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Assessing and measuring leadership identity

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Abstract
This article explores numerous complexities involved in assessing and measuring leadership identity development. It also reviews leader and leadership identity as well as prior attempts to assess leader and leadership identity development. Recommendations for effective assessment and measurement practices when diagnosing development in leader and leadership identity are offered.

INTRODUCING LEADER AND LEADERSHIP IDENTITY

The relationship between identity and leadership has been successfully argued and documented in adults (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Day & Harrison, 2007; Day et al., 2009; Ibarra et al., 2014; Lord & Hall 2005; Miscenko et al., 2017; Shaughnessy & Coats, 2019), as well as among youth and college students (Day & Sin, 2011; Komives et al., 2005, 2006; Lord et al., 2011; Murphy, 2019; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). For example, Day et al.'s (2009) integrative leader development model highlighted leader identity development and self-regulation as undergirding an individual's observed leadership effectiveness. Avolio and Hannah (2008), as well as Day and Sin (2011), reported significant relationships between identity and leadership effectiveness.

One of the earliest comprehensive theoretical arguments for applying identity to leadership development emerged from Lord and Hall in 2005: "…because opportunities for developing leadership skills usually involve proactive behaviors in which individuals attempt leadership, at some risk to status and social acceptance, they are facilitated by seeing oneself as a potential leader and adopting a provisional leadership identity" (p. 596). Lord and Hall (2005) proposed a leader's identity shifts from an individualistic focus to a collective and relational focus as the leader develops. Please see Johnson et al.'s article in this issue for more on developing leader identity across the lifespan.

Komives et al.'s (2005) grounded theory study of leadership identity development (LID) and associated model (2006) further confirmed Lord and Hall's (2005) assertions

and expanded the connection of identity to leadership among young adults, describing LID as a shift from viewing leadership as a position to viewing it as a process. Komives et al. (2005, 2006) corroborated Wielkiewicz's (2000) assessment that leadership attitudes and beliefs in college students change from hierarchical to systemic. Lord et al. (2011) extended the role of identity in leadership even further, contending identities develop over a lifetime and reveal connections between childhood experiences and adult leadership. Specifically, Lord et al. (2011) argued leadership identities develop gradually as an individual assumes new roles, attempts new experiences, and obtains feedback.

Within the fields of leadership education and college student leadership development, Komives et al.'s (2005, 2006) LID model has demonstrated the most extensive draw, with over 1700 citations for the grounded theory and model articles combined, and extensive support from the field of college student development. McCarron et al.'s article of this issue reviews foundational research on leadership identity development. Mayhew et al. (2016) noted:

> Studies of leadership identity and skill development during the 2000s primarily referenced the Social Change Model of Leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) and the Leadership Identity Development Model of Komives and colleagues (see Komives et al., 2005; 2006) (p. 169).

Despite the popularity of the LID theory and associated model, no psychometric measure has been fully developed in part because there are numerous complexities involved in assessing leadership identity development. Rather than exhibiting behaviors and meaning-making strategies that reflect a single stage, learner responses, and behavior are more likely to signal multiple stages at once. Additionally, learners may retreat to an earlier stage when faced with a situation that challenges their understanding of themselves as leaders. These factors can make it difficult to assess leadership identity development trajectories.

Leader and leadership development from youth to adulthood are dynamic and iterative processes (Day et al., 2009; Day & Liu, 2019; Liu et al., 2021; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Murphy, 2019); thus, another challenge to assessing leadership identity development is that some learners can discuss leadership in ways that would indicate one stage, but their actual behaviors reflect an earlier stage. This challenge is not unique to leadership inquiry. In self-report data, it is common to find participants who tend to self-report survey responses one stage higher than their actual behavior (i.e., "Hollywood Effect", Rosch & Schwartz, 2009).

While the challenges to building a psychometric measure of leadership identity development are numerous, the potential value of such measures extend beyond reliable assessment to a scale that allows for developmental feedback and processing. Indications of 'amount' or 'level' of leadership identity development may or may not be useful for respondents or practitioners in facilitating developmental conversations. Notably, Day et al. (2014) underscored the critical function of positive reaction to feedback in the leadership development process, arguing that a positive reaction to feedback leads to desiring more feedback, but a negative reaction can actually do harm. Thus, if a psychometric measure of leadership identity development purely indicates a 'level', will a respondent see the result as positive and developmental? For example, would a college senior react positively to learning that their leadership identity is still in LID stage three? The next section reviews prior attempts to assess leadership identity development.

PRIOR ATTEMPTS TO ASSESS LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT VIA THE LID MODEL

While some scales exist to measure identity in relation to leadership (e.g., *Leader Self-Identity Scale*, Hiller, 2005; *Identity Leadership Inventory*, Steffens et al., 2014), a few attempts have been made to directly and indirectly assess and measure leadership identity development via the LID model (Komives, 2011; Owen, 2010; Rocco et al., 2019; Wagner, 2011). The most comprehensive, quantitative effort was attempted by the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) research team. The MSL is a nationwide study of factors associated with developing leadership capacity in college students (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Two exploratory scales were developed to assess LID stage 3 (leader identified) and stage 4 (leadership differentiated) because this stage progression highlights a key transition from seeing leadership as a position to seeing leadership as a process in the LID model (Komives et al., 2006; Komives, 2011). Exploratory factor analysis results indicated a two-factor solution with items loading properly on their respective stages and reported Cronbach's alphas of .73 and .76, respectively (Komives, 2011). The exploratory scales were then administered to a sub-sample (n = 12,044) of the MSL national sample. Results revealed Stage 4 thinking and beliefs explained 10%–25% more variance in socially responsible leadership scores than stage 3. Specifically, respondents who classified as high stage 3/low stage 4 demonstrated significantly lower scores on all leadership values associated with the social change model (SCM; Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) than respondents who classified as high stage 4/low stage 3, suggesting that higher levels of leadership identity development are associated with stronger capacities for socially responsible leadership (Komives, 2011).

Owen (2010) also contributed to the psychometric measurement of leadership identity development by creating a rubric for qualitatively assessing LID stage 3, stages 3–4 transition, stage 4, and stages 5–6. Wagner (2011) sought to provide evidence of the LID model, employing Q-sort methodology to place respondents into groups based on how they made sense of prospective LID items. Results offered mixed support for the six-stage LID model presented by Komives et al. (2006), as only four groups emerged and three stages of the LID model (i.e., Stages 4, 5, and 6) were aggregated into one group (i.e., group one).

Rocco's (2017) dissertation explored formative experiences that prompted advanced LID stage development. Transformational leadership education experiences such as immersion leadership learning programs, peer leadership facilitation experiences, and academic coursework were attributed to advanced LID stage development due to their use of experiential learning pedagogies, opportunities for increasingly deeper involvements, and exposure to relational leadership approaches and practices. Beyond formal educational experiences, participants highlighted the influence of family dynamics (i.e., parental support or lack thereof), social identities (in particular, how they view themselves as leaders), and positive mentoring relationships on developing advanced stages of leadership identity. Rocco and Priest's article in this issue reviews additional research extending the scope of LID.

CURRENT LID SCALE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Previous attempts at LID scale development astutely generated items deductively from the LID theory and associated model; however, results were mixed as to supporting a six-stage model with most scale development efforts centered around stages 3 and 4. Thus, our

current scale development effort has combined deductive and inductive approaches (Hinkin, 1998) to inform item language, grouping, and infrastructure.

The infrastructure of the proposed LID scale has three phases of questions: Phase A, Phase B, and Phase C. Phase A questions are designed to distinguish between position and process-oriented leadership identity, as the progression from LID stage 3 (leader identified) to stage 4 (leadership differentiated) highlights a key transition in the LID model (Komives et al., 2006; Komives, 2011). Phase B questions are designed to distinguish between stage nuances. Respondents who indicate a more position-oriented leadership identity in Phase A will receive questions in Phase B that serve to distinguish between *awareness* (stage 1), *exploration* (stage 2), and *leader identified* (stage 3) nuances in their growth trajectory. Respondents who indicate a more process-based leadership identity in Phase A will receive questions in Phase B to distinguish between *leadership differentiated* (stage 4), *generativity* (stage 5), and *integration/synthesis* (stage 6) nuances in their growth trajectory. Drawing inspiration from Wiewiora and Kowalkiewicz's (2018) combination of authentic assessment with self-reflection, Phase C of the proposed scale uses visual images to triangulate LID stage nuance and offer developmental utility to the respondent through open-ended reflection. For example, respondents will be asked to select three images from a database that visually represents their leadership identity as articulated through their previous item responses. Each selected visual will be accompanied by open-ended questions, such as, "How does this visually represent your overall leadership identity and why?" While this scale development effort is a start (and is in process), it offers an effective psychometric measure of leadership identity development via the LID Model.

APPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS

While the LID theory and model (Komives et al., 2005, 2006) has received extensive attention within the field of leadership education, the lack of an accompanying LID assessment limits both assessment and research of leadership identity development, which is a particular challenge for leadership educators. For example, consider a co-curricular leadership development program on a college campus that utilizes the LID theory as a foundation for its curriculum and program outcomes (e.g., "Participants will view leadership as a process rather than a position"). While the leadership development program may be able to evaluate the program by having participants complete a post-program survey with Likert-type response anchors (e.g., 1 = Did not increase, 4 = Greatly increased; Seemiller, 2013) or asking participants to reflect on their development through open-ended questions, without a psychometrically reliable and valid measure, the leadership program would not be able to examine the potential shift in LID among participants, limiting the ability of the program to document its impact (Reinelt & Russon, 2003). Below, we highlight assessment and measurement considerations for diagnosing development in leader and leadership identity more broadly.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT PRACTICES WHEN DIAGNOSING DEVELOPMENT IN LEADER AND LEADERSHIP IDENTITY

When the development of leader or leadership identity is an important outcome for any leader/leadership development intervention, its assessment and associated measures become critical considerations. First, it is imperative to determine *for what* you

intend to assess or measure leader or leadership identity development. Are you assessing leader or leadership identity development to evaluate whether the leadership development program met its intended objective? Are you assessing identity changes as a developmental tool for meaning making and processing with participants? Or are you measuring leader or leadership identity development for research purposes? In leadership education, we are often called to do both research and program evaluation, but it is important to avoid conflating the two when diagnosing development in leader and/or leadership identity.

Second, it is important to determine if the goal is to diagnose development in *leader* identity development or *leadership* identity development. When the focus is *leader* identity development, our goal is to examine changes in the degree to which 'being a leader' is central to one's self-concept (Day & Dragoni, 2015). If the goal is to examine changes in viewpoints on leadership, then the focus is *leadership* identity development. *Leadership* identity development can also be an articulated focus when the assessment involves changes in both intrapersonal and interpersonal identity components, echoing DeRue and Ashford's (2010) notion of leadership identity as being comprised of individual, relational, and collective identities.

If the intent is to assess or measure identity development to evaluate whether the leadership development program met its intended objective, then diagnosing development is about measuring the accomplishments of stated learning objectives and program outcomes related to leader or leadership identity development and placing value on that assessment data to determine the effectiveness of the program in meeting its intended outcomes. The good news for leadership educators is that leader identity is considered a proximal outcome of leadership development (Diaz et al., 2022), and therefore, could be reasonably included in stated program outcomes. The key is to be specific in setting up program goals and learning objectives so assessment questions can address specific leader or leadership identity changes, while avoiding assessment issues such as the 'Halo' or 'Hallmark' effects (see Rosch & Schwartz, 2009). The more specific program goals and learning objectives related to leader and leadership identity are articulated, the more precisely one can measure change associated with those goals and objectives, which allows better isolation of the specific effects of the intervention (Hoole & Martineau, 2014).

When the intent is to assess identity changes as a developmental tool for meaning making and processing with participants, precise measurement of leader or leadership identity development can be less of a concern with greater attention paid to reflective methods conducive toward questions of identity changes. To illustrate, the researchers of the original LID model proposed a qualitative indicator question utilizing Kegan's subject-object shift of, "What did you used to think leadership was and what do you think it is now?" Using qualitative approaches such as historiometric methods (e.g., Parry et al., 2014) or utilizing Baxter Magolda's (1992) epistemological reflection model may offer developmental utility for leadership development participants to illuminate changes in patterns of knowing and reasoning related to their leader or leadership identity.

If the intent is to measure leader or leadership identity development for research purposes, then precise measurement is critical and likely to involve true longitudinal research via three or more waves of data, outcome tracking over time, and practical time metrics (Day, 2011). While leader identity as a proximal outcome of leadership development (Diaz et al., 2022) is good news for leadership educators, the bad news is that leader identity tends to develop over time in nonlinear fashions (Day & Sin, 2011). When diagnosing development in leader or leadership identity over time is the desired goal, it will be important to select longitudinal methods and appropriate associated analytic techniques (e.g., latent change score modeling) that account for nonlinear growth trajectories.

Along with diagnosing identity development, some researchers also consider ancillary developmental changes impacted by growth in leader or leadership identity. For example, Day et al.'s (2009) integrative leader development model supports the notion that leader identity development motivates and supports leadership competency development. As one's leader identity evolves, leadership skills are also likely to develop (Lord & Hall, 2005), so it may also be important to consider dynamic and iterative interplays between leader identity and leadership competency development. Last, diagnosing development in leader and/or leadership identity development through research has to acknowledge the complex nature of identity development. Qualitative methods offer more flexibility to unexpected growth patterns, are more sensitive to contextual influences on identity development, and can provide a fuller, more complete picture of leader and leadership identity development over time.

Once we understand *for what* we are assessing leader or leadership identity development, we can be strategic about the use of best practices in assessment and research methods. Drawing inspiration from Liu et al.'s (2021) discussion of leader development across the lifespan, diagnosing leader and leadership identity development should involve more than just focusing on the identity development itself to include the *mechanisms* by which leader and leadership identity development occurs. Leadership educators, who often have equal footing in research and program evaluation, are in an advantageous position to offer the most useful understandings of leader and leadership identity development and to offer leadership development interventions that have the greatest developmental utility for leader and leadership identity development.

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