Leadership as social identity management: The importance of representing, championing, cultivating, and embedding a shared sense of ‘us’

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These are the observations of the eminent leadership theorist John Adair, reflecting on what makes particular leaders more successful than others. His ideas are echoed in the observations of a great many other writers — all of whom recognize that leadership is much more a ‘we thing’ than it is an ‘I thing’ (e.g., Drucker, 1992). Despite this, if one searches for research that might validate Adair’s insights or, better still, explain why they are correct, the story is very different. For such research is thin on the ground. This is because, almost without exception, received approaches to leadership endorse an individualistic understanding that sees this as a process that is grounded in the personal psychology of individual leaders. In this way, leadership is seen to arise from a distinctive psychology that sets the minds and lives of great leaders apart from those of others — as superior, special, different.

This chapter does not seek to diminish the contribution that great leaders have made to the shaping of society, nor does it seek to downplay the importance of their psychology. What it does do, however, is question and provide an alternative to this individualistic consensus. Indeed, rather than seeing leadership as something that derives from leaders’ psychological uniqueness, we argue the very opposite: that effective leadership is grounded in leaders’ capacity to embody and promote a psychology that they share with others. More specifically, we argue for a new psychology of leadership that sees this as the product of an individual’s ‘we-ness’ rather than of his or her ‘I-ness’.

What is distinctive about this approach is that it attempts to do justice to observations like those of Adair by providing an analysis of leadership in which the terms of the theoretical treatment are matched to the nature of the phenomenon. If leadership really is a ‘we thing’ (and we believe it is) then we need to understand what this means, where it comes from, and how it works. The aim of this chapter — and the recent book whose structure it follows closely (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, in press) — is to provide such an explanation.

In developing this analysis we have drawn not only on psychological research but also on work by researchers and commentators in a range of disciplines including management, business, politics, history, economics, even theology. We have also looked at leadership in multiple domains — in organizations and industry, in government and politics, in science and society. At the same time, our work is also informed by findings from laboratory-based research in which
various aspects of the leadership process are put under the analytical microscope in order to demonstrate their causal role in producing particular outcomes. We have then integrated evidence from these various sources in order to shed light on the mental states and processes that underpin effective (and ineffective) leadership. Our task in all this, then, is to explain what it is, psychologically, that binds leaders and followers together in shared endeavor. What commits them to each other and to a shared task? What drives them to push in the same direction? And what encourages them to keep on pushing?

Our answers to these questions all centre on issues of social identity. That is, they all focus on the degree to which parties to the leadership process define themselves in terms of a shared group membership and hence engage with each other as representatives of a common ‘we’. It is this distinctive sense of ‘we-ness’, we suggest, that provides a basis both for leaders to lead and for followers to follow. And it is this that gives their energies a particular sense of direction and purpose.

To say all this, however, is to presuppose a shared understanding of what leadership is. In line with many other researchers, we define leadership as the process of influencing other people in a way that encourages them to contribute willingly to the achievement of group goals. This definition contains a number of important elements that are easily neglected or misunderstood. First, leadership is a process not a property, a verb not a noun. It is not something that an individual ‘has’ but something he or she does. Second, leadership is not something people do on their own — it necessarily involves other people. Indeed, third, the real evidence of leadership emerges not in what individual leaders do, but in what they encourage other people to do. Its proof is therefore found not in leaders’ leadership but in followers’ followership. Fourth, in seeing leadership as centering on influence, it is important to distinguish it from a range of other processes with which it is commonly confused. Leadership is about winning others over so that they want to do what is being asked of them. It is not about brute force or raw power. Certainly, these things can be used to affect the behavior of others in ways that may bring them more into line with a group’s goals. But they will not produce ‘true’ influence in the sense that those goals are internalized as valid, appropriate, and correct. Moreover, unless leadership involves true influence, the activities it leads to will be performed with little enthusiasm, they will lead to sub-optimal outcomes, and they will diminish once the leader’s back is turned.

Following the structure and content of our recent book, in this chapter we explore these ideas by first outlining our critique of received approaches to leadership. We then summarize the theoretical foundations upon which the social identity approach is based. After this, we elaborate upon four key aspects of social identity management that bear upon the leadership process.
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These concern the ways in which, in order to be effective, leaders need (a) to represent, (b) to champion, (c) to cultivate, and (d) to embed a sense of shared social identity. We then illustrate these points with specific reference to our recent work on the BBC Prison Study (Reicher & Haslam, 2006a). Finally, we elaborate on these considerations by reflecting on some of the practical and political implications of our analysis for the understanding of leadership in the world at large.

Traditional approaches to leadership: The ‘great man’ and his personality

If there is one model of leadership that exemplifies the individualistic consensus that lies at the heart of prevailing approaches to leadership it is that of the ‘great man’. This is one of the cornerstones of traditional academic and popular understandings of leadership. Dating back at least as far as the writings of Plato (e.g., 380bc/1993) it was perhaps most clearly articulated by Thomas Carlyle in an influential series of lectures on ‘Heroes and Hero Worship’ that he delivered in May 1840. Here, Carlyle declared that “Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here” (Carlyle, 1840, p.3).

The ‘great man’ model encourages us to see the stuff of leadership not as the stuff of ordinary mortals but as the stuff of gods. Exactly what this stuff is has been a topic of intense debate for around two and a half thousand years. Commonly, though, it is conceptualized in terms of distinctive traits or qualities that are believed to make those who possess them inherently more adept at directing, managing and inspiring the remainder of the population who require their direction, management and inspiration. Different analyses place an emphasis on the importance of attributes such as decisiveness, insight, imagination, intelligence, and charisma. Of these, it is the last — charisma — that has received most intense scrutiny. In many ways, this is because the idea of charisma captures particularly well the sense of ‘something special’ that is associated with great leaders and our relationship with them (Weber, 1922/1947).

In line with this thinking, in the two decades following World War II, work on leadership was dominated by a hunt to identify measures of personality that might help organizations identify leaders of the future. However, while this work suggested that some minimal level of various qualities is usually helpful, the capacity for any one characteristic to predict leadership was found to vary dramatically across different studies. In the case of charisma, many of these difficulties reflected the inherent slipperiness of the construct itself. Yet even in the case of the very best predictor — intelligence — this was typically found to predict only about 5% of the variance in leadership (e.g., Mann, 1959). A massive 95% was thus left unaccounted for.
Given the difficulties inherent in trying to use standardized assessments of a person’s charisma or personality as a basis for predicting and understanding his or her future success as a leader, one obvious alternative is to look backwards into the biographies of effective leaders in an endeavor to discern the ‘leadership secrets’ that made them so great. Again, though, such efforts generate a range of inconsistent insights because the nature of the secrets that emerge from these analyses varies dramatically as a function of the particular leader and the particular group that is under consideration (Peters & Haslam, 2009).

Nevertheless, around the middle of the last century a series of influential behavioural studies suggested that two types of leader were generally associated with successful leadership: consideration and initiation of structure (Fleishman & Peters, 1962). Consideration relates to a leader’s willingness to attend to the welfare of those they lead, to trust and respect them, and to treat them fairly. Initiation of structure relates to the leader’s capacity to define and organize their own and their followers’ roles with a view to achieving relevant goals.

The importance of these twin behaviours draws attention to the fact that successful leadership needs to be both context-sensitive and perspective-sensitive. More specifically, it is apparent that, in order to be successful, a leader needs to be attuned to the circumstances and needs of the particular group that he or she is trying to lead. Yet while this insight makes good sense, it sits uncomfortably with the tendency for prevailing psychological approaches to assume that if one has identified the right person for a particular leadership position (e.g., on the basis of his or her personality), then this suitability will be recognized by all. This is far from true. Instead, a person’s capacity to influence others depends very much on who exactly those others are.

Contemporary approaches to leadership: Issues of context and contingency, transaction and transformation

If character does not make the leader, perhaps context does. If leaders are not those individuals who are made of ‘the right stuff’, then perhaps they are simply those who are in the right place at the right time. There are stronger and weaker variants of this situational approach. In its most extreme form, character is seen to play no role at all. This position implies that just about anybody can exercise the leadership function once installed as a leader. In practice, few psychologists ever adhered to such an extreme position and even fewer adhere to it today. This is because, conceptually, it effectively writes human agency (the fact that people seek out and choose particular leadership positions) out of the picture (Reicher & Haslam, 2006b).
It is therefore far more common for researchers to adopt a *contingency approach* to leadership in which the situation moderates but does not entirely obliterate the significance of character. The defining idea here is that leadership is the product of a ‘perfect match’ between the individual and the circumstances of the group that he or she leads (e.g., Gibb, 1958). At one level, such approaches are undoubtedly correct since, as Lewin (1952) observed, *all* behavior is the product of an interaction between the person and his or her environment. However, in its standard form the contingency approach encounters two fundamental problems. The first is that each term in the interaction is conceptualized as a fixed entity that is separate from the other. Yet the idea that a person will display the same characteristics over time and across a broad range of contexts is implausible, as is the idea that this could ever be a recipe for leadership success. The second problem is that only one of these terms, the person, is the subject of a properly psychological analysis. Yet the means by which leaders are effective involves moving people, and, accordingly, the context confronting any leader is always partly constituted by *followers*. Those followers are self-evidently subjects for psychological analysis and, being people, they are as variable as leaders.

This latter point alerts us to the fact that to understand leadership one must also understand *followership* (Hollander, 1995). In order to be a great leader, it is not enough to ‘do great things’. One’s greatness also has to be appreciated by others and one’s actions have to be recognized by them as constituting leadership. Indeed, for this reason, Weber (1922/1947) saw charisma as something that followers *confer* on leaders rather than something that leaders possess or exhibit in the abstract (see also Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg & Spears, 2006; Lord & Mahar, 1991).

Consistent with this idea, Hollander’s *transactional approach* to leadership contends that the leader–follower relationship is a social exchange — a matter of give and take in which each party has to provide something to the other before it can receive anything back. This suggests that effective leadership flows from a maximization of the mutual benefits that leaders and followers offer each other. In short, leaders and followers are believed to co-operate with each other because, and to the extent that, both parties see that there is ‘something in this for me’.

This way of thinking is intuitively appealing, not least because the language of economic exchange is something with which we are all familiar. Nevertheless, a fundamental problem is that the concepts of ‘cost’ and ‘benefit’ that are central to the theory are incredibly elastic. Thus while perceptions of cost and benefit are consistent with people’s experience of leadership after the fact, their predictive power is limited (Bruins, Ng & Platow, 1995).
It is also the case that the transactional approach treats both parties to the leadership exchange as equals, and yet it would appear that this is often not the case. Consistent with this view, a power approach to leadership asserts that leaders typically have the power to reward their followers, and that it is this that allows them to get those followers to do whatever it is that they (the leaders) want (French & Raven, 1959). From this perspective, then, leadership is considered primarily a question of amassing resources and then using them in the most effective ways (e.g., Bacharach & Lawler, 1980)

Yet power is not simply something that leaders have (or don’t have) as individuals; it is also something that they have by virtue of other people. Leadership, then, involves harnessing the power of others — whether to batter down old regimes and old institutions or else to build up existing institutions, to buttress existing laws and regulations, or to realize existing policies. In this sense it is important to distinguish, as Turner (2005) does, between power over and power through. Sensitivity to this distinction highlights a further concern with transactional approaches (both exchange-based and power-based), namely that the model of leadership they present is essentially contractual. Yet if one views leadership as a process of influence in which the aim is to shape what people want to do rather than induce or force them to do things against their will, then a sense of contractual obligation would seem to be an unpromising foundation. In line with this point, a large body of research indicates that people are much less motivated when they do things for extrinsic rather than intrinsic reasons (i.e., doing them because they bring valued rewards — such as money — rather than because they are valued for their own sake). In the same vein, inviting leaders and followers to stop and ask themselves, before they do anything together, ‘What’s in it for me?’ is actually a good recipe for encouraging both to stop doing anything at all (Tyler & Blader, 2000; Smith, Tyler & Huo, 2003). Instead, then, the task of leadership is often precisely to shift people from thinking about ‘what’s in this for me’ to thinking about ‘what’s in this for us’. Moreover, when leadership involves such a shift it proves to be more transformational than transactional (Burns, 1978) — both in changing the psychological orientation of those who are party to the leadership process and in having the potential to produce dramatic change in the world.

A new approach to leadership: Issues of social identity and self-categorization

The critiques of prevailing theory that are summarized in the preceding sections suggest that any adequate theory of leadership needs to include at least four key elements:

First, it must explain why different contexts demand different forms of leadership;
Second, it must analyze leadership in terms of a dynamic interaction between leaders and followers;

Third, it must address the role of power in the leadership process, not simply as an input but also as an outcome;

Fourth, it must include a transformational element which explains how leaders and followers are able to change the world and are themselves changed in the process.

Social identity

In moving towards these goals, it is apparent that one key element that is routinely overlooked in standard treatments of leadership is the group. For leaders are never just leaders in the abstract. They are always leaders of some specific group or collective — of a country, of a political party, of a religious flock, of a sporting team, or whatever. Their followers don’t just come from anywhere. Potentially at least, they too are members of the same group. Leaders and followers are therefore bound together precisely by being part of the same group. This relationship is cemented not through their individuality but by their being part of (and by their being mutually perceived as part of) a common ‘we’.

Our perspective on these matters is derived from what has, over the last quarter century or so, become the dominant approach to the study of groups in social psychology. This approach derives from the pioneering work of two European researchers: Henri Tajfel and John Turner. At its heart is one core concept: social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987; for a recent overview see Reicher, Spears & Haslam, in press; for extensive background and core readings see Postmes & Branscombe, in press).

Social identity refers to individuals’ sense of internalized group membership. It is a sense of self associated with an awareness that one belongs to a particular social group and that this group membership is important and meaningful (Tajfel, 1972). So, for example, it is social identity that underpins people’s sense that they are part of a particular nation, a particular organization, a particular club, and so on. And it is social identity that allows people to refer to themselves and other members of such groups as ‘us’ (e.g., ‘us psychologists, ‘us Ford employees’, ‘us Real Madrid fans’, ‘us Latina women’). However, what is most important for present purposes is the fact that it is social identity that allows people both to lead and to be led. This is because social identity — a shared sense of ‘us’ — is central to the social influence process that lies at the heart of effective leadership.

We can set about the process of demonstrating why social identity is so important to leadership by first asking what it is that turns any collection of individuals into a social group.
Why do people join groups? And what keeps them there? In the process of answering such questions a large body of evidence has been accumulated which demonstrates that people’s gravitation towards groups, and, when in them, the things they do with and for other group members, are driven not by personal attraction and interest, but rather by their group-level ties (e.g., see Hogg, 1992; Turner, 1984). For this reason leadership which entreats people to engage in group behavior because this is in their personal interests is unlikely to produce optimal results. Personal interest is typically not what encourages people to support football teams, to pursue organizational goals, or to join armies (although, in time, they may certainly come to see such things as personally rewarding). Moreover, they won’t necessarily do these things more or better if lured with promises of greater personal reward (Akerlof, in press; Tyler & Blader, 2000).

In terms of our present focus on leadership, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) makes four contributions that pertain to the study of leadership. The first is to expound the central concept of social identity — the notion that our sense of self can be derived from our group membership and the meanings associated with that group membership. The second is to recognize that different forms of intergroup behavior stem from the definition of this social identity. The third is to establish that, when social identities are operative (or ‘salient’), what counts for an individual is the fate and the standing of the group as whole, not his or her fate as an individual. The fourth is to observe that the nature of groups and of group processes is always bound up with social context. In particular, if the meaning of who we are depends upon comparisons with ‘them’, then our own social identities will shift as a function of who we are comparing ourselves with in any given context (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994).

**Self-categorization**

Social identity theory introduces us to these concepts, but they are more fully developed and given wider application to group processes in general within self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). This theory provides the essential conceptual tools for crafting a new psychology of leadership. In particular, this is because as well as recognizing social identity as the basis for group behavior, self-categorization theory also specifies a psychological process that underpins the transition from behavior that is informed by a person’s sense of his or her own individuality (what Turner, 1982, referred to as personal identity) to that which is informed by social identity. In order to convey the idea that the self is no longer seen in personal terms (as ‘I’), Turner refers to this process as depersonalization, arguing that this leads people to perceive and respond to themselves and
others, not as unique persons, but as psychological representatives of the group to which they belong.

To illustrate this point, imagine a situation in which you are playing in a game of football between your team (the blues) and another (the reds). In this situation, would you see yourself and the other players on the two teams simply as unique individuals (Sam, Charlie, George, etc.)? Would you want to? The answer to both questions is probably ‘No’. Instead, you would see all the players (including yourself) as representatives either of your team or of the opposition. As a result, amongst other things, you would try to pass the ball to another blue player but not to a red one, and you would expect to receive a pass from a blue player but not a red one. Indeed, were you to perceive yourself and the other players as individuals (so that you saw yourself as equally different to all other players, and all players as equally different from you and from each other) this would be highly dysfunctional in this context and it would interfere with your ability to have a meaningful game of football.

Depersonalization matters for social behavior because if people weren’t able to act on the basis of social identity they would have no basis for being able to coordinate their behavior with others, for knowing who is on their side and who isn’t, or for knowing (both implicitly and explicitly) what goals they are aiming for. Without this, they wouldn’t be able to play a game of football or to engage in any other form of meaningful group behavior.

This point is absolutely crucial for the analysis of leadership. For if self-categorization as a group member is a necessary basis for social collaboration, then it is equally necessary as a basis for someone to guide and shape that collaboration. Most starkly, we can formulate a framing principle for leadership: that without a shared sense of social identity, neither leadership nor followership is possible.

The implications of social identification and depersonalization for leadership can be spelled out further by noting that when people define themselves in terms of a particular social identity (e.g., seeing themselves as ‘a Conservative’), they both (a) seek to discover the meaning associated with the category (e.g., ‘Conservatives value tradition and respect for authority’) and (b) strive to conform to these elements (so that, as a Conservative, ‘I value traditions and treat authorities with respect’). Those who identify as group members therefore need information from others about the meanings associated with the group (what it means to be a Conservative), and about the implications of those meanings for situated practice (what, as a ‘good’ Conservative, I am meant to do in the here and now).

But, of course, we can’t rely on just anyone to confirm our understanding of the world. So who can we trust to tell us about the way things are, about what counts, and about what we
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should be doing? Who is in a position to tell us about group values and group action? The obvious answer is our fellow group members. Moreover, through influence of this form an internalized sense of shared social identity serves to structure and organize social perception and social interaction in such a way that people’s idiosyncratic views are transformed into consensual beliefs. Indeed, what we see is that social identity theorizing provides a social psychological analysis of the transformational processes described by a number of leadership theorists (notably Burns, 1978; Weber, 1922/1947). For it is through social identity-based processes of influence that low-level individual inputs are fashioned into higher-order group products. These have emergent higher-order-properties which ensure that the group whole is qualitatively different from (‘more than’) the sum of its individual parts (Asch, 1952; Turner, 1991). Furthermore, these processes have the capacity to energize group members in the service of a common purpose by offering them both a sense of collective self-belief and a sense of a collective to believe in.

This is a point that is exemplified by Martin Luther King’s famous “I have a Dream” speech in which he called upon his fellow Americans to stop seeing themselves and each other in terms of opposed lower-level identities as Blacks and Whites and to unite instead around the common identity proclaimed in the American Declaration of Independence and enabled through the American Constitution. It was by forging this shared American identity, King asserted, that “jangling discords” could be transformed into a “beautiful symphony of brotherhood”; and through this recategorization that they could collectively garner “the faith to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope” (MacArthur, 1996, pp.487-491). Likewise, two years earlier in his inaugural address as President, John F. Kennedy had asked his audience:

Can we forge against these enemies [tyranny, poverty, disease and war] a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can ensure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

(MacArthur, 1996, pp.483-487)

Both these speeches hinge on a key point that the two leaders recognize implicitly: that transformation of the world goes hand-in-hand with transformation of identity. It is the forging of new forms of shared social identity that motivates the collective forging of new worlds.

Pulling all these various strands of research together, we can see that the cumulative effect of shared social identity is to transform a disparate collection of people into a coherent social force. Mutual social influence leads people to agree on what is important and to strive for the same goals. As a result, their efforts, rather than pulling in different directions and cancelling each other out, become aligned and additive. In sum, shared social identity is the basis of collective social power. It also follows from this that to be seen as representative of a given
social identity is also to have a major source of potential power. Indeed, the first priority of those who want to be effective in shaping their social world — that is, those who would be leaders — is to be seen both as being of the group and as speaking for the group. The first rule of effective leadership, then, is that leaders need to be seen as ‘one of us’.

**Social identity salience**

The preceding discussion clearly places great significance on the question of just how categories are defined. How do we come to see ourselves and the world in terms of certain categories rather than others? How do we come to ascribe particular meanings to our group membership? As a consequence, how do particular people come to be seen as more or less representative of the in-group or of the out-group and their proposals as embodying or else betraying group values and goals?

In setting about answering such questions, the theoretical and empirical work of self-categorization theorists suggests that the nature of the categories that we employ to define ourselves and our social world depends upon two factors: (a) the fit of a particular categorization with the organization of social reality, and (b) the readiness of people to employ particular categories (Oakes et al., 1994; Turner, 1985). This means that a person is more likely to define him- or herself as a member of a particular group (i.e., in terms of a particular social identity) if this self-categorization maps on to what he or she sees and understands about the patterns of similarity and difference between people in that group and in other salient groups, and if that group has some prior meaning for them. For example, Spanish people are more likely to define themselves as Spanish if they see Spaniards as meaningfully different from Portuguese (say) and if they are also patriotic.

A given self-categorization is fitting if it appears to be a sensible way of organizing and making sense of the social world that a person confronts. Fit has two components: comparative and normative. *Comparative fit* is all about the *distribution* of what people say and do, and the extent to which they form distinct clusters that are separate from others. More technically, it suggests that a person will define him or herself in terms of a particular self-category to the extent that the perceived differences between members of that category are small relative to the perceived differences between members of that category and other categories that are salient in a particular context. This is termed *the principle of meta-contrast*. As well as explaining how categories form and become salient, this principle can also be used to explain how the meaning of category membership is defined. Specifically, the position that best characterizes the group — the *category prototype* — will be the position within the group that simultaneously minimizes
intra-category differences and maximizes inter-category differences. In less technical terms, it is the position that best epitomizes both what we have in common and what makes ‘us’ different from ‘them’. And again, because the prototype is rooted in comparisons within and between groups, it shifts as a function of who exactly we are comparing ourselves with (e.g., Haslam & Turner, 1992; Hopkins, Regan & Abell, 1997).

*Normative fit* is all about the content of what people are saying and doing, and the extent to which this meshes with our expectations about what members of a given group should say and do. It suggests that in order to represent sets of people as members of distinct categories, the differences between those sets must not only appear to be larger than the differences within them (comparative fit), but the nature of these differences must also be consistent with the perceiver’s expectations about the categories. If these content-related expectations are violated, then the social categorization will not be invoked. A Democrat watching a political debate will be unlikely to classify participants as Democrats and Republicans (or to define herself, *and act*, as a Democrat) if the members of these two groups are seen to differ from each other in ways that are unexpected — perhaps if the Republicans are arguing for higher taxes and the Democrats are arguing for less spending on welfare.

These ideas (and the empirical work that supports them) serve to underline two important points. The first is that there are no inherent, stable differences between representations labelled ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’. The second is that there is no pre-defined, universal identity in terms of which a person will define him- or herself (and others). Indeed, the very same people can be defined as ‘in-group’ or ‘out-group’ in different contexts. Moreover, based on these principles of fit, we are now in a position to elaborate on what, above, we characterized as ‘the first rule of leadership’: that a leader must be seen as ‘one of us’. To be seen as such, an individual must not simply be a member of a currently salient social category, but must also exemplify what makes ‘us’ different from the relevant ‘them’. Leadership potential thus becomes a function of one’s *ingroup prototypicality* relative to other aspirants (Platow, Haslam, Foddy & Grace, 2003; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; Turner, 1991).

However, leadership is not just a matter of being. It is also a matter of doing. If, as social identity theory suggests, group members are motivated to enhance the relative standing of their group, if group members are concerned with the fate of the group, if their sense of ‘self-interest’ is centered on the group interest, then a leader who represents them (in all senses of the word) will be one who promotes the good of the group. All these points converge to define a second general lesson for those who seek to hold sway over others. This is that they must not only be seen to be of the group but also as being *for* the group. *The second rule of effective leadership,*
then, is that leaders need to be in-group champions. Whatever they do, they must be seen to do it in our collective interest.

Defining and embedding social identities

On the basis of self-categorization theory, we noted above that social identity salience is determined by the interaction between people’s present context (the meaningfulness of particular groups in the present) and their prior experience (the meaningfulness of particular groups in the past). Furthermore, categorization is not only about the past (prior experience) or the present (existing social organization), it is also about the future. To make the point more generally, categories are as much about saying how things should be as about how they are. This is particularly relevant for leadership, since the tasks of leaders are always future-oriented — whether this be a matter of preserving existing social arrangements or of transforming them. Added to this, categories are not just about envisaging the future. They are also tools for making the future. They are world-making things. Appreciation of this point leads us to recognize that precisely because social category definitions constitute such a powerful social force, then anyone who is interested in shaping the world — political actors, social movement activists and so on — needs to be interested in defining categories. Our third rule of effective leadership, then, is that leaders need to be skilled entrepreneurs of identity. Their craft lies in telling us who we are and in representing their ideas as the embodiment of who we are and what we want to be. And if they succeed, then our energy becomes their tool and our efforts constitute their power (see Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Through the operation of the above principles we can see how category definitions shape the collective mobilizations that in turn shape social reality. Moving on, we now need to address the question of when and why people accept particular definitions and act upon them. In part this will come down to the plausibility of the construction itself — the extent to which a specific version of identity incorporates well-worn understandings of who and what we are: the events that every child learns at school, the historical figures and cultural icons who appear on our landscape in statues, place names, even postage stamps. In this way, understandings of the past can make for a compelling vision of what the future should be — a vision compelling enough to move people to action.

Yet however compelling a vision, and whatever its ability to mobilize in the short term, vision alone is not enough to sustain our understanding of social identity in the longer term. Vision is only useful if it allows us to see and then create a better future. Accordingly, if collective mobilization fails to translate a definition of identity into experienced reality, then that
definition will fall by the wayside. By contrast, where mobilization does succeed in creating realities that reflect a given definition of identity, then that definition will gain in support.

The same goes for those who offer these various definitions. Those leaders who turn visions of society into social realities will succeed over those whose visions remain limited to the imagination. Our fourth rule of effective leadership, then, is that leaders need to be embedders of identity. They must not only tell us who we are, they must also make a world in which our sense of who we are can be made to matter.

In sum, the social identity approach leads us to see leadership as a process that centres on a relationship between leaders and followers in a group such that leaders gain their effectiveness through their ability to represent and advance the social identity of the group. On the one hand this acts as a constraint upon them. Leaders cannot say anything or get followers to do anything. They are reliant on their ability to persuade followers of their prototypicality and normativity, and this in turn depends upon features of social context. But on the other hand, it is social identity that enables leaders to energize people with their vision, and to recruit the agency of followers in order to transform both their self-understanding and the world they inhabit. Leaders, followers and situations are not static entities that exist independently of each other, but elements that interact to shape each other — and it is through this interaction that the power of leadership is unleashed.

An experimental field study of social identity and leadership: The BBC Prison Study

The previous section provided an overview of the social identity approach and used this to derive one framing condition and four rules of leadership. Within the fields of social and organizational psychology there is now an abundance of research that has tested and provided support for these various points (for reviews see Ellemers, de Gilder & Haslam, 2004; Haslam, 2001; Haslam et al., in press; Reicher et al., 2005; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Nevertheless, because research tends to test separate hypotheses in isolation, there is a sense in which the empirical analysis of leadership from a social identity perspective is somewhat fragmented. As a result, it is sometimes hard to gain a sense of how (and whether) these various facets of the process interrelate and hence appreciate exactly how social identity and self-categorization processes impact both upon the dynamics of leadership and upon the systems within which they are played out. In this section we therefore attempt to provide an integrated analysis of the preceding points by drawing on data from an experimental case study that two of us conducted a number of years ago — the BBC Prison Study (BPS; Haslam & Reicher, 2005, 2007; Reicher & Haslam, 2006a, 2006b)
The BPS was possibly the largest social psychology study to be conducted in the last three decades and it revisited the paradigm of Zimbardo and colleagues’ classic Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE; Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973). As in the SPE, the BPS involved randomly dividing ordinary men into groups as Prisoners and Guards within a simulated prison environment (see Figure 1). However, unlike the SPE, what we found was that, as the study progressed, the Prisoners identified more and more with their group while the Guards identified less and less. This difference resulted from experimental manipulations that we had devised on the basis of social identity theory, but these need not detain us here (see Reicher & Haslam, 2006a, for a full account). Instead, we want to start by looking more closely at the consequences of this asymmetry.

Figure 1. Prisoners and Guards in the BBC Prison Study (Reicher & Haslam, 2006a; for relevant video clips visit bbcprisonstudy.org)

Consistent with the claim that the exercise of leadership is contingent upon group members embracing a shared sense of social identity, what we found was that as the Prisoners developed a sense of shared social identity they became more effective in coordinating their actions as a group — notably in challenging the authority of the Guards. At the same time they also became more willing and more able to choose a leader to represent them. Indeed, this emergent leadership was apparent not only to the Prisoners themselves but also to the Guards and to independent observers (Haslam & Reicher, 2007).

In total contrast, however, as shared identity amongst the Guards declined so they became less and less able to work together. Amongst other things, this meant that they couldn’t establish a basic system of work shifts because they were afraid that other Guards would do things they disapproved of in their rest periods. This meant that everyone worked all the time, not to help each other but to hinder each other. And the harder that everyone worked the more exhausted they become and the less they achieved as a group. Their efforts cancelled each other
out. Leadership in such a context was quite impossible. No-one trusted anyone else, and no-one could agree on who to represent them. This is seen in the following extract where the Guards were deciding who to be their official representative on a newly instituted negotiating forum (a body that we will discuss further below)

\[\text{TM}_G^1: \text{I think [BG] or [FC] would be a good spokesman because of their nature...} \]
\[\text{TQ}_G: \text{I would like to be considered as well — I see it as my dream job.} \]
\[\text{TM}_G^2: \text{Yeah and me as well, but I know I’m going to just rack on for ages and I think that with my personality, I think, I mean no disrespect to anyone here and even to myself, but I know my personality, I’d...} \]
\[\text{TQ}_G: \text{I think I’m just born to do that.} \]
\[\text{TM}_G^3: \text{OK then why don’t we just, why don’t we have a ballot and decide on it that way?} \]
\[\text{TQ}_G: \text{You say a first and a second?} \]
\[\text{TM}_G^4: \text{Yeah. Write down first, write down second on the same sheet. The first gets two points, second gets one point. We add up the points. Now obviously it doesn’t mean that anyone’s the leader of anyone else...} \]
\[\text{TQ}_G: \text{No it’s a spokesman, it’s a courier.} \]
\[\text{TA}_G: \text{OK then, write it down. Is it a secret?} \]

Indeed here we see not only that the guards disagree on who should be their leader, but also that they disagree over the very idea of leadership. Rather than being a group, the guards are simply a collection of competing personalities — each advocating different positions and unable to secure the support of others. Again, this was apparent to both Prisoners and Guards as well as to onlookers. Moreover, the net result of these opposing dynamics was that after six days the Prisoners’ resistance triumphed and the Guards’ regime was overthrown. The study was thus a perfect illustration of our contention that leadership and social identity go hand in hand and that no leader can represent us without there being an ‘us’ to represent.

**Representing social identity**

Shared social identity was thus a precondition for the emergence of leadership in the BPS: there must be a sense of ‘us’ to represent before any individual can fulfil this role as leader. Yet it was also apparent that social identity was central to the ongoing dynamics of leadership in the study. This too was clear in the struggle for leadership that took place among the Prisoners. This ultimately came down to a choice between two candidates: DM$_P$ and PB$_P$. Their differing approaches to the role are exemplified in the following exchange:

\[\text{PB}_P: \text{I’ll be honest, right. I don’t want to be part of any forum. Because I know it won’t work. We’ll be pissing in the wind. We’ll be sitting here for fucking hours arguing with each other about shit. And nothing will be done. All as I want to do ‘Give me a fucking answer. Do you want hot drinks or not? Yes or no’ That’s all, right. Now I’m going to try to do them a deal with the keys. End of story. I’m not interested in solving the problems of the world, I want to solve the problem of the hot tea because [JE] requested it.} \]
\[\text{JE}_P: \text{So what you are saying is then, [PB] that you do not wish to discuss it in a forum, you just want to go in there...} \]
PBp: I don’t want to be part of it. I don’t want to be part of a forum. I know we’re all here because we’re wearing the same uniform but we’re all here as individuals. And I am here as an individual individual.

JEp: Yeah but your grabbing the keys…

PBp: I’ll do what I can to help you guys, but I’m not going to…

JEp: [PBp] I’m not being funny mate, but your grabbing the keys affects us all. If you want to go in there and, you know, nick the keys, that is fine. You know, I stand behind you. But if you want to do a deal right now with them, that’s not the way we want to do things.

PBp: Yeah, but the only thing I was interested in negotiating for was a hot drink.

JEp: The majority – we want to do things as a team here.

In this context it was the collective position championed by DMp that prevailed. As a result, PBp — the “individual individual” — was marginalized and DMp was elected unopposed as the Prisoners’ representative to go ahead and negotiate with the guards.

In line with our first rule of leadership, we see here that DMp’s success derived from the fact that his candidacy was attuned, and tapped in, to what ‘we’ should do rather than what ‘I’ want to do. In other words, he based his candidacy on the group identity that he sought to represent. Moreover, we see that by this means he was also able to recruit the support and energies (i.e., the followership) of his fellow prisoners — notably from JEp who clearly articulated the desire of the Prisoners to act collectively (“as a team”). Indeed, despite the fact that DMp had been in the prison for far less time than PBp, because he was clearly ‘one of us’, he was able to assume the mantle of leadership and (for the time being) PBp was cast aside.

Championing social identity

Yet having been elected, DMp did not rest on his laurels and simply bask in the glory of his elevated position. Rather, he strove to advance the interests of the group in his dealings with both the Guard out-group and the Prisoner in-group. This can be seen first in the negotiations that DMp conducted with the Guards once he had been elected as formal representative of the Prisoners:

TA: We should have looked after the keys, but we got a bit too trusting and because of that one of your lads — one of your lads, as in one of your members — nicked the keys. And now you’re basically saying to us: ‘we’ll give you the keys back, if you give us something in return’.

DMp: Alright. OK. Let’s tell you our position on that: nobody has got your keys. Is that what you want? Because that’s the position that’s going to prevail if I go out of here and I say, you know, there’s no broad agreement on this. And it’ll not be the keys tomorrow, it’ll be something else.

Rather than trying to cut a deal that served his own personal interests, DMp thus strove to ensure that his actions were — and were seen to be — in the interests of the Prisoner group as a whole. Not only did this mean that he advanced “our position” rather than “my position”, but also that his actions as leader had more credibility because they were seen by the Guards as having the collective weight of the Prisoners behind them. Throughout negotiations, DMp thus
spoke confidently for his group and was able to convince the Guards of his authority. Moreover, as a consequence of the collective power that he both drew upon and advanced, despite being in a position of structural weakness, DM$_P$ prevailed and so too did the position of the Prisoners that he represented.

**Cultivating social identity**

The foregoing observations might be seen to imply that the key to successful leadership is to be fortunate enough to find oneself in a situation where the characteristics and qualities one espouses turn out to be representative of the particular groups that need to be led in any particular set of circumstances. In these terms, DM$_P$ could be seen to have succeeded because, as a former trade unionist, he was skilled at representing the interests of low-status groups in their confrontations with high-status groups that had authority over them. This experience was undoubtedly a very important element of DM$_P$’s success. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to imagine that DM$_P$ simply worked within the parameters of pre-existing category definitions. On the contrary, it is clear that he sought to consolidate and advance his leadership by cultivating new understandings of the relevant groups within the prison.

Above all, DM$_P$ needed to do this because within the prison he aspired to turn a social system that was conflict-ridden, dysfunctional and unsafe into one that was functional and safe. In other words, like a great many other leaders, he had an agenda for social and organizational change. Yet in order to achieve this change, DM$_P$ recognized that he needed to replace a system that was based on antagonism between Prisoners and Guards with one that was organized around a challenge by the participants as a whole to the experimenters. And to achieve this, DM$_P$ needed to encourage participants to see themselves in terms of a new set of categories and to imagine a world based on those new categories.

The nature of this vision was anticipated in a couple of early interactions between DM$_P$ and his cellmates, FC$_P$ and DD$_P$. First, he initiated a discussion about the clothes that they were wearing (orange singlets and baggy orange trousers) and suggested that they looked like the uniforms of local government employees. The others picked up on the analogy and extended it, suggesting that perhaps they looked like miners and other groups of workers. Next DM$_P$ raised the question of the heat in the prison and asked why people put up with it. When FC$_P$ and DD$_P$ responded that it was just part of the study which they had agreed to participate in, DM$_P$ challenged this, saying that whatever else he might have agreed to, the heat was not part of it.
Leadership as social identity management

DM_P’s vision, and the social categories around which it was organized, were then spelt out much more clearly in a conversation he had soon afterwards with a guard, TQ_G, during one of the daily work periods:

DM_P: We used to represent people in the prisons – in the catering staff and whatever — and I’ve been inside a prison but it certainly wasn’t as hot as this.
TQ_G: Yes, this is hot, it is. We, we — and as a Union man you may be thinking about the regs [regulations] on the old health and safety. We have ...
DM_P: Very much so.
TQ_G: We have, we have made that point very clear on a number of occasions — not least because we are wearing this [TQ_G indicates his guard uniform] and that mess room is an absolute sauna.
DM_P: If this was a real life situation ...
TQ_G: Yes.
DM_P: … and you were working in this condition, then you as an employee could well go to the employer and say ‘the condition is unacceptable, I’m not prepared to work in it’. Now let’s treat this as a real life situation. You and I — your group and the group I’m in — both have this problem of the heat. And if I’ve got to sleep in this, there is no way I will. And, you know, I won’t bear it. And I think collectively we should do something about it to the people who are running the experiment. Now you know in a normal, day-to-day, real life situation, that’s what would happen.
TQ_G: Well, I am most impressed with your new-found kind of angle on this, which possibly shouldn’t come as a surprise to me. But I think that is a very, very valid point you are making and I’m going to go along with it completely.

The categories, then, that DM_P was working to create, and encouraging others to embrace, were those of workers (incorporating both Prisoners and Guards) vs. management (incorporating the experimenters and the BBC) and the shared vision he was seeking to promote was of a workers’ struggle for enhanced conditions. In short, far from being bound by present conditions, the mark of DM_P’s leadership was his ability to imagine and organize towards alternative futures. This involved (a) envisioning and working towards a new form of social organization and a new set of social categories and (b) reconceptualizing the existing organization of categories as a bridge towards that new world.

Embedding social identity

Yet when it came to sustaining his leadership and promoting the democratic vision that he sought to advance, it was also apparent that a key dimension of DM’s success lay in his creation of organizational structures that served to embody his vision. In particular, this was seen in his creation of a negotiating forum in which Prisoners and Guards could come together to discuss their grievances. The origins of this are seen in the following exchange:

PB_P: What the issue is, they want the fucking keys back and all I am saying is I want to use the keys as a lever to move us forward as a group.
DM_P: Can I make a suggestion? What we should do is, we should suggest to them – and I suggested this to a couple of lads before, and the guards, and they were nodding – we should have a forum that meets once a day between us, all of us, the guards and us, and in the forum we’ll discuss the grievances we’ve got.
Elaborating on points that we remarked above, there are several critical differences between DM_P’s position and that of PB_P that account for the former’s success in this context. First, in line with points made above, despite PB_P’s claims to want to ‘move us forward as a group’ his approach comes across to other Prisoners as individualistic where DM_P’s is collectivistic. This is apparent in the substance of the proposals: whereas PB_P advocates an exclusive approach based on individual acts of heroic subversion, DM_P advocates an inclusive approach in which everyone works together to advance the group position. This difference is equally apparent in the different language used by the two men: PB_P stresses “what I am saying” and “what I want” whereas DM_P refers to “what we should do”, “we should suggest to them”, “we should have a forum” and so on (Donnellon, 1996).

Most critically, though, through this particular ‘initiation of structure’ not only did DM_P propose that the Prisoners act collectively but he also worked to provide a means for them to do so. More precisely, it is clear that the forum was an identity-embedding structure since, to be effective, it needed to promote and sustain identity-based norms and values rather than be seen as an independent element. Thus, in line with our fourth rule of leadership, we see that in order for leadership to succeed, it is not just ‘any old structure’ that needs to be initiated (as previous behavioural studies have tended to suggest; e.g., Fleishman & Peters, 1962), but rather one that serves as a vehicle for collective identity. In this case, then, not only did DM_P himself represent the Prisoners’ democratic identity, but — through the forum — he also created a world in which that identity could be lived out. In this way, the rhetoric of social identity was translated into practice, and this practice played a key role in propelling the group and DM_P’s leadership forward.

Conclusion: The prejudice, practice and politics of leadership

Following Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (in press), the preceding sections summarize our exposition of a new psychology of leadership. This argues that leadership is essentially a process of social identity management — and hence that effective leadership is always identity leadership. However, in drawing our treatment of this topic to a close, there are a number of ‘big picture’ issues that we want to explore in a bit more detail. These concern the prejudice, practice, and politics of leadership.

The prejudice of leadership

As we saw at the start of this chapter, there are three aspects to ‘the prejudice of leadership’ that dominate traditional approaches to this topic. The first is the notion that leaders
are a race apart, that they are blessed with certain special qualities that are lacking in the rest of us (or at least the great majority of us) and that the success or failure of leadership comes down to whether or not the leader possesses these qualities. The second is the notion that leadership is a matter for leaders alone rather than a process that is rooted in a social relationship between leaders and followers — and framed by their membership of a social group. The third relates specifically to the explanation of group success whereby, when the group does well, leaders are given the credit even when there is little or no evidence to suggest that they have done anything special (or indeed anything at all) to bring about that success (Meindl, 1993). These three aspects of ‘the prejudice of leadership’ are generally (though not necessarily) inter-related. Moreover, they are promulgated not only in psychology but also in the broader academic literature and in society at large.

If it was not clear before, it should be obvious by now that we consider this individualistic and leader-centric understanding to be deeply flawed. In many ways, it is just plain bad: bad in the sense of being a poor explanation of leadership phenomena and bad in the sense of sustaining toxic social realities. Moreover, by dividing leaders from followers, the heroic model of leadership makes it hard for leaders and followers to work together to realize a shared vision. This is problematic because the holy grail of leadership is to mould group members into a cohesive unit, to generate collective enthusiasm, and to guide the application of that enthusiasm. Effective leadership, in short, is primarily a matter of building strong groups. Ultimately, the core failing of the heroic view is that it creates weak groups.

But in calling for the individualistic prejudices that have come to dominate the leadership landscape to be rejected, we need to be clear that it is the elitist assumptions surrounding what makes for great leadership that we reject, not the idea that leadership itself can be great. Moreover, our aim is to demystify the leadership process precisely so that we can analyze and appreciate the skills of great leaders (much as we have done through the analysis of leadership in the BBC Prison Study; Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Reicher et al., 2005). So what exactly are these?

**The practice of leadership**

In the sections above we have made a number of observations about what leaders need to do in order to be effective. In what follows we attempt to integrate these lessons into some practical lessons of leadership. This exercise reveals important points of contact with a number of models of leadership that all have important things to say — in particular those of distributed leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, inclusive leadership, and ethical leadership.
Leadership as social identity management

Nevertheless, our analysis differs fundamentally from these alternative models, not only because it is based on theory that integrates their various insights, but also because that theory sees the psychology of effective leadership to be grounded in the social identity that a leader builds and advances with followers, rather than in his or her identity as an individual. For this reason, we refer to the model of leadership that we propose as one of identity leadership. Our recommendations then centre on what we refer to as the three R’s of identity leadership: Reflecting, Representing, and Realizing.

Reflecting involves the need to get to know the group you want to lead; understanding its history, culture and identity; and working out how it relates to other groups. By way of example, we noted above how DMp deployed his skills as a leader. What we didn’t describe was how he came to be a leader. One thing that he certainly didn’t do was ‘barge in’ and try to take over or to tell people what to do from the outset. For a long time he sat in his cell, asking questions of his cellmates and listening to their answers. First he asked about the Prisoners and about the relations amongst them. Then he asked about the Guards, about their hierarchy, about power relations between them and the Prisoners. Above all, he probed to discover their sense of what was acceptable and unacceptable, their grievances and their hopes. In all this time, as he was sketching out for himself the nature of the groups in the study, he was largely silent. Only later, when he felt more confident, did he begin making proposals for action which exploited both his understanding of the aspirations of the Prisoners and the ambivalence of the Guards. And only through this understanding was he able to recruit the collective support for his ideas that was the basis for his (and their) success. The first skills of leadership, then, have to do with biding one’s time. Don’t rush to assume authority. Learn especially to listen to others before you yourself speak. Consider the lie of the land — specifically, the contours of group identity — before you act. In leadership as in much else, patience will be rewarded. This matters because it is impossible to lead a group unless one first understands the nature of the group that is to be led.

Representing involves ensuring that, as leader, both you and your proposals are seen to be consonant with, as well as the embodiment of, group beliefs, norms, values, and aspirations. This has at least three components. The first of these involves representing oneself as prototypical of the group. This can be a matter of defining what the group is, of defining one’s own self, or of defining both in order to achieve a consonance between the two. These definitions can occur on many levels and no element of what a leader does is too trivial to merit consideration. The second component has to do with developing policies, projects and proposals that instantiate the group’s identity and, at the same time, ensuring that those policies, projects and proposals are seen as the instantiation of group identity. It is precisely for this reason that it
becomes so important to have a thorough and deep understanding of group culture and group history. For this provides the resources through which one can portray new departures as a way of furthering old traditions. For example, only through a deep understanding of American history and of the nation’s foundational texts could Lincoln, in his Gettysburg address, present the policy of emancipation as nothing more than an expression of core values (Reicher et al., 2007). And later on, it was only through a deep understanding of American history and of the Gettysburg address that Martin Luther King could present the Civil Rights Movement as the realization of American values in his ‘I have a dream’ speech. The third component involves ensuring that the structure of one’s organization, party or movement can be seen as an instantiation of group identity. This is fundamental to the need for social identity to reflect social reality. For either the group’s identity must reflect the way things are, or, if not, it must at least reflect what the group can become. And here there must be correspondence between the leadership rhetoric surrounding ‘who we are’ and the reality for followers on the ground. If leaders find that these are out of register, then they must make their realignment a priority. For this alignment is essential both to the success of the group and to the authenticity and authority of their own leadership.

Realizing involves achieving group goals and creating a world for the group that reflects its identity. The most able and charismatic of leaders may be able to mobilize people by representing themselves and their policies as the embodiment of identity, and they may be able to deliver a promissory note by structuring their organization in the image of the future. But no charismatic promise and no promissory notes last forever. In the end, leaders must deliver. More specifically, they must advance the group interest in two key respects. First, they must help the group accumulate those things which it values. Second, they must work with the group to create a social world in which the group can live according to its values. In this sense, neither the leader, nor the version of identity that he or she endorses, can thrive without what we refer to as collective self-objectification (Drury & Reicher, 2005). Ultimately, this is because leadership can only thrive if the group is made to matter.

The politics of leadership

We are very aware that there is some peril associated with the foregoing recommendations. For it could be argued that we have adopted a Machiavellain stance, siding entirely with the prince (or leader) and advising him (or her) on how to learn the wiles of duping, seducing and entrapping the populace (Machiavelli, 1513/1961). In short, our position could be seen as manipulative and elitist. For all our protestations about science, aren’t we actually conspiring with the masters to subjugate the slaves?
This is an objection that we take extremely seriously — not least because it rests upon a distinction that is all too often ignored in the leadership literature, especially in the organizational field (in which notions of leadership are typically associated with unalloyed good). For there is a crucial difference between effective leadership and good leadership. Leadership is effective when it is successful in mobilizing followers and wielding the group as a powerful social force; but it is only good if the mobilization of that social force helps achieve laudable and desirable social outcomes. To use an extreme case to make the point, Hitler was undoubtedly a highly skilful and highly effective leader, but he was hardly a good leader. He mobilized the German population, but he used this mobilization as an instrument of oppression and tyranny.

Put another way, there is a world of difference between the psychology of leadership and the politics of leadership. As we have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter, the psychology of leadership hinges upon processes of social identity management — a leader’s capacity to create, co-ordinate and control a shared sense of ‘us’. In contrast, the politics of leadership centres on the content of social identity — the meaning of ‘us’, our shared beliefs, our shared values, our shared goals.

Key issues here, then, concern the way in which leaders use the power of group members and how they treat those group members. In this regard, it is important to note that one way in which our model of identity leadership differs from a range of influential alternative models (e.g., those of authentic, distributed, ethical, inclusive, and servant leadership) is that these models are all normative, in the sense that they make recommendations about the norms and practices that should inform leadership-related activity (e.g., decision-making, group governance, strategic planning). In contrast, the model of identity leadership is explanatory and suggests that the activities encouraged by these models are necessarily predicated upon logically prior decisions about the nature of the group that is to be led.

Whether leaders embrace and embed the particular practices that these models recommend therefore depends critically upon whether they work with followers to promote an understanding of social identity that is consonant with those practices. To engage in inclusive leadership, for example, one must first engage in identity leadership to ensure that inclusive practices make sense and seem appropriate. And whether this occurs itself depends on answers to two key questions. First, what is the process by which social identity is defined? Second, to what extent does the leader involve followers or else substitute for them in the process of definition?

We would go so far as to say that in answers to these questions — that is, in different relations between leaders and followers in the interpretation of identity — lies the key to different forms of political system. Moreover, by articulating a new psychology of leadership
that focuses equally on the role that leaders and followers can play within the group, our analysis also open up the possibility of a *new politics of leadership* centered on inclusive debate about what our groups stand for and where they are heading. This, we contend, is a debate in which all must play a part if any vision for democracy is to be translated into reality.
Footnote
1. $p$ denotes a Prisoner; $g$ denotes a Guard.

References


Leadership as social identity management


