

## Investigating the Relationship between Identity-Based Leadership and Employee Engagement with Employee Core Self-Evaluation

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### Abstract

*Based on a social identity approach, present research intends to investigate the impact of identity-based leadership on employee engagement, through the mediating role of employee core-self evaluations. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the measurement model. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized model. The proposed model was supported empirically by data collected from 327 employees who work in the telecom sector of Pakistan. The result indicated that employees' core self-evaluations act as a mediator between four dimensions of identity leadership and employee engagement. Identity-based leadership also showed a direct positive relationship with employee engagement.*

### Key Words

Social Identity Approach, Identity Leadership, Core Self-Evaluations, Employee Engagement.

### Introduction

One of the biggest challenges that the business leaders and Chief Executive officers (CEOs) of organizations face today is to ensure the physical, mental and emotional presence of employees at work. It means that organization leaders want their employees to be fully engaged in their work. It is necessary for every organization to measure employee engagement at least once a year by conducting anonymous surveys where their employees feel safe to speak their minds (Welch, 2011). Though employee engagement is a highly researched construct from the last two decades, still little research has been done so far on its antecedents (Saks 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011; Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher, 2017).

The dearth of literature was found on investigating the relationship of identity leadership with employee engagement. Only a single study (Steffen et al., 2014) was reported from the literature that looked at the relationship of identity leadership with employee engagement. Thus, the present research intends to contribute to identity leadership literature by investigating how identity leadership influences employee's engagement via the mediating role of employee core self-evaluation.

The basic research framework of the study is based on a social identity approach that laid its foundation on two intertwined but distinctive theories; one is social identity theory while other is self-categorization theory (Turner, 1991; Haslam, 2001). Tajfel (1972) defined social identity in terms of individual knowledge about their belongingness to the definite group in a society to which they attach emotional significance being a member of that group. Self-categorization theory characterizes perception about one's self with different level of generalization. One concept of self is related to personal identity (unique individual) like "I & me, while another concept of self is related to group membership, that is, social identity like "we & us" (Turner, 1985). Personal identity and social identity together enable individuals to answer the question "Who am I?". The social identity approach deals with thinking of people about themselves and about the groups from which they belong. A social identity approach considers leadership as comprehensive progression emphasizing on leaders competence to signify shared or mutual sense of social identity (Turner & Haslam, 2001).

The current study intends to develop a good understanding of the mediation path that facilitates the link of identity leadership to employee engagement through employees' core self-

evaluation. Based on this strong theoretical foundation the present research intends to provide useful implications to researchers, policymakers, managers and target readers.

## **Literature Review**

Social identity approach and its influence on various organizational phenomena including various fields of leadership have been studied from past few decades (Tyler & Blader, 2000; Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Haslam et al., 2011). Social identity has been claimed to influence significant forms of group behavior. The social identity approach involves leaders influencing their followers based on shared group membership. The approach claims that the process of leadership can be made possible when followers categorize themselves and their leader with reference to shared group membership (Steffen et al., 2014). According to Turner (2005), leaders are responsible for developing a shared sense of 'us' to galvanize followers' idiosyncratic motivations and to mobilize employees' coordinated energies. A social identity approach considers leadership as part of the social identity management process focused towards management and control of "sense of us" (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg, 2011; Haslam et al., 2011). In order to bring into play a social identity approach to leadership, a new instrument named "Identity Leadership Inventory" was corroborated by Steffen et al. (2014). The rationale for devising a new instrument was to reflect on leadership dimensions concerned with the social identity process. An identity leadership inventory was devised to evaluate and assess identity leadership along with its dimensions that include identity prototypicality which is concerned with the "being one of us" approach (van Knippenberg, 2011; Steffens et al., 2014), identity advancement which relates to "Doing it for us" notion (Haslam & Platow, 2001), and identity entrepreneurship that is concerned with "crafting a sense of us" (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) and the fourth one identity impresario-ship that promotes the "Making us matter" notion (Steffens et al., 2014).

## **Identity Leadership and Employee Engagement**

Identity leadership inventory was developed and validated by Steffen et al. (2014) to effectively utilize leaders' shared identity of "us" with their respective group/team members. While taking into account representational matter in the form of perceived identity prototypicality, identity leadership also encompasses allegorical, realistic, and structural concerns in the form of identity advancement, identity entrepreneurship, and impresarioship. Steffen et al., (2014) carried out research on employees employed in the solar business of China, to examine their engagement levels at their workplace. Engagement of employees is considered as optimistic and fulfilling mind state and is considered to have aspects of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employee engagement was established in the course of social exchange theory and considered as a unique and distinct construct containing emotional, cognitive and behavioral elements that have a complementary relationship with role performance (Saks, 2006).

Employees demonstrate greater engagement when they work in the form of teams or groups and also betrothed in job crafting and enthusiastically shape their work environment (Tims, Bakker, Derks & van Rhenen, 2013). The extent to which leaders craft a follower-centered work environment, and in return followers are expected to show more engagement into their work after they perceive that their leaders conduct, promotes a "shared sense of us" (Haslam et al., 2011). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H1:** Identity leadership (perceived by employees) is likely to have a positive impact on employee engagement.

## **Leadership and Employee Core Self-evaluations**

There are several mechanisms by which leader behavior can influence followers/employees self-motivation (Tischler, Giambatista, McKeage & McCormick, 2016). Research on Leadership from a few past decades has implied that the coalition employees build up with their respective leaders is important in understanding the mode by which leadership influences self-motivation of employees (Manz & Sims, 1987). Shamir, House, & Arthur, (1993) suggested that when a leader tries to nurture self-motivation and self-efficacy of employees then they show positive workplace behavior (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Previous studies show that dynamics of leadership have positive effect on employees personal resources like for example transformational leadership, influence follower self efficacy, and self development (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir (2002), authentic leadership (which stimulates self-awareness in followers) (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumba (2005) and charismatic leadership, which encourages self-esteem and self-efficacy of followers (Shamir, House, and Arthur, 1993). These studies reflect the dynamics of leadership to have a positive effect on employees' personal resources, thus the second hypothesis is hypothesized as follows.

**H2:** Identity based leadership ((perceived by employees)) is likely to have a positive influence on Core self-evaluations of employees

### Employees Core Self-Evaluation and Employee Engagement

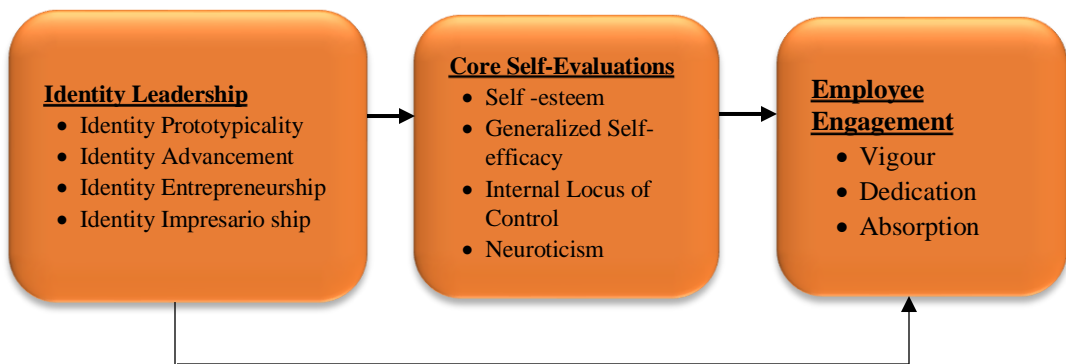
Judge, Locke, & Durham (1997) considered Core self-evaluation (CSEs) as a continuous measurement of a person's own value and proficiency. Core self-evaluation was defined in terms of individual's deep-seated evaluation of oneself (Judge & Bono, 2001). CSE has considered higher-order construct as it contains overlapping sections of four well-known variables that include self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, internal locus of control and neuroticism (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen & Tan, 2012). Rosenberg (1965) considered self-esteem as an overall assessment of self-worth. Generalized self-efficacy is personnel estimated competency to execute in a dynamic state of affairs (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001). Rotter (1966) conceptualized the locus of control in terms of an individual's certainty that the required outcome resulted from their behavior instead of resulting from outside pressures. Emotional steadiness is conceptualized in terms of an individual's predisposition to feel tranquil (Eysenck, 1990)

Four traits of CSE showed their independent association with employee engagement: for example, organizational based self-esteem was found as a predictor of employee engagement (Rotich, 2016). Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) found organizational based self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism to have a significant impact on employee engagement. Internal and external locus of control was found strongly linked with employee engagement (Myers, 2014; Paramanandam & Sangeetha, 2015; Laat, 2016). The fourth trait of CSE, neuroticism, also found associated with employee engagement (Shukla, Parul, Adhikari & Singh, 2014; Ziapour & Kianipour, 2015; Gulamali, 2017).

The reviewed literature suggested that workers with positive CSEs show greater job and life satisfaction, are highly committed and show extraordinary performance (Crawford et al., 2010). The direct relationship of CSEs with employee engagement is also evident from the literature (Karatepe et al., 2010; Karatepe & Demir, 2014). CSEs alleviate the negative impact of burnout on workers well being (Karatepe, 2011). Based on the reviewed literature following hypotheses were proposed:

**H3:** Employee core self-evaluation is likely to have a positive impact on employee engagement

**H4:** Employee core self-evaluation is likely to mediate the relationship between identity leadership and employee engagement



**Figure1:** Research Framework of the Study

### Methodology

Research methodology of the study used a deductive approach and was concerned with testing the theory that identity leadership influences employee engagement. Mediation of employee core self-evaluations between identity leadership and employee engagement was also tested in the study.

### Participants and Procedure

The cross-sectional research design was embraced in the present research and data was obtained from telecom sector of Pakistan. Employees working in Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), Telenor Pakistan,

Mobilink, and Ufone, participated as respondents in the data collection process. The survey questionnaire was employed as a data collection tool and was administered among the employees of the telecom sector. In the research, convenience sampling was used. The reason for using such sampling technique was its convenience to be carried out with only a few rules governing about how the sample is supposed to be collected. Also, convenience sampling is helpful in achieving the sample size of one’s own choice in a quick and inexpensive manner.

### **Sample Size**

The sample of 500 employees was devised for data collection from the telecom sector. 327 responses were obtained, and the effective response rate was 84.8%. Out of the 424 obtained, 97 responses were either incomplete or answers were found to be unreliable. Subsequently, data analyses were conducted on the 327 usable responses, yielding a usable response rate of 77 %. Respondent profile is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondents Demographic-Profile for Telecom Sector (N=327)

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>		<b>Sample</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender	3.20	.822	Male	186	56.9
			Female	141	43.1
Age	1.43	.496	25-29	65	19.9
			30-34	150	45.9
			35-39	93	28.4
			40 and above	19	5.8
Education	2.56	.873	Bachelor	22	6.7
			Master	305	93.3
Experience	2.33	.599	1-5years	34	10.4
			6-10years	125	38.2
			11-15years	118	36.1
			>15years	50	15.3

### **Instrument and Scales**

#### **Identity Leader Inventory Scale**

To measure identity leadership a measure developed and validated by Steffen et al. (2014) called Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) was used. ILI evaluate leaders effectiveness in sharing a social identity with its group by representing, advancing, crafting and embedding a shared sense of ‘us’. These four identities include identity prototypicality associated with “being one of us” approach, identity advancement employing “doing it for us” notion, identity entrepreneurship promoting “crafting a sense of us” impression and identity impresarios adhering “making us matter” conception. A five-point Likert scale was employed to evaluate each statement. The identity leadership inventory scale showed a reliability of 0.913.

#### **Core Self Evaluation Scale**

Core self-evaluations are a fundamental assessment of one’s worth, usefulness, and competence. CSEs contains 12 items and employed a five-point Likert scale to attain responses. The core self-evaluation scale showed a reliability of 0.957

#### **Employee Engagement Scale**

Employee engagement was evaluated with Utrecht work-engagement scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Statements of UWES were divided into subscales i.e. vigor, dedication and absorption. Totally, 9 items were included in the scale of employee engagement, among them three items measured the vigor, three statements assess dedication and three items measures absorption. Five-point Likert scale was employed to attain reply from respondents. Employee engagement scale showed the reliability of 0.944.

### **Result and their Interpretation**

Using AMOS 20. software the validity and reliability of the instrument were tested first. CFA was performed to examine the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Convergent validity of survey instrument was assessed using factor loading, variance extracted, and composite reliability (Hair et al., 1998). Each item factor loading was found above 0.5, AVE of each construct was above 0.6 and composite constructs reliability for each latent construct

was found above 0.7. The measurement model is presented in Figure 2. Result of convergent validity internal reliability is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Internal Reliability and Convergent Validity of Measuring Instrument

Items	Internal Reliability	Convergent Validity			
	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR	
ILP	.913	.838	.70	.74	
ILA		.844			
ILE		.851			
ILI		.837			
CSEs1		.957			.769
CSEs2					.757
CSEs3					.823
CSEs4					.840
CSEs5					.858
CSEs6					.828
CSEs7					.920
CSEs8					.844
CSEs9	.871				
CSEs10	.670				
CSEs11	.688				
CSEs12	.736				
EEV1	.944	.825	.66	.70	
EEV2		.786			
EEV3		.840			
EED2		.693			
EED3		.868			
EED4		.898			
EEA3		.817			
EEA4		.860			
EEA5		.705			

Fitness Indexes of measurement and structural model shows how each model is fitted to the data and are divided into three categories, i.e., absolute, incremental and parsimonious. Chi-square, RMR, GFI and RMSEA represent absolute fit measures; CFI, TLI, NFI and AGFI reflects incremental fit measure; and Normed Chi-square and Chisq/df represents parsimonious fit measures.

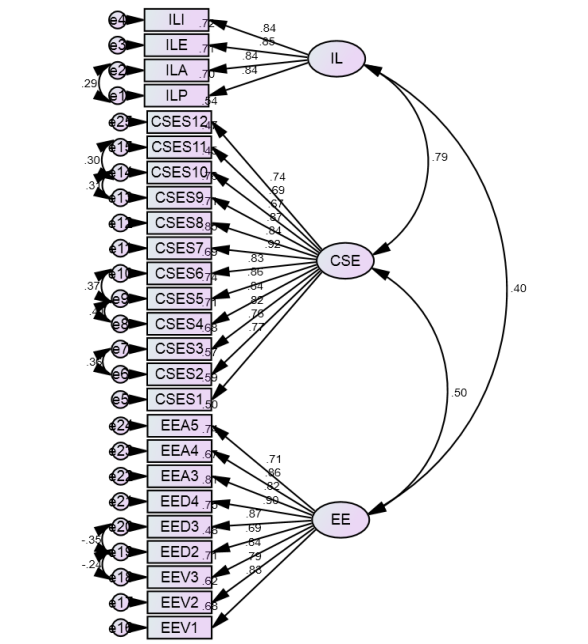


Figure 2. Measurement Model

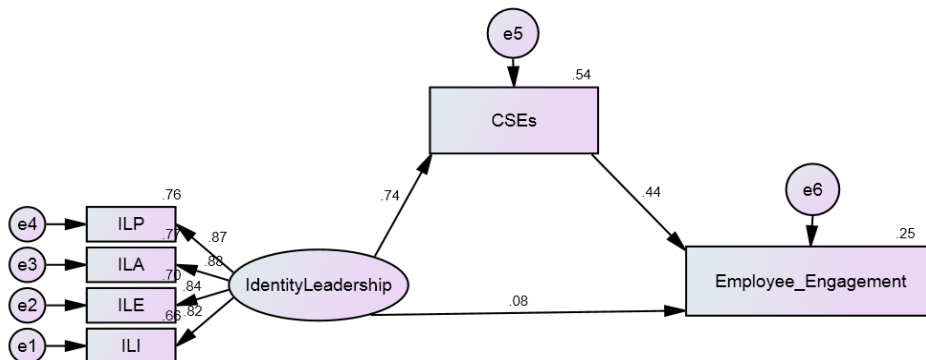


Figure 3. Structural Model

To have a good model-fit, the value of CFI and TLI ought to be above .90, root mean square error must be below .08 and  $\chi^2/df$  value needs to be below 5 (Henry and Stone 1994). Results from CFA showed good model-fit for measurement model with indices of CFI = .928, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .07, and  $\chi^2/df$  (806.359/264) = 3.05.

Discriminant validity of each construct was calculated by comparing square root of each construct AVE by inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Findings of the current study confirm discriminant validity of each construct (Table.3).

Table 3. Correlation-Matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.Employee_engagement	4.43	.566	0.81		

2. Identity Leadership	4.43	.586	0.40	0.83	
3. CSEs	4.40	.588	0.50	0.79	0.80

*\*Diagonal blocks show the square root of the AVE.*

Structural equation modeling was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the mediation model. MLE (Maximum likelihood estimation), that is considered as the most common SEM procedure was used to analyze the data. The MLE required sample size is at least 10 times the total number of instrument items (Hair et al., 2010). Consequently the present research sample size (327) was sufficient for MLE to analyze data. The model fit indices demonstrated fine model-fit connecting observed data with hypothesized structural model with a highly acceptable values of CFI = .994, TLI = .988, NFI = .987, GFI = .983, AGFI = .955, RMSEA = .055 and  $\chi^2/df = 1.97 (15.78/8)$  with p-value of 0.046. Result of structural model indices is summarized in Table 5.

**Table 4.** Model-fit Indices for Structural Model

Model-Fit Indices	Obtained Value	Recommended Cut-off Values
<b>Absolute Fit Measures</b>		
Chi-Square	15.78 ( $p = 0.046$ )	The lower, the better
RMR	.007	<0.08
RMSEA	.055	<0.08
GFI	.983	>0.9
<b>Incremental Fit Measures</b>		
AGFI	.95	>0.9
CFI	.99	>0.9
TLI	.98	>0.9
NFI	.98	>0.9
<b>Parsimonious fit</b>		
Chi Square /df	1.97 (15.78/8)	< 5

Regression analysis was performed in SPSS 20., to assess criterion and incremental validity of identity leadership. Regression Results are summarized in Table 6. Findings from analysis are consistent with the research objectives of the study. Impact of identity leadership (as perceived by employees) on employee engagement was found significant for employees working in PTCL. The association of identity leadership (as perceived by employees) and employees core self-evaluations were found significantly acceptable for employees working in PTCL. Moreover, the influence of CSEs on employee engagement was also proved empirically.

**Table 5.** Regression Analysis for Telecom Sector

	Employee Core Self-Evaluations		Employee Engagement	
	Model-1	Model-2	Model-1	Model-2
Age.	.121	.110**	.134*	.129*
Gender	.185	.080*	-.084	-.139*
Experience	-.031	.007	-.002	.018
Qualification	.060	.100**	.011	.033
Identity Leadership		.728**		.368**
$R^2$	.053	.569	.022	.167
$\Delta R^2$	.053	.569	.022	.167
F change	4.48	84.7	1.84	12.88**

*\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01*

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study calls for careful consideration regarding the relationship between employees perception about identity leadership of their superiors, employees CSEs and employee engagement. The present paper investigates the impact of identity leadership on the engagement of employees working in the telecom sector of

Pakistan by taking employees' core self-evaluation as a mediator. Findings from the present research confirm the mediation of employees' CSEs between identity leadership and employee engagement. Thus, the present research contributes to theoretical insights of social identity approach to leadership and employees' CSEs as critical antecedents of employee engagement. Furthermore, the research provides crucial insights on the role of employees' core self-evaluations as a partial mediator between the relationship of identity direction and employee engagement.

Findings from the present research provide significant and practical directions to organizational practitioners who ought to effectively deploy available resources in order to compete successfully in a dynamic marketplace. Moreover, the results of the study serve as motivation to organizational scholars who can follow the present study with newly developed concepts relating to identity leadership, CSE and other work-related outcomes.



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