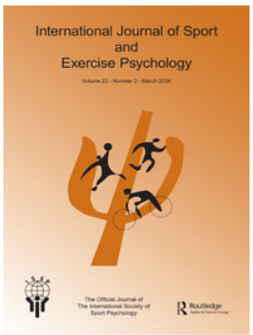

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Promote "*we*" to inspire me: examining the roles of group identification and trust in the association between identity leadership and follower inspiration*

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has highlighted leaders as a source of inspiration for followers in sport, providing leaders embed, embody, and represent the group's values (i.e., the leader demonstrates identity leadership and creates a shared identity). Consequently, two studies (one cross-sectional and one longitudinal) aimed to examine the relationship between identity leadership and follower inspiration via the mediating roles of group identification and trust in the leader. In Study 1, 233 participants completed measures of identity leadership, group identification, trust in their leader, and follower inspiration in a cross-sectional design. In Study 2, 121 participants completed the same measures at two time points (towards the start and end of the season). Cross sectional findings (Study 1) indicated that group identification and trust serially mediated the positive association between identity leadership principles and follower inspiration. Whereas, in Study 2, identity advancement and identity impresarioship at the start of the season predicted follower inspiration at the end of the season through trust in the leader but not through group identification. Taken together, the findings add weight to the importance of identity leadership by not only suggesting that followers of leaders who engage in identity leadership are more inspired but, also, by highlighting important mechanisms (group identification and particularly trust) that may explain these processes.

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Sport is full of examples where leaders have inspired teams to achieve feats beyond their capabilities but, currently, we know little about how leaders inspire followers (Arthur et al., 2012). Understanding how leaders inspire followers in sport is important because inspiration changes an individual's perception of what they can achieve (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and is associated with desirable outcomes including productivity and efficiency (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010), wellbeing (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), and mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2015). Accordingly, leaders who inspire will also enhance athlete performance and wellbeing. Therefore, understanding the antecedents of athlete inspiration is an important avenue of research.

Several studies (Figgins et al., 2016, 2019; Searle & Hanrahan, 2011; Smith et al., 2018) have explored how leaders inspire in sport. These studies identified that leaders could inspire by making followers aware of greater potential, demonstrating belief in followers' ability, showing followers how to overcome obstacles, and providing emotional support. Interestingly, however, while leaders could engage in these behaviours to inspire followers, findings suggest other factors are more important to a leader's inspirational capacity. Figgins et al. (2019) developed a grounded theory that suggests leaders are inspiring to the extent to which they have established trust with their followers. One factor Figgins et al. found to be central to the development of trust is the leader's ability to represent, respect and embed group values. This finding aligns with the social identity approach to leadership (termed identity leadership), whereby the influence of leadership is underpinned by an individual's ability to create, advance, embed, and represent a shared group identity (Haslam et al., 2020a). Based on this initial evidence, identity leadership may enhance a leader's ability to inspire, and group identification and trust may play a role in these relationships, but researchers have yet to investigate identity leadership and inspiration. As such, we have limited knowledge of: (a) if identity leadership is associated with follower inspiration; and (b) the mechanisms that might explain this link. Consequently, across two studies, we examined the relationship between identity leadership and follower inspiration, and explored two potential mediators of this relationship: (a) group identification; and (b) trust in the leader.

The social identity approach

The social identity approach is becoming well-established within sport and exercise literature, with notable growth in last decade (see Haslam et al., 2020b). Combining tenets from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987), a core philosophy of the approach reflects the notion that everyone can define themselves as individuals in "I" and "me" terms (i.e., how I am unique from others: my personal identity), *and* as group members in "we" and "us" terms (i.e., a shared emotional bond with others; a social identity). Crucially, individuals' self-concepts are comprised of both their personal identity and range of social identities (e.g., as a family member, as a Lakers fan). When athletes internalise their group's (e.g., a sport team) interests as a central part of their self-concept, this social identity orientates their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in that context. Further, when individuals perceive that they share a social identity (i.e., we are on the same team, not just on paper, but *psychologically*) there is a greater likelihood that they adopt their teammates perceptions and see one another as similar to each other (Haslam & Turner, 1992). In understanding how to create a shared

social identity, substantive evidence – and associated conceptualisations (i.e., identity leadership; Haslam et al., 2020a) – have established leadership as one of the primary determinants of creating a sense of "us".

Identity leadership is based on the principle that leadership is a process of social influence and leaders mobilise followers by creating and representing a shared identity (Haslam et al., 2020a; Steffens et al., 2014). In short, the more a leader is seen to represent and be part of the group the more influential they are (Haslam et al., 2020a). Specifically, identity leadership comprises four related dimensions of: (1) identity *prototypicality*; (2) identity *advancement*; (3) identity *entrepreneurship* and (4) identity *impresarioship* (cf. Steffens et al., 2014). Identity *prototypicality* ("Being one of us") refers to representing the unique qualities that define the group. Identity *advancement* ("Doing it for us") refers to advancing and promoting core interests of the group. Identity *entrepreneurship* ("Crafting a sense of us") refers to bringing people together by creating a shared sense of "we" and "us" within the group. Identity *impresarioship* ("Making us matter") refers to developing structures, events, and activities that give weight to the group's existence and allow group members to live out their membership. Researchers in sport and exercise have demonstrated that being perceived to engage in identity leadership behaviours promotes a range of positive outcomes for athletes including greater self-efficacy, perceived control, and social support (Miller et al., 2020), but to date, researchers have not investigated the relationships between identity leadership and inspiration. We seek to address this in the current research.

Identity leadership > group identification > trust > inspiration model

As displayed in Figure 1, we propose that by demonstrating identity leadership, individuals will be considered ingroup members (i.e., high group identification) and, thus, be more trusted by followers which, in turn, will enhance their ability to inspire. In what follows, we outline the theoretical and evidence-based rationale for the proposed mediational model.

Within the identity leadership framework, successful leadership hinges on a leader's ability to create, embody, advance, and embed a shared sense of social identity. In other words, leaders engaging with identity leadership behaviours create a strong and shared sense of group identification for all (Haslam et al., 2020a). This theoretical

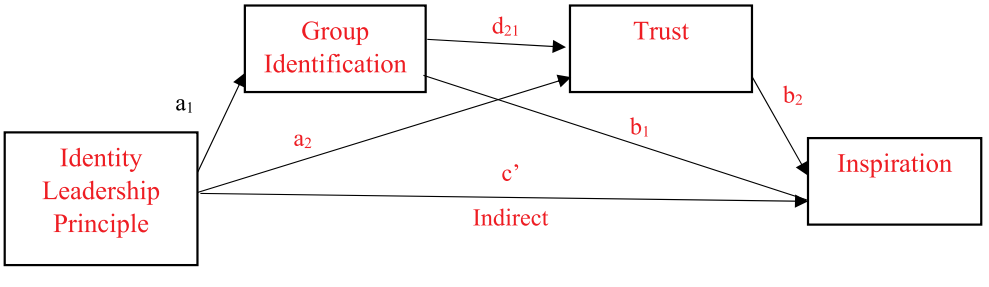

Figure 1. Our hypothesised serial multiple mediation model for the corresponding identity leadership principle (X) relating to inspiration (Y) through two mediators: group identification (M1) and trust (M2).
Note: a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, d_{21}, c'= regression coefficients.

reasoning is also well supported by evidence in sport (e.g., Fransen et al., 2020), and accordingly our proposal that identity leadership is positively associated with group identification is well-established in extent literature. In turn, group identification has been associated with positive individual and group outcomes including team cohesion (Worley et al., 2020), exercise attendance (Stevens et al., 2018), wellbeing (Williams et al., 2019), and performance (Fransen et al., 2017). Researchers have additionally found that group identification often plays a mediational role between leadership behaviours and outcomes (e.g., in the relationship between servant leadership and team cohesion; Worley et al., 2020).

When leaders demonstrate identity leadership, they are perceived to have the group's best interests at heart and are seen as an in-group member. In this case, all group members – including the leader – categorise themselves as part of a group membership that they share (a process termed depersonalisation in self-categorisation theory; Turner et al., 1987). In turn, this shared group identification is likely to pave the way for team members to perceive leaders as more trustworthy and, therefore, be more open to influence from them. Trust has been defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712). In further support of our proposed model, there is some initial evidence (outside of sport), too, that group identification predicts trust in a leader (e.g., Van Dick et al., 2018).

While within the social identity approach it is suggested that identity leadership enhances trust, researchers have paid this limited attention to date. Studies that have explored this have primarily focused on the association between prototypicality and trust (cf. Barreto & Hogg, 2017), with trust seen to mediate the prototypicality – leader effectiveness relationship (Giessner et al., 2009). Beyond prototypicality, studies have shown that leaders who display impresarioship are more trusted by followers (Evans et al., 2021), and that trust in the leader mediates the relationship between identity leadership and follower burnout in organisational settings (Krug et al., 2021). However, Krug and colleagues assessed identity leadership as a unitary construct leaving scope to examine if and how the four dimensions of identity leadership associate with trust.

Researchers have yet to examine the link between identity leadership and inspiration. However, studies conducted by Chadborn and Reysen (2018) examined the relationship between group identification and inspiration. In study 1, participants were asked to rate their identification with their country (America) and the extent to which being American inspired them. Findings revealed that higher identification was associated with more frequent and intense experiences of inspiration. Building on this, Study 2 explored whether identity salience impacts the experience of inspiration via the mediating mechanism of group identification. Participants were randomly assigned to an "American" group (asked to think about their identity as an American) or a "University student" group (asked to consider their identity as a student) and asked to complete questionnaires regarding identification and inspiration in relation to the group they were assigned. The findings showed that participants' identification with a salient ingroup was related to the frequency and intensity at which they experienced inspiration. These findings suggest that higher identification with the group is related to higher levels of inspiration and the more salient this identity is the more inspiration is experienced. In relation to the present study, these findings suggest that followers of leaders who demonstrate identity

leadership may identify more with their group and, subsequently, experience more inspiration. Our study aims to be the first to explore these relationships in sport, and also examines the role of trust in these associations.

Central to inspiration is the proposition that people are inspired by an evocative external stimulus (e.g., a leader) that outlines something considered to be good, right, or true (Belzak et al., 2017). Given that identity leaders are considered to behave in ways beneficial for the group, they should be more inspiring as their actions should be considered as being good, right, and true for the group (i.e., trustworthy). The leader is doing it for "us", and we trust them to be good, right, and true for "us". In short, group identification and trust could explain why identity leaders in sport are inspirational. As it stands, this suggestion is hypothetical and we examine these relationships for the first time.

The present research

Across two studies we explored the relationships between identity leadership and follower inspiration in sport, and whether this relationship is mediated by group identification and trust in the leader. In line with contemporary studies on identity leadership in sport (e.g., Miller et al., 2020) and responding to recent calls by Stevens et al. (2021) to assess further potential mediators, we both establish novel relationships between constructs (i.e., identity leadership and inspiration) and, further, going beyond the descriptions of relationships, examine group identification and trust as potential sequential underlying mechanisms (i.e., serial mediators) of these associations. Specifically, we explore whether perceptions of leaders engaging in identity leadership principles strengthens athletes' group identification, which may, in turn, enhance the extent to which athletes trust their leader, ultimately raising their levels of inspiration. In other words, we propose that group identification and trust serve as mediators in the positive identity leadership – inspiration relationship. Based on the social identity approach, we expected to observe the same associations both cross-sectionally and temporally. In Study 1 we use a cross-sectional design and in Study 2 a longitudinal design to examine the following hypotheses:

H1. The four principles of identity leadership will be positively associated with follower inspiration.

H2. Group identification and trust in the leader will mediate the positive association between identity leadership and follower inspiration.

Study 1

Participants and design

We used an atemporal cross-sectional design to explore the indirect effects of identity leadership on follower inspiration. 233 participants (Females = 64, M_{age} = 20.52, SD = 3.16) met the inclusion criteria set for this study following the removal of 68 participants remained (for two reasons: (a) they had not completed at least one of the measure variables; or (b) they had not identified with a sports team). These participants had a mean of 9.44 years' experience (SD = 5.26) and competed in a range of sports (e.g., football, rugby,

netball) at Amateur ($n = 59$), University ($n = 114$), Regional ($n = 37$), Semi-Professional ($n = 18$), and Professional ($n = 5$) level. Participants had 3.20 years ($SD = 3.27$) experience with their team and 2.40 years ($SD = 2.65$) experience of working with their current leader.

Priori Monte Carlo power estimations, via the MARlab application (Schoeman et al., 2017) were conducted. Specifically, for paths a^1, a^2, d^{21}, b^1, b^2 and c', anticipated estimations between, and standard deviations of identity leadership (X), group identification (M1), trust (M2) and inspiration (i.e., innovation, creativity) reported by previous research (Chadborn & Reysen, 2018; Miller et al., 2021; Van Dick et al., 2018) have been used. Because our sample size estimates are based on four articles alone, this calculation should be considered a vague approximation. In line with previous studies (Stevens et al., 2020), alpha was set at .05, and 5000 replications were conducted. From this, sample size estimates for the mediated paths indicated at least 118 participants needed to achieve a power of .80 (a^1b^1 $N = 108$, a^2b^2 $N = 116$, $a^1d^{21}b^2$ $N = 118$).

Procedure

Following receipt of ethical approval from the lead author's institution, participants were recruited via the authors' Universities and contacts. To be eligible for inclusion, participants were required to be currently playing a sport in a group that had a formal leader (i.e., coach or captain). Here, the formal leader, irrespective of whether they were the coach or the captain, fulfilled the same leadership role within their respective team. Participants were asked to complete measures (online or via paper and pencil questionnaire) of identity leadership, group identification, trust with their leader, and follower inspiration in relation to their coach ($n = 140$) or captain ($n = 93$), and then were debriefed.

Measures

Identity Leadership. The 15-item Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI; Steffens et al., 2014) was used to assess identity leadership. Participants were asked to indicate their perceptions of their leader's identity leadership (e.g., "this leader exemplifies what it means to be a member of the team") on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). Subscales of identity leadership are as follows; identity prototypicality, identity advancement, entrepreneurship, and identity impresarioship. Each subscale includes four items, except for impresarioship, which has three. Research the ILI (Steffens et al., 2014; Van Dick et al., 2018) to have high internal consistency and construct validity for both the global and subscale constructs across more than twenty countries. In line with previous research in sport settings (e.g., Stevens et al., 2018) the ILI also demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present study (Prototypicality $\alpha = .89$; advancement $\alpha = .85$, entrepreneurship $\alpha = .90$, and impresarioship $\alpha = .87$).

Group Identification. A four-item measure (Doosje et al., 1995) was used to assess participants' identification with their sports team. The measure comprises four items (e.g., "I identify with other members of this group"), based on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). For analysis, the total score is averaged to provide a singular group identification score. High internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$) has been demonstrated (Postmes et al., 2013). As with previous

examinations of group identification in sport (e.g., Stevens et al., 2018) the measure was seen to have excellent internal consistency in the present study (α = .90).

Trust. McAllister's (1995) 11-item measure was used to assess participants' perceptions of trust in their leader. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In line with previous research (Dirks, 2000), the measure was adapted to suit the nature of the current study (e.g., "My leader and I have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes" was used rather than "We have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes"). Consistent with previous research in sport (Dirks, 2000) the measure of trust demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present study (α = .89).

Follower Inspiration. We used the Inspiration Scale (IS; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The IS consists of four statements which can be adapted to fit the context of interest (Thrash, 2021). In this case the stems were altered to refer directly to the leader (e.g., "something I encounter or experience inspires me" was changed to "my leader inspires me"). For each of the four statements participants rate their experience in terms of frequency on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very Often) and intensity on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very deeply). For analysis, the four intensity items (1a, 2a, 3a, and 4a) and the four frequency items (1b, 2b, 3b, and 4b) were summed to produce an overall inspiration score. The IS demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present study (α = .97).

Data analysis

First, we screened the data for missing values and parametric assumptions. Second, we identified the direct (H1) and indirect (H2) effects of the four identity leadership principles on inspiration through the potential mechanisms of group identification and trust. Addressing H2, we conducted one serial atemporal mediation model per identity leadership principle (4 in total). For completeness, we also ran the mediators in reverse (i.e., trust before group identification). Analyses of indirect effects were conducted through the lavaan package of R software (v. 4.0.0). Structural equational model estimates (with two serial mediators) are reported alongside robust standard errors. Structural equational model estimates (with two serial mediators) are reported using the Satorra-Bentler correction (Chou et al., 1991; Satorra & Bentler, 1988) due to multivariate non-normality. The Satorra-Bentler correction is robust to non-normality (Satorra & Bentler, 1988). Robust standard errors enabled calculation of 95% confidence intervals (CI's) for all indirect effects. A significant indirect effect can be determined if CIs do not cross zero (Zhao et al., 2010). Further, a good-fitting model is required to interpret paths of a structural model (Imai et al., 2010). Hence, the robust comparative fit index (i.e., the discrepancy between the data and the hypothesised model; CFI), the standardised root mean square residual (i.e., standardised difference between the observed correlation and the predicted correlation; SRMR), and the robust root mean square error of approximation (i.e., absolute measure of fit; RMSEA) were reported. Values close to .08 for the robust RMSEA and .06 for the robust SRMR indicate a

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations for Study 1 variables.

	M	SD	Age	Exp (Sport)	Exp (team)	Exp (leader)	Proto	Advan	Entre	Impre	GI	Trust	Inspira-tion
Age	20.52	3.16	–	.28**	.06	−.09	−.14*	−.08	−.11	−.09	−.18*	−.14*	−.18*
Exp (sport)	9.44	5.26		–	.27**	.17*	−.08	−.01	−.05	−.05	−.07	−.07	−.05
Exp (team)	3.20	3.27			–	.66**	.10	.11	.07	.04	.07	.16*	.12
Exp (leader)	2.40	2.65				–	.10	.11	.15*	.16*	.02	.20*	.20*
Proto	5.22	1.12					–	.75**	.80**	.55**	.40**	.71**	.64**
Advanc	5.34	1.09						–	.76**	.53**	.45**	.68**	.60**
Entre	5.18	1.20							–	.68**	.41**	.74**	.70**
Impre	4.79	1.37								–	.29**	.57**	.59*
GI	5.85	.87									–	.47**	.69**
Trust	4.99	1.00										–	.44**
Inspiration	4.51	1.35											–

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .001$. Variable key: Exp (sport) = years' experience in sport; Exp (team) = years' experience with sport team; Exp (leader) = years' experience with leader; Proto = Prototypicality; Advan = Advancement; Entre = Entrepreneurship; Impre = Impresarioship; GI = group identification.

good model fit. Equally, values close to .95 for CFI (Hu & Bentler, 1999) constitute good model fit. A correlation matrix (see Table 1) identified that intercorrelations between variables (excluding the four identity leadership principles) were below the .80 cut-off (Berry & Feldman, 1985).[1]

Results

Data screening

The dataset included no missing data. Data were screened for parametric assumptions and detected the presence of outliers in all seven variables via box plots, tests of normality, and calculation of *z* scores. Following Smith's (2011) guidelines, data-points with *z* scores greater than two were winsorized. Winsorizing involved replacing extreme values (in our case, all at the negative end of the scales) with the next figure that is not an outlier to reduce the influence of outliers on the data. In total, 5.46% of the data were winsorized. Across all analyses, the multicollinearity assumption was met, and cook's distance values were less than 1. Variance inflation factor values and tolerance values were acceptable (Hair et al., 1995). The independent errors assumption was satisfied, with Durbin-Watson values being between 1 and 3 (Field, 2017).

Indirect effects

To address H1 and H2, in the following analyses the four identity leadership principles form the predictor variable (X), with group identification as mediator 1 (MV), trust as mediator 2 (MV), and inspiration as the dependent variable (Y). The direct effect of identity leadership principles on inspiration makes up H1. Mediation models in this order were a good fit (Std. RMR $\leq$ .05, RMSEA < .08, CFI > .95). Good fit was also identified when the mediators were reversed (Std. RMR $\leq$ .06, RMSEA < .08, CFI > .95). See Figure 2 for an example model.

Prototypicality. We found evidence of significant positive total (β = .38, p < .001) and direct (H1; β = .33, p < .001) effects for *prototypicality* on *inspiration*. In addition, there was a significant indirect effect for prototypicality on inspiration through *group identification* (β = .06, CIs = .001, .12) and *trust* alone (β = .33, CIs = .20, .45). There was a significant indirect effect

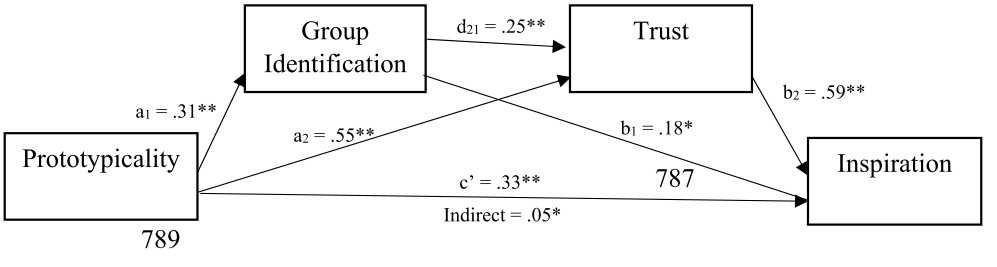

Figure 2. Serial multiple mediation model of prototypicality on inspiration.

Notes: p < .05*, p< .01**. The 95% CI indicate a significant indirect effect. M1 is Group Identification and M2 is Trust. Solid arrows depict significant associations, and dashed arrows depict non-significant associations.

through both *group identification* and *trust* ($\beta = .05$, CIs = .02, .08). When the mediators were reversed (i.e., trust placed before group identification), there was a non-significant indirect effect through both *trust* and *group identification* ($\beta = .04$, CIs = −.01, .08).

Advancement. We found evidence of significant positive total ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) and direct (H1; $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) effects for *advancement* on *inspiration*. There was a non-significant indirect effect for advancement on inspiration through *group identification* ($\beta = .06$, CIs = −.01, .13). There was a significant indirect effect for advancement on inspiration through *trust* ($\beta = .35$, CIs = .23, .48). There was a significant indirect effect through both *group identification* and *trust* ($\beta = .06$, CIs = .02, .09). When the mediators were reversed (i.e., trust placed before group identification), there was a non-significant indirect effect through both *trust* and *group identification* ($\beta = .03$, CIs = −.01, .06).

Entrepreneurship. We found evidence of significant positive total ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$) and direct (H1; $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$) effects for *entrepreneurship* on *inspiration*. There was a non-significant indirect effect for entrepreneurship on inspiration through *group identification* ($\beta = .05$, CIs = −.01, .11). There was a significant indirect effect for entrepreneurship on inspiration through *trust* ($\beta = .25$, CIs = .13, .37). There was a significant indirect effect through both *group identification* and *trust* ($\beta = .03$, CIs = .01, .05). When the mediators were reversed (i.e., trust placed before group identification), there was a non-significant indirect effect through both *trust* and *group identification* ($\beta = .03$, CIs = −.01, .07).

Impresarioship. We found evidence of significant positive total ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and direct (H1; $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) effects for *impresarioship* on *inspiration*. In addition, there was a significant indirect effect for impresarioship on inspiration through *group identification* ($\beta = .04$, CIs = .004, .07) and *trust* alone ($\beta = .22$, CIs = .13, .30). There was a significant indirect effect through both *group identification* and *trust* ($\beta = .04$, CIs = .02, .07). When the mediators were reversed (i.e., trust placed before group identification), there was a significant indirect effect through both *trust* and *group identification* ($\beta = .03$, CIs = .01, .06).

In sum, direct associations were independently found between the four identity leadership principles and *inspiration*. Analyses of indirect effects show that the relationships between the four identity leadership dimensions and inspiration were mediated by: (1) *group identification* in *prototypicality* and *impresarioship* models, (2) *trust* in all models; and (2) *group identification* and *trust* in all models. In reverse (i.e., trust before group identification), indirect effects were significant in the *impresarioship* model only, and non-significant in the remaining models. All mediation models (with mediators in both directions) can be found in the supplementary file.

Discussion

The results showed that all identity leadership principles were directly associated positively with follower inspiration (H1). In addition, prototypicality and impresarioship were associated with follower inspiration through followers' group identification. The four principles of identity leadership were also associated with follower inspiration through followers' trust in the leader. When group identification and trust were both

considered as mediators in serial, both were seen to indirectly effect the relationship between all identity leadership principles and follower inspiration. These findings add further weight to the importance of identity leadership by demonstrating its association with inspiration, and point to group identification and trust as potential underpinning mechanisms. While important to understand these associations, team dynamics are not static. Therefore, it is worth understanding the associations between identity leadership and inspiration, and the role of group identification and trust in this relationship, temporally to move towards casual relations. To achieve this objective, in Study 2, we assess all main study variables as used in Study 1 at two timepoints.

Study 2

Method

Participants and design

In line with similar research (e.g., Miller et al., 2020), a two-wave longitudinal design was adopted to investigate serial mediation models. Initially, 265 athletes participated at wave 1, with 122 athletes ($M_{age} = 19.89 \pm 1.72$; 71 females) of various sporting experience ($M_{years} = 8.22 \pm 6$) taking part in both timepoints (only these participants were included in analyses). The athletes competed in nine sports, with the most common being football ($n = 49$), cheerleading ($n = 27$) and netball ($n = 19$), at university level in the United Kingdom, had 7.79 months (SD = 9.29) experience with their team, and 6 months (SD = 7) experience of working with their current leader prior to data collection at wave one. Retaining the power analyses used for Study 1, sample size estimates for the mediated paths indicated at least 118 participants needed to achieve a power of .80 (a^1b^1 $N = 108$, a^2b^2 $N = 116$, $a^1d^{21}b^2$ $N = 118$).

Measures

The same questionnaires were used in Study 2 as in Study 1. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were at least good across all variables at both timepoints ($\alpha \geq .88$).

Procedure

Wave 1 surveys were handed out between four and six weeks into the season. On the first page, it was noted that this was a two-wave study, and that the procedure will be repeated towards the end of the season. Athletes then completed demographic information and the questionnaire pack. Wave 2, which was an exact replication of the above, was completed in the final two weeks of the season (four months later).

Data analysis

Our planned data analyses replicated Study 1. We tested whether group identification and trust at wave 2 mediated the relationship between perceived identity leadership (i.e., the four principles) at wave 1 and inspiration at wave 2. Group identification at wave 2 formed mediator 1, and trust at wave 2 formed mediator 2. Then, mediators were reversed,

placing trust at wave two as mediator 1, and group identification at wave 2 as mediator 2. Wave 1 group identification, trust, and inspiration were used as controls (Adachi & Willoughby, 2015).

Results

Data screening

There were no missing data, and 2.31% of the data were winsorized. Across all analyses, the multicollinearity assumption was met, and cook's distance values were less than 1. Variance inflation factor values and tolerance values were acceptable (Hair et al., 1995). The independent errors assumption was satisfied, with Durbin-Watson values being between 1 and 3 (Field, 2017). A correlation matrix (see Table 2) identified that intercorrelations between variables at each timepoint (excluding the four identity leadership principles) were below the .80 cut-off (Berry & Feldman, 1985).

Indirect effects

When including group identification as mediator 1, all models were an acceptable fit (Std. RMR $\leq$ 0.06, Robust RMSEA < 0.08, Robust CFI > 0.90). Within the following analyses, perceived identity leadership at wave 1 forms the predictor variable (X), with group identification at wave 2 forming M1. Trust at wave 2 formed M2 and inspiration at wave 2 formed the Y variable. Lastly, all wave 1 variables were used as covariates to control for stability effects. Total effects of wave 1 *advancement* ($\beta = .35$, $p = .004$), *entrepreneurship* ($\beta = .27$, $p = .02$) and *impresarioship* ($\beta = .31$, $p = .001$) on wave 2 *inspiration* were significant. Total effects for wave 1 *prototypicality* at on wave 2 *inspiration* were non-significant. See Figure 3 for an example model, and complete mediation models can be seen in the supplementary file.

There was a significant positive direct effect for wave 1 *advancement* and *impresarioship* on wave 2 inspiration (H1; $\beta \geq .31$, $p \leq .004$). There was a non-significant indirect effect for wave 1 *advancement* and *impresarioship* on wave 2 inspiration through wave 2 group identification ($\beta \leq .02$, 95% CI = $\leq -.09, \leq .12$). There was a significant indirect effect for wave 1 *advancement* and *impresarioship* on wave 2 *inspiration* through wave 2 *trust* ($\beta \geq .20$, 95% CI = $\geq .02, \leq .45$). Furthermore, there was a non-significant indirect effect for wave 1 *advancement* and *impresarioship* on wave 2 *inspiration* through both wave 2 *group identification* and *trust* ($\beta \leq .08$, 95% CI = $-.01, \leq .17$). There was also a non-significant indirect effect for wave 1 *advancement* and *impresarioship* on wave 2 *inspiration* when wave 2 *trust* was placed before wave 2 *group identification* ($\beta = .01$, 95% CI $\leq -.03, \leq .04$). The positive direct effect for wave 1 *prototypicality* and *entrepreneurship* on wave 2 *inspiration* was non-significant (H1; $p \geq .15$).

Discussion

In partial support of H1, the results of Study 2 showed that identity advancement and impresarioship – but not prototypicality and entrepreneurship – at the start of a season were associated with athletes' inspiration at the end of the season (H1). Regarding H2, there was also partial support in that there was evidence that the associations between both advancement and impresarioship at the start of the season and inspiration at the

Table 2. Study 2 Pearson's correlations coefficients (r) between the variables across timepoints.

	Exp (Sport)	Exp (team)	Exp (leader)	Proto	Advanc	Entre	Impre	GI	Trust	Inspiration
Exp (sport)	–	−.04	−.11	−.30**	−.18	−.19*	−.08	−.08	−.20*	−.13
Exp (team)	−.04	–	.54**	−.03	−.08	−.08	−.12	.07	−.06	−.002
Exp (leader)	−.11	.54**	–	−.07	−.04	−.07	−.14	.13	.01	.18*
Proto	−.33**	.07	−.06	–	.85**	.86**	.65**	.30**	.78**	.55**
Advanc	−.25**	−.03	−.14	.75**	–	.87**	.70**	.34**	.82**	.58**
Entre	−.21*	−.06	−.04	.74**	.75**	–	.73**	.34**	.84**	.60**
Impre	−.26**	.01	−.001	.63**	.64**	.73**	–	.30**	.70**	.54**
GI	−.16	.12	.13	.51**	.41**	.52**	.33**	–	.38**	.31**
Trust	−.16	.003	.11	.60**	.62**	.76**	.61**	.42**	–	.64**
Inspiration	−.19*	.07	.20*	.45**	.57**	.53**	.52**	.54**	.58**	–

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .001$. Wave 1 correlations are below the diagonal, and wave 2 correlations are above the diagonal. Variable key: Exp (sport) = years' experience in sport; Exp (team) = years' experience with sport team; Exp (leader) = years' experience with leader; Proto = Prototypicality; Advanc = Advancement; Entre = Entrepreneurship; Impre = Impresarioship; GI = group identification.

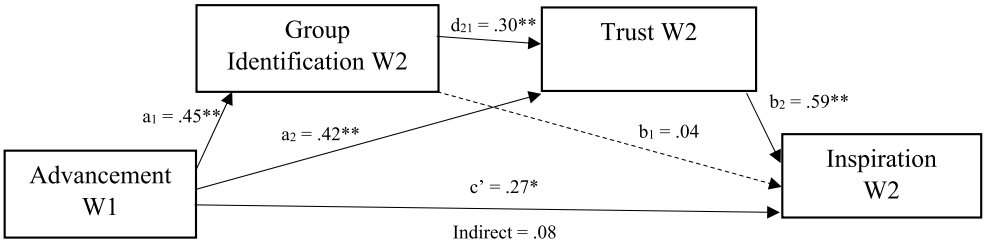

Figure 3. Serial multiple mediation model of advancement at wave 1 (W1) on inspiration at wave 2 (W2).

Notes: $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**. M1 is Group Identification at wave two and M2 is Trust at wave two. Wave 1 variables were used within analyses as controls. Solid arrows depict significant associations, and dashed arrows depict non-significant associations.

end of the season was through trust, but not group identification nor trust and group identification in serial.

General discussion

The aim of our research was to examine the relationship between identity leadership and follower inspiration (H1), and to consider potential mechanisms (i.e., group identification and trust) of this relationship (H2). Regarding H1, all identity leadership principles were positively associated with follower inspiration in Study 1. In Study 2 advancement and impresarioship – but not prototypicality and entrepreneurship – were temporally positively associated with follower inspiration. With regards to H2, in Study 1 group identification and trust in the leader (in this sequential order) mediated the positive association between all identity leadership principles and follower inspiration. In Study 2, however, we found trust in the leader – but not group identification – mediated the relationship between both advancement and impresarioship and inspiration. Broadly, these findings indicate that sport coaches and captains engaging in identity leadership may inspire athletes and that, across a season, advancement and impresarioship increase trust in the leader which, in turn, increases the leader's ability to inspire followers.

Implications for theory and practice

These findings provide important contributions to the identity leadership and inspiration literature. First, our findings support and extend existing identity leadership literature in sport (cf. Stevens et al., 2021) – that reports identity leadership to be related to several performance and wellbeing variables – by showing that identity leadership is associated with follower inspiration. Second, in finding this association, our findings enhance knowledge surrounding the antecedents (i.e., identity leadership) of inspiration. This is not to say demonstrating identity leadership principles is inspiring per se, rather being perceived to engage in identity leadership increases the likelihood that the leaders can inspire. This finding is important because, by demonstrating that identity leadership can inspire followers, leaders may, in turn, have positive impacts on follower performance and wellbeing. Indeed, inspiration is related to effort (Thrash et al., 2010a) and wellbeing (Thrash et al., 2010b).

Regarding our findings on the associations between identity leadership principles and follower inspiration, advancement and impresarioship were positively associated with

follower inspiration across both studies. In Study 2, advancement (i.e., standing up for and championing our team's interests) and impresarioship (i.e., creating opportunities for us as a team to live out our group identity) at the start of the season were associated with greater levels of inspiration at the end of the season, galvanised through trust (also at the end of the season). The reason that advancement and impresarioship – but not prototypicality and entrepreneurship – were positively associated with follower inspiration temporally could be down to the length of time athletes in Study 2 had worked with their team ($M = 7.79$ months) and leader ($M = 6$ months). At such an early stage in their association with the team, athletes might not fully understand their team's identity and, thus, might not know if a leader is an identity prototype. Seeing the leader create opportunities to live out team identity (i.e., showing impresarioship) and stand up for the group (i.e., showing advancement) may enhance understanding of group identity, increase identification, and influence perceptions of the leader and their inspirational capacity.

In relation to entrepreneurship not being associated with inspiration in Study 2, this might be because other leaders are demonstrating these principles. It may be that athlete leaders demonstrate prototypicality and entrepreneurship. For instance, considering prototypicality, if the content of team identity is related to high levels of performance, this is something that an athlete can demonstrate more easily than a coach. Research has shown that teams possess multiple formal and informal leaders who play complimentary roles when leading teams, and that informal athlete leaders can have equal or more influence than formal leaders (Fransen et al., 2017). The nature of the teams sampled could also be a factor that explains the lack of association between inspiration and entrepreneurship. Competitive University teams in the UK often have well-established identities. Therefore, the leader might not need to craft a sense of us (show entrepreneurship), rather they need to create opportunities for new group members to live out team identity (i.e., engage in impresarioship) to strengthen perceptions of trust. This suggests that leaders of teams with a strong and established identity who engage in advancement and impresarioship are more likely to inspire followers.

In testing the relationship between identity leadership and inspiration via group identification and trust (see Figure 1), our findings also shed light on potential mechanisms of identity leadership – suggesting trust in the leader is a key mechanism that might explain the associations between identity leadership and inspiration. Consequently, these findings support a core prediction from Figgins et al.'s (2019) grounded theory that followers need to trust the leader to be inspired by them. While Study 1 suggested that group identification and trust in the leader serially mediated the association between identity leadership and follower inspiration, this study was cross sectional, and it was trust rather than group identification that was driving the effect ($\beta \geq .22$). In Study 2, across a season, only trust in the leader mediated the relationship between two principles (advancement and impresarioship) and follower inspiration.

These findings, therefore, support previous research that has found trust to be a key mediator that can explain the process of effective leadership (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1990) and extend existing identity leadership research that has found associations between prototypicality and trust (e.g., Giessner et al., 2009). The results of our study extend this work by identifying two other identity leadership principles (advancement and impresarioship) that were associated with trust in the leader temporally. We expected

identity advancement (where leaders stand up for and defend the interests of the group) to be associated with trust, as this aligns with Giessner et al.'s proposal that having followers' best interests at heart is key to trust in the leader. Our finding that impresarioship is associated with trust supports the findings of Evans et al. (2021) by showing that leaders who actively embed identities are trusted by followers. Broadly, that trust mediates the association between identity leadership and inspiration may be due to inspiration being typically elicited by intrinsically valued external stimuli (e.g., a leader) that illuminate something considered "good, right, or true" (Belzak et al., 2017, p. 125). Thus, by demonstrating identity leadership and, in turn, enhancing followers' trust in the leader, leaders are likely to be intrinsically valued stimuli and considered more inspiring.

Though group identification was found to be a weaker mediator (weaker in Study 1, and no evidence in Study 2) of the identity leadership-follower inspiration relationship than trust. The differences in mediation strength could be because trust is dyadic referent (i.e., leader and follower), whilst group identification is group referent (i.e., follower and team). It may be that relational identification (i.e., the dyadic connection with a leader; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) rather than group identification is better aligned to the dyadic nature of trust and inspiration.

Limitations and future research directions

Though our research makes clear contributions to the understanding of identity leadership and inspiration, there are several areas for future research to consider. A strength of our research was that two studies (one cross-sectional and one longitudinal) demonstrated similar findings. Also, as Study 2 used a longitudinal design it allows us to make temporal inferences from the data regarding the impact of identity leadership on follower inspiration. However, though the longitudinal design allowed us to explore these relationships over time, further research using experimental designs could be conducted to test and further develop this research. For example, researchers could manipulate the level of identity leadership (e.g., high vs low) and examine the impact on follower inspiration.

While our study found trust in the leader to indirectly effect the association between identity leadership and follower inspiration, we assessed trust as a unidimensional construct. Trust is suggested to be multifaceted whereby followers assess their leader's trustworthiness based upon their benevolence, integrity, and ability (cf. Van Knippenberg, 2011). Consequently, researchers should look to assess the different dimensions of trust when assessing the link between identity leadership and followers trust in their leader. Importantly, if trust is a crucial mechanism of the identity leadership-inspiration relationship, further research is needed to examine the role trust plays in how identity leadership influences pertinent individual- and group-level outcomes. Further, given the limited exploration of trust in the sport leadership literature and given its proposed importance to leadership (Dirks, 2000), more research is needed to understand what trust is and how it is developed. Such research should seek to examine its constituent dimensions and develop a measure that taps into the different dimensions of trust, enabling us to test identity leadership's relationship with trust, identification, and inspiration.

Our research objectives examined individuals in formal leadership roles (i.e., captains and coaches). Nevertheless, evidence has demonstrated that shared leadership structures

involving both formal and informal leaders play an important role in team performance (Fransen et al., 2017). Specifically, theorising on peer leadership (cf. Cotterill & Fransen, 2016) suggests that formal leaders may have less impact on followers than informal leaders on certain outcomes, including motivation. Given that inspiration is a motivational state (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), understanding how informal leader's identity leadership impacts on inspiration is an interesting avenue of research. Further, understanding how experience with the team impacts on the relationship between identity leadership and outcomes is an important consideration. Within the present study, some participants had less than one year's experience with the team and, therefore, may not understand the values and identity of their group. Consequently, examining (a) followers who have more experience with their team and (b) teams more mature in their development may provide important insight into the importance of identity leadership during the lifespan of a team. That is, the relative importance of different identity leadership principles may change depending on the length of time members have been associated with their team. This would strengthen leaders understanding of when to demonstrate certain identity leadership principles.

Conclusion

Our study adds to current understanding regarding the potential positive influence of identity leadership by being the first examination of the link between identity leadership and inspiration. Specifically, over two studies, our findings indicated that leaders who engage in identity leadership (particularly advancement and impresarioship) are more likely to inspire followers. Furthermore, our study extends current understanding by examining potential mechanisms (group identification and trust in the leader) that explain the association between identity leadership and follower inspiration. Cross-sectionally, we found evidence for group identification and trust acting in serial atemporal mediation. Longitudinally, trust was a particularly important mediator, whereby when leaders engage in identity leadership at the start of the season, they strengthen trust in the leader towards the end of the season, which leaves them more open to inspiration. Interventions that enhance identity leadership (cf. Haslam et al., 2017) are therefore important to enable leaders to positively impact on followers' temporal trust in the leader, and, subsequently, the extent to which followers are inspired.

Note

1. In addition, we ran a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the differences in perceived identity leadership between those referring to the coach ($n = 140$), and those referring to the captain ($n = 93$). No significant differences were found in perceived leader prototypicality ($p = .47$), advancement ($p = .62$), entrepreneurship ($p = .48$) and impresarioship ($p = .23$), reinforcing the comparable nature of leadership roles between the two positions (i.e., coach vs. captain).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

The data that support this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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