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Leadership in project-based organizations: Dealing with complex and paradoxical demands

Havermans, L.A.

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CHAPTER 4

BALANCING DISINTEGRATIVE
AND INTEGRATIVE TENDENCIES:
LEADERSHIP FOR SHARED
PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

ABSTRACT

Project teams are subject to disintegrative tendencies arising from team diversity and the finite nature of projects. These disintegrative tendencies should not be eliminated, arising as they do from project team characteristics that are essential for effective project working. Rather, they should be balanced with integrative tendencies. We propose that the development of shared identification with the project can act as an important integrative tendency in projects and that leadership plays a crucial role in stimulating this shared project identification. In the current paper we study the role of leadership in enabling shared identification as an integrative tendency in project teams in two studies, one using qualitative and the other using quantitative data. In these studies we explore the integrative and disintegrative tendencies in project teams, the practices project leaders implement to stimulate shared project identification, and how such leadership practices vary in different contexts.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Balancing disintegrative tendencies with integrative tendencies

In project-based organizations most activities are organized in projects that tend to emerge in response to evolving pressures and market and technological demands (Hoegl & Weinkauff, 2005; Keegan & Turner, 2002). These projects enable them to deal with complex problems and adapting to continuously changing conditions (Bresnen et al., 2004; Sydow et al., 2004). In order to effectively deal with the complexity of environmental stimuli, the organization and its sub systems must respond with a similar complexity of responses, or in other words, approach requisite complexity (Boisot & McKelvey, 2010). An important way in which project-based organizations respond to environmental stimuli, in the form of market and technological demands, is by initiating projects (Hoegl & Weinkauff, 2005; Keegan & Turner, 2002). Characteristics of project work that are vital ingredients in allowing organizations to approach requisite complexity are diversity of project team members and the finite nature of projects.

The diversity of project team members typically derives from the combination of team members coming from a variety of professional disciplines, and can derive from multiple employing organizations and multiple work locations (Espinosa, Cummings, Wilson, & Pearce, 2003; Espinosa et al., 2007; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005; Söderlund, 2004; Sydow et al., 2004). This diversity in project team members is accompanied by a high variety of beliefs related to team members' different backgrounds. This variety of beliefs triggers adaptive tension to elaborate and adjust (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009), which can enable the project team to more fully understand the situation and identify more solutions (Weick, 1995). Diversity of project team members and the resulting variety of beliefs are vital ingredients in approaching requisite complexity as they enable increasing the complexity of responses (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Though projects vary widely in their duration, all projects are finite by nature (Sydow et al., 2004; Turner, 2006). Project team members are sometimes only involved in the project for a part of its duration or only involved in the project part time, having to spread their attention across a number of different projects and tasks. This finiteness of team members' involvement in each project, and the related time pressure, allows organizations involved not to waste resources as it pushes project team members to work efficiently (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). They can do this by quickly finding agreement on certain aspects of the work, such as overall goals, division of tasks and planning, in effect reducing the variety of beliefs on these issues. Overall, the finiteness of team members' involvement in projects and the resulting push for efficient use of resources are vital ingredients in approaching requisite

complexity by decreasing the complexity of responses.

However, while the functional, organizational, and geographic diversity that can be embedded in project teams, and the finite nature of projects, are needed to approach requisite complexity, they also constitute strong disintegrative tendencies that can pull these teams apart (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Morgan, 1981). Disintegrative tendencies are tendencies of a group that inhibit the development of shared understanding and unified group work (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Morgan, 1981). Diversity based on functional background, organizational affiliation, or geographic work location, is a disintegrative tendency as it reflects differences between project team members that need to be bridged in order to develop a shared understanding and unified way of working (Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Individual differences can lead to negative affective reactions (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003). For example, professional diversity, which is part of functional diversity, is negatively associated with team effectiveness under conditions of high identity threat (Mitchell, Parker, & Giles, 2011). In addition, diversity in the form of geographically distributed project team members can present a disintegrative tendency as their geographical distance from one another can strengthen task and relational conflict and weaken employee attachment (Hinds & Bailey, 2003; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999). Finiteness of the project can form a disintegrative tendency as it limits the amount of time available to bridge these differences. In this way these disintegrative tendencies of diversity and finiteness can lead to a lack of meaningful interaction among team members.

Project teams are often strongly characterized by these disintegrative tendencies. Project teams often consist of team members with a wide range of backgrounds, bringing together people with diverse areas of expertise and conflicting values. In addition, project workers are often employed by different organizations leading to conflicts of interests within the team. These project workers might have never met each other before the start of the project, and even have limited contact during the project as they work from different locations. In addition, the time available to get to know each other and overcome differences is limited by the finite nature of projects, people working on multiple projects at the same time and team members moving in and out of the project team depending on the demand for their expertise within the project and elsewhere. Understandably, these conditions of project work pose significant challenges in developing unified group work and shared understanding. However, Morgan (1981) states that: 'The continued survival of social systems is problematic and hinges upon a balance between disintegrative and integrative tendencies' (p. 40).

As diversity and finiteness are crucial to the project team's ability to approach requisite complexity, disintegrative tendencies should not be countered directly. Instead, they should be balanced with strong integrative tendencies that can

bring the project team together. One important integrative tendency in projects is the development of shared identification among team members. Stimulating the development of shared values is a strategy to preserve and manage differences (Eisenberg, 1984). In a similar vein, Ospina and Foldy (2010) show that by naming and shaping identity, leaders can bridge differences without necessarily reducing them. Hinds and Bailey (2003) argue that shared team identity will serve as a countervailing force to the disintegrative effects of geographical distribution, and Mitchell et al. (2011) show that teams with a strong team identity are able to turn their inter-professional diversity into an effective dynamic.

Identification can relate to specific foci such as the project, the department or the organization as a whole. As the effects of identification are strongest for the specific focus of the identification (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005), and the disintegrative tendencies of diversity and finiteness mainly stem from the nature of projects, we expect these disintegrative tendencies can most effectively be balanced by integrative tendencies resulting from strong project identification as opposed to identification with other organizational foci.

1.2 Benefits of project identification

Shared project identification can be important for the individuals involved in a project, and can contribute to the successful completion of projects and the success of project-based organizations as a whole. Strong identification with organizationally relevant foci provides employees with guidance and enhances psychological safety (Shamir, 1999) as well as helping to fulfill the psychological need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Identification can also increase levels of effort and enable decision making that is more beneficial to the focus of identification (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011).

In order for the organization to effectively adapt to complex environments, organizational identity should be dynamic and mutable (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). This flexibility of identity should facilitate adaptation to the environment (Ashforth et al., 2011). If identification is not fluid, identities can become core rigidities based around organizational characteristics that are no longer effective in responding to an unfolding environment (Fiol, 2001; Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010). Identities at different levels both enable and constrain each other (Ashforth et al., 2011). Because of this, strong identification with projects is also important for the success of the project-based organization as a whole. Shifting situated identifications tied to projects can make organizational identities more fluid and allow the organization to respond to change (Fiol, 2001). In other words, project identification, which can be fully or partly nested within organizational identification, can

contribute to the overall adaptability of the organizational identity. By stimulating project identification leaders stimulate the development of integrative tendencies in an attempt to balance the disintegrative tendencies in projects, while at the same time increasing the chances of project success, and preventing organizational identity from turning into a core rigidity.

1.3 Challenges to developing shared project identification

Paradoxically, though the disintegrative tendencies embedded in projects increase the need for the development of strong integrative tendencies such as shared project identification, these disintegrative tendencies also inhibit the development of shared project identification. The finite nature of projects can lead to a lack of identification with the project. Due to the finite nature of projects, deep structure identification with the project is less likely to develop as this takes time. Project identification is likely to take the form of situated identification, as opposed to deep structure identification, because situated identification is formed by immediate environmental stimuli that signal shared goals, such as working towards a deadline of a project (Rousseau, 1998). These situational cues influence workers in real time, which can lead to swift trust and transform strangers into an effective team as long as the cues persist (Rousseau, 1998). However, the disintegrative tendencies of functional, organizational and/or geographic diversity, that can be embedded in projects can inhibit the development situated identification with the project.

The potential geographical distribution of project team members can reduce the availability of social cues, needed for the development of identification (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). The geographical distribution of the project team influences the level and type of interaction between team members. The face-to-face interaction that comes with physical co-location involves rich social and physical cues that shape the development of identification (Fiol & O'Connor, 2005). For example, Millward, Haslam and Postmes (2007) have found hot desking, an externalizing strategy in which no fixed desks are assigned to employees, shifts the primary focus of identification from the team to the organization.

The construction of identity in projects will also be influenced by their potential multi-functional, and often multi-organizational nature, making project identity a multiple and cross-cutting concept (Marshall, 2001). The inter-organizational nature of many projects inhibits spillover effects from deep structure identification with the organization to situated identification with the projects. Meyer, Becker and Van Dick (2006) propose that for interdependent foci (such as the organization and the project) deep structure identification with one can contribute to situated identification with the other. However, many projects are not fully embedded within the organization,

but are entities that cross organizational boundaries (e.g. Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, & Marosszeky, 2002; Söderlund, 2004). The client of the project can be external to the employing organization of a project member and the project team can be composed of employees from a number of different organizations. Their inter-organizational nature makes them less dependent upon one organization than projects that are fully embedded in one organization. For these inter-organizational projects, the interpretative schemes of project team members are likely to be divergent and conflicting (Bresnen et al., 2004). This can lead to low levels of belonging or conflicts between organizational and project identification (Alvesson, 2000), which can come with less helping behaviors in the group (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007). This reduced interdependence between project and organization could lead to reduced spillover effects from organizational identification to project identification.

Because situated identification needs ongoing situational cues to develop and persist, and the disintegrative tendencies embedded in projects inhibit the development of shared project identification, shared project identification cannot be expected to develop automatically. Leadership is expected to play a major role in the development of shared project identification.

1.4 Leadership to stimulate project identification

As projects with strong disintegrative tendencies do not only increase the need for shared identification as a balancing integrative tendency, but also come with additional challenges to developing shared identification, it is important to enable the development of strong shared identification. Some authors hold that leadership is needed to bring the project team together in the midst of forces that can pull them apart (Alvesson, 1992; Shamir, 1999). This is why authors such as Shamir (1999) and Alvesson (1992; 2000) have argued that leadership in organizations facing complex environments should mainly focus on stimulating identification. Organizational members have considerable influence on the development of their own organizationally relevant identifications (e.g. by processes of distancing (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006)). However, leaders, and especially officially appointed leaders, can also have a substantial impact on the development of these identifications because of their central role in interaction in the organization and the tendency to idealize leaders (Brown, 2006; Chreim, 2002; Stacey, 2010).

Leaders can stimulate identification in multiple ways. They can do this by naming and shaping identity (Ospina & Foldy, 2010) and by stimulating identification through unifying leadership that aims to maintain a collective identity and shape efforts for both exploration and exploitation (Hazy, 2007). In addition, research suggests that leadership practices likely have to be adjusted to the level of identification already

in place (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Leaders should enable a process of identity construction that also takes into account flexibility, in order to prevent identity from turning into a rigidity (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010).

An important path through which project identification can develop is through interaction. Identities can be seen as ‘complexes of in-progress stories’ (Brown, 2006, p 732) or a pattern of interaction (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Identities are shared when rules of interaction are shared (Hazy, 2012). Organizational identification has been shown to be actively shaped by interaction (Jones & Volpe, 2011; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). Enabling the development of identification can be done through the development of a strong communication climate (Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong, & Joustra, 2007), contact of high intensity and duration (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), effective informal discussions (Alvesson, 1992), and spontaneous communication (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). As identification is shaped through processes of interacting (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005), Jones and Volpe (2011) propose that leaders can stimulate identification by enabling social interaction and relationship development among members. More specifically, as efforts to strengthen identification have the strongest positive effect on identification with the focus to which these effort pertain (Reade, 2001), we expect the development of project identification will especially be enabled by interaction on, during, and through projects.

1.5 The current study

Previous research from a range of perspectives has highlighted two things. The first is the tension that can emerge in project work from the potential functional, organizational, and geographic diversity and the finite nature of projects. The second is the importance of identification for individual, group and organizational outcomes. In this paper we are specifically interested in how shared project identification provides a way of bridging differences in project teams without eliminating these, as such differences are not only essential for effective project work but also a source of difficulty in developing identification with the project. We aim to answer the following research question: How do leaders in project-based organizations use leadership practices to balance the disintegrative tendencies of diversity and finiteness with the integrative tendency of project identification? We examine empirically how leaders manage this balancing act. By studying leadership in light of the disintegrative tendencies embedded in the context we respond to calls to take context into account in examining leadership practices (Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006).

The two studies presented in this paper explore how leaders balance the disintegrative tendencies in projects with integrative tendencies, and specifically

whether and how they stimulate identification with projects in order to achieve this. The studies focus on the officially appointed leaders responsible for the project (project managers), as such officially appointed leaders are proposed to have a major influence on the development of shared identification related to a focus (Brown, 2006; Chreim, 2002; Stacey, 2010). In Study 1 we conducted interviews to explore the disintegrative and integrative tendencies operating in the context of projects and the leadership practices with which project managers stimulate project identification. Subsequently, in Study 2 we conducted a survey study to address the generalizability of the leadership practices identified in Study 1. In Study 2 we also explore the extent to which project managers perceive project identification as an important issue, and how the leadership practices to stimulate identification vary in different project contexts.

2 METHOD STUDY 1

In order to explore leadership practices to stimulate project identification as a way to balance disintegrative and integrative tendencies in project team work, we analyzed data from 33 interviews drawn from a larger dataset (see table 1 for a summary of the interview sample). These individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with team members and their project managers in project-based organizations in the Netherlands (see Appendix 2 for the interview protocol). The interviews were grouped into 18 sets, each set including individual interviews with interviewees clustered around the same focal project. These focal projects were nearing completion or recently completed at the time of the interviews. Interviews focused on these focal projects. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and 17 minutes. We recorded all interviews with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed the interviews verbatim resulting in 807 pages of single spaced text.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including projects from multiple sectors (IT, organizational change and technology and construction) which allowed us to explore overarching rather than potential sector specific patterns in leadership in project-based organizations. The interviews were conducted in a relatively high number of projects with the disintegrative tendencies of diversity in the form of geographical spread of team members (12 out of 18 projects), and external clients (11 out of 18 projects), and prominent pressures from finiteness by selecting projects in which project team members simultaneously work on other tasks and projects beyond the focal project (10 out of 16 interviewed team members). This allowed us to uncover the ways in which project managers stimulate integrative tendencies to balance disintegrative tendencies.

Table 1 Summary of Interview Sample

Project number	Sector	Interviews with project manager (PM), project team member (TM)	Client is internal or external to the employer of the project manager	Project team is co-located or spread across multiple locations	Interviewed team member spends all time on the focal project or simultaneously works on other projects and tasks
1	IT	PM, TM	External	Co-located	Single
2	Technology and construction	PM, TM	External	Co-located	Multiple
3	Technology and construction	PM, TM	External	Spread	Multiple
4	IT	PM, TM	External	Spread	Multiple
5	IT	PM, TM	External	Spread	Single
6	Organizational change /IT	TM	External	Single team member	Single
7	IT	PM, TM	External	Spread	Single
8	Technology and construction	PM, TM	Internal	Co-located	Multiple
9	Technology and construction	PM, TM	Internal	Spread	Multiple
10	Technology and construction	PM	External	Spread	-
11	IT	PM, TM	External	Spread	Multiple
12	Technology and construction	PM, TM	External	Spread	Multiple
13	Technology and construction	PM, TM	Internal	Spread	Single
14	Organizational change	PM, TM	Internal	Co-located	Single
15	Organizational change	PM, TM	Internal	Spread	Multiple
16	IT	PM, TM	Internal	Co-located	Multiple
17	Organizational change	PM	Internal	Spread	-
18	Organizational change	PM, TM	External	Spread	Multiple

We uploaded our transcripts in NVivo 9 for analysis. We analyzed the qualitative material inductively to develop an understanding of disintegrative and integrative tendencies in project-based organizations and the role of leadership practices in

stimulating integrative tendencies through efforts to stimulate project identification. The results of this analysis are presented in the next section. They also provide the basis for the development of the survey for Study 2.

3 RESULTS STUDY 1

3.1 Integrative and disintegrative tendencies in projects

The results of the qualitative study show specific integrative and disintegrative tendencies in projects. These tendencies respectively enable and hinder the development of strong identification with the project.

The projects in our sample had one important integrative tendency in common, and that was the strong focus leaders placed on shared goals with clear deadlines. These shared goals and clear deadlines provided a metaphorical glue for the project team, attaching them to the goals and needs of the project. A project team member stated that after a certain period of time he felt more connected to the project he was working on than to his department, which was a few meters away and partially consisted of the same people. His attachment to the project increased because of a combination of ‘putting more hours into it and that the end goal keeps getting closer and that you just work towards that even more.’ (Team Member, Project 12)

However, without appropriate leadership, these integrative tendencies in project teams did not always lead to shared project identification. One interviewee illustrated this by explaining that within one project ‘there was no feedback’ and ‘no form of communication’ (Project Manager, Project 4). The project manager of this project only involved project team members individually to accomplish their own tasks. This interviewee stated ‘there might have been a shared goal, but there was no shared bond.’ (Project Manager, Project 4).

This leadership challenge to bring the project team together and stimulate shared project identification arose from the disintegrative tendencies of functional, organizational, and geographic diversity and finiteness. For example, a project manager stated that the combination of team members working only part time on the project and working from a diversity of locations hindered the development of shared project identification.

‘From consulting they are all assigned to the project full time. Then it is easier to keep the team spirit. And here you are with a lot of different teams and everyone has his daily tasks next to it. And that is difficult, also to get them

together, because they are spread.’ (Project Manager, Project 18)

The diversity in project work was seen by our interviewees as a strong disintegrative tendency as it came with conflicting perspectives and values which hindered the development of shared project identification. One form of diversity that was present in all projects in our sample is functional diversity. A project team member explained that people with different functional backgrounds in the project team can have very conflicting perspectives hindering the development of shared identification with the whole project.

‘Programmers can really discuss something for days and that is wonderful. As long as there is no deadline and stuff, but yeah, then you have project managers who then, they come every once in a while to spoil everything and then you have to do all kinds of weird things.’ (Team Member, Project 1)

Diversity in projects also arose from having multiple organizations involved, and hindered identification with the project. A project manager explained that he identified less with the project than with his employer because the project was done for an external client which made him an outsider:

‘You enter there, you are also just seen as an external there, external expert who comes to help (...) so you have a different relationship with that.’ (Project Manager, Project 5)

The finite nature of projects suggests that identification with projects forms a situated identification that needs ongoing cues to be developed and maintained. Our results show that even for projects with relatively low disintegrative tendencies, project identification could not be taken for granted. For example, a project manager who spent most of his hours of the week on a project for which he co-located the project team, explained how his identification with the project diminished immediately when situational cues diminished: ‘I feel connected at the moment I’m there, but when I am working on something else for a day, then that connectedness is surely a lot less strong.’ (Project Manager, Project 2)

In addition, the finite nature of projects and the continuous movement of project workers from project to project made people cautious not to identify too much

with the project. Or, as a project manager said: 'You know something is finite.' She explained that because of the finite nature of projects and on top of that the possibility that you will be pulled of the project before it ends, 'we have to be very flexible and not attach ourselves too much to a project and certain people.' (Project Manager, Project 18)

We can conclude that, leadership practices are needed to stimulate the development of shared identification as an integrative tendency that can balance out the disintegrative tendencies in projects. We continue to describe the specific leadership practices employed by project managers to stimulate shared project identification.

3.2 Leadership practices to stimulate project identification

The analysis of the data revealed how leaders in the sample overcame the challenges posed by the disintegrative tendencies in project work. The analysis of the qualitative material led to the identification of a number of leadership practices project managers used to stimulate shared project identification (see table 2). The most important leadership practices used by project managers to stimulate such shared project identification were aimed at stimulating interaction. Some tried to stimulate work related interaction by organizing meetings in which information about the project was shared by the project manager or in which discussion about the project among all project team members was stimulated. Another way in which project managers tried to stimulate work related interaction was by organizing excursions or inviting speakers. Project managers also aimed to stimulate project identification by stimulating non work related interaction by organizing events such as lunch, dinner, drinks, or other fun activities. They also aimed to stimulate identification by informing project team members about aspects of the project that were directly relevant to them to fulfill their tasks, or by also sharing other project related information that was not directly relevant for each project team member's tasks. For example, when asked what her project manager did to stimulate identification with the project a project team member answered: 'I think by being very open about what's going on, about what's going well and what's not going well. And... yes...surely also sociability. That's the most beautiful way to connect people to each other.' (Team Member, Project 16)

Table 2. Leadership practices used to stimulate project identification

Leadership practices	Sample quotes
Informing team members of developments regarding the project	<p>'They are often highly educated people, often professionals, and if you just provide them with information, engage them, you very often get that back.' (Project Member, Project 4)</p> <p>'It's about taking people with you the moment you do something of which you think the other can benefit from that.' (Project Manager, Project 11)</p>
Organizing meetings at which project team members are informed of project progression	<p>'As a project we often organize meetings to inform them. So every month there is such an information meeting in which everyone is informed about the goings of the project.' (Project Manager, Project 5)</p> <p>'Then we just rent a restaurant and we just sit and get a business update like "guys, this is what we accomplished and this is how it went" and then it's just applauding for yourself and for each other in an American way and then we move on.' (Team Member, Project 5)</p>
Organizing meetings at which the project is discussed by all project team members	<p>'By sitting together at every meeting. (...) And because of that you create a connectedness, because we all talk about everyone's subject.' (Project Manager, Project 2)</p> <p>'Or maybe it's getting time to just, uh, while enjoying a coffee and an almond cake, as a matter of speaking, just have the meeting.' (Team Member, Project 3)</p>
Organizing excursion or speaker	<p>'We've been saying for a year now we're going to [a park] because they have somewhat similar problems.' (Project Manager, Project 9)</p>
Organizing lunch, dinner or drinks	<p>'So we decided to have a sort of Christmas breakfast. Well, then everyone takes a lot of stuff with them. Really sociable!' (Team Member, Project 15)</p> <p>'And especially for the big projects, then, after the first results, there is cake or a "beer-moment".' (Team Member, Project 14)</p> <p>'A festive kick-off (...) Also with a sort of cooking workshop and drinks with everyone. So there you are already trying to get to know each other better.' (Project Manager, Project 20)</p>
Organizing other non-work related activities	<p>'We already celebrated Sinterklaas together twice. With a poem and a gift.' (Project Manager, Project 2)</p>

The results of Study 1 highlight how the integrative and disintegrative tendencies in projects enable and inhibit the development of shared project identification. Most importantly the results show how project managers address the challenge of balancing disintegrative tendencies with integrative tendencies. The results indicate a number of leadership practices project managers use in their efforts to stimulate shared project identification. In Study 2 we further explore these leadership practices of project managers among a wider sample to assess how broadly used these practices are, what other practices are implemented, and how these leadership practices vary in different contexts. In addition, we explore how project managers perceive the strength and importance of shared project identification.

4 METHOD STUDY 2

In order to explore in a much wider sample whether leadership practices identified in Study 1 were generalizable, and further explore the extent to which project managers perceived shared project identification to be important for project success we administered an exploratory survey among project managers in the Netherlands (see Appendix 3 for the survey). We pretested our questionnaire by soliciting feedback on a preliminary version of the questionnaire from three experienced project managers who participated in Study 1. Based on their feedback we reworded some items.

Data collection for Study 2 started at a countrywide conference for project managers organized by the International Project Management Association the Netherlands. 132 paper questionnaires were handed out, of which 56 were returned. The response rate for the paper questionnaire was 42 percent. We continued data collection by distributing the same questionnaire online. With our online questionnaire we targeted a wide range of project managers through two routes. In the first online route the questionnaire was emailed and forwarded to 493 project managers, out of which 126 filled out the questionnaire. For this group the response rate was 25 percent. For the second online route we targeted project managers through web newsletters, at social network groups or other websites. Through this route 69 project managers responded to our questionnaire. As we cannot assess how many people have seen the link to our online questionnaire through these media we cannot assess the response rate for this second online route. Taken both online routes together, 195 people started filling out the questionnaire online, from which we excluded 35 in our analysis as these questionnaires were not filled out past the descriptive statistics. In total, including the paper and online questionnaire, we received 251 questionnaires, from which we used the 216 surveys that were completely filled out in our analysis.

Similar to the interviews, respondents of the survey were asked to keep one focal project in mind when answering the questions, because project managers often work on multiple projects at the same time. At the time the questionnaires were completed respondents were either still working on the project, or the project had been completed a maximum of 6 months before. The project managers in our sample represent projects from multiple application areas. The majority of the project managers filled out the questionnaire focusing on a project in the application area of information technology (68.1 %), while the, sometimes overlapping, application areas organizational change (36.6 %) and technology and construction (27.3 %) were also represented.

The focal projects in our sample had an average duration of 58 weeks, and the project managers were involved with the focal projects for an average of 41 weeks. On

average, the project managers in our sample worked on 3.4 projects simultaneously, spending an average of 26 hours a week on the focal project. The focal projects, on average, consisted of 19 project team members, all working an average of 0.7 FTE on the project. The project team members of one focal project on average represented employees of three different employers. Most project managers (89.3 %) did not have line authority over any of the project team members. The focal projects represented for 48.8 % projects in which the employer of the project manager was also the client of the project, and for 51.2 % projects in which the client of the project was external to the employer of the project manager is. The majority of these project teams were not co-located; only 13.1 % worked at one project location, 16.7 % worked in the same building, 38.9 % worked in a few sub groups on a few locations, and in 30.6 % of the focal projects team members worked individually spread in multiple locations.

4.1 Measures

Contextual measures We included a number of measures to take into account the project context. We measured geographical spread of the project team by asking: ‘Where do the team members work on the project?: Everyone works at one project location / everyone works in the same building / a few sub groups work on a few locations / the team members work individually spread on multiple locations’. We measured the diversity of professional disciplines of the project team by asking: ‘How many professions are represented by the project team members? ... disciplines’. We measure the time spent on the project by project managers by asking: ‘How much time did you on average spend on this project? ... hours per week’. We assessed whether project managers had responsibility for team building activities by asking ‘Does your employer require you to organize team building activities? Yes / No’.

Perceived strength of identification Perceived strength of identification was measured with seven items, one item per organizationally relevant focus of identification: ‘Estimate how strongly your project team members feel connected to: The project / their employer / their department / their professional group / you as project manager / their line manager / colleagues on the project.’ Responses were given on a scale ranging from 1 (hardly) to 5 (very strongly).

Importance of identification with the project The perceived importance of identification with the project for project success was measured with one item: ‘How important is it for the success of project A that all team members feel connected to the project?’. Responses were given on a scale ranging from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (crucial).

Importance of other success factors In order to assess the relative importance of identification with the project we also measured the perceived importance of other success factors. To stimulate project managers to distinguish between crucial and less

important success factors we probed them to think about their priorities under time pressure. We measured these additional success factors with one item per success factor: 'How important is it for the success of project A that all team members: Know what is expected of them in the project / can focus primarily on their core tasks in the project / can be involved in more than just their core tasks / can personally develop themselves during the project / discuss different views?'

Leadership practices to stimulate identification After being asked about their perceived importance of project identification respondents were asked the following questions: 'Do you undertake something to stimulate this?' and 'If so, what do you undertake as project manager to stimulate this in project A?'. From the analysis of the qualitative material we developed an inventory of leadership practices used by project managers to stimulate identification with the project (see table 4). This inventory included specific leadership practices aimed to inform project team members or increase their interaction through different types of meetings, including formal and informal gatherings. In addition, respondents were asked in an open question to write down any other leadership practices they implemented in the focal project to stimulate project identification. These open answers were analyzed in NVivo 9.

5 RESULTS STUDY 2

Building on the exploratory results of Study 1, Study 2 continues to explore project managers' perceptions of, and leadership practices to stimulate shared project identification using a different method of data collection. This second step in the exploration aims to provide more insight into the perceived importance of project identification and the use of leadership practices by a broader group of project managers, and to shed some light on how the use of these leadership practices varied across contexts.

5.1 Strength and importance of project identification

First, we assessed how strongly project managers perceived their project team members to identify with a number of organizationally relevant foci. Results show that project managers perceived their project team members to identify most strongly with the project, compared to a wide range of other organizationally relevant groups or persons (see table 3).

In addition, we assessed how important project managers perceived shared identification with the project to be for the success of the project, and compared this to scores on the perceived importance of five other possible success factors of

the project. The results show that project managers perceived identification with the project as one of the most important success factors of the project. Overall, they ranked it as the second most important success factor of the project, only surpassed by the importance of all team members knowing what is expected of them in the project. Factors they perceived to be less important for the success of the project were team members being able to concentrate on their core tasks in the project, being involved with more than just their core tasks, personally developing themselves during the project, discussing differing perspectives and not discussing differing perspectives.

Table 3: Project team members’ strength of identification as perceived by project manager

Focus of Identification	Perceived strength of identification
Project	4.02
Colleagues on the project	3.87
Department	3.59
Project manager	3.55
Employer	3.50
Profession	3.42
Line manager	3.21

5.2 Leadership practices to stimulate project identification

In line with the perceived importance of project identification, the survey results show that project managers used a variety of leadership practices to stimulate identification, most of which are used by a substantial group of project managers (see table 4).

In addition to the 7 categories developed on the basis of Study 1 (see table 4), free text responses show that 13 % of the respondents additionally implemented other leadership practices to stimulate project identification. These free text responses were categorized to identify four additional leadership practices implemented by project managers to stimulate identification: increasing interaction, developing an open and/or positive atmosphere, keeping project team members informed or increasing project team member responsibilities (see table 5).

Table 4. Implementation of leadership practices aimed at stimulating project identification

Leadership practices for project identification	Percentage of project managers that implement the practice
Informing team members of developments regarding the project directly relevant to their ability to fulfill their tasks	73.1
Organizing meetings at which project team members are informed of project progression	71.8
Informing team members of developments regarding the project not directly relevant to their ability to fulfill their tasks	68.1
Organizing lunch, dinner or drinks	45.8
Organizing meetings at which the project is discussed by all project team members	38.4
Organizing other non-work related activities	22.7
Organizing excursion or speaker	8.3

Table 5. Additional leadership practices aimed at stimulating project identification

Additional leadership practices for project identification	Examples of free text responses on 'other activities' to stimulate project identification from questionnaire
Increasing interaction	'Daily stand up meetings' 'Weekly meetings' 'Online meetings'
Developing an open and/or positive atmosphere	'Talking about goals and expectations and frictions' 'Try to create a "dream team" experience' 'Take care of good, positive, informal atmosphere at the work floor, in which the project and context can be discussed openly'
Keeping project team members informed	'Newsletter' 'Offering clarity about status of the project'
Increasing project team member responsibilities	'I give a lot of responsibility and power to the team members' 'Giving team members the space to suggest improvements'

We assessed whether the implementation of leadership practices by project managers that were used to stimulate project identification was related to the extent to which project managers perceived their project team members to identify with organizationally relevant foci. We performed this initial exploration by reporting significant correlations that can provide input for future studies. The results show that project managers organizing informal meetings with the project team members in the form of lunch, dinner or drinks correlates with the strength with which they

perceive the team members to identify with them as project manager (0.14[★])¹, the project (0.17[★]), their colleagues on the project (0.25^{★★}), and their professional group (0.16[★]).

As the literature suggests leaders should adapt their leadership practices to stimulate identification to the environment, we explored to what extent the leadership practices implemented by project managers varied across contexts. The results show that the leadership practices project managers enacted, and specifically the amount of leadership practices they used to stimulate identification, varied in different contexts.

First, we explored whether project managers did more to stimulate shared project identification when faced with stronger disintegrative tendencies. We find that project managers did significantly more to stimulate identification with the project when the project team represented more professional disciplines, or in other words, when the functional diversity in the project team was higher (that is, the correlation between the number of leadership practices enacted by project managers to stimulate shared project identification and the number of professional disciplines represented by the project team is 0.26^{★★★}). This illustrates that project managers invested more effort in strengthening the integrative tendencies in the project when the project represented strong disintegrative tendencies.

However, when faced with stronger disintegrative tendencies of diversity from geographical spread of the team and finiteness from the limited time spent on the project by the project manager, project managers did less to stimulate shared project identification. Project managers who spent less of their time on the project, compared to the average time project managers spent on the focal projects, also implemented fewer leadership practices to stimulate identification (that is, the correlation between time spent on focal project and the number of leadership practices enacted by project managers to stimulate shared project identification is -0.17[★]). Project workers working individually spread over a number of locations was negatively correlated with stimulating informal interaction by organizing lunch, dinner or drinks (-0.14[★]). These strong disintegrative tendencies from geographical spread in combination with fewer practices aimed at stimulating identification were reflected in perceived weaker integrative tendencies of shared project identification. Specifically, project workers working individually spread over a number of locations was negatively correlated with perceived identification of team members with the project is (-0.16[★]).

Second, we explored whether project managers that are stimulated by their organizations to spend time on the development of their project teams, did more to stimulate shared project identification. We find that project managers having official

¹ Numbers mentioned in brackets in the text of the results section represent Pearson correlation coefficients, with stars representing significance levels (★=0,05, ★★=0,01, ★★★=0,001).

responsibility to organize team building activities for the project was positively correlated with the number of leadership practices used to stimulate identification (0.21**). These same project managers also rated the importance of project identification higher (that is, the correlation between project managers having official responsibility to organize team building activities for the project and the perceived importance of project identification is 0.21**). These project managers perceived themselves as successful in their efforts to stimulate identification with the project, shown by the fact that they perceived their project team members to identify more strongly with the project than project managers who were not officially responsible for organizing teambuilding activities (that is, the correlation between project managers having official responsibility to organize team building activities for the project and the extent to which they perceive their project team members to identify with the project is 0.21**).

Finally, as the literature suggests leaders adapt their efforts to stimulate identification to the strength of identification (van Knippenberg, et al., 2004), we explored whether the use of leadership practices by project managers varied for the levels of the perceived identification of their project team members with other foci. We find that project managers did significantly less to stimulate identification with the project when they perceived their project team members to identify strongly with their department (that is, the correlation between the number of leadership practices used to stimulate shared identification with the project and the perceived identification of project team members with their department is -0.14*) and line manager (-0.15*). This relationship was not moderated by the intra-organizational or inter-organizational nature of the project.

To summarize, Study 1 highlights the integrative and disintegrative tendencies projects. In addition, the identification of leadership practices used by project managers to stimulate shared project identification in Study 1 provided the basis for further exploration in Study 2. The results of Study 2 start to shed some light on the perceptions and leadership practices of project managers regarding shared project identification of project team members. The survey results show that project managers perceived shared project identification to be high compared to other organizational foci and relatively important compared to other success factors of the project. In addition, the results show that project managers invested effort to stimulate identification and that most of the leadership practices identified in Study 1 were used by a relatively wide group of project managers. Last of all, the results illustrate that leadership practices varied for differences in team diversity, geographical distribution, time spent on the project, official responsibilities, and strength of identification with other foci.

6 DISCUSSION

In the current study we use both qualitative interviews and a survey to explore how leaders in project-based organizations can overcome the challenges arising from the disintegrative tendencies embedded in project-based work. Leaders in these organizations are often faced with the disintegrative tendencies of functional, organizational and geographical diversity of team members and the finiteness of projects also created by the potential part-time assignment of people to the project for only part of the project duration. As these disintegrative tendencies are crucial ingredients in approaching requisite complexity, they should not be eradicated, but balanced by integrative tendencies. This balancing act to bring the project team together within limited time and without discrediting their differences is an important leadership challenge in project work.

The development of shared project identification can represent such an integrative tendency by enabling the development of shared understanding and unified group work. Shared project identification can have positive implications at multiple levels. On the one hand, high levels of project identification can serve to enable the project and its team members to benefit from strong identification in the form of increased psychological safety, guidance in decision-making and improved project success. On the other hand, identification with the project can enable the project-based organization to effectively adapt to the environment by making organizational identity more fluid.

In Study 1 we have identified the integrative tendency of shared goals with clear deadlines in projects, and the disintegrative tendencies of functional, organizational and geographic diversity and finiteness. These disintegrative tendencies inhibit the development the integrative tendency of shared project identification, and we find evidence of a number of leadership practices to stimulate the development of shared project identification.

The results of Study 2 illustrate that most project managers perceive team members' project identification to be higher than identification with any other organizationally relevant focus. If the perception of the project managers in our sample is correct that project team members identify strongly with both the organization, including the department, and the project, this could provide a fitting basis for a balanced adaptive identity for project-based organizations. As the literature indicates, leadership practices that stimulate project identification can enable the development of strong project identification, which in turn can lead to more effective projects and an organizational identity adaptable enough to respond to changes in the environment (Alvesson, 1992; Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Fiol, 2001; Shamir, 1999).

However, this high identification with the project does not automatically occur

and almost all project managers in our sample implement leadership practices to stimulate identification of project team members with the project. As most of these practices involve interaction, it seems that project managers indeed implement the proposition by Jones and Volpe (2011) that leaders can stimulate identification by encouraging social interaction. However, we also find that the presence of disintegrative tendencies from geographical diversity and finiteness from limited time spent on the project by the project manager is linked with a lower level of leadership practices to stimulate shared project identification.

6.1 Varied implementation of leadership practices across contexts

Our results also begin to show the ways in which leadership practices vary across contexts. Researchers and practitioners are called upon to take into account the effects of the fragmented nature of identification in project-based organizations. Project team members often identify with multiple foci that are not always fully nested and create conflicts of interest. In line with suggestions in the literature that leaders adapt their leadership practices to the strength of identification (van Knippenberg et al., 2004), we find that project managers do less to stimulate identification when they perceive their project team members to already identify strongly with their department or line manager, and that this relationship is not moderated by the project being either intra-organizational or inter-organizational. Although stimulating identification might be less important in this context because psychological safety of team members is already stimulated elsewhere, this lower effort to stimulate identification could be problematic for the success of the project, especially in inter-organizational projects, where the goals of the project will not always be fully in line with those of the line managers and departments of the project team members.

The results are mixed when it comes to the ways in which the implementation of leadership practices to stimulate identification vary in contexts with different levels of disintegrative tendencies from diversity and finiteness. We find that, depending on the type of disintegrative tendency, project managers take either more or less effort to strengthen the integrative tendencies in projects when confronted with stronger disintegrative in the project.

Project managers implement more leadership practices to stimulate project identification when the project team represents more professional disciplines, and thus exhibits a higher functional diversity. However, we also find that project managers do less to stimulate shared project identification when confronted with a low amount of time spent on the project by the project manager, and are significantly less likely to stimulate informal interaction by organizing lunch, dinner or drinks

when confronted with higher geographical diversity. On top of this, and contrary to findings of Millward and colleagues (2007), we do not find a perceived shift in focus of identification in geographically dispersed projects. We do find project managers perceive their team members to identify significantly weaker with the project for the most geographically dispersed teams compared to less dispersed teams. However, we do not find an opposite effect for organizational identity.

These results seem to imply that though disintegrative tendencies in projects call for leadership to balance these with equally strong integrative tendencies, some of these disintegrative tendencies inhibit leaders from enacting leadership practices that can stimulate these integrative tendencies. However, the results also indicate that efforts to stimulate project managers to enact leadership practices aimed at strengthening integrative tendencies can have significant effects. Specifically, we find that project managers that have official responsibility to organize team building activities for the project, perceive project identification to be a more important success factor, and implement more leadership practices to stimulate identification, than those project managers that do not officially have these responsibilities. A possible explanation for these relationships is that making project managers responsible for the organization of teambuilding activities sends a signal from the employer that identification with the project is important and leads those project managers to value identification with the project more highly and invest more effort in stimulating it.

6.2 Limitations and future research

Our study begins to explore the role of leadership in balancing disintegrative tendencies in project-based organizations with integrative tendencies, and specifically leadership practices to stimulate project identification, and as a result we have only scratched the surface of these processes. As much is still unknown about identification and leadership in the context of project-based organizations we adopted an exploratory rather than hypothesis testing approach to the analysis of both the qualitative interviews and the survey data.

The current study has a number of limitations and highlights some areas of interest for future research. Though the interviews of Study 1 offer opportunities for triangulation by analyzing both intended and perceived leadership practices, the questionnaires of Study 2 only focused on the intended leadership practices of project managers and their perceptions of the extent to which their team members identify with organizational foci. The quantitative study is a single source and cross-sectional survey that we used in an exploratory manner. The scales used in this survey have been developed on the basis of the emergent results from Study 1, and as such are not validated measures. Future research can give more insight into the strength

of identifications with a number of different foci in project-based organizations from the perspective of the project team members themselves and their perception of leadership practices aimed at stimulating identification.

As both studies in the current research focus on one project per interviewee or respondent, future research can analyze the role of leaders in dealing with disintegrative and integrative tendencies in project-based organizations by investigating the full spectrum of tasks and roles people fulfill within a specific period. In addition, our cross-sectional set up does not allow us to examine the temporal patterns of strengthening and weakening disintegrative tendencies, the development of shared identification, and the results of leadership practices on this development. Taking a longitudinal approach, future research can substantially increase our understanding of these temporal patterns.

In addition, in our quantitative study we have chosen to focus specifically on the leadership role of the project manager. Although officially appointed leaders have a somewhat privileged leadership role, in order to get a better understanding of leadership in and around the project, leadership practices of all people involved should be taken into account. In line with the results of Jones and Volpe (2011) taking the social relationships that already existed among project team members prior to the project into account could provide a clearer picture of the context in which leadership is enacted. This line of research can provide more insight into the leadership practices in project-based organizations and show how they enable the development of integrative tendencies to balance disintegrative tendencies.

With the current qualitative and quantitative exploration we draw attention to the importance of shared project identification in project-based organizations, and shed light on the leadership practices implemented to stimulate shared project identification. We build on relevant perspectives in the literature to make the case for the importance of these integrative tendencies to balance the disintegrative tendencies in this context. Not only can this enable project team members to bridge their differences, it can also set the stage for project success and adaptively balanced organizational identities.