CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
As humans, we are "essentially social in nature and situated in context" (Fiol, 2001, p. 692; Pratt, 1998). In this regard, identification is one of the few concepts that binds the individual to its larger social environment (Albert et al., 1998; M. R. Edwards & Peccei, 2007; Pratt, 2001) and captures the essence of the psychological relationship between individuals and their social environment, such as the organization or work group (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). In fact, identification partially answers the fundamental question “Who am I?” (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989) – not only in terms of a unique isolated individual, but also in relation to the social surrounding. Therefore, identification guides our behavior and provides continuity, coherence, and a sense of meaning (Amiot, Blanchard, & Gaudreau, 2008; Fiol, 2001). Within the present dissertation, I focus on identification in organizational settings, where identification helps employees to find a “sense of meaning, belonging, and control at work” (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004, p. 2).

Besides providing orientation to the individual, employee identification can make a significant contribution to an organization’s sustained competitive capability (Fiol, 2001). Because people enact behavior that is consistent with their identity (Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Pratt, 2001), employee identification ensures that employees have the benefit of the identification target at heart when taking decisions and act in the target’s best interest (Cheney, 1983; Sluss, Polyhart, Cobb, & Ashforth, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The more employees identify with the organization, for instance, the more they think and act from an organizational perspective (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Therefore, employee identification constitutes a crucial asset for organizations.

In order to better understand identification processes in organizations, researchers and practitioners need to take a more holistic approach to identifications. In this regard, research needs to specify the focus of identification as employees can identify with different targets
at work, such as their organizations, their team, their leader\(^1\), or their profession (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Van Dick, 2001). Systematically addressing identifications with various foci concomitantly is the first important contribution of this dissertation.

Similarly, more research needs to be done to better understand how identifications at work develop (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Pratt, 1998). In particular, proximal antecedents of employee identifications have remained largely unexplored. Consequently, enabling an active management through illuminating antecedents grounded in everyday work practices is the second important contribution of my research.

In the remainder of this chapter, I elaborate on the issues raised above in more detail. First, I describe the concept of identification and outline how identification is a deep-rooted process in humans. Next, I shortly illustrate the many positive outcomes associated with identification, before I discuss different foci of identification in detail. Then, I turn to changes in contemporary work settings that necessitate an active management of identification and provide some theoretical background for the discovery of proximal antecedents of identification. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a more comprehensive description of the goals of this dissertation and an overview of the overall dissertation.

**THE CONCEPT OF IDENTIFICATION**

The concept of identification is grounded in the social identity approach (social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1979, and self-categorization theory, Turner, 1982) and many different definitions of social identification have been suggested. Social identity theory, for instance, suggested that the self is composed of multiple social identities and defined identification as “a part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value

\(^1\) Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “leader” and “supervisor” as well as “identification with the leader/supervisor” and “leader/supervisor identification” interchangeably.
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and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). In organizational research, identification has been characterized as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Gautam, Van Dick, and Wagner suggested that “organizational identification is a merge of personal-self with organizational-self” (2004, p. 310). Even though all of these definitions highlight slightly different aspects of identification, they all converge in the assertion that through identification, a social referent from outside the individual is absorbed to become part of the self. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will adopt Pratt’s (1998, p.172) view that identification occurs when an individual’s beliefs about another person or group become self-referential or self-defining. This rather inclusive conceptualization leaves room for identification with various foci (see below), and emphasizes the process of linking a social entity to the self. Furthermore, as reflected in all of the above definitions, this dissertation deals with a permanent, fairly stable integration of a social referent into the self-concept (i.e., deep structure identification) as opposed to situated identifications, which arise temporarily in response to specific environmental cues (Riketta, Van Dick, & Rousseau, 2006; D. M. Rousseau, 1998).

Importantly, identification has to be distinguished from its closest conceptual neighbor: commitment (for detailed comparisons see Gautam et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Even to date, identification and commitment are sometimes used synonymously as both concepts refer to an individual’s attachment to its larger social environment and share some conceptual overlap (Meyer et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Moreover, some scales assess organizational identification and commitment with similar items and thereby contribute to the confusion of both constructs (see Gautam et al., 2004).

However, identification is radically different from commitment when considering its definition and theoretical grounding in the social identity approach. In this respect,
identification reflects the extent to which the social referent is incorporated in the self-concept. Consequently, through identification, values and goals of the referent become guiding principles of decisions and actions by virtue of being part of the self (e.g., Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Van Dick & Wagner, 2002). On the contrary, commitment is characterized as “a force that binds the individual to a course of action” (Meyer et al., 2006, p. 667), so that the individual self and the social referent remain separate entities (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2005). As such, commitment can be understood as a phenomenological description of an individual’s attachment and lacks the crucial component of self-definition inherent in identification. Supporting this conceptual distinction, factor analyses revealed that identification and commitment are two separate constructs (Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2001, 2004; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Therefore, it is both useful and sensible to treat each construct as such (Meyer et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

**Measuring Identification**

Much has been written about the dimensionality of identification as a construct and researchers have debated at length whether identification is an unidimensional or multidimensional concept. These ongoing discussions have generated a variety of potential subdimensions (e.g., cognitive, affective, or evaluative components) and multidimensional measures of identification along with some corresponding evidence (e.g., Ashmore, Deaux, McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; M. R. Edwards & Peccei, 2007; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Leach et al., 2008; Van Dick & Wagner, 2002). However, despite these various expansions and differentiations, the cognitive, self-referential aspect of identification seems to be the dominant characteristic, which is accompanied by or subsequently leads to affective, evaluative, or behavioral responses (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Boros, 2008; Dutton et al., 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992, 1995). As such, the distinction between different components of identification might be somewhat arbitrary (Boros, 2008). Thus, identification is most commonly measured and reported as an overall
Following this line of thinking, I will adopt the unidimensional view on identification for my research. As such, I will use the Mael and Ashforth Scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, 1995) to assess identification in my primary empirical studies, which I have chosen for several reasons. First, it is the most widely used measure of identification in organizational research and has been applied in a large number of different contexts (M. R. Edwards, 2005; M. R. Edwards & Peccei, 2007; Riketta, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Hence, it is the most representative measure for the organizational identification literature (Boros, 2008). Second, the scale is explicitly grounded in social identity analysis (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, 1995; see also Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006) and seems to produce relatively homogeneous and robust results in comparison to other measures (Boros, 2008; Riketta, 2005). Third, in keeping with a more holistic approach to study identification, this scale is deemed especially appropriate as previous research has adopted it to assess identifications with different foci (on which I elaborate below; e.g., Carmeli, Atwater, & Levi, 2011; Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer, & Lloyd, 2006; Riketta & Nienaber, 2007).

**Identification as a Fundamental Human Process**

From an evolutionary psychology perspective, identification might have enabled humans to collaborate outside their immediate kin group to obtain mutual fitness advantages (Axelrod, 2006; Caporeal, 1997). Indeed, small social groups have been suggested to provide the basic unit for human natural selection, so that integrated and well-coordinated groups yielded advantages for survival (Brewer, 2007; Brewer & Caporeal, 2006; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). In this respect, identification can be viewed as “the social glue” (Pratt, 2001; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004) that keeps a group together in times of vital challenges and crisis (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999; Van Vugt, 2001) and encourages individuals to forego short-term outcomes from outside the group for the (potential) long-term benefit from within the group (e.g., Tyler, 2001). Identification
enhances the individual’s group loyalty and thereby contributes to the group’s stability and longevity (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). In sum, evolutionary psychology proposes that the proneness to identify might have provided benefits in survival for our phylogenetic ancestors. Even though we cannot directly test these propositions about human evolution, which render them somewhat speculative (Bahn, 1990; see also Panksepp & Panksepp, 2006), empirical evidence based on modern human behavior supports this evolutionary view of identification (Brewer & Caporeal, 2006; Caporeal & Brewer, 1991; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006). Hence, evolutionary theory highlights the very likely possibility that contemporary identification processes have a long-standing history and are firmly rooted within our species.

Similarly, identification has been proposed to fulfill some basic human needs. Meyer et al. (2006) proposed, for instance, that identification serves to establish self-esteem, security, and belonging. Along the same lines, Pratt (2001) outlined that needs for affiliation, safety, self-enhancement, and meaning can be fulfilled through identification. Furthermore, multiple authors have linked identification to only one specific need such as belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Baumeister & Leary, 1995) or uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Albeit different taxonomies of motives, they all converge in the affirmation that identification indeed fulfills basic needs, so that people readily identify in all kinds of situations.

Combining the notion on basic human needs with the evolutionary view on identification, the clear picture emerges that identification seems to be something fundamental in human behavior. Indeed, as individuals seek to understand who they are – a question that has already kept generations of philosophers ponding (e.g., from the Greek aphorism “Gnothi seauton” [Know thyself] to Descartes, 1641/1996) – individuals are motivated to learn more about themselves vis-à-vis their social environment and are inclined to engage in identification processes (Bem, 1972; Brewer, 1991; Festinger, 1954;
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Pratt, 1998).

**VALUABLE OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH IDENTIFICATION**

For quite some time, strategy research has focused on human resources as the most important source of sustainable competitive advantages (e.g., Pfeffer, 1994; Stimpert, Gustafson, & Sarason, 1998). However, human resources can only fulfill this promise and become the driving force of superior performance, if they are aligned with the values and goals of the organization and if they do not leave the organization (Coff, 1997; Fiol, 2001). Identification by its very nature can secure that both of these conditions are met, which makes employee identification an important building block of an organization’s competitive advantage (Fiol, 2001).

The importance of identification is also mirrored in a continuously growing research interest in identification processes, ever since Ashforth and Mael (1989) have first introduced the concept to organizational research (Albert et al., 2000, Pratt, 2001; Van Dick, 2004). Consequently, much research has illustrated the numerous favorable outcomes identification provides for both the employing organization and the individual employee, which makes identification a desirable goal for the mutual benefit of both parties. With respect to outcomes of greater interest to the organization, much research has concentrated on turnover and extra-role performance (for meta-analyses see Riketta, 2005, and Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). As such, ample evidence suggests that identification is strongly related to turnover or early retirement intentions and actual turnover (e.g., Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; L. G. E. Smith, Amiot, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2013; Van Dick & Wagner, 2002; Zhu, Wang, Zheng, Liu, & Miao, 2012). Likewise, identification has been associated with extra-role behavior of various forms including specific behaviors (e.g., individual initiative or voice behavior) as well as broader concepts like organizational citizenship behavior or prosocial behavior (M. R. Edwards & Peccei, 2007; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Van Dick, Grojean, Christ, & Wieseke, 2006; Vondey, 2011). Surprisingly,
the findings with regard to in-role performance are equivocal to date: Although many recent studies were able to detect a small, yet significant association between identification and both supervisor rated and objective performance (e.g., Hobman, Jackson, Jimmieson, & Martin, 2011; Kraus, Ahaerne, Lam, & Wieseke, 2012; Lian, Brown, Tanzer, & Che, 2011), no such link was found in a meta-analysis on organizational identification (Riketta, 2005).

From an employee’s perspective, identification is desirable not only to fulfill basic human needs, but also as a means to obtain specific positive results. In this respect, the effects of identification on job satisfaction are well documented (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006; Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005; Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, & Moltzen, 2006). Interestingly, identification can also enhance employees’ well-being by reducing the frequency of stress experiences, health complaints, emotional exhaustion, or depressed mood (Haslam, O’Brien, Jetten, Vornedal, & Penna, 2005; Van Dick & Wagner, 2002; Wegge, et al., 2006).

**ISSUE 1: FOCI OF IDENTIFICATION**

As many adults spend long hours at work, the organization has been recognized as one of the most important social categories to identify with (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000, 2001). Consequently, much of the initial work on identification in organizational sciences has investigated on organizational identification, which to date is the most well-studied focus of identification (Johnson et al., 2006; Riketta, 2005; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Hogg, & Cremer, 2004). Yet, the social work environment offers a variety of further targets beyond the organization that employees can identify with. The division or department, the own workgroup, or the leader, for instance, are often important referents of employee identifications (Meyer et al., 2006).

Importantly, identifications with these different foci have been differentiated on conceptual, empirical, and practical grounds. From a conceptual perspective, identification
makes a social entity become an essential constituent of the self, which subsequently serves to guide thoughts and actions (Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Pratt, 2001; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). However, each social entity is associated with a unique set of values and goals that are integrated into the self through identification. Therefore, different identifications can be expected to be associated with different processes, antecedents, and outcomes (Van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004).

Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that employees distinguish between different foci of identification. To this end, confirmatory factor analyses have revealed that items pertaining to identifications with different foci load on separate factors, and multifactor models explain the data better than models specifying only one overall identification factor (e.g. Liu et al., 2010; Van Dick et al., 2004).

Finally, the distinction of different foci of identification has proven to be meaningful from a practical viewpoint, for instance, in their prediction of outcomes (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006). I will return to the differential predictive validity of identifications with different foci in more detail in the correspondence of focus section, after introducing some relevant classifications for identifications.

**Collective vs. Relational Identifications**

Social identifications can be categorized as either collective or relational identifications. Whereas collective identifications refer to groups or categories becoming self-referential, relational identifications indicate that a relationship with a significant other is incorporated into the self-concept. Some early works on identification have used the terms social and collective identification interchangeably, as the original social identity approach deals with belonging to a larger group of people as opposed to a personal sense of self. However, researchers have subsequently attested to the importance of relational identifications as a third form (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Interestingly, this classification mirrors the basic structure of the self as a composition of
personal, relational, and collective levels of self-representation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).

As relational identification has been introduced only about a decade ago, it has received markedly less research attention than team or organizational identification (e.g., Ashforth & Sluss, 2006; S. Zhang, Chen, Chen, Liu, & Johnson, 2014; Zhu et al., 2013). Nevertheless, accumulating evidence has demonstrated that especially relational identification with the supervisor plays an important role in work contexts and is worth to investigate further (e.g., Liu et al., 2010; P. Wang & Rode, 2010; Y. Zhang & Chen, 2013; Zhu et al., 2012).

**Nested vs. Cross-Cutting Identifications**

In their relationships to each other, identifications can be described as nested or cross-cutting. As the leader, the workgroup, the department, and the organization are related in a way that the smaller entity is part of the larger one, these identifications are referred to as nested identifications (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Lawler, 1992; Riketta & Nienaber, 2007). In this respect, all identifications with a smaller unit are identifications in their own right as well as means to a higher order identity, thus making nested identities part of a means-end-chain (March & Simon, 1958). In contrast, employees may identify with their
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occupation or profession, which is still within their work context but not limited to their specific team or organization. Such identifications are called cross-cutting (i.e., they share some members, but not all; Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ellemers & Rink, 2005). Figure 1.1 captures graphically, how these different identification foci are related among each other.

Interrelations between Identifications

Both nested and cross-cutting identifications usually overlap to some degree and are often positively interrelated (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). Many different reasons have been suggested to account for such a positive association. First, the principle of cognitive consistency and the human desire to maintain a coherent self-concept (Festinger, 1954) could lead to positive relationships among overlapping identifications. Second, nested foci within an organization are related through the inherent structure of the organization, which usually makes them aligned at least to some degree (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). As such, Ashforth and Johnson (2001; see also Sluss & Ashforth, 2008) have argued that lower level identifications are more exclusive, concrete, and proximal to an employee and might hence be more salient at first. Subsequently, however, such identifications might generalize to a more abstract level of identification (see also Bartels, Pruyn, De Jong, & Joustra, 2007; Sluss et al., 2012). A team, for instance, is more exclusive than the organization, and employees usually have a clearer representation of their team, which is therefore psychologically closer to the individual employee. Consequently, team identification has been argued to be initially more important (cf. Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000), but might inform the more general perception of the organization afterwards. Conversely, once identifications with higher level foci, such as organizational identification, are established, they can provide a general interpretative scheme, so that an individual perceives lower level identifications in a more favorable way (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001).

Yet, identifications with different foci do not have to be positively related, even
though this is often the case. Several researchers have drawn the attention to cases when identifications are not aligned or even conflicting with each other (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Pratt, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). For instance, goals of the leader or the team might be at odds with overall goals of the organization (Van Dick, 2001). Similarly, a doctor’s professional identification might require him or her to treat a patient differently (e.g., providing the best possible treatment) from the requirements associated with his or her organizational identification (e.g., the hospital needs to cover its costs).

The Importance of Correspondence of Focus

As employees can identify with a variety of different foci, the question arises, which identification predicts the outcome best. Unfortunately, most prior research has considered relationships between isolated foci of identification and therefore produced evidence in support of associations between outcomes and various foci of identification (e.g., Avanzi, Van Dick, Fraccaroli, & Sarchielli, 2012; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013; Zhu et al., 2012). However, some studies have recently started to examine multiple foci of identification simultaneously and assessed their differential predictive validity on outcomes. Such research has repeatedly demonstrated that the strongest effects on outcomes occur, when identification and outcome share the same focal referent or are aligned in terms of level (e.g., Ullrich, Wieseke, Christ, Schulze, & Van Dick, 2007; X. Wang & Howell, 2012). This principle has been referred to as the correspondence of focus (Van Dick et al., 2004). For instance, organizational citizenship behavior toward the team and the organization were predicted by team and organizational identification, respectively (Christ, Van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, 2003; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006). Similarly, leader identification has been shown to enhance speaking up to the leader, whereas team identification enhanced speaking out towards other team members (Liu et al., 2010). Also a meta-analysis provided support for the correspondence of focus principle (Riketta & Van...
Dick, 2005): Work group identification was strongly related to outcomes with a work group focus (e.g., work group climate, work group extra-role behavior, or work group satisfaction), whereas organizational identification was predominantly related to outcomes with an organizational focus (e.g., organizational extra-role behavior, organizational satisfaction, or intention to leave).

In sum, taking the distinction between identifications with different foci into account, the question of employee identification is only relevant to the degree that we understand what the employee identifies with. Moreover, when recognizing the importance of correspondence of focus, new avenues for research arise, not only in terms of corresponding outcomes, but also in terms of corresponding antecedents of identifications. Yet to date, many studies have not completely acknowledged the importance of different identification foci and, as a result, oftentimes concentrate on one specific focus of identification selectively (cf. Grice, Paulsen & Jones, 2002; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Sluss et al., 2012). This (self-)restriction, and the inherent exclusion of other relevant identification foci, however, has not only led to an abundance of seemingly unrelated models, but also bears the risk to either discover spurious relationships or not to discover relevant associations due to concentration on a rather irrelevant focus of identification. As Podnar, Golob, and Jancic summarized it, “the failure of previous research to make a clear conceptual and empirical distinction between one focus and another is a notable gap in the research, because concentrating on a single aspect of the organization may result in serious omissions” (2011, p. 1400). Hence, in this dissertation I will join the more recent trend to consider identification with multiple foci simultaneously (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006; Sluss et al., 2012). Thereby, my research aims to respond to several calls for a more integrated approach to the study of identification (e.g., Meyer et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Van Dick, 2001).
Many changes in the contemporary work context, work content, and work force hinder the development of identification, whereas others magnify the importance of identification for reaching organizational goals. Consequently, these changes have raised the awareness of identification as a valuable organizational asset and the necessity to actively manage identification (Barker, 1998; Sluss et al., 2012). The question of how identification can be fostered is therefore the second important question guiding my dissertation, on which I will elaborate after highlighting some of the most important changes.

With regard to the work context, different trends pose a threat to the natural development of identification. Globalization, for instance, often brings about more globally operating and heterogeneous organizations, which are psychologically more distant to the individual employee and thus can erode the individual’s attachment to the organization (Herriot & Scott-Jackson, 2002; Wieseke, Kraus, Ahaerne, & Mikolon, 2012). Similarly, organizational changes involving major restructuring or mergers frequently involve a fundamental transformation of what the organization is and consequently hamper identification (Albert et al., 2001; Fiol, 2001; Giessner, 2011; Van Dick, 2004). Also contractual and contemporary work often implies that employees are less willing to incorporate this temporary or marginal organizational “membership” into their permanent self-concept and therefore impede identification (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; George & Chattopadhyay, 2005; Lipponen, Helkama, Olkkonen, & Juslin, 2005). On the contrary, team work has become ubiquitous (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003), for which identification is an important facilitator (Albert et al., 2000; Ellemers, 2001). This is even more the case when collaboration becomes virtual. Here, identification might substitute for ineffective
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traditional mechanisms of mutual regulation, while reduced possibilities for personal
encounters render identification more difficult to develop (Bouas & Arrow, 1996; Fiol &
O’Connor, 2005; Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999; Scott, 1997; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, &

Along the same lines, many transformations in the work content require employees to
take on greater levels of responsibility and self-control, which contributes to identification’s
role as an indispensable organizational asset (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Pratt, 1998). As
many jobs have shifted from the manufacturing to the service sector in industrialized
countries, tasks have become less manual and more cognitive and flexible instead
(Ellemers, 2001). In addition, to survive in global competition and turbulent markets
organizations and their employees need to constantly adopt and show innovative and extra-
role behaviors to secure their company’s sustainable success (Ellemers, 2001; Fiol, 2001).

Finally, the work force itself has changed with significant implications for
identification, too. The demographic change many Western countries are facing is
associated with an increased diversity of the work force (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003;
Leibold & Voelpel, 2006), thus rendering identification more difficult to develop
(Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004; Homan, Hollenbeck, Humphrey, Van
Knippenberg, Ilgen, & Van Kleef, 2008; Tsui, Egan, & O’Reilly, 1992). However, the
demographic change – taken together with longer times spent in education and a shorter
work life – also leads to a shortage in well-educated professionals (Ellemers, 2001). In the
resulting “war for talents” (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), identification can
be one strategy to retain employees, once they have been successfully recruited (Mael &
Ashforth, 1995; Riketta, 2005; Zhu et al., 2012). As such, identification contributes to the
organizations overall performance because turnover has been associated with excessive
costs, and employees’ tenure makes investments in selection and development processes
pay off (Salop & Salop, 1976; Van Dick, 2004).
ISSUE 2: PROXIMAL ANTECEDENTS OF IDENTIFICATION

Much early research on (organizational) identification has focused on rather static (organizational) properties to enhance identification. Sticking closely to antecedents that should enhance identification according to social identity theory, initial research focused on means to highlight the distinctiveness of the group or to promote identification-related self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998). For instance, many studies investigated the perceived external image or prestige as determinants of identification (e.g., Bartels, et al., 2007; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortnell, 2002; Wan-Huggins, Riordan & Griffeth, 1998). On the same basis, large, boundary-less, or versatile organizations make it harder for their employees to recognize a common distinct core, which in turn could impede identification (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Albert et al., 2000; Pratt, 1998). Consequently, strategies that highlight the distinct organizational characteristics, such as pointing to a rivaling other organization, have been suggested to promote identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998).

Expanding the range of antecedents beyond the ones that flow directly from social identity theory, other rather global predictors – such as tenure (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), socialization tactics (Pratt, 1998), favorable communication climates (Bartels et al., 2007), or justice perceptions (Olkkonen& Lipponen, 2006) – were found to foster identification. Even though these studies have provided valuable insights into the processes associated with identification, these comparably stable antecedents might only be altered in the long run, if at all, and are therefore difficult to use for an active management of employee identification. Yet, to enable such an active management, it is important to discover more proximal levers of identification that can easily be applied in organizational contexts.

Furthermore, when integrating this quest with the different foci of identification (Issue 1), relationships between antecedents and identifications might not be isomorph. Instead,
different (proximal) antecedents might be useful to shape identifications with different foci. In this respect, the idea of corresponding foci between identification and outcome might be extended to include also antecedents in a way that antecedents should most strongly shape identification with the focus to which they correspond in target.

**The Importance of Social Interactions**

Complementing the rather impersonal view on the formation of identification as suggested by social identity approaches (Tajfel & Turner, 1978; Turner, 1982), identification can also be established in interpersonal interactions (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Early on, Cheney (1983) acknowledged the role of communication to shape identifications. Similarly, drawing on the long tradition of group (formation) processes, Postmes, Haslam, and Swaab (2005) proposed a model in which a group’s social identity can be formed through social interactions. Moreover, numerous studies have addressed social networks’ influence on identification, thereby pointing to the relevance of interactions for identification development (Bullis & Bach, 1991; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Jones & Hamilton Volpe, 2011). As such, the establishment of a stable, deep structure identification has been suggested to require some modeling and affirmation from others (Ashforth, 1998; Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Gibson, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Corroborating these arguments, Sluss et al. (2012) recently concluded that immediate, personal relationships might play a key role in identification development. Following this reasoning, I will investigate specific, everyday workplace interactions as proximal antecedents of identification in this dissertation.

**Leadership behavior.** One particular well-studied form of interactions in work contexts is leadership. As leaders occupy outstanding positions within teams and due to the position power granted to them by the organization, they exert a special influence on many individuals at the same time (Yukl, 2013). Interestingly, for decades there has been some scattered writing on how to apply social identity theory to leadership phenomena (Haslam
& Platow, 2001; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) recently provided a comprehensive outline of the social identity approach to leadership, which they even labeled the “new psychology of leadership”.

According to this social identity approach, leaders can only be effective when they are successful in transforming followers’ self-concepts, so that the followers voluntarily pursue the goals suggested by the leader. In this respect, leadership needs to provide more than simple situational cues to what is expected in this particular situation in order to create and strengthen deep structure, permanent identifications (Lord et al., 1999). More specifically, the social identity approach suggests that the potential of leadership resides in the relationship between leader and followers. In this regard, leader and followers need to be bound together in a common “we”, that is through a shared identification, in order to jointly reach goals and make their mission come true. As such, it has long been argued that leaders need to represent the group and advance its interests, which is reflected by research on, for instance, leader prototypicality, ingroup-favorism, or leader self-sacrifice (De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2002, 2004; De Cremer, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke, & Bos, 2006; Tyler & Degoey, 1995). However, acknowledging the active and outstanding role of leaders, they also shape the beliefs, desires, and priorities through “crafting a sense of us [the group]” (Haslam et al., 2011, p. 137; see also Haslam & Platow, 2001). In this respect, leaders markedly influence who is part of the group (in-group boundaries) and what the group is about (content of identification), which certainly is highly idiosyncratic for every group. Nevertheless, the processes through which a goal is successfully conveyed on a follower might be comparable irrespective of the particular content. As such, leadership styles, which have previously been established as successful leadership behaviors, might instigate exactly the transformation of followers’ self-concepts, which results in increased identification.
Providing some initial support for this meta-theory, several different leadership styles have been associated with identification. Much research has associated transformational leadership with identification (e.g., Epitropaki, 2013; Hobman et al., 2011; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; X. Wang & Howell, 2012), as the transformation of the follower’s self-concept has long been suggested as a (unique) mechanism through which transformational leadership operates (Bass, 1998; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Additional research has sporadically linked other leadership styles to identification, among which are leader-member-exchange (e.g., Hogg, Martin, Epitropaki, Mankad, Svensson, & Weeden, 2005; Sluss, Kilchak, & Holmes, 2008; Walumbwa, Cropanzano, & Hartnell, 2009), empowering (L. Wu, Wei, & Lau, 2010), ethical (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Wang, Workman, & Christensen, 2011), respectful (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010), or servant leadership (Vondey, 2010; H. Zhang, Kwong Kwan, Everett, & Jian, 2012). However, these studies mostly have not focused on identification as the primary outcome of interest and they usually include identification with only one particular focus. Consequently, these studies do not provide a systematic in-depth rationale for the leadership-identification link.

**Interaction with Others.** Moving beyond leadership practices, the question arises, which other interactions can foster identifications. In this respect, recent research has pointed to coworkers – besides leaders – as important interaction partners, who significantly influence the employee’s work experience (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Consequently, investigating interactions with coworkers might be a promising approach to discover proximal antecedents of identification besides leadership behaviors.

The question *how* others might shape employee identification in social interactions is closely tied to the more general issue of how identification occurs, which has been proclaimed as one of four fundamental questions in organizational identification research (Ashforth et al., 2008). Although a comprehensive model of identification development has not been proposed to date, different researchers have highlighted various aspects. Ibarra
(1999), for instance, pointed to the importance of experimenting with tentative selves and the role of internal and external reactions to elicit professional identification (see also Gibson, 2003). Others have studied perception of social validation as an important precursor of identification (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013). Combining our current knowledge on different aspects of identification development and identifications with different foci, I propose a comprehensive process of identification development in this dissertation. More specifically, I suggest that information about tentative identifications, received in social interactions, serves to validate them and thereby contributes to the formation of stable, deep structure identifications. Consequently, differential effects of various antecedents on different identifications can be expected.

In this regard, interactions at work have long been suggested to fall into one of two categories, namely task-related behavior and social-emotional behavior (Hare, 1960). Although these two broad categories certainly do not accommodate all workplace interactions, this distinction covers a large number of behaviors and is reflected in a wide variety of research areas. For instance, leadership behavior emerged to be either job or employee centered in the Michigan and Ohio State Leadership Studies and task-focused and relation-focused behaviors mark important meta-categories of modern leadership taxonomies (e.g., De Rue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Fleishman, 1973; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002). Similarly, the mentoring literature distinguishes psychosocial mentoring from career-mentoring (Reid, Allen, Riemschneider, & Armstrong, 2008; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), and socialization processes involve both task-transitions and social transitions (Fisher, 1986). As this distinction between task-focused and relational-focused interactions has proven useful in a wide variety of research contexts, it can be a useful guiding distinction in selecting specific workplace interactions to study as antecedents of identification.
GOAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation seeks to provide a more inclusive picture of identification in that it includes multiple foci of identification and aims to uncover antecedents of identification that can directly be used in management practices. Given that it is essential to understand what an employee identifies with, each of the following empirical chapters includes several identifications in the work context to stress the importance of carefully choosing the identification focus under study. Further, I will illustrate that often more than just one identification focus will be necessary to fully understand the identification processes involved. This also implies that the chosen statistical approaches need to be capable of handling multiple related outcomes simultaneously in order to adequately represent related outcomes within one model. To this end, I used a variety of different techniques within the structural equation framework offered by MPlus (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2011).

With respect to the goal to detect proximal antecedents of identifications, much prior research has been dedicated to outline important large-scale antecedents of identification that most commonly either refer to broader perceptions, such as prestige, image, or climates (Bartels et al., 2007; Wan-Huggins et al., 1998), or to immutable characteristics of the employee, the identification target, or both (e.g., tenure, group size, or group composition; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Lipponen et al., 2005; Tsui et al., 1992). With the research of my dissertation, I aim to complement these findings through antecedents at a more proximal level that can more easily be applied in everyday managerial practices. Thus, to advance our understanding of how identification is evoked in everyday work interactions, I will first take a closer look at leadership behavior as one way to enhance employee identification and subsequently broaden the spectrum of potential antecedents to include also coworkers as crucial interaction partners. These precursors of identification are more easily influenced than the currently tested ones and encourage individuals to actively engage in identification-promoting behaviors.
Bringing the research streams on interactions in general and leadership in particular together with the understanding that identifications with different foci need to be separated, potentially different associations between different antecedents and identifications with the various foci need to be considered. Therefore, I propose a more holistic approach to the study of identification in work contexts in my dissertation. In this regard, I explore the dynamics of identification development with different foci and uncover proximal means to enhance employees’ identifications with different foci. Thereby, this dissertation contributes to a more precise understanding of identification in the work context that serves both researchers and practitioners alike.

**DISSERTATION OVERVIEW**

The heart of this dissertation consists of three empirical papers, which were written to be published in scientific journals and were slightly adopted to fit the present format. These chapters have particularly benefitted from the collaboration with different co-authors, so I use “we” rather than “I” as the appropriate pronoun throughout these chapters. Moreover, as the empirical chapters are also meant to be understandable on their own and outside the context of this dissertation, they all follow the same structure (i.e., theoretical background, methods, results, and discussion).

Underlying all three empirical studies is the attempt to provide a more holistic view on identification through the inclusion of multiple foci and by examining more proximal, malleable antecedents of identifications that enable a more active management of identification. An overview of the distinct aspects of identification, antecedents, and methodological considerations for each study is provided in Table 1.1. Aiming to answer the question what managers and organizational members can do to actively foster identification, each study contributes a unique piece to solve this puzzle.

The first empirical study, which is presented in Chapter 2, examines transformational leadership as a way to foster identifications. In this respect, the ability to transform
followers’ self-concepts has long been discussed as a key mechanism through which transformational leadership unfolds its effects on outcomes (Bass, 1998; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Shamir et al., 1993). Accordingly, much prior research has already investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and identification from a leadership perspective, but mostly without considering the specific focus of identification under study (e.g., Epitropaki, 2013; Kark et al., 2003; Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Furthermore, this rich body of research has not been used to inform identification research in return, which is looking for manageable antecedents of identification. With the presented meta-analysis the valuable insights inherent in the accumulated evidence from this area of leadership research become more accessible to identification research. In this regard, the study sheds light on the potentially different relationships between transformational leadership and identifications with the organization, the team, or the leader in a meta-analytic summary of the current state of the literature. The results reveal that transformational leadership is indeed more strongly related to leader identification than to team or organizational identification. To advance our understanding of the relationships between transformational leadership and multiple nested organizational identifications further, I apply a meta-analytic structural equation modeling technique (MASEM; Cheung & Chan, 2005). The resulting integrative model shows that transformational leadership first influences leader identification and subsequently affects collective identifications – that is, team and organizational identification – indirectly via leader identification.

Chapter 3 presents the second study, which examines how consideration and initiating structure, two fundamental leadership behaviors suggested by the Ohio State Leadership Research program (e.g., Fleishman, 1973; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilgen, 2004; Stogdill, 1953), shape identifications and organizational outcomes. Whereas the first study is grounded in the tradition of transformational leadership, which often assumes that the capability to transform followers’ identifications is a unique feature of this specific leadership style, the
### Table 1.1

*Overview of Study Features with Respect to Addressing Multiple Foci of Identification, Different Antecedents, and Methodological Considerations*

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<th>Study 2</th>
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<td>Multiple foci of identification assessed</td>
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<td>Collective identification</td>
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<td>Professional identification</td>
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<td>Relational identification</td>
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<td><strong>Antecedents of Identification</strong></td>
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<td>Coworker behavior</td>
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<td>Traditional leadership styles</td>
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<td>Distinction of task-focused vs. relation-focused behavior</td>
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<td>Correspondence of focus principle</td>
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<td><strong>Methodological Aspects</strong></td>
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<td>Relationships among identifications modeled</td>
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<td>Indirect effects</td>
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<td>Multilevel data considered</td>
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second study was designed in the spirit of the more general social identity approach to leadership (e.g., Lord et al., 1999; Haslam et al., 2011). More specifically, this study again encompasses multiple foci of identification and assesses differential effects of consideration and initiating structure on these identifications and key outcomes (i.e., individual performance, unit performance, and job satisfaction) in path models. The results demonstrate that consideration and initiating structure primarily nurture identification with the leader or the organization, respectively, and that these identifications are in turn each associated with different outcomes. In this respect, this study explicitly extends the “correspondence of focus” principle from identification-outcome relationships to include antecedents of identification as well. Furthermore, this model takes a crucial step to empirically support the social identity approach to leadership and illustrates that different leadership behaviors are needed to foster different foci of identifications.

Chapter 4 presents the third and final study of this dissertation, in which I move beyond leadership to include both supervisor and coworker behaviors as antecedents of identification. Following the dichotomy of task-focused versus relation-focused behaviors I also used in the previous study, this study examines social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers as means to shape identification with the supervisor, the team, and the profession. Here, again, I draw on the correspondence of focus principle found in studies of identifications and outcomes to predict differential effects of these antecedents on identifications. Furthermore, this study aims to better understand the underlying process of identification development. To this end, several earlier propositions on how identifications are formed (Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 1999; L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013) are integrated to suggest a general mechanism underlying identification development. In order to better understand the identification formation process, identification development of apprentices, who are newcomers to both the organization and the profession, is investigated over a six month time interval using a latent difference score approach within a structural equation model.
model. Thereby, this study provides substantial evidence for the idea that identification develops in social interactions through the social validation of tentative identifications.

Finally, Chapter 5 puts the results of the individual empirical chapters into perspective of the broader scope of this dissertation. Here, I discuss the meaning of the findings taken together and highlight their contributions with regards to the theoretical development of the research field as well as to the practical insights gained for the successful management of identification.