **Investigating problems systematically**

Demonstrated when a leader breaks a problem into small pieces and collects data within the team to systematically trace its cause.

"You've got to be on the floor . . . you really have to determine where your downtime is and why. I was tracking downtime everyday, every zone, every day. When the line is down I'm over there within a minute and ask what kind of problems we're having. Why are you down? What's the problem here? What do we gotta do?" [They would say] "Well we need another gun" . . . And [as] they're telling me this and this and this . . . I'm jotting it down. We made some engineering changes . . . all based on the feedback that I got."

### **Persuading Obtaining external support**

Demonstrated when a leader uses persuasion to shape the beliefs and behaviors of external constituents (such as managers and engineers) so that they will provide assistance, resources, or support for the needs or ideas of a team.

"At first, he [an engineer] was defensive and [he said], 'I designed it to do the job and it does the job.' [I said], 'We're not saying it doesn't, but there is some question about fatigue from holding it.' [He said], 'Oh come on.' I said, 'Well wait a minute, have you got it? Have you used it in a situation like this?' [He said], 'Well, I checked it out back there in the lab.' I said, 'Now wait a minute. If you used it on the line . . . every 12 seconds you were doing another one. Come and talk to the people that do that.'"

**Influencing the team**

Demonstrated when a leader uses persuasion or encouragement to shape the beliefs and behavior of team members so that they will make choices that increase team effectiveness or support organizational goals.

A good advisor "understands employees' needs."

An advisor should be a "good listener."

The advisors should "recognize people's needs."

An advisor should be a "good listener."

"Effective advisors are good problem solvers."

"Effective advisors utilize the team to solve problems."

Team members discussing outstanding issues [the feeling that] they [management] knocked this down, they don't want us to do anything. You could see it in their body language."

"I know there are a couple of things I have to watch out for, but I don't want to tell them [that is, the team], to get them all worried . . . I'll take care of it . . . I didn't want to get anybody alarmed."

Team members of ineffective advisors said: "Members are potentially holding back information that could improve product and process," and "[advisors] don't like it if you know more than they do."

"Effective advisors are good problem solvers not questions."

"Effective advisors utilize the team to solve problems."

"You have to have an advisor with authority [in the larger organization]."

A team member with an ineffective advisor said, "Upper management doesn't support [our advisor]."

"Effective advisors communicate the big picture to the team."

"Effective advisors establish and communicate clear objectives and expectations."

"A good advisor explains [organizational] needs and then gets [our] input."

A team member of a less effective advisor said, "they [advisors] don't want to give up information—it's their power."

A team member with an ineffective advisor said "I could not get a straight answer out of my advisor. He knew nothing."

"I went to his office [a low-level employee in scheduling]. I says 'I need help. I can't run it this way. Everybody's frustrated. . . . You're gonna have down time or we're gonna put the wrong parts on . . . we're constantly moving people . . . you can't move people and expect a line to keep running.' He says, 'Well, you know, we gotta give the customer what they need when they need it.' I says, 'If I don't get them out the door it don't make any difference.' He finally said he'd try to help but he never did. Nobody was gonna help me."

"I had good information . . . graphs, production reports, how our production was going . . . our quality reports. [I had information about] the organization as a whole and then I broke it down into their area . . . including gain-sharing information referring to if we have an improvement over the quarter before, they get a personal check . . . I was trying to grab their attention."

"They've [his team] worked in the same area for a long period of time, and they were very comfortable in their work . . . so I knew going in that it would be a tough group to try and persuade. I used all the cost information that we had . . . emphasizing that we need to continue to reduce costs to stay competitive."

**TABLE 1**  
**Continued**

Function and Behaviors	Outstanding Leaders	Average Leaders	Team Members	Managers
<b>Empowering Delegating authority</b> Demonstrated when a leader gives control, decision-making authority, and responsibility to the team.	"They came in, and set up their [equipment], . . . They very much had ownership. [They] knew what we needed to do and took it from there. This needed to be their baby. I was there to help them, came in and got greasy [setting things up] and whatever, but they were gonna be much more pleased with it if they did it themselves. It's an independence thing."	"They don't mind [not knowing everything that I do and decide behind the scenes], they're not involved in the end result like I am. But, they kind of laugh, you know 'what the heck is going on' and I say 'you don't want to know' sometimes."	"My advisor accepts my ideas." "The advisor's role is to empower teams to do it on their own."	"Effective advisors give reins to employees." One leader went to his manager about a controversial decision made by his team: "[My manager said] 'Well, change it, that's terrible.' I said, 'Well, wait a minute, we've got self-directed work teams here, I think we should use this approach first. . . .'"
<b>Flexibility regarding team decisions</b>	"They wanted to put on a skit, which was like unheard of in a departmental meeting. But I said 'okay' . . . [I said] 'It's your meeting.' They wanted to put on a skit and I thought, 'Oh, we could look so foolish on this, but all right let's take a risk! . . .' And they put on a skit . . . it was a very festive atmosphere, but it was totally new, it wasn't like a department meeting. And at the end [when] we were cleaning up, I saw team members slapping each other hands."	"I have one team . . . they do a good job . . . but they don't want to meet. [I said to them], 'If you don't want to meet it's all right as long as you let me know the problems that you are having . . . If you're having quality problems or equipment problems, [let me know]. I wouldn't tell my manager or anybody else, but I don't force them.'"	"Team members in three of the six focus groups brought up the importance of advisors being "open minded about team decisions" and of "believing in" team ideas."	"Advisors should let people take risks." Flexibility around team decisions was said to be important by only 2 of the 17 managers we surveyed.
<b>Coaching</b>	Demonstrated when a leader takes steps to strengthen the team and the contributions of its members through encouragement, feedback, and the development of knowledge and skills.	"Well, the first couple of meetings, I met with the team leader prior to the meeting and helped [her] develop an agenda. . . . Well, I would get [her] off the line. . . . she'd make some suggestions, and I would make some suggestions, and in between the two, we'd come up with an agreeable agenda."	A superior leader discussed coaching and encouraging a team member that had great potential . . . "He was the kind of individual that didn't really need me to be there to get work done. Unfortunately, to get advanced here, you have to have additional schooling. He was just short of having his degree . . . he started a family . . . it's hard to go back sometimes, but you've got to do that. I have kids; I know how hard it is. So I worked on this person . . . you ought to be doing . . . you want to be there . . . you know you can.' And to make a long story short that person now is a temporary advisor."	"Advisors should take care of team training needs." "An effective advisor provides opportunities for team and member development."

TABLE 2  
Descriptive Statistics and Comparisons between the Superior and Average Leaders<sup>a</sup>

Function	Leadership Behavior	Overall		Superior		Average		<i>U</i> <sup>b</sup>
		Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
Relating	Social and political awareness	4.16	3.34	6.20	3.12	1.89	1.76	9.50**
	Caring for team members	4.00	3.21	5.40	3.53	2.44	2.01	21.50*
	Building team trust	2.95	2.30	4.00	2.49	1.78	1.39	19.50*
Scouting	Seeking information from managers	1.21	1.40	2.00	1.49	0.33	0.50	15.00**
	Seeking information from peers	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.08	0.44	0.53	18.50**
	Seeking information from specialists	2.68	2.31	3.60	2.17	1.67	2.12	16.00**
	Diagnosing member behavior	16.95	6.24	18.10	5.69	15.67	6.91	33.00
	Investigating problems systematically	5.21	3.78	6.80	3.58	3.44	3.32	20.00*
Persuading	Obtaining external support	2.47	3.34	3.10	2.85	1.78	3.87	22.00*
	Influencing the team	2.74	2.45	3.90	2.77	1.44	1.13	18.00*
Empowering	Delegating authority	2.42	3.66	3.70	4.57	1.00	1.50	20.00*
	Flexibility regarding team decisions	1.11	1.56	1.90	1.79	0.22	0.44	18.50**
	Coaching	2.42	2.09	3.50	1.84	1.22	1.72	14.00**

<sup>a</sup> For the overall sample,  $n = 19$ . For the superior performers subsample,  $n = 10$ , and for the average performers,  $n = 9$ .

<sup>b</sup> These are Mann-Whitney nonparametric comparisons.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Two-tailed tests.

sources (leaders, team members, managers, and research and field notes) to identify the function each behavior served and to uncover the process through which the behaviors combined to facilitate team self-management and effectiveness. The first stage in data interpretation involved repeatedly reading through all of our data and creating an outline for each of the 11 behaviors that included (1) team leader narratives that had been coded for the behavior, (2) team member narratives that showed leader use of the behavior or recommended its use, (3) managers' narratives that showed leader use of the behavior or recommended its use, and (4) for each of these narratives, our interpretation of the context surrounding the statement and the consequences of the behavior. To develop these interpretations, we answered questions that Strauss and Corbin (1998: 69, 77) suggested as useful for understanding context: With whom is an interaction or exchange occurring or being recommended and why? Who begins or is expected to begin this interaction or exchange? What are the consequences of engaging in this behavior, and are these the same or different for other leaders and other situations? What can the narratives tell us about the purpose or function served by this behavior?

For example, the information in our outlines revealed that the consequence of diagnosing team member behavior and of systematically collecting data within the team was the acquisition of information that these busy leaders would otherwise

have not obtained. Leaders in the subsample of superior performers consistently described initiating these scouting behaviors because they provided information that was valuable in future interactions inside and outside of the teams.

**Behaviors categorized.** After several discussions about the intent and consequence of each behavior, we inductively categorized them into four functional clusters: relating, scouting, persuading, and empowering. Each function, except empowering, included behaviors focused on teams and behaviors focused on members of the organization. The categories in Yukl's (1989) taxonomy fit well with these functions, but we chose labels that more accurately described the intent or purpose behind the actions of the best-performing external leaders. For example, we used "relating" rather than "relationship building" because these leaders were not only focused on developing kinship, but also on understanding and connecting with the interests, needs, and perspectives that influenced the behavior of team and organization members. We should note that Yukl's ideas were not imposed on our data; they had informed our thinking, but they earned their way into our interpretation.

**Process analyzed.** We then returned to our outlines, which were now organized by function. In this stage we focused on identifying the process through which the functions were combined, paying particular attention to when and why behaviors were focused on teams or on members of the larger

organization. Following Strauss and Corbin (1998: 163–169), we examined the outlines looking for sequences of interactions and actions and sought to understand how they varied in response to changing conditions. We asked ourselves questions Strauss and Corbin recommended for uncovering process, including: What conditions have contributed to the context in which the leader behavior emerges as useful? What conditions or activities connect one sequence of events to another? How do the consequences of one set of behaviors and interactions play into subsequent behaviors and interactions? For example, team members' narratives revealed that they were more willing to share their needs, problems, and ideas with leaders they trusted to have their best interests in mind. The consistency with which we saw this link in team member and leader transcripts led us to include in our model a connection between leader behaviors focused on building trust and leader ability to scout information from a team. Also, both the leader and manager narratives revealed that managers were more likely to support team initiatives if external leaders shared supporting information from several sources. Our data consistently showed that leaders held such information if they had searched or scouted for it from their team members and other members of the organization. This link was the basis of the connection between scouting and obtaining external support shown in our model.

**Model developed.** As our theory emerged, we continually tested and retested it on the critical

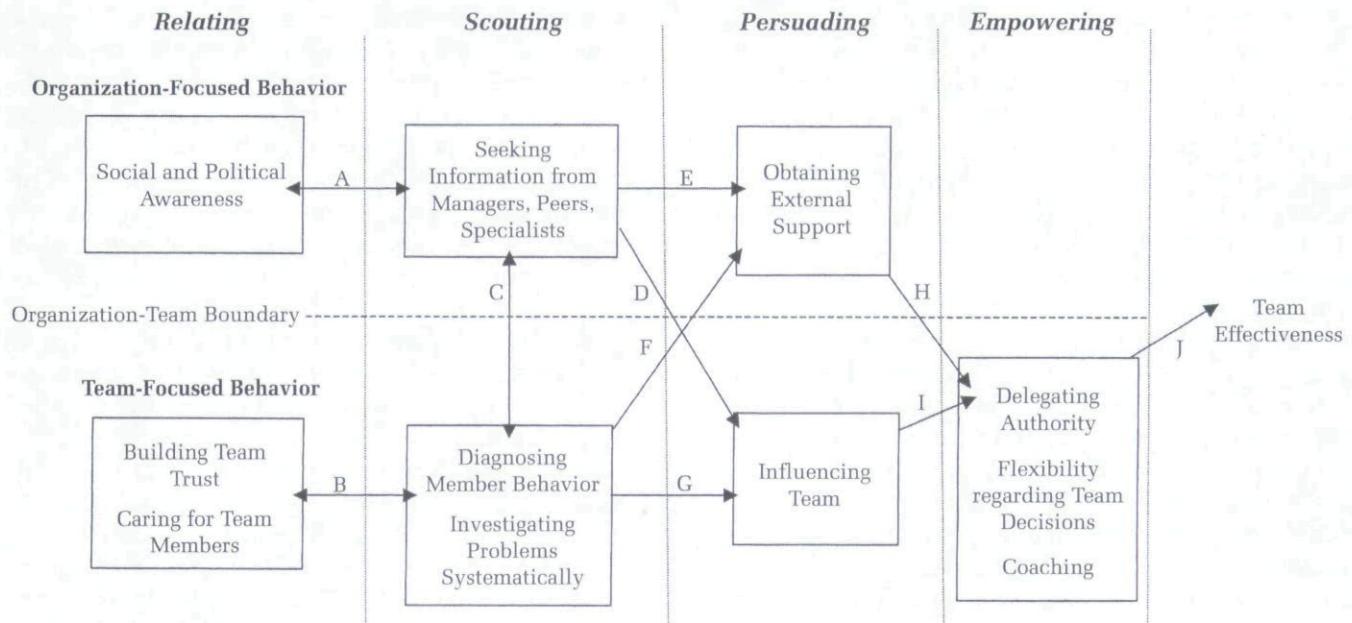
incidents described in the leader and team member interviews. Our iterative tests and discussions eventually led to our final process model of effective external leader behavior, which shows when and why the external leaders with superior performance engaged in specific behaviors. This model, described below, consistently fit the mode of operation used by these leaders. Average performers discussed using the behaviors less often and used the process incompletely.

## RESULTS

### The Process of Effective External Leadership: A Boundary-Spanning Model

**Overview.** A central theme in our data was that superior performers used their location at the team-organization interface, or boundary-spanning position, to their advantage. As the arrows in Figure 2 show, they moved back and forth between their teams and the organization engaging in four categories of behavior, each with its own purpose: (1) *relating* with team and organization members and building political awareness, (2) *scouting* information and staying abreast of activities inside and outside their teams, (3) *persuading* their teams to attend to organization needs and persuading organization members to attend to team needs, and (4) *empowering* their teams. Leader behaviors in these categories facilitated self-managing work team effectiveness. We considered these teams' ef-

**FIGURE 2**  
An Inductive Boundary-Spanning Model of Effective External Team Leader Behavior



fectiveness to be a manifestation of effective external leadership (see Hogan et al., 1994).

Below, we organize our findings by these four categories or functions of leader behavior. Within the description of each function are two subsections: (1) organization-focused behavior and (2) team-focused behavior. In each subsection we also discuss the process through which these behaviors are linked to other behaviors in the model. Table 1 presents quotes from the superior performers that illustrate the behaviors within each function, quotes from average performers (when available) to illustrate how their behavior differed, and quotes from team members and managers that illustrate their perspectives on the leader behaviors.

## Relating

Relating involved developing political and social awareness and relationships. The leaders' boundary-spanning position meant that they were not automatically connected either with management or with their teams. In fact, the placement of their offices separated them from both. Our data reveal that the key purpose of the behaviors in this function was the access created to those who could provide information to enable a leader to intervene where and when necessary.

**Organization-focused behavior.** At the organizational level, relating consisted of a set of behaviors we labeled "social and political awareness." The code was applied when a leader demonstrated an understanding of the organizational system that included a focus on the needs, concerns, and decision-making criteria of groups like management and engineering. The external leaders with superior performance consistently discussed behaving in ways that recognized the importance of social and political awareness in the larger organization (see Table 1 for quotes). Average performers focused less on understanding the political system. Several complained of their poor relationships with groups and individuals in the larger organization.

Arrow A in Figure 2 shows that those leaders who demonstrated social and political awareness developed access to people and places that allowed them to scout and obtain information that ultimately helped team performance. For example, one best-performing leader said, "I don't think I've alienated anybody [in the larger organization] . . . you can get moved to the top of the list for things in a hurry if you're not pissing people off." Since average leaders placed less emphasis on understanding the political system and members of the larger organization, they were less able to obtain information or resources for their teams. One aver-

age leader opened his interview with complaints about other areas in the plant. Later, when discussing an incident in which he could not get what he needed from engineering, this leader said, "When the engineers come down here you tell them what's wrong [and] they don't seem to understand what you're saying to them . . . there's a lot of young engineers." He failed to recognize the value of building relationships with engineers, or of building an awareness of their perspective.

Data from the managers of the external leaders supported the link between social and political awareness and access to people and places where leaders could scout information about organizational priorities and agendas. Managers preferred interacting and working with leaders who understood their needs and concerns. Hence, arrow A is double-sided: understanding a manager's concerns provided more access to the manager and an increased opportunity to build social and political awareness. Fourteen of the 17 managers surveyed said that to be successful in the external leader role, an individual had to understand the needs of his or her manager and of the organization.

**Team-focused behavior.** At the team level, relating consisted of two behaviors: building team trust and caring for team members. Leaders demonstrated building trust by showing their teams they were fair, reliable, and focused on their teams' best interests. Without trust, team members felt vulnerable and subject to the whims of their leaders (Dirks, 2000; see Table 1 for quotes).

Leaders demonstrated caring for team members when they discussed engaging in care-giving actions that showed respect and concern for individual team members. There was no shortage of opportunities to exhibit care for members. Leaders discussed many events that involved helping members with matters such as early paycheck delivery or personal time off from work. Each leader was typically responsible for 45 team members (five teams), many of whom couldn't afford to take a sick day or an unpaid absence. Complicated personal issues were a constant challenge. Average performers were more likely to view personal problems as obstacles. Superior performers recognized care giving as an opportunity to build relationships and as part of their role. Kahn (1998) argued that even simple caring behaviors strengthen the bonds between individuals. Team member interviews showed that above all else, team members wanted leaders they knew had their best interests in mind.

As arrow B in Figure 2 shows, building team trust and caring for members created a relational foundation that permitted leaders, despite their infrequent presence, to ask questions and to access can-

did information from team members on their ideas, needs, problems, and the like. Leaders had limited time with any one team. Scouting for information enabled a leader to develop timely and accurate diagnoses of problems and to intervene appropriately to help the team.

One superior performer discussed how he built trust and obtained information at the same time. He said, "I do what I call 'a miracle mile.' I go around and talk to each individual on the line every day . . . a personal touch. . . . I walk up, 'Hi, how're you doing today? Everything okay?' Once in a while, they'll say, 'Yeah, we're having a problem with this,' and it gives me the opportunity to dive right in there." This example shows how relating enables access to insider information. It also shows the reverse: seeking inside information allowed a leader to demonstrate trustworthiness and build trust (see double-sided arrow B, in Figure 2, connecting relating and scouting).

In contrast, one average performer who failed to build team trust was caught unawares when "impeached" by her team. At first, the team asked her to stop coming to meetings, making her less able to scout information or to build trust. Eventually, the team asked management to replace her. Another advisor explained, "They did not like [her] . . . did not trust [her]." Moreover, her surprise at being removed from the team revealed her lack of information or awareness about the team's concerns.

While the superior performers developed good relationships inside and outside their teams, we found that the average performers frequently developed one or the other, but not both. For example, the events described by one average performer showed he had a good relationship with his team members. He said, "I have a very good rapport with my people. They're very open to me . . . they know I will listen." However, his interview also revealed that his manager did not back his decisions and that other advisors complained about him to management. Other average performers focused primarily on building external relationships and ignored their teams. For example, the "impeached" leader discussed above described a very good relationship with her manager. In fact, after her impeachment he merely assigned her to a different team.

Team member interviews supported the link between the relating function and team's willingness to share information and to work *with* a leader. The team members in all six focus groups also spoke about preferring to work with leaders (1) who cared about them as people, (2) whom they trusted to be honest, and (3) who followed through when asked for help.

## Scouting

Scouting involved searching for information inside the organization and a team to identify and clarify organizational and team needs. Our data reveal that this information was essential for persuading teams to make decisions that supported the organization and for persuading members of the organization to make decisions that supported the teams.

**Organization-focused behavior.** The superior performers discussed accessing information in the organization by approaching their contacts. Informal interactions are known to be an effective way of acquiring current and timely information (March & Simon, 1958). They were so common among the superior performers that we broke the behavior into three subcategories: seeking information from managers, seeking information from peers, and seeking information from specialists.

As shown by arrows C, D, and E in Figure 2, scouted information provided insightful perspectives and was a powerful tool for influencing the actions and decisions of one's teams and members of the larger organization. One superior performer discussed how he used scouted information to influence the choices made by one of his new teams. He obtained statistics from his friends in accounting for use in persuading this struggling team to think of ways to improve its productivity. He said, "[I] showed numbers of what happens [to profits] if the line is down for any amount of time, the way it equates out per hour, or per minute. They seemed to be in awe of the numbers." Three months after this team was empowered to make changes to increase its productivity, it was meeting its production goals.

As shown in Figure 2, our data reveal that leaders who demonstrated social and political awareness in the organization were better able to scout and retrieve useful information from organization members. The data also reveal that superior performers often described this information as an impetus or indication of the need to collect additional information from team members. Information from several sources was of strategic use for influencing teams to act in ways that supported the organization, and/or for organization members to act in ways that supported a team (arrows C, D, and E in Figure 2). Information was an important resource for external leaders.

Data from managers supported the link between scouting information and obtaining external support. Managers said they wanted to work with leaders who came to them with well-supported recommendations, were proactive about solving

problems, and needed little direction. Approaching managers with requests for support that were backed up by scouted data and information met those requirements.

**Team-focused behavior.** As mentioned above, we found that the leaders' boundary-spanning position meant that they spent most of their time outside any one team and were rarely present during critical team events. Therefore, they also had to scout for information inside their own teams. The best-performing leaders scouted team information through two primary activities (see the quotes in Table 1): diagnosing member behavior and investigating problems systematically. The superior performers continually diagnosed member behavior in order to obtain information about team and member needs, problems, strengths, and weaknesses. They did this primarily by studying and interpreting team member verbal and nonverbal behavior.

The second activity, investigating problems systematically, involved systematically collecting data and analyzing it to trace the cause of a problem. For the superior performers, problem solving usually began inside a team with thorough problem identification and data collection (for instance, asking questions and diagnosing behavior) to understand team member perspectives on a problem, its causes, and its solution (see Table 1 for leader quotes).

As shown by arrows C, F, and G in Figure 2, scouting data inside a team enabled the leader to assist it by (1) collecting additional information about the issue in the larger organization (arrow C), (2) seeking external resources or support to help solve the problem (arrow F), and/or (3) intervening to influence the team's response to the problem (arrow G).

One leader with superior performance discussed how he investigated a problem systematically by scouting for information inside and outside his team and by ultimately using the information to persuade his manager to support his team. The engineering department had decided that this team needed one less member on its production line. The team adamantly disagreed. The leader went directly to his team members to collect information about their perspective. He then visited engineering to ask about their perspective. He said, "I listened to what the [team] had to say . . . in their opinion [the engineers] weren't listening . . . I decided to start making some contacts and calling. When I talked to the lead engineer, I could understand why the team felt the way they did because he was the type of engineer that doesn't like to be challenged. So, I contacted [my manager] and told him exactly where we were with the situation and what I felt about it. I said, 'I think we need to take

a different approach otherwise it's not gonna go away . . . I think [the team] is just looking for people to listen to them.'" The manager stepped in and asked engineering to conduct a time and motion study that revealed the team needed the extra person. This outcome boosted team members' confidence in their task expertise.

The average performers were more likely to attempt problem solving with less data or input from a team. This meant they were less informed of team needs, concerns, and perspectives and had less information for persuading management and their teams to support one another. As arrow B indicates, it also resulted in lost opportunities to build relationships with team members.

Team member comments supported the link between scouting information and influencing teams. All six of the team focus groups expressed a preference for leaders who asked them questions and listened to their ideas. Team members also discussed the importance of having leaders who provided them with information from the broader organization that they were unable to access themselves. In a comment about engineers making themselves inaccessible to team members, one team member stated, "Engineers don't have time for my drivel."

### Persuading

Persuading occurred when leaders worked to influence members of the organization to support their teams and to influence team members to set priorities that supported organizational goals. Successful persuasion allowed a leader to empower his or her teams and to generate the resources necessary for team success.

**Organization-focused behavior.** At the organizational level, persuading consisted of behaviors we labeled "obtaining external support." The code was applied when a leader discussed working to convince external constituents (such as managers and engineers) of the importance of team concerns and/or working to support the team. It sometimes involved keeping someone (such as a manager or engineer) from trying to reject a team's decision. The behavior is similar to the ambassadorial behavior found to be critical to the success of product development teams (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992) and to the issue-selling behavior found critical when working with top management (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; see Table 1 for quotes).

As arrow H in Figure 2 shows, obtaining external support provided the resources and "buy-in" that allowed a leader to empower a team and to increase its decision-making authority with more confi-

dence. Management approval and external resources enabled a team to control and implement its ideas with a higher probability of success and boosted the team's sense of independence and responsibility—cornerstones of self-managing work team effectiveness (Cohen, 1994). For example, one best-performing leader discussed how one of his teams had researched options for fixing a production problem and had developed a solution. The leader described a meeting he and another advisor (who would be affected by the solution) held with his manager to seek support for the team's decision. Management support would enable the leader to empower the team to initiate its solution. He knew it was going to be tough to persuade his manager to accept the team's seemingly expensive solution. He said, "We sat down and discussed it . . . talked to [the manager] about the different scenarios [the team] had come up with and presented the [chosen] scenario. And right away, the manager interrupted us and said, 'Well, cost-wise [a different scenario] would be better. . . .' We interjected and said yes initially, but when you look at the quality aspect of it, productivity aspect of it, scheduling and manpower. . . ." In the end, they changed the manager's opinion and obtained his support for the team's decision. This success enabled the leader to empower his team to initiate its solution (see arrow H in Figure 2, showing the link between external support and delegation).

Average leaders discussed seeking external support less frequently and indicated less success when they did seek it; these negative factors had a negative influence on their ability and willingness to empower their teams. For example, one average performer described his unsuccessful attempt to persuade a scheduling employee to stop scheduling one of his teams to run small batches of specialty products. These products required the team to perform time-consuming machine changes that left it no time for working on other important team projects. No change was made. Thus, despite their complaints, his team members continued to be rigidly tied to the production line, and he was unable to empower them with responsibilities beyond the line. The team's performance remained poor. This leader's attempt to obtain external support differed in two clear ways from the attempts made by his peers with superior performance. First, he did not collect data to back up his request. As noted, our findings reveal that data and information increased the probability of obtaining external support. His request would have been strengthened if he had brought data comparing the number of product changes made by his team to those made by other teams. Second, lack of political awareness led him

to approach a scheduling employee rather than a manager with power to make the change. This example emphasizes the links in our model between social and political awareness, obtaining information, and persuading external constituents. Lack of social and political awareness ultimately hurt a leader's ability to empower his or her teams.

**Team-focused behavior.** At the team level, leaders engaged in a similar behavior we labeled "influencing the team." This behavior sometimes involved what Manz and Sims (1987) labeled "encouraging" a team to make effective choices (see Table 1 for quotes).

As arrow I in Figure 2 shows, influencing a team to understand the implications of their decisions and actions enabled a leader to fully empower the team. As discussed, we found the use of data and information to be a leader's most powerful tool for encouraging or influencing their teams. Common influence tactics included these: sharing information about how team decisions and actions affected the organization's goals, sharing information about how team decisions and actions affected members' payoffs from the company's gain-sharing program, and creating elaborate charts, graphs, and/or reports to capture the attention of team members. For example, one leader with superior performance said the following about his successful attempt to influence one of his teams to change its mind about shutting their production line off for breaks: "[I] showed them the numbers . . . and I talked about incentives. [I said] 'If somebody is cutting the line off just to eat a sandwich . . . it is costing everybody.' We've got this performance share kind of thing . . . when you start hitting somebody in the pocket, then they start thinking. [I said] 'When we make a good [product] this is money that comes back to us. Either you want it or you don't.'"

The team was then delegated responsibility for increasing its production enough to meet its production goals. The team took ownership of this task and before long it was meeting these goals. The team decided to stop shutting off the line for breaks and made other changes as well, including deciding to work an extra five minutes at the end of each shift. The leader said, "My manager asked me if I asked them to do it. I never asked . . . and they do it [work the extra five minutes] right now still."

Members of all six focus groups discussed the importance of having a leader who shared input and circulated information. Although team members did not realize that the successful passing of information was linked to a leader's choice to delegate decisions to a team, they fully understood that the information improved their ability to make effective decisions.

## Empowering

Empowering involved delegating decision authority and supporting that delegation. Hollander and Offermann (1990) distinguished between sharing power (participation) and distributing power (empowerment). Our data revealed that the self-managing work teams were merely participating until the external leader distributed power by delegating and supporting decisions. Well-supported empowerment led to teams' increasing their competence as self-managing work teams, increased ownership over tasks and responsibilities, and stronger team performance.

**Team-focused behavior.** The final function of leader behavior, empowerment, includes a set of three team-focused behaviors: delegating authority, flexibility regarding team decisions, and coaching. Our interviews supported Argyris's (1998) claim that delegating is highly stressful for leaders because they are held responsible for team decisions and outcomes. The leaders we studied were required to share power and delegate authority. However, they had discretion over the amount and type of authority delegated.

As shown through arrow J in Figure 2, our data revealed that delegating authority was linked to team effectiveness. For example, one superior performer described an event in which his team was having its assembly line expanded, an activity that was notorious for creating persistent problems and slowing down production. The event began when the leader's contacts in engineering told him about the expansion, shared with him drawings of their new design, and asked for his input. Instead of giving his input, he brought the drawings to the next team meeting, where he shared the information he had received from the engineer, stirred team interest in getting involved, and began influencing some of their ideas about the expansion. Once he recognized that team members understood the situation and issues, he delegated to them the decision authority for the project.

In recounting a later meeting between the lead engineer and the team, the leader said, "The only thing that stood out was watching the team have a lot of input. . . I never said one word. . . just sat there and listened to them talk. . . I was there for support. . . The [team] took the drawing, drew in workstations. . . and then gave it to the engineer." When the expansion was implemented, as usual, problems surfaced. Again, the team was delegated full responsibility for identifying and solving these problems and for making recommendations to the engineers. The following quote also shows the leader supporting the team's empowerment by

demonstrating flexibility around team decisions, the second behavior within the empowering function: "Somebody would call me over and go 'This probably needs to be over here. . . or what do you think about moving this over there?' [I would say], 'If you think it will work over here, by all means do it.'" By the end, the team's excitement and sense of ownership was at an all-time high and the team was back to meeting its production goals in a record-breaking two days.

Average leaders discussed delegating authority less often and regularly spoke of making decisions and solving team problems covertly. Evidence revealed that they were not reluctant to delegate because the teams they led were poorer performers. Many superior performers discussed events involving their transfers to poor teams to improve their performance. Our model shows how superior performers set up delegation for success so that teams took ownership of their work and performed well. This is not to say that superior performers delegated all decisions. They also stepped in and made decisions without team input, but this was not as common an event as it was among the average performers. One superior performer said, "The team concept is a very good idea, but [not] when you need to get something done right away. I would say that for about 90 percent of the decisions I involve the teams."

Although delegation was fundamental to team ownership, only 43 percent of the managers we surveyed mentioned the importance of delegating authority to teams, while 77 percent listed the need for positive results in the forms of increased quality and productivity. Also, few team members discussed their desire for decision responsibility, although three of the six focus groups discussed the link between freedom to do their job the way they wished and team performance. These findings illustrate what we found to be a clear paradox in the external leader role. Despite the discomfort most leaders faced with delegating decisions for which they were held responsible, they had to be the champions of team self-management. The superior and average performers consistently spoke of feeling stuck in the middle between team members who "want to be told what to do every day" and those who "go right to the director" if they feel they are not empowered enough. Also, managers were asking the leaders to delegate authority and in the same breath telling them to "make" their teams comply.

Even more difficult than delegating was the second behavior in this function: flexibility regarding team decisions. Sometimes teams would create solutions that leaders told us were "outlandish" or

could make them "look bad." But, as the example discussed above illustrates, if these teams asked for their external leaders' opinion, the superior performers, who were trying to cultivate the sense of ownership required for team self-management and successful performance, replied with comments such as: "It's not what *I* think, it's what *you* think." Only 2 of the 17 managers we surveyed mentioned flexibility around team decisions as important to leader performance, yet team members in three of the six focus groups raised the importance of being "open minded about team decisions" and of "believing in" team ideas.

The final behavior, coaching, involved strengthening team member contributions, a team's confidence, and its ability to manage itself by working one-on-one with employees, giving feedback to the team, and modeling behaviors such as effective meeting facilitation. Theory and research have emphasized coaching as a primary part of the external leader role and as useful for helping a team to face both novel and routine situations (Hackman, 1986; Wageman, 1997, 2001).

We found that because external leaders were not present for most day-to-day team activities, coaching was an important part of the empowerment function and its link to team effectiveness. It provided the dual purposes of increasing the competence and performance of team members and of a team as a whole, and of building leader and team confidence in team actions. As discussed, data also revealed that a leader's ability to coach effectively was improved by the groundwork laid through building caring, trusting relationships, scouting information to determine individual and team needs, informing and influencing team actions, and obtaining external resources.

One team member talked about how his team's external leader, a superior performer, improved his team's sense of confidence and its performance by providing feedback to a teammate. The teammate was hearing- and speech-impaired, and the team had been having problems with his performance. They had complained to their previous advisor but had been told to "work with him." When the new (best-performing) advisor was transferred to their team, team members again shared their complaints. The interviewee recalled how the leader handled the situation: "He did his homework. . . . He came in on a Saturday and talked to us about what we thought and how we felt. He said it was an HR factor and it was a handicap factor and a safety factor. [Within a week], he came back and had a meeting with the guy, sat him down, and gave him a choice to either keep the job or go on to another job . . . he told him his work has been lacking and

[he had been taking] too many smoke breaks. I thought he handled it really well because [the team member] came back and he was not angry. He wrote us a note and said, 'If there is anything you want me to do and I'm not doing it, please tell me, please write it down. I didn't know.'" Team performance improved.

## DISCUSSION

### Contributions

Our key objective in this study was to answer long-standing questions about the leadership of self-managing work teams by developing a comprehensive model of the actions and strategies that distinguish the performance of effective external leaders. The model we present can benefit the growing number of organizations utilizing self-managing work teams (Lawler, 1986, 1998; Tannycz, 1997). It can also shed light on the role of leadership in the 21st century as leaders become increasingly "external" to the day-to-day activities of empowered and distributed workforces.

Our data reveal how behaviors within four leadership functions and their internally and externally focused dimensions support one another over time and how a leader's movement between a team and an organization affects self-managing work teams' effectiveness. It shows that effective external leaders build relationships and seek to understand the perspectives both of team members and of those in other positions in an organization. Good relationships and political awareness enable leaders to access key information in both contexts and to use it to define team and organizational needs. These capabilities allow the leader to focus on the most relevant needs, to use the information to persuade teams to think and behave in ways that facilitate organization effectiveness, and to persuade others in their organization to think and behave in ways that increase team effectiveness. This influence enables a leader to fully empower his or her team, which leads the team to take increased ownership of outcomes.

In contrast to the prevailing view that external leaders should take a hands-off approach and focus on asking questions (Courtright et al., 1989) and on encouraging appropriate strategies (Manz & Sims, 1987), our study found that effective external leadership involves a wider range of hands-on and hands-off strategies and behaviors. Our results make three contributions to current knowledge. First, they emphasize the importance of boundary-spanning activity to success in the external leader role. Theorists have proposed boundary spanning

to be central to the role (see Cohen et al., 1997; Cordery & Wall, 1985; Cummings, 1978; Hackman, 1986), yet its relevance has never been studied. We found it to be so fundamental that each leadership function, except empowerment, had dimensions focused internally toward teams and externally toward their encompassing organization.

Our data suggest that for an external leader, spanning boundaries and shifting attention and allegiance back and forth from a team to an organization requires conscious strategic maneuvering. External leaders who exhibited average performance tended to use strategic maneuvers less and to focus their energy in one area or the other, but not both. Team members' and managers' poor understanding of the leadership tasks required on the *other* side of the boundary contributed to the ambiguity around boundary spanning. A team's members wanted their leader's loyalty to be with the team, while managers, having little appreciation for the intricacies of team empowerment, felt the leaders should simply make things happen. The centrality of boundary spanning in this environment, coupled with the lack of understanding of its centrality, has likely contributed to the role ambiguity often experienced by external leaders. Indeed, boundary spanning is known to contribute to role ambiguity (that is, lack of clarity about expectations), and role conflict (conflicting job demands) (Lysonski, Nilakant, & Wilemon, 1989; Miles, 1976).

Our second contribution is in our infusion of dynamism into theory on the external leader role. By initiating a shift from a static to a dynamic conceptualization of the role, our results support and add to current knowledge. They place previous findings into the larger context and process of the full role by revealing when and why specific strategies and behaviors improve team effectiveness. For example, Courtright and colleagues (1989) found that external leaders were more likely than traditional leaders to ask questions rather than issue orders. Our results take those findings further by suggesting that questions can serve one of four leadership functions—relating, scouting, persuading, and empowering—aimed at improving team success. Questions aimed at building relationships might differ from those aimed at scouting information about team needs. Our results also show that the encouraging behaviors identified in Manz and Sims's study (1987) are only one step of the leadership process. We suggest that encouragement becomes more meaningful when leaders develop caring, trusting relationships with their teams and have scouted information to determine what type of actions to encourage. Encouragement is also use-

ful as a coaching technique that can build skills and confidence.

We were able to put these behaviors into context because we used an in-depth qualitative methodology focusing on leader perspectives and added the perspectives of the leaders' key constituents, their team members and their managers. Past research on external team leadership has focused primarily on the perspectives of team members (Cohen et al., 1997), despite their incomplete view of the leader role. Our methodology allowed us to ask external leaders what they were thinking and feeling as they engaged in specific actions and to ask managers and team members what they were thinking and feeling as team leaders carried out specific actions. This method allowed us an intimate view of behaviors, thoughts, strategies, and constituent reactions.

Our third contribution is our further clarification of how the self-managing context influences the behavior of effective leaders. Our literature review raised five unanswered questions about how the context for external leaders differs from that of traditional leaders and how this affects leader behavior. Our first research question asks what external leaders do to influence those inside and outside of their teams and how their modes of influence facilitate team self-management and effectiveness. Our findings support previous research (Courtright et al., 1989) suggesting that, unlike traditional leaders who are in a position to legitimately command actions, external leaders must engage in a less direct form of influence. The best-performing leaders we studied relied on referent and expert power to influence their teams and members of the larger organization. (Referent power is a form of personal power held by a leader whose followers wish to identify with, imitate, and remain loyal to the leader; see French and Raven [1959].) They acquired these forms of power by building political awareness and relationships with a wide variety of groups and individuals. The information they obtained through these relationships established their expert power and enabled them to persuade their constituents to accept their ideas. Referent and expert power have been found to be the most likely forms of power to engage follower commitment, rather than compliance (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Since commitment is critical for successful team self-management (Cummings, 1978), it makes sense that influence through referent and expert power facilitates team self-management and effectiveness.

Our second question asks whether effective external leaders focus on building relationships inside and/or outside of their teams and how relationships affect team self-management and effectiveness. Research examining supervision from a

follower's perspective has found the quality of leader-follower relationships to be central to effective leadership (Fleishman, 1953; Stogdill & Coons, 1957). We found that self-managing work team members viewed their relationships with their leaders as critical to their willingness to cooperate. It was so important to the process of effective external leadership that it became the foundation of our model. Team members universally noticed the explicit and implicit messages of care and respect sent by their leaders. As our data reveal, strong leader-member relationships provided leaders with the access and information that increased their ability to improve team self-management and effectiveness.

Relationships developed in the larger organization were also fundamental for the boundary-spanning role that was so central to team leader success. Leaders were responsible for several teams conducting different tasks. This complexity required leaders to have access to a variety of external resources and information. Good organizational relationships facilitated that access. Research shows that information obtained through boundary spanning is a powerful resource for influencing organization-level decisions (Pettigrew, 1972) and for improving team decisions and team effectiveness (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Tushman & Katz, 1980). It also reveals that when team members take on boundary-spanning functions, it can divert teams' focus away from their task (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), making it an inefficient and ineffective method of communicating externally (Katz & Tushman, 1979). Our results suggest that when a team's external leader takes over the boundary-spanning role, team success is enabled.

Our third question asks whether external leaders scouted and disseminated information among teams and the broader organization and how this might facilitate team self-management and effectiveness. As discussed above, leaders' ability to influence actions and decisions inside and outside teams relied heavily on their ability to scout and share information. Information was a powerful resource that effective external leaders accumulated and used to their advantage.

Our fourth and fifth questions ask about the behaviors and strategies that enable a leader to empower his or her teams and how these strategies combine to facilitate team self-management and effectiveness. We integrated data from several sources to produce a process model revealing how effective leader behaviors and strategies lay the groundwork for successful team empowerment. Our findings support Kirkman and Rosen's (1997) proposal that team empowerment is a multidimen-

sional construct that involves both autonomy in relation to meaningful issues and a team's confidence in its ability to succeed. Our results also support their findings showing that team leader behavior is a predictor of the level of team empowerment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).

Our model outlines successful leadership functions and shows how and why they lead to success, but it does not necessarily define one best way to lead self-managing teams. The successful leaders we studied carried out each function in highly diverse ways. For example, our interview with one superior performer revealed his loose and easy style and sharp sense of humor. His interview and those with his team members revealed that his humor helped him build relationships and to influence and coach in nonthreatening ways. Another superior performer obtained the same results using a well-organized and serious style. In his case, it was his conscientiousness that helped him build trust and relationships and achieve influence inside and outside his teams. Our model reveals the process through which the actions and interactions of leaders, whatever their style, were aligned, purposeful, and focused on enabling the delegation of decision authority and the making of effective decisions. The leaders with superior performance understood how the outcomes of one set of interactions influenced the outcomes of future actions and interactions.

As mentioned above, the inductive external leadership model we present also suggests the leadership behaviors and strategies that may become more useful as 21st-century organizations become increasingly networked and global. In such situations, organizational members meet face-to-face infrequently and are primarily connected through telephone lines and the Internet. Our boundary-spanning model of effective external leadership provides a theory that may be relevant for the increasing number of leaders at all levels of organizations who are finding themselves to be external leaders. Additional research in this area is clearly necessary.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

We designed this study to be theory building. Thus, our results must be interpreted and generalized with caution until they are replicated at another site, in another industry and task environment, and, as discussed above, at other leadership levels. Our research focused on identifying the behaviors and strategies that distinguished effective

external leaders of self-managing work teams. A limitation of our design was that we did not seek to understand the behaviors exhibited consistently by average performers that might have hurt their performance. The performance of leaders with average (and poor) performance may be affected by more than their inability or reluctance to engage in the strategies used consistently by the best-performing leaders. Future research should include work conducted with the aim of understanding self-defeating leader behaviors, or trip wires, that hurt leader and team performance.

A benefit of our model is that it raises a new set of research questions about external team leadership. Future research might focus on determining how organizational context alters the specific leader behaviors we present. For example, what happens to external leaders who are not empowered by their own managers? If they don't experience empowerment themselves, where does the model break down? Are unempowered external leaders less able to seek out external information, or do they fail to persuade their managers to support their teams, or do they simply model themselves after their managers and make decisions without empowering their teams?

Other questions that need deeper research attention include the relationship between team member behavior and leader behavior and the relationship between the behavior of other organization members and leader behavior. Our research reveals that effective external leadership requires team members and other members of an organization to be willing to listen to and follow these leaders. Our research and that of others (Manz & Sims, 1984) also suggests that in self-managing work team environments, constituent groups often hold very different views of what external leadership should entail. Researchers should take a deeper look at how specific team member and organizational member attitudes and behaviors influence and alter the behaviors in our model.

Despite their pivotal influence on self-managing work team effectiveness, external leaders appear to be a forgotten group. Scholars have provided little theory to clarify their role (Cohen et al., 1997), and organizations have paid more attention to building teams than to supporting external team leaders (Walton, 1982). The comprehensive model we have presented here makes the external leader role less elusive and takes existing theory and research one step closer to answering both scholarly and practical questions about how to best lead teams that manage themselves. It also lends insight into the

role of leadership in the 21st century as leaders become increasingly "external" to the day-to-day activities of their workforces.

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