

The Prevalence and Magnitude of Social Loafing, and Biographical Influences, in a Team-Based Organizational Setting

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Abstract: This paper assesses the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in a team-based organizational setting as social loafing has the potential to threaten and disrupt the effectiveness of teams. The presence of social loafing is evaluated in terms of perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards and, group cohesiveness. Biographical influences on perceptions of the factors having the potential to influence social loafing are also assessed. A consensus sample of 80 employees formed part of the sample. Data was collected using a self-developed, precoded questionnaire whose psychometric properties (validity and reliability) were assessed using Factor Analysis and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha respectively. The results indicate that social loafing does exist in the organization and is sparked by various factors which in descending level are perceived co-worker loafing, visibility of contribution, nature of tasks, group size, individual outcomes and rewards and, group cohesiveness. Furthermore, social loafing is moderate in magnitude and is not influenced by biographical variables (gender, age, marital status, tenure) except for the influence of age on individual outcomes and rewards. Recommendations are presented, which when implemented, have the potential to reduce the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in a work environment.

Keywords: *Social loafing, visibility of contribution, group size, group cohesiveness, outcomes and rewards*

1. Introduction & Literature Review

The chronicles of human existence are punctuated by people functioning together in teams and groups in order to accomplish, overcome and discover. The realization of common goals by individuals combining their effort to satisfy basic needs has been fundamental to mankind's survival ever since their initial existence. In the contemporary organizational setting, there seems to be added impetus and recognition of the value of this primitive principle in the accomplishment of work. Organizations rely more on teams and groups to accomplish an array of activities, from designing commodities to developing services, with the belief that team functioning leads to better outcomes and enhanced level of performance. However, group and team functioning is not without challenges and working in teams or groups can also result in reduced effort. One such challenge is the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing that has the potential to threaten the effectiveness of teams, which this study aims to assess. In an environment engulfed with immense competitiveness and pressures, organizations increasingly rely on teams to enhance performance and productivity and to gain a competitive advantage. However, an obstacle in the path of team performance and goal accomplishment is having team members who fail to contribute and, who engage in social loafing. The impact of social loafing on team performance and organizational survival, growth and profitability is immense and therefore, deserves to be studied to better understand how its prevalence may be minimized, if not curtailed.

The Challenge Posed by Social Loafing: There is increasing evidence that the challenges of teamwork have the propensity to produce disappointments and even catastrophic problems. Poor group or team effectiveness in the key areas of leadership, coordination, communication, procedures, roles and responsibilities, and positive relationships lends itself to team dysfunction (Goldenberg, 2010; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Marks, 2006). An ever increasing number of people who work on collaborative projects have begun to manifest negative perceptions regarding the benefits of group work (Hurley & Allen, 2007). Recent group process research contends that working collectively can affect people's motivation and effort, resulting in process losses for teams and reduced productivity gains for organizations (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005). In addition, social psychologists are discovering that group participation may actually result in decreased effort being exerted by individuals (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). These findings are crucial to organizational performance and become more profound when organizations

are aiming to increase efficiencies and performance during difficult economic climates (Dennis, Wixom & Vandenberg, 2001). This has moved group behavior researchers to examine the effect of individual contributions combined with those of other people (Karau & Williams, 2001). It is in this context that the study of social loafing, a phenomenon that has been shown to threaten and disrupt the effectiveness of teams, has emerged (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001). Social loafing occurs when employees expend less effort when working in a team than they would when working individually (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979; Ying, Li, Jiang, Peng & Lin, 2014).

The Nature of Social Loafing, Its Prevalence and Magnitude: A specific dysfunction that has been shown to threaten and disrupt the effectiveness of teams is social loafing (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2001). Formally, social loafing is characterized by reduced motivation and effort when employees work in a group as opposed to when they work alone or coactively (Karau & Williams, 2001; Meyer, Schermuly & Kauffeld, 2015). Meydan, Kahraman and Basar (2014) report that loafers who feel disconnected tend to be distracted and behave disruptively. The principal reasons for this occurrence include tasks that are not intrinsically motivating, deficiencies in performance feedback within the group, situations in which the performance of others will conceal the reduced effort exerted by a given member, and not wanting to exert oneself more than the perceived effort exerted by others (Luthans, 2005). Research findings indicate that cultures dominated by individual and self-interest values are more inclined to have groups that experience social loafing (Earley, 1989 cited in Clark & Baker, 2011; Erez & Somech, 1996). Conversely, collectivist cultures have a stronger focus on the collective good of the group and may, therefore, experience less social loafing by group members (Earley, 1989 cited in Clark & Baker, 2011; Erez & Somech, 1996).

However, Clark and Baker (2011) did not find that individuals from collectivist cultures are less likely to loaf socially but deduced that social loafing occurs across a multicultural group. Prokofieva, Jackling and Natoli (2015) noted that levels of optimism about participating in a group may differ across cultures and language may be an obstacle to effective group functioning. Social loafing is expected to appear more in large teams, where individual inputs are difficult to identify. To reduce the impact of members exerting less effort and to ensure that they are fully contributing members of the team, it has been recommended that teams be kept small in size, task specialization be increased so that the contributions of individual members are identifiable, individual performance be measured and, highly motivated employees be selected when creating teams (Judge & Chandler, 1996). Whilst numerous variables may impact on the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in the workplace, the current study focusses on perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards and group cohesiveness.

Perceived Co-Worker Loafing: Individuals can potentially hide in a group and go unnoticed through the practice of social loafing. This allows them to freewheel on the team's energies especially when their separate inputs cannot be known. Perceived co-worker loafing refers to the degree to which members of a group are of the opinion that others in the group are engaging in social loafing (Comer, 1995) and these opinions will be based on perceptions of the actions of group members irrespective of whether the actions are taking place (Meyer et al., 2015; Mulvey & Klein, 1998). Hall and Buzwell (2013) refer to this behavior as free-riding, like Ringleman did over a century ago (1986), and describe it as a universal group concern. It is these perceptions that cause negative influences on other group members, who react based on personal interactions and perceptions (Plaks & Higgins, 2000). Irrespective of whether a job is interactive or individual, employees base their effort on perceived contextual issues (Plaks & Higgins, 2000). However, successful teams challenge the tendency of social loafing because they take responsibility for both individual and team performance. They also hold one another accountable to their commitments to the team (Gilligan & Carter, 2006). Members are sure of what they are individually and jointly responsible for.

Nature of Tasks: The nature and significance of tasks can influence the occurrence of social loafing. Tasks can be categorized into simple, novel, non-routine tasks or complex, routine, standardized tasks. Robbins, Judge, Odendaal and Roodt (2009) contend that complex tasks profit the group by promoting discussions around unconventional work techniques that can be successfully utilized. They add that when it comes to simple tasks, members do not need to discuss such alternatives and merely rely on regular operating procedures to do the job. However, in the situation where tasks largely intercept each other, members are

required to interact continuously. Efficient communication and negligible amounts of conflict will therefore affect group performance when tasks are interdependent. Tasks that have higher levels of uncertainty, complexity and interdependence will require more information processing. Task uncertainty can be moderated by the information processing capacity within group processes (Buss, Meinlschmidt & Foerstl, 2016). A group characterized by ineffective communication, feeble leadership and elevated levels of conflict will not necessarily be low performing since the presence of effective information processing and good group decision-making can moderate these group processes and result in high performance (Robbins et al., 2009).

The significance of a task is pivotal to group and team performance. Essentially, the size-performance relationship of a group or team is regulated by the task requirement it has to accomplish (Robbins et al., 2009). Group effectiveness research suggests that when the task requirement involves making an important decision by pooling comprehensive information on an issue that may affect people in many areas of the organization, a larger group representative of individuals in each of the affected areas within the company will better facilitate the task requirement. A diverse assessment by an information gathering or problem-solving team characteristically results in process gains. Conversely, when a group's task requirement is coordinating and implementing a specific and precise decision, a process loss is produced by each additional member's presence and this is likely to be greater than the process gain produced by the individual (Saavendra, Earley & Van Dyne, 1993; Tufail et al., 2016). Similarly, Hinsz (2015) noted that two drawbacks of team performance on cognitive tasks are delay in taking action and coordination losses. Furthermore, the size-performance relationship of a group or team is regulated by the group's task requirement (Robbins et al., 2009). These research studies also contend that the effect of team processes on team performance and member satisfaction is also moderated by group tasks.

These studies indicate that the complexity and interdependence of the task impacts on group effectiveness (Saavedra et al., 1993). Various factors of work design also influence social loafing, namely, freedom and autonomy, the prospect of utilizing distinct skills and talent, the ability to finish a complete and identifiable task or product, and working on a task or project that has a considerable influence on others (Robbins et al., 2009). The characteristics increase member motivation, awareness of responsibility and ownership for the work thereby making the work appealing to perform (Campion, Papper & Medsker, 1996) and consequently, enhance team effectiveness and reduce the occurrence of social loafing. However, social loafing can increase when stronger team members exclude a weak member of the team (Pieterse & Thompson, 2010 cited in Jones, 2013).

Visibility of Contribution: Task visibility is an employee's perception that his/her effort is being noticed (Kidwell & Bennett, 1993) and is thus, negatively related to social loafing (George, 1992, cited in Simms & Nichols, 2014). When working in a team, employees may care less to contribute, may lapse in self-discipline and hence, the performance standard is compromised. To combat this, Black (2002) advocates assigning team leaders, having clearly defined individual roles within the group, employing methods to increase task visibility and the individual's perception that others are contributing their fair share of the workload. These methods include ensuring that group members establish performance targets, communication procedures, and methods for solving problems. This can be achieved by creating timeframe milestones for large group projects or assignments, restriction of communication methods to ones that can be monitored by the team leader for participation, assigning roles with clearly defined responsibilities, and peer evaluation of group members (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005). To enhance self-awareness of standards of performance, peer evaluations (Stevens cited in Perron, 2011), group assessments and group discussion boards (the scheduling of personal contributions as set by the leader) may be used. However, these are often conducted at the tail-end of group activities and can therefore, have a negative effect as team members may retaliate on non-performers (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Evidently, the benefit of group assessments will depend on the timing of the assessments and in this regard, Brooks and Ammons (2003) developed recommendations for assessments that include early implementation, multiple evaluation points and specific evaluative criteria. Multiple evaluation points enhance task visibility and awareness of each member's contribution thereby, discouraging social loafing and providing the opportunity for non-performers to adjust their behavior and performance (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005).

Group Size: The size of the group has the potential to influence social loafing because as the size of the group increases, team member behavior may be less productive (Czyz, Szmajke, Kruger & Kubler, 2016). The most successful groups or teams are neither very small nor very large. A very small team is composed of less than four or five members and a very large team is typically composed of more than 12 members. Small teams lack the value of diversity and in large teams it is difficult to accomplish much. In addition, in larger teams' members have difficulty interacting constructively and agreeing. Moreover, they may lack cohesiveness, commitment, and the mutual accountability required to achieve high performance. In the case of a natural working unit that is larger than 12 members it is conceivable to obtain team efforts from such a unit if it is broken down into sub-teams (Robbins et al., 2009). Evidently, in establishing a suitable group size the group goals, purpose and function should be taken into consideration (that is, brainstorming, decision-making, problem-solving).

When taking into account the group's purpose, it is crucial to consider how group size may impact on group outcomes. In larger groups, individuals generally believe they make less of a difference, are less effective, and that their individual contributions are less visible (Kerr, 1989), thereby creating the potential for social loafing to occur. Moreover, increased group size makes it more complicated to assess and evaluate each individual's contribution to the group (Belanger, Watson-Manheim & Jordan, 2002). An additional harmful effect of large groups is that cooperation and self-efficacy tend to decline as groups grow (Kerr, 1989; Komorita, Parks & Hulbert, 1992), thereby creating the potential for social loafing. Research indicates that in smaller groups, individuals may feel their contributions are more essential to the success of the process than when they work in larger groups (Hindriks & Panscs, 2001). As member contribution becomes less recognizable, effort decreases and hence, social loafing increases.

It is difficult to determine the ideal group size. Piezon and Donaldson (2005) believe that larger group sizes are valuable for brainstorming but not otherwise and recommends a small group size of six. Similarly, Soboroff (2012) found that members of larger groups were less committed, that groups larger than six members experienced lower levels of trust and that group members prefer to work with groups of four to six members. With regards to trust, Buvik and Tvedt (2016) emphasize the importance of nurturing a climate of high trust in groups and found that trust impacts on task commitment and team performance. Meyer et al. (2015) found that there is higher probability of social loafing among the members of teams with strong fault lines (dividing line that splits a team into rather homogenous subgroups) who are members of larger subgroups and those who exhibited low levels of social competence.

Individual Outcomes and Rewards: The reward system is a potential predictor of the motivation to withhold effort (Kidwell & Bennett, 1993 cited in Stark, Shaw & Duffy, 2007). If people do not get rewarded fairly or get recognized for their contribution, they will exert less effort and social loafing will increase (Hassan, 2010 cited in Davoudi, Oraji & Kaur, 2012). Team members need to be both individually and collectively accountable. This requires that the conventional, individually oriented evaluation and reward system be adapted to reflect team performance (Wageman, 1997). Individual performance appraisals, fixed hourly wages, individual incentives, and the like are beneficial for evaluating and rewarding members for their individual contributions but are not consistent with the development of high-performance teams. Management must, therefore, consider evaluation and reward system adaptations that will strengthen team effort and commitment.

These system changes may include group-based appraisals, profit sharing, gain-sharing and small-group incentives (Robbins et al., 2009). Critical to effort and rewards are the issues of distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice is the awareness of a just distribution of rewards and compensation among group members. When the distribution of rewards are perceived as being fair, social loafing decreases (Liden, Wayne, Jaworski & Bennett, 2004), for example, effective performance appraisals conducted in the past can decrease social loafing (Hildreth, 2015). However, when employees perceive that their rewards (salary, fringe benefits, promotion) are not commensurate with their effort or that rewards are unfairly distributed they are likely to reduce their effort after taking cognizance of issues such as task visibility. From the study of De Backer, Boen, De Cuyper, Hoigaard, and Vande Broek (2014), it is evident that perceived fairness in general, not only related to rewards, is imperative for the optimal functioning of teams.

Individuals may choose to withhold effort because they believe that the benefits of social loafing outweigh the cost of their lack of participation (Murphy, Wayne, Liden & Erdogan, 2003). Whilst distributive justice refers to the distribution of rewards, procedural justice is the perceived fairness of the procedures or policies that surround distributive justice (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005). Evidently, perceptions of fairness in distribution procedures influences effort expended on tasks and social loafing whereby perceived procedural injustice results in increased social loafing (De Backer et al., 2014; Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Liden et al., 2004; Murphy et al., 2003). Procedural justice dictates that rewarding through distributive justice must be based on well-established and specific evaluative criteria (Brooks & Ammons, 2003).

Group Cohesiveness: Group cohesion moderates the relationship between teamwork and social loafing (Alnuaimi, Robert Jr & Maruping, 2010). Group cohesiveness is the potential of the team to connect effectively with each other. The greater the cohesiveness of the team, the greater the possibility of goal accomplishment and the lower the incidence of social loafing (Davoudi et al., 2012; Karns, 2006 cited in Rich, Owens, Johnson, Mines & Capote, 2014; Simms & Nichols, 2014). A cohesive and effective group or team accomplishes the results that it sets out to achieve and does it consistently (Lencioni, 2005). According to the social exchange theory, when group members believe that they are engaging in a high-quality interaction they are more likely to reciprocate and contribute (Murphy et al., 2003).

Research reflects that feelings of group cohesiveness results in reduced social loafing (Høigaard, Tofteland & Ommundsen, 2006 cited in Nilsen, Haugen, Reinboth, Peters & Høigaard, 2014) particularly because members do not want to disappoint their team members (Liden et al., 2004). Jaikumar and Mendonca (2017) found that perceived loafing by colleagues may lead to counterproductive work behaviors towards such colleagues and such interpersonal relations had the potential to impact on the cohesion of the group. Team cohesiveness may be enhanced through team building strategies (Black, 2002), group discussions, meaningful feedback, equitable rewards and by creating a culture and atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation for team member contributions. The study therefore assesses:

- 1) The influence of the dimensions (perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards, group cohesiveness) on the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in a team-based organization.
- 2) The influence of the biographical variables (gender, age, marital status, tenure) on perceptions of the aforementioned dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing.

2. Methodology

Respondents: The population comprised of all employees in the organization who are members of a team or a group. The entire population consisted of 80 employees. This team-based organization was selected because the study aimed at assessing the impact of visibility of contribution in a team, group size and group cohesiveness on the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in a team. According to Sekaran and Bougie's (2010) population-to-sample size table, the corresponding minimum sample size for a population of 80 employees is 66. The study however utilized the responses of all 80 employees who participated, thereby confirming the adequacy and appropriateness of the respondents. Therefore, in this research a census study was undertaken and was considered to be appropriate given the population size. The adequacy of the sample was further determined using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.733) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (1552,414; $p = 0.000$) for factors influencing social loafing, which respectively indicated suitability and significance. The results indicate that the normality and homoscedasticity preconditions are satisfied (Oodith & Brijball Parumasur, 2012). In terms of the composition of the sample, there are more females (53.8%) than males (46.3%), more employees <30 years old (55%) than >30 years old (45%), more unmarried (58.8%) than married (41.3%) employees, and given their age, naturally more employees with <5 years of tenure (75%) than >5 years of length of service (25%). Seventy-five percent of the participants are team members as opposed to supervisors or team leaders (25%) and the majority of them are permanent staff members (92.5%) with only 7.5% being contract/temporary.

Measuring Instrument: Data was collected using a self-developed, pre-coded, self-administered questionnaire consisting of two sections. Section A dealt purely with the biographical variables (gender, age,

marital status, tenure) and operational data (status in group, namely, supervisor/team leader or team member and status of post, namely, permanent or contract/temporary) of participants. Section B of the questionnaire elicited information on employee perceptions of the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing within their respective groups or teams. It used 35 items to tap into six key sub-dimensions that have the potential to promote social loafing, namely, perceived co-worker loafing (6 items), nature of tasks (5 items), visibility of a member's contribution (8 items), size of group (6 items), individual outcomes and rewards (5 items) and group cohesiveness (5 items). Whilst Section A was nominally scaled with precoded option categories, Section B required respondents to rate each item using the Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was formulated on the basis of identifying recurring themes that surfaced while conducting the literature review. These ensured face and content validity. Furthermore, in-house pretesting was adopted to assess the suitability of the instrument. Pilot testing was also carried out on ten employees working in groups/teams to test the appropriateness of questions and their understanding. No inadequacies were reported and the final questionnaire was considered appropriate in terms of relevance and construction.

Research Procedure: The research was only conducted after ethical clearance was obtained for the study and upon completion of the pilot study.

Measures/Statistical Analysis of the Questionnaire: The validity of the questionnaire was assessed using Factor Analysis. A principal component analysis was used to extract initial factors and an iterated principle factor analysis was performed using SPSS with an Orthogonal Varimax Rotation. In terms of the validity, 6 factors influencing the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing with latent roots greater than unity were identified (4.427, 3.921, 3.670, 2.924, 2.667 and 2.510). The items were also reflected as having a very high level of internal consistency and reliability, with the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha being 0.913 with reliabilities for the sub-dimensions ranging from moderate (0.558) to very high (0.845) as follows: perceived co-worker social loafing ($\alpha = 0.558$), task accomplishment ($\alpha = 0.605$), visibility of contribution ($\alpha = 0.801$), group size ($\alpha = 0.811$), individual outcomes and rewards ($\alpha = 0.814$) and group cohesiveness ($\alpha = 0.845$).

Administration of the measuring instrument: The questionnaires were personally administered in conjunction with the director of the organization to all employees who presently belong to either a team or a group. The administration was convenient as the participants were geographically concentrated and conveniently assembled in a single open-plan office space and employees completed the questionnaires during 20 minutes prior to their lunch break.

Statistical analysis of the data: Descriptive statistics (mean, variance, standard deviation) were used to evaluate the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing in the organization and an inferential statistic (t-test) was used to assess the influence of biographical variables (gender, age, marital status, tenure) respectively. The t-test was used because due to the sample size of 80 the biographical data was divided into two categories in each case so as to avoid insignificant cells which can occur with over-stratification.

3. Results

The perceptions of employees regarding the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing was assessed by asking participants to respond to established dimensions and aspects of social loafing using a 1 to 5 point Likert scale (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Dimensions having the potential to influence the prevalence and magnitude of social loafing

Dimension	Mean	95% Confidence Interval		Variance	Std.Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound				
Perceived co-worker loafing	2.76	2.61	2.91	0.461	0.679	1	4
Nature of tasks	2.55	2.38	2.72	0.616	0.785	1	5
Visibility of contribution	2.67	2.48	2.85	0.715	0.845	1	5
Group size	2.53	2.34	2.72	0.725	0.851	1	5
Individual outcomes & rewards	2.51	2.30	2.71	0.871	0.933	1	5
Group cohesiveness	2.46	2.24	2.68	0.949	0.974	1	5

Table 1 indicates that employees differ in their perception of the various dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing, which in decreasing level based on the mean score values are:

- Perceived co-worker loafing (Mean = 2.76)
- Visibility of contribution (Mean = 2.67)
- Nature of tasks (Mean = 2.55)
- Group size (Mean = 2.53)
- Individual outcomes and rewards (Mean = 2.51)
- Group cohesiveness (Mean = 2.46)

It is evident that perceived co-worker loafing has the highest mean, thereby indicating that employees do believe that social loafing occurs in their organization. Evidently, social loafing has been found to consistently occur as a negative outcome of each of the aforementioned dimensions and is moderate in magnitude. In order to assess employee perceptions, frequency analyses were conducted.

In terms of perceived co-worker loafing, frequency analyses indicate that 65% of the respondents are in agreement that they considered it inequitable that each person in the group receives the same reward, when certain group members may have exerted lower levels of effort compared to the rest. However, 66.3% of the respondents disagreed that they have preconceptions that group members withhold effort during collaborative tasks, which has resulted in them withholding effort as well. In addition, 71.3% of the subjects disagreed that in an attempt to avoid carrying group members whom they believe are not pulling their own weight during collaborative tasks, they exert less effort themselves.

Visibility of contribution had a mean score value of 2.67, thereby indicating that employees do believe that it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. With regards to visibility of contribution, frequency analyses indicate that 56.3% of the employees agreed that when their group members are not held accountable for their contributions, the said members do not perform an equitable share of the workload. Moreover, 48.8% of the participants agreed that when the individual contributions of their group members could not be easily observed, measured, and evaluated, the said members worked less intensely. However, 66.3% of the employees disagreed that when individual roles and performance targets were not established in the group, they personally exert less effort. Additionally, 63.8% of the respondents disagreed that when they believe their input is immaterial to making a difference to the group outcome, they do not utilize all their effort.

Nature of tasks had a mean score value of 2.55, thereby indicating that employees believe that it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. In terms of nature of tasks, frequency analyses reflect that 48.8% of employees agreed that when team leaders do not acknowledge that individual tasks are critical to group success, they personally lose motivation to utilize the maximum effort. Moreover, 38.8% of the participants agreed that collaborative tasks make the members in their group more inter-reliant; hence, the said members do not experience a true sense of personal accomplishment, causing a reduction in their levels

of effort. However, 85.1% of the employees disagreed that for uncomplicated, simple, and well-learned tasks, the increased presence of co-workers reduces their personal desire to respond effectively, and as such they exert less effort. Additionally, 73.8% of the subjects disagreed that when they are given complicated, complex, and unfamiliar tasks to accomplish, they are not stimulated to respond effectively and they work less intensely.

Group size had a mean score value of 2.53, thereby indicating that employees do believe that it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. In terms of group size, frequency analyses indicate that 46.3% of the respondents were in agreement that as the size of the group increases, there is a progressive reduction in group members' personal contribution to the group. Moreover, 45.1% of the subjects agreed that when the number and demands of supervisors or team leaders increases, pressure is defused across all group members, and there is a progressive reduction in group members' contribution to a collaborative task. However, 73.8% of the employees disagreed that as the size of their group increases, the assessment and evaluation of their personal contribution to collaborative tasks decreases, thereby causing them to work less intensely. Additionally, 68.8% of the participants disagreed that as the size of their group increases, cooperation amongst group members decreases, causing them to personally work less intensely and that in large group settings, they consider their contribution too small to make a difference and that consequently, they are not motivated to apply total effort.

Individual outcomes and rewards had a mean score value of 2.51, thereby indicating that employees do believe that it plays a moderate role in influencing social loafing in their organization. In terms of individual outcomes and rewards, frequency analyses reflect that 42.6% of the employees agreed that when they perceive that the policies and procedures used to establish the distribution of rewards and compensation amongst members are biased, they are personally less motivated to expend absolute effort. Moreover, 26.3% of the respondents agreed that when the policies and procedures used to establish the distribution of rewards and compensation amongst members are not based on specific criteria, they personally apply less effort. Furthermore, 70.1% of the participants disagreed that they work intensely when group outcomes are not linked to favorable individual outcomes. Additionally, 63.8% of the employees disagreed that they withhold their complete effort when they perceive the distribution of rewards and compensation amongst members to be unjust.

Group cohesiveness had a mean score value of 2.46, thereby indicating that employees do believe that it plays a less than moderate role in influencing social loafing in their organization. In terms of group cohesiveness, frequency analyses indicate that 32.6% of the employees agreed that they work less intensely when the presence of domineering and intimidating group members make them feel that their contributions are not welcomed. Moreover, 31.3% of the respondents agreed that they personally exert effort proportionate to the cohesiveness of their group. However, 67.6% of the participants disagreed that they work less intensely as a consequence of the presence of domineering and intimidating group members who make them feel that their knowledge is insufficient to be useful to the group. Additionally, 67.5% of the employees disagreed that they work less intensely when group members are not closely knit and well bonded. The influence of the biographical variables on individuals' perceptions of the dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing, were assessed (Table 2).

Hypothesis: There is a significant difference in the perceptions of employees varying in biographical profiles (gender, age, marital status, tenure) regarding the dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing (perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards, group cohesiveness) respectively. Table 2 indicates that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of employees varying in biographical profiles (gender, age, marital status, tenure) regarding the dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing (perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards, group cohesiveness) respectively except for age which significantly influences individual outcomes and rewards at the 5% level of significance. Hence, hypothesis 1 may be rejected except in the case of age and individual outcomes and rewards.

Table 2: T-test: biographical variables and dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing

Dimension	Gender			Age			Marital status			Tenure		
	T	Df	p	T	Df	p	T	Df	p	T	Df	p
Perceived co-worker loafing	0.536	78	0.593	-0.511	78	0.611	0.442	78	0.660	0.031	78	0.975
Nature of tasks	-0.721	78	0.473	0.285	78	0.777	0.620	78	0.537	0.987	78	0.327
Visibility of contribution	-0.666	78	0.508	1.054	78	0.295	1.100	78	0.275	0.475	78	0.636
Group size	-0.226	78	0.822	0.539	78	0.592	-0.098	78	0.922	-0.276	78	0.783
Individual outcomes and rewards	-1.024	78	0.309	2.059	78	0.043*	0.112	78	0.911	0.248	78	0.805
Group cohesiveness	-0.475	78	0.636	-0.238	78	0.812	-0.702	78	0.485	0.158	78	0.875

* p < 0.05

In order to assess where the differences lie amongst the age groups in terms of individual outcomes and rewards, mean analyses were undertaken. It was found that individuals 30 years and under (Mean = 2.70) were more inclined to engage in social loafing than those who are over 30 years (Mean = 2.27) when they perceive rewards as being unsatisfactory and unjust in terms of distributive and procedural justice.

Perceptions of the dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing: In the current study, perceived co-worker loafing has the highest mean score value (Mean = 2.76), thereby, indicating that employees do believe that it occurs in their organization. According to Mulvey and Klein (1998), the mere perception of a co-worker's loafing (whether accurate or not) may have negative effects on a group member's motivation and could result in them loafing. Consistent with Mulvey and Klein's assertion, the frequency distribution of the current study indicates that 26.25% of the respondents revealed that they noticed a reduction in their level of motivation when working collectively compared to working individually. The resultant act of group members carrying a perceived social loafer has been termed playing the *sucker role*. Avoiding to play the sucker role by reducing one's effort has been termed the sucker effect (Robbins, 1995). Evidence for the sucker effect has been provided in research with participants who were led to believe that their partner, who had the ability to perform, was failing to do so (Karau & Williams, 2001). These individuals subsequently reduced their individual efforts and performance. In this study, the frequency analyses indicate that 37.5% of the employees disclosed that they exert less effort when working in a group than when working independently. This is consistent with Schnake's (1991) contention that preconceptions of co-worker loafing may direct individuals to produce less effort in groups in an attempt to maintain an equitable division of labour because there is no reason to work hard in aid of 'shirkers' or 'incompetents'. Similarly, Chidambaram and Tung (2005) in their empirical study of social loafing contend that people exert a level of effort proportionate to their perception of the effort of others.

Visibility of contribution has a mean score value of 2.67, thereby indicating that employees do believe it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. This is consistent with George's (1995) claim that social loafing occurs when individual input or contributions are perceived to be unidentifiable. Likewise, Hurley and Allen (2007) contend that when individual inputs are difficult to identify and evaluate, one is likely to 'hide in the crowd', making it easy to slacken off and avoid taking the appropriate blame for poor group performance. Similarly, Charbonnier, Huguot, Brauer and Monteil (1998) assert that when individuality and the recognition that comes with contributions are not identified in a group, members lose motivation to exert their full effort. When studying social loafing in technology supported teams, Beenen, King, Wang, Chang, Frankowski, Resnick and Kraut (2004 cited in Abraham & Trimutiasari, 2015) found that perception saliency about the uniqueness of an individual's contribution to the group's performance will degrade online social loafing. Likewise, Rich et al. (2014) recommend that valuable individual contributions must be emphasized in attempts to reduce social loafing. Hart, Karau, Stasson and Kerr (2004) conclude that members

might be reluctant to exert effort if they have an idea that their contributions are redundant or unneeded in comparison with those of other group members, or else are immaterial to group performance and, consequently, not acknowledged or identified. Mullen (1983) proposes that working on a collaborative task will lead to a decrease in self-awareness for individuals and in their conviction that their effort is being observed, thus precipitating social loafing, a disregard for performance standards and less self-regulation. Conversely, Thompson and Thornton (2007) maintain that social loafing is said to disappear when participants believe their individual effort can be observed, measured or evaluated, resulting in them being held accountable for their contribution.

Nature of tasks has a mean score value of 2.55, indicating that employees do believe that it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. This finding is consistent with the claim of Latané et al. (1979) that members are tempted to redefine a maximising task to an optimising task and, consequently, do not exert maximum effort towards task accomplishment, but merely exert adequate effort to reach some more or less well-defined standard. Likewise, Piezon and Donaldson (2005) contend that in submaximal goal setting the task becomes an optimising rather than a maximising task and team members may perceive that with a well-defined goal and with several people working towards it, they can work less towards task accomplishment. Charbonnier et al. (1998) proposes that individuals will be reluctant to apply exceptional effort on a task unless they consider their individual task as meaningful and unique. Karau and Williams (2001) affirm that working collectively reduces stimulation, thereby reducing performance on simple tasks but enhancing performance on complex tasks. However, Schippers (2014) found that a high level of conscientiousness and agreeableness within a group will pacify members to compensate for social loafing habits, thereby leaving performance unchanged. On the other hand, Ulke and Bilgiç (2011) did not find relations between conscientiousness and agreeableness and social loafing respectively.

Group size has a mean score value of 2.53, indicating that employees do believe that it plays a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. This finding is consistent with Soboroff's (2012) finding that the greater the number of members in a group, the lower an individual's effort and commitment to group tasks. Similarly, Chidambaram and Tung (2005) contend that larger groups intrinsically have more sources and targets of social impact than smaller groups. An outside source of social influence such as one's boss is divided across all group members or multiple targets, leading to decreased levels of motivation and effort and therefore, members are more prone to social loafing. Kidwell and Bennett (1993) maintain that members are less motivated to perform in larger groups, thus, precipitating social loafing. Similarly, Weisband (2002) concludes that in large groups individuals view their effort as being too small to make a difference, thus withdrawing effort from the group. Kerr (1989) declares that in larger groups, individuals generally believe they make less of a difference, and eventually exert less effort. Conversely, Hindriks and Pans (2001) confirm that in smaller groups, individuals may feel their contributions are more essential to the success of the process than when they work in larger groups. A field study investigation on social loafing conducted by Liden et al. (2004) noted that as group size increases, the group members are more likely to reduce their effort. Contrary findings in research on brainstorming groups have demonstrated that productivity is positively related to group size. A larger group size produces a more productive brainstorming session (Valacich, Dennis & Connolly, 1994). However, most other studies have suggested that increasing group size can have detrimental effects on group goal achievement (Hurley & Allen, 2007).

In this study, individual outcomes and rewards has a mean score value of 2.51, indicating that employees believe that it does play a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. This finding is consistent with Karau and Williams' (2001) assertion that individuals will exert effort on collaborative tasks to the extent that they perceive their efforts to be influential in obtaining outcomes that they personally value. Karau and Williams (2001) confirm that when outcomes linked to the group's performance are not meaningful, important, or intrinsically satisfying, individuals are less likely to exert effort. Liden et al. (2004) and Kidwell and Bennett (1993) assert that if individuals perceive an unfair distribution in rewards and resultant outcomes, they will withhold their individual work effort. Moreover, accounts of social loafing in group projects are a common complaint among members who report dissatisfaction with the procedures surrounding the distribution of rewards (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Murphy et al. (2003) acknowledge that

social loafing is likely to occur in the presence of unfair procedural justice, which ultimately influences the distribution of rewards.

In this study, group cohesiveness has a mean score value of 2.46, indicating that employees believe that it does play a role in influencing social loafing in their organization. Supportive of this finding, Murphy et al. (2003) claim that if group members do not feel closely-knit they may be more inclined to engage in social loafing. Michaelsen, Fink and Knight (1997) note that fragmented groups lacking cohesiveness lead to less assertive group members feeling intimidated and hence, are more likely to engage in social loafing. From the aforementioned it is evident that in this study, social loafing has been found to consistently occur as a negative outcome of each of the respective dimensions (perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards, group cohesiveness) and is moderate in magnitude. Similarly, a meta-analytic synthesis by Karau and Williams (2001) of 78 studies on social loafing consistently found social loafing occurring across all the studies and it was moderate in magnitude, indicating that individuals tended to engage in the phenomenon when working collectively.

Influence of Biographical Variables: The biographical variables (gender, age, marital status, tenure) did not influence perceptions of employees regarding the dimensions having the potential to influence social loafing (perceived co-worker loafing, nature of tasks, visibility of contribution, group size, individual outcomes and rewards, group cohesiveness) respectively except for age which significantly influences individual outcomes and rewards. Similarly, a number of studies have revealed significant social loafing regardless of participant's gender, nationality or age (Guerin, 2003; Harley, 2001; Okuda & Inoue, 2002). However, several researchers (Gabrenya, Wang & Latané, 1985 cited in Tsaw, Murphy & Detgen, 2011; Simms and Nichols, 2014) found that gender plays a substantial role in social loafing and that males were more likely to loaf than females.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

It can be concluded that social loafing is occurring as a result of all the dimensions studied and is moderate in magnitude. A notable finding of the study in terms of perceived loafing indicated that more than one third of the respondents admitted having preconceptions that their co-workers were loafing, which resulted in them withholding effort themselves. It is a matter of concern that individuals may potentially loaf as a result of preconceptions. Consequently, individuals need to be made aware of the error of unauthentic perceptions of co-worker loafing since if this continues unchecked it will advance a cycle of needless loafing. Team members may also be involved in team assessments of outputs so that there is greater visibility of each team member's outputs. With reference to nature of tasks, more than one third of the employees felt that collaborative tasks make the members in their group more inter-reliant; hence, they do not experience a true sense of personal accomplishment, causing a reduction in their levels of effort. In addition, almost half of the employees believed that team leaders did not acknowledge that individual tasks are critical to overall group success and therefore, employees lost their motivation to utilise their absolute effort. It is therefore, recommended that individual roles and responsibilities be succinctly clarified and individual contribution to team efforts should be closely monitored as this will allow group members to gain a sense of personal achievement. In addition, group members must share awareness that teamwork and inter-reliance is a precondition for achieving the end goals of the team. It is also recommended that team leaders ensure that all group members understand that their respective individual tasks are critical to the success of the overall goal of the group.

With reference to visibility of contribution, half of the respondents admitted that when the individual contributions of their group members are not easily observed, measured, and evaluated and when they are not held accountable for their contributions, these group members worked less intensely. To combat this, it is important to appoint team leaders to groups with the expressed purpose of overseeing the contributions of individual members and ensuring clearly defined individual roles and performance targets for members. This is imperative as personal feedback, accountability and assessment provides an employee with insight into his/her work and reduces social loafing. In addition, timeframes or milestones for large group projects or assignments should be set, communication channels and methods should be limited to ones that can be monitored by the team leader for participation, roles with clearly defined responsibilities should be assigned to team members and peer evaluation of group members should be undertaken or team members should

display their contributions on boards. In a technologically advanced work environment, creatively displaying and monitoring individual contributions and engaging in evaluations becomes easier and less time consuming and can be a fun-filled exercise especially when the process is developmental rather than punitive. With regard to group size, nearly half of the respondents indicated that as the size of the group increases, there is a progressive reduction in group members' personal contribution to the group and, when the number and demands of supervisors' increases, pressure is defused across all group members, and there is a progressive reduction in group members' contribution to a collaborative task. In establishing a suitable group size, it is recommended that cognizance be given to the group goals, purpose, and function, especially in terms of brainstorming, decision making, problem solving. When taking into account the group's purpose, it is crucial to consider how group size may impact group outcomes and when brainstorming is not a function of the group, the group should be kept as small as needed.

With reference to individual outcomes and rewards, just under half of the employees admitted that when they perceived that the policies and procedures used to establish the distribution of rewards and compensation amongst members were biased, they felt less motivated to expend absolute effort. Procedural justice is the perceived fairness of the procedures or policies that surround distributive justice. A possible means by which procedural justice could be addressed is through individual assessments and evaluations. These evaluations could be determined by a combination of looking at overall group performance, individual contribution to the final project, group meetings attendance, and the ability to meet individual submission requirements by the group; rewards must be based on well-established, objective and clear evaluative criteria.

In terms of group cohesiveness, more than one third of the employees admitted that they exerted effort proportionate to the cohesiveness of their group and, that the presence of domineering and intimidating group members made them feel that their contributions were not welcomed, consequently they worked less intensely. It is recommended that constructive team building strategies should be incorporated into team tasks and assignments. In addition, teams need to consciously strive to create an atmosphere in which the values and contributions of all members are encouraged, respected, and appreciated. Accountability, constructive feedback, fair rewards for outputs and open discussions are also imperative to enhance group cohesiveness. With globalisation and the increase in multinational corporations it is imperative to also take cognisance of the impact of cultural orientations on group cohesion as individualistic cultures may experience greater social loafing whilst collectivist cultures thrive on loyalty to the group and embrace opportunities to contribute effectively. It is therefore, imperative to facilitate group cohesion in multinational groups. The aforementioned practical interventions suggested, when implemented, have the potential to reduce social loafing in a work environment.

Suggestions for Future Research: This study focused on one group in one setting. Future research could validate social loafing in other settings such as multinational corporations as this would enable the generalizability of social loafing in terms of dispositional and situational factors.

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