

COACHING NEW LEADERS: A RELATIONAL PROCESS OF INTEGRATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

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The transition to a new leader role requires identity work. New leaders are likely to experience anxiety, threat, and conflict related to valued aspects of their identities. These identity challenges are particularly salient in the experiences of new leaders from minority and non-dominant groups. We address this challenge by proposing a narrative coaching framework that is practical and amenable to empirical testing. Specifically, we propose a framework of coaching principles and narrative practices that can support leaders through the identity transitions of separation, liminality, and the integration of a new leader identity. In doing so, this paper provides actionable practices for coaching new leaders as well as directions for research on coaching and leader development.

The transition to a first-time leader role requires more than just skills and knowledge. The transition requires *identity work*—the work of constructing and integrating a new leader identity with other valued identities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Sinclair, 2011). Unfortunately, many new leaders struggle to attain and integrate a leader identity. This challenge is particularly salient for new leaders who are from minority groups (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014) and in institutions with systemic discrimination (Nkomo, Bell, Roberts, Joshi, & Thatcher, 2019). The challenge in this transition is evident in individuals who feel like impostors in a new leader role (Clance & Imes, 1978), who feel it necessary to hide or suppress a valued identity (Robinson, Van Esch, & Bilimoria, 2017), or who experience conflict between their leader identity and other valued identities (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). We unpack these challenges and the role of coaching to support new leaders through this process.

In taking on a leader role, individuals can draw on multiple identities to access knowledge, resources, and capabilities related to those identities and to

apply them in their role (Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). The integration of multiple identities has been found to predict successful adjustment following life changes (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009); psychological well-being (Thoits, 1983); and creative performance (Steffens, Gocłowska, Cruwys, & Galinsky, 2016). However, successfully integrating multiple identities may not often occur for new leaders and is notably challenging for women, minority, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) leaders who do not fit a dominant leader narrative or stereotype (Ely, Ibarra, Kolb, 2011; Nkomo et al., 2019; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Building on prior research, we propose a coaching framework that could support the integration of multiple identities in the transition to a new leader role.

Specifically, we examine the contested dynamics of multiple identities in the transition to a new leader role. A primary contribution of our paper is the attention to multiple identities in the context of leader development and coaching. We attend to dynamic identity tensions that occur in this transition and propose a narrative coaching framework to help new leaders navigate through them. In particular, we focus on the relational process of integrating a leader identity with other valued identities. In doing so, we emphasize the role of multiple identities and

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narrative coaching as an identity-based approach for supporting leader development.

In the sections that follow, we describe a process of leader identity development whereby an individual (1) anticipates taking on a new leader identity and feels tension due to separation from their current identity, (2) experiences the liminality of claiming (and being granted) a new leader identity, and (3) seeks to integrate across multiple identities. For each of these identity challenges facing new leaders, we propose a set of coaching principles and practices, integrated into our proposed framework of narrative coaching.

LEADER DEVELOPMENT AS IDENTITY WORK

We focus on leader development as a process of identity work. Our approach is consistent with definitions of leader development as a process of developing identities, skills, and competencies to be more effective in a leader role (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). We acknowledge the importance of skills and competencies in the leader development process, but we narrow our focus on identity work as a critical component for new leaders. Arguably, the experience of becoming a new leader is one of identity work—the work of claiming, granting, and integrating a new leader identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006).

Accordingly and aligned with the dominant thinking on the topic (Day, 2000), we view identity development in the context of leader development (i.e., a process of developing an individual leader identity) as distinct from leadership development (i.e., a process of developing a collective leadership identity). Both leader development and leadership development involve a relational process of identity development in that leadership is a relational process of influence between leader and followers (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). From an identity perspective, leadership is not limited to a set of individual characteristics. It is co-created in the process of social interaction.

Researchers have highlighted the need for a holistic approach to leader development, developing the whole person rather than focusing solely on skill acquisition (Hibbert, Beech, & Siedlok, 2017). More specifically, Hibbert et al. (2017) note that leader development needs to go beyond deficit-oriented approaches (a focus on acquiring skills and capabilities) to a focus on leader formation: the development of a person in dialogue and in the context of a community. A deficit-oriented approach is arguably a dominant model, reflected in leadership models and courses that emphasize particular traits of leaders, many of whom are selected based on

perceptions of being “extraordinary.” In contrast to such deficit-focused models, we propose a framework of leader development through narrative coaching, an approach that affirms the distinctiveness of multiple identities and the centrality of narratives in the construction of self and identity. It is a framework that does not elevate particular traits, but seeks to help people experience leadership as a natural expression of their multiple identities.

Leader Identity

Leader identity is the degree to which a person views themselves as a leader (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009; Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). More specifically, Day and Harrison (2007) define leader identity as the “sub-component of one’s identity that relates to being a leader or how one thinks of oneself as a leader” (p. 365). Accordingly, leader identity development involves the process of formulating leadership-related self-views (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) and internalizing the label *leader* as self-descriptive (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009).

Leader identity is dynamic and has been found to increase and decrease over time and in the course of a leadership role (Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). For example, in a study of military leaders, Hannah, Jennings, and Ben-Yoav Nobel (2010) found that new military officers struggled with their leader identity even after they assumed a formal leader role. A leader’s identity develops along the dimensions of strength as well as integration with other valued identities (Hammond, Clapp-Smith, & Palanski, 2007). Once held, leader identity can vary in strength over time and in response to leader development interventions, becoming weaker or stronger as new leaders make meaning of their new identity (Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017) and engage in identity work.

Although leader identity has been theorized to be a personal identity (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009), it also fits the definition of a social identity (Hogg, 2001). This duality makes sense because leader identity comprises both intra- and interpersonal components, which we discuss in greater detail below. Although distinct, leader identity is one among many identities that constitute a leader’s self-concept (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The transition to a new leader role triggers an identity development process in which individuals begin to anticipate taking on a new identity and integrating it within their existing set of valued identities.

Here, we focus on the integration of a leader identity with individuals’ other valued identities. The integration of a leader identity is a social process involving the claiming of a leader identity by a new leader

and granting of that identity by relevant others (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). For example, new leaders may seek to claim a leader identity as they assume their role; however, the leaders' peers may not grant this identity. In other words, the formal transition to a leader role does not guarantee that the new leader will internalize or integrate a leader identity (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009).

Multiple Identities in Leader Development

A person's leader identity is situated within their broader self-concept, which consists of multiple personal and social identities (e.g., African American, female, and introvert) that exist in an *intrapersonal* network of relationships with each other (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Ramarajan, 2014). Multiple identities are "two or more meanings that individuals attach to themselves as a function of their multiple social group memberships" (Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015: 5). In the domain of leader research, Lord and Brown (2001) first introduced this perspective in their theory of the working self-concept, arguing that the self is not a unitary whole. Instead, it is a shifting constellation of core and secondary self-schemas that act as a self-regulating mechanism for behaviors.

Multiple identities function as a resource for work relationships and continued identity development (Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Rothbard, 2001). In the context of leader development, a positive leader development trajectory is one toward increasing identity complexity and one that enables leaders to adapt effectively to changing environments (Day & Lance, 2004). This concept is supported by research on how identity complexity is associated with individual development and adaptive decision-making (Hannah, Balthazard, Waldman, Jennings, & Thatcher, 2013; Lord & Hall, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The process of integrating a new leader identity is a critical leadership challenge and may not occur immediately or automatically when assuming a leader role.

The emergence of a person's leader identity within a constellation of multiple identities represents a leader development challenge. We propose that a leader identity can be exclusive (separate from the leader's other identities) or inclusive (integrated with other identities), as illustrated in Figure 1. This concept builds on Ramarajan's (2014) network perspective on multiple identities, which postulates that a person's identities can be in conflict, enhanced, or integrated. We can better understand the challenge of integrating a leader identity with multiple identities using a psychodynamic perspective.

A Psychodynamic Perspective on Multiple Identities

A *psychodynamic perspective* draws attention to the interaction between intrapersonal and interpersonal systems, as well as psychological defenses that can hinder identity integration and development (Ford, 2010; Petriglieri, Ashford, Wrzesniewski, 2019; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Svalgaard, 2018), and thus, adds two important considerations to understanding multiple identities. First, identity development is not a linear process (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009), but rather one that involves gains and losses (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). As noted above, in becoming a new leader, people face the challenge of integrating a new leader identity with their other valued identities. This challenge can result in identity loss when other identities become destabilized and unraveled, a process that Nicholson and Carroll (2013) describe as "identity undoing" (p. 1226).

Second, a psychodynamic perspective recognizes that identities can be contradictory and in conflict. As Islam (2014) notes, "the creation of self-identity is itself fraught with contradictions because it means crafting a self out of materials found on the outside" (p. 12). This perspective is consistent with the narrative and post-structuralist view of identities, which considers identity development to be a state of dynamic reconstruction (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Collinson, 2006; Sinclair, 2011) driven by individual agency. In the following section, we describe these challenges and discuss the role of narrative coaching in addressing them.

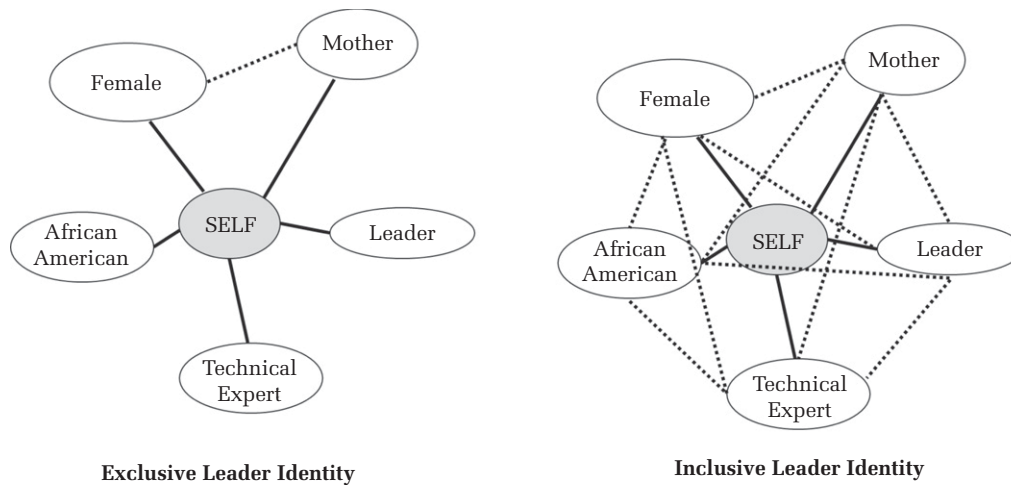
NARRATIVE COACHING AND LEADER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Narratives are the stories we tell about ourselves and the world around us (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), and thus, help us understand who we are (i.e., identity) within the context of our life story. Major role transitions—such as to a new leader role—require *narrative identity work*, or "social efforts to craft self-narratives that meet a person's identity aims" (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010: 137). In particular, taking on a new leader role requires crafting and integration of multiple identity narratives—of "Who I am," "Who I am becoming as a leader," "Who I want to be as a leader," and "Who others expect me to be."

Narrative Coaching

Narrative coaching is an approach centered on "an integrative approach to being with people and working

FIGURE 1
Network Diagram of Exclusive and Inclusive Leader Identities



with their stories” (Drake, 2015: 16). It is uniquely suited to identity work in a way that is distinct from goal- and performance-oriented approaches to coaching leaders. Whereas goal- and performance-oriented models of coaching focus on progress toward a clear objective or performance outcome, narrative coaching takes a psychodynamic and social constructionist approach (Stelter, 2014) to leader development. It involves a greater level of relationality, with emphasis on the co-construction of a leader identity.

Here, our use of the term *coach* extends to anyone who would coach a new leader, such as senior leaders, more experienced peers, professional coaches, and management educators. Broadly defining who might serve as a coach allows us to provide a flexible framework (see Table 1) that can be adapted to suit a wide range of applications for supporting new leaders. Examples of these applications include coaching provided as a supplement to formal leader development programs, as a formal ongoing one-on-one engagement, or informally by a mentor in the context of the new leader’s day-to-day work environment. In the sections that follow, we describe how narrative coaching can serve as a relational holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) for people to integrate a new leader identity.

Narrative Coaching As a Holding Environment

Winnicott (1965) first developed the concept of a holding environment to describe relational processes that support development in caregiving relationships, and it represents “a reliably available, empathetic presence” (Slochower, 1991: 709). The theory extends to research

on organizations and supportive adult relationships (Ghosh, Haynes, & Kram, 2013; Kahn, 2001; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). When new leaders undergo identity transitions at work (Kahn, 2001), they experience greater levels of anxiety and uncertainty (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). These changes and corresponding emotions can result in optimal outcomes of self-awareness and development, but also maladaptive outcomes of identity loss. For new leaders in transition, a healthy holding environment keeps them secure while equilibrium is regained (Kahn, 2001).

Van Genep (1960) proposed that identity changes occur across three distinct phases: separation, liminality, and integration. These stages reflect how individuals new to a leader role integrate a leader identity into the self, culminating in successful identity integration, or a more complex, cohesive, and authentic self. Extending Van Genep’s (1960) theory, we propose a set of complementary interpersonal processes that coaches can use to create a holding environment through each stage. These processes are based on the holding behaviors of containment, affirmation, and enabling perspective (Kahn, 2001). In Table 1, we provide a summary of this framework, which we anchor in the concept of a relational holding environment for identity development (Kahn, 2001; Ragins, Ehrhardt, Lyness, Murphy, & Capman, 2017; Winnicott, 1965). The framework applies perspectives from Winnicott’s (1965) holding environment by extending it to the interpersonal exploration of identity narratives within coaching relationships. In the sections that follow, we describe the identity challenges in each stage of the narrative coaching framework.

TABLE 1
Framework for Narrative Coaching

| IDENTITY CHALLENGE | IDENTITY TENSIONS | COACHING PRINCIPLE | COACHING PRACTICES |
|---|---|--|---|
| SEPARATION The challenge of losing an existing identity | IDENTITY ANXIETY Anticipation and uncertainty about a new leader identity and the anxiety of losing existing identities. | CONTAINMENT Provide safe and reliable support for identity exploration | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a safe space through relational attunement. Acknowledge non-verbal and emotional cues (e.g., "I notice that you were folding your arms. . .") and non-verbal affirmation (e.g., focused attention). 2. Acknowledge and work through potential feelings of identity loss and anxiety. |
| LIMINALITY The challenge of moving between identities | IDENTITY THREAT New leaders may experience tensions of claiming identities that are not mutually valued by organizational members or consistent with organizational expectations. | AFFIRMATION Affirm the new leader's valued identities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affirm a growth narrative. Acknowledge liminality as both a challenge and an opportunity for growth. 2. Buffer against identity threat by affirming multiple identities as resources for a leader role. 3. Build self-affirming capability. Help new leaders connect their personal values to their valued identities. |
| INTEGRATION The challenge of integrating a new identity | IDENTITY CONFLICT A pivoting to new identity structures. When multiple identities are perceived to be in conflict, it creates additional strain for the leader. | ENABLING PERSPECTIVE Challenge fixed assumptions of self and identity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use double-loop coaching to help new leaders become aware of their internal scripts and bracket them, so they can stand apart and attribute new meaning to their ongoing experience. 2. Enable possible leader selves by connecting the leader identity with other valued identities. |

IDENTITY-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR NARRATIVE COACHING OF NEW LEADERS

Specifically, we describe the identity challenges that people face in taking on a new leader role, associated identity tensions, and narrative coaching principles and practices to help new leaders navigate through these challenges. To illustrate our framework of narrative coaching, we consider the case of Malia, a young and competent female software engineer who is preparing to assume leadership of the Engineering Department in a social media organization.¹ In taking on a new leader role, Malia struggles with the prospect of losing her identity as a technical expert and a friend to her peers at work, as well as reconciling her identity as a leader with that of a mother and caregiver. Malia experiences conflicting thoughts and feelings in anticipating the forthcoming change. Fortunately, Malia

has a trusted senior colleague named Grace, who is the only other female leader within the company, and who has offered to coach Malia through this transition.

Identity Challenge: Separation

To begin, the psychological experience of identity separation (Van Gennep, 1960) involves the anticipation and anxiety of potentially losing an existing identity in the transition to becoming a new leader. The experience of separation represents a period during which individuals are aware of an impending change to a first-time leader role and contemplate their sense of self in light of that new role. The uncertainty that often accompanies change brings with it anticipation of what is to come and anxiety about the unknown.

Identity anxiety. The possibility of letting go of old identities and integrating a new leader identity can trigger anxiety over identity loss and uncertainty when confronting the identity challenge of separation. Identity anxiety is particularly salient for individuals who take a dichotomous view of identity: that is, assuming taking on a new identity requires the displacement of an old identity. The experience of anxiety is a result of internalized constraints and is a defensive mechanism in coping with the transition process (Bovey & Hede, 2001).

We can further understand the anxiety associated with becoming a new leader through the lens of implicit leadership theories (ILTs). ILTs represent an individual's narratives about what "leaders 'look like'" (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009: 223) and what an effective leader is (Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994; Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, 2011). ILTs are formed through experiences (Offermann & Coats, 2018) and reinforced by societal norms and organizational practices that indicate expectations about leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). If a new leader's identity does not align with their ILTs, they will likely experience a tension between their self-narrative and their beliefs about what a leader should be. The tension resulting from the discrepancy between ILTs and self-views creates anxiety in adopting a new leader identity.

For example, the anxiety that Malia experiences with her transition to a new leader role is shaped by gender differences between herself and other leaders in her organization. She is the only female in the Engineering Department, promoted to a leader role among older males. If Malia holds an ILT that leaders tend to be men, she may experience anxiety in her attempts to generate a coherent self-narrative that integrates her identities as a leader and a woman. Going beyond the intrapersonal to the interpersonal level, coworkers, who also possess masculine ILTs and therefore associate the leader role with men more so than women, may exacerbate Malia's anxiety (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Coaching is a valuable method to help new leaders like Malia navigate the developmental tension of identity anxiety, particularly through the interpersonal process of containment.

Coaching principle: Containment. Containment in the coaching relationship helps support the leader through challenges associated with separation. Coaching can serve as a container (Drake, 2008) for the exploration of identity challenges and as a secure base for emerging leaders to address emotional angst and the uncertainty of a new leader identity (Carroll & Levy, 2010). More specifically, containment occurs when

"people [who are] floundering in anxiety are caught up and secured by others—calmed, appreciated, understood, helped—until they are able to regain their equilibrium and continue on their way" (Kahn, 2001: 263). The principle of containment is about establishing a psychologically safe coaching relationship from which the new leader can express and explore their anxiety without fear of evaluation or judgment. This principle is critical to the establishment of trust in a coaching relationship, particularly in helping new leaders express and work through their identity anxieties during separation.

Consider the example of Malia. In her transition to a new leader role, she is likely anticipating how her relationships with coworkers will change, whether she will be able to perform adequately in the new role, and what aspects of her identity she may need to accentuate or downplay to be successful within her organization. As a result, she may be struggling with deeper identity narratives such as "Who am I," "Why do I want to become a leader," and "What kind of leader will I be" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). To create an environment in which Malia will feel comfortable surfacing her narratives (and underlying emotions) while engaging in the deep reflection that facilitates identity work, her coach, Grace, could consider two coaching practices: establishing a safe space through relational attunement and working through potential feelings of identity loss and anxiety.

To enable containment, coaches can *establish a safe space through relational attunement*. Relational attunement refers to the coach's awareness of the emotions that underlie a situation or narrative (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008; Stelter, 2014). The practice of relational attunement includes attending to the emotions that correspond with a person's narrative, normalizing these emotions, and expressing support and partnership. It is a practice that goes beyond speaking or the mirroring of words (e.g., "I hear you saying. . .") to acknowledge non-verbal and emotional cues (e.g., "I notice that you were folding your arms. . .") and non-verbal affirmation (e.g., focused attention, being non-judgmental). By creating a safe space for new leaders to experience and express their emotions through attunement, the coach can become a trusted and reliable resource for new leaders to assuage identity anxiety and promote feelings of preparation to cope with the change.

By practicing relational attunement, the coach helps leaders safely explore their evolving narratives along with the emotions, beliefs, and concerns that accompany them. For example, Malia's expressed anxiety with changing from a role where she identifies as a technical expert to a leader role might stem

from a fear that she may not have the required skills to be an effective leader. In this instance, her coach Grace can attune to the emotions surrounding Malia's narrative by attending to and acknowledging non-verbal cues, such as emotions that Malia expresses (explicitly and implicitly) as she talks about the transition. By attuning to Malia's narrative and corresponding emotional state, Grace can reflect these observations to Malia, thus allowing Malia to become aware of how her narrative is shaping her emotional experience and vice versa.

In addition to relational attunement, the coach can support containment by *acknowledging and working through potential feelings of identity loss and anxiety*. When coaches are relationally attuned, they are better able to perceive and mirror negative feelings back to the leader in the contained environment. By explicitly making negative emotions part of the conversation, the coach can help leaders process their emotions and provide support, rather than leaving leaders to struggle with complex emotions on their own. For example, in Malia's struggle with doubts about her potential skills as a leader, Grace may share her observations about the emotional content of Malia's narrative and ask if these observations are accurate. By simply sharing her observations, Grace invites an open discussion about Malia's negative emotions and creates the opportunity for a deeper level of narrative processing. Furthermore, research suggests that the act of labeling emotions can reduce negative affect (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007). As a result, encouraging new leaders like Malia to verbalize their emotions may facilitate coping with the negative emotions that accompany identity anxiety.

The principle of containment in the separation stage is enhanced when new leaders can express their anxiety and process their emotions in the coaching relationship. This process enables leaders to reappraise their emotion through the transition process instead of repressing them. Where the reappraisal of emotions supports identity development, repression of emotions can result in psychological harm and defensiveness (Gross, 2015). By overcoming identity anxiety, the new leader is prepared to transition the identity battleground of liminality.

Identity Challenge: Liminality

The second identity challenge in the framework is liminality. First proposed by Van Gennep (1960), the *liminal state* is a fluid in-between period where

new leaders experience the transition as a "threshold person" (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012: 1451), wrestling with a new leader identity in relation to other valued identities. Developmentally, individuals in this stage are grappling with the ambiguity (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010) and uncertainty that accompanies internalizing a new leader identity (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). The new leader is shifting to a different social identity as a leader (Hogg, 2001). Contact with members of the new social group (i.e., other leaders) and lingering feelings of belongingness to the old social group (i.e., followers, former peers) punctuates the distinction between old and new identities. Through this stage, old and new identities coexist as the new leader tries on provisional selves (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012).

Thus, liminality is an identity battleground for new leaders, and the organizational context is an identity workspace (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), which serves as the arena. Individuals experience the liminal state as an identity struggle when attributes of the old and new identities clash (Amiot, de la Sablonniere, Terry, & Smith, 2007). New leaders struggle to internalize their emerging leader identity (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009) and align it with existing identities in a way that elicits self-coherence (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). New leaders are caught between who they were before their leader role and who they are becoming.

The experience of liminality can be further understood through the metaphor of an identity "neutral zone" (Bridges, 1986), a stage when one is "neither here nor there" (p. 29). Bridges (1986) aptly points out that the challenge of transition "comes not from a difficulty with beginnings per se, but from a difficulty with endings and neutral zones" (p. 31). He argues that an identity neutral zone is a disorienting and vulnerable period for individuals, one that requires the reorganization of the individual's identity or sense of self.

The disorientation and lack of familiarity that accompany liminality can result in transformative learning outcomes as well as increased uncertainty and dissonance (Johan, Sadler-Smith, & Tribe, 2018). Uncertainty is particularly so when there are no clear rites of transition (Johan et al., 2018) or the presence of a relational holding environment (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). From a developmental perspective, this is an especially vulnerable period for identity development. Going beyond these intrapersonal challenges, new leaders must also

contend with social perceptions and expectations (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009) that may challenge their valued identities. To the extent that new leaders are unable to reconcile competing demands, they will experience identity threat.

Identity threat. Liminality can involve identity threat, the experience of having an aspect of one's personal or social identity challenged (Breakwell, 1983) or undervalued (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). In taking on a new leader role, identity threat occurs when a leader is ambivalent about one or more of their multiple identities, or when others fail to grant the new leader identity. For example, Malia may feel that her identity as a female leader is threatened and not valued in a group that expects her to conform to a more stereotypically masculine approach to leadership. Thus, she may experience identity threat.

The social dynamics of identity claiming and granting are key to understanding the experience and resolution of identity threat. DeRue and Ashford (2010) define claiming as "the actions people take to assert their identity as either a leader or a follower" (p. 631). Examples of claiming behaviors include referring to one's self as a leader, sitting at the head of the table at a meeting, taking the initiative in a group setting, and dressing the part (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Individuals new to the leader role may not automatically exhibit claiming behaviors. Failure to claim could be due to an individual's resistance to what they perceive as identity definitions imposed upon them by external others (Ramarajan, 2014) or a mismatch between their self-perceptions and conceptions about leaders, or ILTs (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Conversely, claiming may be facilitated when an individual's ILTs match their attributes (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009).

The claiming of a new leader identity is notably salient when considering the identity conflicts female leaders experience in adapting to a prototypically male-oriented leader identity model (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Mainstream assumptions hold "that white male leaders are the people in charge who create visions, make decisions, and transmit orders. . ." (Collinson & Tourish, 2015: 585). Societal norms characterize *leader* in masculine terms (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and these norms are reinforced through organizational practices that (intentionally or unintentionally) signal that women are not suited for leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). In the example of Malia, she might hesitate to claim a leader

identity as a result of identity conflicts associated with being a leader (e.g., "I can't talk about parenting with my male colleagues, they would think of me less as a leader") or from feeling insecure when enacting a leader identity (e.g., "I feel less of a leader as the only female in my group").

In the process of identity work, other organizational members make social comparisons between their ILTs and attributes of the new leader (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). They then provide cues or responses that either affirm or disaffirm a new leader's identity (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). When these responses affirm the individual's claims as a leader, identity granting occurs. Defined as "the actions that a person takes to bestow a leader or follower identity onto another person" (DeRue & Ashford, 2010: 631), *granting* can be done through actions or words and either validate or invalidate the new leader's enactment of a leader identity (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012). Examples of granting behaviors include referring to an individual as a leader and deferring to the requests of the leader in decision-making (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Granting of a leader identity represents the receipt of validation, and it is associated with a positive affective response and a greater likelihood that the new leader will continue in pursuit of their leader identity (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). Validations or invalidations through the claiming-granting process can influence how new leaders envision themselves in their new role and shape identity growth (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Invalidations may result in the undoing of a new leader's identity (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). The undoing of a leader's identity occurs when new leaders see themselves one way and others see them a different way, such as when a new leader claims a leader identity but others fail to grant it. After all, leadership means different things to different people (Collinson & Tourish, 2015). The experience of identity undoing is especially salient for new leaders who do not match the ILTs of organizational others (Offermann & Coats, 2018). In particular, women, who vary from traditional masculine leader models, may see their leadership claims go ungranted (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Consequently, Malia may question her leader identity.

The practices, behaviors, and routines comprising claiming and granting are identity in action (Glynn, 2000). Without adequate support during identity work, the undoing of a leader's identity can result in maladaptive behaviors (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013).

Alternatively, the experience of identity undoing, with the right support, can release a person's fixed assumptions of leadership, resist the pressures of conforming to an existing ILT, and open up possibilities for integrating one's valued identities with a new leader identity. Coaching behaviors related to affirmation facilitate these positive leader identity development outcomes.

Coaching principle: Affirmation. Just as liminality represents a period of vulnerability for emerging leaders, it also represents a novel learning opportunity (Johan, Sadler-Smith, & Tribe, 2018) when supported by an affirming other. The coaching principle of affirmation involves the creation of "an empathic context that affirms a person's sense of self as knowable, worthwhile, and understandable" (Kahn, 2001: 269). The claiming and granting process can cause individuals to question and doubt their identity as a leader. Affirmation is necessary to buffer against identity threat by recognizing the value of existing identities (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). It is also a critical relational principle to help new leaders through the identity undoing process.

The coaching principle of affirmation has three corresponding coaching practices. First, coaches can *affirm a growth narrative*, which acknowledges liminality as both a challenge and an opportunity for growth. By affirming the experience of identity undoing and situating it within a growth narrative, the coach frames liminality as an opportunity for self-growth and transformation (Vough & Caza, 2017).

In Malia's example, her identity as a female leader might be threatened when her male peers do not grant that identity. Her coach, Grace, can help Malia affirm a growth narrative by approaching her female-leader identity as both a strength and a developmental challenge. Instead of a discounting narrative (e.g., gender doesn't matter) or a security narrative (e.g., don't challenge the status quo), Grace can help Malia reframe her situation as an opportunity to enact her identity as a female leader and break leader stereotypes within her organization. By incorporating the best facets of both identities, Grace affirms a growth narrative and reframes identity undoing as an opportunity for identity growth. Grace could also work with Malia to identify social resources to include in her growth narrative, such as relationships with other people who affirm Malia's identity as a female leader.

In affirming a growth narrative, feedback should be pragmatically candid, accentuating the positive without bright-siding potentially problematic developmental areas that the leader needs to address

(Collinson, 2012). In addition, with the encouragement of their coach, leaders can re-tell their stories and gain affirmation by considering new elements or different perspectives, thus changing or adjusting the plot, and in turn, crafting a different narrative from the original (Stelter, 2014). For example, Grace and Malia can have a conversation on Grace's gender and age as strengths, and how they can enhance her identity as a leader. This can lead to Malia developing a *growth narrative* of being a young female leader instead of a *discounting narrative* where her gender and age is unrelated to her strengths as a leader.

Second, coaches can help *buffer against identity threat* by affirming resources and strengths in the leader's existing self-narrative. Coaches can encourage new leaders to proactively select tasks and settings where they can add value through their strengths (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). By leveraging a new leader's strengths, the coach can enact the granting process of helping new leaders construct a positive leader identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). For example, Malia may not realize that her identity as a technically competent engineer is a strong asset, which she has already claimed and her colleagues have already granted. Her coach Grace could build on that by helping Malia explore a narrative that affirms her identity as an engineer. This affirmation of strengths extends the credibility and reputation Malia developed as an expert software engineer to her new role as a leader. Furthermore, this can help Malia strengthen her influence through expertise-based power, an effective strategy for social influence (Yukl & Falbe, 1991).

Third, the coach can help *build the new leader's self-affirming capability* through modeling narrative strategies in the face of identity threat. More specifically, coaches can help new leaders connect their personal values to their valued identities. For example, Grace can ask Malia to reflect how her personal values are an expression of her different identities. Grace can encourage Malia to make this narrative more accessible by writing a personal statement: a statement that Malia can recall to in moments of self-doubt.

Identity Challenge: Integration

Last, the third challenge in our proposed framework is identity integration (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Van Gennep, 1960). At this stage, leaders engage in sensemaking about how their new identity as a leader relates to aspects of existing

identities. This stage is characterized by the challenge of establishing linkages between multiple, differentiated identities to foster a coherent sense of self (Amiot et al., 2007). More specifically, identity integration involves the incorporation of new identities and perspectives into one's existing identity, thereby expanding one's global self-concept (Aron & Aron, 1997). Successful integration requires the deep structural changes discussed by Lord and Hall (2005), wherein a new leader's identity network expands to incorporate as many elements of the self as possible, including valued personal or social identities. Malia can achieve an integrated leader identity when she successfully integrates her identity as a leader with her other valued identities of being a female, mother, technical expert, and African American, among others.

Integration results from the perception that the new leader identity can coexist with, or complement those other identities (e.g., a new leader can be both a mother and a leader who is committed to the organization), as well as the successful internalization of interactions with others (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Kets De Vries, 2006). Much like a mosaic that consists of multiple pieces that hold together to create an image, the integration of multiple identities allows individuals to bring more of themselves to the leader role.

Identity conflict. Integration is a dynamic process in which a person may experience conflicting identities over time. New leaders may experience conflict when reconciling a new leader identity with other identities that they perceive as being unrelated or incompatible. The integration process is neither linear nor guaranteed to result in resolution (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). As a result, people who take on a new leader identity may end up displacing or devaluing a prior or existing identity. For example, women who transition into a leader role may distance themselves from their identity as a mother, which they may perceive to conflict with being a leader (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012). Identity conflict creates additional strain for new leaders and, if left unresolved, may prevent them from developing an integrated leader identity.

From a psychodynamic perspective, identity conflict manifests itself in defensive behaviors as a means of coping with conflict. Examples of defensiveness include avoidance, rationalization, and idealization (Argyris, 2004). *Avoidance* occurs when a person dismisses or represses the identity conflict altogether. *Rationalization* occurs when a person seeks to justify the conflict, but not address it

directly. In other cases, shame surfaces as a defense mechanism to identity conflict. People develop adverse reactions to a particular identity when they perceive the identity to conflict with a socially valued identity (e.g., a person feeling ashamed of their minority identity as a leader). Such defense mechanisms arise as a means to protect the ego from perceived harm.

Identity integration is an ongoing process during which leaders make sense of new experiences, roles (e.g., becoming a mentor to subordinates), and changes in themselves that they must weave into their evolving self-narrative. As an example, once Malia has internalized her identity as a leader by navigating the liminality stage, she may feel a greater sense of responsibility, as a leader, for the societal impact of her business. As a result, she may experience a sense of conflict between her identities as a leader who is responsible for the technological and financial success of the business, as well as her identity as an empathetic person who cares about the well-being of others. This conflict may force her to grapple with deeper questions about her values and the societal impact she wants to have during her life. The identity-integration process is dynamic and continuous, culminating in a new internal model that is by no account a finished state (Johan, Sadler-Smith, & Tribe, 2018). New events can potentially lead to new forms of identity conflict among multiple identities.

Coaching principle: Enabling perspective. A coach can help leaders navigate the challenge of identity conflict by *enabling perspective*. This principle involves coaching new leaders to make sense of their ongoing experience. Metaphorically, it involves helping leaders step off the dance floor and observe the dance from the balcony (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The coach can provide an enabling perspective by supporting and stimulating sense-making processes such as the noticing and bracketing of underlying assumptions (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). As Weick (1979) notes, people can be unaware of the mental models, or internal scripts, that govern their behaviors or interpretation of experience. By enabling perspective, the coach helps new leaders become aware of their internal scripts and bracket them, so they stand apart and attribute new meaning to their experience. This new awareness and viewpoint helps undo rigid beliefs and expand possible leader selves in the ongoing process of leader development. Coaching practices that enable perspective include double-loop coaching and enabling possible leader selves.

Double-loop coaching (Witherspoon, 2014) is a relational practice that extends Argyris's (2002) theory of double-loop learning, which involves reflection (stepping back from a dominant narrative); reframing (considering alternative frames); and redesign (identity work). A coach can stimulate new leaders' reflection and awareness of their internal scripts through a process of inquiry and mirroring. Specifically, the coach poses questions that draw out a leader's underlying beliefs and assumptions in their evolving narrative. For example, the coach could ask questions that invite new leaders to articulate assumptions they are making that contribute to their experience of certain conflicting identities. The coach could supplement this type of inquiry by mirroring the leader's words back to the leader. Using the new leaders' own words challenges them to confront the meaning behind their narrative, thereby increasing awareness of their internal scripts. This enablement of reflection through balanced inquiry and mirroring facilitates identity integration by surfacing false or competing assumptions within the leader's mental models, giving the leader opportunity to engage in sensemaking and develop an integrated self-narrative.

Once new leaders are aware of their assumptions, the coach can then engage them in the reframing and redesigning process. From a narrative coaching standpoint, this requires re-authoring the leader's story. Re-authoring involves helping a person externalize a challenge they are facing as something independent from themselves. This process can help new leaders step outside their experience and see their story in a more objective way (Stelter & Law, 2010). Once externalized, re-authoring involves openly acknowledging the narrative script and intentionally rewriting the leader's story through the course of the coaching conversation (Stelter & Law, 2010).

Let us return to the example of Malia's internalized narrative that is preventing her from integrating her identity as a leader. Malia's negative beliefs could include internal scripts such as "My discomfort with becoming a leader means I'm not cut out for it" or "I am not a good leader right now, so I will never be one in the future." To help reframe the situation, Grace could ask Malia how she might reinterpret the situation in a way that externalizes these attributions. If Malia struggles to do so, Grace could also offer alternative interpretations of her own. For example, she might suggest that the those who selected Malia for the leader role must have faith that she is capable of being an effective leader and that every

new leader experiences a learning curve, even the greatest leaders in the world. By offering alternative narratives, Grace reframes the situation to help Malia see the possibility for different interpretations. Once Malia considers these alternative frames, Grace might encourage Malia to intentionally re-author her negative beliefs in a way that externalizes negative attributions. Malia's revised beliefs could include internal scripts such as "The transition to a leader position is a stressful process," or "Leadership skills are complex and take time and effort to develop."

For negative beliefs arising from gender-related ILTs, Grace could acknowledge the presence of gendered expectations and suggest ways for Malia to have agency over these expectations (Collinson & Tourish, 2015). Grace might offer interpretations such as "These expectations are from outside you; they do not define you or the leader that you are." This reinterpretation facilitates critical awareness of social identity dynamics and Malia's agency to author her own identity as a new leader. Through this process, Malia can intentionally rectify what she may perceive as two conflicting narratives and ultimately integrate her new identity as a leader.

Second, a coach can enable perspective and address identity conflict by *enabling possible leader selves*. *Possible selves* represent identity narratives of who we would like to become, are afraid of becoming, and feel like we ought to become (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Coaches help individuals open up possibilities for their identity as a leader through the exploration of potential self-narratives. The coach accomplishes this by encouraging new leaders to bridge relationships between previously unconnected identities and to envision possible future visions of the leader they would like to be. In addition, the coach can help new leaders integrate multiple identities by exploring different narratives about how their identities are related (or not) to their leader identity. Through this process, new leaders generate novel possibilities for effectively integrating other identities with that of being a leader.

For example, Malia's multiple identities may include being African American, a woman, a mother, a technical expert, and a leader. To help her understand the connections between these identities, her coach Grace could encourage Malia to visually map her multiple identities and talk about them as an interrelated unit. Subsequently, Grace may take Malia through a line of inquiry to stimulate reflection around the relationships among her identities. How

is her identity as a leader connected to her identity as a woman, as a mother, or as an engineer? How do each of these identities influence the leader she wants to be? Where are they in conflict? How can she bring strengths from these other identities to bear on her identity as a leader? By recognizing and embracing the interconnectedness of her multiple identities, Malia can surface new possible leader selves. This process, otherwise described in narrative psychology as *emplotment*, allows new leaders like Malia to integrate multiple identities into a coherent narrative (Sparrowe, 2005).

In addition to exploring connections between existing identities, the coach enables possible leader selves by helping the individual envision the leader they would ideally like to become. Stimulating reflection upon an ideal future not only helps new leaders connect their multiple, valued identities with possible leader selves, but also supports integration by identifying the core values that cut across new leaders' multiple identities. The coach facilitates the envisioning process by asking new leaders to articulate their ideal future state and then helping surface the values that underlie their vision.

In Malia's case, Grace might ask her to imagine 20 years into the future where everything in her career as a leader has gone as well as it possibly could. Grace could then ask Malia to share what that imagined future is like (e.g., where she is, how she spends her time, what she has accomplished, how she feels). Grace may then ask about that future from the perspective of each of Malia's valued identities (e.g., what this ideal future looks like as a mother, a technical expert, and a leader). Through this coaching conversation, Malia may see a future where all of these identities converge into a singular self-narrative, thus allowing her to integrate her multiple identities into a single possible self.

Drake (2007) notes that "the stories clients tell in coaching are windows into their identities, their patterns of authorship, and openings for new narratives about who they are and how they want to be in the world" (p. 284). Exploring and opening up new potential self-narratives during the coaching process allows coaches to help nascent leaders negotiate their new leader identity and other valued identities. Coaches can help leaders identify turning points in their narrative and sensitize them to unfolding new narratives (Drake, 2008). Through the coaching process, an integrated leader identity can emerge from new or alternative self-narratives that are socially validated and foster a sense of authenticity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

DISCUSSION

We have looked at leader development differently—not as the instrumental acquisition of skill, but as a social process of integrating a new leader identity with other valued identities. We unpack the identity challenges at each stage of a person's transition into a new leader role. We integrate psychodynamic and narrative perspectives on coaching and propose a narrative coaching framework, one that acknowledges the identity tensions at each stage of the leader development process and relational practices that can support leaders through them. Together, identity challenges and associated coaching responses provide a practical framework for coaching new leaders.

This work makes four primary contributions. First, our paper integrates psychodynamic and relational processes to provide an actionable framework for coaching new leaders—one that unpacks identity tensions at each stage of the leader development process and identifies appropriate coaching practices to support leaders through these challenges. We underscore the challenge of integrating a new leader identity for minority groups members and discuss how minorities are confronted with the challenge of identity loss and the undoing of valued identities. Departing from current perspectives that focus on the role of individual agency in navigating these challenges, we propose a relational response.

More specifically, we extend the theory of a relational holding environment (Winnicott, 1965; Kahn, 2001) to the context of leader development and provide a coaching framework to support new leaders in their identity transition. We uncover how coaching can provide a holding environment to contain the emotional anxieties associated with an identity transition, affirm valued identities in the face of identity threats, and provide enabling perspectives for the integration of multiple identities.

Our resulting framework provides specific narrative coaching practices suited to identity challenges that are salient during the transition to a first-time leader role (separation, liminality, and integration) and their corresponding identity tensions (anxiety, threat, and conflict). By extending the theory of a holding environment to leader development, we provide an alternative perspective to leader development—one that acknowledges the presence of identity anxiety, threat, and the potential loss of valued identities. More importantly, by approaching coaching as the creation of a holding environment, we highlight the outcome of developing leadership as a natural expression of multiple identities. This is

in contrast, but not in contradiction, to models that emphasize leader development as the instrumental acquisition of skills and knowledge.

Second, building on the work of Ibarra (1999) and Nicholson and Carroll (2013), we argue that leader identity development is a dynamic, evolving, and socially contested process. We describe it as a process that could include both identity gains and losses. This perspective departs from treatments of leader identity development as the mere internalization of a leader identity or approaches that focus solely on positive identity development. More importantly, where prior research has placed the onus of identity work on the leader, we unpack the role of coaching as an enabling condition in identity work. We specify how coaches can create a holding environment for identity integration and provide examples of actionable coaching practices for each stage of a new leader's identity transition.

Third, the identity processes described here extend current theories of the identity transition process. Although other leadership researchers (Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010) have described Van Gennepe's (1960) phases of separation, liminality, and integration, none fully unpacked the dynamic identity tensions within these phases. We elaborate on these nuanced tensions and their consequence in each phase of a new leader's transition. For example, we unpack how taking on a new leader role can result in increased identity anxiety, defensiveness, and the potential displacement of a valued identity. More specifically, we integrate Nicholson and Carroll's (2013) perspectives on "identity undoing" and describe how the experience of identity undoing, with the right support, can release a person's fixed assumptions of leadership and open up possibilities for integrating one's valued identities with a new leader identity. We describe these identity tensions as processes for coaches and new leaders to embrace and not to avoid or hasten to resolve through simple solutions.

Finally, we describe relational processes that facilitate each stage of transition. Relationships are an important mechanism for learning and identity development. Yet, current viewpoints on leader development have framed identity work as an *intra*-personal and cognitive process (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). We advance a narrative coaching framework that identifies different stages in the leader identity development process and narrative coaching principles relevant at each stage. These *inter*personal coaching processes parallel the *intra*personal identity work undertaken by

individuals before, during, and after taking on a new leader role. Our focus on relational processes in creating a holding environment describes how a coach can support identity tensions. Additionally, we propose specific coaching principles and practices to ground leaders in the critical realities of their work environment.

Practical Implications

The identity dynamics and coaching principles described here contain several implications for management education. First, we provide a framework for management educators to attend to identity tensions in leader development—an arguably important conversation for undergraduate students in business (who have yet to hold a leader role) and for MBA students who have either recently taken on a leader role or are preparing to. The tension of identity anxiety and the emotions associated with identity transitions is one that we have emphasized here. Management educators can apply the coaching principles of containment and affirmation in creating a holding environment for students as they go through similar transitions. For example, in the classroom, educators can facilitate the creation of relational holding environments through initiatives such as peer and group coaching (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008).

Second, attention to multiple identities requires a different approach to management education. The purpose of management education expands beyond the instrumental acquisition of skills to that of the ontological—How can we help students experience being and becoming leaders in a way that honors their multiple and valued identities? This question, we argue, is particularly important when working with students who are not from dominant identity groups. Where prior research has placed the onus of identity work on the leader, this paper provides principles and practices that coaches and management educators can use in coaching new leaders.

Third, we advance the role of narrative coaching as a relational practice for developing new leaders. Leaders do not develop in isolation, but do so through dialogic engagement with and within community (Hibbert et al., 2017). Accordingly, the coaching framework presented here provides a set of actionable principles for a dialogic process that is beneficial for both the leader as well as the people who seek to engage in this process. As Hibbert et al. (2017: 610) note, a dialogic process of engagement can result in an "openness to new understandings

in each encounter” and “enables access to rich resources opened up in each conversational process.” The coaching process of valuing multiple identities can also extend to other relational modalities in management education, such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1999); career communities (Parker, Arthur, & Inkson, 2004); and developmental networks (Chandler, Kram, & Yip, 2011; Ghosh, Haynes, & Kram, 2013).

Finally, management educators can extend narrative coaching principles that we propose here and examine them in other narrative-based models of learning and education. In many parts of the world and across cultures, narratives and stories are central in the communication and formation of identities. Yet, in management education, the attention to narratives has been limited to case-based and experiential learning. Management education could instead approach teaching as a process that attends to the articulation and co-construction of identity narratives. Further, the attention to narratives and narrative coaching could help foster greater levels of interpersonal empathy and establish that integration of multiple identities is a beneficial learning and developmental outcome.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper provides a coaching and leader development framework that researchers can extend and investigate empirically. More specifically, we recommend the perspective of a relational holding environment as a lens to leadership development and management education. Research on the relational holding environment can help advance an understanding of how work relationships can attend to the emotions and anxieties related to identities and role transitions. Established measures are available for research on the holding environment, including a recent measure on relational holding behaviors (Ragins et al., 2017). Further research can include the role of the relational holding environment in authentic leader development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) as well as leader coaching and its impact on follower identity (Lord & Brown, 2003).

In addition, we recommend further research on the role of multiple identities in leader development. Further research on the integration of multiple identities in a person’s transition to a leader role could help advance a fuller understanding of the content and complexities of leader identity. One approach would be to adopt the use of network analysis in the study of multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014) and

to examine identity gains and losses in the transition to a new leader role.

CONCLUSION

A fundamental challenge for leader development is the development of the whole person (Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002; Hibbert et al., 2017; Reichard & Johnson, 2011). Developing the whole person requires attention to a person’s multiple and valued identities. It also requires attention to the emotions and narratives that people tell themselves about letting go, taking on, and integrating new identities. We address this challenge by proposing a narrative coaching framework that is both practical and amenable to empirical testing. Ultimately, we describe how the integration of multiple identities is a relational process that can be intentionally supported through coaching to prevent the displacement or fragmentation of a person’s valued identities. Our approach, thus, constitutes an inclusive approach to leader identity development—an approach that affirms the whole person at work.

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