

Leaders' Personal Performance and Prototypicality
as Interactive Determinants of Social Identity Advancement

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Acknowledgements

The present thesis is a result of an endeavour that started in October 2008 in a small, cosy office in the North Tower of Washington Singer Laboratories. It then took me shortly to the cognitive (but sociable) research group on the second floor and the South Tower, before it came to an end in the same charming tower in which it had started. Over the course of this endeavour, I made a lot of friends without whom — and their tremendous help, support, and encouragement — I would not have been able to complete writing this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of leaders' personal performance and prototypicality on their ability to champion a social identity by advancing shared group interests. With this in mind, general theories of leadership and followership are reviewed as well as theories of leaders' performance more specifically. As a framework for understanding leaders' role in managing shared identity, we then discuss the social identity approach and its application to the field of leadership.

In three studies (Chapter 3), we examine the interactive effect of leaders' prototypicality and personal performance on followers' evaluations of their leadership. Studies 1 and 2 show that the impact of leaders' performance on followers' favourable reactions to their leadership (in terms of group advancement, trust in the leader, and leader endorsement) is more pronounced when leaders are prototypical, rather than non-prototypical, of followers' ingroup. Study 3 provides evidence from the field that this interaction between performance and prototypicality also impacts on followers' perceptions of leader charisma. Moreover, there is evidence that this impact can be explained, in part, by the degree to which followers perceive leaders to advance shared group interests. Results suggest that highly prototypical leaders who display elevated, rather than average, performance are responded to more favourably because their performance is perceived to advance a shared social identity.

Although our first three studies demonstrate that we can disentangle leaders' performance and prototypicality in order to examine their interactive effects, this does not mean that these two things are independent. Studies 4-6 (Chapter 4) provide evidence from the field and the laboratory that followers associate the performance of leaders with their prototypicality. A field study indicates that followers' perceptions of leader performance

and prototypicality are indeed positively related (Study 4). Moreover, experiments suggest that while followers infer a leader's prototypicality from his or her performance (Study 5), their evaluation of a leader's performance is also influenced by his or her prototypicality (Study 6). Studies 5 and 6 also indicate that leaders' performance and prototypicality determine their capacity to engage in identity entrepreneurship by changing ingroup norms and ideals. In this way, results suggest that leader performance and prototypicality are not only bidirectionally related but are also important factors that contribute to a leader's capacity to craft present and future understandings of a social identity.

In the third empirical chapter (Chapter 5), we examine the impact of evaluators' status as either internal or external to a group on assessments of leader prototypicality and performance. Study 7 shows that compared to external evaluators, internal evaluators are more likely to perceive highly prototypical low-performing leaders to advance the group more than low-prototypical high-performing leaders. Study 8 also demonstrates that internal (but not external) evaluators perceive highly prototypical leaders as more likely to advance the group compared to their moderately prototypical counterparts. Results suggest that these differential evaluations are primarily attributable to internal evaluators' increased responsiveness to prototypicality such that they are less willing than external evaluators to forgo leaders' prototypicality in exchange for their outstanding performance.

Taken together, the thesis supports a complex model in which leader effectiveness is determined by followers' appreciation of leaders' prototypicality and performance against the backdrop of their perceived capacity to realize shared goals and ambitions. The present thesis extends theories that emphasize the importance of leaders' exceptional performance. It shows that leaders' extraordinary capability is of limited value if they fail to demonstrate their alignment with followers. In successful leadership these two go

together such that leaders must be seen to promote 'our' ambitions and to be able to realize them. Theoretical implications for leadership theories and practical implications for organizational practices are discussed.

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