Introduction

Articulating a shared vision is considered one of the central practices of organizational leadership (Bass, 1990). A leadership vision facilitates a shared understanding of goals and creates commitment among organization’s members to work towards their completion (Kotter, 1995). Consistent with this idea, Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) treat leadership as an identity construction and management process, wherein social identity building communication is considered a key aspect. Their theory provides further insight into the demands of effective leadership communication, discussing the required fit between leaders’ communications and follower identities. Viewing the leadership vision as a
form of identity building communication, this paper studies responses to leadership communications in an organizational setting. We examine leadership efforts in a multi-cultural, geographically dispersed unit of a multinational ICT company undergoing a strategic change. The leader of the organization sought to establish support for the organization’s new strategic direction by different forms of visionary communication. As suggested by the identity leadership approach by Haslam et al. (2011), these efforts were influenced by local identities in the organization’s sub-units. We discuss the implications of these fragmented identities for organizational leaders who seek to address and lead organizations as coherent wholes.

As Haslam et al. (2011) astutely express, communicative practices and the articulation of an actionable future are at the core of leadership. Their social identity approach (cf. Haslam et al., 2011) underlines people’s interpretations of leadership communications in the context of their own group identities. A leadership vision needs to connect with the follower identities, which are in turn influenced by the local context. These follower identities refer to organizational members’ group identities, which act as a source for shared meanings and values (Haslam et al., 2011). When the organization in question is a multi-located, multi-cultural, and functionally diverse, the theory implies complications. The frame of reference, the group values and meanings, may not coincide. The resulting fragmentation (cf. Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) signifies that there is no single salient identity for leaders to address, but instead multiple. Consequently, leaders become less effective if the visionary communications do not match its contextually embedded audience. They fail to connect with the identities of their followers in a meaningful way (Haslam et al., 2011).

In this paper we argue that this setting implies a paradox: Simultaneously, a vision should be a tool for organization-wide alignment and commitment, yet also address the idiosyncratic conditions faced by followers in different contexts. The identity leadership theory (cf. Haslam et al., 2011) proposes that successful leaders present themselves as exemplar in-group members – embodying characteristics of group prototypes – while concurrently seeking to define group values and beliefs, and the ensuing “correct” collective behavior, to fit their purposes. In a fragmented organization it is to be expected that leaders would need to possess ‘chameleon-like’ characteristics, representing different qualities depending on the observer. But how one would construct such ‘chameleonship’ yet deliver a unifying message remains the key question. To influence leadership outcomes (cf. Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O’Connor & McGuire, 2008), to direct and align organizational members, a leader must emphasize one-ness, while concurrently tending to the idiosyncrasies of individual group identities to
create commitment. However, if the leader builds his or her influence by strengthening individual group identities the organization will travel towards increased fragmentation.

This paradoxical leadership condition is highlighted through a case study of a sub-unit of a multinational ICT company. The organization operated in multiple locations under multiple nationalities in Asia, Europe and the United States. These semi-structured interviews dealt with the topics of organizational transformation, identity and leadership. The result of this analysis is a deeper understanding of the complexities that leaders may face in organizations with multiple group identities.

**Relevant theoretical viewpoints**

Identity has been the focus of increasing interest in the recent years both within leadership studies (e.g. Hogg, 2001; Haslam et al., 2011) and the general organizational science field (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985). Identity based approaches have provided new ways to examine established research topics, such as organizational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

*Identity and leadership*

This study focuses on a social identity theory perspective on organizations and leadership (cf. Haslam et al, 2011). However, in our approach to the empirical data we will also draw on some concepts from the area of identity theory. For this purpose, we will examine some of the literature discussing the relation of these two theories. In both identity theory and social identity theory (SIT) the self is seen as reflexive: it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications (Stets & Burke, 2000). This takes place through processes of self-categorization (in the case of SIT) or identification in which the self is formed (ibid.). Both theories deal principally with the components of a structured society (ibid.): In identity theory, meanings and expectations attached to a role guide behavior; in SIT it is the meanings and values attached to a group category.

Identity leadership, on the other hand, supposes the agentic behavior of individuals as transformers of identity (cf. Haslam et al, 2011). It specifically views leadership as the management and enhancement of group member identities (ibid.). To first gain the status of a leader, individuals must be recognized as prototypical group members – as individuals, who embody stereotypical characteristics of the group members. In effect, this creates the perception of ‘being one of us’ (ibid.). Leaders must also be seen as working towards valuable group goals (ibid.). This status then allows leaders to alter the values and
meanings attached to the group identity, ‘craft a sense of us’ (ibid.). These behaviors, which could also be described as a form of identity regulation (see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), then subsequently get translated into organizational action, as group members seek to conform to these values or meaning.

**Leadership communications and the vision**

More traditional leadership theories have tended to treat the social context for leadership as less influential and less complex. It is commonly recognized that the perceptions of followers are important for leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985), but the underlying social or psychological aspects that give rise to these perceptions are rarely addressed. Instead, the focus is on establishing effective behaviors for positively influencing the organization. The idea of articulating an engaging and inspiring vision is shared across different leadership theories (e.g. Bass, 1990; Kotter, 1995; see also Yukl, 2010). Some approaches focus more on the rational or functional role of the vision (e.g. Kotter, 1995), while others (e.g. Bass, 1990) tend more to the motivational aspects. We can view these differences in emphasis through the leadership outcomes framework provided by Drath et al. (2008), who view leadership in terms of establishing direction, alignment and commitment within the organization. The functional role of the vision can be seen as the establishment of a common direction for the organization and alignment between different organizational constituents. The inspirational aspect of vision on the other hand relates to the commitment creating aspects of leadership discussed by Drath et al.

Also consistent with the typology from Drath et al. (2008), identity leadership addresses the need and means for organizational commitment (Haslam et al., 2011). Instead of a more focus on ‘vision’ – which could described as the 'message' of leadership – the theory describes leadership influence as taking place through communicative and performative actions. The similarities are quite clear, however, and we would suggest that both approaches – identity leadership and more traditional conceptions on leadership vision – are describing the same essential leadership activity, albeit through differing viewpoints (see Ladkin, 2010). Traditional approaches have applied a more macro-centric view for leading organizations, while identity leadership attends to the micro, more local group identities.

Where the relationship between these theories or approaches becomes more convoluted is the micro processes suggested by identity theory. The theory suggests that leadership communications (or performances, if we look at communication as a more situated practice) should always tend to the idiosyncrasies of group identities (Haslam et al., 2011). Identities, on the other hand, can be more or less
pluralistic within an organization (see Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). If we accept the notion that multiple group identities can exist within an organization, we set the stage for the failure of an organization wide, directing and aligning vision from the commitment perspective. In other words, communication that appeals to some groups will not do so for other groups, given that there is enough diversity.

This is the type of setting we will explore in our empirical case on organizational identity fragmentation and leadership. Simultaneously, there exists the need to align (or in this case, re-align) the organization behind a common goal – an attempt which may in turn lead to leadership failure from a group identity perspective. Next, we will explore the necessary methods and theoretical pieces required to make sense of the case from an identity perspective.

Methods

Background

The case organization was a recently formed division with a newly appointed leader. To assure the anonymity of the organization, we will simply state that this organizational change process took place within a timeframe of 24 months before or after the turn of the 2010’s. The new division was formed by the parent company by integrating several product and research and development (R&D) units together to form a single organization that could be competitive in a new, fast growing market area. These units were located across the globe. Most of the new organization’s members came from acquisitions made by the parent company (approximately dozen bought companies) during a five year period preceding the formation of the new division. These acquisitions were mostly technology or talent acquisitions, and the acquired companies had been placed under various organizations in the parent company. In the new division these units were integrated under a common leadership team. The merger event included considerable downsizing efforts, whereby the organization’s management closed down several R&D units and operations across the globe.

The new divisional configuration was such that there were three key sites in the organization, two in the United States and one in Europe (called US1, US2, and EU henceforth). The division still had presence in other locations, too, but these sites became the key operational sites for the division. These sites had individual histories as part of the parent company and their site identities varied as a consequence. US1 was a site with a long history as a medium sized, independent technology company in the mid-US.
Previous to the integration with the other sites, the organization had a history of financial success and rapid growth. US2 site was a diverse crew of various small technology start-ups acquisitions, accompanied with operational back-office infrastructure units from the parent company. The organization had a history of multiple years of downsizing following strategic changes in the parent company. The site is located in the eastern region of United States. The EU site was a collection of Central European start-ups. This site had had a lot of upside over the preceding five years and its' headcount had grown tenfold over the period.

Research data

Our research team visited all of the organization's key sites to conduct interviews: two of the organization's primary sites in the United States (US1 and US2), and the third primary site located in Europe (EU). The case organization had undergone the merger approximately one year before the interviews were conducted. The research data consisted of 27 qualitative interviews of top and middle managers from the case organization, including the managers responsible for each main site. All of the interviewees, excluding one individual, worked at the three main sites of the organization. The interviews were themed around issues of organizational change and development, identity, culture and leadership – the interview process usually unfolding in this thematic sequence. The interviewees were asked to describe how they saw the organization’s recent development path. They were also asked to describe the organization’s newly appointed leader, in terms of his leadership. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, amounting to a total of 650+ pages of interview data. Relevant organizational and press documentary was also examined in the reconstruction of the organization’s recent history.

Data analysis assumptions and process - reflexivity

The data was analyzed thematically. In total, there were two rounds of analysis, one following the data closer, leading to a more practical understanding of the case, whereas the second round of thematic analysis was more distinctively informed by theory. First and second order coding of the data took place during both rounds of analysis, while the latter analysis focused solely on the theme of leadership. Overall, the research setting amounted to an abductive research process (see Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), where more general theories (of change and leadership) informed the interviews and the first round of analysis, becoming later more refined and definite (leadership communications, identity leadership) as the analysis moved to the second round of analysis. Overall, reflexivity (Alvesson, 2003),
relating to the content and use of research data, was an important consideration during the analysis. Alvesson (2003) has emphasized the role of reflexivity when working with interview data. The most important reflexive observations or assumptions made in regard to the research data in this study are:

1. The leader is specifically identified by the researchers in the interview process. Still, one cannot start with the assumption that the interviewees attribute leadership to this individual on voluntary basis. Yet, the interview setting allows us to explore how the interviewees construct a perception of the leader individual and his/her actions (be they ‘leaderful’ or not) in relation to their local group identities. The concern that leadership suggests passive roles to followers, while emphasizing the agency and impact of single leader individuals, has been raised previously (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992). The interview sequence used in this study (leadership discussed after topics of change/identity) would suggest that the interviewees were not assigned “passive follower roles” from the outset.

2. The change context present in the case can make elements such as group identity visible and salient, as people struggle to retain or redefine meaning and values attached to the old and new organization.

3. The interviews are approached as individual accounts of group identity, and its effects on leadership. Where these accounts share similarities, a shared group identity between the interviewees might be suggested. People with a shared group identity display uniformity of perception and action (Stets & Burke, 2000).

4. It cannot be assumed that the way people discuss matters of identity and leadership during the interview has direct effects on their actions outside of the interview situation. Yet, if we talk about retrospective accounts of events that have taken place, the interviewees can certainly attach meanings to such events and we may assume that they have, or will have, some impact on individual behavior. To theoretically argue for such a connection, we will turn to narrative identity theory, which will be explored as a part of the data analysis process below.

The coding during the second iteration of thematic analysis was carried out with these considerations in mind. The first level coding consisted of open codes for instances, where interviewees made reference to the organization’s leader or leadership in more general sense. The second round of coding sought to establish more general themes

Results
The analysis of the empirical material produced a host of second order categories that were related to the focal leader individual and more generally to leadership in the organization. In interviewee testimonies the leader’s behaviors, characteristics, and communications were given various interpretations and evaluations. Overall these evaluations varied greatly even within key locations. The four major emerging themes related to the leader were:

- leader action, related to distinct events and performances and the effects these actions have had
- leader person, related to the personality of the individual
- leader style, related to consistent behavior beyond single interactions
- leader(ship) vision, related to the communication and content of the vision by the individual

Less prominent categories included such as: leader capability, change, intent, focus, perception, position, presence or visibility, leadership expectations, need, practices or team, and general strategy. Table 1 provides some illustrations of the types of quotations in the categories.

Table 1: Examples of the most prominent leader(ship) categories contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader action, example quotes (55 instances in total):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;But [the leader] was really effective. I mean, he’s... to me, really the strength in leadership that we have. [...] Where, you know, he asked the right questions and kind of, you know... I was going down a certain path in discussion and he’s like, this is going to take too long. We gotta cut to the chase, we gotta move faster. [...] So it was, kind of, cut through all the mess. [...] And gave us some clarity and direction. [...] And I think that without that we would've been stuck.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;And I think... you know, [the leader] does a good job to always explain and tell people how important [the organization] is. And the contributions we're making. [...] I think he does a good job with... with that.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;And the fact that he’s, he’s a visionary.... was, I think con- you know, a bit controversial for the [US1] people. It’s like oh my god, is this little start-up guy gonna... understand my b-to-b business or is he gonna, is he gonna ruin it. You know [...] I’ve got a very stable, very process driven company. [...] But, you know, he did a great job of retaining their key leadership&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;And, even though it’s clear that we need to do that, to get to those future opportunities, and the reason we’re able to do this is, is as I started this conversation with you, is because [the leader] is able to say, well, we’ll just maintain. It still doesn’t make people who are on the side of... sort of, cash-cow business, feel good, right? It doesn’t, it doesn’t feel good and inspiring if- Like, we’re not planning to relocate to [EU].&quot;</td>
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| "And part of it is simply because, to be quite honest, every time he was talking about the [EU technology], people associate it with the function, the organization, and he- what he really means is the [US1 technology] in the [EU technology] and the [EU technology]. [...] But, because we were using the same term that you would use to describe a part of the organization in [EU], it
Leader person, example quotes (18 in total):

“[The leader]... he’s usually... not shy of expressing his own opinion in the matter, we can get things resolved. [...]...One way or the other.”

“And he cares about his, his people, I think, and people see that when, and they really truly appreciate it, so... [...] You know... So it’s good, good to have somebody that engaged.”

“I like [the leader] in, in his heart – and which is why I’m excited to be here – is a product guy. I’m in heart a product guy. I think ultimately, if you can create new products... get people internally to, to really... relate to them.”

“So it’s been interesting with the, seeing the [EU] team interact. So, so [the leader] is a very strong personality. And, and the [EU] team really defers to, to [the leader] a lot. Like in terms of- he’s, he’s a product guy and he’s very involved in the product. So, so, the product decisions are made a lot... you know, they, they defer to [the leader] a lot.”

“And, you know, [the parent company CEO] wanted... the leader for this unit to have a very strong product vision. And then [the leader] had a very strong, you know, product vision and strong product background. So then [the leader] took over as the head of this... combined entity.”

Leader style, example quotes (26 in total):

“Where I think the things that have not changed, is that he has an extremely interest to understand the detail and going through the detail of the product. And influence details of the product. And this can sometimes be very beneficial, sometimes it can be even a bit counter-productive, but this is, this is how those things are.”

“It’s, it’s a largely the power of his intellect. And his ability to articulate a vision. And, and his kind of... And, I mean this in a very, you know, positive and complementary way, his salesmanship... around a vision. His ability to, to sort of... So, he, he is... you know, that’s where, that’s where I would say his leadership lies, his strength there.”

“I think [the leader] and I’ve had many, many conversations at of what we’ve observed and what he... I believe he wants... to drive. [...] So, there are some things he does absolutely with intent. [...] When he comes here, he tries to avoid sitting in the executive corner.”

“[The leader] is very, very visionary. And I’m sure you’re heard that statement... before. But it’s true, it’s totally true. The way he talks about... the world and the way he’s thinking about it... He’s thinking four-five years out, right? So he’s out there...”

“Initially, he takes very strong positions and it’s very difficult to debate him. [...] You know, he’s... he’s an academic, he’s very strong willed and, and kind of a... [...] I think, initially he may give you like an initial reaction. [...] If he doesn’t agree with you. You can continue to make your own arguments and sometimes it takes him a while to internalize the arguments. And over time he’ll... he’ll start to soften up his position.”

Leader(ship) vision, example quotes (21 in total):

“Yeah, I think today, you know, we’re still, we’re still digging out of the old days. I mean, so... I mean, that’s... it’s hard. I mean, it’s just sort of... we’re trying to clean up, right? There’s a lot of clean up going on. But I think the vision to me is, is a lot clearer
now. [...] And we've had a lot of revisions of the vision for this year, right, for [the organization]. But I think, for me, I can get more behind it now than ever. [...] It was kinda squishy before and I wasn't quite sure what we were doing. It's forming, forming up."

"Unfortunately [US1] does not show up on any strategic kind of visions, right?"

"But I think the fact is we have a view on what the future will be. You know, I really believe [the novel technology] that he likes to talk about, I'm a big fan, I think there's untapped opportunities for, for us in that space. I'm looking at things that big-potentially we do with [the devices]."

"People will probably question [the leader] on most is on execution and, and... can he really bring the vision down and make sure we execute on that. And I think it's not about him, I think it's about, you know, how the leadership team... how effective the leadership team is and is the organizational structure, if- I don't think the organizational structure is impediment to anything at this point."

"I think they, they see the vision. Some people question how it relates to the business. [...] I don't think that's been clarified enough. [...] So I think from a... user experience... vision perspective, I think that's really clear. I think he's got there where people say, oh, oh i see where we're going from that... From the business side it's maybe a little less clear."

"But I think a... you know, [the leader’s] view is [US1] has a very specific way of thinking about things, and it's not where we're headed. And... we need to get leaders in the organization who don't think of the same way. [...] Well, you know, originally he came out and said we were... what did he say... We're the insurance policy. Then we were a jewel. Which felt better than the insurance policy. [...] It meant we were the engine. And needed to keep running. And everyone else was the cool stuff. [...] I mean, that's how it felt."

The leader action category consisted of interviewee recollections of leader behavior overall or in distinct instances; what actions the leader had taken, how they were evaluated, what effects they had. This category included a host of actions, performances and reoccurring behaviors, with considerable variety. There were few instances where interviewees referred to the same singular action taken by the leader. The key subthemes within this category were related to decision making, communication, creating structures, and level of engagement. The division between positive and negative instances or references to the leader’s actions was relatively equal, signifying that the evaluations were very dispersed within the organization.

The types of actions that were predominantly viewed in positive terms were related to creating new functional structures for the organization, e.g. doing “a great job of retaining their (US1 site) key leadership” or “really banding” his leadership team together. The leader’s decision, on the other hand, were mostly discussed in negative terms. These issues were related to the decisions themselves – e.g.
making budget cuts: "so, [the leader], working with finance, determined that each group needed to reduce costs" – or the decision making processes, e.g. making decisions concerning the whole organization within his own home site EU site without consulting the organization’s leadership team: “decisions occur in [EU] and that ... only get communicated afterwards to, like, [US1].” The leader’s communications received equally positive and negative assessments. The positive aspects were related to the ability and willingness to explain the organization’s vision – either in a broad sense or within specific practices, such as performing Q&As: “They’re giving managers the opportunity to do Q&A. And [the leader] does a really good job of that.” The negative associations followed from evaluations of using language inconsistently or giving negative attributions to the interviewees' local site: “the people in [EU] know his language and they understand it [...] But for people who don’t always understand it, we’re like, wait, he just changed strategy again?” Similar to communications, the leader engagement with the interviewees or their organizations received equally positive and negative evaluations. Even for co-located people the leader might be rarely present (“He doesn’t visit that often”), or someone who is engaged and willing to take time with people who needed it (“He spends [time], and every time he comes, he makes sure he sees me.”). The notable differences in the reports of the leader’s actions show the diversity of possible subjective evaluations a leader can obtain even within the context of a single geographical location.

The leader person was mostly described in positive terms, which is not necessarily surprising given the research context. However, the fact that the leader was described with similar personal characteristics across the organization suggests that the leader is given relatively stable attributions in terms of his personality. On multiple accounts, the leader was described as someone who is active, open, accessible, and engaged with the organization and the products it was creating. Interviewees described the leader individual as someone who “is a product guy at heart” and “clicks with engineering extremely well”, while others stated that he is “very engaged” and “wants to go to the engineer and fidget with what they’re doing.” Also, evaluations of a strong personality who is highly intelligent were given during multiple interviews. The leader was described as someone who is not “shy of expressing his own opinion”, “very strong willed”, and a “brilliant” strategic thinker. Overall, the view of the leader's personal strengths and dispositions were very congruent across the different sites and interviewees.

The leader’s style was expressed in many instances as leading with a vision. As interviewees expressed it: “it’s largely the power of his intellect. And his ability to articulate a vision” or “Because in some sense, he’s almost like a CTO, right? [...] And he can paint a picture like CTOs do.” The leader was described as
highly involved. The constant engagement with the operational organization and the products was described as both empowering and exciting, but also by some as disempowering due to the leader intervening with daily operations: “it’s become a little disempowering at... for some of the individuals to realize that [...] anything could change at a moment’s notice.” The empowering leadership style could also create indecision for people who were used to working in a more structured environment: "...you know some people were waiting to be empowered. [...] So some people are starting to flourish in that environment and other people are... are, aa, paralyzed. They’re disempowered, they don’t know how to make decisions.” In essence, the leader’s style was described in highly congruent manner across the organization, similar to his personality. Yet, different interviewees attributed different types of outcomes for this characteristic behavior within their local contexts.

Leader or leadership vision category was formed of both evaluations of leader vision articulation and the overall vision content. Evaluations of the vision and its effects on the organization varied greatly between interviewees. At best, it was seen as exciting, clear and functional: “But I think the fact is we have a view on what the future will be. You know, I really believe the [new technology] that he likes to talk about, I’m a big fan, I think there’s untapped opportunities for, for us in that space” and “There’s a lot of clean up going on. But I think the vision to me is, is a lot clearer now. [...] And we’ve had a lot of revisions of the vision for this year, right, for [the organization]. But I think, for me, I can get more behind it now than ever.”

Two common forms of critique towards the vision were the missing links to a) operational results: “On, on the engineering level... people still love the vision and believe in the vision, but they’re struggling to see the way we, we, we can achieve our goals. Because the, the milestones across the organization are not clear enough” and b) financial results: "But, you know, business-wise, how does that line up? Because I think that helps people understand and feel positive on... [...] Oh, I can see how, not only, you know, users using it, you know, how does that relate actually money in the coffers." Some interviewees saw their own local unit’s role missing from the vision: “Unfortunately [US1] does not show up on any strategic kind of visions, right?”, while others saw their site’s role diminishing: “It doesn’t feel good to be, you know [...] the fuel. Because it feels like... [...] is that sustainable? Is- are we becoming less and less important? We don’t get to think anymore, we just have to do?”

A common conception persisted on the future strategic direction of the organization that the top management had instituted. Yet, the evaluations and meanings that were assigned to the new strategy differed across groups. Overall, the disconnects interviewees were describing with the vision were
related to individual salient organizational issues, whether it was the issue of the future role of the local unit (status), questions of future financial feasibility (business), capability to execute (management), capability to create new products (technical skill), appealing to consumers (marketing), coordinating activities (structure), or combining resources (restructuring).

The interviews revealed the interviewees’ diverse accounts of their local organizations’ histories. Narrative identity theory suggests that such diversity can be seen as a potential source of diverse or fragmented identities (see Singer, 2004). On the other hand, the interviewees’ evaluations of the group identities of their local organizations and the other sites were relatively stable across the units. In one sense, the interview process contributed to the production of these group identities, as the interviewees were encouraged to explicate the differences between the organization’s three major sites during the interviews. However, the interviewees were also able to explicate and link the bases for these evaluations to various historical processes within different parts of the organization. Interviewees’ personal experiences were also frequently used to explain in-group and out-group identities.

Discussion

This study suggests that attempts to simultaneously create commitment, alignment, and direction for an organization can pose a challenge for leaders in an organizational context that is characterized by identity fragmentation. The preliminary results from this study indicate that these issues are derived from the existing identities of – and the identity work performed by – organizational members. It is a question of how they relate their focal organization’s (group’s) past – which functions as identity resource – to the leader’s intentions (as prescribed by the vision). For instance, what has been the dominant business logic (“sales orientation”) or mode of organizing (“constant involvement by a leader figure”) may influence the interpretations of the new ideal future that is proposed by the leader, consequently framing the leader as either an insider or an outsider. A new sense of a ‘we’ cannot be established from outside of the group. Yet, a leader individual cannot also simply conform to an existing group prototype, if he or she is to transform the group’s mission.

The results of this study question the traditional treatment of leadership contexts as unproblematic and universal. They point out the important role of the followers’ identity work and the related local contexts when leadership interpretations are made within organizations. This paper aimed to illustrate
how followers come to possess these interpretations by invoking certain historical events, performances, or ‘states of affairs’ to construct them. This description serves to show how entangled leadership processes are in the complexities of every day events and reinstates the importance of followers within this process.

Though such an interpretation is not directly supported by the data or the findings of this study, one might speculate that leaders must, through some available means, resolve or cope with the conflicts inherent in organizations that consist of fragmented or pluralistic identities. This might suggest, for instance, that the process of constructing a leadership vision is in fact a joint performance, whereby important stakeholders’ commitment is secured by accommodating their views into the vision. The identity theories of leadership (i.e. Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001) imply that the leadership vision must be made congruent with organizational members’ existing identities. Yet, literature on identity control also suggests that leaders can impose new identities on organizational members through identity regulation (see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). How this tension is actually resolved remains an open question. At the very least, through the observations made in this study we can perhaps move closer to discussing the realities of managers and other organizational leaders, whose work includes meeting such conflicting or paradoxical requirements.
List of references


