

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Ramamoorthi, Bhavani; Jäppinen, Aini-Kristiina; Taajamo, Matti

**Title:** Manifestations of leadership identity development among multicultural higher education students

**Year:** 2023

**Version:** Published version

**Copyright:** © 2023 the Authors

**Rights:** CC BY 4.0

**Rights url:** <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Please cite the original version:**

Ramamoorthi, B., Jäppinen, A.-K., & Taajamo, M. (2023). Manifestations of leadership identity development among multicultural higher education students. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 47(10), 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ejtd-02-2023-0027>

# Manifestations of leadership identity development among multicultural higher education students

Leadership  
identity  
development

147

Bhavani Ramamoorthi and Aini-Kristiina Jäppinen  
*Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä,  
Jyväskylä, Finland, and*

Matti Taajamo  
*Finnish Institute of Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä,  
Jyväskylä, Finland*

Received 27 February 2023  
Revised 7 July 2023  
Accepted 24 July 2023

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to examine how leadership identity manifests at the individual and collective levels within a relational training context among a group of multicultural higher education students.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This is a case study and examines the interactions among eight multicultural students through the theoretical lens of leadership identity development (LID) theory.

**Findings** – The main findings of this study suggest that LID manifests through an open will and intensifying motivation to the collective impulse of achieving shared goals through nurturing the collective cognition to integrate diverse perspectives and a broadening view of leadership as a collective capacity for co-creation and generativity.

**Research limitations/implications** – Although the paper builds on a case study with a limited number of participants and the ability to generalise its findings is partial, the study may provide practical applications for training leadership in other collaborative contexts and supporting it at the individual and collective levels.

**Originality/value** – The LID theory and LID model have been applied simultaneously to a training lab to examine how LID manifests among a multicultural group of higher education students. The lab emphasises a participatory leadership-oriented pedagogy.

**Keywords** Leadership identity development, Higher education students, Collaboration, Multiculturality

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Understanding leadership identity and how it develops over time is a continuous process of evolution. A world that is constantly changing requires leaders who are collaborative and socially responsible through the influence of relationships (Kezar *et al.*, 2006;



© Bhavani Ramamoorthi, Aini-Kristiina Jäppinen and Matti Taajamo. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

The authors would like to thank all the participants of the study and the technical support received from the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the University of Jyväskylä.

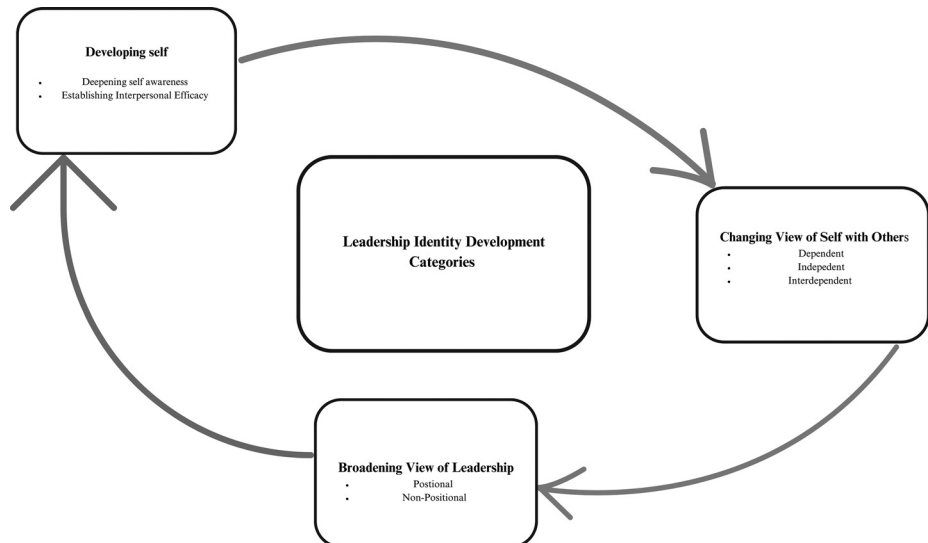
European Journal of Training and  
Development  
Vol. 47 No. 10, 2023  
pp. 147-162  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
2046-9012  
DOI 10.1108/EJTD-02-2023-0027

Komives, 2009). Hence, developing leadership capabilities in higher education students is essential. In particular, such leadership capacities are needed to develop a leadership identity (Carroll and Levy, 2010; Venus *et al.*, 2012). Complexities of global challenges and the need to find solutions through relations invite researchers to think beyond the traditional idea of leadership identity being invested in single leaders and focus on developing collective leadership capacities (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2016; Day and Harrison, 2007; Komives *et al.*, 2009) such as networks (Weibler and Rohn-Endres, 2011), teams (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2016) and groups (Kershaw *et al.*, 2021; Komives *et al.*, 2005).

Based on what is known about the development of leadership identity, there is still very little understanding of how leadership identity develops in a collaborative context (McKenzie, 2018). There is some evidence of how leadership identity continues to evolve in the context of students interacting in group settings (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a). This understanding led to the construction of the leadership identity development (LID) theory and an interrelated LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a). From now onwards, we use the acronym “LID theory” to point to the theory and LID to refer to the domain of LID. Recent studies have validated how LID is enhanced in various contexts using different tools, whereas very few have investigated how LID development takes place (McKenzie, 2018; Nagda and Roper, 2019; Owen *et al.*, 2017).

The LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005) presents a framework for understanding how individual higher education students develop the social identity of being collaborative, relational leaders and has been used as the theoretical lens of this study. It comprises five key categories of leadership identity: developing self, changing view of self with others, broadening view of leadership, developmental influences and group influences.

Each of these LID categories includes different attributes, and we focused on those that are most relevant to the context of this study (Figure 1). The developing self includes the attributes of deepening self-awareness and establishing interpersonal efficacy. The category of changing view of self with others includes the attributes of being independent, dependent



**Figure 1.**  
Developing a  
leadership identity

**Source:** The above figure is an adaptation of Komives *et al.* (2005, p. 599)

and interdependent. The category of broadening view of leadership includes the attributes of being positional and non-positional. In this paper, we look at the first three categories, namely, developing self, changing view of self with others and broadening view of leadership and the specific attributes under each of these categories (Figure 1). We excluded the last two categories from this study because we were not interested in the developmental (i.e. childhood) and group (e.g. family) influences of the participants.

There is an interrelated LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), which is a practical framework to apply the LID theory. The model shows that individuals go through diverse stages, such as awareness, exploration, leadership identity, leader differentiation, generativity and integration, that are experienced continually, resulting in a deeper understanding of their leadership identity (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Each of the categories includes all these stages. However, we did not focus on the diverse stages but presumed that they were all included in a higher education training programme called Collaboratories lab and had an overlapping effect on the background.

The Collaboratories lab included eight higher education students from multicultural backgrounds. The multiculturalism of the group worked as a driving force in building relational bridges among the students, which is essential for leadership identity manifestation. One of the main purposes of the Collaboratories lab was to build a toolkit of collaboration for LID, particularly for future working life needs. Hence, we applied the LID model (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b) as a practical framework to apply the LID theory. The model and theory are closely interlinked; as such, we used the theory as an interpretive lens for data analysis. The LID model was simplified and applied (Table 1) as a practical tool by the trainer throughout the Collaboratories lab.

Social interaction through collaborative relationships is crucial for LID (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Denis *et al.* (2012, p. 214) suggest that:

Producing leadership in interaction decentres the idea of leadership not being situated in individuals but rather a view of leadership as a human social construction that emanate from rich connections and interdependencies (see also, Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655).

Thus, for LID to manifest, group influences are an important factor (Komives *et al.*, 2005). In the Collaboratories lab, the major focus was on the group working together. However, the LID model shows that individuals go through diverse stages in their personal LID process (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b); hence, both individual and collective levels of LID are essential.

Consequently, the theoretical aim of this study was to augment the knowledge of LID in the wider area of higher education training and to investigate how LID manifests at the

LID categories	Leadership identity development properties (enabled through participatory pedagogy in the Collaboratories lab)
<i>Developing self</i>	Deepening self-awareness Establishing interpersonal efficacy
<i>Changing view of self with others</i>	Dependent Independent/dependent Interdependent
<i>Broadening view of leadership</i>	Positional Non-positional

Source: The above table is an adaptation of Komives *et al.* (2006a)

**Table 1.**  
Leadership identity  
development model

---

individual and collective levels. The practical aim was to implement the LID model in collaboration with higher education training. Thus, the research question was framed as follows:

*RQ1.* How does leadership identity development manifest within a group of multicultural students at individual and collective levels?

To answer the research question, we first explain the idea of LID and the related theory and model. This is followed by an introduction to the Collaboratories lab and the method used.

### **Leadership identity development**

The development of leadership identity is created through purposeful acts and interactions (Karp and Helgo, 2009). The studies conducted by both Komives *et al.* (2005) and Gibson *et al.* (2018) used a grounded theory approach to LID, and both studies demonstrated that there is a shift from an earlier stage of leadership identity to a deeper understanding of self and leadership. Individual shifts in their view of leadership develop themselves and understand the influence of groups throughout this process (Day *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Miscenko *et al.*, 2017).

Recent studies suggest a narrative framework for exploring the experiences and sense-making of LID in emerging adults in higher education (McCain and Matkin, 2019). Among these exist leadership identity studies that focus on building leadership identity as a multifaceted process that encompasses expanding boundaries, recognising interdependences and discerning purpose (Zheng and Muir, 2015). Another major theme in the LID literature is the concept of the identity development spiral. The more people have an integrated identity of themselves as leaders, the more likely they are to engage in leadership experiences, which build leadership competencies and further inform their leadership identity (Day *et al.*, 2009; Wagner, 2011).

A study conducted by Wolfenbarger *et al.* (2021) with 14 higher education students of diverse backgrounds applied the LID model. The findings suggest an understanding of leadership as a relational process that enhances the LID of most participants. In a study of 50 student leaders of diverse backgrounds (Sessa *et al.*, 2016), LID prefigured an understanding of leadership. There, students identified themselves as individual leaders, which is contradictory to leadership being viewed as shared, relational and collaborative (Crevani, 2007) and for which they would need support and scaffolding from mentors (Sessa *et al.*, 2016).

In sum, in the field of leadership identity studies, there is a need for more studies on “developing collective leadership identities, processes that involve participants in engaging across boundaries (functional, hierarchical, geographical)” (Day and Harrison, 2007, p. 360). With scholars increasingly emphasising leadership as a relational process (Uhl-Bien, 2006), a relational perspective on leadership identity has emerged (DeRue *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2006a), but few studies exist with a relational perspective on leadership identity and a focus on LID as a multilevel phenomenon (DeRue *et al.*, 2009; Komives *et al.*, 2006a).

### **Leadership identity development theory and model**

The LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005) emerged from studies on the relational leadership model (Komives *et al.*, 2006b) that focused on leadership being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process-oriented. The theory emphasises leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Komives *et al.*, 2006b, p. 11). The theory has implications for the design of leadership programmes.

The LID theory and model have implications for developing the leadership capacity and identity of individual students and for developing the capacity of groups (Komives *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b).

In 2006, based on the LID theory, Komives and colleagues developed the interrelated LID model, which describes the stages students go through in their understanding of leadership as a relational process and their identity as leaders (Komives *et al.*, 2005, 2009). The LID model has been used by several researchers to better understand students' experiences or pedagogical approaches that improve students' leadership development (Schmiederer, 2018).

As mentioned above, we extracted from the LID theory (Komives *et al.*, 2005, p. 599) three of the five major categories: developing self, changing view of self with others and broadening view of leadership. The categories are interconnected and influence each other and explain how the leadership identity develops. All the categories of the LID theory include within themselves the individual and collective levels through the various attributes that exist for each LID category. Our study aims to understand how LID manifested among a group of higher education students. We considered it from two perspectives:

- (1) members of a group as unique components; and
- (2) the members functioning as an interconnected collective.

Thus, we studied each of these three leadership identity categories at the individual and collective levels.

## Methods

### *Study context and participants*

This paper is based on data derived from a case study called Collaboratories lab, in which students built knowledge capital through collaboration. It was offered as a training programme as part of the curriculum on "Current Issues in Learning and Pedagogy" in a higher education institution in Finland. Programme details were shared in a face-to-face presentation with a new cohort of students pursuing a master's degree at the Faculty of Education and Psychology. It was also sent as an invitation to all exchange and master's students in the Faculty of Education. The participants voluntarily signed up for the programme via a university portal. The consent process included signing a form granting permission to use the coursework, discussions and interactions as research material. A detailed programme plan is included in [Appendix](#). All students spoke English but with varying competencies. Consequently, English was used as a common language in the programme. The students signed a consent form for the research and were advised they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point.

The programme aimed to introduce collaborative educational activities that involved small-group work or working as an entire class. Dialogical interactions were integral. This was followed by an online discussion with reflections based on the students' face-to-face learning experiences and their experiences of group work. There were 30 contact (in-person meeting) hours, and the students met for 11 contact sessions over three months. The students also spent approximately 30 h on group reflections and online discussions following class interactions, and the programme was worth five European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credits, which required approximately 135 h of work.

The Collaboratories lab included eight students, five of whom were exchange students and three who were pursuing a master's degree in education. The multicultural group consisted of two men and six women (see [Table 2](#)) in the age group of 18–30 years. Their areas of specialisation (in their degrees) were multidisciplinary. We used pseudonyms to

**Table 2.**  
Details of the study  
participants

Participant pseudonym	Demographic details			
	Gender	Country	Student role	Degree programme
<i>Audrey</i>	Female	Taiwan	Full-time student	Master's degree
<i>Cecilia</i>	Female	Wales	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
<i>Diana</i>	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree programme
<i>Emma</i>	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree
<i>Gina</i>	Female	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
<i>Samantha</i>	Female	Italy	Exchange student	Bachelor's + master's five-year degree programme
<i>Steven</i>	Male	India	Full-time student	Master's degree
<i>Thomas</i>	Male	Japan	Exchange student	Bachelor's degree

**Source:** Authors' own work

protect the students' anonymity. The students in the Collaboratories lab had no specific background in leadership training. One student had worked as a teacher trainer, and the rest had some exposure to teaching experiences but not necessarily any formal leadership training.

The Collaboratories lab was an experimental intervention for team members to explore how collaboration works. The lab was designed based on experimental collaborative exercises, such as the marshmallow challenge (Anthony, 2018), in addition to theatre and storytelling (Boje *et al.*, 2015). A major part of the programme involved students actively engaging in the practice of appreciative inquiry, which is a creative thinking model well-researched in the context of collaboration and relational leadership (Sim, 2019).

### *Data and analysis*

This is a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2011) with a detailed analysis of a group of students in the context of the Collaboratories lab while describing their leadership identity manifestation. The data included students' individual and group reflections on an online discussion forum written after an in-person working session. It also included face-to-face group discussions and their final learning assignment (data samples are shown in Table 3). Group discussions were audio and video recorded, and the audio recordings of the group reflections on collaboration were transcribed.

Data analysis for this study follows a qualitative content analysis that is both deductive and inductive. Qualitative content analysis is one of the many ways to analyse textual data and focuses on reducing it into manageable segments through the application of inductive and/or deductive codes and reorganising data to allow for the drawing and verification of conclusions (Forman and Damschroder, 2007). It often starts with deductively developed codes but remains open to new topics suggested by the data (inductive codes). The product of this process is an interpretation of the meaning of the data in a particular context.

This hybrid approach balanced the research question for the study and allowed theories of LID to be integral to the process of deductive analysis while allowing for themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding. The deductive analysis was guided by



**Table 3.**

Data sources and  
sample data extracts

Data source	Sample data extract
Discussion forum (online)	<i>Experiencing different cultures through collaboration exercises like this one . . . enables me to re-examine my personal belief (belief) system and notice what is working for me and what is not (Audrey)</i> Category: Developing self
Group discussions (face-to-face)	<i>At a community level, individuals . . . come together with variety of opinions . . . and converge at the . . . centre which in turn leads to change in perspectives (that penetrates at an individual level) (Gina)</i> Category: Broadening view of leadership
Learning assignment	<i>The work done in groups made me reflect on how I portray myself to others . . . and the aspects I still need to work on to fully appreciate and benefit collaboration (Diana)</i> Category: Self and others

**Source:** Authors' own work

the theoretical concepts of LID theory (see [Figure 1](#)). Thus, we focused on the three major themes of LID:

- (1) the development of the self;
- (2) a changing view of the self with others; and
- (3) a broadening view of leadership and the related attributes of each category.

Subsequently, the data were analysed inductively. The data provided evidence of the individual and collective levels for the three categories of the LID theory (as shown in [Table 4](#)).

The first author was primarily responsible for the analytical process. The analysed data sets were presented to other authors who conducted debriefing processes to ensure a systematic and scientific approach to the data analysis. These authors examined the codes

**Table 4.**

Data organization:  
examples of  
individual and  
collective levels

LID categories	Individual	Collective
<i>Developing self</i>	<i>I was quite critical of myself. . . but. . . inside me it's very strong and clear the desire to collaborate in the realization of this project (Emma)</i>	<i>I am able . . . notice the different in collaborating whilst feeling "fully involved" or discussing whilst feeling "fully alive or dedicated" (Cecilia)</i>
<i>Changing views of the self with others</i>	<i>That in some situations, I could get help and that I could not do it alone I realized that this has also allowed to increase relations whit [with] the people (Emma)</i>	<i>I feel like the most important thing . . . was . . . rethink the role of others in my own knowledge convergence and in the productive outcome of the group (Diana)</i>
<i>Broadening view of leadership</i>	<i>The working definition I would propose for the term collaboration is the activity of learning, design and co-creation by open minded and passionate individuals (Gina)</i>	<i>The flow was persistent and effective. . . I cannot say with certainty that there defined roles (Diana)</i>

**Source:** Authors' own work



and categories developed and provided important feedback and comments. The data examples of this study were chosen by the first author, and the manuscript was checked by two other authors. The results of the analysis are shown in [Table 5](#).

**Findings**

The findings section connects the students’ narratives and reflections to the three LID categories and their related attributes. The developing self refers to how each student perceived their personal growth and their own LID. The changing self with others is connected to how their developing self was influenced by the collaborative interactions within the group. The broadening view of leadership is connected to how their changing view of self with others influenced their perception of being in collaboration and leadership. We elaborate on each of these leadership identity categories at the individual level and collective level and summarise the key findings.

*Category 1: developing self*

*Attribute of deepening self-awareness: individual level.* Through continual reflections, the students expressed their motivations, deepening their self-awareness and interpersonal efficacy. They observed how their behaviours and mental constructs helped them transition towards inclusivity as they evolved in their interactions. Students observed that as they built their confidence, they were willing to take steps to become more involved and build a sense of personal integrity. When they acknowledged they had the potential to contribute to the shared goals of the group, they were willing to overcome their limitations and find solutions to overcome these barriers, as Emma reflected:

LID categories	Relational context	
	Individual level	Collective level
<i>Developing self</i>	Deepening self-awareness Expanding motivation Commitment to a shared goal Exercising self-leadership to overcome limitations	Openness to new perspectives Expanding interpersonal self-efficacy through new relational skills
<i>Changing views of the self with others</i>	Accessing collective wisdom Self-growth through relational bridges Critical thinking influenced by others  Moving from dependence to interdependence	Foundation of trust Creating a democratic space Integrating and synthesizing the varying perspectives Knowledge construction as a collective
<i>Broadening view of leadership</i>	A positional view of leadership entails being sensitive to the individual and collective levels of desire among the group members Operating from a positional leadership can also mean a shared space of authority  Experiencing leadership as evolving and not located in one person	Empowering spaces for every group member  Leadership was web-like, fluid and dynamic, moving among the group members Enabling spaces of co-creation and generative listening

**Table 5.** Examples of individual and collective levels of leadership identity manifestation

**Source:** Authors’ own work

---

I was quite critical of myself because I was aware of my language limitations, but I wanted to participate and contribute. [...] [Inside] me, it's very strong and clear, the desire to collaborate in the realisation of this project.

As they learned to integrate their sense of self with new ideas and perspectives introduced by their fellow group members, the students experienced a change in their sense of self. There is a deepening of the self-reflection process. This is encouraged by the views and opinions brought about through experiential stories by other individuals in the circle. This led one to observe a change in their values and how their own identity evolves. Gina described this as follows:

I believe that there is an evolution of your identity because [...] you [...] tend to start to question your own beliefs based on the perspectives of other people, based on their backgrounds [...] their views and opinions, you [...] reflect more.

*Attribute of building interpersonal efficacy: collective level.* We noted how the students' deepening self-awareness and reflections on themselves as individual entities influenced their efficacy in working as a collective. They developed a willingness to receive new perspectives as this improved their ability to interact and relate to others. They observed that this was a necessary skill if they had to work with a group and achieve shared goals, as explained by Cecilia:

I've always believed that someone learns from experience, but someone can learn from others' experiences too, and with a collaboration of both, the result can be very powerful.

The students noted that they required new interpersonal skills and levels of self-awareness that were aligned to practising these interpersonal skills efficiently. They operated as part of a larger interconnected group with expanding motivation and exercising self-leadership. Thomas emphasised this as follows:

When our views were contradictory, I could think critically and deeply [...] the existence of others helped me think about the topic and join in the [...] conversation actively.

### *Category 2: category of changing views of the self and others*

*Attributes of being independent/dependent: individual level.* The students reflected upon their collaborative dialogues and their changing views of themselves and others. Their views fluctuated between phases of being dependent or independent but consisted largely of expressions of being interdependent. To clarify the meanings of these terms, independent is a mindset based on enlightened self-interest, interdependence is a mindset based on shared discovery and collective learning, and dependent is a mindset based on authority or compliance (Drath *et al.*, 2010).

The developing self is influenced by group interactions in a variety of ways. Emma, reflecting on the collective wisdom that existed in the group, shared how initial dependence on others for support could lead to situations in which interdependence could begin:

I realised that [...] I could get help and that I could not do it alone. It was a nice discovery to be aware that asking for help is not a limit, but rather is wealth. [...] I realised that this has also allowed [me] to increase relations [with] the people.

The students attributed their critical thinking to the active presence of others in the group. They experienced that they were empowering themselves to contribute actively to the group, while the presence of others functioned as scaffolding. They considered that depending on others while asking for help supported mutual growth and built relationships.

*Attribute of being interdependent: collective level.* Students reflected on how the relational dynamics of independence or interdependence came to the foreground during the learning interactions and thinking about the nature of their group work. The foundational aspect of trust helped them stay interconnected as a group. The element of trust also contributed to how each found their own democratic space without being influenced by power.

Another significant factor during this experience was the theme of trust in each other, before starting the project and during the activity. (Emma)

The students' transition to a space of feeling as a collective was facilitated by the rising awareness of how they perceived their roles. They frequently expressed the need to integrate the diverse perspectives that came from the group members and embrace varying points of view. This allowed them to create new frames of thought. In exercising interdependence, they constructed something together. Diana and Cecilia shared the following on this aspect:

[...] freedom and the opportunity to create a space where the roles are adapted following the group needs [...] where everybody can collectively construct something. (Diana)

Then the [...] phase acted like an opportunity in which we all found a common [...] passion that instantly put our differences aside, and emergence was embraced. (Cecilia)

### *Category 3: broadening view of leadership*

While examining the findings of this study, we attempted to determine whether the students expressed a perspective on leadership as positional or non-positional, with positional leadership referring to someone who is assigned a role of authority or the responsibility of being a leader and non-positional leadership referring to anyone in a group (i.e. without hierarchy).

*Attribute of positional leadership: individual level.* Steven expressed that a leader nurtures a collaborative and empowering environment; he emphasised leadership as entailing the formal position of an assigned leadership role to share power and of a leader being sensitive to individual and collective levels of desire among group members. He reflected as follows:

A true leader, as I see it, fosters a truly collaborative team [...] empowers as many members as possible [...] and is responsive to individual and collective desire levels.

Audrey reflected on one of her past experiences considering the current experiences in the Collaboratories lab. Audrey had taken the role of a positional leader and taken on the responsibility and tasks to achieve the outcome. In hindsight, she felt that there was an opportunity to be a positional leader and yet recognise and include the diversity of talents that the group might have brought into co-creating the event:

The only role of leader I can think of that I took up [...] decorating the venue of a charity breakfast. [...] I wanted to make the venue reflect my vision. [...] Now that I reflect, I think I could have shared my leadership roles a bit more with my peers.

*Attribute of non-positional leadership: collective level.* Group members worked towards a shared goal while exercising relational interdependencies. The students described leadership as an empowering process for the whole group while offering powerful spaces for each other. Some highlighted the organic nature of the group and leadership, while others

---

shared how they found that the absence of designated roles enabled a space for creativity and co-creation.

Gina reflected on this explicitly:

I struggle to assign or identify roles for myself and others [...] as I observed, all of us were inquiring, expressing, critiquing, leading and writing our thoughts at one point or another.

Many narratives expressed ways in which group members strove towards congruence and attempted to articulate “the link” that held the group together through these endeavours. Even if none of the students owned the “leader” title, they found leadership to be actively taking shape. This is evident in one of Steven’s reflections:

I think that it is hard for a group to be organic in the absence of leadership, which is what makes the organic aspect special in our case.

Witnessing and adapting strong dialogical and relational practices, the students led themselves, both as individuals and collectively, towards a space of co-creation and listening that generated creativity and transformative conversation:

I believe that the [...] approach ultimately eliminates the pressure of roles [...] and instead allows [...] an enriching moment of collaborating or co-creating. (Cecilia)

In summary, the main findings of this study show that the developing self is represented by an intensifying willingness and motivation to contribute to the *collective impulse* of achieving shared goals. The changing view of self with others is represented by *collective cognition*, which is defined by how students synthesise the experiences of others to create new meanings and integrate them with their own experiences. This helps them build a stronger understanding of how to work with one another. The broadening view of leadership is represented by *co-creation at the core*. This is defined by how everyone in the group exercises their own strengths and skills, creating fluidity in roles and enabling a space of co-creation and generativity.

## Discussion

This article aimed to examine how leadership identity manifests within a relational training context (Collaboratories lab) among a group of multicultural higher education students at the individual and collective levels. This was studied through the lenses of LID theory. The thematic content analysis, which was conducted both deductively and inductively, indicated that leadership identity develops uniquely at the individual and collective levels.

The findings from this study correspond to observations of other leadership scholars. Our main findings show that in LID, multiple students expressed their relational space with their fellow group members as they worked together towards a collective goal. This finding is supported by Komives *et al.*'s (2005, p. 608) description of leadership identity as the growing ability “to intentionally engage with others to accomplish group objectives”. Emphasising the collective and the power of relationships in collaboration, Haber-Curran and Pierre's (2023) study suggests that LID manifests through open will and motivation to contribute to a collective impulse of achieving shared goals (Boettcher and Gansemer-Topf, 2015), nurturing the collective cognition while integrating diverse perspectives (McCarron *et al.*, 2023) and building a collective capacity for co-creation, generativity and innovation (Scharmer, 2021).

Hence, trainers must augment the efforts of participants to contribute with an open will to a collaborative effort by using different tools. Training programmes should enable participants to synthesise the learnings and experiences of others and integrate them with

their own to create cognitive shifts and stronger working relationships. Higher education training programmes must include tools and methodologies that allow participants to experience the power of co-creation and evolve in their ability to collaborate while generating creativity, innovation and change.

We suggest that our study may provide higher education trainers and training programmes with a new understanding of LID. Firstly, the original LID model was taken and simplified so that it could be applied to a multicultural team. The connection to multiculturalism could give rise to fresh ideas in designing training programmes, especially for multicultural teams. Secondly, the study focuses both at the individual and collective levels on LID. The results at the individual and collective levels may provide trainers in other relational contexts new possibilities to observe how their students' LID manifest and become resources for a collective. These observations and understanding may provide trainers with essential cognitive and relational ideas to assist their students in working in diverse future environments.

Our study has some limitations. Firstly, it was conducted with a small student group. The results might be different in larger teams or groups that include students or participants from a broader demographic spectrum. Secondly, the Collaboratories lab used collaborative pedagogies as a learning design. Leadership practitioners seeking to follow-up on the results of our study need to apply them consciously and adapt them to their specific circumstances. Thirdly, the theories applied in this study were chosen specifically from within the scope of LID, and applying other leadership theories may provide different results. Data collection techniques and the length of time spent on student engagement may also be critical to the validity of the study findings.

### Conclusion

Importantly, in the working world, there is a great need to create teams that are often formed to address multifaceted issues and generate creative solutions. Supporting this need and building capacity for transformation requires cultivating the interior conditions of emerging leaders, and this inner cultivation work needs support (Scharmer, 2021). These emerging leaders need practice fields that help them adopt new behaviours and work with new tools in safe, supportive and generative environments. The Collaboratories lab training programme aimed to provide this social and relational context, offering students a complement to their core curriculum and linking learning with opportunities for real-world action and change while cultivating the necessary interior condition. Regarding future research, an increasing understanding of how leadership identity develops among team members who work collaboratively may yield new and interesting insights into team practices that shape both individual and collective identities.

### References

- Anthony, S. (2018), "Innovation leadership lessons from the marshmallow challenge", *Harvard Business Review*, available at: <https://hbr.org/2014/12/innovation-leadership-lessons-from-the-marshmallow-challenge> (accessed 2 February 2023).
- Boettcher, M.L. and Gansemer-Topf, A.M. (2015), "Examining leadership development through student leader outdoor recreation training", *Recreational Sports Journal*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 49-58, doi: [10.1123/rsj.2014-0034](https://doi.org/10.1123/rsj.2014-0034).
- Boje, D.M., Rosile, G.A., Saylor, J. and Saylor, R. (2015), "Using storytelling theatrics for leadership training", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 348-362, doi: [10.1177/1523422315587899](https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422315587899).

- Carroll, B. and Levy, L. (2010), "Leadership development as identity construction", *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 211-231, doi: [10.1177/0893318909358725](https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318909358725).
- Chrobot-Mason, D., Gerbasi, A. and Cullen-Lester, K.L. (2016), "Predicting leadership relationships: the importance of collective identity", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 298-311, doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.003).
- Crevani, L., Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2007), "Shared leadership: a post-heroic perspective on leadership as a collective construction", *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 40-67.
- Day, D.V. and Harrison, M.M. (2007), "A multilevel, identity-based approach to leadership development", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 360-373, doi: [10.1016/j.hrmr.207.08.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.207.08.007).
- Day, D.V., Harrison, M.M. and Halpin, S.M. (2009), *An Integrative Approach to Leader Development: Connecting Adult Development, Identity, and Expertise*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Denis, J.L., Langley, A. and Sergi, V. (2012), "Leadership in the plural", *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 211-283, doi: [10.1080/19416520.2012.667612](https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2012.667612).
- DeRue, D.S., Ashford, S.J. and Cotton, N.C. (2009), "Assuming the mantle: unpacking the process by which individuals internalize a leader identity", in Roberts, L.M. and Dutton, J.E. (Eds), *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations*, Psychology Press, New York, NY, pp. 241-260.
- Drath, W.H., Palus, C.J. and McGuire, J.B. (2010), "Developing interdependent leadership", in Van Elson, E. (Ed.), *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA, pp. 405-428.
- Forman, J. and Damschroder, L. (2007), "Qualitative content analysis", in Jacoby, L. and Siminoff, L.A. (Eds), *Empirical Methods for Bioethics: A Primer*, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, pp. 39-62, doi: [10.1016/S1479-3709\(07\)11003-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3709(07)11003-7).
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2011), "Case study", in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 301-316.
- Gibson, D.M., Dollarhide, C.T., Moss, J.M., Aras, Y. and Mitchell, Y. (2018), "Examining leadership with American counseling association presidents: a grounded theory of leadership identity development", *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Vol. 96 No. 4, pp. 361-371, doi: [10.1002/jcad.12219](https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12219).
- Haber-Curran, P. and Pierre, D.E. (2023), "Student involvement as a catalyst for leadership identity development", *New Directions for Student Leadership*, Vol. 2023 No. 178, pp. 75-86, doi: [10.1002/yd.20556](https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20556).
- Karp, T. and Helgø, T.I. (2009), "Leadership as identity construction: the act of leading people in organizations: a perspective from the complexity sciences", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 28 No. 10, pp. 880-896, doi: [10.1108/02621710911000659](https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710911000659).
- Kershaw, C., Rast, D.E., Hogg, M.A. and Van Knippenberg, D. (2021), "Divided groups need leadership: a study of the effectiveness of collective identity, dual identity, and intergroup relational identity rhetoric", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 53-62, doi: [10.1111/jasp.12715](https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12715).
- Kezar, A.J., Carducci, R. and Contreras-McGavin, M. (2006), "Rethinking the 'L' word in higher education: the revolution in research on leadership", *ASHE Higher Education Report*, John Wiley and Sons, San Francisco.
- Komives, S., Longerbeam, S., Mainella, F., Osteen, L., Owen, J. and Wagner, W. (2009), "Leadership identity development: challenges in applying a developmental model", *Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 11-47, doi: [10.12806/V8/I1/TF2](https://doi.org/10.12806/V8/I1/TF2).
- Komives, S.R., Longerbeam, S.D., Owen, J.E., Mainella, F.C. and Osteen, L. (2006a), "A leadership identity development model: applications from a grounded theory", *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 401-418, doi: [10.1353/csd.2006.0048](https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0048).



- Komives, S.R., Lucas, N. and McMahon, T.R. (2006b), *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference*, 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Komives, S.R., Owen, J.E., Longerbeam, S.D., Mainella, F.C. and Osteen, L. (2005), "Developing a leadership identity: a grounded theory", *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol. 46 No. 6, pp. 593-611, doi: [10.1353/csd.2005.0061](https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0061).
- McCain, K.D. and Matkin, G.S. (2019), "Emerging adults leadership identity development through family storytelling: a narrative approach", *Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 159-167, doi: [10.12806/V18/I2/T3](https://doi.org/10.12806/V18/I2/T3).
- McCarron, G.P., McKenzie, B.L. and Yamanaka, A. (2023), "Leadership identity development", *New Directions for Student Leadership*, Vol. 2023 No. 178, pp. 31-43, doi: [10.1002/yl.20552](https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.20552).
- McKenzie, B. (2018), "Am I a leader? Female students leadership identity development", *Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 1-18, doi: [10.12806/v17/i2/r1](https://doi.org/10.12806/v17/i2/r1).
- Miscenko, D., Guenter, H. and Day, D.V. (2017), "Am I a leader? Examining leader identity development over time", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 605-620.
- Nagda, B.R.A. and Roper, L.D. (2019), "Reimagining leadership development for social change through critical dialogue practices", *New Directions for Student Leadership*, Vol. 2019 No. 163, pp. 117-136, doi: [10.1002/yl.20351](https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.20351).
- Owen, J.E., Hassell-Goodman, S. and Yamanaka, A. (2017), "Culturally relevant leadership learning: identity, capacity, and efficacy", *Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 48-54, doi: [10.1002/jls.21545](https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21545).
- Scharmer, O. (2021), "Democratizing access to the tools for transformation", available at: <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/democratizing-access-to-the-tools-methods-for-societal-transformation-10300d92f3cd> (accessed 14 February 2023).
- Schmiederer, J.K. (2018), "Threshold concepts in relational leadership and leadership identity development", available at: [https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Schmiederer\\_uncg\\_0154D\\_12594.pdf](https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Schmiederer_uncg_0154D_12594.pdf) (accessed 2 February 2023).
- Sessa, V., Ploskonka, J., Alvarez, E., Dourdis, S., Dixon, C. and Bragger, J. (2016), "The relationship between student leaders' constructive development, their leadership identity, and their understanding of leadership", *The Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 15-30, doi: [10.12806/v15/i1/r2](https://doi.org/10.12806/v15/i1/r2).
- Sim, J.H. (2019), "Exploring the relational leadership potential of appreciative inquiry: a case study", *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 47-57, doi: [10.1177/227797918803217](https://doi.org/10.1177/227797918803217) [journals.sagepub.com/home/bmc](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/bmc).
- Uhl-Bien, M. (2006), "Relational leadership theory: exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 6, pp. 654-676, doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.007).
- Venus, M., Mao, C., Lanaj, K. and Johnson, R.E. (2012), "Collectivistic leadership requires a collective identity", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 432-436, doi: [10.1111/j.1754-9434.2012.01476.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2012.01476.x).
- Wagner, W. (2011), *Examining Developmental Stages of Leadership for College Students: A Validation Study of the Leadership Identity Development Model*, University of MD, College Park, MD.
- Weibler, J. and Rohn-Endres, S. (2011), "Learning conversation and shared network leadership: development, gestalt, and consequences", *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 181-194, doi: [10.1027/1866-5888/a000015](https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000015).
- Wolfenbarger, K.G., Shehab, R.L., Trytten, D.A. and Walden, S.E. (2021), "The influence of engineering competition team participation on students' leadership identity development", *Journal of Engineering Education*, Vol. 110 No. 4, pp. 925-948, doi: [10.1002/jee.20418](https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20418).



Zheng, W. and Muir, D. (2015), "Embracing leadership: a multi-faceted model of leader identity development", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 630-656, doi: [10.1108/LODJ-10-2013-0138](https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-10-2013-0138).

**Further reading**

Demmy, T.L., Kivlahan, C., Stone, T.T., Teague, L. and Sapienza, P. (2002), "Physicians' perceptions of institutional and leadership factors influencing their job satisfaction at one academic medical center", *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 77 No. 12 Part 1, pp. 1235-1240.

Theme	Content	Mode of engagement
<i>Invitation to the programme</i>	Pre-task: a short write-up on the expectations from the Collaboratories lab	Email
<i>Team games</i>	Theatre games	Team games
<i>Collaborative games</i>	The marshmallow challenge Literature on collaboration and the marshmallow challenge Reflection questions on their group experiences	Group games and dialogue Online discussion forums
<i>Leading and being led</i>	Mirroring – drama game Story mapping Reflection questions	Group games Story landscapes Online discussion forum
<i>Experiencing and understanding working in groups; being part of a team</i>	Warm-up (theme based on a recent event at the university)	Collaborative poetry writing
<i>Exploring diversity through experiential stories</i>	Storytelling – Beeble Bee and Beeble Boo Question prompts for reflection Herman's grid activity	Active listening Dialogue Small group discussion Online discussion forum
<i>Introduction to the AI model</i>	Introduction to appreciative inquiry (AI)  Exploring literature on AI	Teacher-led session with an introduction to AI Suggested resources Reading circles (literature) Sharing in small groups
<i>AI model – Session 1</i>	Exploring the AI question together: designing a powerful question Reflection questions	Working as a team through the discovery phase Online discussion
<i>AI model – Session 2</i>	Exploring the AI question further Working as a team through the dream phase Reflections questions	Working in groups  Online discussion
<i>AI model – Session 3 (design phase)</i>	Group work – design phase Reflection questions	Working as a team Online discussion
<i>Sharing and presenting the school change models designed by the teams</i>	Teams share their models, a visual representation experiences of being through AI	Presentation Collective brainstorming Mind mapping
<i>Divergence; convergence; emergence</i>	All that we share video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc</a> Divergence, emergence and convergence model Art session with instructions Reflection questions	Video-based discussion and reflection  A brief explanation of the model followed by question prompts Art session: individual work time Group discussion on the art works

**Table A1.**  
Collaboratories  
programme

**Source:** Authors' own work

### Corresponding author

Bhavani Ramamoorthi can be contacted at: [bhramamo@student.jyu.fi](mailto:bhramamo@student.jyu.fi)

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)