

## Social Loafing – Evidence Review

Latane (Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979) found that when people clapped or cheered together the volume per person went down. Latane speculated that this might be because people lack trust and attribute laziness and ineptitude to other people.

Harkins (Harkins, Latané, & Williams, 1980) found that people who worked in groups engaged in social loafing, regardless of whether they also worked alone. I.e. they used a ‘minimising,’ strategy to reduce their effort, rather than conserving it for individual work.

Williams (K. Williams, Harkins, & Latané, 1981) found that making people’s output identifiable eliminated social loafing. Harkins (Harkins & Jackson, 1985) later found that identifying people’s outputs only worked if they felt they were being compared to fellow workers and evaluated.

Harkins (Harkins & Petty, 1982) found that even when people were unidentifiable giving people harder tasks and making each person responsible for a specific task eliminated social loafing.

Zaccaro (Zaccaro, 1984) found that task attractiveness – as manipulated by instructions and incentives – eliminated social loafing.

Gabrenya (Gabrenya, Wang, & Latané, 1985) compared Chinese and American school children and found that while American children engaged in social loafing Chinese children engaged in ‘social striving.’ Earley (Earley, 1989) compared trainee managers from the US and China and concluded that “collectivists (i.e. the Chinese) did not exhibit social loafing, regardless of the level of accountability.”

Jackson (Jackson & Williams, 1985) found that people did better individually on simple tasks but better in groups on more complicated ones (social facilitation).

Brickner (Brickner, Harkins, & Ostrom, 1986) found that personally-involving tasks eliminated social loafing. Atoum (Atoum & Farah, 1993) also found that “the social loafing effect was eliminated when ... [subjects] performed highly involved tasks, regardless of the identifiability of their output.”

Peterson (Peterson, Zaccaro, & Daly, 1986) concluded that social loafing was not associated with “subsequent problem-solving difficulties or with sad affect,” and that social loafing was different from learned helplessness.

Szymanski (Szymanski & Harkins, 1987) found that *self* evaluation also reduced social loafing. Harkins (Harkins & Szymanski, 1988) also found that “the potential for self-evaluation was sufficient to eliminate the loafing effect in a study with 120 college students.” Harkins (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989) later found that “providing a standard that allowed the *group* to evaluate its performance eliminated the loafing effect.

Price (Price, 1987) found that identifiability had little impact on social loafing when group members were asked to make a decision but it did have an impact when group members were asked to express an opinion. Unidentifiable persons with sole task responsibility loafed *more* than unidentifiable persons who shared task responsibility.

Singh (Singh & Singh, 1989) found that job specificity correlated negatively with the causes of social loafing.

Williams (K. D. Williams & Karau, 1991) found that the social compensation hypothesis worked: people did less social loafing when they expected their co-workers to perform poorly. However, they did not engage in social compensation when they perceived the task to be low in meaningfulness.

Hardy (Hardy & Crace, 1991) studied rowers and non-rowers paired together on a team rowing task and concluded that “the least proficient teammate exhibited a loafing effect.”

Karau (Karau & Williams, 1993) carried out a meta-analysis of 78 studies and found that social loafing was robust and generalised across tasks and sample populations. Evaluation potential, expectations of co-worker performance, task meaningfulness, and culture had especially strong influences.

Robbins (Robbins, 1995) examined the ‘sucker effect,’ when people believe that other people aren’t putting effort in it and don’t try hard for fear of being mistaken for a ‘sucker.’ She found the sucker effect pertained even when a task was thought-provoking, personally-involving, and provided the opportunity for unique contributions.

Comer (Comer, 1995) recommended: composing groups in which every member brings a unique set of skills to bear on a task and at which members are at comparable levels of expertise; making members’ areas of expertise explicit to reduced feelings of dispensability; limiting group sizes to fit task requirements; remedying problems in the group while it is not too late; giving groups greater discretion over planning and executing their work.

Karau (Karau & Williams, 1995) developed a model which suggested “that individuals will be willing to exert effort on a collective task only to the degree that they expect their efforts to be instrumental in obtaining outcomes that they value personally.” Karau (Karau & Williams, 1997) also found that people who work in cohesive teams are less likely to engage in social loafing.

Swain (Swain, 1996) found that people who are motivated by a task, rather than their ego, are less likely to engage in social loafing.

Charbonnier (Charbonnier, Huguet, Brauer, & Monteil, 1998) found that social loafing was stronger in people who are motivated to assert their individuality and uniqueness. Huguet (Huguet, Charbonnier, & Monteil, 1999) found that people who felt ‘uniquely superior,’ expended less effort when working collectively on an easy task but more effort when working collectively on a more challenging one.

Hoeksema-van-Orden (Hoeksema-van Orden, Gaillard, & Buunk, 1998) found that fatigue increased social loafing but that individualizing the task and providing public, individual feedback counteracted these effects.

Shepperd (Shepperd & Taylor, 1999) found that instrumentality - the belief that one’s own performance influenced the team’s performance, which in turn influenced the team’s outcome - was important in eliminating social loafing.

Gagné (Gagné & Zuckerman, 1999) found that performance goals led to lower levels of social loafing than learning goals.

Smith (Smith, Kerr, Markus, & Stasson, 2001) found that individuals with a high need for cognition – a tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavours – were less likely to engage in social loafing.

Tata (Tata, 2002) found that account-giving reduced the perception of social loafing. Concessions were more effective in decreasing perceptions of social loafing than excuses and justifications which, in turn, were more effective than refusals.

van Leeuwen (van Leeuwen & van Knippenberg, 2002) looked into the effects of social matching – matching one's efforts to what one believes is expected of one. She found that this worked when there was no specific goal. However, when there was a specific goal men stuck to social matching but women changed their performance level to represent an equal share of the group goal.

Murphy (Murphy, Wayne, Liden, & Erdogan, 2003) found that leader-member exchange but *not* team-member exchange was related to social loafing.

Liden (Liden, Wayne, Jaworksi, & Bennett, 2004) found that task interdependence and decreases in task visibility and distributive justice were associated with greater occurrence of social loafing as were increased group size and decreased cohesiveness. However, perceptions of co-worker loafing were associated with *reduced* social loafing, evidence of a social-compensation effect.

Hart (Hart, Karau, Stasson, & Kerr, 2004) found that achievement motivation reduced social loafing regardless of expected co-worker effort.

Tan (Tan & Tan, 2008) found that conscientiousness and felt responsibility were both reduced social loafing but that there was no connection between social loafing and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Woodman (Woodman, Roberts, Hardy, Callow, & Rogers, 2011) found that narcissistic people displayed greater effort when their efforts were identifiable but that being identifiable made no difference to people low in narcissism.

Smrt (Smrt & Karau, 2011) found that a Protestant work ethic reduced social loafing.

Worchel (Worchel, Rothgerber, & Day, 2011) found that people working in new groups did not engage in social loafing but as groups got to the midpoint and end of their existence social loafing increased.

Ferrari (Ferrari & Pychyl, 2012) found that conscientiousness, procrastination and social loafing were all linked.

Luo (Luo, Qu, & Marnburg, 2013) found that employee commitment was an important mediating factor, while turnover intention was the main driver of employee social-loafing behaviour. Justice-related satisfaction significantly influenced employee commitment.

Schippers (Schippers, 2014) concluded that “if there is a high degree of conscientiousness and agreeableness within the team, team members will compensate for social loafing tendencies, and performance will stay up to par.”

Lount (Lount & Wilk, 2014) found that “when individual performance was publicly posted in the workplace, employees working in a group performed *better* than when working alone.”

Arevalillo-Herráez (Arevalillo-Herráez, 2014) found that “assessment-based reactive strategies that exploit existing emotional relationships between team members are effective as a response to unequal commitment in cooperative tasks.”

Meyer (Meyer, Schermuly, & Kauffeld, 2016) found that social loafing was more common among team members who were part of a team with strong faultlines, who belonged to the larger subgroup in their team, and who exhibited low levels of social competence.

Jaikumar (Jaikumar & Mendonca, 2017) reviewed ‘bad apple,’ behaviour and found that perceived co-worker loafing may lead to counterproductive work behaviour towards colleagues, and that interpersonal deviance may affect the task cohesion of the group. However, the presence of affectively *negative* individuals is empirically proven to *improve* group performance, especially when the task is related to creativity or information processing.

Mihelic (Mihelič & Culiberg, 2018) found that mindfulness and moral meaningfulness were negatively related to loafing attitudes but that extrinsic motivation strengthened the relationship between social-loafing attitudes and intentions.

Chen (Chen & Chen-Yang, 2018) found that lean management techniques could reduce social loafing.

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