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Leader's Morality, Prototypicality, and Followers' Reactions

Valeria Amata Giannella[1]*, Stefano Pagliaro*[1]*, & Manuela Barreto*[2]

[1]*Università degli Studi di Chieti-Pescara, Italy*

[2]*University of Exeter, UK and Lisbon University Institute (CIS/ISCTE-IUL)*

All authors contributed equally to the development of the research and to the present paper. Valeria Amata Giannella collected and analyzed data. Please address all correspondence to Stefano Pagliaro, Università degli Studi di Chieti, Dipartimento di Neuroscienze, Imaging e Scienze Cliniche, Via dei Vestini, 13, 66100 - Chieti (ITALY), E-mail: s.pagliaro@unich.it; or to Valeria Amata Giannella, Università degli Studi di Chieti, Dipartimento di Neuroscienze, Imaging e Scienze Cliniche, Via dei Vestini, 13, 66100 - Chieti (ITALY), E-mail: valeria.giannella@unich.it.
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Abstract

We examine the effects of moral (vs. competent) leadership on followers' leader evaluations and endorsement. In Study 1 (N=157), followers evaluated a leader more negatively and endorsed them less when they failed on morality than competence. An indirect effect from leader morality to leader evaluation, through perceived group prototypicality emerged, demonstrating the identity-basis of this evaluation. In Studies 2 (N=150), 3 (N=297), and 4 (N=192) participants considered incongruous situations in which the leader failed on morality but succeed on competence, or vice-versa. Followers expressed more negative evaluations and less endorsement of an immoral but competent leader than of a moral but incompetent leader, through group prototypicality. In Study 4, we manipulated group prototypicality. A leader considered prototypical of the group received worse evaluations when they behaved immorally, irrespective of their competence. Results contribute to the understanding of leader-followers dynamics.

KEYWORDS: Leadership; Morality; Competence; Prototypicality; Social Identity

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Leader-followers dynamics are crucial for groups and organizations, as positive relations between leaders and followers facilitate group cohesion and effectiveness, while negative ones foster disengagement, deviance, and social loafing. For this reason, researchers have focused their interest on understanding when and why people choose to follow and support their leader. Approaches to leadership often focus on the individual attributes that leaders need to have to be successful. One example of these theories is Implicit Leadership Theory, which originally conceptualized the existence of naïve theories of how successful leaders were expected and desired to be (Lord et al., 1984; see also Judge et al., 2002; Offermann & Coats, 2018). For example, research has shown that group members tend to prefer leaders who are sensitive, dedicated, intelligent, attractive, masculine, and strong (Offerman et al., 1994). In contrast to this perspective, the social identity approach to leadership proposes that leadership effectiveness is not dependent on leaders having specific pre-defined individual attributes, but that, instead, leaders can only be successful if they represent the group's identity, that is, if they are perceived to be prototypical group members. Indeed, leaders who are perceived to be prototypical of the group are perceived favourably by followers, in particular by those who are highly identified with their group (Fielding & Hogg, 1997), are perceived as more charismatic than other leaders (Hains et al., 1997; Platow et al., 2006), receive greater support from group members, and are better able to influence them (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Gleibs & Haslam, 2016; Platow & Van Knippenberg, 2001; van Knippenberg, 2011). Of course, from this perspective, prototypical leaders can be seen as sensitive, dedicated, intelligent, attractive, masculine, or strong, but these attributes are neither necessary nor sufficient—their relevance depends on what is perceived to be typical of the group.

In the present paper, we aimed to add to the social identity approach the consideration that leader morality is a fundamental leadership attribute that predicts whether or not a leader is perceived to be prototypical of the group. That is, we claim that leader morality is an attribute that is central to perceived group prototypicality. Specifically, we aim to extend the social identity

approach with key insights from literature on the role of morality in social judgement—which underlines the centrality of morality in individual impressions and group processes (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012); ethical leadership—which points to the importance of morality in leadership (e.g., Brown et al., 2005; Keck et al., 2020); and the role of morality in group processes (Leach et al., 2007). In this way, we hope to integrate approaches to leadership that see it as a property of individuals who possess specific attributes (like competence or masculinity) with the social identity approach, which sees leadership as a group process.

Individual Differences in Leadership Attributes

Historically, the scientific approach to the study of leadership began with theories of leadership that focused on the individual attributes that make a good leader (e.g., Great Man theory, Carlyle, 1907). Grounded in the notion that the history of the world was shaped by great personalities, or better by great men, this seminal approach focused attention on the description of a list of individual attributes that characterise effective and desirable leaders, irrespective of what group they lead (Kelloway et al., 2017). Even though scholars and practitioners have consistently proposed that individual attributes *per se* were not enough to explain leadership effectiveness and followership, there is evidence showing that followers expect their leaders to have specific attributes, such as intelligence, charisma, strength, and sensitivity (e.g., Offerman et al., 1994; Judge et al., 2004). The task, in this area of knowledge, is to determine what these attributes might be and how these can be nurtured. These individual-based approaches dominated the first decades of scientific leadership research (Zaccaro, 2007).

A number of scholars have provided a substantial empirical basis for studying the attributes that predict leadership effectiveness (e.g., Judge et al., 2002; Peterson et al., 2003; see Zaccaro et al., 2004, for a review). Zaccaro and colleagues (2004), for example, refer to dispositions and abilities so stable in time and space as to be immune to any situational contingency. Zaccaro and colleagues (2004) suggest that effective leadership requires the integration of relatively stable and coherent personal characteristics (such as motivations, temperament, cognitive abilities, and skills)

able to promote a consistent model of leadership performance in a variety of organizational and group situations. A similar approach – Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) – suggests that a leader is perceived as such through a process of recognizing and matching an individual's attributes and behaviours to the corresponding prototype of the "leader" category, a prototype that tends to be the same across groups and situations. In other words, ILT proposed that individuals hold implicit and naïve conceptualizations of how leaders should be like, that is "cognitive structures or schemas that specify what people expect from leaders in terms of leader traits or attributes" (Offermann & Coats, 2018, p. 513). Such implicit theories have been found to change across time—that is, history influences what is seen as the prototype of the leader—but are expected to be stable within times and across contexts (Kalish & Luria; 2020; Offermann & Coats, 2018).

The Social Identity Approach to Leadership

In contrast to the approaches to leadership that see it as a property of individuals who possess specific attributes or individual differences, the social identity approach to leadership proposes that leadership is a group process that emerges from shared collective identities (Ellemers et al., 2004; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Turner & Haslam, 2001). This means that attributes like charisma and sensitivity only describe a good leader if they also describe the group they wish to lead. In addition, this perspective proposes that leadership effectiveness relies on the leader's capacity to mobilize identities and strengthen group bonds (Haslam et al., 2011).

An individual's social identity refers to their sense of belonging to a social group and the importance this has for them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Describing themselves in terms of specific group memberships allows people to communicate to others how they wish to be perceived and what can be expected from them in particular situations. Therefore, the definition of the group determines who is able to represent it, and the identity of the group can in turn be influenced by who represents it (Haslam et al., 2011).

From this perspective, leadership effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to represent

and promote the group's social identity at a particular point in time (for a review see van Knippenberg, 2011). The leader's power derives from expressing group identity and promoting standards and values linked to this shared identity—that is, leaders have the power to ensure followership when they are seen to represent the group, that is, when they are seen as *prototypical* of the group. Indeed, research has shown that a prototypical leader receives more trust than a leader that is not seen as prototypical of the group because they are perceived as having the group's interests at heart (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005).

To summarize, the social identity approach to the study of leadership posits that for a leader to be effective it is fundamental that they represent the group they lead, its core values, and its positive distinctiveness. Followership ensues from this perceived group prototypicality (Haslam et al., 2011). Examining how a leader comes to be seen as prototypical of the group is important to improve understanding of leader-followers dynamics. In the present paper, we aimed to complement existing evidence on the role of prototypicality by connecting this line of research with evidence about the prominence of morality in social judgments and group dynamics. Just like morality has been shown to be primary in group pride, evaluation, and in the regulation of group members' behaviour (e.g., Ellemers, 2017; Leach et al., 2007), we advance that it is likely to be central to perceived leader prototypicality. Specifically, we propose that a moral leader is likely to be perceived as representing the core values of the group (that is, they will be perceived as prototypical)—and more so than another leader who has other positive attributes.

Morality, Social Judgment, and Intragroup Processes

Although considering leadership as a property of individuals who possess specific attributes and seeing it as an emerging group property (as the social identity approach does) have often been considered incompatible, we propose that they come together when it comes to leader morality. This is because morality is central to group identity and therefore it is an individual attribute that is central to the perception of whether or not a leader is perceived as prototypical of the group. It follows, then, that leader morality is likely to be a particularly strong determinant of leadership

endorsement and that this is likely to happen through the social identity route of perceived leader prototypicality.

Research on social perception identified two core evaluative domains along which people form judgments about themselves, about others, and about social groups: Competence and warmth (for a review see Cuddy et al., 2008). Whereas the first domain refers to the ability to perform a task in a competent, efficient, and intelligent manner, the second refers to fundamental characteristics for the functioning of social relationships, such as sociability, reliability, and honesty. Leach and colleagues (2007) further highlighted that within the warmth domain two sub-domains can be distinguished: Morality (tapping into characteristics such as honesty and trustworthiness) and sociability (tapping into characteristics such as likeability or friendliness). Across a range of studies, researchers consistently showed that morality (vs. competence and vs. sociability) plays a prominent and leading role in forming impressions about unknown targets, in evaluations of oneself and one's ingroups (Leach et al., 2014), and in regulating group processes (Ellemers et al., 2013).

That is, evidence shows that group members' evaluations of their groups, and their choice of which groups they want to belong to, are driven primarily by the group's perceived morality (Leach et al., 2007). Individuals find it important to perceive themselves as moral (Pagliaro et al., 2016) and, to achieve this, they find it important to belong to groups considered moral (Leach et al., 2007). Because of this, morality has also been found to play a key role in regulating behaviour amongst group members, so that norms that are presented as reflecting moral values are more likely to be endorsed (Ellemers, 2017). This work was important in part because it clarified that, although group members are often willing to concede on whether their group is perceived as competent or as sociable, they are not as willing to concede on group morality. This might be, in part, because (im)morality is quickly inferred from (im)moral behaviour (e.g., Fiske, 1980) and is perceived to be stable over time (e.g., Reeder & Coovert, 1986; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Therefore, moral transgressions tend to be seen as enduring attributes in the eyes of perceivers, from which it is hard to come back.

If morality is so central to group identity, and if group prototypicality is key to leader effectiveness, then it seems plausible to infer that, to be supported and followed, a leader must be perceived as moral too. In line with our reasoning, prior evidence seems to suggest that a leader's behavioural integrity—that is, the extent to which a leader delivers on promises and enacts the values they espouse—induces followers' commitment and performance (Leroy et al., 2012; Palanski & Yammarino, 2011). In addition, a supervisors' perceived morality is a strong determinant of whether or not they function as effective role models (Peters et al., 2018).

Further indirect support for our reasoning stems from research showing that organizations perceived as moral (to which leader's morality presumably contributes) facilitate organizational citizenship, that is, behaviors that go beyond the call of duty and are useful for the growth and success of an organization (Dineen et al., 2006; Ellemers et al., 2011). Research on ethical leadership also lends support to these ideas. For example, Brown and colleagues (2005) developed a instrument to measure ethical leadership (designated as *normatively appropriate conduct)* that demonstrated a positive correlation between trust in leadership, satisfaction with the leader, perceived leader effectiveness, job dedication, and followers' willingness to report problems to management. Elaborating on this concept, Keck and colleagues (2020) recently relied on relational models theory (RMT; Fiske 1991) to show that followers' ethical leadership perceptions are not absolute, rather they depend upon the fit between the relational model that they deem appropriate and the relational model they ascribe to interactions with their leader. Finally, Gerpott and colleagues (2019) recently reported that perceived ethical leadership is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior via followers' moral identity, but only when the leader is perceived as highly prototypical of the group.

There is thus evidence suggesting that the leader's morality is central in leader-followers dynamics, and that this happens through group identity processes. Nevertheless, experimental or causal evidence for this process, and a more direct link between morality perceptions and group identity, remain elusive, at least to our knowledge. In the present paper, we aimed to fill this gap, by

directly investigating whether or not the moral domain is a more important determinant of perceptions of a group leader and of their endorsement, compared to another evaluative domain that is also positive and can also be deemed important for leadership effectiveness, that is, competence. In particular, bringing together the social identity approach to leadership with evidence about the social regulatory functions of morality, we aimed to show that morality drives leadership evaluation and endorsement. Moreover, we aimed to show that the effect of morality on leader-follower dynamics is driven by the perception that a moral leader is prototypical of the ingroup and fundamental for the ingroup's reputation. By contrast, we proposed that an immoral (vs. an incompetent or a moral) leader is perceived as particularly low in group prototypicality and is more threatening for the group's reputation, which is likely to reduce followers' willingness to endorse the leader.

Overview of the Present Research

In the present research, we aimed to extend the social identity approach to leadership by drawing on existing knowledge about the importance of morality both for social judgments and for group identity. To do so, we compared the extent to which group members endorsed their leader as a function of positive versus negative information about their morality or their competence. We also examined how these factors influence the extent to which the leader is perceived as prototypical of the ingroup, and whether the leader's perceived prototypicality drives effects on endorsement.

We conducted four studies to directly compare the causal effects of a leader's (im)morality and (in)competence on perceptions of the leader's prototypicality and leadership endorsement. In Study 1 we explored the effect of these two evaluative domains separately, while Studies 2, 3 and 4 put these two domains against each other. Studies 1, 2 and 3 considered perceived leader's prototypicality as a mediator; in Study 4 we further manipulated (high vs low) leader's prototypicality, to examine its causal effect on endorsement.

Study 1

In Study 1, we experimentally compared followers' reactions to a failure (vs. a success) of

the leader in the moral (vs. competence) evaluative domain. Based on our rationale, we hypothesized that leaders who fail in the moral domain, compared to leaders who fail in the competence domain, are evaluated more negatively (Hp1), are perceived as less prototypical of the group (Hp2), and elicit lower leadership endorsement (Hp3). Moreover, we anticipated that the relationship between the leader's (positive vs. negative) morality and leadership endorsement is mediated by perceived ingroup prototypicality (Hp4). Such a mediation is expected to be weaker or non-significant with regard to the leader's (positive vs. negative) competence.

To acknowledge the fact that leaders can be male or female and that both leadership and morality have been found to be gendered, we also varied leader gender in this study. It is possible that men are more easily endorsed as leaders than women are, given that they are a better fit to the general prototype of a leader (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Carli & Eagly, 2007, Eagly et al., 1992). However, this idea fails to differentiate between the prototype of *a leader* and the prototype of *the ingroup*. From our perspective, we think there is no reason to suspect that women are less likely to be seen as prototypical of the ingroup, which is what the social identity approach proposes is important to leadership endorsement. On the other hand, women might be judged differently from men particularly when behaving immorally. Research has shown that women with moral failings are judged more harshly than men (Montgomery & Cowen, 2019), perhaps because they are often expected to be particularly morally (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It is therefore important to explore whether or not gender affects the processes we examine here.

Method.

Design and participants. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions resulting from a 2(*Outcome*: Failure vs. Success) x 2(*Evaluative Domains*: Morality vs. Competence) x 2(*Leader's Gender*: Male vs. Female) between participants design. One hundred and fifty-seven undergraduates were recruited in a Psychology class (133 females, 21 males, 3 unknown; *M age* = 20.81; *SD* = 1.85) and voluntarily participated in the study. We collected responses from all the students presented in the classroom. All participants were resident in Italy.

Procedure. We informed participants that they would take part in a study on the opinions of young people about several aspects of social life. After providing their initial written consent to take part in the research, participants completed a measure of identification with the ingroup (students from the University in which the research was performed). This consisted of a four-item scale adapted from Ellemers et al. (2008; e.g., "Being a student of the University X is important to me"; "I have the feeling that I belong to the group of students from the University X"; 1 = *completely disagree* 7 = *completely agree*; Cronbach's α = .68). We controlled for identification with the ingroup in all subsequent analyses.

Participants then read a fictitious article describing the alleged activities of a student leader in the University Council, a university body with student representation. Participants were led to believe that this article was published by a local newspaper. In these scenarios, the student leader described had the task of managing the money raised for a student activity. According to condition, the students' leader was either male (Marco) or female (Francesca), and either succeed or failed in their activity. In the *morality condition*, the leader's behaviour was either described as dishonest and insincere in the management of the public money, with the leader having used part of that money for their personal purpose (*failure condition*); or as honest and sincere in the management of this public money, with the leader never having used part of the public money for their personal purpose (*success condition*). In the *competence condition*, the leader's behaviour was either described as incompetent in the management of the public money, having made a series of accountancy mistakes (*failure condition*), or as a competent in the management of this public money, never having made any accountancy mistakes (*success condition*).

An attention check was conducted by asking participants to remember the leaders' behavior in a multiple choice format by asking them if the leader had made a miscalculation or used the money for personal use (*alternatives: yes, no, I don't remember*). Nine participants failed these manipulation checks, and their responses were discarded from the dataset (retained sample = 148).

We also ran analyses with the whole sample and the results obtained were almost identical to what is reported here.

After reading the article, participants evaluated the leader ("*On the basis of what you have read, to what extent do you consider Marco/Francesca as…*") on the fundamental domains of judgment: *Morality* (trustworthy, honest, sincere; Cronbach's α =.96) and *competence* (competent, skilled, bright*;* Cronbach's α =.91)[i]. Participants additionally provided *a global evaluation* of the leader on a scale ranging from 1 (*completely negative*) to 7 (*completely positive*).

Subsequently, we assessed the extent to which participants perceived the leader as *prototypical of their ingroup* (students from the University X) with four items (e.g., "Francesca/Marco is prototypical of the students from the University X"; "Francesca/Marco is a good example of students from the University X"; 1 = *not at all* 7 = *a lot*; Cronbach's α = .84)[ii].

Finally, participants indicated their *endorsement* of the leader on four items: The extent to which they would "Support the future candidacy of leader", "Vote for leader", "Suggest to other colleagues that they vote for leader", and "Contribute to leader's electoral campaign" (1 = *not at all* 7 = *a lot*; Cronbach's α = .96).

Results. We performed a 2(*Outcome*: Failure vs. Success) x 2(*Evaluative Domains*: Morality vs. Competence) x 2(*Leader's Gender*: Male vs. Female) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)[iii] including all the dependent variables described above. Mediation analyses in all the studies were performed with PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). Tables 1 report the descriptive statistics and the inter-correlations for all variables in Study 1.

At the multivariate level, the analysis showed a main effect of evaluative domains $F(5,135) = 21.15$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .44$, and a main effect of outcome $F(5,135) = 169.11$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .86$; a significant interaction between evaluative domains and outcome further emerged $F(5,135) = 24.77$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .48$. Neither the main effect of leader's gender $F(5,135) = .62$, $p = .69$, nor the other interactions were significant, $Fs < 1.09$, $ps > .37$. Below we describe the univariate effects.

Leader morality and competence. At the univariate level, with regards to leader's morality both the main effect of outcome, $F(1,139) = 826.41$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .86$, and the main effect of evaluative domains, $F(1,139) = 69.22$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .33$, were significant. The main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $F(1,139) = 70.01$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .34$. As intended, participants evaluated the leader as less moral when they failed on a moral basis ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.76$) rather than on a competence basis ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.75$). The leader was, instead, evaluated as similarly moral in the case of a success that was morality-based ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 0.80$) or competence-based ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 0.74$). Thus, in line with our intention, though morality was generally affected by outcome, the effect of outcome on perceived leader morality was larger in the morality than in the competence domain.

With regards to the leader's competence, the analysis showed that the main effect of outcome was significant, $F(1,139) = 181.28$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .57$; the main effect of evaluative domains on was not significant, $F(1,139) = 0.15$, $p = .70$. A marginal outcome X evaluative domains interaction emerged, $F(1,139) = 3.69$, $p = .06$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. In both conditions, the leader was evaluated as less competent in case of failure (Competence: $M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.16$; Morality: $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.57$) than in case of success (Competence: $M = 6.10$, $SD = 0.71$; Morality: $M = 5.65$, $SD = 0.92$). The significant interaction reflects the fact that this difference was larger in the competence than in the morality condition, as intended.

Global impression of the leader. Both the main effect of outcome, $F(1,139) = 239.91$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .63$, and of evaluative domains, $F(1,139) = 27.10$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$, were significant. The effect of evaluative domains was qualified by a reliable interaction, $F(1,139) = 22.32$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$ (while the effect of outcome was not). As intended, participants evaluated the leader more negatively when they failed on a moral ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.17$) rather than on a competence basis ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.93$). The leader was, instead, evaluated similarly positively in the case of a success that was morality-based ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 0.87$) or competence-based ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 0.78$).

Leader prototypicality. As regards the perception of the leader as a prototypical student of the University the analysis showed that both the main effect of outcome, F (1,139) = 74.00, p < .001, partial η^2 = .35, and the main effect of evaluative domains, F (1,139) = 34.80, p < .001, partial η^2 = .20, were significant. The effect of evaluative domains was qualified by a significant outcome X evaluative domains interaction, F (1,139) = 16.27, p < .001, partial η^2 = .11. As intended, participants evaluated the leader as less prototypical of their ingroup when they failed on a moral (M = 2.21, SD = 0.95) rather than on a competence basis (M = 3.79, SD = 0.91). The leader was instead evaluated as similarly prototypical in the case of a success that was morality-based (M = 4.22, SD = 1.08) or competence-based (M = 4.51, SD = 0.91).

Leader endorsement. Both the main effect of outcome, F(1,139) = 436.19, p < .001, partial η^2 = .76, and of evaluative domains, F(1,139) = 8.05, p = .005, partial η^2 = .06, were significant. The effect of evaluative domains was qualified by a reliable interaction, F(1,139) = 12.43, p < .001, partial η^2 = .08. Participants reported a lower willingness to endorse the leader when they failed on a moral basis (M = 1.30, SD = 0.57) rather than a competence basis (M = 2.31, SD = 1.01). Leader endorsement was similar in the case of a success that was morality-based (M = 5.18, SD = 1.15) or competence-based (M = 5.07, SD = 1.01).

Moderated mediation. In light of the hypothesis, we conducted a moderate mediation analysis which however produced unreliable results. The analysis was conducted to verify whether the effect of Outcome (coded as 0 = *failure*; 1 = *success*) on leader endorsement was mediated by perceived leader prototypicality and moderated by the evaluative domain along which the leader either failed or succeed (moderator coded as 0 = *competence*; 1 = *morality*). We followed the procedure described by Hayes (2013) for estimating indirect effects (model 8; 5,000 resampling).

The overall equation was significant, R^2 = .78, F(4, 142) = 122.29, p < .001. Both outcome (B = 2.62, p < .001) and prototypicality (B = .18, p = .03) significantly predicted willingness to endorse the leader. Moreover, the conditional indirect effect of Outcome on leader endorsement through perceived leader prototypicality was significant at both levels of the moderator

(competence: B = .13; 95% CI: LL = 0.0031; UL = 0.3084; morality: B = .36; 95% CI: LL = 0. 0135; UL = 0. 7709). Crucially, the index of moderated mediation was reliable, B = .23; 95% CI: LL = 0.0067; UL = 0.5516. This means that, as hypothesized, the indirect effect of the leader's outcome on leader endorsement through perceived leader prototypicality was stronger in the morality than in the competence domain.

However, because our meditator is measured rather than manipulated it is likely that it is endogenous to leader endorsement. In order to estimate the causal effect of leader prototypicality on leader endorsement, we used an instrumental-variable estimator (2SLS) in which outcome and evaluative domain served as instruments for leader prototypicality, to isolate exogenous variance between our meditator and leader endorsement. Indeed, our manipulations are exogenous by design and if they are strong and predict out dependent measure only through our mediator they can be used as instruments (Sajons, 2020). The F-statistic testing the joint significance of outcome and evaluative domain in the first stage regression was 122.29. It was therefore well above the stricter critical value of 16.38 derived from Stock and Yogo (2005). This means that our instruments are strong. However, our over-identification test is significant (χ^2=22.95, p < .001), indicating that our instruments influence leader endorsement through paths other than the evaluative domain. Thus, our instruments are not fit to estimate an IV model, since endorsement is not predicted only through leader prototypicality. The estimates from our mediation model cannot therefore be considered causal, but rather correlational and the reduced form model results are the only reliable estimates that we can report. Future research should be conducted to further examine the causal path we hypothesised.

Discussion of Study 1 and Introduction to Study 2. Study 1 showed that a leader's failure is detrimental for how they are perceived and for the extent to which they are endorsed by group members, but, crucially, that this is substantially stronger when the failure is based on morality rather than competence considerations. In Study 2 we pit leader morality and competence against each other to establish whether competence failures are better compensated by moral successes than

the other way around. Specifically, we faced participants with incongruent situations in which the leader failed on one domain and succeed on the other.

Based on Study 1 and on previous literature showing the prominence of morality over competence in individual and group evaluations (e.g., Brambilla et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2008; Pagliaro et al., 2011; 2016), we hypothesised that participants would evaluate the leader more negatively when they failed on morality (even though they succeed on competence) than when they failed on competence (even though they succeed on morality) – that is, negative judgements on competence can be partially compensated by positive judgements on morality, more than the other way around. Moreover, we expected that participants would be less willing to endorse the leader when they displayed immoral behaviour (despite their competence) than when they displayed incompetent behaviour (despite morality). In line with Study 1, we also expected that the effect of moral failure on leader endorsement would be mediated by reduced perceived prototypicality of the leader. We again explored the effect of leader gender, but did not expect any effects of this factor, in line with Study 1's results.

Method.

Design and Participants. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions resulting from a 2(*Outcome of behaviour*: Moral but Incompetent vs. Immoral but Competent) x 2(*Leader's Gender*: Male vs. Female) between participants design. As in the previous study, we collected data in a classroom, recruiting all available participants. One hundred and fifty undergraduates were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions (120 females, 28 males, 2 unknowns; *mean age* = 21.82; *SD* = 3.63) and voluntarily participated in the study. All participants were resident in Italy.

Procedure. The procedure was almost identical to that used in Study 1 with some relevant changes to the manipulations. In particular, participants were faced with one of two incongruent scenarios describing a male or a female leader's activity. In the first one, the leader was described as managing the public money in a dishonest and insincere way, having used part of that money for

their personal purpose; At the same time, they were described as behaving in a competent way, having produced a perfect report, and never having made accountancy mistakes with the public money (*Immoral but Competent condition*). In the second condition, the leader was described as behaving in a honest and sincere way, never having used parts of the public money for their personal purpose; At the same time, however, they were described as managing the public money in an incompetent way, having made a series of accountancy mistakes with the public money (*Moral but Incompetent condition*).

These manipulations were checked by asking participants to recall the leaders' behaviour by choosing one of several options on a multiple-choice question, as in the Study 1 (alternatives: yes, no, I do not remember). Seventeen participants failed these manipulation checks, and their responses were discarded from the dataset (retained sample = 133). We also ran the analyses with the whole sample and the results were almost identical to what is reported here.

We again assessed the extent to which participants perceived the described leader as *Moral* (α =.94) and *Competent* (α =.84). *Global evaluations* of leader were provided on a scale ranging from 1 (*completely negative*) to 7 (*completely positive*). *Perceived ingroup prototypicality* (α = .89) and leader *endorsement* (α = .95) were also assessed as in Study 1.

Results. We performed a 2(*Outcome of behaviour: Moral and Incompetence vs. Immoral and Competence*) x 2(*Leader's Gender*: Male vs. Female) MANOVA including all the dependent variables described above. Tables 2 report the descriptive statistics and the intercorrelations for all variables in this study.

At the multivariate level, the analysis showed a main effect of outcome $F(5,124) = 150.86$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .86$; but neither the main effect of leader's gender $F(5,124) = .79$, $p = .56$, nor the interaction were significant, $F(5,124) = .72$, $p = .61$.

Leader Morality and Competence. At the univariate level, with regards to leader morality the main effect of outcome, $F(1,128) = 666.59$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$, was significant. As intended, participants evaluated leaders as less moral when they had a moral failure with a

competence success (M = 1.77, SD = 0.96) than when they behaved morally but incompetently (M = 5.80, SD = 0.81).

With regards to the leader's competence, the analysis showed that the main effect of outcome was significant, F (1,128) = 22.06, p < .001, partial η^2 = .15. As intended, participants evaluated leader as more competent when they were competent but immoral (M = 4.83, SD = 1.39) than they were moral but incompetent (M = 3.71, SD = 1.36).

Global Impression of Leader. As regards the evaluation of global impression showed a main effect of outcome of behaviour was significant, F (1,128) = 148.64, p < .001, partial η^2 = .54. Participants reported a more negative evaluation of the leader when they were immoral but competent (M = 2.71, SD = 1.19) than incompetent but moral (M = 4.97, SD = 0.90), as expected.

Leader's Prototypicality. The main effect of outcome was significant, F (1,128) = 63.13, p < .001, partial η^2 = .33. As expected, participants considered the leader as more prototypical of their ingroup when they were moral but incompetent (M = 4.17, SD = 1.15) compared to when they were competent but immoral (M = 2.59, SD = 1.11).

Leader Endorsement. The main effect of outcome was significant, F (1,128) = 79.56, p < .001, partial η^2 = .38. As expected, participants were less willing to endorse the leader when they were immoral but competent (M = 1.70, SD = 1.02) than they were incompetent but moral (M = 3.65, SD = 1.47).

Mediation. We then conducted a mediation analysis to test whether the effect of outcome (coded as 0 = *Competent but Immoral*; 1 = *Moral but Incompetent*) on leader endorsement was mediated by perceived prototypicality of the leader as a student of the University X (PROCESS model 4; 5,000 resampling; see Figure 1).

The overall equation was significant, R^2 = .57, F(2,130) = 85.79, p < .001. As shown in Figure 1, the behaviour of the leader significantly predicted both leader endorsement and perception of leader prototypicality. More importantly, the indirect effect of the outcome of behaviour of the leader on leader endorsement through the perception of leader prototypicality was significant (b =

.99; 95% CI: LL = 0.6548; UL = 1.3889). In line with our hypothesis, a leader behaving in an immoral but competent way was perceived as less prototypical, and this in turn reduced the extent to which group members were willing to endorse this leader, compared to a leader who behaved in a moral but incompetent manner.

As in study 1, it is likely that leader prototypicality is endogenous to leader endorsement. Thus, we again sought to estimate the causal effect of leader prototypicality on leader endorsement by using an instrumental variable approach in outcome served as an instrument for leader prototypicality. Our instruments are statistically strong. The associated F-statistic for the outcome of behavior in the first-stage regression was 78.328. It was therefore well above the stricter critical value of 16.38 as derived from Stock and Yogo (2005). However, here again our overidentification-test was significant (χ^2=11.65, $p < .001$), indicating that our instruments do not predict leader endorsement only through leader prototypicality. Thus, we cannot estimate an instrumental model in order to retrieve causal estimates. Since our meditation is likely to be endogenous, only the reduced form estimates should be trusted—i.e., the estimates obtained from the model in which our mediator is not included.

Discussion of Study 2 and Introduction to Study 3. Study 2 showed that followers are less willing to endorse a leader who is competent but immoral than a leader that is incompetent but moral. Therefore, leader immorality weighed more strongly in group members' judgements of their leader than leader incompetence. This was again mediated by the extent to which participants recognised the leader as prototypical of the group. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, in our scenarios, stronger effects of morality might be due to the fact that immoral scenarios described situations in which the leader's behaviour produced personal gain for him/her. Therefore, Study 3 was conducted with different scenarios in which the immoral behaviour of the leader did not produce any personal gain. Based on the null effect of leader's gender in studies 1 and 2, we decided not to manipulate this factor further in study 3. The hypotheses were the same as in Study 2.

497 **Method.**

498 ***Design and participants***. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions
499 (*Outcome of behaviour*: Moral but Incompetent vs. Immoral but Competent) resulting from a
500 single-factor between participants design. Two hundred ninety-seven participants were randomly
501 recruited via online data platform "Clickworker" (182 females, 114 males, 1 other; *mean age* =
502 37.71; *SD* = 9.09) and voluntarily participated in the study. All of the participants in this study were
503 resident in the UK. Although we have now further demographic information on our sample, the
504 general characteristics of the population of Clickworkers are documented on this platform, i.e., over
505 2.2 million 'workers', of which 51% are male and 49% female; from 18 to 80 years of age (the
506 largest age group is 25-34 year olds, which are 41% of the sample), 65% of participants have a high
507 school degree, 34% a college degree, and 1% has a PhD; 46% reside in North America 30 in
508 Europe, 15% in Asia, and7% in South America, and 1% in Africa; 47% are native English speakers,
509 12% native German, 3% native Spanish, 3% native French, 35% other.

510 ***Procedure.*** The procedure was almost identical to that used in Study 2 with some relevant
511 changes to the manipulations. In particular, participants were faced with one of two incongruent
512 scenarios describing leader's activities. The described leader was the manager of a company and
513 had to draw up a budget that the leader discovered had deliberately tampered with by the
514 administrative offices. In one condition the leader used their excellent calculation skills to detect the
515 misconduct, but chose to keep the impropriety hidden, resulting in competent but dishonest
516 behaviour (*Immoral but Competent condition*). In the second condition, the leader could not detect
517 the error because of their incompetence, but at the same time they did not behave immorally
518 because they did not hide the tampering (*Moral but Incompetent condition*).

519 These manipulations were checked by asking participants to recall the leaders' behaviour by
520 choosing one of several options on a multiple-choice question, as in the Study 1 and 2 (alternatives:
521 yes, no, I do not remember). Sixty-eight participants failed these manipulation checks, and their
522 responses were discarded from the dataset (retained sample = 229). This number is higher than in

the prior studies, which is consistent with the switch to online data collection, instead of collecting the data in a classroom. We also ran the analyses with the whole sample and the results were almost identical to what is reported here.

We again assessed the extent to which participants perceived the described leader as *moral* (α =.91), *competent* (α =.87), and *global evaluation* of the leader. *Leader's prototypicality* (α = .96) and leader *endorsement* (α = .92) were also assessed as above.

Results. We performed (*Outcome of behaviour:* Moral and Incompetent vs. Immoral and Competent) a MANOVA including all the dependent variables described above. Tables 3 report the descriptive statistics and the intercorrelations for all variables in this study. At the multivariate level, the analysis showed a main effect of the leader's behavior $F(5,223) = 102.09$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .70$.

Leader morality and competence. At the univariate level, with regards to leader morality the main effect of outcome, $F(1,227) = 204.49$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .47$, was significant. The evaluation of the leader's morality showed that, as intended, participants evaluated the leader as less moral when they were immoral but competent ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.44$) than they were moral but incompetent ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.08$).

As regards leader's competence, as intended, the main effect of outcome, $F(1,227) = 87.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .28$ was significant. Indeed, participants evaluated the leader as more competent when they were competent but immoral ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.42$) than they were moral but incompetent ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.18$).

Global impression of the leader. As expected, participants reported a more negative evaluation of the leader in the immoral but competent ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.34$) than in the incompetent but moral condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1,227) = 24.36$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$.

Leader's prototypicality. In line with our prediction, participants considered the leader as more prototypical of their ingroup when they were moral but incompetent ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.52$)

548 compared to when they were competent but immoral (M = 2.93, SD = 1.63), F(1,227) = 9.32, p =
549 .003, partial η^2 = .04.

550 ***Leader endorsement.*** As expected, participants reported lower willingness to endorse the
551 leader when they were immoral but competent (M = 3.12, SD = 1.62) than they were incompetent
552 but moral (M = 4.71, SD = 1.48), F(1,227) = 59.79, p < .001, partial η^2 = .21.

553 ***Mediation.*** We again tested a mediation model in which the outcome of the leader's
554 behaviour (coded as 0 = *Competent but Immoral*; 1 = *Moral but Incompetent*) predicts leader's
555 prototypicality, which in turn affects endorsement. The model is depicted in Figure 2 (model 4). The
556 overall equation was significant, R^2 = .31, F(2, 226) = 51.64, p < .001. A bootstrapping procedure
557 with 5,000 resamples showed that the indirect effect of the leader's behaviour on endorsement
558 through the hypothesised mediator was significant, B = .23, CI: LL = .0758; UL = .4133.

559 As in studies 2 and 3, it is likely that leader prototypicality is endogenous to leader
560 endorsement. Again, we sought to test the causal nature of this relationship by estimating an
561 instrumental variable regression in which outcome is used as an instrument for leader
562 prototypicality. Outcome is exogenous by design. Additionally, it is statistically strong. The
563 associated F-statistic for the outcome of behavior in the first-stage regression was 51.645. It was
564 therefore well above the stricter critical value of 16.38 as derived from Stock and Yogo (2005),
565 indicating that the instrument is indeed relevant. However, here again we find that our instrument
566 does not satisfy a cornerstone assumption of IV regression, namely that the instruments predict the
567 dependent variable only through the instrumented mediator. Our overidentification-test was
568 significant (χ2=36.86, p < .001), indicating that our instruments do not predict leader endorsement
569 only through leader prototypicality. Therefore, we cannot interpret our estimates as causal but rather
570 as correlational. Thus, only the reduced form estimates should be trusted as for Studies 1 and 2.

571 **Discussion of Study 3 and Introduction to Study 4.** The results of Study 3 were similar to
572 those of Study 2, demonstrating that morality weighs more than competence in the evaluation of a

leader, even when no immoral behaviour is not accompanied by personal benefit. Study 4 was designed to manipulate the mediator tested in Studies 1-3, i.e. the leader's group prototypicality.

We argue that an immoral leader is rejected because it is not perceived as prototypical of the group. In addition, since a leader can be particularly well positioned to portray what the group is about to the outside world, their behaviour, if negative, can reflect poorly on the group. As such, in Studies 1-3 we demonstrated that group members are motivated to see an immoral leader as less prototypical of the group than a moral leader, in this way reducing the extent to which it can reflect in the group's reputation. If so, then leader morality (vs. immorality) should be particularly important when the leader is regarded as prototypical (vs. not). At the same time, leader immorality might undermine the beneficial effect of leader prototypicality on leadership endorsement. To test this, we adopted an experimental design and compared followers' reactions to their leader's behaviour (*Immoral but Competent* vs. *Incompetent but Moral*) as a function of the leader's prototypicality (*high* vs. *low*). Based on the results obtained in previous studies, and on our theoretical model, we hypothesized that the effect of the leader's immorality on endorsement would be qualified by their prototypicality: In particular, we predicted that participants would endorse an immoral leader to a lesser extent when they are perceived as more prototypical (vs. less prototypical) of their group.

Method.

Design and participants. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions resulting from a 2(*Outcome of behaviour*: Moral but Incompetent vs. Immoral but Competent) x 2(*Group Prototypicality*: High vs. Low) between participants design. One hundred and ninety-two undergraduates were recruited in a Psychology class (138 females, 53 males, 1 unknown; *M age* = 21.64; *SD* = 3.09) at an Italian university and voluntarily participated in the study. We collected responses from all the students presented in the classroom.

Procedure. The procedure was almost identical to that used in Study 2 and 3 with some relevant changes in the manipulations. In particular, participants were faced with one of four

scenarios. To manipulate leader group prototypicality, in one condition, the leader – always a man, as in Study 3 – was described as *very prototypical* of the company, since a survey conducted within the company had judged them as prototypical and representative of the group; in the other condition, the leader was described as not very prototypical of the company, so not representative of the typical worker in that organization. To manipulate leader's behaviour, in one condition the leader detected misconduct by using their excellent calculation skills, but kept the impropriety hidden, resulting in competent but dishonest behaviour (*Immoral but Competent condition*). In the other condition, the leader could not detect the error because of their incompetence, but at the same time he did not behave immoral because he did not hide the tampering in a voluntary way (*Moral but Incompetent condition*).

These manipulations were checked by asking participants to recall the leaders' behaviour and leader's prototypicality by choosing one of several options on a multiple-choice question, as in other studies (alternatives: yes, no, I do not remember). Fifty participants failed these manipulation checks, and their responses were discarded from the dataset (retained sample = 142). After reading the article, participants evaluated the leader's ("*On the basis of what you have read, to what extent do you consider Marco as…*") on: *Morality* (trustworthy, honest, sincere; Cronbach's α =.86), and *competence* (competent, skilled, bright*;* Cronbach's α =.52), on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a lot*). Participants additionally provided *a global evaluation* of the leader on a scale ranging from 1 (*completely negative*) to 7 (*completely positive*). Then, participants indicated their *endorsement* of the leader on the same four items, as above (1 = *not at all* 7 = *a lot*; Cronbach's α = .89).

Results. We performed a 2(*Leader's Behavior*: Immoral but Competent vs. Incompetent but Moral) x 2(*Leader's Prototypicality*: High vs. Low) MANOVA including all the dependent variables described above. Tables 4 report the descriptive statistics and the correlations for the variables in this study.

At the multivariate level, the analysis showed a main effect of leader's behaviour $F(4,133) = 71.11$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .68$ and a main effect of leader's prototypicality $F(4,133) = 3.33$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$; a significant interaction between leader's behaviour and leader's prototypicality further emerged $F(4,133) = 3.28$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$.

Leader morality and competence. At the univariate level, morality judgements showed that both the main effect of leader's behavior, $F(1,136) = 185.80$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .58$, and the main effect of leader's prototypicality, $F(1,136) = 4.21$, $p = .04$ partial $\eta^2 = .03$, were significant. There was also a significant interaction, $F(1,136) = 3.59$, $p = .06$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

In the moral but incompetent condition, a high prototypical leader was perceived as more moral ($M = 5.50$; $SD = 1.08$) than a low prototypical leader ($M = 4.76$; $SD = 0.95$). By contrast, in the immoral but competent condition the leader was perceived as similarly immoral in the high prototypicality condition ($M = 2.56$; $SD = 1.12$) and in the low prototypicality condition ($M = 2.53$; $SD = 1.21$). That is, prototypicality was not blindly associated with perceived leader morality, since when participants were told the leader was prototypical but immoral they could reflect this in their evaluations.

With regards to the leader's competence, there was a significant main effect of leader's behavior, $F(1,136) = 46.24$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .25$. As intended, the leader was considered more competent when he behaved competently but immorally ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.09$), compared to the moral but incompetent condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.65$). Neither the main effect of prototypicality, $F(1,138) = .01$, $p = .92$, nor the interaction were reliable, $F(1,138) = 0.85$, $p = .36$.

Global impression of the leader. The main effect of leader's behavior was significant, $F(1,136) = 14.22$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. The effect of leader's prototypicality was not reliable, $F(1,136) = 0.05$, $p = .83$. The effect of leader's behavior was qualified by a reliable interaction between leader's behavior and prototypicality, $F(1,136) = 4.13$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. In the high prototypicality condition, participants evaluated the leader more negatively when the leader behaved immorally but competently ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.46$) than morally but incompetently ($M =$

650 4.67, *SD* = 1.42). In the low prototypicality condition, instead, the leader was evaluated similarly
651 when they behaved immorally but competently (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = 1.19) and when they behaved
652 morally but incompetently (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 1.19). The effect of the leader's prototypicality was not
653 qualified by the leaders' behavior. That is, morality was a more important determinant of leader
654 evaluation when the leader was perceived as prototypical.

655 ***Leader endorsement.*** A significant main effects of leader's behavior, $F(1,136) = 35.62$, $p <$
656 .001, partial $\eta^2 = .21$, and of leader's prototypicality, $F(1,136) = 7.27$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, and
657 a significant interaction between these two factors, $F(1,136) = 10.25$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. In
658 the high prototypicality condition, participants reported lower willingness to endorse the leader
659 when the leader behaved in an immoral but competent way (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = 1.56) compared to
660 when the leader behaved in a moral but incompetent way (*M* = 5.67, *SD* = 1.00). In the low
661 prototypicality condition, instead, leader endorsement was similar in the immoral but competent
662 condition (*M* = 3.80, *SD* = 1.18) and in the moral but incompetent condition (*M* = 4.40, *SD* = 1.21).
663 That is, leader morality was a more important determinant of leadership endorsement when the
664 leader was prototypical, and the beneficial effect of leader prototypicality on leadership
665 endorsement was undermined by leader immorality.

666 **General Discussion**

667 According to the social identity approach to leadership, the leader-followers dynamic
668 reflects an identity definition process by which followers look to the leaders to define and share a
669 collective identity, and interpret the social world (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003).
670 Following this rationale, the more the leaders are perceived as typical/ideal members of the group,
671 the more they are trusted and endorsed (Barreto & Hogg, 2017). The present set of studies integrate
672 the idea that leadership effectiveness is linked to the ability of the leader to embody the central
673 values of a group (i.e., to be prototypical of the group) with the idea that morality is central to group
674 identity. Specifically, we theorized and found that group members disengaged from an immoral (vs.
675 moral) leader, and that this disengagement stemmed from the perception that they were less

prototypical of the ingroup. This was supported by Studies 1, 2, and 3 in which the proposed mediator (ingroup prototypicality) was measured, and by Study 4, in which it was manipulated in a factorial design. Study 4 additionally clarified that leader morality is particularly important when a leader is described as prototypical.

In doing so, our research tried to connect approaches to leadership that see leadership as a property of individuals who possess specific attributes with the social identity approach, which sees leadership as an emerging group property. By showing that perceived leader morality predicts perceived leader prototypicalitty and endorsement, we expand the social identity approach with the consideration of a specific attribute that group members particularly value (Leach et al., 2007). We do this by considering morality as a fundamental group regulation element, a feature that is core to group identity. Indeed, participants in our studies consistently saw the moral leader as the most prototypical of the group, both compared to an immoral leader and compared to a competent leader.

In sum, our results support the idea that the leader-follower process may be interpreted as the result of shared collective identity (Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg & Abrams, 1993), but add to this the knowledge that leader morality is key to this sense of identity and is, therefore, a strong predictor of the extent to which a leader can be seen as prototypical of the ingroup. In doing so, we also complement past research on morality in group processes by providing further evidence to the centrality of the moral domain in the definition and management of the collective self (Ellemers et al., 2013).

We additionally show that leader morality plays this role more strongly than does leader competence—also a positive attribute that is often desired in leaders. That is, group members preferred a leader who was moral but incompetent (and therefore not very effective, but harmless) to a leader who was immoral but competent (and therefore very capable of acting on their immoral beliefs). And, importantly, this preference was associated with the view that the moral leader was more typical of the group, even when they were also incompetent.

In summary, in the set of studies presented here we consistently showed that moral attributes

(compared to another positive attribute that can be seen as important to leadership effectiveness, i.e., competence) have a fundamental importance on the formation of judgments about a leader and on behavioural tendencies towards them. This of course does not mean in any way that competence is not important when judging and supporting a leader. And indeed, our results seem to suggest that the evaluative domain is most important when the leader behaves in a negative way (or when they have a set-back). So, it is not moral vs. competent behaviour that matters as much as immoral vs. incompetent behaviour. In daily life, setbacks and errors are part of every leader's portfolio of behaviours, but our findings highlight that group members' tolerance for these will depend on whether they are interpreted as moral or competence failures. This is strongly in line with previous evidence about the so-called negativity effect — according to which observers place greater weight on negative than positive information when forming an impression of others, and subsequently decide whether to approach or avoid them—are particularly pronounced for behaviours relevant to morality. As a result, a single instance of dishonest behaviour can spoil previous expectations of honesty (Pagliaro et al., 2016; Reeder & Coovert, 1986; Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987).

It is also worth relating our findings to those that have established that leaders who are seen as prototypical of the ingroup are given a license to fail (Giessner & Van Knippenberg, 2008). Indeed, this was shown by varying leader competence and prototypicality and showing that ingroup members tolerated competence-based failures from prototypical leaders, but not from non-prototypical ones. Our findings are similar in the competence domain, but not when the leader fails to behave morally. This suggests that the license-to-fail documented for prototypical leaders in previous research might not apply to morality-based failures.

This work demonstrates that morality has a far greater weight than other attributes important to a leader (such as their competence) on the perception of the leader as a group's prototypical member. With these results, we add to the literature by showing that behaving consistently with the moral values important to the group makes the leaders highly prototypical members, enhancing

their ability to positively impact the group, as they will be able to represent the shared group's moral identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our main hypotheses were consistently supported across the four studies, there are some limitations that need to be addressed and can suggest further avenues for future research. The first limitation relates to the use of deception, and the presentation of fictitious scenarios to participants. Though deception is in general not an ideal procedure, we decided to rely on it because perceptions of ingroup leaders as they occur in real life conflate various factors such as competence and morality, making these two dimensions and their effects hard to disentangle. However, as previous research showed (Ellemers et al., 2013; Leach et al, 2007), it is theoretically possible to differentiate between these two domains and we aimed to do so experimentally in this paper. Moreover, results of the manipulation checks confirmed that full experimental control was maintained and that participants actually believed experimental instructions. Future research should focus on developing procedures that allow to examine this in the field, without resorting to deception.

Regarding the use of fictitious scenarios, it could also be argued that in real situations a leader is never evaluated only along one evaluative domain. Usually, in real situations, information about other aspects important to a leader is also weighed. For example, if information is available about the leader's competence or morality-based behaviour, followers most likely will infer one from the other, as often happens in interpersonal perceptions (Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994). Our experimental approach is likely to have strengthened the distinction between moral vs. competent behaviour. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence showing that individuals are able to distinguish morality from competence (e.g., Ellemers et al., 2008; Leach et al., 2007; Pagliaro et al., 2011), even though they are positively correlated in interpersonal impressions, and it is easy to imagine real situations in which a leader's behaviour diverges on the two evaluative domains. Thus,

753 although there may be other factors that intervene in more complex and ambiguous situations, we
754 believe our procedure appropriately resembles what could be a real situation.
755 A second avenue for further investigation is relative to the effect of the leader's gender. In
756 Studies 1 and 2 were this was also manipulated, we found no significant effect of the leader's
757 gender (alone or in interaction with the other factors) on their evaluation and future support.
758 Nevertheless, previous research has shown a relation between gender roles and the role of leader
759 (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Morrison et al.,
760 1987). For example, women are entrusted with more characteristics related to help, kindness, and
761 reliability; whereas men are often associated with characteristics linked to assertiveness,
762 independence, and competence (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987). As a result, leadership is often
763 perceived as a purely masculine characteristic. This aspect needs further investigation also in light
764 of the fact that our samples were unbalanced by gender, rendering it impossible to investigate the
765 possible interaction between the leader's and the followers' gender.
766 Another limitation of the studies refers to the samples recruited, as university students were
767 used for three out of four of these studies. Although this is quite common in psychological research,
768 we are reassured by the fact that the study conducted with real employees (Study 4) reveals results
769 consistent with those obtained in the other studies. This study focused on employees in a variety of
770 organizations—ideal to ensure variability in leader perceptions—drawn from a population that was
771 also older than university students. However, we did not collect much information about these
772 employee's workplaces, so future research might wish to replicate these findings with employees in
773 a range of work settings and examine whether their specific characteristics (e.g., area of activity)
774 modify the relationships observed.
775 Another aspect that is worth investigating is the fact that history tells of many examples in
776 which, despite immoral actions, leaders can be supported and defended, such as in situations where
777 the leader's unethical behaviour produces benefits for the group. The reasons why these happen
778 might lie in the circumstances under which group members are willing to recognise their leaders as

779 immoral in the first place, despite what to outsiders appears to be immoral behaviour. That is,
780 though morality appears to be key to group identity, individuals and groups are likely to differ in
781 precisely what they regard as (im)moral. Our studies focused on a specific view of morality that is
782 in line with that adopted in the literature of morality in groups—i.e., the idea of honesty, integrity,
783 trustworthiness (e.g., Leach et al., 2007). But there are clearly others, and there are trade-offs group
784 members might be very willing to accept, such as the idea that lying is acceptable if it is done to
785 protect ingroup members from harm. Future research might wish to build on these findings to
786 further complexity the relationship between morality and group behaviour.

787 It is also interesting to note that our participants did not blindly regard a prototypical leader
788 as moral—instead, they were sensitive to information about immoral behaviour. This finding also
789 opens avenues for future research into the circumstances under which group members might begin
790 to challenge prototypical but immoral leaders in an attempt to either adjust their behaviour, or
791 indeed change leadership.

792 A last intriguing avenue for future research is related to the fact that the present research
793 focused on the effect of morality on leader's group prototypicality and, in turn, on endorsement.
794 Future research might be designed to address the subsequent question of how this might further
795 impact on group life. In other words, researchers might want to consider the downstream
796 consequences of the leader's (im)morality not only in terms of leader endorsement, but also in terms
797 of group regulation processes such as for deviance management, group locomotion, and potential
798 schisms.

799 **Conclusion**

800 With the present research, we set out to demonstrate that morality is a fundamental attribute
801 of leaders, rooted in group identity. We showed that a leader's moral behaviour tends to be more
802 important than their competence, in particular when this behaviour is negative (i.e., immorality vs.
803 incompetence). We also showed that this process is mediated by the perception of the leader as a

prototypical member of the ingroup. In these ways, our findings extend the social identity approach to leadership and contribute to highlighting the centrality of morality in leader-followers dynamics.

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Table 1. Study 1*: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha values.*

			M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Evaluations	1. Outcome	2. Evaluative domains							
1. Morality	Failure	Moral	1.47	0.76	(.96)				
		Competence	3.58	0.75					
	Success	Moral	6.18	0.80					
		Competence	6.18	0.74					
2. Competence	Failure	Moral	3.42	1.57	.73***	(.91)			
		Competence	3.13	1.16					
	Success	Moral	5.65	0.92					
		Competence	6.10	0.71					
3. Global Impression	Failure	Moral	2.49	1.17	-.89***	.78***	1		
		Competence	4.06	0.93					
	Success	Moral	5.68	0.87					
		Competence	5.76	0.78					
4. Prototypicality	Failure	Moral	2.21	0.95	.66***	.51***	.70***	(.84)	
		Competence	3.79	0.91					
	Success	Moral	4.22	1.08					
		Competence	4.51	0.91					
5. Endorsement	Failure	Moral	1.30	0.57	.90***	.74***	.82***	.57***	(.96)
		Competence	2.31	1.01					
	Success	Moral	5.18	1.15					
		Competence	5.07	1.01					

Note. Internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha values) are listed along the diagonal. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Study 2*: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha values*.

Evaluations	Immoral but Competent		Incompetent but Moral		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
	M	SD	M	SD					
1. Morality	1.77	.96	5.80	.81	(.94)				
2. Competence	4.83	1.39	3.71	1.36	-.27**	(.84)			
3. Global Impression	2.71	1.19	4.97	.90	.81***	-.04	1		
4. Prototypicality	2.59	1.11	4.17	1.15	.61***	-.05	.69***	(.89)	
5. Endorsement	1.70	1.02	3.65	1.47	.70***	.04	.77***	.67***	(.95)

*Note. Internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha values) are listed along the diagonal. * p < .05, ** p < .01 *** p < .001*

Table 3. Study 3. *Means, standard deviations, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha values.*

Evaluations	**Immoral but Competent**		**Incompetent but Moral**		**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**
	M	SD	M	SD					
1. Morality	2.82	1.44	5.24	1.08	(.91)				
2. Competence	4.62	1.42	3.00	1.18	-.01	(.87)			
3. Global Impression	3.14	1.34	3.96	1.19	.67***	.30***	1		
4. Prototypicality	2.93	1.63	3.57	1.52	.46***	.30***	.58***	(.96)	
5. Endorsement	3.12	1.62	4.71	1.48	.62***	.02	.65***	.43***	(.92)

Note. Internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha values) are listed along the diagonal * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Study 4. *Means, standard deviations, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha values.*

			M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
Evaluations	**Leader's Behavior**	**Leader's Prototypicality**						
1. **Morality**	Immoral but Competent	High	2.56	1.12				
		Low	2.53	1.21	(.86)			
	Moral but Incompetent	High	5.50	1.08				
		Low	4.76	0.95				
2. **Competence**	Immoral but Competent	High	5.15	1.02				
		Low	4.94	1.17	-.28***	(.52)		
	Moral but Incompetent	High	3.31	1.26				
		Low	3.52	2.12				
3. **Global Impression**	Immoral but Competent	High	3.34	1.46				
		Low	3.76	1.19	.57***	.26***	1	
	Moral but Incompetent	High	4.67	1.42				
		Low	4.15	1.19				
4. **Endorsement**	Immoral but Competent	High	3.69	1.56				
		Low	3.80	1.18	.61***	-.16	.54***	(.89)
	Moral but Competent	High	5.67	1.00				
		Low	4.40	1.21				

Note. Internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha values) are listed along the diagonal * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

1062 Footnotes

[i] According to Leach and colleagues (2007), people rely on three evaluative domains when they form judgments about other and themselves: morality, competence, and sociability. Morality and sociability are intended as two sub-domains of the general Warmth factor. Even though in this set of studies we were interested in the comparison between morality and competence, for the sake of completeness we also assessed leader's sociability in all the studies. We did not report complete results about sociability in the paper.

[ii] In all the studies presented in this paper, we further assessed whether the leader's behavior represents a reputational threat to the group as a feasible parallel mediator. Nevertheless, in all the studies this almost fully overlapped with the perception of leader's prototypicality. For this reason, we decided to focus on the leader's prototypicality, and we did not report results about reputational threat to the group.

[iii] We also conducted the analyses with group identification as a covariate, but the results do not change compared to what is currently reported in the paper.