



## Leadership as social identity management: Introducing the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) to assess and validate a four-dimensional model<sup>☆</sup>

Niklas K. Steffens<sup>a,\*</sup>, S. Alexander Haslam<sup>a</sup>, Stephen D. Reicher<sup>b</sup>, Michael J. Platow<sup>c</sup>, Katrien Fransen<sup>d</sup>, Jie Yang<sup>e</sup>, Michelle K. Ryan<sup>f,g</sup>, Jolanda Jetten<sup>a</sup>, Kim Peters<sup>a</sup>, Filip Boen<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Psychology, University of Queensland, St. Lucia QLD 4072, Australia

<sup>b</sup> School of Psychology, University of St. Andrews, Fife KY16 9JU, UK

<sup>c</sup> School of Psychology, Australian National University, ACT 0200, Australia

<sup>d</sup> Department of Kinesiology, KU Leuven, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

<sup>e</sup> Research Center for Innovation and Strategic Human Resource Management, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang 330013, China

<sup>f</sup> Psychology: College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, EX4 4QG Exeter, UK

<sup>g</sup> Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Groningen, 9700 AV Groningen, The Netherlands

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 20 September 2013

Received in revised form 29 April 2014

Accepted 3 May 2014

Available online 1 July 2014

Handling Editor: William Gardner

#### Keywords:

Leadership

Social identity

Self-categorization

Scale development

Identity leadership

### ABSTRACT

Although nearly two decades of research have provided support for the social identity approach to leadership, most previous work has focused on leaders' identity prototypicality while neglecting the assessment of other equally important dimensions of social identity management. However, recent theoretical developments have argued that in order to mobilize and direct followers' energies, leaders need not only to 'be one of us' (identity prototypicality), but also to 'do it for us' (identity advancement), to 'craft a sense of us' (identity entrepreneurship), and to 'embed a sense of us' (identity impresarioship). In the present research we develop and validate an *Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI)* that assesses these dimensions in different contexts and with diverse samples from the US, China, and Belgium. Study 1 demonstrates that the scale has content validity such that the items meaningfully differentiate between the four dimensions. Studies 2, 3, and 4 provide evidence for the scale's construct validity (distinguishing between dimensions), discriminant validity (distinguishing identity leadership from authentic leadership, leaders' charisma, and perceived leader quality), and criterion validity (relating the ILI to key leadership outcomes). We conclude that by assessing multiple facets of leaders' social identity management the ILI has significant utility for both theory and practice.

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Questions of collective self and identity (e.g., "Who are we?", "What do we stand for?", "How will we progress?") are at the heart of collaborative human enterprise. Not least, this is because the answers to such questions are crucial to leaders' attempts to mobilize and shape the energies of potential followers. Nevertheless, despite the readily apparent relevance of these questions to issues of leadership and followership, relatively little leadership research has placed these issues center stage and attempted to build theory around them (Akerlof, 2011; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010).

<sup>☆</sup> This work has been supported by a grant (FL110100199) from the Australian Research Council awarded to the second author, a grant from the Research Foundation Flanders awarded to the fifth author, and a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC no. 70962001) awarded to the sixth author.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 7 3346 9506; fax: +61 7 3365 4466.

E-mail address: [N.Steffens@uq.edu.au](mailto:N.Steffens@uq.edu.au) (N.K. Steffens).

There are however, some notable exceptions to this observation. Most particularly, two theories that have placed issues of group process at the cornerstone of the analysis of leadership are *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and *self-categorization theory* (Turner, 1991; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) – theories which, together, comprise the *social identity approach* (Haslam, 2001/2004; Postmes & Branscombe, 2010; Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Tyler & Blader, 2003). In answer to the question “who am I?”, self-categorization theory suggests that a person’s subjective sense of self can be defined at varying levels of abstraction (Turner, 1985). At one level, these definitions involve conceptions of the self as a unique individual (in terms of *personal identity* as ‘I’ and ‘me’; Turner, 1982), but at another they involve more inclusive definitions based on shared group memberships (in terms of *social identity* as ‘us’ and ‘we’). Importantly, self-categorization in terms of social identity (i.e., where the self is defined in terms of shared group membership) is argued to underpin behavior that is qualitatively distinct from that which is predicated on personal identity because it is shaped by, and oriented toward, the interests of the group as a whole. Indeed, more generally, self-categorization theory asserts that it is individuals’ internalized sense of shared identity (their sense of themselves as part of ‘us’) that “makes group behavior possible” (Turner, 1982, p. 21; see also Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ellemers, 2012; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003; Hogg & Terry, 2001).

### The social identity approach to leadership

The theoretical assertion that social identity makes possible all meaningful forms of group behavior provides the conceptual basis for a novel analysis of leadership. Indeed, building on the foregoing insights, the social identity approach asserts that leadership is a recursive, multi-dimensional process that centers on leaders’ capacities to represent, advance, create, and embed a shared sense of social identity for group members (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Turner & Haslam, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). This is because it is by developing and directing a shared sense of ‘us’ that leaders are able to galvanize individuals’ otherwise idiosyncratic motivations and to harness the transformative power of their coordinated energies (Ellemers, de Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Reicher et al., 2005; Turner, 2005). Importantly, from this perspective, successful leadership is a process of social influence (something that does not reside in a position, a person, or a result) that involves making followers *want* to contribute to shared goals (see also House, Javidan, & Dorfman, 2001).

Yet despite the multi-faceted nature of this approach, previous empirical work that has been informed by this body of leadership theory has tended to be somewhat narrow in scope. In particular, research and theory have tended to focus on the importance of leaders being seen to be representative – or *prototypical* – of the groups they seek to lead such that they are seen to embody those attributes that characterize a particular ingroup and make it distinct from other groups<sup>1</sup> (after Rosch, 1978; Turner, 1985; for reviews see van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). The focus on this aspect of the leadership process reflects Turner’s (1991) original insight that it is by being representative of shared group interests that individuals are able to exert *influence* over other group members. In line with this claim, recent comprehensive reviews by Haslam et al. (2011), van Knippenberg (2011), and Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012) demonstrate that leader prototypicality contributes to a range of important leadership outcomes including (a) perceived leader fairness (De Cremer, van Dijke, & Mayer, 2010; Koivisto, Lipponen, & Platow, 2013; Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997), (b) endorsement of leaders (Ullrich, Christ, & van Dick, 2009), (c) trust in leaders (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008), and (d) perceived leader charisma (Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg, & Spears, 2006; Steffens, Haslam, & Reicher, 2014). Nevertheless, it is apparent that, as well as representing shared social identity, leaders often must first create this sense of commonality through acts of *identity entrepreneurship* (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher et al., 2005) and then also have to work to *promote* the group through acts of *identity advancement* (Haslam & Platow, 2001). Finally, they also need to embed the group within members’ lived experience through acts of *identity impresarianship* (Haslam et al., 2011). Thus, as we argue in more depth below, while clearly very important, prototypicality is certainly not the be-all and end-all of identity leadership.

At the same time, the social identity approach to leadership has also been hampered by two interrelated methodological weaknesses. The first of these relates to the fact that, to date, researchers have lacked a validated measurement tool to assess various aspects of identity leadership. This contrasts starkly to the predicament of those who work with other prominent leadership theories, for which a range of measurement tools are available, and where the development of reliable and valid measurement tools has facilitated theoretical and empirical progress (Schriesheim & Cogliser, 2009). This is true, for example, in the case of work on (a) transformational leadership (where researchers use the Transformational Leadership Inventory, *TLI*; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; or the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, *MLQ*; Bass & Avolio, 2004), (b) leader–member exchange (where researchers use the Leader–Member–Exchange 7-Scale, *LMX-7*; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; or the multidimensional LMX scale; Liden & Maslyn, 1998), and (c) authentic leadership (where researchers use the Authentic Leadership Inventory, *ALI*; Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; or the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire, *ALQ*; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

Second, there is also some confusion about the precise meaning of prototypicality that, in turn, has resulted in measurement inconsistencies. As several recent reviews (Bartel & Wiesenfeld, 2013; Hogg et al., 2012; van Knippenberg, 2011) have pointed out, it is a mistake to equate leader prototypicality simply with being maximally similar to other group members or with being an average group member. For rather than relating to the average-type, prototypicality relates more to the *ideal-type* of what it

<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the present concept of leaders’ identity prototypicality differs from leader prototypicality (or stereotypicality) developed within leader categorization theory (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984) that refers to the extent to which a leader is seen to be representative of *leaders* in general (i.e., of the category of a leader rather than the particular group that a leader is leading).

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