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Department of Psychology

**Stronger Together: The Relationship between Identity
Leadership and Employee Well-Being in Swedish
Municipalities**

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. Given the limited empirical evidence on the relationship between the specific identity leadership dimensions (prototypicality, advancement, entrepreneurship and impresarioship) and employee well-being, the current study aimed to explore these relationships. The study was conducted with a digital questionnaire distributed to employees in Swedish municipal departments ($N = 81$). The results showed that identity leadership is positively correlated to employee well-being. More specifically, prototypicality and advancement were positively linked to employee well-being and job and career satisfaction, while impresarioship was the strongest predictor of employee well-being. Additionally, social support partially mediated the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. In conclusion, the study found that identity leadership is most effective when all its dimensions are considered collectively. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how identity leadership relates to employee well-being in Swedish organizational settings.

Keywords: Identity leadership, employee well-being, social support, social identity theory, self-categorization theory, social identity approach

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Stronger Together: The Relationship between Identity Leadership and Employee Well-Being in Swedish Municipalities

Leadership has been extensively researched over the past century as it has been viewed as a fundamental aspect of social groups (van Knippenberg, 2011; Halevy et al., 2011). Generally, no member of a social group is capable of impacting the group to a greater extent than its leader (van Knippenberg, 2011). More particularly, Yukl (2019) argued that leadership can be observed only in its influence on others, and that the answers to the questions of self-identity are central when attempting to mobilize potential followers (Steffens et al., 2014). Recent research highlights the importance of leadership behaviors that foster a sense of belonging and recognition among employees. More specifically, employees' perceptions of leaders' ability to create a shared group identity, referred to as *identity leadership*, plays a significant role in well-being (Krug et al., 2021a; Krug et al., 2021b; van Dick et al., 2021).

Recent data from the Swedish Work Environment Authority report that employees within Swedish municipalities that experience weekly appreciation from their supervisors have increased in recent years. In particular, 32% of employees in municipalities reported appreciation from their leaders, compared to 39% across the entire labor market (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2023). While these numbers indicate progress, the percentage of employees in municipalities feeling appreciated is still relatively low. This is especially relevant in the context of identity leadership, which emphasizes that leaders can foster a shared sense of belonging, trust, and group identity among followers. Leaders who demonstrate identity leadership are focused on connecting their employees to a larger collective purpose, which can manifest in actions such as offering regular recognition and validation (Haslam et al., 2020). This act of recognition, in the context of identity leadership, serves to reinforce the group's shared values and goals, making employees feel appreciated.

In recent years, research has shown that leadership plays a pivotal role in relation to various organizational outcomes. Leaders' behaviors, their leadership style, and their relationship with their employees, are evidenced to influence employee stress and employees' affective well-being (Skakon et al., 2010). Leaders who create a sense of shared identity within their teams, in other words enforce identity leadership, increase employee well-being (Krug et al., 2021a) and protect them from workplace stress and burnout effects (van Dick et al., 2021). The identity leadership theory consists of four dimensions in which leaders should

behave as “one of us” (*identity prototypicality*), “doing it for us” (*identity advancement*), “crafting a sense of us” (*identity entrepreneurship*) and “making us matter” (*identity impresarioship*). Despite the identity leadership theory and its assessment tool (*Identity Leadership Inventory*; *ILI*) being validated (van Dick et al., 2018), there is a gap of empirical research, specifically focusing on the relationship between the four dimensions and well-being. Thus, in the current study the goal is to explore leadership from this perspective, to gain insights into such complex phenomena. Additionally, research has shown that social support plays a mediating role in the relationship between job stress and well-being (Avanzi et al., 2015; Mensah, 2021). Although social support has been explored as a mediating variable in several studies, no empirical study has explored social support in the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being.

The present study examines the link between identity leadership and employee well-being, focusing on how each identity leadership dimension relates to well-being. Additionally, the mediating role of social support will be explored. Given the growing importance of workplace well-being, this research could potentially help organizations understand identity leadership and employee well-being.

The following section will include theoretical background concerning the study’s key variables. Firstly, definitions of employee well-being factors based on the Work-Related Quality of Life (Easton & van Laar, 2018) will be presented. This will be followed by the main theories (social identity theory; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; self-categorization theory; Turner & Reynolds, 2012; social identity approach; Haslam, 2012) that form identity leadership (Haslam et al., 2020). The next section will present the definition of social support. Relevant empirical evidence will also be outlined. The section continues with the procedure and aim of the current study. Lastly, results and contributions of the study will be discussed.

Background

Employee Well-Being

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various dimensions that contribute to an individual’s overall quality of life (Easton & van Laar, 2018). The framework for employee well-being in the present study will be based on the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL; Easton & van Laar, 2018), consisting of six psychosocial factors; General Well-Being (GWB), Home-Work Interface (HWI), Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS), Control

at Work (CAW), Working Conditions (WCS) and Stress at Work (SAW) which are defined below. The following definitions of the factors are based on the work of Easton and van Laar (2018). GWB is a concept consisting of psychological well-being as well as physical health and may be independent of one's work situation. However, it influences and gets influenced by factors such as work environment. HWI explains the extent to which one feels like their organization understands and tries to help with challenges outside of work. It can be linked to work-life balance and the control of when, where and how one works. This is often achieved when one feels fulfilled in both work and outside work environments. A poor work-life balance can therefore have a negative impact on one's well-being. JCS reflects the degree to which an individual is satisfied with their work prospects. It also encompasses the sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, and fulfillment experienced in the workplace. This factor is impacted by multiple aspects such as clarity of goals, role ambiguity, recognition and reward and personal development. CAW represents the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as being involved in decisions that directly affect them at work. It also reflects the extent to which one feels they can utilize their own perception of an appropriate level of control within the work environment. Therefore, the perception of control can be associated with links such as being included in the process of decision-making that directly affects them. It has been argued that control at work can strongly impact one's stress and health. WCS reflects the extent to which individuals are satisfied with the fundamental resources and security of their work environment, allowing employees to do their job effectively. SAW reflects the degree to which one perceives their work environment and demands as stressful rather than acceptable and manageable. Even though work stress can be motivational and challenging, excessive levels of stress can lead to negative outcomes such as overloading. In the present study, all the factors will be included to measure employee well-being. However, previous studies often use job and career satisfaction to measure work-related well-being (e.g., Avanzi et al., 2015; Krug et al., 2021a). Therefore, the focus will be placed on this specific factor in some of the hypotheses.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT) was originally formed in order to uncover the fundamental processes of intergroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The focus was on the questions of why groups defame other groups and what makes members believe that their group is superior to others (Haslam, 2004). In this context, a group can be defined as a

collection of people who recognize themselves as members of the same social group with similar emotional involvement, and a degree of social consensus. Social identity theory builds on the notion that an individual's identity derives from the social group that they perceive they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals usually tend to enhance their self-esteem, and according to SIT the positive self-image is maintained by comparing their group to other groups. If one's group is viewed more positively than another, then the social identity of the group is enhanced. On the other hand, if it is viewed negatively, then the individuals may try to improve the group's status, or even attempt to leave their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The importance of this theory in an organizational context is emphasized by leaders amplifying their followers' or group members' social identity, which in turn would increase the group's self-esteem (Halsam, 2004). SIT explains the process through which a group forms shared beliefs and goals, which in turn leads to group members perceiving their group as more positive. In an organization, this can energize employees to work toward common goals, which subsequently makes group members more confident in both themselves and the group as a whole (Haslam et al., 2020).

Self-categorization theory

Building on the foundations of SIT, self-categorization theory (SCT) investigates the cognitive mechanisms responsible for social identity and group behaviour in more depth (Turner, 2010). SCT posits that individuals possess both a personal identity and a social identity (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Personal identity is defined by individual and unique attributes, and social identity refers to self-definition that is based on membership of a social category (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). When individuals perceive themselves as representatives of a group, they may experience feeling less as a unique individual, which is a process called depersonalization (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). This process leads individuals to behave in accordance with the group's shared norms and values. It's important to note that SCT emphasizes that personal and social identities coexist. Depending on the context, individuals may behave in ways that either reflect their personal identity or their social identity (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). SCT can help explain how employees' organizational behaviors may depend on whether they share a social identity with their work group or not (Haslam, 2004). The self-categorization process works as a mediator between the organizational context and employees' behaviors. The process consists of individuals categorizing themselves according

to the organizational context, which includes the norms and values of a group they identify themselves with (Haslam, 2004).

Social identity approach

Emerging from SIT and SCT, the social identity approach posits that leadership does not work in a vacuum, rather, it is a social process that is entrenched in the shared group membership between leaders and members of a particular social group (Haslam, 2004). The social identity approach argues that leadership is a multi-dimensional process that focuses on the leader's abilities to create, maintain and represent a shared identity of a group (Haslam et al., 2020). Leadership is a process in which leaders convince their followers to want to contribute to the shared goals. In other words, the more the leaders create a sense of “we-ness” the more influential and trusted they become. This aligns with previous research suggesting that behaviour change in individuals requires distinguishing personal and social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By fostering a shared identity, leaders can influence group members, which reinforces the idea that leadership is rooted in social identity rather than solely individual characteristics. There are a number of aspects that contribute to leaders creating a shared identity among employees. Firstly, leaders must be perceived as representative or prototypical of the group they lead or seek to lead (identity prototypicality). They must also promote the shared interests of the group (identity advancement) as well as create a sense of cohesion and unity within the group (identity entrepreneurship). Lastly, leaders reinforce the group's shared identity by organizing activities that strengthen members' connection to the group (identity impresarioship) (Haslam et al., 2020).

Identity Leadership

Prior to the development of the identity leadership theory, research has predominantly focused on the dimension of prototypicality (Koivisto et al., 2013; Ullrich et al., 2009; Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008). However, this was considered insufficient to capture the multidimensionality of social identity and leadership, which led to the development of the theory including additional dimensions (Haslam et al., 2020). Based on the previous theories, identity leadership was developed consisting of the four dimensions: identity prototypicality, identity advancement, identity entrepreneurship and identity impresarioship. The dimensions are further explained below. Although the field has demonstrated that there is a relationship between identity leadership and employees' well-being (Krug et al., 2021a; van Dick et al., 2021), the concept is quite novel and there is still a lack of empirical studies supporting this

relationship. Based on the existing empirical evidence, it is expected that this study is expected to follow the trend of identity leadership having a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Identity Prototypicality (Being One of Us)

Identity prototypicality is often connected to the self-categorization theory (Turner, 2010) as it emphasizes the leader's similarity to, rather than uniqueness from, the group. Therefore, this dimension considers the ability of leaders to be representative of a particular group which they pursue. For example, Platow (2005) found that people were influenced by laughter of other in-group members rather than out-group members, suggesting that the leader must be accepted as being "one of us" in order to influence other group members. This example illustrates that followers may be more inclined to follow their leaders if they perceive them as being part of their group. Leaders often try to manifest the attributes that characterize their group and aim to cause this group to be distinct from any other group (Steffens et al., 2014). Moreover, the qualities of a leader are not valued due to individual qualities, but rather for qualities that define a particular group (Haslam et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that leader prototypicality is associated with follower outcomes such as perceived leader fairness (Koivisto et al., 2013) and trust in the leader (Ullrich et al., 2009; Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008). However, while these factors are known to shape leadership effectiveness (De Cremer et al., 2010; van Knippenberg, 2011), their direct link to employee well-being remains underexplored. Given that trust and fairness are associated with positive work experiences (De Cremer et al., 2010; Yang & Mossholder, 2010), it is plausible that identity prototypicality could be linked to a key employee well-being factor such as job and career satisfaction. Based on this, identity prototypicality is expected to have a positive relationship with both employee well-being and job and career satisfaction in the current study.

Identity Advancement (Doing it for Us)

Leaders who implement identity advancement promote the shared values, goals and interests of the group they are leading (Haslam & Platow, 2001). Haslam et al. (2020) emphasized the contextual nature of leadership, highlighting that a group's best interests are based on the norms and values of the group. Therefore, aspiring leaders must develop a deep understanding of the group's shared identity and values in order to adapt strategies to fit the shared identities and values. Research has found that leaders who act in the best interests of

the group, rather than their own, are more effective (van Dick et al., 2007). The identity advancement dimension involves advocating for the group and its interests when necessary, contributing to the achievement of the group's goals, and preventing obstacles that stand in the way of these goals (Haslam et al., 2011). Krug et al. (2021a) found that identity advancement was linked to reduced burnout rates, meaning that when leaders support their group's needs, employees feel less exhausted. The current study does not focus on burnout, however, it is considered to be negatively related to employee well-being. While well-being reflects positive psychological functioning and satisfaction at work (Easton & van Laar), burnout typically represents emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), indicating lower levels of well-being. Based on the definition of the dimension (Haslam et al., 2011) and the previous findings of Krug et al. (2021a), we expect that identity advancement will have a positive relationship with employee well-being and job and career satisfaction.

Identity Entrepreneurship (Crafting a Sense of Us)

Leaders must act as entrepreneurs to create a shared sense of identity among their followers and consistently foster a collective sense of "us" and "we" (Steffens & Haslam, 2013). Specifically, if members lack the shared sense of belonging in their group, the effort to mobilize them often fails (Haslam & Reicher, 2007). In other words, leaders must work to establish unity and cohesion within the group to effectively motivate and influence their followers. The importance of identity entrepreneurship is highlighted in the study by Steffens et al. (2018) which found that leaders who engage in identity entrepreneurship were associated with positive outcomes among employees. More specifically, employees reported less burnout, higher work engagement and better performance among their teams. Furthermore, according to Laguía et al. (2021), identity entrepreneurship is the strongest factor when it comes to influencing employee emotions and engagement. Based on Krug et al. (2021b), who explored the direct effect of identity entrepreneurship on well-being, entrepreneurship in formal leaders was associated with higher employee well-being. They also found weaker correlations between impresarioship, job satisfaction and loneliness. These results suggest that entrepreneurship may be more significant. Conversely, Krug et al (2021a) found that identity entrepreneurship was not a significant predictor of burnout, but it was a significant predictor for work engagement. Moreover, van Dick et al. (2021) explored how identity leadership dimensions varied across global cultural clusters. They reported that

identity entrepreneurship had a stronger influence in Anglo, Confucian Asia, and Germanic European clusters, while identity impresarioship was more impactful in Latin America, Latin Europe, and Nordic Europe.

Although there are contradicting findings, there is substantial evidence highlighting identity entrepreneurship in shaping positive employee outcomes. These mixed results could be attributed to differences in outcome measures, cultural settings, or methodological approaches. Importantly, the current study focuses on overall employee well-being, instead of burnout, which aligns more closely with studies that have found significant effects. Despite the contradicting findings, it is expected that identity entrepreneurship will be the strongest predictor of employee well-being out of all the other dimensions.

Identity Impresarioship (Making us matter)

Lastly, identity impresarioship includes that leaders are expected to deliver clear outcomes for the group by engaging in activities that enable group members to meaningfully embody their membership within the group (Steffens et al., 2014b). Previous research argues that leaders are expected to not only articulate the shared identity of the group, but also actively reinforce it through their actions (Steffens et al., 2014b). Such actions could be establishing structures, implementing practices as well as organizing events. Therefore, the group develops a sense of existence and importance both within the group, and outside the group (Haslam et al., 2020). Although Krug et al. (2021b) found a link between impresarioship and job satisfaction, the correlation was very weak. There is a lack of prior research that has specifically examined identity impresarioship. Additionally, studies that have investigated identity leadership and its dimensions have not found significant links with impresarioship alone (Krug et al., 2021a; Krug et al. 2021b; Laguía et al. 2021). Given the limited empirical evidence on impresarioship, no effect is expected for this dimension in the current study.

Social Support As a Mediator

Social support can be defined as the psychological or material resources that are provided to an individual in a social relationship. These resources either contribute to the individual's well-being, or mitigate adverse circumstances (French et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2021). A study by Mensah (2021) found that social support serves as a protective factor in maintaining both physical and psychological health. Employees experiencing low levels of workplace stress tend to benefit from a network of social support, while those experiencing

high levels of job stress found themselves lacking adequate social support to rely on. Further studies have also demonstrated social support as a mediating factor in the relationship between social identification and ill-health outcomes. However, social support was evident only when strong social identification was perceived in the group (Junker et al., 2019), which demonstrates how social support and social identification have an influential relationship.

Although social support seems to have a relationship with social identity, the relationship between social support and identity leadership has not been specifically studied. Van Dick et al. (2021) emphasize the need to investigate the specific mechanisms in the relationship between identity leadership and well-being, and suggested social support as a mediator. Due to previous findings regarding social support, we would expect that social support mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being.

The Present Study

Aim

The aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. More specifically, each dimension of identity leadership and their links to employee well-being will be examined. Additionally, the mediating role of social support will be explored. To investigate this relationship, municipal employees were recruited to report subjective perceptions of their leaders, their own well-being and the perceived social support within the organization. By focusing on these factors, the study seeks to fill gaps in the field by identifying mechanisms through which leadership behaviors relate to well-being. As the importance of workplace well-being has been emerging over the past years, this research could help organizations understand the role of identity leadership and social support within the workplace. These insights could ultimately contribute to leadership development and foster a more supportive work environment.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and previous research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Identity leadership will have a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Hypothesis 2: Identity prototypicality will have a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Hypothesis 3: Identity prototypicality will have a positive relationship with job and career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Identity advancement will have a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Hypothesis 5: Identity advancement will have a positive relationship with job and career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 6: Identity entrepreneurship will be the strongest predictor of employee well-being compared to the three other dimensions.

Hypothesis 7: Social support mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being.

Method

Participants

The recruited sample consisted of employees working in municipal departments across 9 municipalities in Sweden. The sample consisted of 81 participants, 59 women, 19 men, one non-binary and two not stating their gender. The participants' ages ranged from 26 to 64 years ($M = 45$, $SD = 10.6$), with one participant not reporting their age. All participants were employed in the public sector. Seven participants reported working less than a year, 34 reported one to five years, and 40 reported working more than five years at their current workplace. The majority had some sort of flexibility regarding working hours and location, while only seven participants reported having fixed working hours and working location. The majority of participants reported working full time, while only six participants reported part-time employment.

Design and Procedure

The present study's methodological approach is quantitative and cross-sectional, with data collected through a digital questionnaire. Sunet Survey was used to create the questionnaire, consisting of three existing and validated scales, which are explained further below. It was administered in English to keep the original wording of the scales and to avoid potential risks to their validity through translation. The sampling frame for this study included municipalities in Sweden, with 56 municipalities being contacted for participation. The recruitment process involved contacting various municipal departments via email, providing them with information about the study's objectives and methodology, along with a request to participate. The email addresses were obtained from the official websites of each

municipality. The questionnaire was distributed through a digital link via email to the departments that had agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire was open for 6 weeks, and a reminder to complete the questionnaire was sent through email two weeks prior to closing the questionnaire.

Materials

The questionnaire consisted of 54 questions divided into four sections. The first section included demographic variables such as age, gender, job title, work flexibility and work time arrangement. The questions were answered with multiple-choice options and free-text responses. The next three sections consisted of the different scales measuring the study's key variables; identity leadership, well-being and social support. The scales for each variable are further explained below.

Identity Leadership Inventory

Identity leadership was measured using the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI; Steffens et al., 2014b). The inventory consists of 15 items, each assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 7 = Completely), with unlabeled intermediate alternatives. The scale is grounded in the four dimensions of the identity leadership theory, with each dimension measured by three to four items. Examples of items for each dimension include; *"This leader embodies what the group stands for"* (prototypicality), *"This leader promotes the interests of members of the group"* (advancement), *"This leader makes people feel as if they are part of the same group"* (entrepreneurship) and *"This leader devises activities that bring the group together"* (impresarioship). The participants were instructed to assess to what extent the leader engages in the various behaviors and activities that will follow as statements. The instructions were directly adapted from the user guide (Steffens et al., 2013), as recommended by the authors, to ensure consistency and maintain the validity of the instrument. For the full scale and instructions, see Appendix A. The scale has demonstrated cross-cultural validity, as it was included in the ILI-Global project conducted across 20 different countries (van Dick et al., 2018). The findings provided strong support for the scale's construct, discriminant, and criterion validity. The outcome scores for the dimensions were calculated by averaging their respective items, and an overall identity leadership score was computed by averaging all 15 items. Higher scores on both the total score and subscale levels indicate stronger perceptions of identity leadership behaviors. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) in current study for the full scale was $\alpha = .97$ with each factor demonstrating the following values: $\alpha = .90$

(identity prototypicality), $\alpha = .94$ (identity advancement), $\alpha = .93$ (identity entrepreneurship), and $\alpha = .93$ (identity impresarioship).

The Work-Related Quality of Life Scale

To measure employee well-being, The Work-Related Quality of Life Scale (WRQoL; Easton & van Laar, 2018) was utilized. This scale consists of 24 items and six subscales comprising the six key factors that make up the overall quality of working life. The items were assessed by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The six key factors are: General Well-Being (GWB), Home-Work Interface (HWI), Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS), Control at Work (CAW), Working Conditions (WCS) and Stress at Work (SAW). Some examples of the statements are *“I feel well at the moment”* (GWB), *“My employer provides adequate facilities and flexibility for me to fit work in around my family life”* (HWI), *“I have a clear set of goals and aims to enable me to do my job”* (JCS), *“I feel able to voice opinions and influence changes in my area of work”* (CAW), *“My employer provides me with what I need to do my job effectively”* (WCS), *“I often feel under pressure at work”* (SAW). For the full scale and instructions, see Appendix B. Higher scores reflect greater satisfaction and a generally better quality of working life, which is considered a reliable indicator of overall well-being in occupational settings. In the current study, mean scores across all six subscales were used to assess overall well-being, while only the JCS subscale was used for job and career satisfaction. The WRQoL scale was chosen because it incorporates multiple dimensions that are commonly used in research to assess employee well-being. Its multidimensional structure allows for a comprehensive evaluation of factors known to contribute to quality of working life (Easton & van Laar, 2018), which we consider appropriate for capturing employee well-being in organizational settings. This scale has shown high internal consistency of $\alpha = .93$ with the subscale of JCS of $\alpha = .83$.

The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support

Social support was measured using a shortened version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) by Eisenberger et al. (1986). Eight items out of the 36 items were selected based on the highest factor loadings (above .80). Only eight items were selected in order to keep the full survey short and make it time-efficient for respondents. A 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree), with no labeled intermediate alternatives, was used to measure the range of agreement with each item. Examples of items

include “*The organization really cares about my well-being*” and “*Even if I did my best job possible, the organization would fail to notice*”. For the full scale and instructions, see Appendix C. The average score across the eight items was used to represent each participant’s overall level of perceived support. This scale was considered suitable for the current study as it captures key elements of perceived social support in organizational contexts. It has also been frequently used in prior research examining social support in the workplace (Jolly et al., 2021). The current study used eight items with the internal consistency demonstrating a value of $\alpha = .91$.

Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the statistical analysis program Jamovi (2.6.44). The negatively formulated questions were transformed and reversed so that all the items were similar and easier for interpretation in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were carried out to acquire means and standard deviations for all the variables. These variables included scores from the ILI, WRQoL, and SPOS. To test the normality of the data, a Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data were not normally distributed. However, Q-Q plots of the residuals, indicated that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Furthermore, as both parametric (Pearson correlation) and non-parametric (Spearman correlation) tests yielded similar results in terms of statistical significance, parametric tests were used for subsequent analyses. Although some outliers were identified, they were located close to the reference line. Therefore, this was not considered to violate the assumption of normality. To test the hypotheses, Pearson’s correlation was carried out for all of them. To test hypothesis 6, multiple regression was carried out and lastly, for hypothesis 7, a hierarchical regression was conducted. More specifically, to test the mediating role of social support in the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being, a two-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed, as outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). In Block 1, identity leadership was entered. In Block 2, social support was added to the model to assess its potential mediating effect on the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being.

A variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis was carried out to test multicollinearity among the identity leadership dimensions. VIF shows how much of the variance in a regression coefficient increases because of that variable being correlated with other variables in the model. The higher the VIF, the higher the correlations among the factors. In other

words, it becomes harder to estimate the effect of a particular variable accurately (O'Brien, 2007). The usual rule of thumb is to consider values above 10 to have high multicollinearity (O'Brien, 2007). The values of the current study ranged from 3.21 to 5.46 with entrepreneurship having the highest value. These values are within the range, allowing for the statistical analyses and drawing conclusions. Before conducting the multiple regression and mediation analyses, key assumptions such as linearity, normality, and accepted levels of multicollinearity were tested and met.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined by the Swedish Ethical Review Act, in the Law (2003:460) on Ethics of Research Involving Humans, ensuring ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Before starting the questionnaire, participants were provided with an information sheet and asked to give consent before proceeding, which included details regarding voluntary participation, the right to withdraw and the study's aim. Specific information about the municipal departments is not included in the study, and personal information such as age, gender and job title can not be traced back to any individual. The confidentiality of the collected data was ensured with the data only being used and analyzed for the purpose of the study, and will be erased after completion.

Results

In the following section, the results of the current study will be presented. Descriptive statistics will be reported first, followed by correlations and regression analyses.

Descriptive statistics

In Table 1, means and standard deviations of all variables included in this study, are reported.

Table 1

Mean (M) and standard deviations (SD) for all the variables (N =81).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Identity Leadership	5.39	1.29
Prototypicality	5.33	1.28
Advancement	5.69	1.46
Entrepreneurship	5.35	1.41
Impresarioship	5.12	1.47
Employee Well-being	3.90	.58
JCS	3.94	1.06
Social Support	4.92	.67

Note. Scale values: Identity Leadership (total and dimensions) and Social Support = 1–7; Employee Well-being and JCS (Job and Career Satisfaction) = 1–5.

The Relationship between Identity Leadership and Employee Well-Being

In Table 2, the correlations between all study variables are presented. As shown in the table, all variables were positively and significantly correlated. These findings provide support for hypotheses 1 to 5. Hypothesis 1 stating that there is a positive relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. Hypotheses 2 and 3 suggesting that identity prototypicality is positively related to employee well-being and JCS. Lastly, hypotheses 4 and 5 claiming a positive relationship between identity advancement and employee well-being and JCS.

Table 2

Correlations between Identity Leadership, Employee Well-Being, Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS) and Social Support.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Identity Leadership	—						
2. Prototypicality	.92***	—					
3. Advancement	.91***	.75***	—				
4. Entrepreneurship	.95***	.85***	.83***	—			
5. Impresarioship	.89***	.79***	.73***	.80***	—		
6. Employee Well-Being	.68***	.63***	.59***	.62***	.67***	—	
7. JCS	.67***	.64***	.59***	.62***	.62***	.88***	—
8. Social Support	.63***	.60***	.58***	.56***	.58***	.73***	.65***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Identity Leadership Dimensions as Predictors

As can be seen in Table 3, hypothesis 6 was not supported since entrepreneurship was not a significant predictor of employee well-being. Among all of the dimensions, impresarioship was the only significant predictor of employee well-being. The regression model showed a moderate fit with $R = .70$ and $R^2 = .49$, indicating that 49% of the variance in employee well-being was explained by the independent variables.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Coefficients for Employee Well-being and Identity Leadership Dimensions.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	2.28	0.21	10.89	< .001	
Prototypicality	.08	.07	1.09	.28	.18
Advancement	.05	.06	.83	.41	.13
Entrepreneurship	.02	.08	.20	.85	.04
Impresarioship	.16	.06	2.79	.01	.41**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Social Support as a Mediating Factor

The results of the hierarchical regression are presented in Table 4 and Table 5. In Block 1, identity leadership predicted employee well-being ($R = .68$). When social support was included in Block 2, the predictive strength of identity leadership decreased ($R = .36$). This suggests partial mediation, supporting hypothesis 7.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Model. Block 1, Identity Leadership and Employee Well-being.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	2.26	.20	11.11	< .001	
Identity Leadership	.30	.04	8.27	< .001	.68***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Model Block 2, Identity Leadership, Employee Well-being and Social Support.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	Stand. Estimate
Intercept	1.69	.20	8.35	< .001	
Identity Leadership	.16	.04	4.00	< .001	.36***
Social Support	.27	.05	5.55	< .001	.50***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The main objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. More specifically, the study focused on the specific dimensions of identity leadership as this focus has been overlooked in previous research. The study also investigated the role of social support as a potential mediator in this relationship. The findings of the current study provided support for all the hypotheses except for hypothesis 6, which suggested that the entrepreneurship dimension would be the strongest predictor of employee well-being. In this regard, the study fulfilled its primary objective, therefore offering both theoretical and empirical insights into how identity leadership, and its dimensions, relate to employee well-being, as well as the mediating role of social support in this relationship. Further discussion of the results, implications and limitations are presented below.

Linking Identity Leadership to Employee Well-Being

Hypothesis 1 was supported in the present study, aligning with previous findings that suggest a positive relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being (Krug et al., 2021a; van Dick et al., 2021). Van Dick et al. (2021), in a large cross-cultural study involving 28 countries, found that higher ratings of identity leadership were associated with lower levels of employee burnout. Similarly, Krug et al. (2021a) found that identity leadership significantly predicted employee well-being, further supporting this link. The current findings extend these insights to a Swedish municipal context, suggesting that leaders who effectively

foster a shared group identity may contribute to improved employee well-being. Nonetheless, this study reinforces the theoretical relevance of identity leadership and its potential role in enhancing well-being at work.

This relationship could be understood through the social identity theory that posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership. When a group views themselves as more positive, this enhances the group's self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When leaders successfully foster a shared identity, this may also enhance self-esteem, and potentially buffer against stress and burnout. Furthermore, self-categorization theory (Turner & Reynolds, 2012) suggests that when employees categorize themselves as part of a cohesive group, they adopt group norms and goals as their own, which can create a sense of purpose and reduce psychological strain. Together, these mechanisms may help explain why employees who perceive their leaders as promoting identity leadership also report higher levels of well-being. Lastly, this relationship can also be understood through the social identity approach (Haslam, 2004), which conceptualizes leadership as a process grounded in shared group membership. By embodying the group's values and promoting a sense of unity, leaders help employees feel that they belong to a meaningful collective. These theories may offer a potential explanation for the positive association between identity leadership and employee well-being observed in the present study.

How Prototypicality and Advancement Relate to Employee Well-Being and Job and Career Satisfaction

The findings from the present study supported hypotheses 2 and 3, confirming that leader prototypicality is positively associated with both employee well-being and job and career satisfaction (JCS). These results align with the theoretical framework of self-categorization theory (Turner, 2010), which emphasizes that individuals are more likely to identify with, and be influenced by, leaders who are perceived as “one of us”. As proposed by Haslam et al. (2020), prototypical leaders can enhance group cohesion and a sense of belonging, which are likely to contribute to employees' overall positive experience in the workplace. Although previous research has primarily linked leader prototypicality to constructs such as perceived fairness and trust (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; De Cremer et al., 2010), our findings extend this literature by highlighting a more direct relationship between leader prototypicality and employee well-being. The present findings therefore contribute to closing a gap in the literature by examining the direct relationship.

Furthermore, hypotheses 4 and 5 which claim that identity advancement is positively associated with both employee well-being and JCS were supported. These results are aligned with the findings of Krug et al. (2021a), who found a link between identity advancement and reduced levels of burnout. Even though burnout has not been examined in the current study, it could be related to lower levels of well-being, as it is characterized by emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Moreover, this also applies to the positive relationship between identity advancement and JCS. The results of the current study support the idea that when leaders are perceived as advocating for their team's best interests, this can potentially result in reinforcing the group's sense of cohesion and purpose. This in turn, has implications for employees experiencing greater satisfaction within their work environment, potentially improving well-being.

Exploring the Dimensions as Predictors of Employee Well-Being.

Hypothesis 6 claimed that identity entrepreneurship would be the strongest predictor of employee well-being. However, this expectation was not supported by the current results, as this relationship was insignificant. Contrary to previous findings by Steffens et al. (2018), which indicated that identity entrepreneurship was associated with positive outcomes such as lower burnout, the current study found that identity impresarioship was the strongest predictor of employee well-being. This was indicated by its significant and higher beta value ($\beta = .41$) compared to the other dimensions. These results are aligned with the study conducted by van Dick et al. (2021), who found that identity impresarioship showed stronger effects in Nordic Europe. The unexpected results may be due to the different contextual factors in the current study. The study by Steffens et al. (2018) had a sample of manual workers in a high-tech manufacturing organization in China, while the present study focused on employees in municipal departments in Sweden. This difference in organizational and cultural context may influence how leadership behaviors are perceived and which aspects are most impactful. In public sector settings, behaviors such as coordinated group activities may be more salient and recognizable to employees. In contrast, within high-tech manufacturing environments leadership behaviors that foster shared norms and a sense of unity may be more impactful. Thus, differences in organizational structure may account for the inconsistent results across the studies.

Furthermore, the present findings align with those of Krug et al. (2021a), who found that identity entrepreneurship was not a significant predictor of burnout. One possible

explanation is that merely fostering a shared identity (entrepreneurship), may not be sufficient unless it is reinforced through tangible actions (impresarioship). While entrepreneurship reflects the leader creating a sense of belonging for their group members, impresarioship involves reinforcing the shared identity through more straightforward behaviors such as arranging events. However, from the perspective of the participants, it could be easier for them to recognize and report leadership behaviors such as organizing events and activities. In contrast, it could be more difficult for participants to identify and assess more abstract leader behaviors, such as developing an understanding of group membership and identity. This could have influenced how participants report how they perceive their leaders, potentially contributing to the stronger predictive value of identity impresarioship.

Research findings are generally considered more robust when they can be replicated across different studies. While previous research has demonstrated that entrepreneurship is a significant predictor of employee outcomes such as burnout, the current study does not follow this trend. This raises the question of replicability of findings across studies. One possible explanation could be that the current study is not directly examining burnout as previous studies have done. Although burnout is associated with lower levels of well-being, they are two different constructs, which may compromise the comparability of the results. Another possible explanation for not replicating the earlier results could be due to cultural aspects. Previous studies, conducted in different countries (van Dick et al., 2021, Steffens et al., 2018, Krug et al., 2021b), have demonstrated contradictory results. Although the findings of the current study were not replicated, this is not concerning as it appears that the effects of the identity leadership dimensions may differ across countries.

The Mediating Role of Social Support

Hypothesis 7 was supported, indicating that social support partially mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. More specifically, identity leadership significantly predicted employee well-being, however, this predictive strength decreased when social support was included. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that perceived social support plays a crucial role in well-being (French et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2021; Mensah, 2021). Moreover, social support mediates the link between social identification and health outcomes, particularly when individuals strongly identify with their group (Junker et al., 2019). This aligns with the social identity approach, which posits that shared identity can foster mutual support among members (Haslam et al., 2020). Van Dick et

al. (2021) emphasized the importance of identifying mechanisms through which identity leadership contributes to employee well-being and specifically highlighted social support as a potential mediator. The current findings extend the literature by empirically demonstrating that social support may serve as a pathway through which identity leadership is positively associated with employee well-being. Since the specific relationship between identity leadership and social support has not been explored in previous studies, the current study makes a meaningful contribution by addressing this gap in the literature.

Implications

The finding that identity leadership is positively associated with employee well-being extends the limited empirical evidence that supports this relationship. While existing research has validated the theoretical foundations of identity leadership, the current study offers further empirical support, particularly in the context of municipal organizations. Identity leadership theory, although increasingly recognized, remains relatively new within the field of organizational psychology. By reinforcing the link between identity leadership and well-being, the present findings underscore the relevance of this theoretical framework and highlight its potential to contribute to leadership development practices aimed at enhancing employee outcomes. More specifically, when developing leaders, organizations should focus on all the identity leadership dimensions. This would mean that the leaders could improve in being perceived as a representative of the group (prototypicality), promoting the shared interests of the group (entrepreneurship), creating a sense of cohesion (advancement) and organizing activities that strengthen members' connection to the group (impresarioship). The current study suggests that identity leadership is most effective if all the dimensions are used together, rather than separately. However, if an organization seeks to focus on a single dimension, impresarioship may be most effective in a Swedish context within the public sector. Practices would include organizing activities that strengthen the group's cohesion.

One of the main purposes of the present study was to examine the specific dimensions of identity leadership, which has not been focused on in previous research. By analyzing each dimension separately, the findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how each dimension relates to employee outcomes. However, while impresarioship was a significant predictor of employee well-being, the insignificant results of the other dimensions indicate that they may not work as strongly in isolation. It could be argued that the power of identity leadership may be dependent upon the interplay between the dimensions. This could

also be further supported by the VIF results showing moderate levels of multicollinearity, suggesting that the dimensions share some variance and may function in combination rather than independently.

The finding that social support partially mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being presents a novel contribution to the existing literature, as this specific mediation pathway has not been explored before. This result suggests social support as an important mechanism through which identity leadership promotes employee well-being. Theoretically, this deepens the understanding of how leadership processes shape employee outcomes. Practically, organizations could prioritize strategies to enhance social support. For instance, developing leaders to recognize when social support is required, and how the support can be provided for the group members.

Limitations and Future Research

This study encompasses multiple limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the language barrier may have impacted the sample size. Since the questionnaire was administered in English and distributed to employees within Swedish municipalities, it is possible that some individuals refrained from participation due to the language. Moreover, the use of a non-native language may have introduced a risk for misinterpretation of the questions, potentially compromising the validity of the results. Secondly, the relatively small sample size of 81 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings, which poses a threat to the external validity of the study. According to VanVoorhis and Morgan (2007), a commonly accepted guideline for multiple regression analysis is to include at least 10 participants per predictor. As the present study involved four predictors, the sample size was sufficient for the analysis to be conducted. Thirdly, since the sample consisted of employees from the public sector, this limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts, such as the private sector. This further limits the external validity of the findings. Future research should address this by including a more diverse sample to broaden the applicability of the results. Furthermore, as the study was cross-sectional, this may have posed a limitation. Although the purpose of the study was to examine relationships between variables, its cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw conclusions about how these relationships may develop or change over time. Future research adopting a longitudinal design may provide more insights into causal relationships and the dynamics of these associations. Lastly, the variance inflation factor (VIF) for the entrepreneurship dimension was relatively high,

indicating a potential overlap with the other dimensions. As there is a potential issue with multicollinearity, this poses a threat to the internal validity of the findings. However, it is considered problematic when VIF values exceed 10 (O'Brien, 2007). Since the values observed in this study fall within the limit, multicollinearity is unlikely to affect the results. Furthermore, the identity leadership scale has been validated across 20 countries (van Dick et al., 2018), ensuring its cross-cultural robustness. Thus, this scale is considered to be an acceptable measure for the current study.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that identity leadership has a positive relationship with employee well-being in a Swedish municipal context, particularly when the identity leadership dimensions are considered collectively. Among the identity leadership dimensions, impresarioship was the only significant predictor of employee well-being. Moreover, prototypicality and advancement were also positively related to well-being and job and career satisfaction. The findings also claim that social support mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employee well-being. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design and focus on other organizational contexts in order to draw more generalizable conclusions. The results of the study could contribute to a better understanding and potential improvement of employee well-being, while offering a broader perspective. Furthermore, the findings may inform leadership development practices and support fostering healthier and more supportive work environments.

CRedit author statement

Simona Derfenyiová: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing. **Armita Khalighi:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing.

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Appendix

Scales

Appendix A: Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI)

Instructions: Please judge to what extent your nearest leader engages in the various behaviors and activities listed by selecting the corresponding number using the following scale. In what follows, 'the group' or 'this group' refers to the group of people that the leader has responsibility for (e.g., it may be a particular group, a team, a department, a branch, or an organization).

1. This leader embodies what the group stands for.
2. This leader is representative of members of the group.
3. This leader is a model member of the group.
4. This leader exemplifies what it means to be a member of the group.
5. This leader promotes the interests of members of the group.
6. This leader acts as a champion for the group.
7. This leader stands up for the group.
8. When this leader acts, he or she has the group's interests at heart.
9. This leader makes people feel as if they are part of the same group.
10. This leader creates a sense of cohesion within the group.
11. This leader develops an understanding of what it means to be a member of the group.
12. This leader shapes members' perceptions of the group's values and ideals.
13. This leader devises activities that bring the group together.
14. This leader arranges events that help the group function effectively.
15. This leader creates structures that are useful for group members.

Appendix B: Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL)

Instructions: This section will assess your quality of working life. Please do not take too long over each question; we want your first reaction, not a long drawn out thought process.

1. I have a clear set of goals and aims to enable me to do my job
2. I feel able to voice opinions and influence changes in my area of work
3. I have the opportunity to use my abilities at work
4. I feel well at the moment

5. My employer provides adequate facilities and flexibility for me to fit work in around my family life
6. My current working hours / patterns suit my personal circumstances
7. I often feel under pressure at work (reverse-coded)
8. When I have done a good job it is acknowledged by my line manager
9. Recently, I have been feeling unhappy and depressed (reverse-coded)
10. I am satisfied with my life
11. I am encouraged to develop new skills
12. I am involved in decisions that affect me in my own area of work
13. My employer provides me with what I need to do my job effectively
14. My line manager actively promotes flexible working hours / patterns
15. In most ways my life is close to ideal
16. I work in a safe environment
17. Generally things work out well for me
18. I am satisfied with the career opportunities available for me here
19. I often feel excessive levels of stress at work (reverse-coded)
20. I am satisfied with the training I receive in order to perform my present job
21. Recently, I have been feeling reasonably happy all things considered
22. The working conditions are satisfactory
23. I am involved in decisions that affect members of the public in my own area of work
24. I am satisfied with the overall quality of my working life

Appendix C: Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS; short version)

Instructions: Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working, please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement.

1. Help is available from the organization when I have a problem.
2. The organization really cares about my well-being.
3. The organization is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.

4. Even if I did my best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.
(Reverse-coded)
5. The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.
6. The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.
7. The organization shows little concern for me. (Reverse-coded)
8. The organization cares about my opinions.