Leadership, power and the use of surveillance: Implications of shared social identity for leaders' capacity to influence

Emina Subašić [a,*], Katherine J. Reynolds [a], John C. Turner [a], Kristine E. Veenstra [a], S. Alexander Haslam [b]

[a] Department of Psychology, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
[b] School of Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

To ensure subordinates' compliance with organizational policies and procedures, those in positions of organizational leadership and authority have a number of resources at their disposal (e.g. rewards and punishments, surveillance, persuasion). When choosing strategies that will maximise their capacity to influence, however, leaders cannot afford to overlook the role of social identity processes. Evidence from two studies shows that the success or otherwise of strategies such as rewards/punishments and surveillance depends on whether the leader is considered to be an ingroup or outgroup member. In line with hypotheses, the results indicate that while surveillance may be a necessary tool in the repertoire of outgroup leaders (Experiment 2), in the hands of ingroup leaders it is likely to attenuate rather than enhance their capacity to influence (Experiments 1 and 2).

Leadership is fundamentally a process of social influence through which particular attitudes and behaviours are harnessed towards the realization of group goals (Haslam, 2004; Hollander, 1985). How to maximise leader influence has been a matter of ongoing debate within social and organizational psychology. Within this work a distinction is made between those 'tools' of influence that focus more on extrinsic incentives (e.g. rewards and punishments)—and as such require close monitoring and surveillance of subordinate behaviour—from more intrinsic strategies where influence is based on cognitive internalization of leaders' views and objectives (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; French & Raven, 1959; Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Tyler & Blader, 2000). There has also been a growing recognition that leaders' influence is based on a sense of psychological connection or identification with the organization or group and its leadership (cf. Lord & Brown, 2001; Turner & Haslam, 2001). Where there is a sense of shared social identity between leaders and followers, intrinsic motivation to behave in line with organizational or group goals and objectives is also likely to be enhanced and the need for harsh penalties and close scrutiny of individual workers' actions are reduced (e.g. Haslam, 2004).

More recently, it has been proposed that ingroup leaders' influence may be jeopardised when they act in ways that violate "our" beliefs, expectations and values stemming from shared social identity (Subašić & Reynolds, in press; Turner, 2005; Turner, Reynolds, & Subašić, 2008). As such, where there is shared psychological group membership between leaders and followers, resorting to relatively coercive 'power tools' may in fact undermine a leader's influence. Namely, while the use of rewards/ punishments and surveillance may be expected of leaders who do *not* share "our" goals, values and beliefs, the same approach could be seen as unnecessary and detrimental to 'ingroup' leader influence. In this paper, we investigate this novel idea more fully.

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychology, Building 39, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200. Tel.: +61 2 6125 9685; fax: +61 2 6125 0499.
E-mail address: Emina.Subasic@anu.edu.au (E. Subašić).

1. Rewards/punishments and surveillance as strategies of influence

In many social contexts (including organizations), leaders and authorities seek to influence subordinates' attitudes and actions by rewarding certain behaviours while sanctioning others. Traditionally, having a capacity to reward and punish is seen as one of many 'bases of power' (e.g. French & Raven, 1959) that leaders and authorities have at their disposal (see Turner, 2005, for a critique). A prominent early framework proposed by French and Raven (1959), for example, distinguished between reward and coercive power on the one hand, from legitimate, expert, referent and informational power on the other. This distinction is primarily based on the idea that leaders whose 'power' (i.e. capacity to influence) is based on legitimate authority, expertise or membership in a particular 'referent' group are likely to produce change in subordinates' private attitudes through cognitive internalization of the leaders' message. As such, they should continue to be influential even when it is not possible to monitor subordinate actions (i.e. in the absence of surveillance). In contrast, reward and coercive power are the least likely to result in internalization and rely on the capacity to closely monitor subordinate behaviours (see also Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Festinger, 1953; Tyler & Blader, 2000).

The use of rewards and punishments is also most likely to elicit subordinate dissatisfaction with leaders who resort to such strategies, compared to those favouring less harsh strategies of influence (Emans, Munduate, Klaver, & Van de Vliert, 2003; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998; Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, & Agassi, 2001; Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, & Ochana-Levin, 2004; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996). One reason for this may be that, in order to administer rewards and punishments, leaders and groups need to rely on close monitoring and surveillance of behaviour. For example, Tyler and Blader (2000) have argued that people are motivated to hide certain behaviours from authorities in order to avoid punishment. As such, systems of effective surveillance are seen as instrumental in identifying and sanctioning undesirable behaviours (Tyler & Blader, 2000).

Indeed, in many organizational contexts, the use of surveillance is seen as a necessary tool in the organizational leadership repertoire to ensure a range of objectives (e.g. training, compliance with rules/policies, quality control). For example, a recent survey by the American Management Association (AMA, 2007) shows that, of the 304 companies who took part in the survey, 66% monitor internet connections, 45% monitor employee telephone use and voice mail and 48% use video monitoring. However, it is important to consider whether workplace monitoring enables core organizational tasks to be performed (e.g. training, feedback, or performance evaluation) or whether it is used to monitor behaviours or responses that are often expected (or desired) to remain private. In its more intrusive form, surveillance is used (or believed to be used) to monitor and sanction certain types of organizational behaviour that may not be *directly* relevant to one's work performance and/or where employees expect a level of privacy in the workplace context. For example, 30% of companies in the same AMA survey have fired employees for misusing the internet and 88% formally (59%) or informally (29%) disciplined an employee for "misuse or private use of the office telephone" (American Management Association, 2007).

It is in these contexts, where surveillance is likely to be seen as relatively intrusive and punitive, that the practice has also been questioned in terms of its negative impact on workers' performance and wellbeing. For example, surveillance has been shown to decrease perceptions of personal control, which is in turn associated with low job performance and satisfaction (Greenberger, Strasser, & Dunham, 1989; Stanton & Barnes-Farrell, 1996). There is also evidence that surveillance decreases task performance, productivity and wellbeing, and increases stress (Aiello & Kolb, 1995; Smith, Carayon, Sanders, Lim, & Le-Grande, 1992). Some (correlational) evidence suggests that a sense of organizational commitment and identification is associated with less rejection of surveillance, although this relationship seems to be premised on the belief that surveillance is consistent with broader organizational goals and objectives (Spitzmüller & Stanton, 2006). When this is not the case, surveillance is likely to heighten perceptions of procedural injustice, particularly when those under surveillance have limited say in the decision to use surveillance and when they perceive it as a violation of privacy (Alge, 2001). Related to perceptions of procedural injustice, surveillance is likely to be perceived as a violation of trust (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, & Winograd, 2000; Westin, 1992) and impacts negatively on the relationship between workers and management (e.g. Irving, Higgins, & Safayeni, 1986). For example, Westin (1992) found that when a manager in a company known for its positive employee relations policies started using surveillance, this was considered unfair by the employees and a breach of the company's traditional climate of employee-employer trust.

2. Rewards/punishments, surveillance and leaders' capacity to influence—the role of shared social identity

Being able to monitor and sanction subordinates' actions may not *necessarily* be detrimental to leaders' influence. Rather, such outcomes are likely to be shaped by whether or not there is a sense of shared norms, goals and values between leaders and followers—and, centrally, whether or not leaders who resort to strategies such as surveillance and rewards/punishments are seen to act in ways that violate such a sense of psychological connection with followers. From the perspective of self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the presence or otherwise of shared social identity between leaders and followers underpins one's capacity to influence (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Turner, 2005; Turner & Haslam, 2001; Turner et al., 2008). It is this psychological connection that leaders and organizations need to be mindful of if they are to be successful in fostering not only compliance with, but also genuine endorsement of, their policies, goals and procedures.

When a shared social identity between leaders and followers is missing (i.e. a leader is seen to be an outgroup member), the use of relatively harsh, coercive forms of power is more consistent with followers' expectations, seen as more acceptable (from the followers' perspective) and likely to elicit at least public compliance. For example, Schwarzwald, Koslowsky, and Allouf (2005) found that participants perceived authorities' use of relatively harsh forms of power (e.g. rewards, punishment) as more reasonable when there was no shared social identity between leaders and followers. Furthermore, it has been shown that