Doing it for the Team: Soccer Coaches' Identity Leadership Predicts Players' Effort,
Turnover Intentions, and Performance

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Abstract

Objectives: The present research investigates how coaches' identity leadership predicts individual and team outcomes in soccer. Specifically, we tested hypotheses that coaches' identity leadership would be associated with players' perceptions of (a) higher team effort, (b) lower turnover intentions, (c) better individual performance, and (d) better team performance. In addition, we aimed to examine the relationship between coaches' identity leadership and increased team identification of players and the degree to which the associations of identity leadership with these various outcomes were mediated by players' strength of team identification.

Design: We conducted a cross-sectional study of male soccer players in Germany.

Method: The final sample consisted of 247 male soccer players nested in 24 teams that completed measures of their coaches' identity leadership, team identification, team effort, turnover intentions, and individual/team performance.

Results: Analysis revealed a positive relationship between coaches' identity leadership and team effort, as well as individual and team performance. Moreover, coaches' identity leadership was associated with lower turnover intentions. There was also evidence that the relationships between identity leadership and the investigated outcomes were mediated by team identification.

Conclusions: These findings support claims that coaches' identity leadership is associated with better individual and team outcomes because it helps to build a sense of 'we' and 'us' in the team they lead.

Keywords: social identity, identity leadership, team identification, team effort, turnover intentions, performance

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"I try everything to be as successful as possible. I live 100 per cent for the boys, with the boys, what we do for the club. I think that's leadership in the first case."

Jürgen Klopp, manager of Liverpool FC (cited in Shaw, 2019)

Jürgen Klopp has been a remarkably successful professional soccer coach for many years. His recent successes with Liverpool include winning the Champions League in 2019 and the Premier League in 2020. Klopp not only has an impressive track record, but is also admired and loved by fans, the media and his players. But what underpins his success? The above quote points to one potentially important factor: the fact that Klopp defines leadership in a way that puts the team ("the boys" and "the club") first. In other words, he does not focus on his personal gain but on the success of his team and the club as a whole.

In the present work, we look to provide a formal analysis of the way in which this privileging of "we" over "I" contributes to individual and team outcomes by drawing on principles spelled out within the social identity approach to leadership. In this regard, Klopp's quote resonates with the key propositions of this approach — namely that leaders' ability to motivate members to contribute to group goals is predicated on their ability to create and promote a sense of 'we' and 'us' among group members (Haslam et al., 2011; Steffens et al., 2014; van Dick et al., 2018). This 'we-ness' is then argued to serve as the basis for goal-directed collective behavior (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

In line with these claims, there is a growing body of work in the domain of sport which indicates that leaders' identity leadership is associated with a range of important attitudes and behaviors (for reviews, see Rees, Haslam, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2015; Slater, Coffee, Barker, & Evans, 2014; Steffens, Fransen, & Haslam, 2020; Stevens et al., 2017). In

particular, previous work has shown that identity leadership is a basis for individual's motivation (e.g., Slater et al., 2014). However, some key questions remain unanswered. Most notably, as we outline in more detail below, we know little about whether (and how) identity leadership is associated with greater team-oriented behavior including players' *team effort* and *turnover intentions*, both of which are important drivers of team functioning and outcomes (Slater, Thomas, & Evans, 2020). In the present research, we conceptualise team effort in line with the definition by De Jong and Elfring (2010) as "the extent to which team members devote their resources (i.e., energy, attention, time) to executing team tasks" (p. 537; see also Yeo & Neal, 2004) and turnover intentions as athletes' willingness to terminate (vs. retain) membership in the team (Igbaria & Greenhaus, 1992; Leo et al., 2020) which can be seen as a strategy of individual mobility, in which members of a group prioritize personal over collective goals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Ellemers & ; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). This strategy of individual mobility to leave one team and join another (higher-status) team is an option for athletes to boost their self-esteem if they recognize group boundaries to be *permeable*, i.e. if they think leaving their team is actually possible (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The mechanism through which identity leadership might be associated with these outcomes is unclear, a gap that we seek to fill by investigating team identification as a mediating variable. And finally, with the exception of research by Fransen, McEwan, and Sarkar (2020), there has been limited investigation of identity leadership with team-level data from the field. The present research seeks to address these lacunae by investigating the relationship between coaches' identity leadership and players' effort and desire to continue playing for their team in a field context with a sample of German soccer teams.

The Social Identity Approach to Leadership

The social identity approach to leadership (Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2004; Turner & Haslam, 2001) is based on the twin-theories of *social identity theory* (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and *self-categorization theory* (SCT; Turner et

al., 1987). Central to both theories is the idea that people define themselves and others not only as individuals (i.e., as “I” and “me”; in terms of personal identity; Turner, 1982) but also as members of groups (as “we” and “us”; in terms of social identity; Tajfel, 1972). In sports contexts this means that individuals derive a sense of self and thus part of their self-worth from their belongingness to particular groups (Slater et al., 2014). Indeed, even if players take part in sports on their own (e.g., in long-distance running), they often define themselves not only as individuals but also athletes or as members of a particular team or club (Haslam, Fransen, Boen, & Reicher, 2020). The prevalence of social identities in sports contexts also has implications for sports leadership since social identities provide the foundation for *social influence* (Rees et al., 2015; Turner, 1991). More specifically, SCT argues that self-definition in terms of shared social identity (e.g., as players of the same team) motivates people to align their perceptions and action (Haslam, 2004) and to engage in collective behavior that promotes the group’s interest (Rees et al., 2015; Slater et al., 2014).

Building on these ideas, the social identity approach to leadership argues that leadership is a process that centers on a leader’s capacity to build and advance a sense of shared social identity (a sense of ‘we-ness’) between leaders and would-be followers. In this regard, it has been argued that effective leaders engage in *identity leadership* (Haslam et al., 2011; Steffens et al., 2014; van Dick et al., 2018) by: (a) defining what the group is about and clarifying what it stands for (*identity entrepreneurship*; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005), (b) embodying the central qualities and attributes of the group (*identity prototypicality*; Steffens, Munt, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Haslam, in press), (c) advancing and standing up for the group’s goals and interests (*identity advancement*; Haslam et al., 2001), and (d) implementing activities, structures, and events that enable members of the group to live out their collective identity (*identity impresarioship*; Haslam et al., 2011). Supporting these ideas, organizational research indicates that leaders’ engagement in identity leadership is associated with a range of beneficial individual and team outcomes including group members’ trust in

their leaders, job satisfaction, helping (citizenship) behavior, and well-being in the form of reduced burnout (van Dick et al., 2018).

Identity Leadership in Sport and Exercise Contexts

While a wealth of evidence points to unique benefits of identity leadership for organizational effectiveness (e.g., Steffens, Yang, Jetten, Haslam, & Lipponen, 2018; van Dick et al., 2018), growing evidence also speaks to the relevance of identity leadership in sports contexts. For example, previous research across both exercise and sports contexts has identified positive relationships between identity leadership and key sporting outcomes — including attendance and performance (for reviews, see Rees et al., 2015; Slater et al., 2014; Steffens et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2017).

In exercise contexts, cross-sectional research by Stevens et al. (2018) found that the identity leadership of sports team leaders and exercise instructors was associated with greater attendance. Moreover, the researchers also found that leaders who engaged in identity leadership encouraged attendance because they enhanced group members' identification with the group (i.e., such that athletes and exercisers saw themselves as group members rather than as individuals). These patterns have been replicated and extended in a subsequent prospective study (Steffens, Slade, Stevens, Haslam, & Rees, 2019) which found (a) that exercise instructors' identity leadership was associated with both exercisers' class attendance and their individual effort and (b) that both relationships were mediated by group identification. Similarly, a longitudinal study confirmed that the perceived identity leadership of leaders of exercise groups had a positive impact on subsequent attendance because it served to increase the group identification of exercise group members (Stevens et al., 2020). In this way, studies of identity leadership in exercise contexts have consistently identified group identification as a mechanism that can explain the positive relationship between identity leadership and outcomes such as attendance.

In addition to this research from exercise contexts, a growing body of research indicates that identity leadership has an important role to play in sport team contexts as well. One of the first studies to explore these issues in such contexts was a cross-sectional study of athletes in various team sports (Steffens et al., 2014). This found that captains' identity leadership was positively related to various team and leadership outcomes among players including their team identification, task cohesion, team confidence, and the captain's perceived influence.

Similar conclusions have also been derived from experimental and intervention studies in team contexts. In one of the first of these, Fransen et al. (2015) experimentally manipulated athlete leaders' expressed confidence in their (basketball) team and explored the impact of this on team members' confidence and performance. Results indicated that the manipulation increased team members' confidence in the team as well as their sense of collective efficacy and, critically, their performance on a basketball shooting task. These patterns were then replicated in an experiment where the manipulation of (soccer) team leaders' confidence again increased team members' own confidence (i.e., through an identity-based contagion effect) and both individual and team performance (Fransen et al., 2016). Moreover, the authors showed that these effects were mediated by the (male) leader's perceived identity leadership and team identification. So the more confident the leader was, the more identity leadership he was seen as displaying and the more this in turn increased players' identification with the team and, through that, their performance on a dribbling and shooting task. In a more recent experimental study with cyclists, Stevens et al. (2019) also found that identity entrepreneurship had a positive effect on followers' effort (i.e., increased heart rate) and performance (i.e., power output). In this way, studies of identity leadership in team sports settings corroborate findings from exercise contexts by again identifying team identification as a variable that is a mediator of the positive associations between identity leadership and outcomes such as confidence and performance.

In sum, existing evidence from both exercise and sport team contexts suggests that identity leadership is associated with a range of positive outcomes for athletes while group or team identification seems to be a central mechanism underpinning this relationship. However, thus far studies have not engaged in an in-depth examination of the association between identity leadership and central team functioning outcomes — notably team effort and turnover intentions. This is the gap that the present research seeks to fill.

The Present Research

In the present research, we examine the link between players' perceptions of coaches' identity leadership and team effort, turnover intentions, and performance. We also explore the role of team identification as a mediator of this relationship. In this way, we aim to contribute to a growing body of work that has examined identity leadership as a predictor of individual and team functioning (e.g. Fransen et al., 2016; Steffens et al., 2019). More particularly, we advance this literature in four key ways.

First, while some studies have examined individual effort (Steffens et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2019), we know little about the degree to which identity leadership also contributes to a key ingredient of team functioning in the form of *team* effort. This is an important question to address given that team effort has been found to play a crucial role in building trust within a team and enhancing performance in an organizational setting (De Jong & Elfring, 2010), and given that identity leadership has been argued to foster team members' motivation to contribute to not only individual but also *shared* goals (Haslam, Powell, & Turner, 2000).

Second, an additional unexplored question is whether (and how) identity leadership is associated with players' willingness to stay in a team when an opportunity to leave arises. Meta-analytic results from the organizational domain indicate that people's intentions to remain part of (vs. leave) the organization are not only a critical aspect of well-functioning organizations but also have important (negative) consequences for organizational performance

(Park & Shaw, 2013). In the sporting context too, there is evidence that players' willingness to remain (vs. leave) underpins team functioning. *Intentions to return* to a team in the future has been found to be an important indicator of athlete functioning that varies between athletes and is influenced by various factors (e.g., group cohesiveness; Spink, 1995, 1998; Spink, Ulvick, McLaren, Crozier, & Fesser, 2015). Furthermore, there is evidence that coaches' leadership can play an important role in affecting athletes' intention to return (e.g., Evans, Vierimaa, Budziszewski, & Graupensperger, 2020; Spink, 1998). As for actual turnover in the context of professional soccer, research by Montanari, Silvestri, and Gallo (2008) found greater turnover in soccer teams in the Italian 'Serie A' to be associated with lower team performance. In the present work, we advance the social identity approach to leadership in sports by exploring whether coaches' who are seen to display greater identity leadership have an increased capacity to hold the team together by reducing players' turnover intentions.

Third, to explore external validity and reliability of previous findings, we also aim to investigate team identification as a mediator of *coaches'* identity leadership. For while the above variables have been examined in a range of contexts (e.g., Steffens et al., 2019), whether coaches' identity leadership predicts team effort and turnover intentions, and whether it does so by building team identification, is unclear. These, then, are key questions that we sought to address in the present work.

Finally, fourth, previous work has examined identity leadership in sport and exercise contexts primarily in single teams (Slater & Barker, 2019) or those constructed for experimental purposes (Fransen et al., 2016; Fransen et al., 2015; Slater, Coffee, Barker, Haslam, & Steffens, 2019; Stevens et al., 2019). There is also some research that has examined the effects of identity leadership on team players in a natural field context (Steffens et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2020; Fransen et al., 2019). Nevertheless, previous studies have sampled players across teams, rather than from the same team, and as a result we cannot draw any inferences about whether and how identity leadership affects the players in an entire team.

The only exception is the recent work by Fransen et al. (2020), which used a sample of 30 handball teams to study the effects of coaches', team captains' and informal leaders' identity leadership. The researchers found a positive association of identity leadership with both well-being of athletes and team performance through an increase in athletes' team identification and psychological safety. Nevertheless, as these authors note, more work is needed to broaden our understanding of team identification as a potential mediating factor of identity leadership by examining its role in other team sports as well as in relation to broader suite team and athlete.

Based on the social identity theorizing and research discussed above, we sought to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Coaches' perceived identity leadership will be associated with (a) greater team effort, (b) lower turnover intentions, (c) higher individual performance, and (d) higher team performance on the part of players.

H2: Coaches' perceived identity leadership will be associated with greater team identification among players.

H3: Team identification will mediate the relationship predicted by H1.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected in the second quarter of 2020. The local ethics committee of the first author's university granted ethical approval for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Coaches of amateur soccer teams were approached by the fourth author and asked for their consent to contact their players to see if they would be willing to participate in the study. Two-hundred-and-eighty-five German amateur soccer players participated in an online survey. Data screening led to the exclusion of 38 participants. More specifically, we excluded participants who said that they fulfilled the inclusions criteria upon commencing the study but then provided demographic data that made clear that they did not

fulfill the inclusion criteria (i.e., three participants who indicated they were coaches or team-associated people other than players, and one participant who indicated being younger than 16 years of age) and careless responders (i.e., 30 participants who completed the questionnaire in less than 3 minutes). Moreover, we excluded four additional participants with missing data on essential variables. The final sample consisted of 247 male players nested in 24 teams with an average number of 10.29 participants per team. Players' age ranged from 16 to 48 years ($M = 23.74$, $SD = 6.41$), and they were in teams that were competing in teams between the fifth and ninth league: 43 players from four teams (17.4%) played in the fifth league (which involved approximately four practice sessions of two hours every week and a game on the weekend); 38 players from three teams (15.4%) were in the sixth league (with approximately three practice sessions of two hours every week and a game on the weekend); 35 players from four teams (14.2%) were in the seventh league (involving approximately three two-hour practice sessions every week and a game on the weekend); 61 players from six six teams (24.7%) were in the eighth league (engaging in approximately two practice sessions of two hours every week and a game on the weekend); and 70 players from seven teams (28.3%) were in the ninth league (involving approximately two practice sessions of two hours every week and a game on the weekend).

Measures

Identity leadership was measured using the German version (van Dick et al., 2018) of the four items from the Identity Leadership Inventory Short Form (ILI-SF; Steffens et al., 2014; e.g., "This coach is a model member of the team"). As with all other items (unless otherwise noted below), responses were made on seven-point scales (where 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). However, the scale's reliability was unsatisfactory ($\alpha = .65$) when all four items were included. Inspection indicated that this was largely due to the influence of one item ("This coach acts as a champion for the team"). Excluding this from the scale led to

the remaining three items having satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .80$) and so this reduced scale was used for all subsequent analysis.

Players' *team identification* was measured using a German translation of the single-item social identification (SISI) measure ("I identify with my team."; Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013).

Individual and team performance were each rated using three items. These were adapted from Decius and Erdmann (2017) and asked players to rate (a) their success in the current season, (b) their satisfaction with the current season, and (c) the extent to which they believed they had reached their potential in the current season as a player and as a team (e.g., "Looking back, how do you rate your success in the current season as an individual player/as a team?"; where 1 = not at all successful, 7 = very successful). Both scales had good reliability (both $\alpha s = .89$).

Team effort was assessed with a German translation of the five items from the measure devised by De Jong and Elfring (2010; e.g., "The members of my team work as hard as they can to achieve the team's objectives."; $\alpha = .85$).

Turnover intentions were measured using three items adapted from Steffens et al., (2018) (e.g., "I often think about quitting my team."; $\alpha = .85$).

Data Analysis

To account for the team-level structure of the data, hypotheses were tested using multilevel path modeling with Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). Because all variables of interest were measured at Level-1 (players), a 1-1-1 mediation model was used (cf. Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009). Since the number of Level-2 units (teams) was small ($N = 24$), the mediation was modeled only on the within-level.

Results

To establish whether multilevel modeling was appropriate for our data, we first calculated intraclass correlations (ICC) for all dependent variables. The ICC(1)-values in our

study ranged between .06 and .50: team identification = .10, team effort = .22, turnover intentions = .09, individual performance = .06, team performance = .50. According to LeBreton and Senter (2008), ICC(1)-values of .05 or more suggest that group membership influences the results and thus we decided to account for the multilevel structure in the present study.

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1.

— Insert Table 1 about here —

Tests of H1 and H2

Table 2 presents the results of regression analysis designed to explore the relationship between players' perceptions of coaches' identity leadership and team effort, turnover intentions, self-rated individual and team performance (H1) as well as team identification (H2). In line with H1 coaches' identity leadership predicted (a) higher team effort ($b = 0.38, p < .001$), (b) lower turnover intentions ($b = -0.41, p < .001$), (c) higher individual performance ($b = 0.25, p = .006$), and (d) higher team performance ($b = 0.30, p < .001$) on the individual level. As for the strength of the tested relations, the standardized coefficients were as follows: team effort ($\beta = 0.36, SE = 0.09, p < .001$), turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.30, SE = 0.07, p < .001$), individual performance ($\beta = 0.18, SE = 0.07, p = .006$), team performance ($\beta = 0.22, SE = 0.05, p < .001$). Supporting H2, coaches' identity leadership also predicted higher team identification on the individual level ($b = 0.40, p < .001$). The standardized coefficient was $\beta = 0.33 (SE = 0.07, p < .001)$ for this relationship.

— Insert Table 2 about here —

Tests of H3

Table 2 presents the results of regression analysis designed to explore the role of team identification in mediating the relationship between players' perceptions of coaches' identity leadership and team effort, turnover intentions, individual and team performance. In line with H3, results revealed significant indirect effects of identity leadership, via team identification,

on (a) team effort ($b = 0.05, p = .013$), (b) turnover intentions ($b = -0.28, p < .001$), (c) individual performance ($b = 0.09, p = .009$), and (d) team performance ($b = 0.09, p = .001$) on the individual level. To provide indication of the strength of the relationships, the standardized coefficients for the indirect effects for the specific outcomes were as follows: team effort ($\beta = 0.05, SE = 0.02, p = .013$), turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.20, SE = 0.04, p < .001$), individual performance ($\beta = 0.07, SE = 0.03, p = .009$), team performance ($\beta = 0.06, SE = 0.02, p = .001$).

Discussion

The present research examined how soccer coaches' perceived identity leadership predicted players' individual and team functioning. Supporting our hypotheses, results indicated that the extent to which coaches were perceived to engage in identity leadership was associated with players' perceived greater individual (H1c) and team performance (H1d; see also Fransen et al., 2016; Fransen et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2019). In addition, there was evidence that coaches' identity leadership predicted enhanced team effort (H1a) and lower turnover intentions (H1b). Furthermore, as hypothesised, coaches' identity leadership was associated with stronger team identification among players (H2). Finally, results provided evidence that players' team identification mediated these relationships (H3) — consistent with suggestions that it is by building team identification, that coaches' identity leadership predicts greater team effort and better (individual and team) performance as well as lower turnover intentions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of the present research add to a growing body of work which has drawn on the social identity approach to leadership in sports contexts (e.g., Fransen et al., 2015; 2020; Mertens et al., 2020; Miller, Slater, & Turner, 2020; Slater et al., 2019; Steffens et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018; 2020). It does so by providing evidence of associations between coaches' identity leadership and greater team effort, lower turnover intentions and increased

performance among players. A key contribution of the present work lies in uncovering links between identity leadership and team outcomes in the form of team effort and turnover intentions.

In particular, establishing a positive association between identity leadership and team effort is a much-needed extension to existing literature as this speaks to a core feature of the social identity approach to sports — namely that that centers on *collective* concerns (Rees et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2020). In this regard, it appears that identity leadership has an important role to play in enhancing group members' inclination to contribute to a collective (e.g., a sports team) in ways that help its members realize valued shared goals (e.g., winning a game).

In the case of turnover intentions, our results also supported the proposed negative association of identity leadership and turnover intentions. Thus, coaches who were perceived to show greater identity leadership appeared to be better able to keep players on their team and to discourage them from quitting. This resonates with central ideas from social identity theorizing — namely that by enacting identity leadership and fostering identification with the team, coaches can reduce the perceived permeability of group boundaries (i.e., so that players cannot imagine leaving the team; cf. Haslam et al., 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this way, investment in the development of identity leaders (both on the sidelines and on the field), may provide clubs and sport teams with a powerful tool for building lasting and successful squads. Indeed, initial studies of the development of identity leadership in sports contexts provide some additional insights into how this might be done (Mertens et al., 2020; Slater & Barker, 2019; see also Haslam et al., 2017). By providing support for the negative relationship between coaches' identity leadership and turnover intentions, our research also aligns well with previous research in the sporting context that has found that coaches' expectations and behaviors play an important role in contributing to athletes' intentions to return (e.g., Evans et al., 2020; Spink, 1998). Our study extends this research, by suggesting one way for coaches to

reduce their players' adherence is by displaying identity leadership in part because it serves to foster players' team identification.

Team identification was also identified as a central mechanism through which coaches' identity leadership impacts individual and team outcomes. In this, the present research accords with previous findings that have established group identification as a mediating variable in other sports contexts (e.g., Fransen et al., 2020; Steffens et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2020). With the present research we were able to extend these findings and identify team identification as a crucial factor that fosters collective effort and holds the team together in sustainable ways. Moreover, by using data from a large number of soccer teams, our research provides the first team-level analysis of identity leadership in this sport and additional evidence of the broad practical utility of identity leadership as a meaningful construct in the field (e.g., Fransen et al., 2020). This supports claims that identity leadership is relevant to, and important for, performance in a wide variety of sports.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its implications, the present research has a number of limitations. First, the study's cross-sectional design means we cannot make any causal inferences about the relationships we have observed. In future work, there would therefore be value in expanding on the relationships uncovered here by employing experimental designs that can shed light on causality as well as longitudinal designs that explore how these relationships unfold over time (e.g., over the course of a season).

In addition to the previous point, the present data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had (and continues to have) a significant impact on sports teams, since training sessions, games or even whole seasons have been cancelled or suspended. Thus, more research under different circumstances is needed to examine the extent to which the present relationships generalizable to other (e.g., post-COVID) contexts. Nevertheless, the teams had already completed a number of games in the ongoing season ($M = 18.15$, $SD = 2.90$)

throughout which the data was collected, and so it can be assumed that players were able to form valid ideas of the variables of interest.

While we were able to account for the team-level structure of the data using multilevel mediation analyses, the relatively small number of teams ($N = 24$) also meant that we were not able to examine the relationships at the collective team-level. Given that identity leadership centers around a sense of 'we-ness' among followers (Haslam et al., 2011; Steffens et al., 2014), it would thus be worthwhile examining the extent to which sharedness in these experiences among team members can explain additional variance. Future research should therefore further engage in multilevel investigation of identity leadership with larger samples that allow for between-level tests of hypotheses (cf. Zhang et al., 2009).

As for the use of the short form of the Identity Leadership Inventory, the four items scale showed low reliability in the present sample, while a reduced three-item measure (excluding the advancement item) increased the scale's reliability in the present sample. In light of other research that has used the scale in the context of soccer that found the scale to be reliable (Fransen et al., 2016), we can only speculate about reasons for these findings (e.g., the coaches could not act as a "champions" for their team in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic due to cancelled games and therefore limited opportunities for them to actually defend and advance their team; e.g., by winning matches) and so it might be worth exploring in future work whether there is any important (hitherto unobserved) contextual variation in of the form that identity leadership takes.

Regarding the measurement of team identification, there would be value in future research to employ other, more nuanced measurements of social identification in the context of sports. While Postmes et al. (2013) demonstrated good reliability and validity of the single-item scale that we used in the present research, there might be value in employing measures that capture different dimensions of team identification (e.g., Bruner, Boardley, & Côté, 2014; see also Cameron, 2004) to provide further insights like how identity leadership is associated

with different dimensions of identification, as well as how different dimensions are related to specific outcomes.

While the positive association of identity leadership and team identification seems to be generalizable across different sports contexts, further research is also needed to explain *why* increased identification leads to positive outcomes. A first step in this direction has been taken by Fransen, et al. (2020), who recently established psychological safety as an underlying mechanism through which team identification contributes to team functioning as well as well-being outcomes.

Conclusion

The present research investigated the capacity for coaches' identity leadership to predict individual and team outcomes in the context of amateur soccer. Results support claims that this has an important role to play in encouraging team effort and performance and that it does so by increasing players' identification with the team. Reflecting back on our opening quotation, we would therefore suggest that identity leadership is a key component of the success of coaches like Klopp. For by focusing their energies on creating and promoting a sense of 'us' within their teams they help to create an essential platform for that team's functioning. As Pepijn Lijnders, Klopp's assistant manager at Liverpool observed, "Jürgen creates a family. We always say: 30 per cent tactics, 70 per cent team building" (Herbert, 2017).

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Table 1*Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of variables in Study 1*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Identity leadership	5.85	1.01	-					
2. Team identification	5.96	1.21	.34**	-				
3. Team effort	5.16	1.05	.31**	.28**	-			
4. Turnover intentions	2.24	1.39	-.31**	-.60**	-.28**	-		
5. Individual performance	4.20	1.43	.12	.20**	.00	-.18**	-	
6. Team performance	4.53	1.41	.21**	.25**	.32**	-.31**	.24**	-

Note. *N* = 245-247. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 2

Results of multilevel analyses predicting team identification, team effort, individual/team performance, and turnover intentions.

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>p</i>
Outcome: Team identification			
Identity leadership	0.40	0.09	<.001
Outcome: Team effort			
Predictor			
Identity Leadership	0.38	0.10	<.001
Predictors			
Identity leadership	0.33	0.10	.001
Team identification	0.13	0.05	.014
Indirect effect (a*b)	0.05	0.02	.013
Outcome: Turnover intentions			
Predictor			
Identity leadership	-0.41	0.09	<.001
Predictors			
Identity leadership	-0.16	0.07	.022
Team identification	-0.65	0.07	<.001
Indirect effect (a*b)	-0.28	0.06	<.001
Outcome: Individual performance			
Predictor			
Identity leadership	0.25	0.09	.006
Predictors			
Identity leadership	0.15	0.09	.079
Team identification	0.24	0.10	.014
Indirect effect (a*b)	0.09	0.04	.009

Outcome: Team performance			
Predictor			
Identity leadership	0.30	0.07	<.001
Predictors			
Identity leadership	0.22	0.07	.001
Team identification	0.21	0.06	<.001
Indirect effect (a*b)	0.09	0.03	.001

Note. Level 1 (players): $N = 245$ -246. Level 2 (teams): $N = 24$. All effects are modeled on the within-level.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.