

# Understanding Leader Identity & Influencing Factors

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## Research Question

What are the factors that influence leader identity construction in professionals at different ages?

## Target Audiences

Professionals who are or aspire to be effective leaders  
 Employers who are seeking to build more effective leaders

## Methods

### Mixed methods study

Step 1: Quantitative online survey to gather data and source interview participants. Questions about leader development tools used, leader self-perception. 113 responses.

Step 2: Qualitative interviews to discuss influential people and experiences on leader identity. 19 participants. + 2 interviews with talent development managers

## What is leader identity? Why is it important?

*Leader identity is the part of one's identity that relates to being a leader or how one thinks of oneself as a leader.*

Strong leader identity...

Professionals who work on their leader and leadership skills...

More effective leadership!

*"I think any good leader ought to see themselves as a leader. Otherwise, they're not going to be looking at things in the right way."*  
*(interview participant)*

## Key References

Day, D. V., & Harrison, M. M. (2007). A multilevel, identity-based approach to leadership development. *Human Resource Management Review*, 17(4), 360–373.

DeRue, D. S., & Ashford, S. J. (2010). Who will lead and who will follow? A social process of leadership identity construction in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(4), 627–647.

Lord, R. G., & Hall, R. J. (2005). Identity, deep structure and the development of leadership skill. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16(4), 591–615.

## Results

Survey: 73% said mentors were very helpful;  
 Interview: Assigned mentors much less helpful

Mentors, coaches, role models

Turning points & events

Turning points and influential events occurred most often in participants' 30s and early 40s

Influences on Leader Identity

Both positive and negative influence; unique position to influence professionals' leader identity

Bosses

Families

Influence of **fathers** became a theme repeated in 58% of interview participants, across all age brackets

## Conclusions

- No clear point at which professionals move from one leader identity stage to another.
- The earlier influences and training come into play, the greater likelihood they are to become incorporated into leader identity development.
- Employers are waiting far too long to offer leader development training.
- Supervisors who are more cognizant of their influence on reports' leader identity could have a more positive effect.

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## Additional Info

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