

# Taking a free ride: How team learning affects social loafing

Catherine Gabelica

(joint with De Maeyer, S., & Schippers, M. C.)

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Although collaboration is increasingly required in today's academic and work contexts, there are many ways in which teamwork can be impaired by dysfunctional inefficiencies and process loss. An important form of process loss is the tendency for individual members of a team to exert less effort than their fellow team members (i.e., social loafing). Since teams need to sustain the effort of team members as a collaborative resource, it is imperative to understand factors that shape social loafing in team tasks. This study examines simultaneously the degree to which goal orientation and changes in team learning (i.e., shifts in collective knowledge) affect social loafing. The authors use a multiwave design to explain changes in social loafing tendencies of 675 students working in teams. They conduct linear mixed effects modeling to show that individual team members who belong to teams that score higher than other teams on team learning throughout 9 weeks of teamwork experience a decrease in social loafing. Although learning and performance orientations are significantly related to initial self- or peer-rated social loafing, they cannot explain ensuing changes in social loafing. Results highlight the importance of considering team-level dynamic properties when explaining fluctuations of motivation in teams.