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**The Significance of Occupational Identities –  
Leadership in the Chemical Industry**

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## **The Significance of Occupational Identities – Leadership in the Chemical Industry**

### **Introduction**

Competitive pressures and increasingly frequent merger and acquisition activities have had a strong impact on UK and German chemical companies over the last few decades. Many chemical companies have reacted to this by removing hierarchical layers and started to employ the principles of empowerment and teamwork. One of the consequences of this type of structural change is the wider span of control of middle and lower level managers who are facing the challenge of empowering subordinates and becoming facilitators and team leaders themselves (Hill, 2004). Within this process of change, managers have to come to terms with their leadership roles and have to develop leadership behaviour that would fit the expectations and needs of the organisation and their subordinates.

To help them with this change, it is important to investigate what they think leadership is all about and what seems to influence their leadership behaviour within an organisational context. Once we have an understanding of this, we may be able to tailor our advice better and with a greater care for the contextual pressures they may face. Given the international practice of many modern organisations it is very important to understand the influence of national origin as well and to therefore study the perceptions of managers on leadership across countries. Previous comparative research into leadership has narrowly focused on middle managers' perceptions and used a few organisational and national value dimension factors as the main explanatory factors of differences in leadership behaviour across countries (e.g. Brodbeck et al., 2000; Smith et al., 1989; Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002; Jung and Avolio, 1999). It is now time to build upon and extend these rather limited insights via more qualitative and in-depth research into leadership.

Consequently, this paper discusses the results of 105 qualitative interviews with managers and non-managers in the German and UK Chemical industry with a view to understanding the perceptions on and construction of leadership behaviours amongst the participants of this study. The analyses of the data set aim at furthering our understanding of factors that may influence the development of a specific leadership approach.

### **Contextual Influences on Leadership – the Literature**

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leadership theory and research has been dominated by the attempt to find universal or alternatively nation-specific attributes, skills and behaviour that would distinguish leaders from non-leaders and effective leaders from non-effective leaders (e.g. Stogdill, 1948 and 1974; Lewin et al., 1939, Blake and Mouton, 1964, McGregor, 1960; Fiedler, 1967, Vroom and Yetton, 1973,

House and Dessler, 1974, Hersey and Blanchard, 1984; Burns, 1978, Conger and Kanungo, 1998, House, 1977, Avolio and Bass, 2000 etc.). Leadership Theory has evolved around this fundamental purpose, becoming increasingly complex as researchers realised the significance of context and tried to account for it. The dominant leadership theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century originate in the US and have focused on formulating models that would allow researchers to categorise managers according to several pre-defined leadership styles, accounting for a narrow set of pre-defined contextual factors such as skills of subordinates, technology, span of control etc (e.g. Blake and Mouton, 1964, McGregor, 1960; Fiedler, 1967, Vroom and Yetton, 1973, House and Dessler, 1974, Hersey and Blanchard, 1984 etc.). Empirical research at national and cross-country level has therefore by and large adopted a quantitative approach and mainly utilised standardised questionnaires to find patterns of leadership style and to explain variation in leadership styles via a narrow set of contextual factors (e.g. Brodbeck et al., 2002; Smith et al., 1989; Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002; Jung and Avolio, 1999).

A recent review of empirical studies on leadership by Bryman (2004) has explicitly shown that leadership research was dominated by purely quantitative studies in the 1970s and 1980s, but has now gained in methodological diversity and especially in the increase in qualitative research starting in the late 1980s. Yet, it seems that the 'self-administered questionnaire' is still the dominant data-gathering instrument in leadership research (Bryman, 2004). In fact, Lowe and Gardner (2002) reviewed 10 years of publications in the *Leadership Quarterly* and found that 64% of all studies employed some form of questionnaire to collect data and that only one third of the studies used qualitative research methods. They also found that 81% of first authors resided in the USA whilst only 39% of the studies were based in nations outside the USA.

This quantitative approach to leadership research has important limitations and weaknesses. In a nutshell, quantitative studies ignore the interactive aspect of leadership and treat it as a purely individual attribute. They utilise a very narrow set of contextual factors to explain the existence and effectiveness of a specific leadership behaviour and therefore limit the potential of insights into the phenomenon leadership (e.g. Brodbeck et al., 2002; Smith et al., 1989; Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002). Furthermore, these quantitative studies tend to narrowly focus on middle managers, asking them for their opinion on their own leadership style, which bears the risk for bias and measuring attitudes instead of actual behaviour (Conger, 1998). Also, cross-country analyses of leadership (e.g. Brodbeck et al., 2002) tend to ignore national and linguistic differences by imposing leadership prototypes of one national origin on other countries. Using standardized questionnaires and leadership prototypes and simply translating these into different languages, means imposing a system of pre-defined answers on participants (see GLOBE project). The results from any such study will be a reflection of what the participants think would be a socially acceptable way of ranking the pre-defined leadership styles. It will not tell the researchers anything about the country-specific leadership attributes that may not be on the predefined list but may in fact be of greater importance and significance to the participants than any of the leadership prototypes that have been coined in a different country within a different linguistic and institutional context.

Further, at cross-country level research studies such as the GLOBE Project (Brodbeck et al., 2002) have explained variation in leadership mainly via national culture dimensions as first developed by Hofstede (1980). Apart from the limited insight that is gained through such a narrow focus, important criticism has been voiced (i.e. McSweeney, 2002) that calls the validity of such general cultural dimensions into question. Hofstede's underlying theoretical assumptions presume that national culture is implicit, core, systematically causal, territorially unique and shared (McSweeney, 2002). This means that a national culture is 'common' to all individuals within a given territory and indeed 'unique' to the inhabitants of this territory. Hofstede also endorses national cultural determinism (McSweeney, 2002), i.e. that the national culture is the major determinant of an individual's behaviour. These strong assumptions have been criticised heavily and it seems indeed questionable to assume that every person in one country has the same set of values that is guiding his/her behaviour. Researchers should broaden their approach and look at other national factors such as history, education and profession to try and understand some national, regional, professional and personal patterns of leadership.

## **The Study**

With a view to overcoming some of the above-mentioned limitations of previous cross-country leadership research, this study was conducted from an interpretivist approach to leadership and utilised qualitative methods that allowed the researcher to understand the world from the perspective of its participants and treat reality as a projection of individual imagination (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). While there are a variety of qualitative research methods to choose from, qualitative interviews seemed to be most useful to for this project, as they are concerned with analysing and understanding lived experience (Marshall and Rossman, 1996). The final choice of methods was made in favour of semi-structured interviews with employees with and without managerial responsibility.

The interview questions ask the participants to elaborate on their own opinion on what constitutes leadership in the organisation, what impacts on the behaviour of a leader and what kind of leadership is displayed by their superiors and generally within their company. Furthermore, the interviewees are encouraged to talk about their daily interaction with superiors, subordinates and colleagues as well as their own leadership styles. At the end of each interview, the researcher should hence be able to understand exactly what kind of job the interviewee is doing, whom he/she interacts with, what counts for that person as leadership behaviour and whether and how this is exhibited by their superior or generally within the company they work in.

In awareness of potential caveats such as interviewer reflexivity, lack of generalisability, possible self-selection bias and single respondent nature of qualitative interviews, this research has been committed to constant, careful impression management; interviewing at least two subordinates of any manager and bearing in mind a potential self-selection bias during the interviews and analysis.

## Sample

The total data set of this project consists of 105 interviews – 63 managers and 42 employees without managerial status. Managerial status is defined as either a position that other employees formally or informally report into and could hence be labelled as a position with people responsibility. 78 of the 105 interviews were conducted in a total of 9 chemical companies located in Germany and the other 27 interviews took place in 3 chemical companies located in the UK. The companies in each country vary in firm size, industry segment, firm age and are located in different regions within each country.

### *Summary of Companies in Germany*

	<b>Industry Segment</b>	<b>Organisational Departments</b>	<b>Department/ Firm Size</b>	<b>No of interviewees</b>
Firm A	Specialty Chemicals	Plant, Analytic Labs, Technical Sales	1,200 at the site	16
Firm B	Specialty Chemicals	Washing Powder Plant	99 in the plant	7
Firm C	Construction Services	Law Department, Sales and R&D	6,900 worldwide – US HQ	7
Firm D	Specialty Chemicals	Quality Control, Production	120 in Germany	8
Firm E	Construction Services	Sales and Technical Support	50 in Germany	4
Firm F	Construction Services	Sales, Quality Management, Corrosion Protection	1,600 worldwide	8
Firm G	Chemical Textiles	Chemical Plant	100 in the plant	3
Firm H	Specialty Chemicals	Chemical Plants, Controlling	5,000 in Germany – US HQ	18
Firm I	Specialty Chemicals - Distributor	Sales	8,500 worldwide	7

### *Summary of Companies in the UK*

	<b>Industry Segment</b>	<b>Organisational Departments</b>	<b>Department/ Firm Size</b>	<b>No of interviewees</b>
Firm A	Specialty Chemicals	Plant, Analytic Lab, Sales	200 at the site	10

Firm B	Specialty Chemicals	Plant, Analytic Lab, Sales	75 at the site	8
Firm C	Specialty Chemicals	HR, Technical Service, Finance	70 at the site – US HQ	9

### Data Analysis

The interviews in Germany and the UK have been conducted in several waves, lasting for two weeks and including between 12-26 interviews during each wave. Each interview was tape-recorded and supplemented by notes taken during the interview. In between each interview wave, these tapes and notes were then used to transcribe, code and analyse the interviews. Based upon the experience and analysis, the interview questions were updated to account for any gaps that have arisen and to get the full depth of possible answers to the research questions.

Znaniecki (1934) coined this reflective approach and called it the analytic induction approach. It entails a process of first identifying hypotheses on the definition or explanation of a phenomenon and then studying many cases of this phenomenon while constantly realigning the initial hypotheses with the findings from each case until both constructs coincide.

### **Findings**

The following findings represent a small sub-set of the overall data set and aim at answering the Research Question of “What are the perceived determinants of leadership behaviour?” To gather relevant data that can provide insights into what the perceptions of participants are on this, the interview included the question: “What do you think affects/influences the behaviour of a leader?” The content of the answers differed greatly and none of the influential factors mentioned by the participants were indeed mentioned in all 105 interviews. This means in strict terms that there is not one specific factor that from the participants’ point of view seems to be generally influencing the display of leadership. However, the variety of contextual influences offered by the interviewees is an interesting finding in itself and could motivate further research into these factors, which have in fact not been incorporated in existing leadership models. The first part of this section will discuss these factors as they have been expressed by the participants. The second part however will look at a potentially important factor that has arisen out of observation and comparison of the descriptions of actual leadership behaviour. It seems that there is an overriding similarity in leadership behaviour within departments, across organisations and countries.

### Opinions of the Participants

As mentioned above, there is a great variety in the answers of the participants to the question “What do you think influences the behaviour of a leader?” Nevertheless, there are a few contextual factors that have been addressed proportionately more often than others throughout the entire sample and can generally be summarised as education and training, personality and daily context.

The importance of education and training/experience was addressed in different ways by different participants. Some stressed the influence of the behaviour of previous superiors, the route taken within the firm and personal experiences in social interaction. Others referred to the influence of higher education on the behaviour of a leader and explained that a lot of senior managers and directors in the Chemical Industry tend to hold a university degree in Chemistry and have never received any personnel/HR training. Exposure to the behaviour of other leaders also seems to be very important. A sales director at the German firm A put it this way:

“Surely first of all how oneself is being led. Every leader is being led, gets goals and guidance from somebody above.”

Connected to the influence of training and experience is the influence of the daily, organisational context. The behaviour of superiors, colleagues, subordinates, general stress levels and hierarchical position seem to have a comparatively strong influence on leadership behaviour. A leader can, for example, only delegate as much control to her/his subordinates as she/he gets from above. Also, some of the managers said that their supervisor’s leadership behaviour is quite important for the success and legitimacy of their own leadership behaviour and even suggested that they would not be able to work together with someone who has a completely different leadership style than their own. The production coordinator at the German Firm B for example said about his female superior:

“If Mrs ... has a cooperative leadership style as well, then it is good, because then we can work together. If this were not the case, then we would have a big problem”.

Stress was mentioned as another factor that influences the behaviour of a leader and determines the degree to which a manager has the time to lead. Bryman et al. (1988) found similar evidence for the strong influence of the nature of a situation on the ability of a leader to be participative or directive in construction projects. Something that may be expected to be more an issue at lower hierarchical level, but that I found at almost all hierarchical levels is the conflict that managers face when they have to act like a buffer and reconcile the interests and needs from superiors (above) and subordinates (below).

Finally, most of the interviewees said that leadership behaviour is a personality issue. Hence, although the behaviour of an organisational leader may be somewhat affected by contextual circumstances, some interviewees believe that a leader will never change completely and that his/her success depends on the fit between his/her personality and the circumstances. In fact some of the managerial interviewees had quite strong views about this and said they would never change for the sake of pleasing their superiors. Others attributed personality differences to the observation of different types of leadership behaviour within their organisation:

“I think certainly personality. Different people take naturally different approaches and that personality can be born with it and developed throughout childhood. So if you do a personality profile on some people, they are typical alpha-male, got to be doing this, got to be doing that and obviously that comes out in their styles when they manage. Other people are typically more considerate, thoughtful, take a backseat maybe never force themselves or their opinions to the front.” (R&D manager, firm A, UK)

The influence of the local context on leadership has been theorised on by academics following the interpretivist or constructivist approach to leadership and the findings discussed above support this argument for a focus on the local context to understand leadership behaviour in greater depth. The participants in this project have pointed out a variety of factors that may influence the emergence of a specific leadership behaviour and these have been summarised as the influence of education and training, daily context and personality. It has further been illustrated that these factors are specified and understood on an individual basis, mean different things to different people and hence provide support for the critique of previous studies (e.g. GLOBE project; Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002; Jung and Avolio, 1999) that have concentrated on purely organisational or task characteristics and national culture as contextual influences on leadership.

### Departmental affiliation

Looking for further themes in the data concerning what may influence a leader's behaviour in an organisation, the data set was divided into national, organisational, hierarchical and departmental sub-sets. It was indeed the latter sub-sample that proved to be most interesting in terms of similarities in described leadership behaviour. Comparing the descriptions of leadership behaviour within the same departments actually reveals that there is a fair amount of consistency in leadership behaviour amongst, for example, lab managers, plant managers and sales/marketing managers both across organisations and nations. Managers of labs generally described their own behaviour as quite laissez-faire and hands-off so as to utilise the self-motivation and creativity of their subordinates. One of the lab technicians at the UK Firm B explained that lab managers do not need to be hands on or directive as most of the lab technicians find their motivation in the very work they are doing:

“If you do, and this sounds terribly sad, but if you go to university and you do chemistry and you want to do it for living that is your motivation. So most of your motivation or lets say my motivation comes from actually wanting to do it. And I wouldn't want to do anything else. So, but that is half of it, so most of your motivation comes from that really. Wanting to do a good job, being a professional, using the knowledge you've got in another application...”

Interaction with subordinates therefore tends to be described as relaxed and a few of the lab managers identified their main responsibility to be the coordination of tasks/projects and the provision of theoretical advice if at all needed.

On the other hand production or plant managers seem to be more hands-on and controlling due to the sensitivity of chemical processes that are dealt with on the shop floor. The sensitivity of chemical processes and the need for a clear structure of responsibility and control has been mentioned by several production workers and managers in this sample. Further, a fair amount of interviewees working in a plant environment have identified supportiveness as one of the crucial roles of a leader, which ties in with the need to be more hands-on. Finally, sales and marketing managers seem to need a bit of both approaches. They are generally dealing with professionals as subordinates who tend to need little control or supervision, yet cannot be too hands-off due to the close exposure to financial matters and clients. Both within the German and the UK sample, almost all managers fitted into these departmental categories.

It was generally very interesting to see that some participants seemed quite aware of departmental differences in leadership behaviour. When participants were asked whether they or their boss's leadership behaviour is similar to everyone else in the company, some participants started to reflect upon these departmental differences themselves. One sales/ marketing project manager in firm A in Germany described it this way:

“Well I would say that in production, for example, there is a very harsh tone. You can say they are all trained workers but maybe not with a university degree. They are coming lets say from lower social classes, without putting value on it, where maybe already the father shouted at the son...’you do it this way...’. (...) I think specific people need specific leadership styles.”

It should be mentioned at this point, that the Chemical Industry is quite unique in the sense that technology, organisational structures and practices are very similar across countries and the importance of highly trained staff is a characteristic of both the UK and German Chemical Industry. The comparatively less significant similarities in leadership behaviour within national sub-sets compared to departmental sub-sets may therefore be partly attributable to the dominant Industry-specific organisational structures and demands.

### **Social Identity Theory and Leadership**

Given this seeming importance of departmental affiliation and impact of educational background on the understanding of the emergence of certain leadership behaviours, it seemed necessary to go back to the literature and explore it for possible theories that may explain these findings. The literature on leadership and social identity seemed most relevant and insightful.

Identity as an approach to defining a human being is intricately linked to the human ability to be self-conscious, i.e. to have the ‘capacity to reflect upon’ themselves and to see themselves as separate entities of the social world (Collinson, 2003, p. 529) and possibly as members of socially constructed entities within this social world. Drawing upon the works of Durkheim, Collinson (2003) expresses a notion of caution not to exaggerate this perspective of autonomy through self-consciousness, but to remind ourselves of the social conditioning and pressures that may directly or indirectly influence the identity a human being adopts or develops. Building upon this, it is important to be aware of the changes in societal pressures over time and to understand the influence this has had on the changing identities of individuals and groups within these societies (Collinson, 2003). Over time, with greater freedom of expression, equity and ability to advance and learn has equally come the pressure of the ‘success ethic’, i.e. social status attached to personal advancement and careers (Collinson, 2003, p. 531). The greater the influence of this success ethic on identities, the greater will be anxieties associated with job insecurity and the de-valuing of less career oriented jobs. Self-advancement is further often seen as contradictory with manual jobs (Collinson, 2003), which may lead to ‘identity crises’ of those working in manual jobs.

At the workplace, the pressures on identities may be heightened by power structures, positions, technology etc. and may equally influence the development and display of leadership behaviour in organisations. Ellemers et al. (2004) have explored this issue from a work motivation point of view and looked more specifically at social

identity. The core assumption of social identity theory is that individuals tend to primarily think of themselves and others in terms of membership in different social groups. The 'self is considered to be context-sensitive and variable' and therefore changes depending on 'who we compare ourselves to and in what context' (Haslam et al., 2000, p. 327). This is further associated with the intra-psychological processes of social categorization (coping with information by categorising people into groups), social comparison (categories are invested with meaning), and social identification (relating information about groups to the self) (Ellemers et al., 2004). Haslam et al. (2000, p. 323) differentiate personal identity from social identity and treat these two as different levels of self. The personal identity is what makes a member of a group different from the other members of a group, whilst social identity – according to Turner (1982) – is driving one's motivation to be 'psychologically interchangeable' with members of a group that share the same social identity. Haslam et al. (2000) also argue that there is no true self, but that the different personal and social identities somebody may adopt are equally important and a consequence of social interaction and the context a person is situated in (Haslam et al., 2003). Motivation at work may therefore be intricately linked with the will to comply with the group norms and values, which may be very useful for the overall performance of a work group (Haslam et al., 2000). Indeed Haslam et al. (2003) adopt Turner's (1982) argument that it is social identity that makes organisational behaviour possible, as they suggest that a strong social identity of a group has a positive influence on group communication as members are more willing and open to communicate and will be more likely to interpret communication in similar ways as their co-members.

Ellemers et al. (2004) make the link to leadership via these intra-psychological processes and propose that followers think more positively about their leader if this leader is able to create a shared identity or alternatively shares a common identity of an existing group. Hence, leadership is suggested to be positively influenced by group membership, i.e. the leader being identified as an in-group member rather than an out-group member. Being 'prototypical' (Ellemers et al., 2004, p. 488), i.e. endorsing the shared identity, representing it clearly and promoting the distinguishing of the group towards other groups is further proposed to have a positive impact on the existence and acceptance of leadership. Haslam (2004) points out that prototypicality may be seen as a constant process of influencing the social identity – acting as entrepreneurs of identity – and being influenced by it.

Previous to Ellemers et al.'s (2004) work on social identity theory and leadership, Hogg (2001) has looked more closely at the theoretical link between the above mentioned intra-psychological processes and the creation and success of leadership. He described leadership 'as a group process generated by social categorisation and prototype-based depersonalisation processes' (Hogg, 2001, p. 184). Hogg (2001, p. 185) starts his application of social identity theory on leadership by drawing the reader's attention to the relative lack of analysis in the leadership literature on 'social cognitive processes associated with psychologically belonging to a group'. Psychological analyses had previously focused on the individual leader, personal traits and charisma, and ignored the interactive aspect and increasingly common group structure in organisations. Hogg (2001, p. 186) therefore stresses the importance of further research exploring concepts such as prototypical behaviour dynamics of a 'psychologically salient in-group' in relation to leadership. Looking at the dynamics of self categorisation and prototypicality of in-group members, Hogg

(2001) further introduces the process of depersonalisation that is triggered by social categorisation. The pressures of social categorisation lead to the negligence of the acknowledgement of individuals as unique and multifaceted and instead enforce primary attention to the matching of people according to in-group and out-group prototypes. Such a focus on prototypicality instead of individuality may be enhanced within organisations by organisational structures, hierarchy, accounting or budgeting systems etc. and may even provoke clashes between individuality and prototypicality. Combining this focus on prototypicality with a general motive of uncertainty reduction within organisations may then explain the categorisation of a workforce into salient groups that are enforced via self-categorisation and self-evaluation. According to Hoggs (2001) these continuous processes of self-categorisation and prototyping can to a certain extent explain the existence of leaders. In light of social identity theory, Hoggs (2001, p. 188) defined leaders as those who have disproportionate influence and power 'to set agenda, define identity, and mobilise people to achieve collective goals'. The ability to exert this influence and hence be recognised as a leader by followers increases with the prototypicality of the leader as it is the prototype that group members will ultimately conform to. Finally, if a leader embodies the prototype of a salient group, the other members will respect his/her decisions and influence, and view it as being in line with the values and emotions of the group.

Other articles such as Shamir et al. (1994), Van Knippenberg et al. (2004), Reicher et al. (2005) and Sveningsson et al. (2003) have explored the link between social identity, leadership and followership and all support the influence and importance of these links. Overall, it can be said that from a social identity point of view, it appears essential to study leadership as a collective and interactive phenomenon. It seems further prudent to include social identity and the affiliated concepts of self-categorisation and prototypicality into the bundle of factors that may influence the development and existence of leadership behaviour in organisations. These factors should be treated as highly dynamic as membership and prototypicality may change significantly over time.

### Social Identity of Departments

Trying to link the above-mentioned contextual influences of education/experience, daily context and personality to the similarities in leadership behaviour found within departments, it may be useful to draw upon the insights gained from the social identities literature.

Assuming that identity shapes behaviour and that the social context shapes our identity, it could be assumed that social interaction and therefore behaviour shapes identity. If this was true, we could use displayed behaviour in organisations to try to understand underlying personal and social identities. Applying this line of thought to the data of this research, means that we can link the ascribed influences of personality, education/experience and daily context to similarities of leadership behaviour within departments. A certain leadership behaviour may be indicative of a social identity that has been influenced and shaped through daily interaction and a shared educational background. Being, for example, a lab manager in a chemical company requires most of the time a degree in chemistry or even a PhD in chemistry. As discussed above, this lab manager most often faces subordinate technicians with an equal education or training background and the nature of the job requires the technicians to use their knowledge for product innovation and development. Within this specific environment, we can expect a shared identity that is shaped by creativity, respect for

knowledge and similar thinking/analytical patterns stemming from similar education backgrounds. According to social identity theory, a leader in a lab environment will be expected to be very prototypical and therefore to embrace the principles of creativity and respect for knowledge. This implies having a cooperative, hands-off approach to leading subordinates. Occupation is here the key driver of prototypicality within this social group and reinforced by the daily context of social interaction with superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

This line of thought can be easily applied to sale and marketing departments or accounting departments, where training or education within the occupational area is equally important and a prerequisite for most jobs. The elements defining prototypicality of this social group are the differentiating factors based upon the occupational affiliation. Production settings are a slightly more complicated environment, as training may sometimes be less formal and occur rather on-the-job. However, production plants are often divided into shifts and within these shifts you can again find social identities that are then shaped by the individual members and their experience together. Acceptance of a leader within this environment would then be based on his/her similarities with the members of the group. Also, individuals working in production or manual jobs in general seem to form – in Western countries – a distinct social group. The ‘success ethic’ as described by Collinson (2003) has left workers in manual jobs in an identity crisis that could possibly heighten their intra-group identification. The emergence and acceptance of leadership within this setting may ultimately be driven by emotional, experience or relationship-oriented issues rather than educational issues.

Based upon these findings and the link to social identity theory, shared education and experience could be the main drivers of prototypicality within departments, which are strengthened by daily social interaction of the members of the department. By sharing common knowledge and occupation-specific jargon, prototypicality of the department as a social group is secured and a leader is expected to behave prototypically, i.e. in line with the rules and values of this social group. Within this specific sample of 105 participants, the departmental social identities hold across organisations and countries, suggesting similar influences of education and on-the-job experiences across national borders. The behaviour of leaders seems to be primarily influenced by the social identity of the departments they work in as followers will look for prototypicality in a leader. Consequently, prototypical behaviour on the part of the leader then reinforces the social identity of the department. It is important now to investigate through further research whether this finding is generalisable beyond the boundaries of the Chemical Industry and to understand the influence of occupational and departmental identity on leadership further as such an identity is linked to self-regulation of members sharing this identity and may ultimately reduce the need for managerial intervention in departments (Haslam et al., 2000).

**Theme 1:** The interviewees have identified education/experience, daily context and personality as the main influences on the development of leadership behaviour.

**Theme 2:** Leadership behaviour seems to be strongly influenced by education and departmental affiliation.

**Theme 3:** Social identity theory can explain the similarities in leadership behaviour within departments. Shared education and experience drive prototypicality within departments and daily social interaction strengthens this.

### Concluding Remarks

The changing nature of work and organisational structures changes the role of lower and middle managers in the UK and German Chemical Industry and forces them to strengthen their leadership behaviour. To enable a broader insight into the display of and influences on such leadership behaviour, this study adopted an interpretivist approach to leadership and used qualitative interviewing as a method for data gathering. Analysing the qualitative answers given by 78 German and 27 UK participants from different organisational levels and departments led to some very interesting and thought-provoking insights.

This study has shown that leadership behaviour within this sample tended to be very similar within departments and appears to be strongly influenced by education and departmental affiliation. In fact the similarities in leadership behaviour within departments were stronger than within organisations or countries. This finding calls the claim of previous studies (i.e. GLOBE project) regarding the importance of national culture as the main explanatory factor of leadership behaviour into question. Country-origin matters, but it does not seem to matter purely from a national culture point of view. We need to broaden our analysis of leadership and look for more 'local' influences on leadership such as country and regional idiosyncrasies as well as acknowledging the similarities that may exist between behaviours of leaders from different countries. The significance of departmental/occupational similarities in this sample has illustrated the need for a more flexible approach to leadership and the connection of leadership theory to other areas of social science. The attempt has been made in this paper to explain the significance of occupational affiliation via the arguments of social identity theory. A tentative conclusion was drawn and it was suggested that shared education and experience could be the main drivers of prototypicality within departments, which are strengthened by daily social interaction of the members of the department. By sharing common knowledge and occupation-specific jargon, prototypicality of the department as a social group is secured and a leader is expected to behave prototypical, i.e. in line with the rules and values of this social group.

More theoretical and empirical research is needed to explore this finding of the influence of departmental/occupational identities on leadership behaviour and should attempt at answering the following and related questions: Are the findings a consequence of the unique characteristics of the UK and German Chemical Industry or is the importance of departmental identities reflected in other industries and/or across other countries? What is the link between departmental, personal and national identities and their influences on leadership? What is the role of differences in educational systems across countries and their impact on occupational identities?

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