

Group and Organization Management

Special Issue Call for Papers

The Challenges, Value, and Path Forward for “Small” Sample Organizational Team Research

Group and Organization Management (GOM) will publish a special issue of the journal on the subject of “small” sample studies focused on organizational teams.

Guest Editors: Deanna Kennedy, University of Washington, Bothell; Lauren Blackwell Landon, KBR, NASA; M. Travis Maynard, Colorado State University

Motivation for the Special Issue

It is hard to find organizations that do not rely extensively on teams. In fact, many argue that teams are the fundamental building block of organizations and if operating effectively, can be a source of competitive advantage for organizations (e.g., West, Tjosvold, & Smith, 2008). In parallel to this growth in the use of teams within organizations, there has been a greater emphasis on the topic of teamwork within academic research outlets (e.g., Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). In fact, *Group & Organization Management* is an important outlet for cutting-edge organizational team research with many of the journal’s most cited works over the past three years having a team or group focus (e.g., Chung et al., 2020; Maynard et al., 2019; Roh, Chun, Ryou, and Son, 2019; van Veelen & Ufkes, 2019).

Given the popularity of organizational team research, there have been a variety of literature reviews conducted over the past decade (e.g., Maynard, Kennedy, & Sommer, 2015; Mathieu, Gallagher, Domingo & Klock, 2019). A recent one, which focused on team research conducted in the field over the past five years (i.e., within organizations versus lab-based or archival samples), found that the average number of teams in articles published in some of the premier management outlets was 81 teams (Maynard, Conroy, Lacerenza, & Barnes, 2021). As such, it appears that the number of teams needed for publication in premier outlets is increasing as work based on earlier time periods would suggest the sample size needed between 2000 and 2010 was closer to 50 teams (e.g., Mathieu, Aguinis, Culpepper, & Chen, 2012). In part, this trend is being accentuated by some journals requiring power analyses prior to articles being sent out for review which is also raising the sample size bar. We recognize that such approaches have their benefits including allowing for certain methodological techniques to be utilized. As such, we do not argue that there are not inherent benefits, at times, of having larger sample sizes. However, we do contend that this evolution within the team literature may also have some unintended, and less than ideal, consequences.

For starters, obtaining access to samples that are this size is quite challenging and as a result, it is putting more pressure on researchers. In fact, we have heard established academics telling their doctoral students that they should not think about doing work within the team domain as it is too tough to get samples necessary to get published in the premier outlets needed to obtain their first job, much less get the publications necessary to be granted tenure. As such, the need for such large sample sizes is restricting to the individuals who become interested in studying teams in the first place. Likewise, we argue that by only publishing works that have larger numbers of teams, the literature is only learning about teams in larger organizations where researchers are able to access a sufficient number of teams.

While we appreciate and understand the methodological reasons for having larger sample size studies, we also recognize that our literature is ignoring a great deal of teams and likely unaware of certain team phenomena by only publishing large sample studies especially within our literature’s premier outlets. Indeed, there are numerous examples to support our supposition that there is value in small sample team research, here we will only provide two. Namely, Karl Weick’s seminal work on sensemaking published in 1993 relied on the dynamics exhibited within a single team of smokejumpers facing a colossal wildland fire within the Montana wilderness in 1949. This work opened up the

conversation around sensemaking within teams and has been cited over 6,000 times. Likewise, there have been countless leadership scholars who have pointed to the story of Ernest Shackleton and how he led a single team of explorers in the late 1940's. In fact, there are some that are leveraging this story to understand current events with COVID-19 (e.g., Ing, Cocks, & Green, 2020). While Weick's work was published in a premier outlet (*Administrative Science Quarterly*), we argue that there are likely other works that have not made it through the publishing gauntlet because editors and reviewers have made the *knee-jerk* reaction that while interesting, more teams are needed to have such work published.

Accordingly, we contend that there is value in having the difficult conversation about why we have developed into a literature that only publishes work that has 80+ teams in the sample and what implications this has on the organizational team literature. Namely, we argue that by doing so, the team literature is excluding unique contexts where only small samples are possible. For instance, there is increasing interest in studying teams in Antarctica (e.g., Wagstaff & Weston, 2014) as this is an earth-based analogous setting for the dynamics that may be possible within long-duration space missions (e.g., Goemaere, Van Caelenberg, Beyers, Binsted, & Vansteenkiste, 2019; Landon, Slack & Barrett, 2018; Salas et al., 2015). Relatedly, there are simulations that are taking place with the assistance of NASA and their counterparts in the European and Russian Space Agencies (e.g., Tafforin, 2013) where teams are being placed in simulated environments to understand team dynamics within isolated and confined settings. While such work is starting to get published in discipline-related outlets such as *Acta Astronautica* and *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine*, the fact that such work may not be published within mainstream team-related academic outlets can result in a silo effect where traditional team researchers may not be aware of the novel findings being published in these domain-specific outlets.

Beyond space-related work, a willingness to consider smaller team samples could open the door for other unique contexts to be highlighted. For instance, there is interesting work being done examining expedition teams (e.g., Leon, Sandal, Fink, & Ciofani, 2011). Likewise, Chiu and colleagues (2002) surveyed 37 urban search-and-rescue teams following the Ji Ji earthquake that hit the Nantou area of Taiwan in 1999. Again, such work is noticeably not hitting premier outlets that publish team-related research and hopefully with this special issue we can change this tendency. However, beyond opening up the possibility of studying team phenomena within these unique settings where there are only small numbers of teams, if the literature was more open to smaller sample size studies, it could also result in phenomena that could not be examined in more traditional settings. For instance, within the study conducted by Chiu and colleagues (2002), while it was not their area of interest, it provides a compelling setting to understand how teams across cultures (the 37 search and rescue teams were drawn from 21 nations) communicate under stressful situations and the role of leadership in coordinating the actions of these cross-cultural teams with their own histories of working together in other crisis situations. As such, these unique settings and the teams that operate within them may allow for researchers to learn more about teams that may just not be possible within settings where larger samples are drawn.

Additionally, we argue that there are methodological lessons that can be learned by being more open to smaller sample team studies. For instance, Leon and colleagues (2011) provide an example of ways in which robust data can be collected from a single team on a weekly basis over the course of a multi-month expedition to the North Pole. As such, while smaller samples may not have the same number of teams, they may actually afford even more data than large sample studies as they may allow researchers to examine the team(s) in more ways over a longer period of time using mixed methods, qualitative data collection approaches, and case studies. Our hope is that this special issue could draw from these various approaches to provide methodological best practices that team researchers could leverage even with larger sample sizes. Likewise, smaller sample size studies may be able to examine team-related theories that may be less possible with larger samples. For instance, Morgeson, Mitchell, and Liu (2015) introduced event systems theory which shines the light on events that organizational units face. Looking at the effect of such events may be more possible if there is more leniency on sample size.

In this special issue, we aim to bring forward several pieces that demonstrate the value that can be gained by opening up possibilities to smaller sample team research and, in doing so, present a *roadmap* of how such research could be conducted in the future.

Objectives of the Special Issue

- To shed light on the ability of small sample size team research to contribute effectively to team theories, group research, and organizational phenomena
- To demonstrate or discuss methods that apply to small sample size team research
- To highlight the need for team research in contexts where only small sample sizes are available in the resource constrained environment of data collection or method design
- To discuss how to design research studies that take place in small sample size team contexts
- To discuss the methodological choices of analysis that offer opportunities or limitations to small sample size team research

Paper submissions with empirical data should include a section called *Small Sample Rationale* that discusses the rationale for studying the phenomenon in the small sample size context and why the methods are appropriate for use with a small sample size.

Deadline for submissions of full manuscripts is September 1, 2023.

Authors must adhere to a stringent timeline. Relevant dates are as follows:

- September 1, 2023: Initial submission due date.
- December 1, 2023: Decisions and reviews provided on initial submissions.
- March 1, 2024: Revise and resubmit manuscript due date.
- May 1, 2024: Second round reviews provided.
- July 1, 2024: Second round revise and resubmit manuscript due date.
- October 1, 2024: Completed manuscripts due to publisher.

Papers to be considered for this special issue should be submitted online via <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gom> (select “Special Issue Paper” as the manuscript type). Authors who have questions are encouraged to contact one of the Special Issue editors:

Deanna Kennedy: deannak@uw.edu

Lauren Blackwell Landon: lauren.landon@nasa.gov

M. Travis Maynard: travis.maynard@colostate.edu

References

- Chiu, W. T., Arnold, J., Shih, Y. T., Hsiung, K. H., Chi, H. Y., Chiu, C. H., ... & Huang, W. C. (2002). A survey of international urban search-and-rescue teams following the Ji Ji earthquake. *Disasters*, 26(1), 85-94.
- Chung, B. G., Ehrhart, K. H., Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2020). Work group inclusion: Test of a scale and model. *Group & Organization Management*, 45(1), 75-102.
- Goemaere, S., Van Caelenberg, T., Beyers, W., Binsted, K., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2019). Life on mars from a Self-Determination Theory perspective: How astronauts' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness go hand in hand with crew health and mission success-Results from HI-SEAS IV. *Acta Astronautica*, 159, 273-285.
- Ing, A. J., Cocks, C., & Green, J. P. (2020). COVID-19: in the footsteps of Ernest Shackleton. *Thorax*, 75(8), 693-694.
- Landon, L. B., Slack, K. J., & Barrett, J. D. (2018). Teamwork and collaboration in long-duration space missions: Going to extremes. *American Psychologist*, 73(4), 563.
- Leon, G. R., Sandal, G. M., Fink, B. A., & Ciofani, P. (2011). Positive experiences and personal growth in a two-man North Pole expedition team. *Environment and Behavior*, 43(5), 710-731.
- Mathieu, J. E., Aguinis, H., Culpepper, S. A., & Chen, G. (2012). Understanding and estimating the power to detect cross-level interaction effects in multilevel modeling. *Journal of applied psychology*, 97(5), 951-966.
- Mathieu, J. E., Gallagher, P. T., Domingo, M. A., & Klock, E. A. (2019). Embracing complexity: Reviewing the past decade of team effectiveness research. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 6, 17-46.
- Mathieu, J., Maynard, M. T., Rapp, T., & Gilson, L. (2008). Team effectiveness 1997-2007: A review of recent advancements and a glimpse into the future. *Journal of management*, 34(3), 410-476.

- Maynard, M. T., Conroy, S., Lacerenza, C. N., & Barnes, L. Y. (2021). Teams in the wild are not extinct, but challenging to research: A guide for conducting impactful team field research with 10 recommendations and 10 best practices. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2041386620986597.
- Maynard, M. T., Kennedy, D. M., & Sommer, S. A. (2015). Team adaptation: A fifteen-year synthesis (1998–2013) and framework for how this literature needs to “adapt” going forward. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24(5), 652-677.
- Maynard, M. T., Mathieu, J. E., Gilson, L. L., R. Sanchez, D., & Dean, M. D. (2019). Do I really know you and does it matter? Unpacking the relationship between familiarity and information elaboration in global virtual teams. *Group & Organization Management*, 44(1), 3-37.
- Morgeson, F. P., Mitchell, T. R., & Liu, D. (2015). Event system theory: An event-oriented approach to the organizational sciences. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(4), 515-537.
- Roh, H., Chun, K., Ryou, Y., & Son, J. (2019). Opening the black box: A meta-analytic examination of the effects of top management team diversity on emergent team processes and multilevel contextual influence. *Group & Organization Management*, 44(1), 112-164.
- Salas, E., Tannenbaum, S. I., Kozlowski, S. W., Miller, C. A., Mathieu, J. E., & Vessey, W. B. (2015). Teams in space exploration: A new frontier for the science of team effectiveness. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(3), 200-207.
- Tafforin, C. (2013). The Mars-500 crew in daily life activities: an ethological study. *Acta Astronautica*, 91, 69-76.
- van Veelen, R., & Ufkes, E. G. (2019). Teaming up or down? A multisource study on the role of team identification and learning in the team diversity–performance link. *Group & Organization Management*, 44(1), 38-71.
- Wagstaff, C. R., & Weston, N. J. (2014). Examining emotion regulation in an isolated performance team in Antarctica. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 3(4), 273.
- Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative science quarterly*, 628-652.

West, M. A., Tjosvold, D., & Smith, K. G. (Eds.). (2008). *International handbook of organizational teamwork and cooperative working*. John Wiley & Sons.