Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity: Review and Prospect

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The issue of how relational identity about leader-subordinate affects each other's behavior is getting attention. This study took the perspective of social cognitive schema to clarify the dimensions and contents of leader-subordinate relational identity if we can understand how leader's identity the relationship between leaders and subordinates, it will guide leaders to show different leadership behaviors, which will become an essential factor affecting subordinate attitudes, behaviors, and the quality of subordinate relationships. How subordinate identity the relationship between leaders and subordinates will also affect how subordinates respond to leaders and show different work attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, exploring leader-subordinate relational identity as having crucial theoretical value and practical application contributions. Based on this, the researcher systematically collected and analyzed the relevant research, aiming to explain the concept of leader-subordinate relational identity, clarify its theory and content, and understand the current study, measurement, and the extension of the relationship network of this concept, etc. Finally, the implications of theory, practice, and, limitations, future directions were also discussed. In the hope that more scholars will invest in the research field of leader-subordinate relational identity.

Keywords: *leader-subordinate relational identity, relational identity, relational schema, social cognitive theory.*

Extended Abstract

The leader-subordinate relationship is an important topic in organizational behavior research (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Research on leader-subordinate hierarchical relationships has mainly drawn on three perspectives: the interactional, self-concept, and social cognitive schema perspectives. The interactional perspective focuses on the behaviors that are exhibited "after" an interaction, as it assumes that leaders and subordinates form different hierarchical relationships based on the characteristics of their interactions. This perspective has been adopted by most scholars researching leader-subordinate hierarchical relationships. The self-concept and social cognitive schema perspectives focus on individuals' internal cognitive status "before" the interaction. They focus on the "self" and the leader-subordinate dyadic role relationship, respectively, as the basis for determining what interaction methods are exhibited. The latter two are newer perspectives adopted by scholars researching leader-subordinate hierarchical relationships.

This paper reviews the research on leader-subordinate relational identity. First, it explains and defines leader-subordinate relational identity, which refers to leaders' and subordinates' cognition or beliefs about the nature and status of the leader-subordinate dyadic relationship. To do so, it elaborates on the theoretical basis of relational identity, including relational schemas in social cognitive theory. It introduces four components of relational identity: communal affection, instrumental exchange, care-repay, and authority-obedience. It discusses the measurement of leader-subordinate relational identity and how the relational identity perspective differs from that of implicit leadership theory. Next, it explores the antecedents of leader-subordinate relational identity, such as cultural values, which include social orientation and parenting style. It then discusses the consequences of leader-subordinate relational identity, including various leadership behaviors and their impact

on subordinates' work attitudes and behaviors. It also discusses the moderating effect of leader-subordinate relational identity and examines the impact of congruence in the leader-subordinate relational identity. Finally, it proposes directions for future research on leader-subordinate relational identity. The systematic review of the theoretical development and empirical research on leader-subordinate relational identity presented in this paper can serve as a basis for further exploration of this topic.

Components and Measurement of
Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity

Tsai et al. (2015) divided leader-subordinate relational identity into two basic dimensions: the equal-unequal dimension along the vertical axis and the close-distant dimension along the horizontal axis. They then explored the connotations of the four kinds of leader-subordinate relational identity corresponding to the four quadrants formed by the intersection of the two axes as follows.

1. The equal and close dimension constitutes the communal affection relational identity. This relational identity is formed in **a relationship between a leader and a subordinate and is based on mutual care and emotional sharing. In such a relationship, the interaction between the leader and the subordinate is an emotional exchange similar to that between friends. Thus, both parties identify their relationship as one of commonality, intimacy, care, and cooperation**. The interactions between them are motivated by emotional reciprocity and based on the principles of social exchange. Both parties respond to the other's emotions.

2. The equal and distant dimension constitutes the instrumental exchange relational identity. This type of relational identity is formed in **a relationship between a leader and a subordinate that is based on the exchange and coexistence of interests. In such a relationship, the interactions between the leader and the subordinate are purely transactional and**

utilitarian. Both parties identify their relationship as one of self-orientation, rational analysis, and competitiveness. Their interactions are motivated by mutual economic benefit and based on the principles of economic exchange. Both parties respond to each other through the exchange of interests.

3. The unequal and close dimension constitutes the care-repay relational identity. This relational identity exists in **a relationship between a leader and a subordinate formed by the provision of resources or assistance with non-job requirements based on traditional Chinese norms for interaction between leaders and subordinates, according to which leaders offer care and subordinates give something in return for that care. The leader identifies the relationship as one of offering care to the subordinate and the subordinate identifies it as one of offering gratitude to the leader.** The relationship is driven by traditional conventions of interaction between leaders and subordinates, and the interaction is based on the principle of role obligation. The two parties respond to each other by following the traditional leader-subordinate interaction norms in Chinese society.

4. The unequal and distant dimension constitutes the authority-obedience relational identity. This relational identity exists in **a relationship between a leader and a subordinate that is based on their level in a power hierarchy. Therefore, the interaction between the leader and the subordinate is based on an explicit hierarchy, in which the leader identifies the relationship as one of issuing commands and the subordinate identifies it as one of obedience.** Interactions are characterized by the control of the subordinate by the leader, who has more power, and are based on the principle that the leader is superior to the subordinate. Both parties respond to each other in conformance to a strict hierarchy between them (Tsai et al., 2015). The conceptual framework of the four types of LSRI is shown in Figure 1.

To develop a valid and reliable measurement tool for leader-subordinate relational identity based on their proposed model, Tsai and Chou (2020) first identified the components of leader-subordinate relational identity

Figure 1.
The Model of Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity
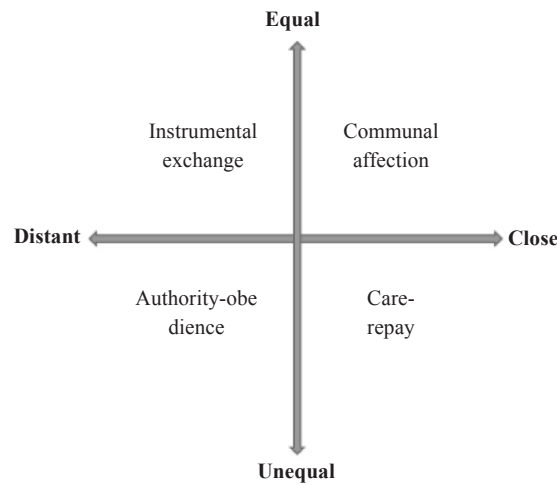
using the critical incident technique. Next, they drafted scale items to measure leader-subordinate relational identity using their results and the theoretical model of Tsai et al. (2015). They then examined the content validity of the scale using the proportion of substantive agreement method, conducted exploratory factor analysis on a sample obtained from leaders to screen items, and examined the scale's internal consistency reliability. Finally, they performed confirmatory factor analysis on a sample obtained from subordinates to confirm the model fit indices and discriminant validity of the four constructs in the theoretical model. The resulting Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity Scale has four subscales and 26 items in total: seven items for emotional commitment, seven items for utilitarianism, six items for reciprocity, and six items for authoritarianism.

Antecedents of Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity

From the perspective of social cognitive schema theory, leader-subordinate relational identity may be determined by individual differences, environmental influences, and person-environment interactions.

1. Cultural values influence leader-subordinate relational identity. For example, Chinese society's orientation toward collectivist values fosters an affective relational identity in subordinates.

2. Parenting styles inferentially influence individuals' leader-subordinate relational identity, with authoritative parenting promoting affective identity and authoritarian parenting promoting unequal identity.

3. Attachment styles also influence subordinates' leader-subordinate relational identity, with securely attached subordinates being inclined toward an affective identity.

4. Leadership behaviors can be learned and modeled by subordinates, leading to subordinates forming different leader-subordinate relational identities based on different leadership behaviors.

5. Research has verified that familial and cultural factors extend their influence to individuals' leader-subordinate relational identity in the workplace.

Outcomes of Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity

This study reviewed the literature to identify the outcome variables that are affected by leader-subordinate

Table 1

Social Orientation and leader-subordinate relational identity between Leaders and Subordinates

relational identity	communal affection		care-repay		instrumental exchange		authority-obedience	
Social Orientation	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate
Authoritarian Orientation		+		+			+	
Relationship Orientation		+	+	+	+		+	
Authoritarian Orientation	+	+	+	+			+	+
Other Orientation	+	+	+	+				+

Table 2

Perceived Parenting Style of Leaders and Subordinates and Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity

relational identity	communal affection		care-repay		instrumental exchange		authority-obedience	
Perceived Parenting Style	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate	leader	Subordinate
Authoritative	+	+	+	+				
Permissive			+					
Authoritarian			+	+			+	+
Neglectful						+		

Table 3

Paternalistic leadership and Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity

relational identity	communal affection	care-repay	instrumental exchange	authority-obedience
Paternalistic leadership	Subordinate	Subordinate	Subordinate	Subordinate
authoritarian leadership	-		+	
Juan-Chiuan leadership		+		+
benevolent leadership	+	+		
benevolent leadership to people	+	+	+	
benevolent leadership to work			-	

relational identity. The main findings are as follows.

1. Leaders' relational identity influences their leadership behavior. For example, a communal affection relational identity is positively associated with inspirational leadership, whereas an instrumental exchange relational identity is positively associated with authoritarian leadership.

2. Leaders' relational identity influences subordinates' work attitudes and behavior. For instance, a communal affection relational identity positively influences subordinates' altruistic behavior, whereas an instrumental exchange relational identity negatively influences subordinates' altruistic behavior.

3. Subordinates' relational identity influences their work attitudes and behavior. For example, a communal affection relational identity is positively associated with prosocial behavior towards the leader, obedience to the leader, and affective commitment, whereas an instrumental exchange relational identity is positively associated with emotional exhaustion.

4. Relational identity influences the relationship between leadership behavior and subordinate performance and thus serves as a moderating variable in the relationship.

5. High congruence between leaders' and subordinates' relational identity positively influences relationship quality.

Moderating Effect of Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity and the Impact of Congruence in Relational Identity Perception Between Leader and Subordinate

1. In the context of relational identity serving as a moderator, a strong communal affection relational identity among subordinates strengthens the positive relationship between leaders' emotional leadership and subordinates' loyalty. An instrumental exchange relational identity among subordinates strengthens the relationship between task-oriented leadership and job performance, whereas a communal affection relational identity among subordinates strengthens the relationship between emotional leadership and loyalty.

2. Congruence in relational identity between leaders and subordinates also impacts outcomes. High congruence in communal affection relational identity positively influences leader-subordinate relationship quality, whereas high congruence in instrumental exchange relational identity negatively influences leader-subordinate relationship quality. Incongruence between leaders' and subordinates' communal affection relational identities results in poorer perceived relationship quality among subordinates compared with congruent communal affection relational identities.

Table 4
Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity and outcome variables

Outcome variables Relational Identity	Prosocial behavior to the leader	Obedience to the leader	Commitment to the leader	Emotional exhaustion	Psychological well-being	Work performance
communal affection	+	+	+		+	+
care-repay	+		+		+	+
instrumental exchange		+		+		
authority- obedience	+	+	+			

Figure2.
Conceptual Framework of Leader-Subordinate Relational Identity
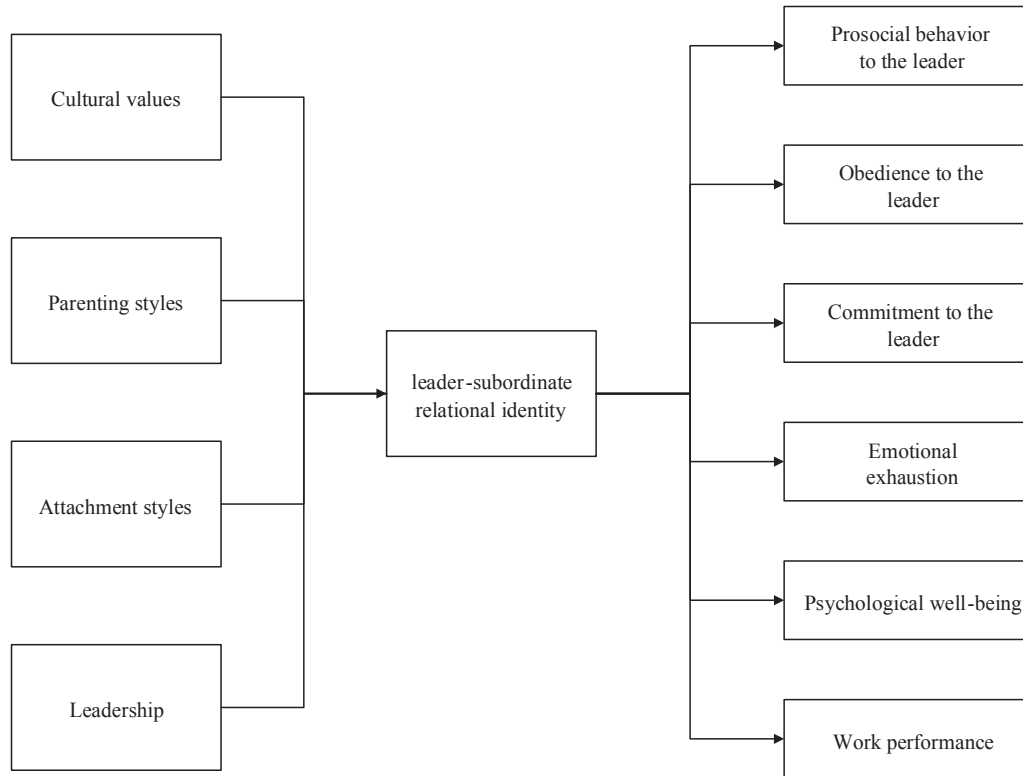
3. Research has shown that when subordinates' communal affection, care-repay, or authority-obedience relational identity is stronger than that of their leaders, the relationship quality is higher, suggesting that when subordinates value giving back to leaders or obeying them, the relationship quality improves.

Conclusion and Research Outlook

This section discusses directions for future research on leader-subordinate relational identity. The following topics may be considered for further exploration.

1. Examine additional antecedents that shape relational identity, such as cultural values, educational environment, individual traits, motivations, and attachment styles.

2. Investigate other potential outcome variables affected by relational identity, including various leadership behaviors, subordinate attitudes and behaviors, and team and organizational outcomes.

3. Explore the mediating and moderating mechanisms through which relational identity impacts outcomes.

4. Extend the study of the effects of relational identity from the dyadic level to the team and network levels.

5. Compare the influences of different leadership levels on relational identity.

6. Investigate the interaction processes, and the effects of congruence, between leader and subordinate relational identities over time.

7. Conduct cross-cultural comparative studies on relational identity.

8. Discuss the practical implications of relational identity research for leader selection, training, and leveraging cultural characteristics to improve subordinates' performance.

In summary, this study provides directions to further develop the emerging research area of leader-subordinate relational identity and its antecedents, outcomes, boundary conditions, and cross-cultural generalizability. The theory and research findings on leader-subordinate relational identity discussed in the paper have important practical implications and can serve as guidelines for organizational management.