

# WHO WILL LEAD AND WHO WILL FOLLOW? A SOCIAL PROCESS OF LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

D. SCOTT DERUE  
SUSAN J. ASHFORD  
University of Michigan

We propose that a leadership identity is coconstructed in organizations when individuals claim and grant leader and follower identities in their social interactions. Through this claiming-granting process, individuals internalize an identity as leader or follower, and those identities become relationally recognized through reciprocal role adoption and collectively endorsed within the organizational context. We specify the dynamic nature of this process, antecedents to claiming and granting, and an agenda for research on leadership identity and development.

Scholars have begun to question traditional conceptualizations that position leadership as top-down, hierarchical, and equivalent to formal supervisory roles in organizations (Ancona & Backman, 2008; Bedeian & Hunt, 2006). While holding a formal position within an institutionalized hierarchical structure clearly conveys some meaning with respect to leadership, this hierarchical perspective does not explain why some supervisors are not seen as leaders (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006) or why some individuals are seen as leaders despite not holding "leader-like" positions (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2000; Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001).

Recently, theorists have begun to conceptualize leadership as a broader, mutual influence process independent of any formal role or hierarchical structure and diffused among the members of any given social system (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006; Collinson, 2005; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Gronn, 2002; Parry, 1998; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Although references to this distributed form of leadership date back to the work of Selznick (1957), this perspective is becoming more prominent in contemporary leadership theories. For example, Quinn (1996) argues that leadership is a state of being that

people can enter into irrespective of their formal role or position within an organization. Similarly, recent research on team leadership conceptualizes it as a shared property of the group such that all members of the group, regardless of their formal role or position, participate in the leadership process (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Pearce & Conger, 2003).

If leadership is not simply prescribed because of one's position in an institutionalized hierarchy, then a fundamental question that remains to be answered is how leadership and leader-follower relationships develop in organizations. What are the relational and social processes involved in coming to see oneself, and being seen by others, as a leader or a follower? This article presents a theory explaining the development of a leadership relationship that is composed of reciprocal and mutually reinforcing identities as leaders and followers, is endorsed and reinforced within a broader organizational context, and is dynamic over time.

By illuminating the interplay of leader and follower identities in the development of a leadership relationship, our theory makes several noteworthy contributions to the leadership literature. Prior research on "leader" as a personal identity (Day & Harrison, 2007; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009) informs but does not fully explain the leadership identity construction process. Our theory makes clear that leader and follower identities are not only cognitions that reside within an individual's self-concept (Day & Harrison, 2007; Day & Lance, 2004; DeRue et al., 2009);

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they are also socially constructed and inherently related (e.g., granting one person a leader identity frequently instantiates a follower identity for others). By equating "leaders" with those holding supervisory positions and "followers" with those reporting to others in an organization, the leadership literature and the emerging literature on followership both underplay the socially constructed and reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers (Collinson, 2006; Hollander, 1993; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008), whereas our theory foregrounds this consideration.

Our theorizing also reflects a dynamism that is absent from much of the existing literature. Leader identities are generally portrayed as intrapersonal, one-directional, and static. **But if leadership is a mutual influence process among individuals, then social interaction among those individuals and various contextual factors can cause leader and follower identities to shift over time and across situations.** Most research on leadership and identity acknowledges that identities develop over time but then goes on to theorize about a leader identity that, once internalized, becomes a static and enduring feature of the person (DeRue et al., 2009; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005) or about leadership relationships (e.g., leader-member exchange; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) that are static and of a particular nature. A static identity is also presumed in the emerging literature on followership (e.g., Collinson, 2006; Kellerman, 2008; Van Vugt et al., 2008), where the focus is on personal attributes that make individuals effective followers. **In contrast, we propose that leader and follower identities can shift among group members through a social construction process.**

By emphasizing the dynamic nature of leader and follower identities, we also bring into focus the antecedents that shape the construction of a leadership identity. **Existing theories of how people come to be seen as leaders focus narrowly on the cognitive aspects of the process.** For example, implicit theories of leadership and perceptions of group prototypicality can cause people to see others as leaders (DeRue et al., 2009; Lord, 1985; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). We extend prior theory by offering a broader and more integrative framework for understanding the antecedents to the construction of a leadership identity and leader-follower relationships.

Developing insights into the leadership identity construction process is important since individuals' identities as leaders and followers are thought to be significant drivers of their subsequent thought, affect, motivation, and action (Day & Harrison, 2007; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Indeed, **prior research suggests that seeing oneself as a leader not only enhances one's motivation to lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Kark & van Dijk, 2007) and one's engagement in the leadership process (Kempster, 2006) but also promotes the seeking out of leadership responsibilities and opportunities to develop leadership skills (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009).** Additionally, understanding the mutual construction of leaders' and followers' respective roles and identities will help us explain and predict the relational outcomes associated with leader-follower relationships. For example, a strong leadership identity implies that there is clarity in the leader-follower relationship and individuals' identities as leader and follower. When this clarity exists, there is greater acceptance of the right of the person constructed as leader to exert influence over the person constructed as follower. **When this clarity is missing, we expect increased conflict and tension in the relationship (Collinson, 2005).** In this sense, the construction of a leadership identity and the respective identities as leader and follower are inputs into the quality of leader-follower relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

We present our theory as follows. First, we define the concept of leadership identity construction and highlight how our theory offers new insights for the broader identity literature. We then describe **an identity work process of claiming and granting whereby individuals co-create reciprocal and mutually reinforcing identities as leaders and followers and, through this process, develop a leader-follower relationship.** From there we elaborate on the relationship between claiming and granting by specifying the conditions under which claims are reciprocated by grants and grants are reciprocated by claims. We conclude with a discussion of the antecedents that prompt individuals to claim and grant both leader and follower identities, as well as an agenda for future research that would extend our theory in new directions.

## LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Identity involves the meaning attached to the self (Gecas, 1982). Any particular identity can be conceptualized along three levels of self-construal: individual, relational, and collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Because leadership involves multiple individuals engaged in a process of interpersonal and mutual influence that is ultimately embedded within some collective (Hollander, 1978; Parry, 1998), it is necessary to integrate across these three levels to fully capture the process of constructing a leadership identity. Therefore, in contrast to the existing literature, we propose a conception of leadership identity that invokes all three levels of self-construal. Specifically, a leadership identity comprises three elements: individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement.

Individual internalization is a state where individuals come to incorporate the identity of leader or follower as part of their self-concept (DeRue et al., 2009; Gecas, 1982). It involves "the creation of new aspects of the self that relate to the leader (or follower) role (e.g., growth in the leader sub-identity)" (Hall, 2004: 157). Prior theory suggests that the designation of these personal attributes to the self is not simply a cognitive, intraindividual assessment but, rather, is embedded in specific contexts where an identity is asserted and ascertained in the course of social interaction (DeRue et al., 2009; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

This embeddedness suggests a second, more relational aspect of leadership identity construction—relational recognition. Individuals' identities are often tied to various roles (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000), and certain roles are reciprocally related (e.g., parent/child or leader/follower) such that individuals in the situation mutually recognize the role relationship (Ashforth, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). In this sense, leadership "is not something the leader possesses" (Hollander, 1993: 29); rather, it expresses a recognized relationship among individuals (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Relational identity processes suggest that, in addition to individuals' internalizing a leader or follower identity, the leadership identity will be stronger to the extent that it is relationally recognized through the adoption of reciprocal role identities as leader and follower (i.e., for leaders, when others take

on a reciprocal follower identity). This relational recognition can be, but is not necessarily, synonymous with the organizational hierarchy and individuals' positions in that hierarchy.

Collective endorsement is about being seen within the broader social environment as part of a particular social group—for example, leaders or followers (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). We expect that the more an individual is collectively endorsed as part of the group "leaders" or the group "followers," the more those related identities will be reinforced and the stronger and more stable that particular identity construction will be. This collective endorsement might come from other individuals (e.g., an upper-level manager addressing one member of the group as the leader) or the social context more broadly. For example, an individual might not perceive him or herself as possessing the attributes of a leader (follower) or as being in a leader-like (follower-like) position, but the social context within which that individual works might collectively endorse him or her as a leader (follower) and thereby initiate the leadership identity construction process.

By conceptualizing leadership identity across all three levels of self-construal, we are suggesting that leadership development and the construction of a leadership identity are about the construction of a relationship. As Kouzes and Posner note, "Leadership is a reciprocal relationship. . . any discussion of leadership must attend to the dynamics of this relationship" (2003: 1). This recognition is in contrast to much of the existing literature on leadership that focuses on an individual and the static sense of being a leader but misses how leadership comes to be and how it changes over time (Collinson, 2005). As a result, current theory offers little insight into how individuals influence each other to collectively construct their respective identities as leaders and followers and to construct the leader-follower relationship. This article moves the leadership field away from a static and hierarchical conception of leadership and toward a more dynamic, social, and relational conception of the leadership development process.

Although our primary contribution is to leadership theory, this article makes several contributions to theories of identity and identity construction. First, the tripartite identity construction process that we describe serves as a framework

for how scholars might integrate personal, relational, and collective theories of identity. Considering the calls for more integrative theorizing in the identity literature and leadership literature (Avolio, 2007; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), our theory showing how these different levels of self-construal are complementary and how they help explain the construction of one's identity is noteworthy.

Second, leadership as an identity may differ from other more commonly studied identities (e.g., race, gender, or specific role identities). Leadership is ambiguous, with no clear definition or meaning across people (Bass & Bass, 2008; Pfeffer, 1977). What it takes to be a leader or follower, as well as who is a leader or follower in any given social context, is ambiguous, dynamic, and contextual. These attributes make the leadership identity high in what Hoang and Gimeno (2010) term *identity complexity and strongly suggest a role for social processes in its creation*. While the idea of social interactionism is not new to the identity literature (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934), the identity literature is only beginning to explain when social interaction is more or less important for identity construction (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Our theory suggests that the nature of the identity itself (in terms of its ambiguity or other attributes) impacts the process by which that identity is constructed. Social mutual influence processes may be most important for the construction of more ambiguous identities, such as leadership.

Third, the identity literature focuses primarily on how individuals come to see themselves vis-à-vis their self-concept. Our theory emphasizes that it is as important to understand the social processes by which others attribute identities to an individual as it is the identities that an individual attributes to him or herself. In addition, our theory explains not only how an individual comes to see him or herself in a particular way, but it also focuses on how a leadership relationship is socially constructed and, ultimately, how patterns of influence form and evolve among individuals. In this sense, the target of our theorizing is different from that in the identity literature and prior treatments of leader identity (e.g., Day & Harrison, 2007; DeRue et al., 2009).

Finally, social interactionist perspectives on identity construction implicitly assume that social interaction is free, fluid, and without interruption. These perspectives generally do not

model the impact of prior interactions or the nature of the actual claims and grants that occur during the identity construction process. Our theory illustrates the limitations of such assumptions. For example, we specify how the nature of claims and grants themselves, along with the prior history among individuals, can facilitate or impair the fluid and reciprocal nature of the identity construction process. By challenging some of the implicit assumptions embedded in the identity literature, we hope that this article surfaces new insights about the identity construction process.

### THE WORK OF CONSTRUCTING A LEADERSHIP IDENTITY

If identities are inherently social (Mead, 1934) and both leader and follower identities are available to anyone (Day et al., 2009; Kempster, 2006; Van Vugt, 2006), then the process by which certain people become socially constructed as leaders, and other people as followers, becomes particularly important to understand. We root our description of this process in what is called "identity work" in the literature (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Based on social interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959), identity work refers to "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" their identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1165). In this sense, identity work is seen as an individual undertaking aimed at creating, presenting, and sustaining particular identities. For example, research has examined the identity work used to sustain a positive image (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Snow & Anderson, 1987), balance different identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006), and customize identities to fit particular environments (Pratt et al., 2006).

In this article we offer a broader and more social conception of identity work. In particular, we draw from theories of symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) to propose that identity work is undertaken both by an individual projecting a particular image and by others mirroring back and reinforcing (or not) that image as a legitimate identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). We refer to this broader, multiparty process as *identity construction* and find reflections of it in Hatch and Schultz's (2002) examination of the iterative and reciprocal process of identity

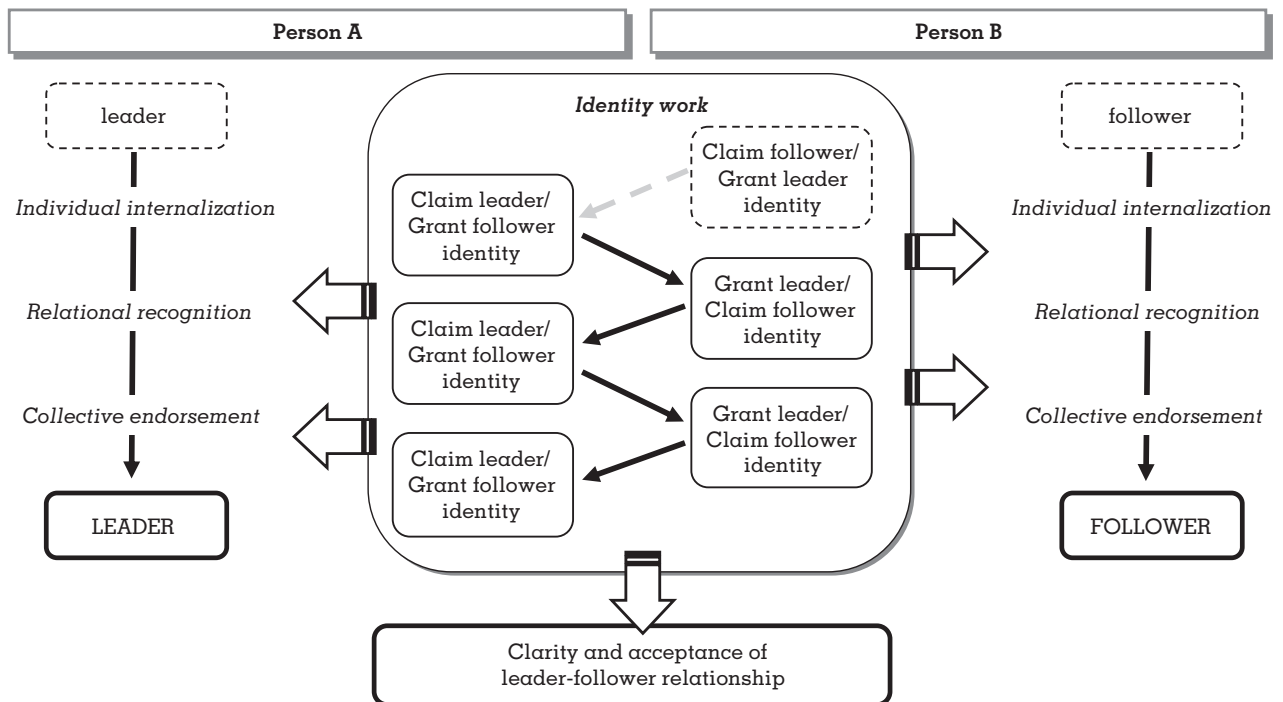
construction at the organizational level and in Bartel and Dutton's (2001) qualitative description of how temporary workers engage in behaviors aimed at establishing themselves as legitimate members of the organization. In this process other members of the organization meet these moves and acts with affirming or disaffirming responses, and through this "reciprocal" identity work, the ambiguity of organizational membership is resolved.

As presented in Figure 1, we propose identity work in which individuals "claim" an identity and others affirm or "grant" that identity as the underlying process by which leader and follower identities become socially constructed and form the basis of leader-follower relationships. Claiming refers to the actions people take to assert their identity as either a leader or follower. For example, consider LeBron James' statement to the press upon joining his NBA basketball team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, as a nineteen-year-old rookie: "I'm a leader. I am the leader of this team" (*InsideHoops.com*, 2004). Or consider people in organizations who say, "I'm just not the leader type." Both statements are verbal assertions that represent claims to a

leader or follower identity in a particular context.

In contrast, granting refers to the actions that a person takes to bestow a leader or follower identity onto another person. Grants can come from individuals actively involved in work with the focal person (who then take on follower roles) or from people who simply notice and endorse a person as a leader (e.g., a colleague from another department). Our focus is on the former set of individuals. For example, grants might include publicly referring to someone as your group's leader or, in the case of a follower identity, explicitly indicating that a person should act in accordance with the direction of another. As shown in Figure 1, individuals can grant a leader or follower identity by agreeing to a claimer's assertion or by bestowing the identity onto a person prior to any initial claim (i.e., the dashed box at the top of Figure 1). **Thus, granting can occur in response to other individuals' claiming behavior and/or it can be the motivation for future claiming behavior.** It is through the interplay of these claims and grants that leader and follower identities are, **as Sveningsson and Alvesson state, "frequently in**

**FIGURE 1**  
**Leadership Identity Construction Process**



movement" (2003; 1165). This recursive property of the process is consistent with recent work on the follower's role in leadership (Howell & Shamir, 2005).

Drawing from the existing literature on identity construction in leadership (DeRue et al., 2009; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007) and other contexts (Alvesson, 1994; Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Pratt et al., 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987), we theorize that **claiming and granting tactics vary on two basic dimensions: verbal/nonverbal and direct/indirect**. Direct verbal acts aimed at claiming a leader identity might include a person making statements that he or she is a leader or statements consistent with being leader-like, while direct verbal granting acts might include referring to another person as a leader. Similar direct verbal acts can also be used to claim a follower identity, such as stating that you are simply following the direction of another person or that you expect to follow the lead of others in a particular situation. **In contrast, people can also claim or grant a leader identity via direct nonverbal acts, such as manipulating physical artifacts associated with leadership or followership** (Gallo, 2006). In this case a person might claim leadership by displaying particular identity cues (e.g., looking the part; Swann, 1990) or by sitting at the head of a meeting table. In the case of followership, a person might claim a follower identity by choosing to speak in a meeting only when called on. Similarly, a person might grant leadership by offering the head of a meeting table to another person, **or grant followership by not including that person in an important (direction-setting) conversation**.

Claiming and granting leader and follower identities can also be more indirect. Indirect claiming tactics might include the invoking of relational ties that communicate and highlight closeness with recognized authorities or other leaders. Examples include dropping the name of an influential organizational leader (in the case of claiming) or acknowledging a person's relationship with other notable leaders in the organization (in the case of granting). In the case of followership, **we often see groups in which individuals actively refrain from taking initiative within the group. This form of inaction is an indirect claim of followership**.

Figure 1 depicts the claiming and granting process as iterative and generative. When a fo-

cal person claims a leader or follower identity, this stimulates other people in the social environment to consider seeing that focal person in accordance with that particular identity. **They communicate their acceptance of this perception by granting that particular identity to the focal person through their words or actions (directly or indirectly)**. Although this granting of the identity may not always occur immediately and may even require several claims before the identity is granted, the relational recognition of the claim through a reinforcing grant is essential to the identity construction process. For example, if a person claims leadership in a setting but others do not reinforce that claim with supportive grants, the three aspects of leadership identity construction are insufficient for a leader-follower relationship to emerge. **The leadership identity will not be fully internalized by the individual, it will not be recognized in relational ties between individuals, and it will not be endorsed in the broader organization**. In this case the leadership identity and leader-follower relationship do not **become part of a "working consensus" defining the situation** (Goffman, 1959). In contrast, if a person claims a follower identity (e.g., states explicitly or communicates through actions that he or she expects someone else to lead) and other people reinforce the claim with a supportive grant (e.g., do not look to this person for guidance, direction, or vision for the task), then that person's follower identity becomes established in that particular context.

**These reciprocal claims and grants promote the individual internalization of leader and follower identities and their relational recognition in group members' roles and relationships** (depicted by the boxes on the right and left in Figure 1). As others in the organization come to recognize and understand this emerging relational structure and pattern of influence, the leadership identity becomes collectively endorsed in the broader organizational context. A leader-follower relationship is more or less established (i.e., is clearer and mutually accepted) to the degree that these three conditions are met. As situations evolve, leader and follower identities can shift among individuals through this same reciprocal process of claiming and granting, thereby creating a revised structure for the leader-follower relationship. It is through this iterative and generative claiming and granting process that the leader-follower rela-

tionship becomes a social reality in organizations and a leadership identity is constructed.

*Proposition 1: The construction of a leadership identity occurs when claims and grants of leader and follower identities are endorsed with reciprocal grants and claims.*

### The Reciprocal Nature of Claiming and Granting a Leadership Identity

Proposition 1 suggests that a leadership identity is constructed when claiming and granting mutually reinforce each other. Over time, this pattern forms "deviation-amplifying" loops (Masuch, 1985; Weick, 1979), in which a deviation in one variable (e.g., more granting behavior) leads to a similar deviation in another variable (e.g., more claiming behavior), which, in turn, further amplifies deviation in the first variable. As the process unfolds, the cyclical nature of the claiming-granting process is thought to result in either positive or negative spirals (DeRue et al., 2009). A positive spiral occurs because grants of a particular identity, leader or follower, convey information about how others in that social environment see the focal individual with respect to that identity. **Thus, when individuals receive grants supporting their claims of a leader or follower identity, they are inclined to respond with more frequent and stronger claims for that identity.** In contrast, a negative spiral occurs when claiming or granting behaviors are not positively reinforced (e.g., claims are not reinforced by grants), and, as a result, these behaviors are less likely to be repeated in the future (Ferster & Skinner, 1957). **The response to fewer grants of a leader identity will be that the focal individual engages in fewer or weaker claiming behaviors, which, in turn, will yield fewer subsequent grants.**

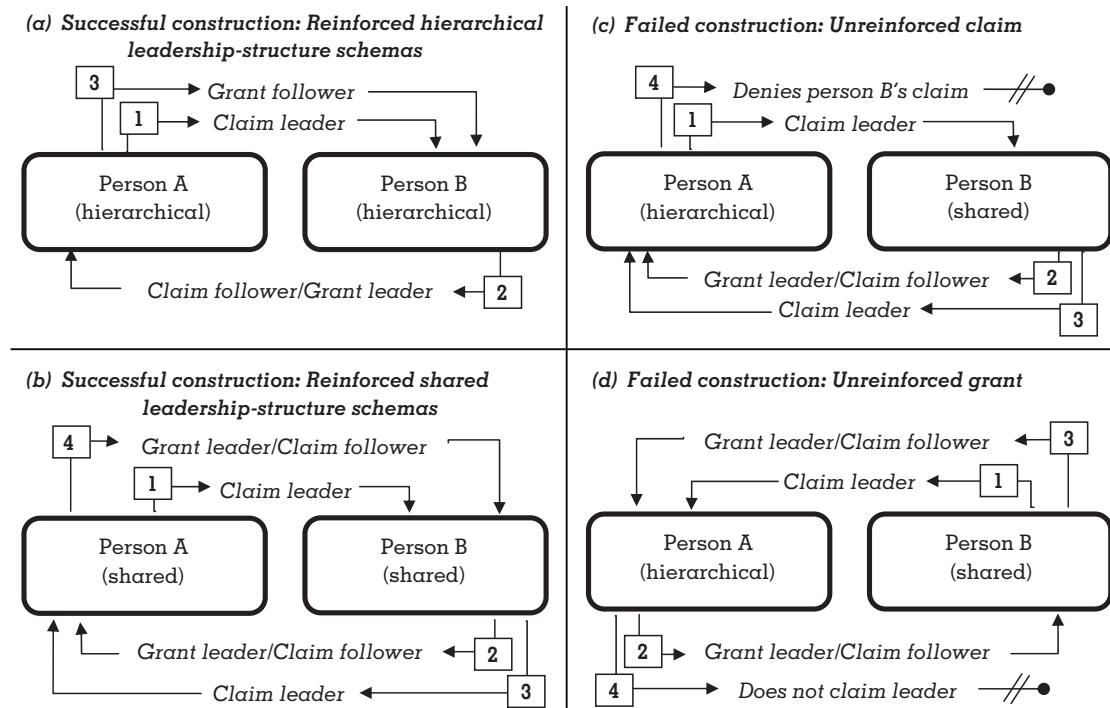
Implicit in this discussion of positive and negative spirals and in our description of the leadership identity construction process are several assumptions about the reciprocal nature of claims and grants. First, a deviation-amplifying pattern presumes that there is convergence in individuals' beliefs regarding how leadership is and should be structured in groups. **However, we propose that individuals' conceptions of leadership range from hierarchical (only one leader in a group) to shared (multiple leaders in**

**a group) and that differences in this conception have important implications for how the process unfolds.** Second, a deviation-amplifying pattern presumes that the **claims and grants exchanged are of a sufficient quality to be perceived accurately and have influence on others.** Yet both claims and grants can vary in their clarity and visibility to others, and this variation will likely affect the process of constructing leader-follower identities. Finally, **a description of the claiming-granting process as deviation amplifying leaves unstated the role of history in its unfolding, but it is likely that a prior history of reinforcing claims and grants between individuals will carry forward and affect how likely individuals are to reciprocate the claims and grants of others.** To more carefully delineate the leadership identity construction process, we now consider the implications of relaxing these three assumptions.

**Leadership-structure schemas.** Consistent with the leadership literature in general (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006), we propose that individuals range from conceptualizing leadership as a process that can be shared and mutually enacted among group members (e.g., Carson et al., 2007; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992) to one that is hierarchically structured such that there is only one leader in a group and leader and follower identities are mutually exclusive. References to a single-leader assumption date back to Bion's (1961) psychoanalytic work on groups, and its predominance in the management literature has been traced by Gemmill and Oakley (1992). Similar to the zero-sum/positive-sum assumptions that shape negotiation behavior (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Thompson & Hastie, 1990), we expect individual differences in leadership-structure schemas to shape when claims are reciprocated with grants and when grants are reciprocated with claims.

When a person holds a hierarchical leadership-structure schema, that person is more likely to conceive of leadership as zero sum. Therefore, a grant of leadership to another individual implies the claiming of a follower identity. Similarly, a claim of leader identity is likely to be accompanied by a reciprocal grant of a follower identity. **We posit that the degree to which people converge around a common leadership-structure schema will influence the reciprocal nature of the claiming-granting process.** For example, in Figure 2a we depict a

**FIGURE 2**  
Impact of Leadership-Structure Schemas on Claiming and Granting



claiming-granting cycle where individuals experience convergence around a hierarchical leadership-structure schema. In this scenario a claim of leadership that is then granted will be accompanied by reciprocal claims and grants of a follower identity. This occurs because the individuals involved see leadership as reserved for a single individual, and so once a claim of leader identity has been granted, it is consistent with the individuals' leadership-structure schemas to follow that grant with the claiming and granting of a reciprocal follower identity. A common understanding and clarity about who is a leader and who is a follower in this particular situation results, and the individuals experience little tension over leadership. **Individuals internalize their identity as leader or follower, mutually recognize their roles and relationships as leaders and followers, and, as a result, the broader organizational context begins to endorse the leader-follower relationship.**

Similarly, when individuals experience convergence around a shared leadership-structure schema, a more dynamic yet still well-defined leadership identity emerges. Given group members' convergent beliefs that more than one

**leader can emerge in a group, individuals will likely grant another's claim of leadership and accede to his or her leadership by claiming a follower identity, but at the same time may claim leadership for themselves and receive reciprocal, supportive grants from others.** As depicted in Figure 2b, individuals can claim and grant a leader identity while also taking on a follower identity in relation to others. In such situations there is clarity with respect to individuals' leader and follower identities, but in a way that involves a dynamic exchange of leadership and followership that is constantly being renegotiated across time and situations. In such contexts the boundaries between leader and follower identities are permeable; as a result, few identity conflicts and little tension over leadership will emerge.

The reciprocal dynamics of the identity construction process become more complex when individuals have different leadership-structure schemas. For example, consider a person with a hierarchical leadership-structure schema (Person A in Figure 2c) who claims a leader identity in an interaction with a person holding a shared leadership-structure schema (Person B). Person B may grant the initial claim but may also con-



tinue to claim leadership for him or herself. With Person A conceiving leadership as zero sum, he or she will likely resist Person B's claim ("Why doesn't he just follow my lead?") and continue to grant only a follower identity to Person B. In turn, we would expect confusion and conflict over leader and follower identities to emerge, thereby resulting in less clarity around the leadership identity. Alternatively, as shown in Figure 2d, if Person B holds a shared leadership-structure schema and claims a leader identity, Person A's reaction may also be confusing. Person A might grant the leader identity; comfortably claim a follower identity, reflecting his or her hierarchical leadership-structure schema; and never initiate any subsequent claims for a leader identity. **In this case Person B may be puzzled by the lack of subsequent initiative and leadership exhibited by Person A, leading to identity-based conflict in the development of a leader-follower relationship.** In general, divergence in leadership-structure schemas will bring about less individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement of leader and follower identities and, as a result, will lead to less stable and ill-defined leader-follower relationships.

*Proposition 2: When there is convergence in hierarchical leadership-structure schemas, once an initial claim of leadership is granted to an individual, a clear leadership identity is constructed based on a mutual understanding that granting a leader identity to one implies the claiming of a follower identity by others (Figure 2a).*

*Proposition 3: When there is convergence in shared leadership-structure schemas, leader and follower identities flow back and forth within the relationship based on a mutual understanding that granting a leader or follower identity to one individual does not preclude the possibility that the identity will be claimed by and granted to others (Figure 2b).*

*Proposition 4: When there is divergence in leadership-structure schemas, the leadership identity construction process will break down such that after an initial claim of leadership has*

*been granted (Figures 2c and 2d), (a) leaders with hierarchical leadership-structure schemas will not grant the continued claims of a leader identity by people with shared leadership-structure schemas and (b) leaders with shared leadership-structure schemas will continue to grant a leader identity to individuals with hierarchical leadership-structure schemas who have discontinued their claims of a leader identity.*

**Visibility, clarity, and credibility.** To sustain the reciprocal nature of the leadership identity construction process, the claims and grants must be of sufficient quality. **The literature on social information processing suggests that social information (e.g., claims and grants) influences human judgment, thought, and action when the information is clear and easy to understand** (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the saliency and visibility of the information are high (Fiske, Kenny, & Taylor, 1982), and the information is credible (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). Extending this perspective to the leadership identity construction process, **we propose that claims and grants of a leader or follower identity are more likely to promote reciprocal grants and claims when they are clear, credible, and visible within the broader social context.**

For example, consider an individual who is elected to be the designated leader of a group in a public election process during a meeting. This grant of a leader identity is clear, visible, and credible. In this case credibility results because the grant is representative of the group within which the leader identity is being constructed, but credibility could also be high if the grant had come from an expert or highly respected group member.

Contrast this example with a situation in which an inexperienced group member privately suggests to another individual in the group that he or she is really good at setting an agenda for the group and motivating the group to accomplish its goals. Is setting an agenda for and motivating the group an aspect of leadership? Is this group member a credible reflection of the group's opinion or even skilled enough to make this judgment? **In contrast to the first example, this grant of leader identity is much less**

visible to other group members, may be unclear in its meaning and intention, and is less credible. As a result, the focal individual will be more likely to respond with his or her own reciprocal claim of a leader identity in the first example than the second.

Clear claims and grants create transparency as to how individuals see themselves and how they are viewed within the social context. In addition, highly visible grants of a leader or follower identity should reduce the image risk associated with claiming that particular identity (because everyone saw the grant) and, in addition, likely increase the felt pressure to comply with a reciprocal claim of that identity. Such claims and grants, though, can be difficult in organizations. Consider, for example, a group that is connected primarily through virtual means. Lacking media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1984), claims and grants made in this context can easily be misunderstood by others.

We propose that clarity, visibility, and credibility all enhance the likelihood that claims of a leader or follower identity will be reciprocated with supportive grants and that grants of a leader or follower identity will be reciprocated with supportive claims.

*Proposition 5: The greater the clarity, visibility, and credibility of claims and grants, the more likely those claims and grants will be reinforced via reciprocal grants and claims.*

**History of claims and grants.** According to sociological theories of role enactment, the way in which people have enacted their roles in relation to others in the past strongly influences how they will enact their roles and behave toward others in the present and future (Turner, 1978). In addition, empirical evidence from social and applied psychology shows that prior behavior influences future behavior (Ouellette & Wood, 1998) and that these behavioral response patterns can be conscious or unconscious (Bargh, 1989; Wegner & Bargh, 1998). In fact, as long as the situation and context do not differ dramatically, prior behavior can lead individuals to develop habitual responses that get enacted in future situations with minimal thought and effort (Ouellette & Wood, 1998; Proctor & Dutta, 1993). Similarly, in the identity literature scholars have noted that people establish relationships between themselves and others and then

engage in behaviors to maintain consistency and symmetry in those relationships over time (Gergen, 1968; Sampson, 1963, 1985). In this sense, a history of social interaction creates both an expectation for and a consistent pattern of behavior that influences future social interaction and behavior.

Drawing from this literature and recent theorizing on the role of personal history in leadership (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005), we propose that a prior history of reciprocal and reinforcing claims and grants between people will carry forward and affect those individuals' future claims and grants of leader and follower identities—especially when the situational context is relatively stable over time. The effect of history can be vicarious or direct. A person may have a reputation as a leader that carries over into a new situation, and even though people have never worked with this individual before, his or her reputation will serve as a vicarious mechanism for increasing the likelihood that claims will be reciprocated with grants and grants with claims. The direct effect of history occurs when an individual has granted a follower identity to another person previously and, as a result, is more inclined to grant that person a follower identity in the future (especially if that person were to first claim a follower identity). Similarly, if a person has claimed a leader identity in the past and been granted that identity by others, it is likely this person will claim a leader identity again in the future. In fact, as the history of claims and grants between people develops over time, we expect the reinforcing nature of these claims and grants to become more habituated and mindless (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978). As the automaticity of the leadership identity construction process increases, a pattern of claiming and granting behavior that is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing will emerge, leading to a more coherent and enduring leader-follower relationship.

*Proposition 6: A prior history of reciprocal and reinforcing claims and grants between individuals will carry forward and increase the likelihood that current claims and grants will be reciprocated.*

Thus far, we have delineated an identity work process explaining how leadership relationships get constructed through reciprocal and

mutually reinforcing claims and grants. We have also specified several mechanisms that facilitate or impair the reciprocal nature of the claiming-granting process. We now turn our attention to predicting and explaining when individuals will initiate a claim or grant of leader and follower identities.

### When Will People Claim and Grant Leader or Follower Identities?

We provide a general framework for identifying the antecedents that we believe will be especially important predictors of claiming and granting. In particular, **we focus on (1) implicit theories of leadership that refer to individuals' beliefs about what makes someone an effective leader, (2) the motivational risks and rewards associated with claiming or granting leader and follower identities, and (3) the institutional structures that can impose leader and follower identities in group settings.** This framework is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, we identify general categories of antecedents to illustrate how the origins of claiming and granting span from individuals' internal belief systems to the organizational context within which the leadership identity is being constructed. **We chose to focus on these particular antecedents for two important reasons.**

First, the predominant theories of identity development and maintenance highlight the importance of each of these antecedents. For example, **self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) explains how one's implicit theory about the attributes associated with different social groups influences the self-concept and identity that one ultimately internalizes.** Likewise, **research in social psychology (Higgins, 1987; La Guardia, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Waterman, 2004) points to the importance of motivation and incentives for the exploration and internalization of particular identities.** Finally, **classic theories in sociology (see Stryker & Burke, 2000) and social anthropology (Cohen, 1994) emphasize the role of social structure and context in shaping individuals' identities.** In our theory **we do not give preferential treatment to any one of these perspectives but, rather, span across these different domains to provide an integrative account of what prompts someone to claim or grant a leader or follower identity.**

Second, each of these factors plays an important role in the broader leadership literature, especially given the emphasis in prior research on cognitive, behavioral, and social constructivist accounts of leadership (Chen & Meindl, 1991; Sjostrand, Sandberg, & Tyrstrup, 2001). However, until now, scholars have not fully articulated the process by which these factors enable leadership relationships and identities to develop (Day, Zaccaro, & Halpin, 2004). By focusing on these antecedents, we situate our theory in the broader nomological network of leadership research, while also extending prior research by specifying how these factors shape the development of leader-follower relationships.

**Implicit theories of leadership.** By the time people begin working in organizations, they have developed varying assumptions and beliefs that form an implicit theory about what leaders and followers "look like" and how leadership unfolds in groups (DeRue et al., 2009; Lord, 1985; Lord & Alliger, 1985; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). We propose that these implicit theories of leadership and followership influence whether people claim a leader or follower identity for themselves and/or grant a leader or follower identity to others.

Prior research suggests that individuals attribute leadership to others depending on how well they correspond to or match the perceivers' implicit theory and that this cognitive process can be conscious or unconscious (Lord, 1985; Lord & Maher, 1991; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). The existing literature also suggests that under conditions of high social identification with a group, the standard for perceiving someone as a leader shifts from how prototypical that person is of an effective leader in general to how prototypical that individual is of the local group (Lord & Hall, 2005; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). In both cases, the more consistency between the focal individual and one's implicit theory of leadership, the more likely one will attribute the identity of leader to that individual.

Extending this perspective, we propose that this reliance on implicit theories of leadership and followership not only creates a belief about whether a person is a leader or follower but also prompts the granting of a leader identity to individuals who match their implicit theory. That is, when an individual looks like, seems like, and acts like a leader (follower), people are more likely to grant that person a leader (fol-

lower) identity. Granting can occur both in response to claiming acts and without a prior claim by the focal person and can pertain to either a leader or follower identity. For example, individuals' implicit theories for what it means to be a leader can differ. If the focal person's implicit theory differs from that of others in the social environment, others may see leadership attributes and characteristics in the focal person that he or she does not yet see. Thus, the process of constructing a leadership identity may begin with a granting act (e.g., an unexpected designation as the leader of a group or task force). Similarly, when a focal person seems like and acts in line with perceivers' implicit theory for a follower, perceivers grant that identity to the focal person.

Not only can implicit theories affect the granting of leader and follower identities, but we propose that this same process can also promote more frequent claiming of these identities. That is, just as individuals compare others' attributes to their implicit theories about the prototypical attributes and characteristics of leaders and followers (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord & Alliger, 1985; Lord, Foti, & Devader, 1984), so they do with their own personal attributes (e.g., their traits, behaviors, skills) as well (DeRue et al., 2009). Given that individuals are motivated to act authentically in accordance with their self-views (Foote, 1951) and to engage in acts designed to align others' perceptions of them with their self-views (Swann, 1990; Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2002), if there is a match based on this internal-to-self comparison process, they will be more likely to claim a leader or follower identity in social interactions (i.e., to act as a leader or to follow others' leadership). This process, at times, may be quite automatic, operating without a lot of conscious thought. At other times claiming behaviors might be the result of a deliberate and conscious process whereby individuals decide if the attributes of a leader or follower are self-descriptive and then engage in claiming behaviors based on that assessment. Based on these ideas, we put forth two propositions related to individuals' implicit theories and the likelihood of claiming or granting leader and follower identities.

*Proposition 7: The more consistency people see between their own attributes and their own implicit theory*

*of leadership (followership), the more they will claim a leader (follower) identity.*

*Proposition 8: The more consistency people see between others' attributes and their own implicit theory of leadership (followership), the more they will grant others a leader (follower) identity.*

**Motivational risks and rewards.** A well-established tenet in our understanding of human motivation is that self-interest shapes human behavior and action (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1998; Schwartz, 1986). Acting leader-like and being seen as a leader is a socially valued and rewarded "ideal self" (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986) in many organizational settings (Day et al., 2009; Kempster, 2006; Van Vugt, 2006). It may lead to instrumental rewards such as promotions, interpersonal rewards such as power or status, or image-based rewards such as a positive reputation. These rewards create a motivation to claim this identity. In addition, individuals are often simply motivated to get things accomplished and claim a leader identity because it helps facilitate that accomplishment (Quinn, 1996). Likewise, some individuals, such as those with a high need for power (McClelland & Burnham, 2003), might claim a leader identity because they derive personal, intrinsic satisfaction from influencing others and being seen as a leader. When these instrumental, interpersonal, and image-based rewards are present and associated with seeing oneself and being seen as a leader, we expect individuals to be motivated to claim a leader identity and grant others a follower identity.

For example, even if a discrepancy exists between an individual's self-view and his or her implicit theory of leadership (i.e., an individual does not see him or herself as leader-like), he or she may be motivated to experiment with or "try out" a possible rendition of the self that might be particularly valued within the organizational setting (Kempster, 2006). Similar to Ibarra's (1999) notion that individuals experiment with "provisional selves," by taking small steps to act like a leader, individuals can explore where they stand with respect to a leader identity. Thus, in addition to claiming an identity because it is believed to be authentic to oneself (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), individuals may claim a leader

identity within their social environment both as a way to gain instrumental outcomes that come from being seen as a leader and as a way to determine for themselves whether or not they view themselves as a leader. Ibarra's research on provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra, Snook, & Guillén Ramo, 2008) suggests that grants from others will further enhance this experimentation process because they help create the motivation for further experimenting with the identity (e.g., "This person sees me as a leader; perhaps I can lead well in this group"). Mentors often grant a leader identity to a mentee, for example, in the hopes of spurring that person's leader identity and subsequent leader behaviors.

The instrumental (e.g., promotions, formal power, and authority), interpersonal (e.g., informal power and status), and image (e.g., being seen by others positively) rewards associated with seeing oneself and being seen by others as a leader will also make the claiming of a follower identity less likely. In settings where a leader identity is highly esteemed, the perceived rewards of leadership will motivate individuals to try to be seen as a leader and, in turn, not "simply" a follower. However, taking on leadership responsibilities also entails considerable instrumental, interpersonal, and image risk (Gardner, 1995; Heifetz, 1994). While risk perceptions may be mitigated somewhat by a past history of leadership success, psychoanalytic perspectives on leadership suggest that people take on the follower role in part as a defense against the anxieties associated with the risks of leadership (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992). We expect that individuals, consciously or unconsciously, assess the level of risk involved when deciding whether or not to claim a leader identity or whether to grant that identity to another person.

The amount of instrumental risk involved in leadership depends in part on the likely fate of the group or organization, since groups' successes and failures are frequently attributed to the leader (Meindl, 1995; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Thus, to the extent there is uncertainty regarding a group's proper course of action, and the greater the complexity, uncertainty, and dynamism of forces affecting the group's performance, the more we expect individuals to perceive greater instrumental risk in taking on leadership responsibilities. Ro-

mance-of-leadership ideas (Meindl, 1995) suggest that it is in these uncertain times that individuals are especially motivated to grant a leader identity to other people, since leadership is seen as an antidote to uncertainty.

Interpersonal and image risks stem from the social nature of the claiming-granting process. Individuals may fear the interpersonal awkwardness that will arise if their claims for leadership go ungranted—for example, if they attempt to lead but no one follows. Further, as with any proactive, extrarole behavior, such as voice (Avery & Quinones, 2002) or issue selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), actively claiming leadership brings with it a myriad of concerns regarding how the act of claiming might be perceived by others (e.g., as appropriate, presumptuous, or overly controlling). Proactive actions are thought to be especially risky because observers consider them to be expressive of individuals' true underlying nature and desires (Bem & Funder, 1978, Grant & Ashford, 2008), and this risk is enhanced when individuals are new to a situation or lack an established track record of success. In addition, the more dissension there is in a group regarding the proper enactment of leadership, the more risk there is in claiming leadership because it is not clear how best to lead. For example, claims based on one style of leadership (e.g., a participative style) may be negatively received by those advocating a different style of leadership (e.g., more authoritarian). These arguments suggest the following two propositions.

*Proposition 9: The more individuals perceive instrumental, interpersonal, and image rewards associated with leadership, (a) the more they will claim a leader identity and (b) the more they will grant a follower identity to others.*

*Proposition 10: The more individuals perceive instrumental, interpersonal, and image risks associated with leadership, (a) the less they will claim a leader identity and (b) the more they will claim a follower identity.*

**Institutional structures.** The processes we are describing take place within an organization whose formal structures are themselves an institutionalized form of leader/follower grants.

Consistent with the reciprocal nature of the process we are describing, these formal structures may be the residual effect of past cycles of claiming and granting, the resultant collective endorsement of leader and follower identities, and an antecedent to subsequent leadership identity construction. Thus, occupying a supervisory role represents a powerful institutional grant of a leader identity conveyed through a formal social structure that all group members recognize and operate within. Within such systems people often hold expectations of a supervisory role that include leadership. Indeed, "leader" is one of the roles of a manager's job identified by Mintzberg (1973). While leadership is not synonymous with holding a supervisory position and many people in supervisory positions do not embody a leader identity, the generalized expectations of that role bias people's observations and interpretations of a supervisor's behavior. As a result, individuals will be more likely to grant a leader identity to people in supervisory positions than they will to individuals who are not in these positions. This greater likelihood of granting a leader identity will continue until that individual is ineffective or acts in ways that are inconsistent with individuals' implicit theories of leadership.

Position incumbents also hold similar socialized expectations. As such, they may feel increased responsibility to and comfort in claiming a leader identity. Incumbency also reduces the potential image risks of such claiming, since individuals feel particularly free to try leader-like acts because of their position. These leader-claiming behaviors are likely to be reinforced and affirmed by subordinates as role senders, creating even greater freedom to experiment with a leader identity over time. Thus, it is likely that a person's leader identity will be enhanced by being placed in a formal supervisory role, even though the two are not synonymous.

A similar argument can be made for the claiming and granting of a follower identity. The same institutional structures in organizations that grant leadership to one person also advocate that those people formally reporting to the designated supervisor follow that person's direction and guidance. In this sense, an institutional structure grants a follower identity to lower-level actors. At the same time, designated followers hold socialized expectations about how they are supposed to act in relation to their

designated supervisor (e.g., often to follow and not challenge his or her direction). As a result, these dyadic reporting relationships shape people's behaviors in ways that help construct and mutually reinforce leader and follower identities. For any given formal relationship in an organization, the person in the supervisory position is more likely to claim a leader identity and grant a follower identity to the subordinate. In parallel, the subordinate is more likely to claim a follower identity and grant a leader identity.

*Proposition 11: To the extent people hold formal positions of authority, those individuals will be more likely to (a) claim a leader identity and (b) receive grants of a leader identity from others.*

The antecedents that we have identified independently and in combination will influence when individuals claim and grant leader and follower identities both initially and in response to others' claims and grants. In the next section we build on these ideas to develop an agenda for future research that will hopefully serve as a springboard for research on leadership identity and development.

### **AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: EMPIRICAL TESTS AND THEORETICAL EXTENSIONS**

We have presented an identity-based process model of leadership development that explains how leader-follower relationships become institutionalized in the social fabric of organizations. To help build an agenda for future research, we first specify several methodological considerations relevant to the empirical testing of our model and then offer several ideas for how scholars might extend our theory in new and interesting directions.

#### **Empirical Tests of the Model**

The leadership development process that we propose is decidedly social, occurs over time, and involves multiple levels of analysis. As such, a research program designed to empirically test these ideas should have several characteristics. First, research must account for the individual, dyadic, and organizational aspects

of the identity construction process. The antecedents to claiming and granting span multiple levels of analysis, ranging from individual cognition to organizational hierarchy and social structure. As such, research testing our model needs to capture the individual, relational, and organizational factors that influence the leadership identity construction process. Similarly, a leadership identity is internalized at the individual level, recognized in role relationships among individuals, and collectively endorsed in a broader organizational context. Thus, future research, beginning with measurement, must account for these different levels of identity construction. One question that needs to be addressed is related to the relative importance of these different levels of identity construction and how the different levels complement or supplement each other in the development of leader-follower relationships. Is it possible that a leadership identity cannot be collectively endorsed until it is individually internalized or relationally recognized, or might collective endorsement prompt individuals to internalize a leader or follower identity—and how would processes starting from these different points unfold differently over time? Another question for future research is what happens when the three levels of identity construction do not converge. For example, what are the implications for leadership development if a person fails to individually internalize a leader identity that is both relationally recognized and collectively endorsed in the broader organizational context?

Second, to specify causality and model the reciprocal nature of claiming and granting, the leadership identity construction process needs to be examined over time. The importance of delineating the temporal aspects of the process is evident in research by Shamir and Eilam (2005), where behavioral acts that we would classify as grants of a leader identity were not always followed by the focal individual's claiming leadership and did not lead to the construction of a leadership identity. In our theory we posit that prior claims and grants can carry forward and influence future claims and grants. Longitudinal research testing these ideas should seek to specify why claiming and granting are sometimes reciprocal and create positive spirals and why the process is sometimes disrupted and breaks down. Another question that should be explored via longitudinal re-

search is how the content and scope of leader and follower identities evolve over time. Leader and follower identities will initially develop in relation to specific situations, but through repeated claiming-granting processes, those identities can shift from situated to generalized identities (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). In addition, claims or grants of a particular identity may be acceptable within a specific context or in regard to specific issues, but in other contexts or regarding different issues, those same claims or grants may be outside the zone of acceptance and, thus, may be met with resistance.

Given the social and temporal aspects of our theory, several research methods are particularly well-suited to the study of leadership identities. First, we propose that scholars consider using a social relations approach (Kenny, 1994; Livi, Kenny, Albright, & Pierro, 2008) for modeling the individual, dyadic, and group-level influences on the claiming and granting of leader and follower identities. Specifically, researchers could have group members and/or observers assess the claiming and granting behaviors of all individuals in the group and then use the social relations model to specify the amount of variance in claiming and granting that is explained by individual differences (e.g., motivation), relational ties between actors (e.g., history of prior claims and grants), and group-level factors (e.g., institutional structures).

Second, experience-sampling methods (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1992; Wheeler & Reis, 1991) could be used to capture in real time the patterns of claiming and granting that lead to the construction of leader-follower relationships. For example, researchers could examine new groups where these relationships are not already established and could use daily sampling of claims and grants to predict the emergence of leader-follower identities and relationships in the group over time. This particular method would also be ideal for studying other dynamic factors that might prompt claiming and granting, such as an individual's performance and personal track record of success as a leader.

Third, echoing Parry's (1998) call for more grounded theory research on leadership, we call for more in-depth, qualitative studies to understand the form and nature of claiming and granting in leader-follower relationships. Qualitative methods that involve observational (e.g., ethnography) and/or narrative (e.g., autoethnog-

raphy) techniques will be particularly valuable in capturing what may only be a semi- or unconscious process of acting and reacting to others. By gathering rich, in-depth accounts of the individual cognitive processes and relational processes that underlie the claiming and granting process, this research would go a long way toward explaining the development and evolution of leader-follower relationships.

Finally, given the early stage of theorizing in this area, perhaps the greatest potential for future research lies in experimental studies that enable researchers to control the presence and absence of claiming and granting behaviors in groups. These experiments will be particularly valuable for establishing causality and understanding what factors govern the initiation of claims and grants or impede the reciprocation of reinforcing claims and grants. By manipulating the presence of grants following claims or the presence of claims following grants, researchers can capture the reciprocal nature of the process and, by varying context, can explicitly model the effect of contextual elements such as group norms on the leadership development process.

### Theoretical Extensions and New Directions

There are several aspects of our theorizing that provide the foundation for new and interesting directions in research on leadership identity and development. First, while our theorizing describes how the identity construction process between individuals might unfold over time, future research needs to complicate this picture further by considering the process at the group level. When there are numerous individuals engaged in the claiming-granting process, the group-level composition and dispersion of variables such as implicit leadership theories, motivation, and leadership-structure schemas will likely influence how the process unfolds (DeRue, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, & Feltz, 2010; Harrison & Klein, 2007). For example, if everyone in a group perceives high instrumental rewards for being a leader, the leadership identity construction process will likely feature more competitive claims, less granting, and, as a result, less emergence of a well-defined leadership identity. In fact, the impact of having numerous individuals motivated to lead may depend, importantly, on the predominant leadership-structure schema in the group. For example, if group members who are

motivated to lead converge on a hierarchical leadership-structure schema, the group will likely experience a great deal of competitive claiming with little reciprocal granting. According to our theory, this will create a situation in which leader and follower identities are not fully internalized, recognized, or collectively endorsed. It is important that future theorizing specify how such competing claims get resolved in groups.

Second, although we identify general categories of antecedents to claiming and granting, there are complexities related to these antecedents that are not fully captured in our theorizing and, thus, necessitate further theory development. For example, we highlight different types of motivational rewards and risks associated with claiming and granting either a leader or follower identity, but in organizational contexts it is likely that these rewards and risks will not always be aligned. Future research that explains how people evaluate and make trade-offs between different rewards and risks during the leadership identity construction process would offer a meaningful extension to our theory. In addition, although we highlight formal institutional structures as an important antecedent, we encourage scholars to extend our theory by also considering the impact of informal structures, such as social stratification and status hierarchies (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Lenski, 1984) and social networks (Granovetter, 1985; Krackhardt, 1990). For example, do men and women, because of status or stereotype differences, experience the leadership identity construction process in different ways? Or how does individuals' position within informal networks influence the claiming and granting of both leader and follower identities, independent of their position within the formal organizational hierarchy? Research investigating questions such as these would begin to model the intersection of the claiming and granting processes specified in this article with the underlying social structures embedded within organizations.

Finally, there is a need for future research that explicitly models the role of organizational and cultural contexts on the leadership identity construction process. Our work provides specifics for a nascent recognition of organizations as "identity workspaces" within which individuals work out who they are with respect to the context and each other (Petriglieri & Petriglieri,



2010). In some contexts acts of leadership might be discouraged by cultural norms and values (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001), whereas other contexts (e.g., empowered, decentralized organizational cultures; Spreitzer, 1996) might encourage individuals to take on leadership responsibilities in groups (Howell & Shamir, 2005). In these contexts, claiming of a leader identity is expected and normatively sanctioned, giving individuals the space to experiment with a leader identity and assess the extent to which that identity reflects their true self.

It is also possible that some organizations have norms that enable more rapid construction of leadership identities—for example, in organizations where there is a common leadership-structure schema that is firmly held and widely shared. Whether that leadership-structure schema is hierarchical or shared, its strength as a norm should facilitate reciprocal claiming and granting and allow for the rapid development of well-defined leader-follower relationships. In contrast, organizations without such norms or organizations going through significant changes might experience greater conflict over leadership and within leader-follower relationships (Kan & Parry, 2004), which, in turn, may distract from effective work performance. One interesting question that should be explored is what happens when individuals' leadership-structure schemas converge (e.g., around a shared schema) but those schemas are inconsistent with the dominant leadership-structure schema in the broader organizational context. Scholars could extend our theorizing in new and interesting directions by modeling how these different organizational contexts influence the leadership development process.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

To address recent calls to define leadership as a social and mutual influence process, our models of leadership must illuminate the processes by which leadership relationships and identities are developed. In this article we build on prior research to articulate a process by which individuals jointly construct a leadership relationship and explain why some individuals come to be seen as leaders and others as followers. We describe a generative process whereby individuals cocreate their respective identities as leaders and followers, specify broad categories

of tactics used to achieve this cocreation, and delineate some of the antecedents and conditions that govern its unfolding.

Understanding this process may be particularly important for understanding leadership development in contexts increasingly characterized by rotated (Erez, LePine, & Elms, 2002), distributed (Gronn, 2002), and/or shared (Carson et al., 2007; Pearce & Conger, 2003) leadership. The more members of these groups have internalized leadership identities that are mutually recognized and collectively endorsed, the more successful these distributed and shared forms of leadership will be. Our hope is that the present theory provides the foundation for expanding the field's conception of leadership and leadership development processes and that it stimulates future research on leadership development as a social and mutual influence process.

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**D. Scott DeRue** (dsderue@umich.edu) is an assistant professor of management and organizations at the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business. He received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University. His research focuses on leadership and team dynamics, with a particular focus on how leaders and teams in organizations adapt, learn, and develop over time.

**Susan J. Ashford** (sja@umich.edu) is the Michael and Susan Jandernoa Professor of Management and Organization at the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business. Sue received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University. Her current research interests include leader effectiveness, issue selling, feedback, self-management, and individual proactivity.

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