



Identity Leadership in the Context of Organizational Sustainability: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The present investigation aims to provide a theoretical framework for identity leadership, as well as to comprehend the significance of leadership in organizational sustainability by forming, representing, enhancing and solidifying a common social identity inside the business. This Review combines empirical and theoretical studies published in prominent publications in management, psychology and application to provide a cohesive model of identity leadership. The study focuses on the psychological and social mechanisms of identity leadership and how they impact critical outcomes at the individual team and organizational levels. The findings show that identity leadership is a major predictor of improved follower cohesiveness, collective efficacy supportive group behavior and performance, particularly in situations requiring high connectedness and a clear collective message. This review highlights critical deficiencies, notably the necessity for more longitudinal and cross cultural studies to implement identity leadership for the advancement of sustainability, as well as research into its adverse effects, therefore fostering more sustainable organizational practices.

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Introduction

Given the numerous consequences of environmental preservation and attaining sustainability, as well as the need to confront obstacles and seize opportunities, organizational leadership must realize the importance of sustainability and work to accomplish it via identity leadership. This leadership is distinguished by developing and cultivating a collective feeling of we inside the company, and it is sustained through the techniques used by identity leaders (Dick *et al.*, 2025)^[8]. The importance of identity leadership in organizations is demonstrated by its capacity to help group members reduce their self doubts about their beliefs and behaviors while simultaneously fostering the development of a strong social identity. In organizations, procedural fairness contributes to group member's good social identities. According to Uncertainty identity theory while attempt to strengthen group identification in uncertain settings, the drive to eliminate self doubt takes precedence over the motivation to achieve a good social identity (Milesi, 2022:886)^[24]. Contemporary Sustainability concerns are shared internationally, yet their priorities, manifestations and areas of attention may change and their interpretations might vary depending on context (Vezzoli *et al.*, 2021:123)^[39]. Sustainability has focused on three core systems, the global economy, social systems and environmental systems and how they interact (Wu & Low, 2013:92). According to (Hermann & Kara, 2012:130)^[15], personal motives of stakeholders available resources, and the impacts of monopolization all have an impact on the effective implementation of sustainability. The current study aims to address a question about the function of identity leadership and sustainability.

This study gives a theoretical description of prior research on identity leadership and investigates how the notion of identity leadership has evolved. The absence of research relating identity leadership to sustainability exemplifies the knowledge gap. The study aims to fill this gap. The study uses a scientific methodology based on theoretical literature analysis to present a comprehensive model of identity leadership that takes into account societal cultural and economic characteristics, as well as practical recommendations to improve organizational sustainability. In this approach, it helps to support organizational leadership by giving future insights for decision making geared at ensuring long term competitiveness in a changing business environment.

Theoretical foundations

Historical Development of Identity Leadership

Identity leadership is a qualitative shift in leadership research, going beyond individual and transactional models to emphasize group-based processes through which leadership originates and becomes successful. Its development is intimately related to the use of social identity theory When (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:94) ^[35], and more specifically self categorization theory, (Turner *et al.*, 1987) ^[36] in the field of leadership. Identity leadership is based on the social identity approach SIA, which holds that an individual's self-concept is largely determined by their participation in social groups. Recognizing that leadership is primarily a collaborative activity is a key step forward in leadership studies. Michael Hogg, an early pioneer in this discipline, argues that leadership is a collective phenomenon involving group dynamics, social influence, and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2001:184) ^[16]. This viewpoint opposes the traditional emphasis on leader characteristics and actions, arguing that a leader's efficacy is determined by their capacity to represent their followers, uplift them and foster a sense of shared social identity. Early research in this area found that the representativeness of the leader-*ie*, the amount to which the leader reflects the common features that differentiate the group the "one of us" factor is a basic for leadership impact. The more a leader is viewed as a model member, the higher the trust and affection they inspire, hence increasing their ability to influence group members without looking self serving (Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003) ^[17]. Leadership includes both the leader and their link to the groups identification. This is part of an individual's self concept based on group membership that is a necessary component of group ingratiation, we desire a good self concept as members of specialized organizations, just as we do as individuals (Sidanius *et al.*, 2008:18) ^[31]. This approach redefines leadership as "identity leadership", in which the leader's primary responsibility is to establish, build, and sustain a collective sense of "we" through speech, behavior, and organizational design. This was clearly proven in (Reicher & Haslam, 2006:33) ^[29], BBC Jail research, which found that failure in leadership and authoritarianism is caused by an inability to develop a coherent and shared social identity, rather than fixed personality qualities. Despite its centrality, the prototypicality principle provides a somewhat unfavorable view of leadership. (Haslam *et al.*, 2011) ^[13] comprehensively articulated the following significant evolution in shaping a more effective and strategic model of identity leadership in their seminal work "The New

Psychology of Leadership", arguing that effective leaders not only embody but actively shape and manage an existing collective identity. Subsequent research using the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) has consistently shown that identity leadership is positively correlated with a variety of key organizational outcomes, includin, but not limited to, improved follower well-being (Steffens *et al.*, 2018:11) ^[33], improved team performance, increased behaviors related to organizational citizenship, and increased follower commitment. This body of studies has shown identity leadership as an important determinant in leadership success (Van Dick *et al.*, 2018:25) ^[8, 38].

Concept of Identity Leadership

Many academics and investigators believe that good leadership must be linked to the group, its processes and how to construct influence and create a common identity. Identity Leadership proposes that effective leadership actions change depending on the kind and substance of the group identity, as well as its environment, The more one belongs to a group with similar beliefs in aims, the more beneficial the influence of that identification. It has been demonstrated that individuals who display identify leadership behaviors improve performance and exert more effort (Hoult *et al.*, 2024:2) ^[19]. According to a research study conducted by (De Gracia *et al.*, 2025:538) ^[7], there is an important role in improving employee performance through the adoption of identity leadership behaviors exemplified by faith, trust and communication, which can enhance the organization's commitment to its core values by encouraging employees to be role models by applying those values and participating in service activities that strengthen their commitment to the organization's identity. Identity leadership has a successful influence on followers largely by encouraging them to think, feel and behave as active members of the group and boosting their shared social identity as "we" rather than feeling like distinct individuals via their personal identity as "I" alone (Hou *et al.*, 2021:3). Individuals who emphasize "I" and personal identity may prefer individual decisions and working alone, whereas those who emphasize "we" and collective identity (e.g., family, work, group, organization, tribe) prefer collective decision-making and collaboration (Livermore, 2010:99) ^[23]. In the international arena, identity leadership is an important paradigm for analyzing ethnic conflicts that may arise in various locations or nations. In this environment, identity leadership is critical in directing the emotions and narratives that shape collective thinking, emphasizing the need of understanding this phenomena through the lens of leadership and social interactions. It emphasizes the role of elites in developing and promoting conflicting identities amongst communities. These psychological and social dynamics can sometimes overlap, with symbolic identity reinforcement contributing to hostile circumstances and excessive violence (Krishnamohan, 2025:214) ^[21]. Id Identity leadership views effective leadership as a type of group behavior in which leaders' ability to exert influence stems from a shared sense of belonging to the group represented by identity leaders, which is achieved by embodying the group's norms and values, advancing the group's interests, and developing a sense of shared identity within the group. This can be aided by establishing activities, events and structures that allow the group to live out its collective identity (Butalia *et al.*, 2025:4)

^[4]. The table (1) includes several definitions of identity leadership. Identity Leadership strengthens leaders' attempts to foster a strong feeling of collective belonging among workers or followers by emphasizing shared identities, which promotes collaboration and connection among all members. This promotes sentiments of improved performance and interaction throughout the company (Monzani *et al.*, 2024:979) ^[25]. In marketing management, creating a sense of belonging can lessen client fluctuations, resulting in improved organizational revenues (Al-Karaawi & Al-Hadrawi, 2025) ^[34]. Practical applications include crisis Management (Haslam *et al.*, 2021) ^[14]. In educational leadership (Cruz-Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019) ^[6]. Unlike conventional approaches to leadership, which emphasize the importance of the leader's personal attributes and style, identity Leadership contends that leadership is based on a shared sense of identity among leaders and group members, with leaders playing a significant role in its formation. According to the Social Identity approach to Leadership, social and psychological connections are fundamental to

leadership practice, and they are directly related to the reasons that organizational workers deem vital for their engagement and well-being (Clarke *et al.*, 2025:816) ^[5]. When an organization has a positive reputation, employees feel proud and meet their need for a positive social identity, striving to contribute to its maintenance by demonstrating higher levels of performance and efficiency and lower levels of deviation (Neider & Schriesheim, 2014:143) ^[26]. Furthermore, identity leadership emphasizes the importance of each individual realizing their full potential, interacting peacefully with colleagues, and enhancing collaborative employee growth through non-incentivizing elements such as personal characteristics and professional excellence. This initiates the organizational reform process, implying that employees recognize and accept the organizational clause in which they are currently involved, as well as the beneficial experience these activities provide, gradually establishing their role as employees by explaining and reflecting on relevant personal experiences, and solidifying a strong belief in the struggle for the cause (Li, 2024:273).

Table 1: Some Definitions of Identity Leadership

	Definition	Source
1	Distinct style of leadership necessary in the 21st century, characterized by individuals who are conscious of their intents and identities, and who lead themselves responsibly to overcome difficulties in their own lives, hence leading others to success in driving organizational progress.	(Graham, 2019:11).
2	A leadership strategy that asserts that a leader's power to influence group members stems from their capability to be, perceived as reflecting and strengthening the group's sense of identity two.	(Van Dick <i>et al.</i> , 2019:4) ^[8] .
3	Collaborative process focusing on leader's ability to represent, promote, establish, and reinforce a common social identity that they share with the people they manage.	(Haslam <i>et al.</i> , 2022:2) ^[12] .
4	Leadership paradigm that emphasizes the need of the leader creating a shared sense of identity in order for the team to be more effective. It focuses on defining the group's identity and accompanying modifications, as well as the relationships between the group as a whole and each individual member.	(Hsieh <i>et al.</i> , 2022:3) ^[20] .
5	The process by which leaders develop, improve, represent and reinforce a feeling of "we" and "us" or social identities inside the teams they lead.	(Butalia <i>et al.</i> , 2025:4) ^[4] .

Source : Prepared by the researcher based on the aforementioned literature.

Components of Identity Leadership

Identity leadership consists of three components, as illustrated in figure (1): self-categorization, collective self-esteem, and emotional commitment, as noted by (Hsieh *et al.*, 2022:4) ^[20], citing (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999:383) ^[9]. They can be outlined as follows :

1. Self-Categorization :

The notion of self-categorization is intended to increase the individual's capacity for action and decision making. Originally understood as individuals' membership in groups with clear social ties, the concept of self-categorization has evolved to encompass a different understanding related to individual psychology and highly subjective feelings toward a specific group, culture, language, or perhaps historical experience (Bhatnagar, 2007:99) ^[3]. According to (Reimer *et al.*, 2022:3) ^[30], Self-categorization is a component of an individual's self-concept, which incorporates cognitive beliefs about oneself. Self-categorization is the cognitive grouping of oneself and other members of a category as comparable "we", as opposed to members of another category "they" according to Jay Turner, there are at least three levels of self-categorization, which he refers to as identity levels: the highest level, which defines oneself as part of a broad community encompassing almost all known groups; The middle level, which defines oneself in terms of group

belonging, such as ethnic or cultural identity; and the subordinate level, which includes defining oneself by individual traits and characteristics as a unique individual, (Zakiryanova & Redkina, 2020:5-6) ^[41].

2. Collective Self-Esteem :

Collective self-esteem refers to the group's common feeling of value and respect. Individuals regard themselves as members of a group and are inextricably linked to other group members. According to social identity theory, collective self-esteem indicates that people value themselves depending on their membership in a social or cultural group (Zhou *et al.*, 2023:349) ^[42]. The general version of the collective self-esteem measure focuses attention on various types of group membership (Bettencourt *et al.*, 1999:213-214) ^[2]. Identified four factors that define collective self-esteem and may be developed on as follows :

- Specific collective self-esteem : refers to how good individuals feel about their social groups.
- General collective self-esteem : refers to people's belief that their social groupings are positively seen by others.
- Membership evaluation : self-perception of social group membership.
- Importance of identity : how much people value their social groupings in shaping their self-concept.

3. Emotional Commitment :

Employees' capacity to stay working in an organization because they trust it and want to do well exemplifies emotional commitment inside the organization. This dedication creates an emotional bond that connects the employee to the organization (NEZIRI & TAHIRI, 2025:62)^[27]. There are three sorts of commitment in organizations : emotional commitment, normative commitment, and

continuity commitment. Affective commitment is the degree to which an emotionally devoted employee is happy to be a member of the business and does not consider resigning because they see themselves as part of it. Affective commitment is significantly more strongly tied to individual and Organizational characteristics than other forms of commitment (Erat *et al.*, 2017:224).

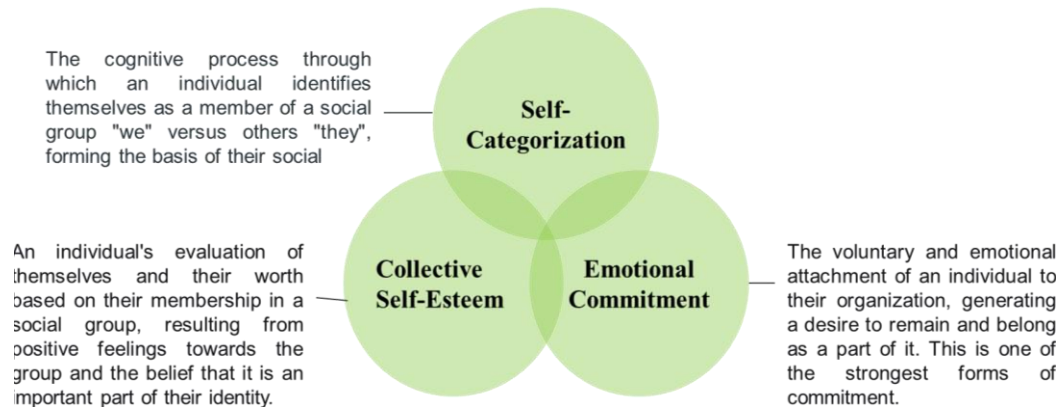


Fig 1: Illustrates the Components of leadership.

Dimensions of Identity Leadership

Several sources have mentioned the dimensions of identity

leadership, which can be detailed in the following table (2):

Table 2 : Illustrates some source for the dimensions of identity leadership

	Dimensions	Source
1	1. Identity Prototypicality: being one of us 2. Identity enhancement: doing this for us 3. Identity entrepreneurship: crafting meaning for us. 4. Identity leadership: making us important (making us valuable).	(Steffens <i>et al.</i> , 2014:1003-1004) ^[32] .
2	1. Identity Prototypicality 2. Identity Advancement 3. Identity Entrepreneurship 4. Identity Impresarioship	(Van Dick <i>et al.</i> , 2018:42;Batchelor <i>et al.</i> , 2023:103) ^[1]

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the aforementioned literature.

Data Collection Process

Data were obtained using the phases outlined in the PRISMA2020 protocol (Page *et al.*, 2021)^[28]. These papers were then reviewed after applying the exclusion criterion that identity leadership was not the topic of the investigation. Scopus, Clarabe, Springer, and Google Scholar were included as primary data sources because of their outstanding

reputation for providing worldwide scientific literature. This is represented in figure (2), and the search lasted six months. The search results were sorted by "identity leadership" and contextual phrases like "sustainability" and "organizational performance". The search parameters were limited to papers published in English, of the category "Article" or "Review", with a publication date ranging from 2015 of 2025.

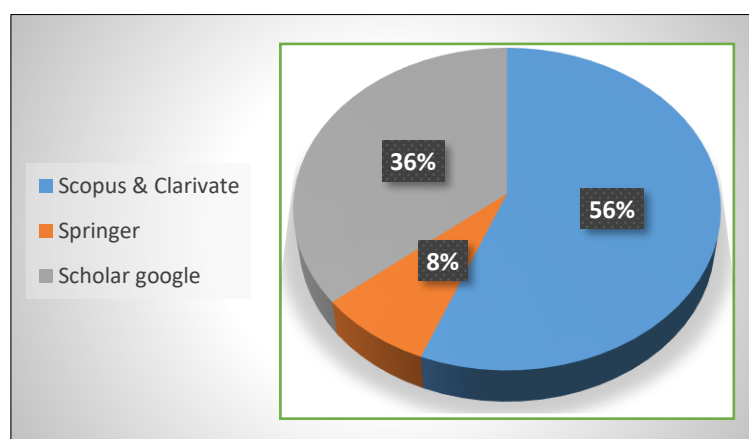


Fig 2 : Illustrates the proprtion of each website used in obtaining sources.

Results

After analyzing the sources and their results, relevant conclusions may be provided based on the most recent research and the distinctions between their fields of application. For example, the educational study conducted by (Hsieh *et al.*, 2022) ^[20], discovered a high level of perceived identity leadership among kindergarten directors, with substantial changes depending on the respondents', demographic features, such as age and position. Studies on athletes, such as those done by (Hoult *et al.*, 2024; Butalia *et al.*, 2025) ^[4, 19], indicate the value of perceived identity leadership in improving athletes' mental health, independent of cultural setting, emphasizing the necessity for leadership development in sports. The study by (Clarke *et al.*, 2025) ^[5] found that identity leadership is positively connected with mental health outcomes, with the quality of social networks and psychological safety leading to improved mental health. This might increase the social dimension of sustainability. Furthermore, the study by (Monzani *et al.*, 2024) ^[25], which investigated how identity leadership among citizens, emphasizes the importance of cultivating the sense of shared identity among citizens in order to improve civic engagement and cooperation across community segments. This emphasizes the importance of the economic factor of sustainability via identity leadership.

Conclusion

Identity leadership may help achieve sustainability by enhancing performance, cultivating a culture of shared responsibility, ethical commitment, and long-term thinking. The identity model expressed in the leader's conduct fosters a sense of belonging and demands leaders to take actions that promote identity development, such as training programs and group activities that deepen member connections. Identity entrepreneurship enables leaders to innovate in the formation of identity, allowing them to modify their leadership methods in response to changes in the company. It is also critical for identity leadership to oversee the process of delivering identity to members through ongoing communication and decision-making. After reviewing the available literature, we notice a lack of clear investigation into the relationship between identity leadership and sustainability, as well as the application of the identity leadership concept in industrial organizations, which play an important role in the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability. This suggests that the function of this style of leadership in attaining sustainability is not being adequately addressed. Furthermore, the significance of identity leadership has received insufficient attention in higher education environments, particularly in terms of perceived inequalities between leaders and followers. As a result, researchers should address these issues in future studies.

Recommendations

1. This assessment of identity leadership studies suggests recommendations for further study, including measuring and using identity leadership in industrial companies to promote sustainability.
2. Support studies and research on identity leadership in many contexts, such as industrial and educational settings, to examine its influence on sustainability.
3. Organizations must assess the impact of identity leadership efforts on individual and collective

performance in order to identify the effectiveness of implemented tactics and match them with sustainability Objectives.

4. Through this study, we advocate that academics use identity leadership in diverse contexts in their future research.

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