

2019

Promoting Identity Development in Leadership Education: A Multidomain Approach to Developing the Whole Leader

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Recommended Citation

Rachel Clapp-Smith, Michelle Hammond, Gretchen Vogelsang Lester, and Michael Palanski. "Promoting Identity Development in Leadership Education: A Multidomain Approach to Developing the Whole Leader" *Journal of Management Education* (2019): 10-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562918813190>

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**Promoting Identity Development in Leadership Education:
A Multi-Domain Approach to Developing the Whole Leader**

Empirical research suggests focusing on one's identity as a leader may enhance ongoing leadership development. As a complement to traditional theory- and skills-based approaches to leader development, we offer an identity-based, multi-domain approach to leadership development through a series of integrated in-class exercises. Specifically, these exercises focus on developing four components of leader identity: meaning, strength, levels (personal, relational, and collective), and integration of domain-specific sub-identities, culminating in the creation of a leader identity narrative. After a brief review of the literature on leader identity, we describe the exercises in detail along with potential prompts for personal reflection and group discussion. We also present qualitative evidence of the intended outcomes of the exercises, including the desired effect of developing students' leader identities.

Keywords

Leader Identity, Multi-Domain Leadership Development, Identity Narrative, Leadership Development

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Introduction

Many management education articles highlight how ever-important and in-demand leadership education is within business schools (Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015; Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011; Podolny, 2011). Many of these articles are also critical, lamenting the teaching of theories and concepts to study leadership at arm's length or presenting leadership as a skill set that can be acquired by reading a textbook or listening to a lecture (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015) without taking into account the individual learner. Petriglieri & Petriglieri (2015) even state that this approach is "severing its ties to identity, community and context" (p. 627).

These authors argue the solution is recognizing that effective leadership development is rooted in identity work that addresses fundamental questions such as "who am I as a leader?" and "what does effective leadership look like for me?" Answering these questions allows an individual to critically assess his or her leadership competences and to chart out a course for honing strengths, addressing weaknesses, and minimizing the gaps between espoused and enacted leadership behaviors (Drucker, 2017). The process of effectively developing leadership competences involves connecting the individual to context, relationships, culture, meanings of leadership, and an understanding of one's leader identity (Petriglieri, Petriglieri, & Wood, 2018). In parallel, a rising body of research stresses the importance of leader identity in both development and effectiveness (Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, & Lord, 2017). An identity-based

approach takes into account each individual's unique understandings and assumptions about leadership (Hammond, Clapp-Smith, & Palanski, 2017) and their unique life experiences (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003) to generate a distinct leadership development narrative.

We present a multi-domain, identity-based approach for teaching leadership linking the process of development to the identity of the individual as embedded in multiple domains and experiences across the potential leader's life (Hammond et al., 2017). This approach is particularly useful for students who are more likely to experience leadership in non-work settings such as in family and friendship networks, team-based course assignments, sports teams, community-based organizations, and student organizations than in traditional workplace settings.

Unlike most predominant theories of leadership that emphasize how others view leader behaviors and skills, leader identity focuses on how individuals view, reflect on, internalize, and define leadership in light of self-perceptions, relationships, and contexts (Epitropaki, et. al., 2017). Leader identity theory grew from a leader development framework, attempting to understand developmental processes rather than identify characteristics of effective leadership. Therefore, at its core, leader identity development addresses the less visible, yet more foundational, aspects of leader development (Day, Harrison & Halpin, 2009). Viewing the classroom as an "identity workspace" creates opportunities for students to examine past and current experiences and reflect on how to craft their own identities (Petriglieri, Petriglieri, & Wood, 2018).

Leader identity, a facet of an individual's overall identity that is specific to leadership, plays a strong role in leadership competence development as those who

identify as leaders are more likely to seek out opportunities to practice leadership (Day et al., 2009). Day and Harrison (2007) suggested that “identity is important for leaders because it grounds them in understanding who they are, their major goals and objectives and their personal strengths and limitations” (p. 366). Thus, viewing oneself as a leader facilitates the process of developing leadership skills (Lord & Hall, 2005). Further, recent empirical research on leader identity shows support for the idea of a positive relationship between changes in leadership skills and changes in one’s leader identity over time (Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). Noting that identity development can have a broad impact on how one approaches leadership opportunities, we now turn to a discussion of why educational institutions should consider including identity work in their business curricula.

Evidence from qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that leader identities can and do develop in educational contexts (Day & Sin, 2011; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). Day and Sin (2011) found longitudinal evidence of a positive within-person effect of leader identity and other ratings of leadership effectiveness for students. Further, leader identity may serve as a motivational mechanism that explains the effect of training on leadership effectiveness for less experienced leaders (Kragt & Guenter, 2018). Thus, identity work is a conduit through which individuals enact effective leadership behaviors, particularly for those with less leadership experience.

In order to help students conduct meaningful identity work of their own, we build on the multi-domain work of Hammond and colleagues (2017; also see Vogelgesang Lester, Palanski, Hammond, & Clapp-Smith, 2017, for a practitioner-oriented

perspective), who suggested that leader identity and leader competence develop through a sensemaking process triggered by the leader's experiences within and across many life domains, such as work, community, and friends and family. One critical aspect of the sensemaking process is identity work that involves authoring a leader identity narrative – a task that benefits from requiring participants to think beyond their current context to identify any experiences that could relate back to shaping the leader identity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2004). Four components of leader identity- meaning, strength, levels, and integration - build this narrative (Hammond et al., 2017). The guided identity work activities we offer result in students authoring their leader identity narrative (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

We first discuss the four components of leader identities in and outside of work. Then, we present a series of identity-based developmental activities for use in leadership education. These activities can be used to programmatically shape students' leader identities, allowing them to reflect on their meaning of leadership, strength of leadership identity, levels of personal and social aspects of identity, and integration across domains. We suggest using these activities enables the development of a leader identity and gives rise to leadership competence.

A Multi-Domain Approach to Developing a Leader Identity

Exploring one's leader identity requires incorporating situations, connections, and personal characteristics and beliefs (Day & Harrison, 2007; Petriglieri et al., 2017). To create those linkages, we employ a multi-domain approach where participants use experiences in all areas of life (e.g., work, family, friends, and community) as critical incidents to examine leader identity. Identifying those unique experiences assists

potential leaders in observing how their subjective realities relate to effective leadership and contrast with others perceptions in addition to evidence from scientifically validated findings (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon & Topakas, 2013). Individuals hold different views on what constitutes effective leadership (Martin & Epitropaki, 2001) and the various life venues in which leadership is enacted (Hammond et al., 2017).

Most individuals begin building their conceptualizations about leadership well before taking on their first full-time job; even in childhood (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009). They build these concepts of leadership by observing parents, coaches, teachers, and friends. Early leadership experiences often occur in sports teams, student activities, and community volunteer activities (Reichard et al., 2011). These types of activities can sometimes be overlooked as leader identity development opportunities but can be used to contribute to the development of leader identity. Because leadership transcends roles and positions, it is important for leadership educators to provide examples of leadership beyond work-only contexts and encourage students to consider their own leadership engagement outside of the workplace. Therefore, taking a “multi-domain” identity approach to leadership education connects past leadership experiences to current leadership identity and functions as a tool for revising (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) or inventing (Braun & Lord, 2017, August) a future leader identity.

Leader identity develops in four key areas: meaning, strength, level, and integration (Hammond et al., 2017). An individual’s *meaning* of leadership forms the basis of the leader identity and is often related to an individual’s implicit leadership theories (ILTs), which refer to schemas specifying the characteristics of a prototypical leader (Epitropaki et al., 2013). ILTs specify the traits and competences associated with

leaders and are constructed from individual experiences (Epitropaki et al., 2013). Because a leader identity is ambiguous (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009), what leadership means to one person might be very different from another. Leader identities develop in meaning when they become more sophisticated by moving from dominance or power-based views to incorporating more interdependent or collective understandings (Day & Harrison, 2007). Although ILTs can be fairly stable over time, there is evidence highlighting that the conflict between old and new experiences can allow for the adaptation of ILTs (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000).

Next, *strength* refers to the extent to which individuals view themselves as leaders. Some students might not identify at all with being a leader whereas others very much see themselves as leaders. Leader identities generally strengthen through claiming and granting acts (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Claiming entails both verbal and non-verbal acts that individuals use to assert leadership; for example, taking the seat at the head of a meeting table or applying for a promotion. Granting refers to behaviors that others in a social interaction engage in to recognize a person's leadership; such as deferring to an expert or agreeing with a plan of action. These claiming and granting processes strengthen personal leader identity strength in a spiral fashion.

Commonly referred to in the literature as level of identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; DeRue & Ashford, 2010) or levels of self (Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, & Lord, 2017), the *levels* dimension describes the personal and social aspects of one's leader identity. i.e., placing the self within context.¹ The three levels are personal, relational, and

¹ Although consistent with academic use, we have found in the classroom that using the terminology of "levels" sometimes creates confusion for students – we have increased clarity on this topic by using other terms such as "layers" or "sources."

collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Day & Harrison, 2007). The personal level draws upon individual characteristics, such as personality traits or leadership behavioral repertoires (e.g., I am charismatic). Relational identities derive from interpersonal relationships: one's identity vis-à-vis another person. An identity of spouse, for example, is only possible when one is married, or sibling when one has a brother or sister (e.g., I am an older sibling, thus, I am a role model to my younger siblings). Finally, collective identities develop in group memberships, such as employee, alumnus/ae, sports fan (e.g., I belong to a student group, I must represent the vision of that group to attract new recruits).

Integration refers to the extent to which one's broader self-concept incorporates the leader identity. Because leader identities transcend formal roles, they may be integrated across various life domains, such as work, community, family, and friendship (Hammond et al., 2017).

Leader identity development exercises

Building on the work of Hammond and colleagues (2017), we focus on the four components of leader identity: meaning, strength, levels, and integration in leadership education. The learning objectives for these activities are:

Learning Objectives: In constructing a leader identity narrative, students will be able to articulate their leader identity in terms of:

1. Their meaning of leadership and how it relates to their identity.
2. Their strength of leader identity.
3. Their three levels of identity (individual, relational, and collective) and how each correlates with different behaviors and skill sets.

4. The extent to which their leader identity integrates across their life domains.

Four in-class exercises serve as triggers for identity work, reflecting on each of the components of leader identity, culminating with a fifth activity - a personal narrative assignment in which students author a coherent leader identity. These activities can be implemented in any type of classroom setting (undergraduates, MBAs, EMBAAs, adult education, etc.) and involve explanation and connection to multi-domain leadership theory (Hammond et al., 2017; Vogelgesang Lester et al., 2017), individual level exercises, and class discussion and dialogue. Each exercise appears in Appendix A; a summary of the exercises is in Table 1. Although the instructions do not differ based on the audience, the amount of preparatory content or time spent debriefing may vary due to participants' experiences with leadership-related topics. These exercises can be done in one long class period (i.e., a 3-hour seminar dedicated to the topic of leader identity) or over a series of class meetings as they relate to other topics (see related topics in Table 1). If spreading out the exercises over a longer time period, we recommend using one-to-two exercises per class for up to four weeks. We find the best approach is to plan the class session around one or more concepts of the leader identity: meaning, strength, level, or integration, respectively.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Meaning: Drawing Leadership Exercise. We recommend beginning with the “drawing exercise” developed by Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, and Tymon (2011), which

asks participants to draw what effective leadership looks like. Explain that this image can be a sketch of people (even stick figures), a symbol(s), a depiction of an event, or even a diagram – anything that the student finds helpful. This exercise allows for a richer contextualization of leadership than simply identifying leader prototypes; the drawing can include followers, metaphors, or symbols (Schyns et al., 2013). After the students take a few minutes to draw an image, we recommend projecting a slide with the images such as those included in Appendix A and asking the students to first describe the images, and then interpret each for the meaning of leadership it represents. Show this slide only after the students complete their drawings as not to prime their meaning to reflect the instructor's conceptualization. Then, ask the students to do the same process with their own images, (i.e., to write a description and interpretation, or articulate using words, what the image represents about *their* meaning of leadership). Depending on class size, we recommend either sharing descriptions with the entire class or in pairs/small groups in larger classrooms. Using images allows students to identify implicit assumptions and challenge ways of thinking (Schyns, et al., 2011). The images are of less importance; the explanations of meaning matter the most. Contrasting explanations should spark some discussion about the relationship between the meaning of leadership and identity; namely, that the meaning one holds about leadership will influence the extent to which an individual will see oneself as a leader (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Most importantly, the instructor should also guide the discussion towards the realization that individuals have different meanings of leadership and how one conceives of oneself or others as a leader will largely depend on this definition. For example, if one student draws a picture of a leader standing in front of a group shouting directions, and another student draws a

picture of a team working together to summit a mountain, the instructor can discuss when each approach is effective, bring in situational constraints, and explore how the students might incorporate these findings into their personal meaning of leadership.

An additional option is to use this activity twice in the course of a semester. It serves as a useful tool for the beginning of a leadership course as a way to introduce the concept of leadership. By revisiting the activity after learning leadership concepts and theories, students tend to see an evolution of their meaning of leadership. We find repeating this exercise at the start and conclusion of the course to be particularly powerful in helping students realize the maturation of their understanding of leadership, particularly after reviewing the empirical evidence regarding effective leadership.

Strength: Leader Meter and Identity Circles. We find that strength is usually one of the most straightforward aspects when discussing leader identity. To facilitate the process of thinking about leader identity strength, Appendix A provides two activities to represent identity strength.

The first exercise, the “leader meter”, asks students to fill in the degree of their leader identity on a picture of a thermometer. After coloring in the extent of their leader identity, we ask students to list the claiming and granting behaviors they feel strengthen their leader identity (what leads to the shaded areas), and also to write down the behaviors they have yet to master in order to continue to fill up their meter (the blank spaces) for the future. It is especially enlightening to have the students revisit their leadership definition and drawing. We often see some disconnect between the types of behaviors students believe would help them identify to a greater degree as a leader and how they have defined leadership. For example, students may draw a collaborative leader

in the first exercise and define leadership as a process of collaboration, but then fill out their leader meter as if a strong leader identity arises from holding leadership positions or having power over others. Examining these inconsistencies promotes deeper level processing and in-class discussion.

The second leader identity strength activity asks students to choose an illustration depicting the amount of overlap between their self-concept and a leader identity (Bergami & Bargozi, 2000; Rockmann, Pratt, & Northcraft, 2007). An individual with a very weak leader identity might not identify any overlap; whereas an individual with a very strong leader identity might choose the illustration of wholly overlapping circles. When fostering discussion, students might debate the benefits and drawbacks of the extremes. It is helpful to also note that leader identity strength varies across time and situations. Often identity strength dips before it grows, in a J-shaped fashion (Miscenko et al., 2017). This is particularly enlightening for students who once had a strong leader identity due to sports team participation or engagement in high school activities, but who shed those identities after starting university studies. Instructors should also compare potential discrepancies between these two activities – some students do submit an empty leader meter with completely overlapping circles, or a fully shaded leader meters with separate circles. Similar to the drawings, these exercises can be used at both the start and end of the term as well, specifically to capture any strengthening or even weakening of leader strength over time.

Levels: “I am” statements. This activity is a variant of the Twenty Statements Test (TST) initially developed to measure the self-concept (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to think about leader identity in

terms of the levels that research identifies as relevant to how leaders think about who they are: the individual (personal), relational, and collective levels (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). First, provide the students with the list of “I am” statements (see Appendix A) and ask them to fill in the blanks. They may fill in as many or as few as they like. Next, explain the concept of levels of leader identity (see Hammond et al. [2017] or DeRue and Ashford [2010] for more details), and instruct the students to review their list of “I am” statements. We find it helpful to discuss levels of identity in terms of the source of the identity, that is, to what extent is a leader identity based on individual factors that set the individual apart from others (individual), based in strong close relationships (relational), or for the good of a group of people (collective).

In the margin, ask them to place an “I” for individual-level identities based on personal attributes (athletic, motivated, kind etc.), an “R” for relational identities based on close relationships (sister, husband, co-worker, etc.), and a “C” for collective identities based in group membership (employee of an organization, religious affiliation, alumna of a university, etc.). Students will likely uncover how much of their leader identity links to domains other than work, namely, to their friends and family and to their community domains. Some leader roles will be more straightforward (e.g., Sorority or Fraternity President); others less so (Sister/Brother/Daughter/Son) but may offer reflective opportunities such as whether or not that identity requires role-modeling, caregiving, advocating, or obeying.

In discussions, students might debate which level is “best.” It is helpful to highlight the advantages of being able to draw across the levels of identity and not elevate one level as any better or worse than the others. As a leader’s identity grows in

inclusiveness from individual to more collective levels, he or she tends to build a more sophisticated and context-dependent understanding and practice of leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007). In fact, Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, and Chang (2012) found evidence to suggest abusive leadership was associated with strong individual-level identities paired with weak collective identities – a finding that can highlight the interplay of the different levels.

Additionally, it is important to note that some personality traits such as extraversion may allow a leader to use the individual level as the main source, but an introvert might excel when embedded within a collective. Leader behaviors might include differentiating oneself as a leader (individual level), focusing on leader-member exchanges (relational level) or contributing through shared and participative leadership (collective level). We find it useful to make explicit links with the drawing exercise by asking students to compare their “I am” statements with their meaning of leadership. Students might not identify with the term “leader” (evidence notes that only 13% of MBA students tend to list leader as an identity in this exercise [Lee, Sunday, & Ashford, 2017]) but realize that they do indeed have several of the competencies they identify as part of effective leadership.

We typically do not see much change regarding levels over one course, so unlike the previous two exercises, we do not recommend repeating this activity. However, it could be assigned either before or after the leader meter.

Integration: Domain Circles. The integration exercise triggers reflection about the extent to which leader identity integrates or splinters across the domains of the leader’s life. We use the three domains of work, community, and friends and family as starting

points, but encourage students to include other domains, such as leading in other cultures, leisure activities, or certain domains that are further segmented (i.e., multiple roles at work or in the family). The exercise begins by asking students to draw a Venn Diagram (Venn, 1880); one circle for each domain. The size of the circles may vary based on relative importance for the student's leader identity. The degree of overlap (or lack thereof) should represent the extent to which the three (or more) domains integrate. The content of the overlap is personal, may vary amongst students, and may include physical space (leading a family-owned business), specific leadership behaviors or values enactment (being able to help develop others across domains), and/or feelings ("feeling" like a leader across domains). Instructors may also suggest to students that they draw the current extent of overlap of each domain and the desired extent of overlap given no situational constraints.

It is helpful if the instructor guides the dialog towards the concept of domains conflicting with and/or enriching each other (for a review of conflict versus enrichment models, see Greenhaus & Powell [2006] and Greenhaus & Beutell [1985]). It is important to foster a balanced discussion on the advantages and disadvantages as well as individual preferences for integration or segmentation (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013); some students may prefer clear boundaries between their domains, whereas others may find enrichment from integrating domains. From an empirical perspective, integrated leader identities can enrich leadership development by noting the similarities and differences as well as the opportunities to try on provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) in other domains. Some types of integration may reduce behavioral-based conflict, which is a perceived incompatibility between appropriate or effective

behaviors across domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As in discussions on the dynamic nature of strength of identity, integration may also fluctuate. There may be times in which students prefer, or their situation requires, being more segmented or integrated.

Similar to the levels of identity exercise, we do not see much change in integration over a course period and do recommend only assigning it once. It is helpful, though, to use the integration discussion as an initial wrap-up of leader identity before administering the timeline activity.

Constructing the Leader Identity Narrative: Timeline

Because the four elements of leader identity interconnect, each exercise informs the other dimensions. A leadership timeline offers a culminating activity to consider as a process to guide leader identity work by linking each dimension of leader identity and building a leader identity narrative (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) by connecting the present to the past and the future. We ask students to map key events that influenced their identity as a leader on a timeline. This generates a leadership story that explains the rationale for past decisions, behaviors, and events. This narrative creates coherence between their background and future goals. Therefore, in authoring a new or modified leader identity (Hammond et al., 2017), we suggest first taking a retrospective approach followed by a future-oriented or quantum (Braun & Lord, 2017) view of possible leader identities.

The retrospective reflection links the present self to the past. By looking back at the timeline, students might build into their narrative elements of the leader self-concept that strengthened and weakened leader identities. The benefit to this guided reflection is to help students recognize that leader identity strength can fluctuate based on the context

and the way they see themselves embedded in each situation. It is also beneficial to cue the students regarding the domains in which significant leadership moments occurred. The timeline exercise should uncover past leading acts that occurred in multiple domains of the leader's life.

The second part of the timeline is future-oriented: students map known and possible future life events. As a useful guide, Braun and Lord (2017) used a “quantum” approach to future leader identity invention. They argue that the distant future holds infinitely many identities that cannot be foreseen through a linear view of development. Yet, as time comes closer to the present, certain identities become more likely and other identities less so. If students take a forty-year future perspective, who they are between now and then has vast possibilities and is difficult to predict. However, who they are next year or in five years may be more predictable because there are fewer potential identities available given their current reality. This exercise requires thinking about the ideal self at different points in the future, which provides opportunities to understand what elements must go into the present-day narrative to foster a path to an ideal future self (Ibarra, 1999; Braun & Lord, 2017).

Integration with Other Theories and Approaches to Leadership Education

Beyond the benefit of offering a method for each individual student to author a unique leader narrative and engage in personal leadership development, our approach can integrate discussions of other leadership theories. Table 1 provides an overview of leadership theories linked to each exercise, as well as suggested readings for preparation. For example, an instructor might consider discussing Implicit Leadership Theories (see Eden & Leviathan [1975], Epitropaki et al. [2013], Foti, Hansbrough, Epitropaki, &

Coyle [2017]) and the Romance of Leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985) in conjunction with the drawing exercise. These theories help explain the influence of leader prototypes and implicit assumptions on the leadership process. Pairing the activity with these theories challenges students to explore what is implicit for them in the meaning of leadership and how they and society might romanticize leadership. These dynamics will influence how and under what circumstances they view themselves as leaders.

When discussing the strength of a leader identity, it is helpful to link to theories that highlight identity and self-concept salience and the role of each during the leadership process. For instance, Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) proposed a self-concept-based theory of charismatic leadership that explains the link between identity strength and motivation. Introducing the working self-concept at this point can also illustrate that fluctuation or J-shaped curve of leader identity strength per Miscenko et al's (2017) findings.

The "I am" statements, dealing with levels of identity, offers insight into social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2001) and adaptive leadership theory (DeRue, 2011; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Here, it can also be helpful to introduce the work of Drath (2001), in that the individual, relational, and collective identities can impact the principles about the sources of leadership. Individual-level leader identities might relate to domineering leading behaviors; whereas, relational levels of identity might elicit interpersonal influence. Finally, collective level identities might involve leading through relational dialog (Drath, 2001).

Leader identity integration can be one of the more challenging topics of discussion among students, as many have formed values around why they choose to

segment or integrate domains. Therefore, linking this component of leader identity to boundary theory (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) and the work-family interface (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) can help to explain when and why students may report or prefer segmentation versus integration of their leader identity across domains.

Impact of Exercises

The learning objectives for these exercises are that students will be able to articulate their leader identity in terms of meaning, strength, levels, and integration across life domains. Below, we present qualitative evidence from student narratives submitted as part of the course assignments which reflect the impact of the five leader identity exercises in achieving the learning objectives.

Sample. To assess the extent to which these activities facilitated the learning objectives, we implemented these teaching methodologies across four geographically dispersed universities in North America with undergraduate, MBA, and EMBA students in leadership, management, and organizational behavior courses. The sample size for our analysis is 107 students. Although we did not specifically collect demographic data, the participants exhibited “typical” university classrooms (about 50% male and 50% female, various ethnic backgrounds, ages ranging from early- to mid- 20s [undergraduate] and late 20’s through early 40’s [MBA]). Of the 107 students, 46 were enrolled in MBA or EMBA programs, and 61 were undergraduates.

Qualitative Evidence. We asked students to share any comments regarding the exercises. Some of their responses provide insight into the students’ impression of how the exercises impacted them:

“Through this exercise, it gives me an idea of who I am and what it takes for me to evolve as a leader” (sic) - undergraduate student

“Overall a very insightful exercise that enlightened my perspective and thoughts around leadership” - undergraduate student

In addition, students also submitted reflection papers as part of their assigned coursework, which provides insight into the impact of the guided reflection, created by the exercises, and its impact on how students’ narratives about their leader identity evolved. For example, the following comment highlights how the timeline exercise can trigger retrospective reflection. In this case, the retrospection helped build awareness around the strength of leader identity:

“Looking back, there were also many moments in my life which I can now see helped me develop in my professional identities as a leader, even though they were negative at the time. It seems as though the times which were the most challenging to me professionally offer the clearest timeline of my professional leadership identity. The first is most indicative of how little I considered myself a leader in a professional capacity [...] However, upon reflection, I see where, once again, I continued to develop my leadership skills as a friend and colleague.” – MBA student

The following quote demonstrates how reflecting on the levels of leader identity relates to meaning of leadership:

“Upon reflection of my many identities, the ones in which I first recognize myself playing a leadership role are those of sister and daughter. My parents divorced

when I was 12, and my mom, younger sisters, and I endured a period of upheaval. It was during this time that I first see myself stepping into a position of leadership, supporting my mom and sisters, encouraging them when things were difficult or chaotic, assuming responsibility as the older sister and eldest daughter. Many aspects of leadership which I admire - empowering others, acting as a motivator, encouraging people to use their strengths and embrace their individuality - are aspects of leadership which I developed or utilized during this time period.” - MBA student

The following quote provides evidence that the integration circles help students become aware of how their domains intersect and the extent to which they integrate their leader identity:

“I feel it is important to have spillover between all domains in an enriching way. This way, I can use the spillover to develop myself as a leader. Unfortunately, this is not always the way it works [...] I tend to keep my work life somewhat separate for the most part. By this, I mean that when I am at work, I do not bring my friends/family “issues” with me. On the other hand, I do tend to bring my work “problems” home with me. I let the negative work issues spill over into my friends/family domain, and this may have a crossover effect on some people in my life.” - MBA student

Considering levels of leader identity, the following quote articulates the effect of relational identities when considered separately from the individual level:

“I never really thought about my leadership story until this course. I cannot say that my initial evaluation of myself as a leader is the same now that the semester has come to a close. The first day of class we did an exercise of “I Am” statements. Originally, I had a lot of relational and social attributes when it came to evaluating my identity. It was all about how others saw me or identified with me [...] For such a long time I allowed myself to be described by others and their thoughts about me, that I had forgotten parts of myself. I no longer identify solely based on relational identifiers, but I allow myself to absorb all the different aspects of my life and choose which ones I truly identify with.” - MBA student

While each of these quotes highlights how the exercises triggered reflection on an element of leader identity, more importantly, the reflections demonstrate the leader development that students experienced through the exercises.

Discussion and Conclusion

We recommend employing identity work in leadership education, emphasizing that the key learning comes from reflecting on the four components of leader identity and using multiple domains to understand the process of how a “whole person” evolves as a leader. Guided reflection helps students author a leader identity narrative by building personal awareness of the meaning, levels, strength, and integration of their leader identity. In understanding one’s leadership meaning, how strongly one incorporates the leader identity as part of the self, how different levels of identity influence an approach to leadership, and to what extent one integrates leadership experiences from other domains,

each student can understand past leadership experiences, define a present leader identity, and take a future-oriented perspective to achieve an aspirational leader identity.

Leadership education has encountered many criticisms (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015), as it often relies on approaches that survey the field of leadership theories but do little to use such theories of leadership to develop more competent leaders. The outcome of this method is business schools *informing* students about leadership but doing very little in *developing* students into more competent leaders. Alternatively, a leader identity approach to leadership education equips students with a method for continuously reflecting upon and improving a sense of self as a leader throughout the lifespan. As recent research notes, there is a positive relationship between changes in leader identity and changes in leadership skills, giving support to the idea that developing one's leader identity motivates individuals towards developmental experiences (Miscenko et al., 2017). Furthermore, a multi-domain approach facilitates development by exploring critical incidents to make the process of internalizing leadership theories into one's identity tangible, particularly for students yet to hold management positions in a business.

The exercises presented in this article also address a conundrum documented by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) that is likely common in many organizations, namely, a contradiction in the discourse or narrative of leadership and the practice of leadership. The exercises allow an instructor to guide students to understand that leadership is complex and building a leader identity is hard work, because it requires reflecting upon the uncomfortable realities that often we behave as bad leaders, despite what we believe about effective leadership. By taking a multi-domain approach, such identity construction

may be more holistic and thus easier for the students to recognize when their behaviors are consistent or inconsistent with their ideal narrative of leading.

While there are many strengths associated with this process, we recognize there are some limitations. First, this process breaks from the traditional norm of business education. With the popularity of experiential or applied learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and the flipped classroom (Bishop & Verleger, 2013, June), it is not unusual to introduce such activities into a classroom setting. However, some students may oppose the “work” involved, because it is personally relevant, but at times, difficult to face the awareness that emerges. Many students are open and eager for this type of development, but some may dislike this in-depth reflection, feeling some level of identity threat. Our experiences also include students who resist the process, but we generally find those students have the greatest epiphanies because the exercises require a deep level of reflection. It is important to both create a dynamic with students to foster openness as well as highlight the value of doing so for the students. We have had success, especially with undergraduate students and those more resistant to this approach, to ask them to turn in a copy of the exercise response for participation credit and to hold them accountable for at least attempting the activities. This also allows the instructor to have a deeper insight into the students’ views of leadership.

Another limitation is that, as opposed to discussing topics that are objective and easy to analyze from an analytical framework or model, this process is deeply subjective and personal. Instructors must be sensitive to this dynamic, particularly in classroom discussions, as many students may find that their reflections are too personal to share with the class or in small groups. In some cultures, such personal sharing in a classroom

setting may be taboo. Therefore, the instructor must create an environment where it is okay to not openly share, or, for those who do share, to treat personal insights respectfully. Instructors may need to establish some collectively agreed upon rules of engagement, such as not repeating certain comments outside of the classroom or avoiding any judgment of personal or emotionally charged stories.

Finally, preparation for such classroom activities is as much about the process and context as it is about the content. Successful implementation of these activities requires knowledge about core theories of leadership behaviors and development, particularly the multi-domain leadership development model (Hammond et al., 2017). We assume that most leadership instructors will generally have a fluent knowledge of core leadership theories. The instructor must be comfortable defying the typical flow of a classroom setting. For instance, many education topics begin with content, followed by process, which then creates the context. We suggest adopting the inverse process, understanding the context first (as students may bring their own situations to bear on the classroom context), followed by process (incorporating the exercises), and then an openness to the content that then emerges and building on it by applying relevant theories of leadership, rather than wedding oneself to any one content area of leadership.

Each of these limitations is present in all attempts of teaching leadership. We believe the process outlined in this paper; however, opens instructors to possibilities for overcoming these challenges in leadership education. Such a process contributes to a robust learning environment in which leadership education is personal, connected, and relevant to the students.

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Table 1

Related Concepts and Theories for Each Exercise

Exercise	Leader Identity Dimension	Related Concepts & Theories	Suggested Reading for the Instructor
<p><u>Drawing Leadership</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Have students draw what effective leadership looks like. <i>Step 2:</i> Show Students slide of possible images and first describe, then interpret each. <i>Step 3:</i> Ask students to write a description of the meaning of leadership that their image portrays.</p>	<p>The meaning of leadership is personal and as such, what it means to each individual will drive how they see themselves as leaders, i.e., the meaning component of their leader identity.</p>	<p>Implicit Leadership Theories Romance of Leadership</p>	<p>Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, (2011), Epitropaki et al. (2013) Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai (2011)</p>
<p><u>Leader Meter</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Instruct the students to shade in the extent to which they see themselves as a leader on the meter. <i>Step 2:</i> Encourage students to reflect on and discuss what factors would lead to a higher rating on the meter. This can foster discussion on a potential disconnect between aspects included in definitions of leadership (from the drawing exercise) and the extent to which they see themselves as leaders.</p>	<p>The exercise focuses on strength of leader identity, which will play a very large role in determining the moments when a student decides to claim leadership, i.e., enact an influential behavior, and when the student will grant leadership to others.</p>	<p>Self-Concept Based Theory of Leadership Social Process of Leader Identity Construction Working Self-Concept</p>	<p>Miscenko, Guenter, & Day (2017) DeRue & Ashford (2010) Markus & Wurf (1987)</p>

<p><u>Identity Circles</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Give the students a handout with the different degrees of strength leader identity strength and have them select the degree of overlap between themselves and leader. <i>Step 2:</i> Instruct the students to reflect on their selection, writing down why they selected the degree of overlap between self and leader and under what circumstances might their strength of leader identity change.</p>	<p>The strength of leader identity will play a very large role in determining the moments when a student decides to claim leadership, i.e., enact an influential behavior, and when the student will grant leadership to others.</p>	<p>Self-Concept Based Theory of Leadership Working Self-Concept</p>	<p>Miscenko, Guenter, & Day (2017) DeRue & Ashford (2010) Markus & Wurf (1987)</p>
<p><u>“I am” Statements</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Have students complete as many I am statements as they like. <i>Step 2:</i> Instruct students to review their list of statements and place an “I”, “R”, or ‘C” for individual, relational, and collective identities, respectively. <i>Step 3:</i> Suggest the students review their identities vis-à-vis their meaning of leadership. Do any of their identities overlap?</p>	<p>The level of leader identity can play an important role in understanding what the source of leadership is for the individual leader. It will give the leader many insights into the competence and skills that an individual uses. However, it can also cue individuals to think about how their own leadership self-perceptions have evolved in relation to others and their activities</p>	<p>Social Identity Theory</p>	<p>Ashforth & Mael (1989) Hogg (2001) DeRue & Ashford (2010)</p>

	in multiple domains.		
<p><u>Domain Circles</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Instruct the students to draw a circle to represent each domain of their life, thinking about the size of the circle to represent relative importance and the degree of overlap for each domain. <i>Step 2:</i> reflecting on the circles, have the students write down in what ways their leader identity, then, transcends the boundaries of the domains and to what extent it is segmented. <i>Step 3:</i> Students may consider also drawing their ideal or desired level of overlap or integration among their domains.</p>	<p>Integration of leader identity across domains can be a matter of preference and/or a matter of domain characteristics. If a highly integrated leader identity is desired, yet the context demands segmentation, a leader might feel conflict and stress, and an inability to develop as a leader. Integration in other academic fields has been found to create enrichment opportunities. This exercise helps students reflect on when and why they find their leader identity segmented or integrated.</p>	<p>Work-Family Interface</p>	<p>Greenhaus & Powell (2006)</p> <p>Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate (2000)</p>
<p><u>Timeline</u> <i>Step 1:</i> Instruct the students to identify critical moments or milestones from their past that have shaped their leader identity. These can be positive, negative, or neutral events. <i>Step 2:</i> Ask students to identify future-oriented milestones, accomplishments, or events that will continue to shape</p>	<p>The exercise nicely integrates all four dimensions (strength, integration, level, and meaning) by helping students to identify critical events that have shaped their current leader identity and project future events to further develop leader identity in</p>	<p>Critical events</p> <p>Leadership narrative</p>	<p>Alvesson (2010)</p>

<p>their leader identity in future.</p> <p>Step 3 (optional): Using the timeline as a starting point, ask students to write out their leadership story (narrative) in biography form.</p>	<p>future (an ideal self as a leader)</p>		
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Appendix A

Instructions for Each Exercise

Exercise 1. Drawing Exercise (Meaning)

Prompt for Individual Exercise

What does effective leadership look like? Draw a picture or symbols to illustrate below.

Prompt for Class Discussion

Describe each picture and interpret its meaning



Question Prompt: What is leadership? What does it mean to you? Write your definition of leadership here.

Exercise 2. Strength or Extent of Leader Identity

The following two exercises will give you a sense of how much you see yourself as a leader. Complete both Part A and Part B with your instructor's guidance.

Part A: Leader Meter

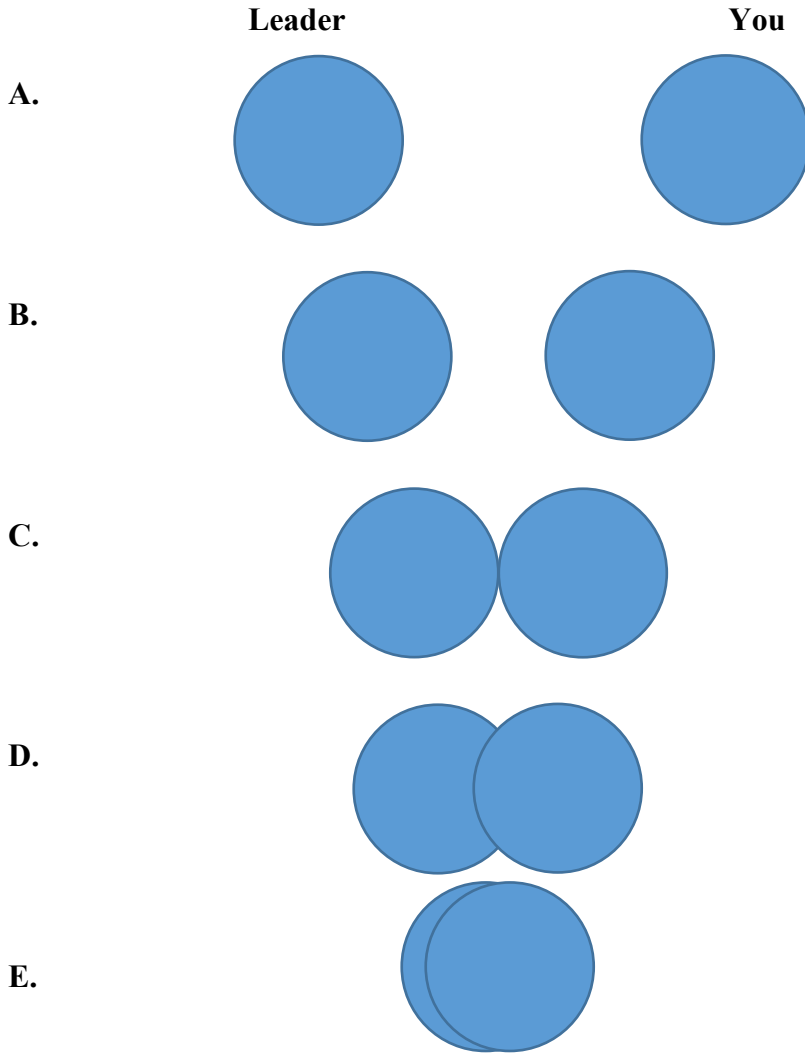
Color or shade in the "leader meter" to represent how much you see yourself as a leader.



Question Prompt: What behaviors help you fill in the meter? How is your sense of "being" a leader connected to "doing" leadership, i.e., engaging in leadership activities? What claiming behaviors do you use? What granting behaviors do your followers use? What about the area not filled in? What behaviors can help you strengthen your leader identity?

Part B: Identity Circles

Instructions: Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents a leader identity and the circle on the right represents your own self-definition or identity. Circle ONE letter (A, B, C, D, or E) which best describes the level of overlap between your own identity and a leader identity.



Question Prompt: How do your estimations of your leader identity strength match up with your meaning of leadership?

Exercise 3. I Am Statements

Instructions: Think about your identity and, in the space below; complete the sentence “I am...” as many times as you can in Column A.

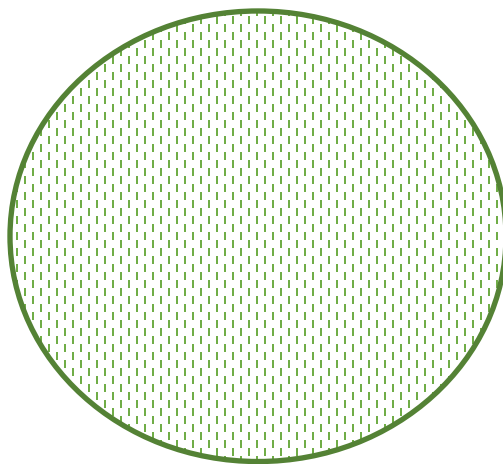
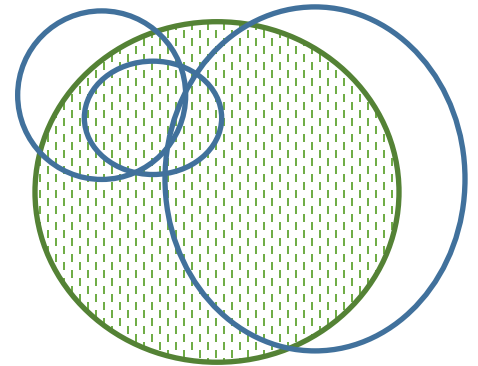
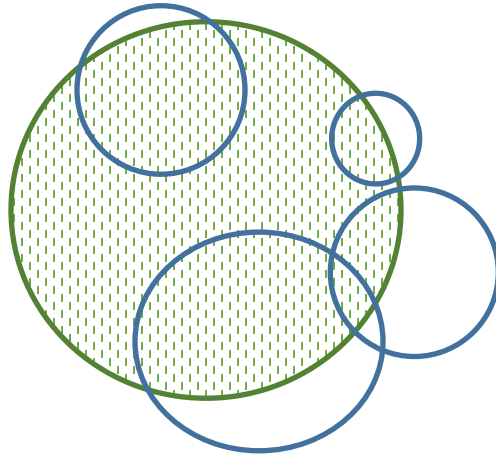
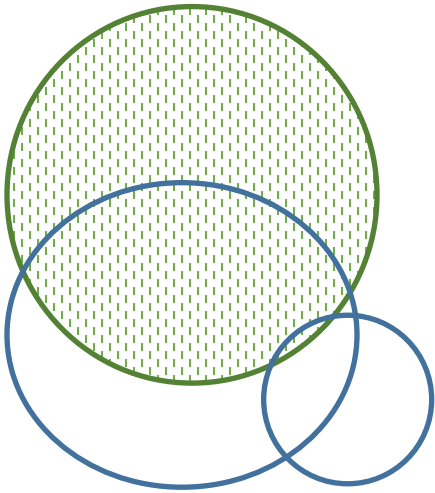
Column A	Column B
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____
I am _____	_____

After completing your statements, follow your instructor’s guidance to label them in Column B with an “I” (Individual/personal), “R” (Relational), or “C” (Collective/Social).

Question Prompt: How do these answers match up to your meaning and strength of leader identity?

Exercise 4. Integration

Instructions. Think about the different domains of your life. How many are there and how big are they? How much do they overlap with each other? To what extent do you practice leadership in these domains? The shaded circles below represent your leader identity. In the space below, draw circles for each domain and map them on to the shaded “leadership” circle. As an example, domain overlap may look like a variant of one of these:



Culminating Exercise 5. Leadership Timeline (Creating a narrative)

Instructions. On the next two pages, draw a leadership timeline. Begin with your earliest memories and continue to the present. Highlight the key events that taught you about leadership, noting your approximate age and a brief description of the event.

What are the key milestones in your leadership journey? Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

- An example of leadership from someone else (perhaps from a parent, or a coach, or even a peer)
- A time when you learned first-hand about what it means to lead (perhaps the first time you led a team, or influenced someone else)
- A book or a film
- An event in the news
- A course you took

On the second page, think about yourself in the future. What are the possible events that you can envision happening that will influence you as a leader and how your leader identity will evolve? You can pick a future timeframe as you see fit, but it is suggested to look 20 years or more out. You may see that the next 5 years are predictable, whereas 15, 20, or 30 years out has many possibilities. Some things to think about charting:

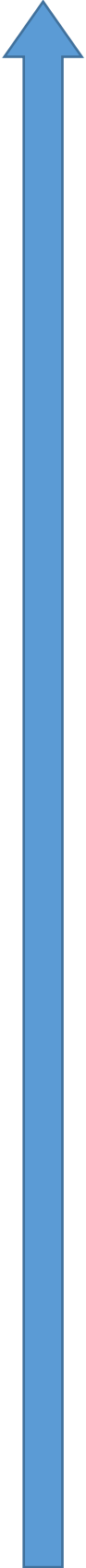
- An anticipated or desired promotion
- Milestones for you or your immediate family members that might impact your leadership
 - Children moving out of the house
 - Retirement
 - Completion of degree or certification
- An anticipated or desired trip
- An anticipated or desired job change

Past Timeline

Future Timeline



X
Today



Today
X