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Individual employees' multiple team membership: a double-edged sword

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CHAPTER 3

Is Multiple Team Membership a Challenge or a Hindrance for Individual Employees?

The Moderating Role of Organizational Tenure⁷

ABSTRACT

This chapter builds on the challenge-hindrance stressor framework to investigate the potential benefits and disadvantages of multiple team membership (MTM) for individual employees. Furthermore, we extend this framework with insights from organizational socialization theory to propose that, depending on an employee's organizational tenure, individual MTM will differentially shape his or her perceptions of work challenge and role ambiguity, subsequently influencing the employee's job performance and absenteeism. We tested our conceptual model using time-lagged multi-source data from a large organization of applied research ($N = 1211$). Our results demonstrate that, for employees with relatively low organizational tenure, MTM was negatively associated with perceived work challenge and positively associated with perceived role ambiguity, which in turn associated with lower job performance and higher absenteeism. For employees with higher organizational tenure, by contrast, MTM associated positively with their work challenge perceptions and subsequent performance outcomes, whereas MTM was unrelated with perceived role ambiguity as well as absenteeism. These findings offer new theoretical insights into MTM's positive and negative individual-level consequences and identify relevant psychological mechanisms and contingency factors in this regard.

⁷ This chapter is based on van de Brake, H.J., Walter, F., Rink, F.A., & Essens, P.J.M.D., & Van der Vegt, G.S. (2017). Is multiple team membership a challenge or a hindrance for individual employees. **Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings**.

A prominent characteristic of contemporary work is that employees are frequently involved in more than one team at the same time (O’Leary, Mortensen, & Woolley, 2011a). Research suggests that such multiple team membership (MTM) is increasingly common in a wide variety of countries, industries, and occupations (Mortensen & Gardner, 2008; Mortensen, Woolley, & O’Leary, 2007). In project-based work settings, for example, parallel project teams often share overlapping personnel stock (Zika-Viktorsson, Sundstrom, & Engwall, 2006). Similarly, health care professionals often work concurrently in multiple patient care teams (Wagner, 2000), and knowledge workers are sometimes involved in nine or more concurrent R&D teams (Bertolotti, Mattarelli, Vignoli, & Macrì, 2015).

In line with this development, scholarly interest in MTM’s consequences has increased during the last decade (O’Leary et al., 2011a; O’Leary, Woolley, & Mortensen, 2011b). Most of this research has focused on the organizational and team levels of analysis. Qualitative studies have shown, for example, that organizations use MTM to spread “expensive resources across teams that don’t need 100% of those resources 100% of the time” (Mortensen & Gardner, 2017: 58; see also Mortensen, Woolley, & O’Leary, 2007). Furthermore, social network research has found that MTM can promote useful information and knowledge flows between simultaneous projects (Vedres & Stark, 2010). Team-level research similarly suggests that MTM may associate with more efficient work routines and better opportunities for intra-team learning, thus improving a focal team’s performance (e.g., Bertolotti, Mattarelli, Vignoli, & Macrì, 2015; Cummings & Haas, 2012). Taken together, these studies paint a picture of MTM as highly efficient and effective, and it only seems logical that organizations are so eager to adopt this type of work arrangement.

Importantly, however, this near-exclusive focus on organizational and team outcomes has left us with little insight into how MTM influences an individual employee’s experiences and behaviors on the job (for a notable exception, see Pluut, Flestea, & Curşeu, 2014).

Complex work phenomena can have markedly different consequences on various levels of analysis (see Heck & Thomas, 2015; Hox, Moerbeek & Van de Schoot, 2017), and there are good theoretical reasons to believe that MTM comes with important disadvantages (in addition to its potential benefits) for individual employees. Some scholars have depicted MTM as highly demanding and potentially confusing for individuals (Kauppila, 2014; Matthews, Whittaker, Moran, Helsley, & Tejinder, 2012), for example, and these psychological stress experiences may invoke unproductive and inefficient work behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 2007; LePine et al., 2004). Hence, there appears to be a real risk that MTM is acclaimed as an effective organizational practice before its effects on individual employees are sufficiently understood. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to increase our understanding of MTM's individual-level consequences.

We draw from the challenge-hindrane stressor framework (LePine, LePine, & Jackson, 2004), in particular, to integratively consider both positive and negative perspectives on individual MTM. On the one hand, we suggest that MTM may represent a problematic type of hindrance stressor that triggers perceptions of role ambiguity (i.e., confusion about core responsibilities within and across teams; Rizzo et al., 1970), potentially reducing an employee's job performance and increasing his or her absenteeism. On the other hand, we draw from exploratory work by Mortensen et al. (2007) to propose that employees may also perceive MTM as interesting and psychologically rewarding, possibly triggering work challenge perceptions (i.e., perceived opportunities for personal growth and gain at work; LePine et al., 2004) that may strengthen an employee's job performance and decrease his or her absenteeism.

Further, beyond demonstrating *that* individual MTM may go along with both beneficial and detrimental implications, we aim to illustrate *when* employees are most likely to perceive MTM as either a challenge or a hindrance and, thus, when employees may exhibit

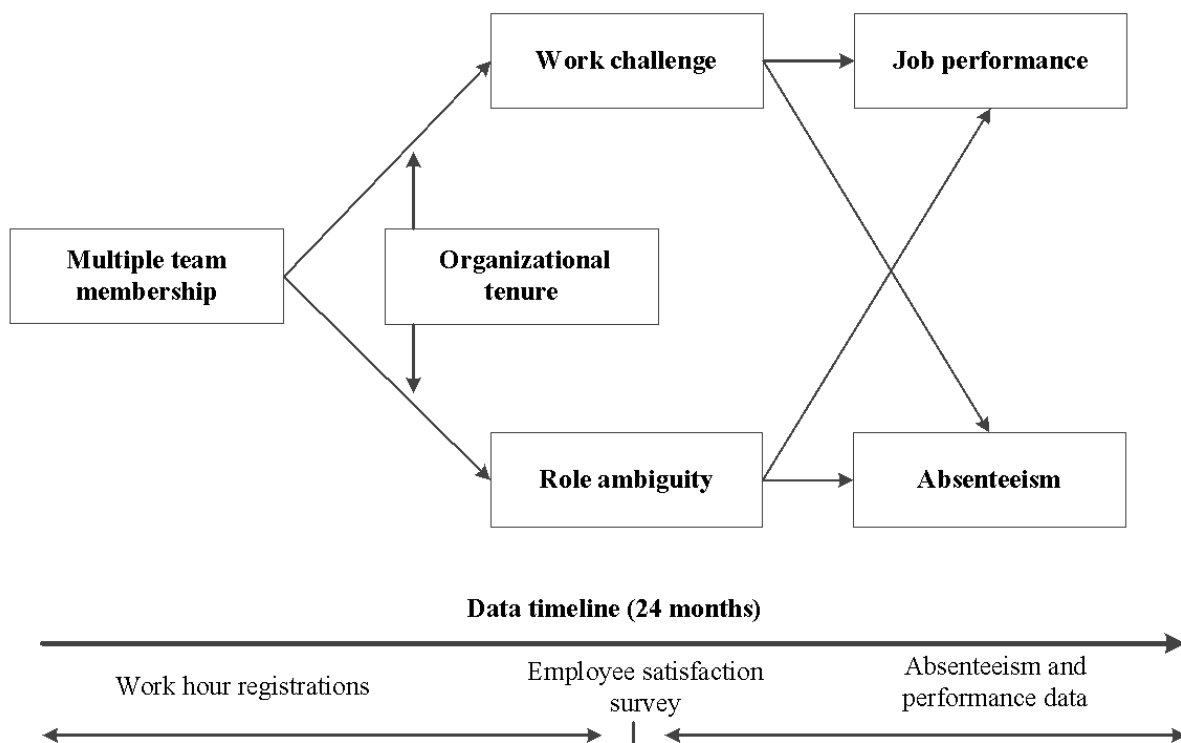
productive or counterproductive reactions. By itself, the challenge-hindrances framework cannot sufficiently explicate the boundary conditions that may elicit either of these countervailing consequences of MTM. We therefore integrate this framework with insights from organizational socialization theory (Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980), which appears particularly useful in explaining employees' diverse stress responses to higher MTM. This conceptual perspective highlights the processes by which employees adjust to their (concurrent) work roles and task requirements (Biddle, 1986; Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). It suggests that employees with longer, more elaborate experience within the organization respond differently to demanding work practices than employees who are relatively new to the organization and, thus, are less familiar with the organization's work processes, implicit norms, and interpersonal settings (McDaniel, Schmidt, & Hunter, 1988; Ng & Feldman, 2011). On this basis, we predict that the prevalence of MTM's positive or negative consequences critically depends on an individual employee's organizational tenure (i.e., the amount of time that an employee has worked within the organization; Quinones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995).

We empirically test these predictions using time-lagged multi-source data from a large organization in the Netherlands, comprising 1211 knowledge workers with differing degrees of MTM. In doing so, our research strives to make several contributions. It adds to the growing MTM literature by supplementing existing organization-level and team-level studies with a distinct individual-level perspective that provides new insights into the possible 'dark side' of this work practice. Potentially counteracting MTM's productivity advantages at the organizational and team levels, we illustrate that working in a multi-team environment can diminish an individual employee's job performance and increase his or her absenteeism. Moreover, this study responds to recent calls for research on the "process variables and contingency factors" that give more insight into MTM's potentially positive and negative

consequences for individual employees (Pluut et al., 2013: 345; see also Van de Brake, Walter, Rink, Essens, & van der Vegt, 2018). In doing so, this investigation enriches the existing theory on individual MTM by explicating both *why* MTM may be detrimental for an employee's work outcomes (introducing an employee's challenge and hindrance perceptions as key psychological mechanisms) and *when* these specific consequences are most likely to unfold (highlighting an employee's organizational tenure as a key boundary condition). Together, this advances a more complete picture of the role of MTM as an important and increasingly popular type of work arrangement in modern organizations.

FIGURE 3.1

Conceptual Model and Study Design



THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Most prior research has conceptualized MTM as a team-level construct, representing the extent to which a focal team's members are also members of other teams (Bertolotti et al., 2015; Mortensen, 2014). Following Pluut et al. (2014), we depart from this team-level conceptualization and cast MTM as an individual-level construct that indicates the extent to which an employee is a member of more than one team at the same time. Such individual MTM is formally defined as an employee's number of simultaneous and active team memberships, as reflected in the number of teams to which he or she allocates working time within a certain period (e.g., per week; O'Leary et al., 2011a). With higher MTM, an individual employee spreads his or her working time across a greater number of teams within the respective period, whereas employees with lower MTM focus their working time on a smaller number of concurrent teams. We note that this definition excludes 'inactive' teams to which employees do not dedicate at least some of their working time (e.g., temporarily discontinued teams), such that it only covers teams that are directly relevant for an individual's work (Pluut et al., 2014).

A Challenge-Hindrane Perspective on MTM

The challenge-hindrane framework is based on the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and it posits that employees' stress responses towards complex and demanding work arrangements (like MTM) depend on their appraisal of the respective situation (LePine et al., 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007). When a work practice is appraised as a challenge, it is seen as something that offers the potential for personal gain (e.g., task mastery, learning, personal growth), and can be dealt with through persistence and increased work effort. When a work situation is appraised as a hindrance, by contrast, it is seen as threatening and harmful, invoking negative stress responses that may hinder an employee's goal attainment. Moreover, it is important to note that recent theory and research on the challenge-

hindrance framework suggests there is considerable variation among individual employees in how they perceive and respond to the same work situations and arrangements (LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016; Ozer, Chang, & Schaubroeck, 2014). A situation perceived as a challenge by some individuals may be seen as a hindrance by others, depending for example on the respective individuals' characteristics and job contexts (Webster, Beehr, & Love, 2011).

We believe such differential reactions are particularly likely for individual employees' MTM. As noted before, complex work arrangements like MTM can offer the potential for mastery and gains in professional development (Mortensen et al., 2007), but they simultaneously offer the potential for increased role ambiguity and unclear job demands (Pluut et al., 2014). Hence, we cast MTM as both a potential challenge stressor (i.e., a source of positive work challenge perceptions) and a potential hindrance stressor (i.e., a source of role ambiguity) for individual employees. Subsequently, we extend this challenge-hindrance perspective with insights from the organizational socialization literature to argue that employees' respective MTM appraisals hinge on their prior experiences within the organization.

Individual MTM as a Challenge

MTM and work challenge perceptions. The challenge-hindrance literature postulates that employees are most likely to appraise a stressful situation as a positive challenge when they perceive the respective task requirements (a) as difficult but manageable and (b) as offering the potential for personal growth or gain (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). Following this rationale, there are two important reasons why individual MTM may increase an employee's work challenge perceptions.

First, work arrangements with high MTM are highly complex, because they require individual employees to divide their attention and efforts across diverse team and task

contexts (O’Leary et al., 2011a, 2011b; Pluut et al., 2015). Although this may increase an employee’s perceived work difficulty (Zika-Viktorsson et al., 2006), research suggests that employees can learn how to be successful in managing their MTM demands over time (Van de Brake et al., 2018). An in-depth qualitative study among 13 employees concurrently involved in multiple teams, for example, found that employees developed more efficient task and time management practices to ease the difficulties associated with multi-teaming (Mortensen et al., 2007). Moreover, research by LePine et al. (2004) suggests that individuals working on a greater number of simultaneous projects increased their work effort to meet multiple concurrent task demands. Thus, employees may often be able to employ various effective strategies to successfully manage the potential difficulties associated with MTM, resulting in positive work challenge perceptions (Mortensen et al., 2007). Employees with lower MTM, by contrast, do not need to increase their efficiency or effort to manage resulting task demands and difficulties, and they may experience their work as less challenging.

Second, higher MTM may promote an employee’s potential for personal growth and gain. Employees with high MTM generally occupy boundary spanning roles that allow them to be immersed in and connect various separate teams (Vedres & Stark, 2010). Research has shown that individuals in such roles are in a unique position to gather information and support, exercise influence, and coordinate activities across multiple parts in the organization (Burt, 1992; Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Hence, higher MTM may offer superior access to organizational resources for individual employees. Moreover, being concurrently involved in many different teams may signal that an employee’s expertise is desired and valued across a relatively large number of tasks and projects (Cummings & Haas, 2012). Employees with high MTM may, therefore, perceive that their work is highly important to the success of the organization as a whole, with their jobs offering relevant opportunities for growth and development (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). By contrast, it is clear that employees with lower

MTM may find it more difficult (a) to directly access diverse teams' resources and (b) to perceive their jobs as contributing to broader organizational goal achievement (i.e., beyond the confines of their immediate, relatively limited work environment). As such, these latter individuals are less likely to experience challenging opportunities for personal gain and growth at work, as compared with employees in high-MTM arrangements. Hence:

Hypothesis 1. An employee's multiple team membership is positively related to his or her work challenge perceptions.

Organizational tenure and the MTM – work challenge linkage. As indicated earlier, recent research on the challenge-hindrane framework strongly suggests that individuals differ in how they appraise a specific work situation (Ozer, Chang, & Schaubroeck, 2014; Webster, Beehr & Love, 2011). Hence, although we believe MTM has the potential to elicit positive work challenge perceptions, it seems likely that this potential is not equally realized among all employees. Scholars have long argued, in this regard, that an individual's stress responses to features of the work environment critically hinge on his or her organizational experience (Katz, 1978; Kozlowski & Hults, 1986). Building on this broad notion, we integrate our previous reasoning, as drawn from the challenge-hindrane literature, with insights from organizational socialization theory to cast an employee's organizational tenure as a key moderating factor in the linkage between individual MTM and work challenge perceptions.

Organizational socialization theory (Louis, 1980) posits that longer organizational experience (i.e., higher organizational tenure) promotes familiarity with co-workers, supervisors, and clients and enhances an employee's understanding of the organization's work processes as well as its implicit norms and values (Bauer et al., 2007; Gregersen, 1993). In other words, employees with higher organizational tenure are typically more knowledgeable about the organization than those with lower tenure (Ng & Feldman, 2011; Sturman, 2003).

The type of knowledge gained with increasing organizational tenure may be particularly relevant in the context of MTM, because it may strengthen an employee's ability to work on multiple and varied tasks within the organization and to participate in complex collaborative work arrangements (Louis, 1980; Jones, 1986). On this basis, we argue that employees with higher organizational tenure are especially likely to appraise high-MTM situations as difficult-yet-manageable and as an opportunity for personal growth and gain, such that MTM should primarily trigger work challenge perceptions among employees with higher (but not lower) organizational tenure.

Employees with relatively high organizational tenure, on the one hand, can rely on considerable work experiences specific to the organization, and they should benefit from intimate knowledge of relevant procedures, requirements, and constraints (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Moreover, high-tenure employees are likely to have developed the necessary skills for effectively handling divergent and complex tasks across different parts of the organization over time, because of their extensive experience with various, organization-specific task requirements, people, and goals and values (Chao et al., 1994). As such, these employees should be rather well equipped to successfully manage the specific demands associated with high MTM. In fact, higher MTM may offer unique growth opportunities for employees with higher organizational tenure, enabling them to fruitfully apply the detailed knowledge gained during their prolonged organizational socialization, to further develop their respective skills, and to break away from established routines and venture into novel tasks and work contexts. Consequently, we anticipate that employees with relatively high tenure in the organization will react particularly favorably toward high-MTM settings, perceiving their work as more challenging when their individual MTM is more rather than less pronounced.

Employees with shorter organizational tenure, on the other hand, typically have had fewer opportunities to build relevant knowledge within their organization (Moreland &

Levine, 1982). These relatively inexperienced employees may be less familiar, in particular, with relevant work processes and regulations, and they may still be in the process of learning how to best accomplish their tasks (Kozlowski & Hults, 1986). Accordingly, we anticipate that employees with lower organizational tenure may perceive their jobs as relatively challenging, even when their work domain remains limited to only one or a few teams (i.e., with low MTM). In fact, when employees have to spread their work efforts across multiple simultaneous teams in this situation, they may feel overburdened by the associated difficulties and unable to effectively manage these increased demands. Hence, high MTM is unlikely to represent a positive and challenging growth opportunity for these employees. In sum, we therefore propose:

Hypothesis 2. Organizational tenure moderates the positive relationship between an employee's multiple team membership and his or her work challenge perceptions.

This relationship is only significant among employees with higher (rather than lower) organizational tenure.

Downstream consequences of individual MTM and work challenge perceptions.

Extending our prior argumentation, we propose that an individual employee's MTM will indirectly relate with his or her tangible work behaviors, via the employee's work challenge perceptions. When work circumstances offer opportunities for personal growth and career progress, in particular, employees are typically motivated to work hard and improve their skills (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Nicholls, 1984). Accordingly, research has shown that appraising a work situation as challenging increases employees' effort and productivity (Podsakoff et al., 2007), and, thus, positively relates with individual employees' job

performance (Amabile et al., 1996).⁸ Employees in less challenging task environments, by contrast, are generally less inclined to exert effort and improve their expertise and productivity, thus lowering these employee's performance levels (LePine et al., 2005).

Moreover, research suggests that work challenge perceptions may negatively relate with employees' absenteeism. When individual employees perceive their work as favorable and interesting, they may try to avoid absenteeism whenever possible because they are highly motivated to invest time and energy into their job (LePine et al., 2005). Employees may be more willing to appear at work, then, even when they suffer from minor indispositions (Michie, Watson, & Pennebaker, 1989). In addition, positive work experiences tend to buffer feelings of anxiety and depression, which are known to promote absenteeism (Wedegaertner et al., 2013). Hence, individual employees with higher work challenge perceptions may perceive their work as more pleasant and engaging than employees with lower challenge perceptions, reducing absenteeism among the former group of employees.

Combined with the reasoning leading up to Hypothesis 1, these arguments cast work challenge perceptions as an important psychological mechanism that links an individual employee's MTM with his or her increased job performance and reduced absenteeism. Moreover, our rationale for Hypothesis 2 suggests that the positive linkage between MTM and perceived work challenge only exists among employees with higher rather than lower organizational tenure. Logically, then, we would also expect the indirect linkages between MTM and job performance as well as absenteeism, as transferred by an employee's challenge perceptions, to be positive (negative) among employees with higher rather than lower tenure (i.e., a pattern of mediated moderation; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006).

⁸ We note that work challenge perceptions may come with some downsides as well. Meta-analytical evidence suggests, for example, that challenge stressors are associated with individuals' job strain (LePine et al., 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007). Ultimately, however, the benefits of perceived work challenges appear to outweigh their potential downsides, as the respective meta-analyses have found effects of challenge stressors on individual employee's work performance and withdrawal to be positive and negative, respectively.

Hypothesis 3a. An employee's MTM is indirectly and positively related to his or her job performance, through work challenge perceptions. This relationship is only significant among employees with higher (rather than lower) organizational tenure.

Hypothesis 3b. An employee's MTM is indirectly and negatively related to his or her absenteeism, through work challenge perceptions. This relationship is only significant among employees with higher (rather than lower) organizational tenure.

Individual MTM as a Hindrance

MTM and work role ambiguity. So far, we have argued that employees (at least with relatively high organizational tenure) may appraise their individual MTM as a favorable challenge stressor that, consequently, relates positively with their job performance and negatively with their absenteeism. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to also expect that employees may perceive high MTM as a type of hindrance stressor, with detrimental implications for their work behaviors and outcomes. Scholars have noted, in particular, that relatively high MTM may cause employees to experience confusion about their core responsibilities on the job, the value of their work efforts, and the consequences of their actions (Kauppila, 2014; Pluut et al., 2014; Van de Brake et al., 2018). A number of studies have demonstrated that such role ambiguities are among the most important sources of hindrance stress perceptions (LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005; Podsakoff, LePine & LePine, 2007). In the following, we will examine individual MTM as a potential trigger of an employee's perceived role ambiguity.

Specifically, employees who are involved in multiple teams at the same time cooperate with numerous supervisors and coworkers across diverse team contexts, and they must handle a relatively large number of different task and interpersonal requirements (Mortensen et al., 2007; O'Leary et al., 2011a). As a result, it may be difficult for these employees to fully understand the expectations associated with each of their multiple team

roles. Adding to these problems, high MTM curtails the time an employee can spend within any given team (O’Leary et al., 2011a). Employees with higher MTM, therefore, have fewer opportunities to get acquainted with their diverse supervisors’ and teammates’ expertise, expectations, and social characteristics (Mortensen, 2014), and with the specific languages, assumptions, and work values associated with working in each of their teams (Biddle, 2013; Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Hence, employees who are concurrently involved in many different teams may lack critical knowledge about how to enact and evaluate their multiple work roles (Kauppila, 2014; Kramer, 2009). These employees may find it difficult, therefore, to comprehend and adequately prioritize their specific tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities in each of their teams (Biddle, 2013; Hughes, 2001; Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990). By contrast, employees concurrently involved in only one or a few teams may find it easier to grasp these issues because (a) they are confronted with less diversity in their task and social requirements at work and (b) they can spend a greater share of their working time to familiarize themselves with their specific job responsibilities (Mortensen, 2014). Hence:

Hypothesis 4. An employee’s multiple team membership is positively related to his or her perceived role ambiguity.

Organizational tenure and the MTM – role ambiguity linkage. Again, we build on organizational socialization theory (Louis, 1980) to suggest that an employee’s tenure with the organization may represent a key contingency factor for the relationship between individual MTM and perceived role ambiguity. Employees with higher organizational tenure, on the one hand, have had ample opportunity to ‘learn the ropes’ within their organization by cooperating with a relatively large number of colleagues, supervisors, and/or subordinates over time (Louis, 1980). Therefore, even in complex work settings with high MTM, high-tenure employees may be in a good position to correctly understand their multiple tasks and

responsibilities and prioritize their actions accordingly (Chao et al., 1994; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Moreover, high-tenure employees should be familiar with organization-wide interaction norms (e.g., resulting from organizational culture; Ferris, Liden, Munyon, Summers, Basik, & Buckley, 2009), due to their intense and prolonged socialization within the organization. As such, they may be able to grasp and integrate multiple teams' role expectations with relative ease, buffering MTM's potentially detrimental consequences for perceived role ambiguity among these individuals.

Employees with shorter organizational tenure, on the other hand, have had less time for thorough socialization into the organization and, thus, they should be less familiar with the organization's culture, regulations, and procedures for task accomplishment (Sawyer, 1992). Consequently, these employees may find it difficult to adapt to and prioritize multiple simultaneous teams' demands and activities, particularly when they can only spend relatively small amounts of their working time within each team (as is common with pronounced MTM; O'Leary et al., 2011b). When faced with high MTM, these employees may be unable to recognize potential synergies between their tasks across different teams (O'Leary, 2011a) and to fully understand their diverse supervisors' and teammates' expertise and social expectations. Consequently, we anticipate that higher MTM will trigger pronounced role ambiguity perceptions for employees with relatively low organizational tenure. In sum, we propose:

Hypothesis 5. Organizational tenure moderates the positive relationship between an employee's multiple team membership and his or her perceived role ambiguity. This relationship is only significant among employees with lower (rather than higher) organizational tenure.

Downstream consequences of individual MTM and role ambiguity. By promoting perceptions of role ambiguity, we anticipate that the potentially negative consequences of

individual MTM may extend toward an employee's relevant work behaviors (i.e., job performance and absenteeism). Meta-analytic evidence suggests, accordingly, that role ambiguity hinders employees' ability to comprehend their task demands and meet performance expectations, thereby decreasing employees' performance on the job (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005; Moreau et al., 2004; Tubre & Collins, 1985). Moreover, research has shown that role ambiguity consistently relates to individuals' depression, burnout, and lowered job satisfaction (e.g., Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Schmidt et al., 2014). Hence, role ambiguity may trigger a number of negative attitudes and unpleasant experiences at work, reducing an employee's motivation to invest effort into his or her job and, thus, diminishing his or her efficiency and effectiveness.

Similarly, prior studies have repeatedly shown positive associations between an employee's perceived role ambiguity and his or her absenteeism (Michie et al., 1989; Williams, 2003). Because high role ambiguity represents an important hindrance stressor (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), individuals tend to withdraw from their work to avoid the strain associated with such experiences (Biddle, 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, the type of continuous and prolonged stress experience originating from role ambiguity has been shown to impose extensive psychological and physiological demands that can cause severe health complaints, ultimately preventing the respective employees' regular work attendance (Michie et al., 1989; Selye, 2013). Hence, we anticipate that an employee's perceptions of role ambiguity are positively related to his or her absenteeism levels.

Integrating this argumentation with the previous hypotheses points toward a pattern of conditional indirect relationships that emphasizes a potentially problematic side of MTM. Combined with our reasoning for Hypothesis 4, in particular, the present rationale suggests a negative indirect relationship between an individual employee's MTM and his or her job performance, and a positive indirect relationship between MTM and absenteeism, with role

ambiguity representing a key mediating mechanism. Furthermore, as noted in Hypothesis 5, the positive MTM-role ambiguity linkage should only apply for employees with relatively low (but not relatively high) organizational tenure. Logically, then, organizational tenure should also moderate the indirect MTM-job performance and MTM-absenteeism linkages, through perceived role ambiguity. We, therefore, suggest:

Hypothesis 6a. An employee's MTM is indirectly and negatively related to his or her job performance, through perceived role ambiguity. This relationship is only significant among employees with lower (rather than higher) organizational tenure.

Hypothesis 6b. An employee's MTM is indirectly and positively related to his or her absenteeism, through perceived role ambiguity. This relationship is only significant among employees with lower (rather than higher) organizational tenure.

METHOD

Data and Study Design

We tested our predictions using time-lagged multi-source data from a large organization in the Netherlands that conducts applied contract research in a wide variety of knowledge areas (e.g., defense, engineering, transportation, organizational innovation). Work in this organization is primarily structured in team-based projects that are formed around specific research assignments and generally last between 6 and 24 months. A project team typically comprises between 2 and 25 employees, and individual employees participate in around 5 to 25 projects per year. This provided a viable context for examining our conceptual model.

We drew from archival sources (including organizational human resource records and survey data) to measure the focal study variables. In particular, the organization provided detailed information on all employees' weekly work-hours. Employees were obliged to digitally register the time they had spent working on different project teams on a weekly basis

to determine project costs, billable hours, and capacity utilization. As outlined below, we used these work time registrations to measure MTM. Similarly, individual employees' job performance assessments and absenteeism information were available through the organization's digital human resource management system. Additionally, we drew on available data from the host organization's bi-annual employee satisfaction survey to capture employees' work challenge and role ambiguity perceptions. And finally, we obtained employees' demographic information (including organizational tenure) from the host organization's department of human resources.

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Arjas & Parner, 2004; Shin & Konrad, 2014), we gauged MTM at an earlier time point to predict the mediators and outcomes at later points in time. Specifically, we operationalized MTM using work hour registrations from the first three quarters of 2010, whereas perceptions of work challenge and role ambiguity were captured using the employee satisfaction survey the host organization had conducted in the final quarter of 2010. Finally, an employee's job performance was rated by his or her supervisor in the beginning of 2011 (referring to performance during 2010), and absenteeism was tracked over the course of 2011.

Sample

We obtained data for all 1706 research employees that had worked for the organization during the study period (i.e., 2010-2011). These employees' jobs were knowledge-intensive (e.g., software development, civil engineering, policy analysis) and highly collaborative because tasks were performed within interdependent project teams. After omitting individuals that had not responded to the organization's employee satisfaction survey, we retained a usable sample of 1211 employees (effective response rate = 71%).

Respondents in our final sample were mostly male (73%), their average age was 42 years ($SD = 10$ years), and they had worked at the organization for an average of 11 years

(SD = 9.5 years). Most of these employees were employed fulltime (average working time = .94 full-time equivalents), and 87% had permanent working contracts with the host organization. On average, employees worked on 15 projects per year. This illustrates that MTM was highly common in this organization, with almost all of the employees in our final sample (98%) working on more than one project per week at some time during the study period.

Measures

Multiple team membership. Consistent with prior research, we defined individual MTM as the number of concurrent teams to which an employee allocated working time within a certain period (O’Leary, 2011, 2011b; Pluut et al., 2014). Specifically, we used employees’ weekly work hour registrations to capture the number of teams in which an employee was involved during any given week. To operationalize an individual’s MTM, we averaged these measures across the first three quarters of 2010. We omitted projects with less than 3 members to exclude individual-based work and dyadic (rather than team) cooperation (Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990).⁹ On average, the employees in our sample distributed their working time across 2.92 teams per week during the study period, ranging from a low of 0.05 teams to a high of 9.96 teams per week.

Work challenge. We used three items from the organization’s employee satisfaction survey to measure perceived work challenge. Employees rated, on a scale from 1 (*low*) to 10 (*high*), their satisfaction with “the amount of challenge in your work”, “the extent to which your work is useful” and “the extent to which you can use your creativity in your work”.

Cronbach’s alpha was .81. We note that these items closely mirror prior definitions of work

⁹ The full dataset contained 5529 projects, reflecting 17794 person-project observations (i.e., individual employees working on distinct projects). We omitted 1432 projects that did not fit our team definition (i.e., with fewer than three members). Importantly, these projects only accounted for 1635 person-project observations (i.e., about 9% of the person-project observations used to create our MTM measure). Moreover, we note that supplementary analyses based on an MTM measure that included all available projects yielded virtually identical results and conclusions, as compared with the findings reported in the following.

challenge. Amabile et al. (1996: 1166), for example, define work challenge as “a sense of having to work hard on challenging tasks and important projects”. Furthermore, we conducted a separate validation study to establish the viability of the present measure (see Appendix).

Role ambiguity. We used three additional items from the organization’s employee satisfaction survey to capture perceived role ambiguity. On a scale from 1 (*low*) to 10 (*high*), employees were asked to rate how satisfied they were with “the extent to which I know what is expected of me”, “the extent to which I have a clear understanding of what is going on in the organization”, and “the extent to which it is clear how my performance is evaluated”. These items closely resemble items from existing role ambiguity measures (e.g., Rizzo et al., 1970; see Appendix for validity information). Cronbach’s alpha was .72. We reverse coded all items, so that higher scores indicate greater role ambiguity.

Organizational tenure. We used the number of years an employee had worked for the organization to measure organizational tenure (Ng & Feldman, 2011).

Job performance. At the beginning of each year, the host organization’s human resource management system requires department-level supervisors to assess each of their direct reports’ overall job performance during the past year. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 1995; Cross & Cummings, 2004), we used these formal appraisal scores to capture employees’ job performance levels. Supervisors were asked to base their respective evaluations on (1) feedback provided by project leaders about the quality and innovativeness of an employee’s respective output, (2) the supervisor’s own assessment of an employee’s overall functioning, and (3) annual peer-assessments by direct colleagues and/or customers (if available). A standardized evaluation form was used to assess each individual with an overall performance rating on a five-point scale, with 1 representing the worst possible evaluation (i.e., *a substantial need for improvement*) and 5 indicating the best possible evaluation (i.e., *highly effective and well-*

functioning). The appraisal outcomes had direct practical relevance for the employees in our sample as the organization used these scores, in part, to determine employees' salary increases and promotions.

Absenteeism. To operationalize absenteeism, we used an individual employee's total number of sick leave hours during the year 2011, as registered in the organization's digital human resource management system (cf. Van Poppel et al., 2011).¹⁰

Control variables. Research on MTM, absenteeism, and job performance suggests that several control variables should be considered in the present investigation. Female and older employees, for example, tend to have slightly higher absenteeism levels and may be subject to biased performance evaluations (Linton, Hellsing, & Halldén, 1998; Mobley, 1982). Because age was highly correlated with organizational tenure ($r = .74, p < .01$), however, we did not include age in our hypotheses tests to avoid multicollinearity problems (Grewal, Cote, & Baumgartner, 2004) – although we note, parenthetically, that all subsequent results remained robust when age was included. Additionally, we controlled for individuals' general workload, as measured through an employee's overall contractual working time (in full-time equivalents [FTE]), because employees with higher workloads (a) may be involved in a greater number of teams and (b) typically have higher absenteeism levels (Rotchford & Roberts, 1982). Following Becker's (2005) recommendations, we repeated all hypotheses tests both with and without the control variables, and we note that the results and conclusions remained virtually identical across these analyses, supporting the robustness of our findings.

Data Analyses

We used structural equation modeling in Mplus version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén,

¹⁰ We repeated all hypotheses tests with various alternative operationalizations of absenteeism to explore our findings' robustness (e.g., the number of absenteeism hours in the first three, six, and nine months of 2011, rather than the full year). These additional analyses all yielded similar parameter estimates and significance levels. We therefore decided to report results based on the annual number of absenteeism hours because this measure had the lowest number of excess zeros (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998).

1998) to examine the hypothesized relationships, as depicted in Figure 3.1, with perceived work challenge and role ambiguity as three-item latent constructs. We employed two estimation procedures (in the same structural equation model) to test the hypotheses. When examining perceived work challenge, role ambiguity, and job performance as dependent variables (Hypotheses 1-3a and 4-6a), we used an ordinary regression estimator. When examining absenteeism as a dependent variable (Hypotheses 3b and 6b), however, a different analytical approach was necessary. As is typical for count data, the absenteeism variable had a non-normal and zero-inflated distribution (i.e., 376 of 1211 employees had not been absent during the study period), thus violating normality assumptions (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998). In line with prior absenteeism studies (e.g., Johns & Hajj, 2015), we therefore used a zero-inflated negative binomial estimator when examining this dependent variable (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998; Hilbe, 2011).

Usable job performance information was available for 1156 of the 1211 individuals in our sample. We used full-information maximum likelihood estimation to handle missing data, because scholars have shown this procedure to result in more accurate parameter estimates and standard errors (as compared to listwise deletion; Enders & Bandalos, 2001).

Because individual employees worked within departments, our data had a nested structure. To assess the extent to which this may affect our estimates, we calculated intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC1) for each dependent variable ($ICC1_{\text{perceived work challenge}} = .04, p < .05$; $ICC1_{\text{perceived role ambiguity}} = .06, p < .05$; $ICC1_{\text{job performance}} = .07, p < .05$; $ICC1_{\text{absenteeism}} = .02, p > .05$; Heck & Thomas, 2015). As shown, these ICCs were relatively low, indicating that an individual's membership in a specific department only had a small influence on the respective variables. Nevertheless, we took several steps to ensure that these nesting patterns did not bias our results. First, we attempted to estimate a multilevel structural equation model with random intercepts (on the department level) for the variables that had a significant ICC. This

multilevel structural equation model did not converge due to the large number of estimated parameters (see Cameron & Trivedi, 1998; Vittinghoff & McCulloch, 2007). We therefore estimated separate multilevel models for each dependent variable. This allowed us to compare the direct effects estimates between ordinary and multilevel models (although we could not examine indirect effects within these separate models; Muthén & Muthén, 1998). In addition, we examined our complete structural equation model with group-mean-centered work challenge, role ambiguity, and job performance scores – a procedure that removes the statistical dependence in the data by subtracting the department average from each individual score (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Importantly, the alternative models produced virtually identical estimates, as compared to those from the ordinary structural equation model. To reduce the complexity of the analyses, we therefore report ordinary structural equation modeling results in the following.

Finally, to assess the conditional indirect associations predicted in our model, we calculated the respective indirect relationships between MTM, job performance, and absenteeism through perceived work challenge (Hypotheses 3a and 3b) and perceived role ambiguity (Hypotheses 6a and 6b) at both higher (+1SD) and lower (-1SD) levels of organizational tenure, using 10,000 bootstrap samples to estimate associated 95% confidence intervals (cf. Hayes, 2009). We standardized all independent variables (i.e., MTM, tenure, and all control variables) to facilitate interpretation of the coefficients (Grewal, Cote, & Baumgartner, 2004).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.1 presents means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all study variables. As shown, MTM was positively related to organizational tenure ($r = .08; p < .01$). Importantly, however, exploratory analyses indicated that MTM was similarly common

among both low-tenure and high-tenure employees in our sample (for employees with less than one year of organizational tenure, $M = 2.03$; for employees with average tenure, $M = 2.88$; for employees with more than 10 years of organizational tenure, $M = 3.09$).

TABLE 3.1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Variable	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Workload (FTE)	94.39	11.61							
2. Gender (<i>Female</i> = 0, <i>Male</i> = 1)	.73	.44	.25**						
3. Tenure	10.84	9.53	.03	.23**					
4. MTM	2.92	1.25	.05	.00	.08**				
5. Work challenge	7.55	1.11	-.01	.02	-.02	-.03			
6. Role ambiguity	4.01	1.38	.07*	.04	.01	.09**	-.42**		
7. Job performance	3.37	.62	.14**	-.05	-.24**	.03	.20**	-.19**	
8. Absenteeism	54.13	143.93	.03	-.03	.07*	-.01	-.04	.06	-.10**

Note. $N = 1156 - 1211$ individuals.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses using Mplus to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the items used to measure perceived work challenge and role ambiguity. A two-factor model with separate latent factors for work challenge and role ambiguity perceptions provided adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 38.24$, $df = 8$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .06, CFI = .98, SRMR = .03) and provided significantly better fit than a single-factor model ($\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 338.40$, $df_{\text{difference}} = 1$, $p < .01$; cf. Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Hypotheses Testing

As shown in Table 3.2, we found no support for the positive association between an employee's MTM and perceived work challenge suggested in Hypothesis 1 ($B = -.02$, $SE = .04$, $p > .10$). Furthermore, although the interactive relationship of individuals' MTM and organizational tenure with perceived work challenge was significant ($B = .10$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$), the respective interaction pattern did not fully match our prediction in Hypothesis 2. As shown in Figure 3.2, the linkage between MTM and challenge perceptions was positive among employees with higher organizational tenure, but this linkage only reached marginal significance at 1 SD above the mean value of organizational tenure (at +1 SD: simple slope = .08, $p < .10$, 95% CI = -.01 to .18). We further examined this interactive relationship using a regions-of-significance approach (i.e., the Johnson-Neyman technique; Preacher et al., 2006). These additional analyses revealed that the positive relationship between MTM and work challenge perceptions reached conventional significance levels at any value of organizational tenure greater than 1.30 SD above the mean (at +1.30 SD: simple slope = .11, 95% CI = .001 to .23). Moreover, as Figure 3.2 shows, MTM appeared as a risk factor for employees with lower tenure, such that these employees' work challenge perceptions were more pronounced with lower MTM (at -1 SD: simple slope = -.12, 95% CI = -.23 to -.01). In fact, the linkage between MTM and work challenge perceptions was negative and significant at any value of

organizational tenure smaller than -1 SD (at -1 SD: simple slope = $-.11$, 95% CI = $-.20$ to $-.04$). Hence, contrary to our predictions, the association between MTM and work challenge was negative (rather than non-significant) among employees with relatively low organizational tenure.

As shown in Table 3.2, we found a positive association between individual employees' work challenge perceptions and job performance ($B = .07$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$), whereas work challenge was not related to absenteeism ($B = .04$, $SE = .04$, $p > .10$). Mirroring the pattern described above, the conditional indirect relationship between MTM and job performance predicted in Hypothesis 3a (through perceived work challenge) was significant at any value of organizational tenure greater than 1.30 SD above the mean (at $+1.30$ SD; estimate = $.01$, 95% CI = $.001$ to $.02$). MTM was indirectly and negatively related with job performance (through lower work challenge perceptions), by contrast, at any value of organizational tenure smaller than -1 SD (at -1 SD; estimate = $-.01$, 95% CI = $-.02$ to $-.001$). In addition, we found no support for a conditional indirect relationship between MTM and absenteeism, through perceived work challenge. Contrary to Hypothesis 3b, this indirect relation was non-significant for employees with both higher ($+1$ SD; estimate = $.00$, 95% CI = $.00$ to $.02$) and lower organizational tenure (-1 SD; estimate = $.00$, 95% CI = $-.02$ to $.00$), and these relationships did not become significant at any organizational tenure value observed in the sample. In sum, these findings provide partial support for our hypotheses around individual employees' work challenge perceptions. We will return to these findings in the Discussion section.

Considering individual employees' role ambiguity perceptions, the present findings corroborate our theoretical reasoning. In support of Hypothesis 4, individual MTM was positively related with employees' perceived role ambiguity ($B = .09$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$), even after incorporating both organizational tenure and the control variables (see Table 3.2).

Moreover, we found a significant interactive relationship of MTM and organizational tenure with perceived role ambiguity ($B = -.10, SE = .04, p < .01$). Corroborating Hypothesis 5, Figure 3.3 shows that the MTM-perceived role ambiguity linkage was positive for employees with lower organizational tenure (-1 SD; simple slope = .19, 95% CI = .06 to .35), and not significant for employees with higher organizational tenure (+1 SD; simple slope = .00, 95% CI = -.11 to .11). Further analyses illustrated that the positive association between MTM and role ambiguity was statistically significant for any value of organizational tenure below the mean (at average organizational tenure; estimate = .09, 95% CI = .02 to .16).

As expected, we further found significant associations between role ambiguity and both job performance ($B = -.14, SE = .03, p < .01$) and absenteeism ($B = .53, SE = .08, p < .01$; see Table 3.2). Supporting the conditional indirect effects pattern predicted in Hypothesis 6a, our results yielded a negative indirect relationship between MTM and job performance, via perceived role ambiguity, when organizational tenure was relatively low (-1 SD; estimate = -.03, 95% CI = -.05 to -.02; this indirect relationship was significant for any value of organizational tenure lower than the mean). The respective indirect linkage was not significant, by contrast when organizational tenure was higher (+1 SD: estimate = .00, 95% CI = -.01 to .01). Similarly, as predicted in Hypothesis 6b, we found a significant and positive indirect relationship between MTM and absenteeism (through perceived role ambiguity) among employees with lower organizational tenure (-1 SD; estimate = .10; 95% CI = .04 to .18), but not among employees with higher tenure (+1 SD; estimate = .00; 95% CI = -.04 to .04). Again, this indirect association was significant at any value of organizational tenure below the mean.

TABLE 3.2

Conditional Indirect Relationships Between Multiple Team Membership, Work Challenge, Role Ambiguity, Job performance, and Absenteeism

Predictors	Dependent variables																					
	Work challenge				Role ambiguity				Job performance						Absenteeism							
	Main effect		Full model		Main effect		Full model		Main effect		Main effect		Full model		Main effect		Main effect		Full model			
	MTM	Full model	MTM	Full model	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA	WC	RA		
<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Workload	-.02	.04	-.03	.04	.08	.04	.08*	.04	.12**	.02	.13**	.02	.13**	.02	.10	.06	.09	.06	.09	.06		
Gender	.03	.04	.03	.04	.03	.04	.03	.03	-.02	.02	-.02	.02	-.02	.02	-.11*	.05	-.13**	.05	-.14*	.07		
Tenure	-.05	.04	-.08	.04	-.03	.04	-.01	.03	-.18**	.02	-.18**	.02	-.17**	.02	.32**	.06	.30**	.06	.30**	.06		
MTM	-.02	.04	-.02	.04	.10**	.04	.09**	.04	.02	.02	.04*	.02	.04	.02	-.04	.06	-.09	.05	-.09	.05		
MTM × Tenure			.10*	.04			-.10*	.04	.00	.02	.00	.02	.00	.02	.09	.06	.09	.06	.08	.09		
Work challenge									.12**	.02			.07**	.02	-.21**	.08			.04	.06		
Role ambiguity											-.18**	.03	-.14**	.03			.49**	.08	.53**	.08		

Conditional indirect relationships	MTM to job performance, via work challenge			MTM to absenteeism, via work challenge			MTM to job performance, via role ambiguity			MTM to absenteeism, via role ambiguity		
	Estimate	95% CI:		Estimate	95% CI:		Estimate	95% CI:		Estimate	95% CI:	
		Lower bound	Upper bound		Lower bound	Upper bound		Lower bound	Upper bound		Lower bound	Upper bound
Tenure -1SD	-.01	-.02	-.001	.00	-.02	-.00	-.03	-.05	-.02	.10	.04	.18
Average Tenure	.00	-.01	.00	.00	-.01	.00	-.01	-.02	-.01	.05	.02	.10
Tenure +1SD	.01	.00	.02	.00	.00	.02	.00	-.01	.01	.00	-.04	.04

Note. $N = 1156 - 1211$ individuals. WC = work challenge, RA = role ambiguity. Predictors were standardized.

A zero-inflated negative binomial estimator was used to predict absenteeism.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

FIGURE 3.2

Interaction Between MTM and Organizational Tenure in Predicting Work Challenge

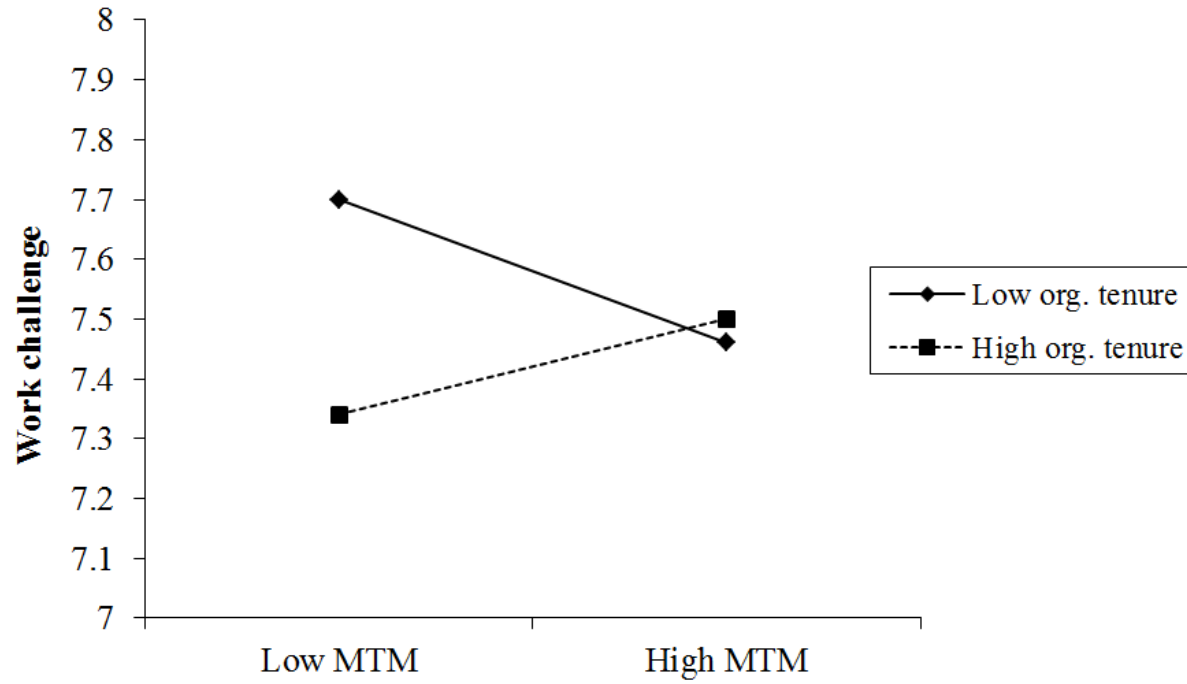
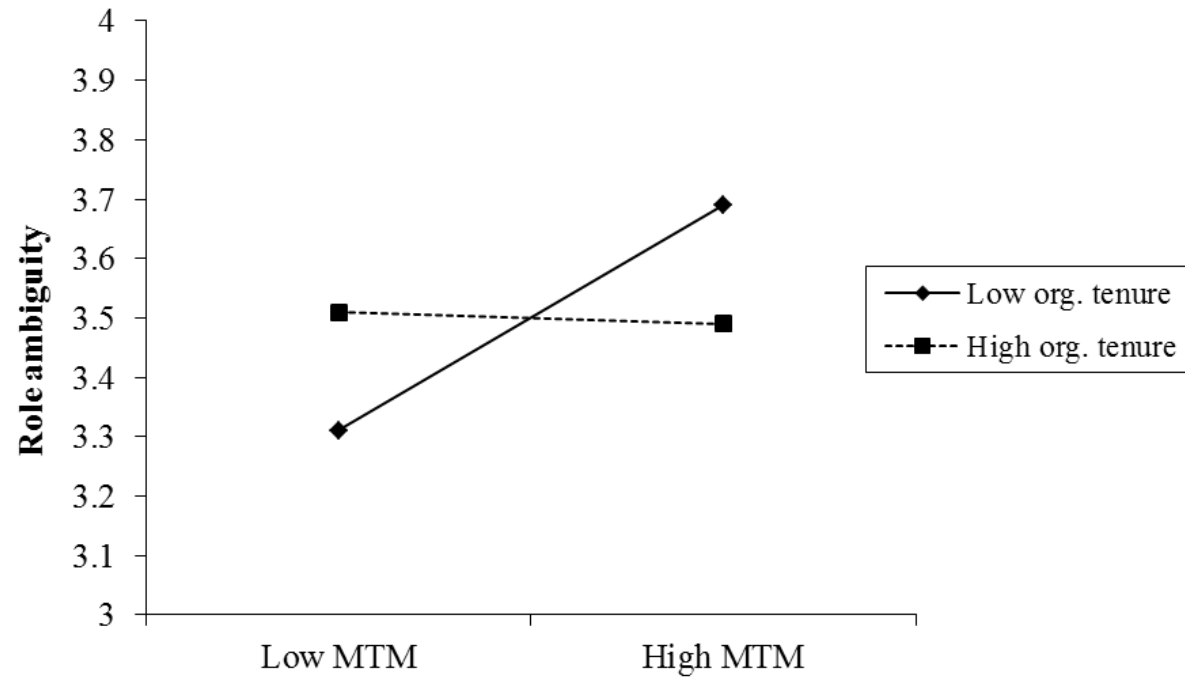


FIGURE 3.3

Interaction Between MTM and Organizational Tenure in Predicting Role Ambiguity



Additional Analyses

In additional analyses not reported in the tables, we examined the indirect MTM-performance and MTM-absenteeism relationships without including organizational tenure as a moderator. When considering perceived work challenge as mediating mechanism, the unconditional indirect linkages between MTM and job performance (estimate = .00, 95% CI = -.01 to .00) as well as MTM and absenteeism (estimate = .00, 95% CI = -.01 to .01) were not significant. MTM was indirectly related to both job performance (estimate = -.01, 95% CI = -.03 to -.004) and absenteeism (estimate = .05, 95% CI = .01 to .11), by contrast, via an employee's role ambiguity perceptions, even if organizational tenure was not considered as a moderator.

Furthermore, a potential concern with regard to our findings is that the observed MTM-organizational tenure interactions might be spurious, resulting from curvilinear relationships of MTM with the dependent variables (Edwards, 2008). For example, low to medium levels of MTM might positively associate with employees' work challenge perceptions, but this relationship might eventually turn negative when individuals' MTM passes a certain optimum (i.e., an inverted U-shape; O'Leary et al., 2011a). We re-estimated our structural equation model with squared terms for MTM beyond this variables' main effects and the hypothesized interactions. None of the coefficients for the squared MTM terms were significant, however ($p > .05$), and the coefficients for the predicted interaction coefficients were virtually identical to the ones obtained in the primary analyses. These results underscore our model's robustness, rendering it unlikely that the observed interactions are attributable to unobserved curvilinear associations.

DISCUSSION

Summary

Scholars have estimated that at least 65% of today's employees are involved in more than one team at the same time (Mortensen et al., 2007; O'Leary et al., 2011a; Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cohen, 2012). The present chapter used the challenge-hindrane stressor framework (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007) to examine how individual employees respond to such MTM. On the one hand, we found evidence for individual MTM as a potentially fruitful work practice that can satisfy employees' intrinsic need for challenging work experiences (Mortensen et al., 2007; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007) and strengthen their job performance (LePine et al., 2005). Importantly, however, these associations only occurred among employees with relatively high organizational tenure.

On the other hand, our results also point toward salient risks associated with MTM. For employees with relatively low organizational tenure, in particular, higher MTM associated with decreased work challenge perceptions and greater role ambiguity, lowering these employees' work performance and promoting their absenteeism. In fact, low-tenure employees were more likely to perceive their work as positive and challenging and, thus, to thrive on the job when their responsibilities remained confined to a limited number of teams. Employees with higher organizational tenure, by contrast, appear largely immune to MTM's potentially detrimental consequences.

Theoretical Implications

The present chapter makes important contributions to the literatures on both MTM and work stress. Regarding the MTM literature, in particular, our investigation moves beyond prior team-level and organization-level examinations by adding a distinct, individual-level perspective (see also Pluut et al., 2004; Van de Brake et al., 2018). In doing so, the present research raises important caveats, illustrating that a uniquely positive view on MTM as an effective and efficient human resource practice, as is prevalent in prior research on higher levels of analysis, would be premature. Consistent with the performance benefits for teams

and organizations illustrated in previous work (Bertolotti et al., 2015; Cummings & Haas, 2012; Mortensen & Gardner, 2017), our study highlights the potential for similar advantages among individual multi-teamers. It is important to note, however, that these benefits remained limited to a relatively small group of employees with many years of organizational tenure (i.e., 24 years or more in our sample, representing about 13% of the study participants). For a larger group of employees (i.e., with average-to-low organizational tenure), by contrast, the negative consequences of individual MTM prevailed, with these employees' job performance and absenteeism suffering in high-MTM settings. Hence, our findings point toward an important 'dark side' of MTM for individual employees, illustrating that careful consideration of MTM's possible advantages *and* disadvantages is required when examining (and implementing) this type of work arrangement.

Beyond illustrating *that* individual MTM may go along with tangible benefits and detriments, our findings enrich MTM theory and research by explicating *why* these particular consequences may materialize. Specifying prior depictions of individual MTM as triggering employees' stress experiences on the job (Matthews et al., 2012; Pluut et al., 2014), our results emphasize that MTM can serve as both a challenge and a hindrance stressor. Moreover, we highlight these distinct stress reactions (i.e., work challenge and role ambiguity perceptions, respectively) as key psychological mechanisms that can explain MTM's downstream consequences for an employee's job performance and absenteeism. Hence, this study advances a novel, more integrative perspective on the diverse outcomes of individual MTM, introducing the challenge-hindrance stress framework (LePine et al., 2005) as a useful theoretical perspective in this line of inquiry.

Furthermore, the present research moves beyond prior MTM studies by explaining *when* individual employees may perceive their MTM as either a challenge or a hindrance and, thus, exhibit associated behavioral reactions. As outlined before, we draw from socialization

theory to illustrate an employee's organizational tenure as a key boundary condition. This important contingency factor may determine whether an employee (a) can utilize and appreciate the opportunities for growth and gain that come with higher MTM (evoking work challenge perceptions) and (b) can maintain a clear understanding of task and interpersonal job requirements even within a high-MTM environment (preventing perceptions of role ambiguity). Hence, our study offers a more nuanced perspective that reconciles the seemingly contradictory consequences associated with individual MTM, explicating why different employees may differentially assess this work practice and, thus, may exhibit differing psychological and behavioral reactions.

Parenthetically, these findings also provide new insights for theory and research on challenge vs. hindrance stressors. Scholars have noted that the challenge-hindrance framework, by itself, cannot sufficiently explain why some work arrangements may appear as a positive challenge to some employees and as a hindrance to others (LePine et al., 2016; Webster, Beehr, & Love, 2011). By integrating this conceptual perspective with key notions from organizational socialization theory, we offer a potential solution to this issue, demonstrating how the length of an employee's work experiences within an organization may shape his or her respective appraisals in a MTM context.

Finally, our study has relevant implications for the occupational stress literature. The percentage of employees suffering from psychological strain at work has increased dramatically over the past decades (Steiber & Pichler, 2015; Selye, 2013), in particular among employees with little work experience and low organizational tenure (American Psychological Association, 2015; Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). At the same time, organizations increasingly use MTMs to manage their human resources as efficiently as possible (O'Leary et al., 2011a). Our findings suggest that these developments may be connected, with highly complex and potentially confusing work practices, such as MTM, triggering negative stress

reactions among inexperienced employees. As such, our study points toward MTM as an important hazard that deserves further consideration in occupational stress research.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite some methodological strengths (e.g., multi-source data collected at different time points; a detailed behavioral, rather than perceptual, measure of MTM; a relatively large sample), we acknowledge a number of study limitations. We used pre-existing items from the organization's employee satisfaction survey, for example, to capture employees' work challenge and role ambiguity perceptions. Although a supplementary study corroborated the respective items' validity (see Appendix), the literature may benefit from further examining the present notions using alternative, more established instruments to capture these constructs (e.g., Pearsall, Ellis, & Stein, 2009; Rizzo et al., 1973). Relatedly, our data did not contain objective information about employees' job performance (beyond supervisors' respective assessments), and we could not disentangle voluntary absenteeism (e.g., to avoid unpleasant work situations; Johns & Hajj, 2015) from involuntary absenteeism due to health-related complaints (Michie, Watson, & Pennebaker, 1989). Hence, future research might benefit from a more direct assessment of these types of work behavior to examine whether MTM relates with both objective and subjective performance and with both voluntary and involuntary types of absenteeism.

In addition, we examined the study hypotheses in a sample of employees that all worked at the same organization in one country, the Netherlands. While this may have prevented organization- or country-level factors (e.g., differing socialization practices or sick leave policies; Ashforth & Saks, 1996) from biasing the findings, it also limits the generalizability of our results. Despite considerable variation in individuals' MTM scores, for example, MTM was relatively common among the employees within our sample. Consequently, we were unable to compare stress experiences and behavioral responses

between employees *with* MTM and employees *without any* MTM. Compared to an increase from moderate to higher MTM (i.e., among employees who are already familiar with MTM, albeit at a relatively low level), an employee's first experiences with MTM may more fundamentally alter his or her interpersonal interactions and task requirements (O'Leary et al., 2011b), potentially triggering more pronounced stress responses. Clearly, additional research that constructively replicates the present results in other settings (e.g., where MTM is newly implemented as a work practice) and in alternative cultural and industry contexts would be valuable to explore our findings' robustness and possibly extend their scope.

Future research could also investigate additional boundary conditions (beyond organizational tenure) that may help employees to capitalize on MTM's potential opportunities for personal growth and gain and to avoid MTM's individual detriments. Employees with more prolonged general task experience (i.e., including their work outside the organization) or greater experience with multiple-team arrangements, for example, may find it easier to handle MTM's complex demands and, thus, may be more likely to perceive their work as a challenge rather than a hindrance when faced with high MTM. Moreover, employees may be particularly likely to view individual MTM as a growth opportunity if they are highly motivated for continuous improvement and self-development (e.g., due to a pronounced learning orientation; Gong, Huang, & Farth, 2009) or if they generally appreciate new and unfamiliar settings and work contexts (e.g., due to high openness to experience; Barrick & Mount, 1991). Studies examining the moderating roles of such task experiences and individual differences may promote a better understanding of possible contingency factors that may emphasize MTM's benefits rather than downsides.

Finally, we focused on employees' role ambiguity perceptions as an important type of hindrance stressor. High MTM may more broadly shape an employee's negative stress experiences at work, however (Kauppila, 2014; Pluut et al., 2014). Employees may perceive

role conflicts and role overload, for example, when different teams simultaneously impose incompatible demands (e.g., due to overlapping schedules or deadlines; Biddle, 2013) or when such demands accumulate towards an unmanageable workload (Beehr, Walsh, & Taber, 1976) –with potentially detrimental consequences for employees’ work behaviors and outcomes (Rizzo et al., 1970; Selye, 2013). Furthermore, akin to the present conceptual model, an employee’s organizational tenure may buffer these hindrance stress experiences. Employees with higher organizational tenure may use their established interpersonal relationships within the organization, for example, to re-negotiate and integrate seemingly incompatible team requirements, and they may draw from their extensive intra-organizational work experiences to more efficiently handle even demanding workloads (Fisher, 1986, Louis, 1980). Future research examining these additional types of stress reactions may promote a more comprehensive understanding of MTM’s consequences for individual employees.

Practical Implications

The results from this study offer several practical implications. They indicate, in particular, that individual MTM may go along with both opportunities and risks, such that organizations should carefully manage their employees’ respective work arrangements. For employees with relatively high organizational tenure, on the one hand, MTM’s benefits appear to outweigh its potential disadvantages. These employees are at risk of perceiving a lack of personal growth opportunities and challenges when their work is concentrated within only a few teams (see Figure 3.2). Hence, assigning high-tenure employees to additional teams could help these individuals to further develop their skills and break away from established work routines, eventually promoting their positive work behaviors and outcomes.

For employees with relatively low organizational tenure, on the other hand, MTM’s downsides may prevail over its benefits. MTM may decrease these employees’ work challenge perceptions and increase their perceived role ambiguity, eventually diminishing

their productivity and promoting absenteeism. Interestingly, anecdotal evidence from four qualitative interviews with department managers at the present study's host organization suggests that, in an effort to efficiently introduce new employees to relevant clients, coworkers, and tasks, employees with relatively low tenure are often stimulated to participate in multiple projects. It is clear, based on our empirical findings, that this strategy is risky and potentially problematic. Rather, it would seem advisable to limit individual MTM for relatively new employees and to only gradually increase employees' number of concurrent team memberships over time.

We acknowledge, however, that this advice may not be practically feasible in all circumstances (e.g., because an organization's procedures and task arrangements may require employees to join multiple teams and projects even in an early stage of their employment). In such instances, organizations could take additional measures to ameliorate employees' role ambiguity and maintain positive work challenge perceptions. Formal leaders could provide clear, frequent, and constructive performance feedback (Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007), for example, to aid new employees in understanding their complex work demands in high-MTM settings. Moreover, leaders may emphasize the potentials for personal growth and development that such arrangements offer and highlight the significance of an employee's respective work, while at the same time providing tangible help and support (e.g., by providing structure and allocating required resources) for an employee's task execution (cf. LePine et al., 2005).

CONCLUSION

The present chapter aimed to integrate and expand our understanding of the benefits and disadvantages associated with individuals' MTM as a prominent characteristic of contemporary work. Our results provide new insights into the stress mechanisms that may link an employee's MTM with his or her tangible work behaviors (i.e., job performance and

absenteeism), and they highlight an employee's organizational tenure as a key boundary condition for these relationships. We hope these findings will help organizations to more effectively manage complex team arrangements and stimulate further research on the consequences of individual employees' concurrent membership in multiple teams.

APPENDIX**Validating the Work Challenge and Role Ambiguity Measures**

The items used to capture perceived work challenge and role ambiguity in the employee satisfaction survey were selected by the present study's host organization. To examine the respective items' validity, we compared the present measures with existing instruments in an online study using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participation in this supplementary validation study was limited to respondents employed at an organization at the time of data collection. Excluding invalid responses and failed attention checks (cf. Goodman, Cryder, & Cheeman, 2013), our final sample consisted of 113 usable participants (of the 120 individuals that had initially participated; effective response rate = 94%). Of these final sample participants, 60% were male, their average age was 35 years ($SD = 10$ years), and their average organizational tenure was 7 years ($SD = 5$ years).

Participants completed five items from Amabile et al.'s (1996) work challenge measure (e.g., "I feel challenged by the work I am currently doing") as well as the three work challenge items used in the present employee satisfaction survey. Moreover, the participants completed Rizzo et al.'s (1970) six-item role ambiguity measure (e.g., "the goals of my job are clear and understandable") as well as the three role ambiguity items from the present survey. Results indicated that there was a high bivariate correlation between both the two measures of perceived work challenge measures ($r = .81, p < .01$) and the two measures of perceived role ambiguity ($r = .84, p < .01$). The correlations between the two perceived work challenge scales, on the one hand, and the two perceived role ambiguity scales, on the other hand, varied from $-.52$ to $-.55$ ($p < .01$). These results support the validity of the items used in our study.