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## The Social Identity Approach to Effective Leadership: An Overview and Some Ideas on Cross-Cultural Generalizability

**Abstract** When employees identify with the groups and organizations they work for, this typically has positive implications for work-related attitudes and behaviors. The present paper provides a focused overview of the social identity approach to leadership and some ideas on its cross-cultural generalizability. To this end, we will first outline the basic tenets of the social identity approach and summarize the relations of organizational identification with work-related variables. Then, we will discuss the role of social identity-related concepts for effective leadership. In particular, we will present empirical studies on the following three aspects: (1) the transfer of leader identification onto their followers, (2) the role of leader prototypicality, and (3) the ways for leaders to actively manage the identities of the groups they lead. Finally, we will provide some suggestions on how to implement the principles of identity management into practice and offer suggestions for future research, with a special focus on China.

**Keywords** social identity theory, leadership, identity management, social identity model of leadership, leader-identity-transfer model

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper, we will outline the theory and research viewing effective leadership from a specific perspective, namely the social identity perspective. Most of the research in this area has been conducted in Western individualistic societies. There is reason to assume, however, that the mechanisms described also apply to more collectivistic societies. The few studies which have been conducted in China will be highlighted throughout the paper. As we will see, results confirm similarities rather than differences.

Sometimes, people see themselves and others not as individuals (the “I,” or personal identity) but as group members (the “we,” or social identity). Together, personal and social identities help individuals answering the question of “Who am I?” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). The social identity approach, comprising Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Whetherell, 1987), argues that behavior which is based on one’s personal identity is fundamentally different from behavior based on one’s social identity. When people define themselves in terms of a specific social identity and when this identity becomes relevant in a given situation, people (1) see themselves and other members of the same group (ingroup) as relatively interchangeable and underestimate the differences between them, a process which is called depersonalization. At the same time, they (2) exaggerate and emphasize differences between their ingroup and people who do not belong to their ingroup (i.e., outgroup members). When their shared social identity is salient, group members (3) also share a common perspective and start acting with respect to emerging group norms and (4) act collaboratively to advance the interests of the group and accomplish its aims. To be clear, a shared social identity does not automatically lead to good or bad behavior. But it increases the importance of group norms and these norms can be good or bad. For instance, Social Identity Theory has often been applied to issues of prejudice and hate crime and here, the norm to see one’s own group as superior often leads to the derogation of outgroups. At the workplace, however, norms typically require behavior such as customer orientation (in service contexts), creativity and innovation (in R&D teams or the design industry) or performance (in production teams). Consequently, when employees strongly identify with their work teams and organizations, they show more customer orientation, more creativity or

perform on a higher level, respectively.

We will demonstrate the importance of people's social identity for work-related variables in the following sections. Before this, however, we want to demonstrate how social identity can be measured. Typically, we use scales to measure the individual's degree of seeing him or herself as a group member. In organizational contexts, the most frequently used scale by Mael and Ashforth (1992) comprises six items such as "When someone praises my organization, it feels like a personal compliment," or "When I talk about my organization, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'." Other scales allow measuring social identification with multiple foci (such as the team, department or organization) simultaneously (van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher and Christ, 2004) or use items which are also applicable to newly formed groups such as "I identify with my team" or "I feel committed to my organization" (Doosje et al., 1995). Postmes, Haslam, and Jans (2013) demonstrated that even using a single item (i.e., "I identify with my group") is a valid assessment of employee identification. Finally, Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) suggested a graphical instrument with two circles that vary in overlap, from being apart from each other to overlapping completely (with the latter indicating strong identification). Irrespective of which scale is used, employees can complete the items with reference to one or more foci and then vary on a continuum from very low to very strong identification with the respective focus.

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## **2 Identification and Work-Related Attitudes and Behaviors**

Above, we have presented various ways to assess employees' identification with their organization or smaller groups within their organization. A multitude of studies, confirmed by meta-analyses (e.g., Riketta, 2005; Riketta and van Dick, 2005; Lee, Park, and Koo, 2015), show relationships between the degree of organizational identification and work-related attitudes and behaviors. For instance, organizational identification relates to affective organizational commitment (with average correlations of about 0.53), job satisfaction (~ 0.37), job involvement (~ 0.41), turnover intentions (~ -0.48), or in-role performance (~ 0.22). The latter effect size is significant but rather small because in-role behavior is often influenced by factors that are outside the individual's control (such as the general economy, the emergence of competitors etc.). Therefore,

particular emphasis has been placed on citizenship behavior. Van Knippenberg (2000) proposed that to the extent that people define themselves in terms of social identity, they should be more willing to engage in behavior which promotes the interests of the group to which that identity relates—and particularly those behaviors which are more under their volitional control such as helping other colleagues. In line with this, dozens of studies, confirmed by meta-analyses, have found relations between organizational identification (e.g., Christ, van Dick, Wagner, and Stellmacher, 2003; van Dick, Grojean, Christ, Wieseke, 2006; Riketta, 2005) and extra-role behavior with effect sizes of about 0.35. Of some importance here is the fact that some of these studies were conducted in Eastern, more collectivistic contexts. Van Dick et al. (2006) conducted one study in Nepal with a heterogeneous sample of 450 employees from various industries and another study was conducted in China with 399 employees of a manufacturing organization in South China. The correlation analyses revealed relations of .39 for Nepal and 0.41 for China which were close to the average correlation of 0.35 in the Riketta (2005) meta-analysis based on 25 samples. Lee, Park and Koo (2015) conducted an updated meta-analysis and replicated the effect of 0.35 for the link between identification and extra-role behavior based on 53 studies. Lee and colleagues also looked at differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. They predicted a stronger impact of identification in cultures where the group is valued more than the individual and found that the impact of identification on outcomes was positive and significant in individualistic cultures but indeed even stronger in collectivistic societies.

Identification thus seems to be good for teams and organizations as it leads employees to be more committed and productive. Moreover, individual studies have shown relations between identification and creativity (e.g., Hirst, van Dick and van Knippenberg, 2009), customer orientation (e.g., Wieseke, Ullrich, Christ, and van Dick, 2007), and many other variables (see Haslam, 2004).

Now, one could argue that employees may show all these in-role and extra-role behaviors even if this involves personal costs and if it leads to exhaustion and other forms of burnout and stress. However, Haslam and colleagues suggested that shared identity should rather contribute to employee well-being because it helps to more positively interpret and cope with potentially stressful situations (Haslam, 2004; Haslam and van Dick, 2011; van Dick and Haslam, 2012). In line with this reasoning, empirical research has found that employees who identify

with their teams and organizations report more social support, higher collective self-efficacy, and, as a result, less stress and greater well-being (Steffens, Haslam, Schuh, Jetten, and van Dick, in press).

To summarize: Higher employee identification with their teams and organizations positively relates to positive outcomes both for the individual (e.g., satisfaction, well-being) and the organization (creativity, in-role, and extra-role behavior) and negatively relates to negative outcomes (e.g., stress, turnover). We therefore suggest that it is one of the key tasks for leaders to pay attention to the identification of their followers. We will now discuss two models of leadership and identity which have been developed in parallel based on the social identity approach but which both provide a different perspective.

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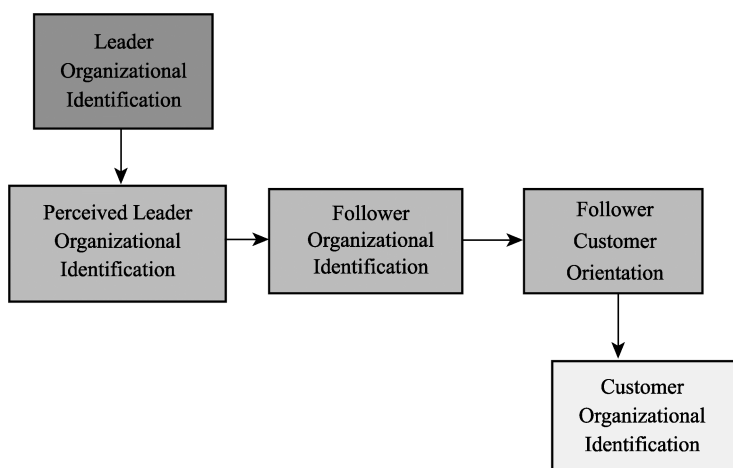
### **3 The Leader-Identity-Transfer Model**

The leader-identity-transfer model proposes that leaders' identification can spill over to their followers. Leaders who identify strongly with their teams or organizations will act as role models for their followers. When they are more strongly identified, they will (1) act more on behalf of the organization's interests rather than out of self-interest, (2) seek to make their organization a "good" organization by developing and communicating a positive vision and (3) be more concerned about their followers' well-being as they are perceived as ingroup members. Van Dick, Hirst, Grojean and Wieseke (2007) provided the first test of the model in three cross-sectional studies in schools and travel agencies. As hypothesized, the authors indeed found that teachers and travel agents identified more with their schools and agencies, respectively, when their principals and managers, respectively, were also more identified. Furthermore, a mediation model was supported which predicted that leader identification translates to employee satisfaction and extra-role behavior mediated by follower identification. Wieseke, Ahearne, Lam and van Dick (2009) replicated these findings in two samples of travel agents and employees in the pharmaceutical industry. They again found a transfer of leaders' identifications onto the identification of their followers. Moreover, the relation between the two identifications was stronger the more the leaders acted in a charismatic way and when the dyadic tenure of leader and follower was longer rather than shorter. Finally, in the travel agency sample, the authors found the transfer model confirmed across three layers, i.e.,

from directors to managers to employees and that this in turn led to better financial results for the travel agencies.

Schuh, Egold and van Dick (2012) extended the transfer model and found that leader identification related to follower identification in health care institutions and that follower identification was related to client identification in turn via more customer orientation of the more highly identified employees. Schuh, Zhang, Egold, Graf, Pandey and van Dick (2012) tested and confirmed the model in a German and a Chinese sample. The former was comprised of 18 leaders of medical centers and their 216 followers, the latter was comprised of 44 leaders who participated in a management training and their 109 followers. Results for both samples showed that transformational leadership mediated the link between leader and follower identification. Finally, van Dick and Schuh (2010) provided evidence for the assumed causal direction. They conducted a scenario study and a lab experiment. Results showed that manipulations of leader identification had the expected effects on the identification of the people they lead.

To summarize: Leaders act as role models and can create stronger follower identification to the extent that they are themselves more strongly identified. This effect has positive implications for follower attitudes and behaviors and even extended to customers. Figure 1 illustrates the main findings.



**Figure 1** The Leader-Identity-Transfer Model

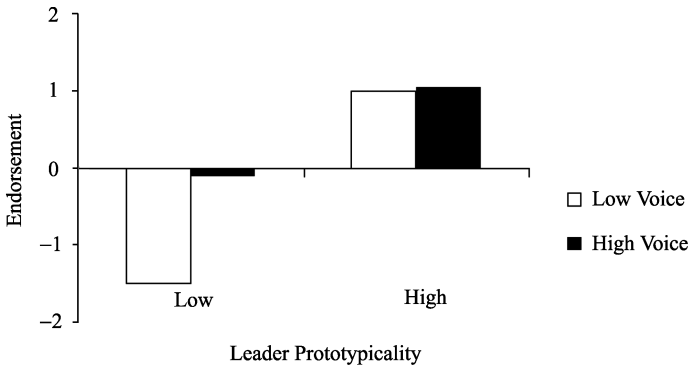
## 4 The Social Identity Model of Leadership (SIMOL)

Van Knippenberg and Hogg (2003) developed the social identity model of

leadership (SIMOL) which states that leadership does not operate within a vacuum but that leaders are also always members of the teams or organizations which they lead. The SIMOL further argues that leaders can gain in effectiveness the more they are attuned to the respective group's identity. This means that every group has a prototype which describes central and distinctive aspects of the group which differentiate the group from relevant outgroups. Leaders will be more effective, for instance, in getting their followers' support and commitment, the more they are prototypical of the group and represent what the group is about. This should especially be the case for those group members who care about the group, i.e., who are more strongly identified. When a leader is highly prototypical, this may even substitute other aspects of good leadership, such as acting fairly. The SIMOL thus predicts three-way interactions between leader-group prototypicality, follower identification and leader behaviors.

To provide but one example of such an interaction, we will briefly outline a study by Ullrich, Christ, and van Dick (2009). The authors combined an experimental scenario study and a field survey which yielded virtually identical results. In the scenario, half of the participants—supporters of the Green party in Germany—read a text in which a regional leader was described as prototypical for the party, whereas the other half read a text describing the leader as not very prototypical. The second manipulation concerned whether the leader had previously asked for his followers' opinion before making an important decision or not. In the field study, a heterogeneous employee sample was asked about their direct supervisor's prototypicality (e.g., "My supervisor represents what our team members have in common," "My supervisor is a good example of our team") and perceived leader fairness. In both studies, participants were asked to which degree they would support their leaders. Results were in line with the SIMOL predictions: When leaders were prototypical, they were strongly supported, irrespectively of acting fairly or not. For the less prototypical leaders fairness mattered and they could gain their followers' support by granting them voice. This pattern was qualified by a three-way interaction as predicted, indicating that prototypicality was the more important leader characteristic only for strongly identified followers whereas the less identified followers were more concerned about their leader acting fairly. Figure 2 illustrates the interaction for the group of the highly identified employees in the field study. As the figure shows, highly prototypical leaders are endorsed whether they act fairly or not.

However, leaders who are less prototypical are much less endorsed when they do not grant voice than when they are granting voice (note that the negative values in the figure result from standardization of effects).



**Figure 2** Simple Interaction of Voice and Leader Prototypicality for Highly Identified Followers

Similar effects have been found in over a dozen studies (Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast, 2012a) and Table 1 provides an overview of the main findings.

To summarize: As soon as a shared identity is salient and/or team and organizational members identify with their groups, leader prototypicality becomes important. It can even substitute for procedural fairness and other leader characteristics or behaviors which are typically associated with leader effectiveness.

**Table 1** Exemplary Empirical Findings on Identity Management in Groups with Respect to the Impact of Embodying the Social Identity by a Leader (Prototypicality)

Criteria	Main Finding with Respect to Prototypicality
Perceived leader(ship) effectiveness	Prototypical leaders are perceived as effective, especially if followers identify with the group (Cicero, Bonaiuto, Pierro, and van Knippenberg, 2008; Fielding and Hogg, 1997; Hains, Hogg, and Duck, 1997).
Perceived leader(ship) effectiveness after failure	Prototypical leaders are perceived as more effective after a failure than non-prototypical leaders; after a success, there is no such difference (Giessner, van Knippenberg, and Sleebos, 2009).

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Criteria	Main Finding with Respect to Prototypicality
Perceived leader(ship) effectiveness after failure depending on the type of goal	Prototypical leaders are perceived as more effective after failing to achieve a maximal goal than non-prototypical leaders; after failing to achieve a minimal goal there is no such difference (Giessner and van Knippenberg, 2008).
Perceived leadership effectiveness, job-satisfaction, and turnover intentions of followers	The effect of the leader’s prototypicality on outcome variables is moderated by followers’ perceived role ambiguity, such that perceived leadership effectiveness, as well as followers’ job satisfaction and turnover intentions are influenced more strongly by prototypicality if followers experience more role ambiguity (Cicero, Pierro, and van Knippenberg, 2010).
Perceived leadership effectiveness	The leader’s prototypicality reduces the influence of interactional fairness on perceived leader(ship) effectiveness (Janson, Levy, Sitkin, and Lind, 2008).
Perceived performance and perceived prototypicality of the leader	The leader’s prototypicality (manipulated experimentally) has a positive influence on the perception of their performance. Conversely, the leader’s performance (manipulated experimentally) has a positive influence on the perception of their prototypicality (Steffens, Haslam, Ryan, and Kessler, 2013).
Follower performance	Leader self-sacrificing behavior has little influence on follower performance if the leader is prototypical for the group. Leader self-sacrificing behavior has a larger influence on follower performance when the leader is non-prototypical (van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg, 2005).
Leader endorsement	The influence of voice provided by the leader on leader endorsement is substantially reduced when the leader is perceived to be prototypical for the group, especially when followers are highly identified with their group (Ullrich, Christ, and van Dick, 2009).
Perceived procedural fairness of the leader	Group members highly identified with the organization view prototypical leaders as more procedurally fair. The perceived procedural fairness in turn mediates the effect of prototypicality (among the highly identified group members) on group members’ self-perceived status in the organization (van Dijke and De Cremer, 2008).
Perceived charisma	Prototypical leaders are attributed greater levels of charisma than non-prototypical leaders, regardless of their group-oriented versus exchange rhetoric. Non-prototypical leaders are only attributed high levels of charisma when they employ group-oriented rhetoric (Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg, and Spears, 2006).
Perceived charisma; follower identification with the leader	Leader prototypicality and leader identification with the group interact with respect to perceived leader charisma and the follower’s identification with the leader, such that highly identified leaders are able to inspire followership even when they are not very prototypical. Results are more pronounced for highly identified followers (Steffens, Schuh, Haslam, Pérez, and van Dick, 2015).

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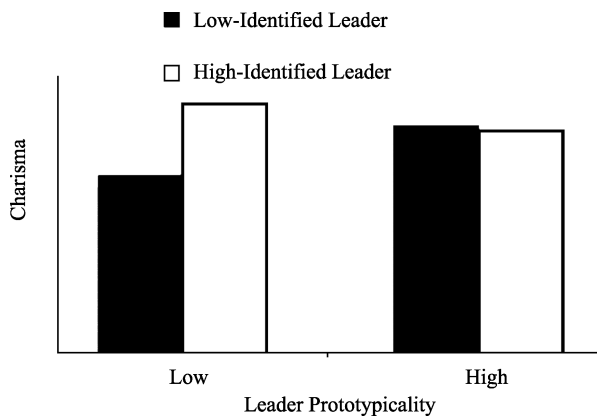
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Criteria	Main Finding with Respect to Prototypicality
Follower trust in their coworkers	Leader prototypicality moderates the effect of perceived leader fairness on follower trust in their coworkers, such that unfairness of the prototypical leader had a negative effect on trust in coworkers; this effect was not apparent for non-prototypical leaders (Seppälä, Lipponen and Pirtillä-Backman, 2012).
Team-oriented leadership	Leader accountability (through transparency) relates less to team-oriented behavior for prototypical leaders than for non-prototypical leaders. This effect is more pronounced for leaders who identify more strongly with their team (Giessner, van Knippenberg, van Ginkel and Sleebos, 2013).

## 5 Identity-Transfer and SIMOL Combined

Sometimes, a leader is highly prototypical for the team but does not seem to be strongly identified with the team. At other times, a leader may not be prototypical (think of the male leader in an all-female nursery school or of the head of an R & D department who has a background in accounting) but strongly identifies with his or her group. There is only one piece of research so far which has looked at the two factors in combination. Steffens, Schuh, Haslam, Pérez and van Dick (2015) conducted two studies to explore the interactive effects of identification and prototypicality. In their first study, a 2 by 2 experiment, Steffens et al. provided participants with an audio tape of an interview with an alleged leader of the student union. In one version, the leader made statements which indicated that he was strongly identified with the group of students whereas in the other version, he appeared less identified. The other manipulation concerned leader prototypicality and again, in one version, participants listened to a leader low in prototypicality whereas the leader was high in prototypicality in the other version. After participants listened to the tape, they were asked to complete questions about perceived leader charisma and their identification with the leader. In the second study, a heterogeneous employee sample was asked to evaluate their leaders in terms of their identification and prototypicality and also to rate leader charisma and their identification with the leader. The data of both studies show that for highly prototypical leaders, evaluations were generally positive and did not vary between those who were high or low in identification. For leaders low in prototypicality, however, only those leaders who were seen as being strongly identified were evaluated positively. Figure 3 shows the results for ratings of

charisma in Study 1.



**Figure 3** Interactive Effect of Leader Identification and Leader Prototypicality on Follower Ratings of Leader Charisma

## 6 Other Aspects of Identity Management: Identity Advancement, Identity Entrepreneurship, and Identity Impresarioship

Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) developed an advanced theory of identity-based leadership. They discuss leader prototypicality in some detail but also add three further components which help leaders to create strong group identities, namely identity advancement, identity entrepreneurship, and identity impresarioship. We will describe the three aspects in the following sections. Although there is some research on these dimensions, the number of studies is far smaller than on prototypicality. Therefore, we combine the main findings in one table (see Table 2).

The first component, *Identity Advancement*, describes the extent to which the leader's interests focus on the group. To assess the degree of identity advancement, one could ask employees whether their "leader acts as a champion for the organization," or "whether she stands up for the team" (formulations are taken from the items of the Identity Leadership Inventory by Steffens et al., 2014). Haslam et al. (2011) propose that leaders have more influence the more followers perceive an overlap between the group's interests and the leader's behavior. Again, this should be the case in particular, when followers are

themselves strongly identified with the team or organization. How can leaders achieve being seen as serving the group interests? Several studies show that

**Table 2** Exemplary Empirical Findings on Identity Management in Groups with Respect to the Impact of Actions of a Leader in Line with the Social Identity (Identity Advancement), Crafting of a Social Identity (Identity Entrepreneurship), and Making the Social Identity of the Group Come alive (Identity Impresarioship)

Criteria	Main Finding with Respect to Identity Advancement, Identity Entrepreneurship, and Identity Impresarioship
Follower performance	Leaders expressing high confidence in their team's success (believing in "us") lead to higher confidence of the team members ("contagion"). Team members' increased team identification partially mediates this effect. Furthermore, leaders' expression of confidence also affects team members' performance (Fransen, Haslam, Steffens, Vanbeselaere, De Cuyper and Boen, 2015).
Follower performance	In a construction task, group members construed qualitatively better models when the instructions were ostensibly created by an ingroup member in comparison to instructions that were ostensibly created by an outgroup member. This effect was enhanced when group members assumed a shared superordinate identity that included both ingroup and outgroup (Greenaway, Wright, Willingham, Reynolds and Haslam, 2015).
Perceived group performance	Identity Entrepreneurship (the degree to which the leader promotes understanding of the shared group identity) relates to higher perceived group performance, mediated by higher work engagement and reduced burnout (Steffens, Haslam, Kerschreiter, Schuh and van Dick, 2014).
Effectiveness of influence-strategies	The effectiveness of behavioral strategies such as surveilling followers is dependent on whether the leader is seen as an ingroup or outgroup member. Whereas surveillance seems to be a necessary tool for outgroup leaders, surveillance seems to reduce ingroup leaders' capacity to influence follower (Subašić, Reynolds, Turner, Veenstra and Haslam, 2011).
Leader(ship) effectiveness	Instrumental leaders (who punish non-cooperating group members) are more effective than relational leaders (who build positive intragroup relations) when group members' identification with the group is rather low (van Vugt and de Cremer, 1999).
Follower self-esteem	Leader self-sacrifice and follower identification with the collective interact with respect to follower self-esteem, such that follower self-esteem is higher when self-sacrificing leaders work together with followers who identify strongly with the collective (De Cremer, van Knippenberg, van Dijke and Bos, 2006).
Leader capacity to act as an identity entrepreneur	The leader's capacity to act as a designer of group identity is promoted by the attributed performance as well as the attributed prototypicality, whereby the perception of performance and prototypicality mutually influence each other (Steffens, Haslam, Ryan and Kessler, 2013).

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Criteria	Main Finding with Respect to Identity Advancement, Identity Entrepreneurship, and Identity Impresarioship
Follower identification	<p>Organizational identification of leaders influences the organizational identification of followers. Furthermore, followers' organizational identification resulted in customer-oriented behavior and this in turn resulted in greater identification of the customers with the organization (Schuh, Egold and van Dick, 2012).</p> <p>The leader's organizational identification influences followers' attitudes and performance by increasing follower organizational identification (van Dick and Schuh, 2010).</p>

fairness is one of the key leader behaviors. In *intragroup* contexts, leaders who act fairly demonstrate that they do not abuse the power difference between themselves and their followers but that they have the interests of the group as a whole at heart (Haslam et al., 2011). They can, for instance, show self-sacrificial behavior (e.g., taking less for themselves than they could, working harder than others) to demonstrate that they care more for the group than for themselves. This is particularly important for leaders low in prototypicality (van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg, 2005). In *intergroup* contexts, however, team members also support leaders who act less fairly—as long as the leader's behavior serves the interests of the ingroup (e.g., Haslam and Platow, 2001; Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley and Morrison, 1997).

The second component of identity management, *Identity Entrepreneurship*, refers to the leader's active management of the group identity. A leader is more successful in managing group identity, when she or he put themselves more at the center of the group by creating a group prototype that overlaps with their own characteristics and behaviors. The identity management inventory uses items such as "This leader makes people feel as if they are part of the same group," or "This leader develops an understanding of what it means to be a member of the team" to assess the degree of identity entrepreneurship. When shaping the group identity in this direction, it is important to maintain a sense of continuity between the "old" and the new identity (Haslam et al., 2011). Ullrich, Wieseke and van Dick (2005) explored this in the context of an organizational merger and coined the term "projected continuity" which means that leaders convey messages that the change will help the organization to be viable and successful.

The final component, *Identity Impresarioship*, describes how the leader helps

group members to experience the group's identity. The attempts to create a new identity only have a lasting influence on group members to the extent that the identity is salient. This can be achieved by developing structures which embody the new identity and make it the new social reality (Haslam et al., 2011). The identity leadership inventory thus uses items such as "This leader devises activities that bring the group together" or "This leader creates structures that are useful for us." The leader can, for instance, organize regular team meetings in a distinctive way such as stand up meetings which are not only more efficient (Bluedorn, Turban and Love, 1999) but also become an aspect of the team's identity (van Dick and West, 2013).

To summarize: The three aspects of identity management can help leaders convey their vision for the team or organization. By making clear what this vision is and how it helps the group to strive, by acting as a champion for this vision, and by devising structures that help sustain the vision in the team members' daily reality, leaders can achieve a stronger identity. This leads to group members developing closer ties and also the leader being seen as an ingroup member (leader and followers are all members of the same team, they all "sit in the same boat") rather than being seen as an outgroup member (e.g., part of the management team).

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## 7 Identity Management in Practice

The findings described in the previous sections demonstrate that leaders should be more successful in the long run if in addition to task-oriented and employee-oriented leadership, they also provide group-oriented leadership with respect to a shared social identity. This is what the social identity approach to leadership proclaims.

Accordingly, the first question to answer is to what extent a leader has already aligned his or her behavior with the findings of the social identity approach of leadership. Steffens et al. (2014) developed an *Identity Leadership Inventory* (ILI), which assesses followers' impression of their leader's identity management. The ILI distinguishes four aspects or principles of identity-based leadership, which we have addressed in the identity management section (see Haslam et al., 2011; Kerschreiter, 2013): The leaders should (1) embody the social identity (i.e., be as prototypical as possible), (2) act according to the social identity and

therefore act in the interest of the group, (3) actively shape the social identity and (4) make the social identity come alive for group members.

To implement these principles of identity management, Haslam and colleagues (2011) recommend to leaders the three R's of identity management: *Reflect*, *Represent* and *Realize*. *Reflect* means that leaders should extensively observe and listen to their group members, thereby getting to know the group members themselves and especially their implicit leadership theories (Eden and Leviathan, 1975; Lord, Foti and De Vader, 1984; Schneider, 1973). It is equally important for leaders to understand the whole group as well as possible, its norms and rules, its history and identity, and its relationship to other groups. This way, leaders develop a precise idea of what constitutes the group. Only by such an understanding of the group can leaders base their actions on the group and the expectations of its members, as well as shape the group's identity in their favor. *Represent* means that the leader and his or her actions are perceived as the embodiment of the group's norms and values (i.e., the group's identity).

*Realize* in turn describes the achievement of group goals. The leader creates an environment in which the group can achieve its goals and (in which) the identity of the group is expressed. Haslam and colleagues (2011) emphasize on the one hand that all three "R's" are equally important and on the other hand that any identity management must always be aligned with the specific group and their respective environment(s). In other words: for logical reasons, there cannot be a general recommendation as to how the content of the social identity should look like for a specific group. For suggestions on the process of developing a shared social identity see Kerschreiter (2013) and van Dick and West (2013).

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## **8 Future Research Perspectives: An Outlook Focused on China**

China is a centrally planned economy which is undergoing a rapid transition (Tang and Liu, 2016). Compared to Western countries, in which most of the identity-related research has been done, China has large and powerful state-owned enterprises in almost every sector. Future research may look at how employee and leader identities vary across these types of organizations—particularly because managerial influence and discretion may vary to a large extent (Jing, Huang and Wang, 2014).

More recently, China has seen both more foreign investment in China (Ma, Wu and Zhang, 2015) and the engagement of Chinese enterprises abroad, for instance in the form of outward direct investment (Curran and Thorpe, 2015; Quer, Claver, and Rienda, 2015). It would be interesting to see how these dynamics can be supported by leaders' identity management but also how identities may work as a hindrance to establish these new forms of collaboration. This could indeed be one of the downsides of strong organizational identification (of both leaders and employees), namely that it may create stronger resistance to changes in the organizational identity due to mergers, acquisitions, or other forms of strategic change (for an overview see Giessner, Ullrich, and van Dick, 2011). It would be interesting to explore these very dynamics in future research.

Moreover, in China, paternalistic leadership seems to be much more dominant than in the Western business world (Farh and Cheng, 2000; Luo, Xu, Li, and Zhong, 2014). Paternalistic leadership comprises three dimensions (see Pellegrini, and Scandura, 2008) which have recently been replicated for mainland China and other Asian countries (Cheng et al., 2014), namely authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral character. "*Authoritarian* leadership characterizes the hierarchical dynamics between leaders' control, power, and authority, and subordinates' obedience, compliance, and respect...*benevolent* leaders invest in their social relationship to the subordinate by providing individualized and holistic concern if the subordinates encounter personal and familial problems...*moral character* ...requires the leader to act as a role model in terms of moral character. Being a moral role model is an important function of paternalistic leadership in the Asian context" (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 83). It would be very interesting to link these three dimensions to identity management in future research, particularly in cross-cultural studies also taking into account differences in power distance between cultures.

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## 9 Conclusion

We have demonstrated that leaders who identify more strongly with their group and who are more prototypical of their group gain power and influence. We have discussed ways to actively manage group identities so that structures are devised that bring the group members closer together and accept the leader's vision. Put differently, this new psychology of leadership stops advocating that the leaders



have to tell their followers what they should do. In contrast, it proposes that followers will do the right thing when leaders help them understand who they are in relation to their groups and organizations (Haslam et al., 2011). Lee et al. (2015) provided evidence that employee identification is even more predictive for work-related outcomes in collectivistic than individualistic cultures. We can, therefore, expect that leader behavior which helps to create strong identities is even more powerful in China and other more collectivistic societies. We believe that testing these ideas in China and other more collectivistic societies will provide a promising avenue for future research and establish the social identity approach as a fruitful basis for new organizational practices.

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