

Understanding the Development of Team Identification: A Qualitative Study in UN Peacebuilding Teams

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Abstract

Purpose The goal of our study was to scrutinize the psychological processes that occur in individuals when developing identification with a highly diverse team.

Design/Methodology/Approach A qualitative, theory-generating approach following the principles of grounded theory was chosen as research design. Data were obtained from 63 personal interviews with members of seven UN peacebuilding teams in Liberia and Haiti. These teams were particularly well suited for analyzing the dynamics of identification processes as they constitute extreme cases with respect to team members' identity diversity.

Findings Our analysis reveals four different processes that occur as individuals develop team identification (TI): enacting a salient identity, sensemaking about team experience, evaluating collective team outcomes, and converging identity.

Implications We can show that team members engage in both individual- and collective-directed sensemaking processes during TI development, thereby using internal (i.e., other team members) and external points of reference (i.e., team-external actors) for ingroup/outgroup comparisons. Moreover, our study reveals different modes of identity convergence (i.e., active, reactive, and withdrawal) which

are associated with different types of TI (i.e., deep-structured TI, situated TI, and disidentification).

Originality/Value Although team members' identification with their workgroup has long been considered important for effective team functioning, knowledge about its development has remained limited and largely without empirical footing from a real-world team context. Our study represents the first empirical attempt to inductively identify the processes that occur in individuals as they develop TI.

Keywords Team identification · Diversity · Qualitative research · Grounded theory

Introduction

Identity dynamics in organizational contexts have been one of the most vibrant areas of organizational research and related disciplines during the last decades (Albert et al. 2000; Corley et al. 2006; Pratt 2001; Scott 2007). Due to the steadily increasing use of teamwork in organizations, in particular team members' identification with their workgroup¹ has attracted considerable attention. Thereby, team identification (TI) has been discussed as an important means for ensuring cooperation in teams and preventing negative group processes (van Vugt and Hart 2004). Accordingly, empirical research has shown TI to be positively related to, for instance, team members' willingness to engage in activities that benefit their team (Dutton et al.

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¹ Following seminal works in team research (e.g., Cohen and Bailey 1997; Ilgen et al. 2005), no distinction is made between "team" and "(work)group" in this study; both terms are used interchangeably.

1994), readiness to communicate and cooperate (Dukerich et al. 2002), and job satisfaction (Scott and Stephens 2009).

However, despite the evidence for its positive effects, extant empirical research has neglected the question of how TI actually develops. That is, so far only conceptual works have explicitly addressed the processes underlying team members' TI development. For instance, Ashforth et al. (2008) provide a careful review of extant findings on the development of several types of identification including identification with organizations, groups, roles, and social entities. They integrate the fragmented findings of existing studies into a conceptual process model of identification, however without empirically testing it. Empirical evidence so far primarily exists for individuals' development of professional and role identification (e.g., Ibarra 1999; Pratt et al. 2006; Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003). While these works provide valuable insights, it remains unclear whether their findings can be transferred to individuals' identification with a team. This is mainly due to two differences in the identification target (i.e., the entity individuals focus their identification on).

First, while role and professional identification are focused on individually anchored targets on a rather abstract level (i.e., a person's function and task), TI is aimed at a proximate collective-level entity (i.e., the team's collective identity). Thereby, a team's collective identity is the result of an ongoing incremental process between team members that involves interpersonal interaction and reflection on the collective level (Ashforth et al. 2011; Pratt et al. 2006; van Maanen and Barley 1984). Thus, the development of TI may be subject to greater ambivalence, active negotiation, and identity crafting among team members as compared to role or professional identification. Second, role and team identification differ in terms of the content of their identification target: Role identification on the one hand is aimed at what people do and what particular expectations are tied to their behavior. Hence, it transcends any given organizational entity. TI, on the other hand, is focused on team members' belonging to a specific social group, thus making their team affiliation the decisive criterion of categorization, regardless of their particular role or task in that team (also see the comparison between different identification targets in Vough 2012).

In sum, we know little about the specific processes which occur in individuals as they develop identification with their team. While some empirical insights exist for the development of individuals' role and professional identification, research on the processes that give rise to the development of TI so far has remained on a conceptual level (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2008). The goal of our paper is to close this gap in research by empirically investigating the processes underlying TI development. Based on a qualitative research approach following the principles of

grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser and Strauss 1967), we aim at building and enriching theory with respect to how (i.e., through which processes) individuals come to identify with teams. In order to accomplish this goal, we carried out in-depth, qualitative case studies of individuals assigned to seven cross-organizationally staffed work teams in the context of two United Nations (UN) peacebuilding operations. These teams are characterized by considerable member heterogeneity and thus offer the possibility to investigate the different facets of identification, in particular with respect to the co-occurrence of multiple foci of identification (cf. Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003).

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Team Identification in the Context of Social Identity Theory

According to Edwards and Peccei (2007), social identification is understood as a deep, psychological, self-defining, cognitive and affective link between an individual and a social entity. Based on this general understanding, *team identification* (TI) in particular refers to an individual's identification with the work team she or he is assigned to. TI occurs when employees (1) feel psychological attachment and a sense of belonging to their team, (2) describe themselves with the same features (in terms of norms, values, and attitudes) they use to describe their team, and (3) categorize themselves as members of their team (Dutton et al. 1994; Pratt 1998; Turner et al. 1987). In addition to cognition and affect, social identity literature alludes to the fact that identification encompasses behavioral elements (Ashforth et al. 2008; van Dick et al. 2004). Thus, in the process of identifying with a team, members adopt the central and distinctive attributes of the team in terms of its values, norms, attitudes, and behavioral standards into their self-concepts and actively enact these in their day-to-day life.

According to social identity theory, the process of identification can only unfold in relation to an identification target (e.g., Riketta and van Dick 2005; van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000). In the case of TI, this target is the collective team identity which is defined as the specific characteristics (i.e., values, norms, attitudes, and behavioral standards) that are central for the team as a collective and are shared among the majority of its members (Albert and Whetten 1985). These characteristics represent "who we are as a team" and are the defining features adopted by team members in the process of identification. As individuals belong to several social entities, they can have different foci of identification (Riketta and van Dick 2005)

which can be directed at a range of identification targets, such as professions, roles, or entire organizations (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Depending on the specific circumstances, individuals may enact that social identity for which they perceive the highest fit with the situational context (i.e., it becomes “salient”; Ashforth and Johnson 2001).

Social identification can also provide the basis for ingroup/outgroup comparisons. According to social identity theory (Tajfel 1981; Turner 1987) and social categorization theory (Hogg and Abrams 1988), individuals identify with social entities in order to satisfy their basic human needs for safety, uncertainty reduction, and belonging (Hogg and Terry 2000), but also their innate tendency for self-esteem enhancement (e.g., Brewer 1991). For maintaining a positive picture of themselves, individuals engage in social comparison processes for which they categorize themselves and others into different groups based on a salient social category (e.g., gender, cultural background, or team membership). While (similar) individuals who belong to the same social category are considered to belong to the ingroup, dissimilar others who are not part of the social category are categorized into the outgroup (Turner et al. 1987). Members of the own ingroup, then, are usually evaluated more positively and perceived to be more trustworthy than outgroup members, thereby satisfying the need for self-esteem enhancement.

Review of Existing Research and Research Question

No empirical study has investigated the processes underlying members’ TI development so far. Most of existing research has remained conceptual and has focused on contingency factors of TI emergence; moreover, not all existing works are based on insights specifically derived for identification with workgroups.

In the context of socio-psychological research on small groups, Postmes et al. (2005a) develop a conceptual model of collective identity formation in teams which comprises two processes: (1) deductive processes in which team members infer their social identity top-down from a given social context; and (2) inductive processes in which team members’ behaviors and interactions serve as inputs to bottom-up formation of a collective identity. Thus, while theorizing on the interplay between a collective team identity and individuals’ TI (also see Postmes et al. 2005b), the model remains silent on the processes that occur in individuals as they develop identification with their team. Further research on identity dynamics in small groups has focused on contingencies of members’ TI such as physical working arrangements (i.e., desk assignments) and shared cognition (Millward et al. 2007; Swaab et al. 2007).

Fiol and O’Connor’s (2005) conceptual model focuses on moderators of identification in virtual, hybrid, and face-

to-face teams. Based on the general notion that TI is driven by team members’ needs for uncertainty reduction and self-esteem enhancement, the authors derive several propositions on moderating variables from earlier works on identification in organizations and social identity theory. Among others, the model posits that TI is contingent on the team’s communication context, the relative salience of the team as a social category for its members, and the situation in which a team finds itself. However, despite the fact that these general insights from social identity theory are transferred to the domain of individuals’ identification with their team, they only inform us about contingencies and barely discuss processes underlying TI development.

Based on a review of works on identification with organizations, groups, roles, and social entities, Ashforth et al. (2008) develop a cyclical process model of identification; thereby, the authors rely on findings from different domains such as small group research and communication science. They conceptualize identification as an interplay between individuals and organizational entities wherein “individuals begin to incorporate elements of the collective into their sense of self by enacting identities and then interpreting responses to these enactments” (Ashforth et al. 2008, p. 340). In this process, the role of the collective is to encourage enactment and to provide feedback either in terms of sensebreaking (i.e., challenging individuals’ enactment and triggering questions about their self-definition) or sensegiving (i.e., giving individuals guidelines for meaning construction that align their self-definition with the definition of the collective; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Pratt 2000). In contrast, the role of the individuals is to make sense of identity episodes and to integrate them into an identity narrative that links their current sense of self with their past identities and the prospect of who they might become in the future. In accordance with prior research, the authors also suggest that individuals’ identity enactment and subsequent sensemaking about their experiences involves elements of cognition, affect, and behavior. The element of cognition (“I am part of the social entity”) is thereby the starting point of identification with a certain category. On the basis of this perception, members can then feel affection to the category (“I value the social entity”) and display behavior in favor of it (“I do things for the social entity”). The behavioral element takes a double role as it can be both an outcome of identification and an important part of the self-categorization process preceding identification (Ashforth et al. 2008).

While the model proposed by Ashforth et al. (2008) constitutes a valuable integration of the partly fragmented findings from the identification literature, it relates to all kinds of identification that may occur in organizational settings. Therefore it may have overlooked specific traits that characterize identification with teams, for example in

terms of the interaction, negotiation, and identity crafting among team members. Moreover, it is deductively derived based on extant works on organizational, group, and role identification and thus is not empirically grounded. As a consequence, the authors conclude that “the model provides more questions than answers” and call to capture facets of the “undercurrents of identification” (Ashforth et al. 2008, p. 346) in greater detail. With our study, we address this gap in research by adopting a qualitative, theory-generating approach which aims at answering the following research question: *What are the processes underlying the development of members’ identification with their team?*

Method

For exploring and understanding the processes underlying TI development, a qualitative research approach following the principles of grounded theory (GT) seemed the most appropriate choice (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser and Strauss 1967). This design allowed us to detect patterns of TI by eliciting participants’ perspectives, behaviors, and actions and to build our GT on team identification processes inductively from the data. Adhering to a guiding principle of GT, our research process was marked by a continuous comparison of data with theory; that is, data collection constantly alternated with data analysis. In the course of this “dialogue,” concepts surfaced, and new theory emerged iteratively as we repeated this process until theoretical saturation was reached. Moreover, our data gathering was based on evolving concepts; this theoretical sampling enabled us to adapt our focus of attention in the course of our investigation if we encountered interesting evidence in our data and saw merit in following up on it (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Research Setting and Case Selection

The subjects of our analysis were individuals working in cross-organizationally staffed teams within UN peacebuilding operations. These operations are networks of UN organizations which are charged, among others, with establishing security in post-conflict countries, developing civil society, and reerecting public administration. They typically consist of an armed UN peacekeeping force (“the mission”) working on a mandate of the UN Security Council and UN organizations from the political, relief, and development domain with presence in the country of operation.²

² These UN organizations may include, for example: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization

In order to unite the different UN organizations operating in a post-conflict country into an integrated peacebuilding operation, the UN has set up cross-functional peacebuilding teams that work together with respect to specific aspects of the broader UN peacebuilding agenda (e.g., teams for disarmament or combat of HIV/AIDS). In these teams, representatives of all UN organizations that are involved in the respective topic come together on a part-time basis (i.e., 10–25 % of their working time) under the leadership of a facilitator (see Table 1 for more details on our sample). Although the different UN organizations keep their own mandates, personnel, leadership, and organizational cultures, they are required to work together in the peacebuilding teams for warranting strategic and operational alignment. This empirical backdrop proved to be adequate for scrutinizing TI development in particular for two reasons. First, the members in our teams varied on at least six major diversity dimensions (see Table 1), thus offering a large array of potential identification targets (Jackson and Joshi 2011). By investigating such extreme cases of members’ identity diversity, we expected to be better able to analyze identification processes with respect to potentially conflicting member identities (cf. Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003). Second, in contrast to many existing studies in identification research, the peacebuilding context allowed for investigating real-world teams entrusted with solving highly relevant challenges under considerable environmental pressure.

We applied theoretical sampling (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 2001) for both case (i.e., peacebuilding operations) and within-case selection (i.e., peacebuilding teams within operations). Out of the 16 peacebuilding operations conducted by the UN at the time of our study, we chose Liberia and Haiti as main cases because they were similar with regard to their structural features (e.g., participating UN agencies, mandate, and organizational set-up), yet different with respect to the collaboration success among the involved UN actors (Pettigrew 1990). Liberia on the one hand was one of UN’s most successful operations in terms of inter-organizational collaboration, while the Haitian mission, on the other hand, was subject to vast collaboration problems (e.g., Frerks et al. 2006).

Footnote 2 continued

(WHO), International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), UN Fund for Children (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN Development Program (UNDP), World Food Program (WFP), UN Joint Program on Aids (UNAIDS), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA). For a complete list of all UN organizations active in UN peacebuilding and development operations, see <https://undg.org/home/about/undg/members/>.

Table 1 Team features and diversity in teams A-G

Team	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
<i>Team features</i>							
Existence (in months)	31	23	48	52	24	30	13
Size (team members)	10	10	9	12	9	8	5
Mean member tenure	17.7	15.5	21.7	19.3	17.9	20.3	13
Tenure range (months)	5-31	5-23	6-48	4-52	2-24	2-30	13-13
Team domain	Communication/PR	HIV Aids policy	Gender policy	Local governance	HIV Aids policy	Communication/PR	Gender policy
Country of operation	Liberia	Liberia	Liberia	Liberia	Haiti	Haiti	Haiti
<i>Member diversity</i>							
Gender (male/female)	10/0	6/4	5/4	9/3	2/7	3/5	0/5
Age groups ^a	3	4	4	2	3	3	4
Nationalities	6	5	7	7	7	4	5
Ethnic groups ^b	3	3	2	4	4	4	5
Fields of education ^c	4	4	3	5	5	4	3
Organizations	9	9	7	8	8	8	4

^a Age groups: 21-30 (group 1); 31-40 (group 2); 41-50 (group 3); 51-60 (group 4)

^b Ethnicities: White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and Other (e.g., Arabic, Caribbean, etc.; cf. Joshi and Roh 2009)

^c Fields of education: Medicine, Engineering, Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Business Administration

During our preparatory visit of each peacebuilding operation, we selected seven teams (and their members) as our primary units of analysis. These teams were chosen based on the criterion of perceived group functioning and included both well-working and poorly working teams. Furthermore, we studied teams from the same topical domains in both countries to limit subject matter-related variance (see Table 1).³

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection took place during two field trips to Liberia and Haiti. We conducted 63 interviews with the members of all seven peacebuilding teams which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. These interviews lasted about 60 min on average and followed a semistructured, yet loose form so that enough freedom was left to scrutinize topics and issues considered particularly relevant for the study (Patton 1990; Rubin and Rubin 2005). The interviews mainly revolved around (1) issues related to team members' identification with their team, and (2) the team's central values, norms, attitudes, and behavioral standards; moreover, questions were included on (3) respondents' personal and organizational background, (4) their role and degree of participation in the team, and (5) perceived team outcomes. We put special emphasis on eliciting a temporal, narrative account from our respondents, yet avoiding the direct mentioning of our research topic.

We used a rough interview guideline to ensure that central aspects would be consistently touched on during all interviews. Typical questions were for example: "Could you please recount how you felt about the team when you first joined?"; "How did your feeling of belonging to the team develop over time?"; "Could you please describe some incidents or turning points which changed the way you saw the team?" As the interviews and our knowledge on TI processes progressed, we expanded the question set and added several more specific sub-questions reflecting the emerging framework. In addition, we also used a chart with converging circles as a visual aid during the interviews for determining the level of respondents' TI (adopted from Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Rockmann et al. 2007). Thereby, we asked respondents how much overlap they perceived between themselves and their team and took the answers as indicators for TI as their salient social category.

In addition to our interviews, we attended several team meetings in which we were able to unobtrusively observe and document both the interaction among team members and the atmosphere in the team. These observations served to better elicit the degree and nature of member interaction, individual interventions, potential conflicts, and the like.

Following the principles of GT, our data analysis was strongly intertwined with data collection (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and proceeded in four phases: (1) The first analytic phase took place during our field investigation in the four Liberian teams. After completing each interview, we exchanged our views about what we had heard in the interview and discussed emerging patterns. Over time, recurring phenomena were condensed into a provisional list of concepts and categories (see Table 2 for an example of concept development). As interviewing progressed, the list was continuously adapted, and the interview guideline was modified.

(2) Upon return from the on-site investigation, we continued our examination by analyzing the interview transcripts with the help of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Based on two randomly selected interviews, two researchers independently developed a more fine-grained and distinct code scheme each. A comparison of these two code schemes showed very high overlap, so that unifying the individual schemes to one master scheme was unproblematic. In further analysis of the data, we incrementally extended and refined the code scheme in order to include additional emerging categories and their dimensions (open coding) and assigned a generic common meaning to each code. Thereby, we conducted ongoing and thorough comparisons of the codings throughout the entire coding process which ensured high congruence between the two coders. Lastly, we conducted axial coding, i.e., we related concepts and categories by combining them inductively and deductively (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

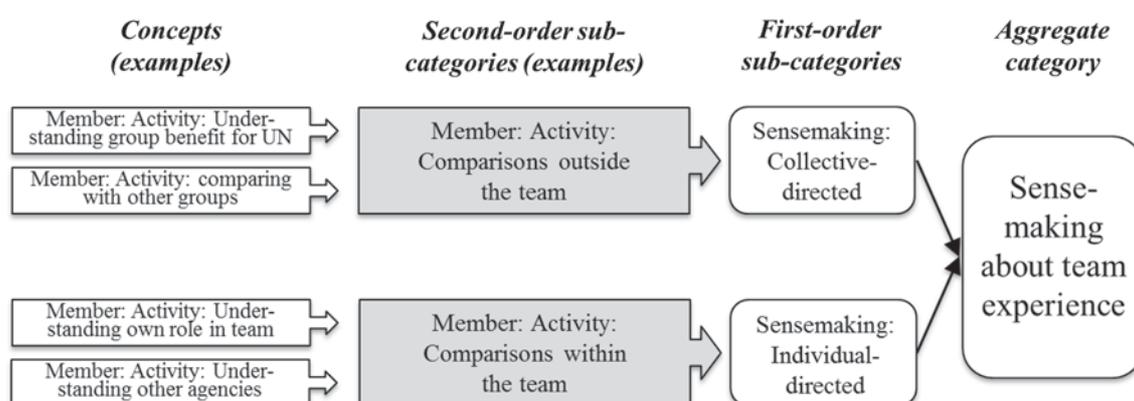
(3) The third phase of data analysis took place during the visit to Haiti using the same semistructured interview guideline employed in the first phase. While the responses from the Haitian team members generally supported our Liberian results, we also gathered new information, for example, on reasons why members had not developed TI.

(4) Finally, we conducted computer-assisted analyses of the Haitian data analogously to the Liberian data. Then, we reanalyzed all data jointly based on the expanded code scheme developed from both cases. We summarized the emerging results for each member and team and started to make intra- and inter-team comparisons with respect to the variables of interest (i.e., processes underlying TI development). Subsequently, we consolidated the code scheme and started to relate concepts and categories by combining them inductively and deductively. For obtaining a coherent picture, we then examined relationships between

³ We moreover selected one team as a special case for Liberia; it was charged with establishing regional governance capacity in a rural district and particularly suitable for investigating the influence of environmental isolation on TI development.

Table 2 Emergence of new concepts from data: “Comparing team with other actors”

Point in analysis	Data incident	Label given to concept
Second interview with member of Team C (R47) on October 5th	Respondent refers to “headquarters” as an institution that gives orders to the team but lacks the greater vision, e.g., “we are very much controlled from up above.”	<i>Blaming superiors/headquarters</i>
Participatory observation in meeting of Team A on October 7th	In team meeting, members often refer to the team as “we” and talk about the necessity of holding a retreat. However, because of resistance from UNMIL leadership (“they”), the retreat has to be postponed several times.	<i>Confrontation “us” against “them”</i>
Fourth interview with member of Team C (R69) on October 7th	Respondent describes how important it is what role the UN senior leadership gives to the team. Respondent underlines how this team is different from the other work teams.	<i>Highlighting differences between team and other actors</i>
First interview with member of Team D (R95) on October 14th	Respondent describes proudly how his team is different from all other teams throughout the country and how senior UN leadership has taken an interest in his team’s success story.	<i>Comparing team with other actors</i>

**Fig. 1** Data structure (example)

the categories and extant research and also considered other models of representation. When we had developed a revised conceptualization of TI processes, we again thoroughly checked its fit with the data (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 2001). Figure 1 illustrates an example of our data structure with regard to the TI process “Sensemaking about Team Experience” (see “Results” section).

Results

Our data revealed four processes to be relevant for the emergence of TI which are further described in the following (see Fig. 2 for an overview).

Enacting a Salient Identity

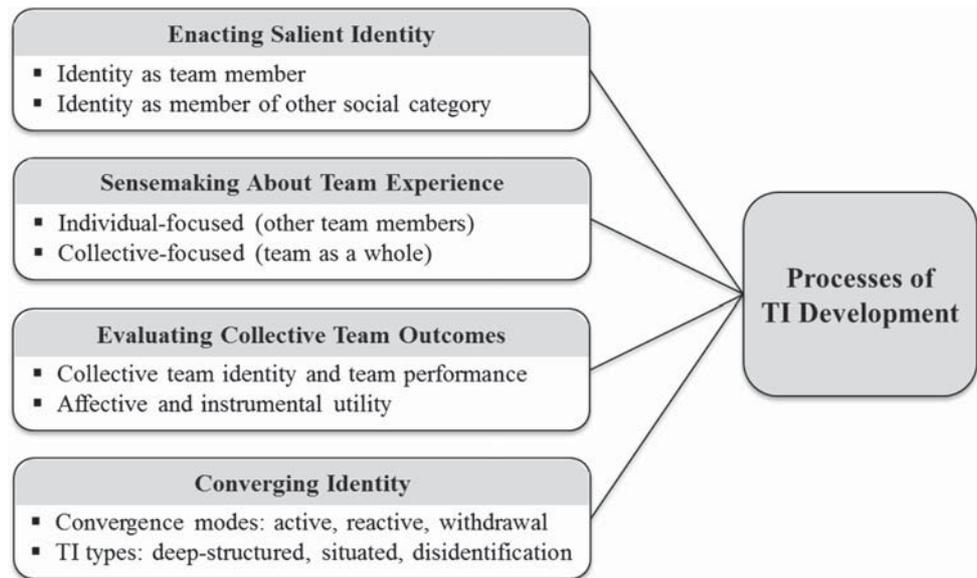
One process underlying TI development refers to team members enacting one (or more) of the social identities they hold in their identity set. These can either reflect the

belonging to a certain social category (e.g., profession, nationality, or gender) or their membership in the team. In our sample, team members’ most frequently enacted social identities were based on organizational membership (“Various agencies see situations from their agency’s perspective,” Team C, R135), cultural and ethnic origin (“This is multicultural; all of us come from different backgrounds. These are different ways of seeing life,” Team D, R64), and professional background (“I can only speak for myself as a military observer,” Team D, R86). In addition, respondents’ gender, age, and nationality surfaced as salient social identities.

If you represent an organization, you are doing the job of your organization; you have to do your job based on the value, on the mission, based on the objectives of your organization. (Team E, R91)

Thereby, our data revealed a dynamic pattern in enacting identities which is closely connected to the concept of identity salience (Ashforth and Johnson 2001). We found

Fig. 2 Processes of TI development



that the enactment of identities vis-à-vis other team members was dependent on the situational context in terms of the team's current topic. The enactment of the professional identity as "humanitarian" by some members of emergency-driven UN organizations may serve as an example. In the day-to-day routine of the team, the "humanitarians" seldom enacted this identity. Yet, the situation changed when the military became involved in the team's projects and was perceived as a threat to their "humanitarian space" by the humanitarian team members.

When I heard people from [the peacekeeping mission] talking about humanitarian [issues] give me a break! What do they know about being humanitarian?! (Team F, R52)

In our interviews, individuals' retrospective accounts of their identification history pointed to the fact that with increasing team tenure, the salience of other social identities (e.g., based on nationality or gender) was usually replaced by their identity as a team member. With growing team tenure, they increasingly enacted their team membership as the salient identity when interacting in the team.

Sensemaking About Team Experience

This process of TI development is marked by recurring instances of team members' sensemaking about their experiences in the team (see also Brown et al. 2008; Weick 1995). Thereby, the team members in our sample typically traversed two episodes: On the one hand, an individual-directed sensemaking episode, and on the other hand an episode in which sensemaking was oriented toward the

team as a collective. Both episodes were characterized by ingroup/outgroup comparisons, although with differing points of reference. The question of which of the episodes dominated sensemaking depended on team members' TI salience, i.e., whether identification with the team was perceived to fit the situational context best. If TI was strongly salient, team members usually engaged in collective-directed sensemaking; if TI was weaker, team members more often engaged in individual-directed sensemaking. Both episodes, along with illustrations from our data, are summarized in Table 3.

In the individual-directed sensemaking episode, team members' thoughts and considerations were typically directed at their own situation in the team ("Where am I, the individual, on this team?" Team E, R129), their work ("What can be my contribution?" Team C, R69), the aspirations of their delegating agency ("What does my organization expect from me?" Team B, R96), and the role of other team members ("I needed time to understand what the place of each one was," Team E, R19). Thereby, team members' sensemaking was dominated by ingroup/outgroup comparisons vis-à-vis other team members based on initially enacted social identities (e.g., organizational membership or cultural background). From the retrospective accounts of our respondents' identification history, it became apparent that individual-directed sensemaking primarily took place at the beginning of one's team membership. For instance, most team members entered their team with a rather pronounced consciousness of their status as delegates of their home organizations. In addition, team members often invoked stereotypical characterizations of other team members to contrast their self-concept in the team context.

Table 3 Sensemaking and ingroup/outgroup comparisons in the teams: illustrations

Individual focused sensemaking	
<i>Sensemaking regarding individual positions in the team</i>	<i>Ingroup/outgroup comparisons within the team</i>
<p>“You find yourself there, then for yourself you are trying to find out exactly what it is about, how can I contribute, what is required for me from the organization, what am I supposed to work.” (Team C, R69)</p> <p>“We don’t know really what the other agencies are doing here. I don’t know what UNFPA is doing; I don’t know what UNESCO is doing.” (Team F, R7)</p> <p>“The first year I can say was more like getting to know each other, trying to get used to the idea.” (Team E, R43)</p> <p>“Some of the agencies were ‘What am I doing there?’ ... And then as we go along when the interest grew then they started to understand what is their position, why there would be a good reason to have FAO, OEM, all these different organization in the [team].” (Team E, R31)</p>	<p>“People in the (military) mission normally need to prove themselves and then they don’t really feel part of the UN system as an agency.” (Team E, R43)</p> <p>“It’s difficult to give a now harmonious image when inside [the team] the agencies’ approach of communication is different, is so much different.” (Team F, R7)</p> <p>“The other reality is that agencies have different mandates and obviously they see things differently, and they have also their ways of programming, they have their culture.” (Team C, R135)</p> <p>“And there is always a distinct difference between [team] members who are international and [team] members who are national.” (Team B, R5)</p>
Collective focused sensemaking	
<i>Sensemaking regarding the team as a whole</i>	<i>Ingroup/outgroup comparisons with actors outside the team</i>
<p>“We don’t come all to the [team] as this is UNDP, this WFP. It’s the consensus, we agree on the decisions and we move from there.” (Team A, R119)</p> <p>“At some point it doesn’t really matter who you are, we have some common agenda and that’s we are interested in.” (Team C, R69)</p> <p>“As a result of the effectiveness of the meetings we have one voice and we go according to the same line. And if someone has of course a different opinion the person can raise it and then we will discuss it. But in the end of the meeting we usually end up with a statement or a policy ... And then everybody will follow on that.” (Team D, R77)</p> <p>“In a [team] the challenge is to lower the tune of the agency and to increase the tune of the larger UN.” (Team C, R75)</p>	<p>“But this speaking with one voice could be one of the accomplishments of the group. Because in other places there would not be such an alignment between the different parties.” (Team D, R77)</p> <p>“I feel that at least we have a common vision when we are at the [team] whereas at the other place you went to the meetings and you remained as UNHCR, UNFPO, you remained at whatever it is that you are.” (Team C, R69)</p> <p>“And if we have an idea and we sell it to the [UN senior leadership committee], then it is easier to pass to others because we are all speaking the same language, we are all going in the same way.” (Team E, R116)</p> <p>“Because we all have just one joint approach, with respect to other international agencies like the international NGOs and local NGOs.” (Team D, R103)</p>

However, in the collective-directed sensemaking episode, members elaborated their understanding of the team as a whole, with its shared aims, characteristics, and defining features. This episode included interactive elements and discussions with other team members. While still anchored in individual-level cognition, the collective sensemaking episode was thus characterized by a subtle fusion of the individual with the collective in a sense that members moved from thinking about “I” to thinking about “we.” During this process, questions such as “What are we making out of this team?”, “What are the priorities of the team?”, or “Where is our role within the broader UN system?” came to the fore. Thereby, the collective-directed sensemaking was associated with team members’ growing subjective understanding of the team’s collective identity and their perception of the team’s performance. The following quotation from Team C illustrates the shift from individual- to collective-directed sensemaking:

There has been generally more emphasis on developing the work of the group, and focusing a little bit more, and there has been a lot of discussion internally on how to make it work... on what it actually means to participate, to make sure that people deliver what they promise to, to give their contribution. (Team C, R68)

By contrasting the team with group-external actors, ingroup/outgroup comparisons occurring during this sensemaking episode also contributed to the emergence of a “team consciousness.” The targets of comparison included not only other working groups, but also groups of persons (e.g., “our bosses”), organizations (e.g., “the NGOs”), national counterparts (e.g., “the ministry”), hierarchy levels (e.g., “headquarters”), and even nation states (e.g., “the donors,” “the Americans”). The important aspect of these comparisons is the distinction

Table 4 Collective Team Identities in the Seven Teams

Team	Topic	Collective team identity	Collective team identity illustrations
A	Communication (UN internal & external) in Liberia	“The professionals” <i>Resourceful, well managed, respected</i>	“Everyone sees the next person as a professional... As you noticed at the meeting the way they even talk to each other is like you’d talk to someone at a peer level.” (R112) “There is a sort of a maturity here [in the team].” (R128) “Progressive is the word that I’d use to describe the group.” (R119)
B	UN HIV/Aids response in Liberia	“The lost bunch” <i>Confused, low capacity & priority</i>	“Even the members of the [team] are not completely aware of their role and their responsibility and how much things to do.” (R5) “The same people that expect us to go somewhere are also the ones stopping us. I think that is an understanding we all share.” (R140) “There is ... a lack of clarity on how to work together.” (R89)
C	Gender policy formulation in Liberia	“The powerful gatekeepers” <i>Strategic, self confident, competent</i>	“It is a group that is focused, but that also understands its responsibilities. And it’s a group that is really trying to prioritize and locate what is strategic.” (R135) “I think it’s a group that opens one up to a lot of learning and sharing experiences.” (R69) “The entire UN relies on the [team] for decisions on gender.” (R4)
D	Regional government support in Liberia	“The pioneers” <i>Innovative, dynamic, unconventional, closely bonded</i>	“We are working vigorously towards ending this agency approach to interventions in the community and we are seeking our joint approach.” (R50) “It’s a group that wants to do things together; it’s an innovative group.” (R70) “The [team] is more like a policy maker.” (R77)
E	UN HIV/Aids response in Haiti	“The idealists” <i>Engaged, self confident, no strategic support</i>	“We are sharing this common idea about what we are looking forward to.” (R91) “I’m lucky to be part of such a very pro active and participative type of group.” (R133) “[It’s] a very dynamic group because they bring people from different perspectives, they are very flexible and also they are very open to ideas.” (R91)
F	Communication (UN internal & external) in Haiti	“The quarrelsome” <i>Estranged, ill constructed, unsuccessful</i>	“We don’t know exactly what is the mission and for what we need to work. We were just focusing on a document ... and different things and I feel that that is not the mission of the [team].” (R25) “If we knew where we were going. There is not really a strategy, a plan, what do we want exactly.” (R7)
G	Gender policy formulation in Haiti	“The expert circle” <i>No coherence, but collegiate</i>	“It has structure but, in fact, it works as an informal group in a sense ... Sometimes we share documents and there is report on whatever you can use this maillist ... and it’s working more on the personal, individual level.” (R72)

between “them” and “us” (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Gaertner et al. 1996), which led to further development and consolidation of members’ understanding of what the team stood for (see also the works on prototype clarity, e.g., Chattopadhyay et al. 2004; Haslam 2004). According to our data, collective-directed sensemaking seemed to be particularly relevant at later stages of interaction with the team. Table 4 presents a short characterization of the seven collective team identities based on team members’ statements and their accounts of typical incidents.

Evaluating Collective Team Outcomes

As another part of members’ TI development, this process pertains to the evaluation of teamwork outcomes. These comprised not only the team’s performance, but also its central values, norms, attitudes, and behavioral standards (i.e., the team’s collective identity). The evaluation by team members was mostly inexplicit in that achievements or failures were often not discussed in the team. Instead, it occurred as a process of team members’ implicit introspection which only surfaced as a result of careful

interviewing. Our analysis revealed that evaluating collective team outcomes typically included two criteria of reflection.

The first criterion was the extent to which the team outcomes appealed to team members' *instrumental utility*. This rationally driven criterion can be roughly captured by the question "What is the added value of working in this team?" Considerations of instrumental utility could be further broken down into three different aspects. We termed these (1) person-related instrumentality ("What am I personally getting out of the team?"), (2) organization-related instrumentality ("What is the benefit for my organization?"), and (3) subject matter-related instrumentality ("How does the subject matter profit from the work of the team?").

Second, the degree of *affective utility* also influenced the evaluation of team outcomes. We conceptualize affective utility as the underlying mechanism determining the relative importance of team membership for team members' self-concepts. In other words, affective utility is the basis for the emotional attachment that members develop toward their team's values, norms, attitudes, behaviors, as well as the team's work ("Do I enjoy being part of the team?"). In contrast to instrumental utility, affective utility can thus be seen as team members' emotional-intuitive appreciation of the team. Our analysis revealed two particular team properties that were able to appeal to team members' evaluations of affective utility: A team's topic and the specific collective identity that a team had developed over time. Consider the following statements as examples for topic- and collective identity-related affect:

I always had an interest, a personal interest in understanding the AIDS epidemic and the structures here in Haiti, and see how they are similar or different from what I'm accustomed to. And, so I would go to the meetings although I was not officially the focal person. (Team E, R133)

I feel the best way to say it is 'we,' because we are a team and as a team, we have to work together; we have to have the same vision, we have to have the same target ... 'we' that means 'one.' So I feel that I have ownership in this group. (Team E, R91)

Converging Identity

In this TI process, team members made the decision whether to converge their identity to that of the team, that is to include elements of the team's values, norms, attitudes, and behavioral standards into their self-concept. Within this matching process, we distinguish between the process of convergence itself (i.e., the mode of convergence) and the associated type of TI.

Modes of Convergence

According to our data, team members compared their currently enacted identity (or identities) with the collective team identity. Depending on the perceived degree of compatibility, they usually adopted one of three different identity convergence modes. First, in case of high compatibility, members usually adapted or expanded their personal identity narrative to match team membership (*reactive identity convergence mode*). This convergence mode was the most frequently used among our respondents as the following quote illustrates:

Most of the people, when they arrive here they arrive to an environment where everybody sees themselves as part of the team. So you don't really have ... no, it's not that you don't have a choice but you stop thinking about yourself as a representative from a different section. 'I am from [organization A]', 'I am from [organization B]', 'I don't have to do anything with these issues,' but you immediately are dragged in a teamwork. Because the majority of the people are members of the team. If you tried to kind of stand out then it's not really a good thing. People don't really question it. (Team D, R77)

Another respondent from Team C underlined the pull effect and peer pressure that a collective team identity could have for members:

If you are in a group of people you see you have similar levels of commitment and there is real interest in what we are all doing, then that should motivate even the person who is not so committed because then maybe you don't be left out by the rest of the group. (Team C, R69)

Thus, by adopting a reactive identity convergence mode, team members enriched and enlarged their personal identities by taking over certain team characteristics and values into their self-concepts (Pratt et al. 2006). This could occur silently and subconsciously in a way that resembled an organic metamorphosis of the individuals' identity sets through membership in the collective, as in the example above, or more deliberately and with full awareness, as the following statement shows:

It's something that is growing, it's a gradual process of trust. You know, the monthly meetings also bring a lot of trust. Because there is much mistrust. When you meet on a monthly basis you tend to ... reduce all the distrust. And now it's that to trust each other and also try to see the degree of communality between the various agencies and the groups on this issue. (Team C, R94)

A second convergence mode *active identity convergence* occurred in case of low compatibility between team members' personal identities and the collective team identity. In this mode, individuals attempted to achieve greater compatibility by actively shaping the team's collective identity. Hence, a match between identities was not realized through the incorporation of existing team attributes into members' self-concepts, but by altering the team's collective identity itself. Unlike the reactive convergence strategy, this mode demanded high involvement and agenda setting actions from members, particularly during collective-directed sensemaking:

My predecessor in [my agency] also acknowledged that and she was the one who has really been calling for this to happen. A kind of an exercise to revamp the commitment, but also to reflect about the situation and ensure whatever the bottlenecks are, that they are addressed. So I think leadership of the [team] itself but not just leadership also a core group of members that are committed ... keeping pushing, keeping reflecting, and keeping talking to each other and trying to find a way of revitalizing the situation. (Team C, R135)

In this way, team members probed and tried to influence the course of interaction and the content of discussions, for example by proposing changes in the team's strategic alignment, the introduction of ethical standards (e.g., in Team F, some members attempted to introduce humanitarian impartiality as a guiding principle), or by proposing alternative mechanisms of organizing. Yet, such activity was not always successful or appreciated by other team members:

If you are working around with your ego the whole time it becomes really difficult to step out of that and really be more constructive. (Team C, R69)

In particular, team members' attempts to influence the team were problematic if they clashed with the attempts of others trying to influence the team in a different direction. In Team F, for instance, competing attempts resulted in an open fight among team members and caused them to withdraw to their individual identities as representatives of their different home organizations. This episode exemplifies how an ill-executed active convergence can cause members to change their mode from identity convergence to withdrawal (see below). However, our data showed that this was an exception and that active identity convergence did not necessarily lead to intra-team clashes.

The third convergence mode *withdrawal from identity convergence* was usually adopted if the compatibility between team members' individual identities and the team's collective team identity was very low. In such cases,

team members chose to not adapt their individual identity narratives at all. In our interviews, respondents only rarely explicitly stated that they refused to adopt team attributes into their self-concept. Therefore, we had to primarily rely on indirect verbal indications for withdrawal which were, for example, reflected in statements indicating distance to the team or when team members did not regard the team as a relevant reference point for their individual identities. Also, when team members referred to their team as "they," this conveyed the implicit exclusion of the self from the team. In particular, Team B can serve as an example, where even the team leader was criticized for not seeing himself as belonging to the team:

He is the main part of the [team]! The person who should make the [team] work! But he divorces himself from the [team] and says 'You are the [team],' you know, 'You should do this, you should do that.' (Team B, R53)

The common characteristic of team members engaging in withdrawal from identity convergence was that their statements and activities reflected a weariness and open disinterest in the team as well as in their team colleagues:

I have learned to work in meetings now because it is a waste of time I'm afraid. (Team B, R140)

Types of Team Identification

Our analysis revealed three *distinct types of TI* which were associated with the three different modes of convergence discussed above. We refer to these as *disidentification*, *situated TI*, and *deep-structured TI*; thereby, situated TI was the most common type followed by deep-structured TI, while disidentification was exhibited only by a limited number of respondents.

Disidentifiers developed no TI or even completely rejected any association with the team (also see Kreiner and Ashforth 2004). Their evaluation of both team outcomes and compatibility between the team's and their individual identity was usually negative and they adopted the withdrawal mode of identity convergence. Their attitude toward the team was characterized by a disaffirmation of the team's values and a reversion to their other social identities (for instance as delegates of their home organizations) or roles that they deemed more important:

UNICEF comes as UNICEF, HCR comes as HCR, we sit and discuss, we leave as HCR and UNICEF. We haven't reached a stage where we can call ourselves a really harmonious group. (Team B, R67)

Besides disidentifiers, our data led us to the conclusion that two distinct types of positive TI existed: situated and

deep-structured TI. Thereby, both types could be associated with either a reactive or an active identity convergence mode. On the one hand, *situated TI* (also see Riketta et al. 2006; Rousseau 1998; Scott et al. 1998) refers to a kind of identification that only lasted for limited periods of teamwork:

Well, when I'm there I identify with this group but it's just a couple of hours. (Team B, R140)

During that meeting we socialize and you know ... The feeling of [we-ness] is there, that 'yeah, I know this person and we work in the same team.' That feeling is there. But the feeling of belonging, the feeling of togetherness, when we are going to our different offices, seems to break. (Team C, R10)

The commonality of team members developing situated TI can be described as follows: While feeling a sense of belonging to the team, their identification remained at the surface and did not fundamentally alter their self-concepts. In this context, our data showed that situated TI was most frequent among team members that saw medium or low compatibility between the collective team identity and their currently enacted individual identity.

On the other hand, *deep-structured TI* represented a fundamental change in team members' self-concepts (also see Riketta et al. 2006; Rousseau 1998; Scott et al. 1998). Unlike situated identification, deep-structured TI led team members to enduringly make membership in the team their salient social identity. As a result, they often defined themselves in terms of their team membership, even when operating in contexts other than the team.

I'm very passionate about my role here and I see the group being, at least the characters in the group, the personalities are very engaged people, so I feel very good about my participation there as a focal point and I hope I can have great things done. (Team E, R133)

Discussion

Team members' identification with their team has long been considered important for effective team functioning (e.g., van der Vegt and Bunderson 2005). Yet, knowledge about the development of TI has remained limited and largely without empirical footing from a real-world team context (Ashforth et al. 2008; Fiol and O'Connor 2005). Our study contributes to a better understanding of TI by providing an answer to the question of what processes underlie team members' identification with their team. With our data, we are able to identify four processes that are part of TI development: enacting a salient identity,

sensemaking about team experience, evaluating collective team outcomes, and converging identity.

Theoretical Implications

Several of our findings extend existing TI research, most of which is summarized in the more general conceptual framework on identification with social entities by Ashforth et al. (2008). In particular, our findings concerning team members' sensemaking about their team experience as well as the different modes of identity convergence provide new insights into the processes underlying TI development.

First, concerning team members' sensemaking during TI development, our findings show that sensemaking incorporates two different aspects: The individuals working in the team and the team as a whole. Accordingly, team members use both internal and external points of reference for their ingroup/outgroup comparisons. This notion is new to the discussion on identification emergence as research so far has mainly focused on inter-individual comparisons (i.e., ingroup/outgroup comparisons within social entities) and left ingroup/outgroup comparisons vis-à-vis external actors largely unattended. Relating our findings to the model developed by Ashforth et al. (2008), future research may also explore how ingroup/outgroup comparisons concerning team-external actors interact with sensebreaking and sensegiving processes (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Pratt 2000). It appears to be relevant, for example, whether the questioning and the promotion of team members' alignment with the team as a collective is dependent on the nature and the strength of ingroup/outgroup comparisons vis-à-vis team-external actors.

Second, our findings on identity convergence extend current knowledge on what Ashforth et al. (2008, p. 343) call the "adoption" of a new identity narrative. In our study, we encounter evidence that team members use different convergence modes (i.e., active, reactive, and withdrawal) when comparing their individual identity to that of the team. This finding resonates with Pratt's (1998) theorizing on organizational identification in which he differentiates between two identification episodes: On the one hand rather smooth episodes of affinity when organizational members come to realize congruence between the organization's values, norms, and behavioral standards and their individual salient identities; on the other hand episodes of emulation characterized by identity conflicts in which organizational members emulate their self-concepts more fundamentally while adopting the new identity. With respect to the occurrence of active identity convergence however, we enter new territory: Our findings show that TI development does not only involve a reaction to the

characteristics of the identification target (i.e., the adoption of attributes of the identification target into individuals' self-concepts), but may also involve the active alternation of the target identity (i.e., the collective team identity) itself in order to establish greater compatibility with team members' individual identities.

In this context, future research may on the one hand scrutinize antecedents determining the adoption of different identity convergence modes. On the other hand, analyzing moderators would allow for identifying contingency factors that, for example, influence the dynamics of active identity convergence. Thereby, it may be particularly relevant to examine the role of communication in determining the choice or the dynamics of convergence modes, for instance with regard to different communicators (e.g., peers, leaders, or whole organizations) and different means of communication (e.g., use of specific rhetorical strategies, symbols, or artifacts; Cheney 1983; DiSanza and Bullis 1999; Pratt 1998)

A third finding extending prior research also pertains to the TI process of identity convergence. More specifically, our results show that team members develop different types of TI which are associated with the identity convergence modes they adopted. We termed these deep-structured identification, situated identification, and disidentification. While different types of identification have also been distinguished in prior research (e.g., Kreiner and Ashforth 2004; Riketta et al. 2006; Scott et al. 1998), our study is the first to find evidence for the notion that identity convergence modes and identification outcomes are closely intertwined; thus, our findings suggest the existence of different patterns of TI development. Therefore, we see promise for further research in scrutinizing the interrelations between identity convergence modes and identification types, in particular concerning the existence of distinct "identification paths."

Lastly, while the framework by Ashforth et al. (2008) posits that identification evolves through episodes of comparison between enacted identities and the social context (such as professions, roles, or organizations), we were able to identify specific criteria (i.e., instrumental and affective utility) that govern this evaluation. Our results show that in particular affective utility is highly important for TI development. This finding reaffirms the notion conveyed by previous works that individuals can actually *feel* their way into identification (Ashforth 2001; Ashforth et al. 2008). Hence, further research is necessary to explore antecedents fostering perceived affective utility to promote team members' propensity for TI development.

Practical Implications

Our findings provide several points of reference for practitioners who aim at promoting TI. With regard to team members' sensemaking about their team experience, managerial interventions facilitating collective-directed sensemaking and ingroup/outgroup comparisons vis-à-vis team-external actors can be particularly effective. Thereby, it seems to be important on the one hand to clarify what a team stands for (i.e., with regard to its vision, goals, and priorities) and on the other hand to define and delimit its role in the broader system's context (i.e., its contribution to and particularity in the organizational context). Both requirements will be best fulfilled by a team leader exhibiting visionary-transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio 2006). Such a leadership style is marked by a clear vision for the team, emphasizes common ground among team members (in terms of shared goals, norms, and priorities), and highlights both the role and the boundaries of the team in the larger context. All of these behaviors have been determined both inductively (Huettermann et al. 2014; Sivunen 2006) and deductively (e.g., Conger et al. 2000; Kearney and Gebert 2009) as drivers of identification in teams. They will also help to strengthen team members' perceived affective utility during the TI process of evaluating collective team outcomes. Transformational and visionary leadership are marked by establishing strong emotional bonds between the individual and the vision, goals, and fate of the collective (van Knippenberg and Stam 2014).

The identity convergence mode adopted by team members is particularly crucial as it appears to be systematically linked to the type of identification they develop. For developing the strongest type of TI (i.e., deep-structured TI), team members have to engage in active identity convergence which means that they actively shape their identification target (i.e., the collective team identity). Therefore, they must be given the opportunity for identity crafting which means that both organizational and team management should not try to impose a predefined superordinate identity which leaves team members with the choice of either reactively converging their identity or withdrawing from identification with the team. Rather, team members should be able to extensively communicate about, negotiate, and "craft" their identification target which allows them to arrive at a common understanding of "who we are as a team" (Postmes et al. 2005a). This can, for example, be achieved by offering and encouraging active involvement in team activities and decisions (Huettermann et al. 2014) and by promoting regular team meetings (Sivunen 2006).

Overall, our findings point to the need for adapting all managerial interventions aimed at promoting TI to the individual process of TI development each team member is passing through. Given the membership fluctuation in most types of teams, it is very likely that team members will engage in different TI processes at a given point of time; hence, from a managerial perspective, tailoring measures for TI promotion to individual team members' needs appears to be indispensable. From a leadership perspective, in particular the concept of differentiated individual-focused leadership may prove relevant here (Kark et al. 2003; Wang and Howell 2010). It pertains to the notion that, in addition to viewing the team as a whole and treating all members in the same way, team leaders also need to adjust their behavior according to team members' individual differences (Wu et al. 2010). Hence, by adapting their behavior to the individual needs and TI processes of followers, leaders may best succeed in promoting members' identification with the team.

Limitations and Future Directions

As for limitations, our analysis is cross-sectional building on team members' retrospective accounts of their identification history and specific incidents therein. This choice of research design was mainly the result of the potentially dangerous field setting in which our objects of inquiry operated and the resulting limited field time we had. Under ideal circumstances, we would have been able to trace the development of TI in situ in a completely longitudinal study from a member's first joining of the team until her or his departure. The implementation of a longitudinal design offers at least two promising opportunities for future research.

First, it would allow for examining interrelationships between the different TI processes identified in our analysis. While our cross-sectional design prevents us from asserting causal links, future longitudinal studies should aim at establishing an empirical process model of TI development. Against the background of the conceptual model of identification developed by Ashforth et al. (2008), a cyclical sequence of the TI processes in our analysis appears to be reasonable starting with identity enactment, followed by sensemaking about team experience and the evaluation of collective team outcomes, and concluding in identity convergence. Yet, this is still mainly a conceptual consideration which can only be corroborated with initial tentative evidence from our data. Moreover, it may overlook the complex interplay and overlaps between the different TI processes in organizational reality. Hence, future longitudinal studies may uncover the dynamics between the processes of TI development. Furthermore, they may provide additional insights into possible contingencies affecting the sequence of

the TI processes or their relative importance depending on specific contextual conditions. Ultimately, such long-term investigations of TI development may also allow for exploring distinct identification paths with different convergence modes and types of TI.

Second, a longitudinal study would provide the opportunity for exploring the dynamics occurring in teams during members' TI development. For example, it would allow for analyzing the interplay between team members' identification with and their negotiation of the target identity (i.e., the team's collective team identity) during active identity convergence. Here, we see particular promise in more strongly connecting research anchored in the tradition of social identity theory and works on identity from communication science (e.g., Bormann 1985; Scott et al. 1998). Thereby, future studies may focus on communication patterns of different "rhetors" (e.g., colleagues, team leaders, or organizational actors) for the emergence and the course of the different TI processes (Cheney 1983). In addition, longitudinal studies would allow for a fine-grained micro analysis of both individuals' TI development and team identity formation. Such a research approach would provide a "fluid view" on identification which particularly attends to features of both communication and situation (e.g., which communication partners and settings are most relevant for identification processes and outcomes in a given situation; for first evidence see Scott and Stephens 2009).

Besides its cross-sectional design, our study also shows some of the limitations that come along with case study research. For example, the generalizability of our findings is inherently limited due to the small number of cases investigated; however, given the purpose of our study, our research approach allowed for rich and detailed insights into the processes underlying TI development (Yin 2003). In addition, specific traits of our empirical setting might have affected the way in which the observed processes unfolded. UN peacebuilding teams and their members are subject to very ambitious goals, usually achieved under high public pressure in mostly unfamiliar, hostile, and unpredictable environments. Because similar circumstances are rarely found in more conventional teams, we suggest that our approach should also be applied in teams from other domains before drawing more general conclusions about TI development. Lastly, the teams we studied were extreme cases in terms of the diversity of their members. It has been argued elsewhere that extremely diverse teams, in contrast to moderately diverse teams, are less prone to negative identity dynamics because there are few similar characteristics among members which may lead to the formation of clear subgroups or fractions within the team (Lau and Murnighan 1998; Li and Hambrick 2005). Hence, the exceptional diversity of our teams might have biased our findings toward more positive realizations

of TI development which we would not have observed in moderately diverse settings.

Conclusion

Our study provides evidence for the existence of four processes underlying the development of team identification (TI): enacting a salient identity, sensemaking about team experience, evaluating collective team outcomes, and converging identity. Thereby, our findings extend existing TI research in several ways. In particular, our study shows that team members engage in both individual- and collective-directed sensemaking during TI development, thereby using internal (i.e., other team members) and external points of reference (i.e., team-external actors) for ingroup/outgroup comparisons. Moreover, we identify different identity convergence modes team members adopt depending on the degree of perceived compatibility between their individual identity and the team's collective identity (i.e., active, reactive, and withdrawal from identity convergence). These identity convergence modes are closely intertwined with different types of identification (i.e., deep-structured TI, situated TI, and disidentification), suggesting the existence of specific TI development paths. In sum, our analysis provides several avenues for future research, in particular with regard to longitudinal studies that allow for scrutinizing the interrelationships between the TI processes identified in our study.

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