The Identity Gap in Management: Why Leadership Training Does Not Change Managerial Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Leadership training can improve knowledge and workplace performance, yet the translation of newly acquired skills into sustained managerial conduct remains variable. This paper asks why, in some cases, a manager understands and can demonstrate a leadership behaviour but does not enact it consistently in real work. It develops an integrative conceptual account that combines evidence on leadership-training effectiveness and transfer with leader-identity research and the Internal Autobiographical Map (IAM) developed by Stoyana Natseva. IAM's five structural components—Core Experience, Conclusion, Rule, Role and Scenario—are examined as a possible reflective vocabulary for interpreting repeated managerial responses, not as an empirically confirmed causal sequence or diagnostic instrument. The article defines an "identity gap" narrowly: a persistent discrepancy between demonstrated capability and repeated enactment in relevant opportunities, after organisational, skill, planning, habit and motivational explanations have been assessed. Its original contribution is the conditional Identity–Action Translation Framework, a sequence of five evidential gates that separately establish capability, real opportunity, enactment or non-enactment across eligible occasions, the identity relevance of the behaviour, and persistence over time. The order of the gates is an order of analysis rather than of data collection: identity measures are always collected before the outcomes they predict, at baseline for most propositions and, for maintenance, after initial enactment but before a documented disruption. Four falsifiable propositions distinguish identity-related predictions from established transfer, habit and implementation-planning accounts, and a prospective mixed-method design is specified with independent behavioural ratings, measured opportunity, nested predictive models and an optional randomised phase. No new data were collected, and the framework is not claimed to validate IAM or to show that identity work improves leadership training. Leadership training can be effective; when its gains do not persist, identity-related interpretations are one testable explanation among several.

Keywords: leadership development, training transfer, leader identity, Internal Autobiographical Map, behavioural maintenance

INTRODUCTION

A manager completes a leadership programme and accurately describes the importance of delegation, developmental feedback or constructive disagreement. In a simulated exercise, the manager may even demonstrate the corresponding skill. Back at work, however, the manager continues to solve every difficult problem personally, avoids candid conversations or escalates routine decisions. Such contrasts are familiar in management development, but they do not establish that all leadership training fails. The question is narrower: what prevents some acquired behaviours from being enacted and maintained when opportunities arise?

This distinction matters because meta-analytic evidence does not support blanket pessimism. Lacerenza et al. (2017), synthesising 335 independent samples, identified beneficial effects of leadership training across learning, transfer and other outcomes; effectiveness varied with programme design, practice, feedback and

implementation. A broader training-transfer meta-analysis by Blume et al. (2010) also found that trainee characteristics, motivation and supportive environments are related to transfer, particularly for relatively open-ended skills such as leadership. Consequently, a claim that training "does not change behaviour" is most defensible as a problem statement about inconsistent translation, not a universal verdict. The question in this article's title is posed in that sense: it asks why, in the cases where leadership training does not change managerial behaviour, the acquired knowledge and skills fail to become lasting practice.

The classic transfer distinction between learning, generalisation and maintenance (Baldwin & Ford, 1988) helps explain why course completion, understanding and even short-term performance are incomplete indicators of success. Leadership is especially sensitive to context: performing a new managerial behaviour may require time, support, discretion, feedback and a team willing to respond. An identity-related explanation is worth considering only after these established influences have been examined.

The present article investigates a further possibility: that a manager's habitual understanding of what it means to be competent, responsible or legitimate in a managerial role may sometimes conflict with a newly taught behaviour. The conceptual bridge is between leader- and professional-identity scholarship (Day & Harrison, 2007; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Ibarra, 1999; Lord & Hall, 2005) and the Internal Autobiographical Map (IAM) developed by Stoyana Natseva (2026c). The paper does not claim that IAM has already been empirically validated as a mechanism of managerial non-transfer. Instead, it identifies where a five-component autobiographical formulation might generate hypotheses that existing transfer theories can test.

A closely related question has been examined by Markova (2026), who reviewed organisational, cognitive and identity-based explanations of strategic inaction in leadership and distinguished four conditions for insight to become durable practice: accurate recognition, compatibility between the required action and the leader's self-concept, behavioural initiation, and maintenance under adverse feedback. The present article differs in its object and its purpose. Its object is not strategic insight in general but specific behaviours taught in leadership training, for which capability and opportunity can be documented independently. Its purpose is evaluative rather than explanatory: the Identity–Action Translation Framework (IATF) proposed here specifies the evidence required before an identity-related interpretation of non-transfer is admissible, tests that interpretation against named rival explanations from transfer, planning and habit research, and translates it into propositions and a measurement design.

Three questions guide the inquiry: (RQ1) What minimum conditions distinguish an identity-related non-enactment problem from insufficient learning or blocked opportunity? (RQ2) What explanatory work, if any, does IAM's Core Experience–Conclusion–Rule–Role–Scenario formulation add beyond established identity and transfer accounts? (RQ3) What evidence would support or refute the proposed identity-related contribution to sustained managerial behaviour?

Review Approach and Evidential Limits

This is a purposive integrative conceptual review, not a systematic literature review or meta-analysis. It joins five research conversations relevant to the guiding questions: (a) leadership-training effectiveness, (b) transfer of training, (c) leadership and professional identity, (d) autobiographical memory and narrative identity, and (e) behavioural implementation and maintenance. To avoid treating any single explanatory tradition as sufficient, foundational works and empirical syntheses were used to delineate what each tradition already explains. The IAM and identity-based adult-learning publications by Natseva were examined separately as author-developed resources, and their evidential status is reported below.

The synthesis proceeds in four analytic steps. First, it distinguishes educational outcomes from actual behaviour and from sustained transfer. Second, it states the strongest rival explanations before invoking identity. Third, it translates the five IAM labels into a prospective managerial inquiry while separating primary definitions from the present article's examples. Fourth, it specifies propositions and measurement strategies capable of producing negative as well as positive findings. The selection is interpretive and deliberately bounded: it does not claim that every relevant study has been located, independently quality-rated or quantitatively pooled.

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Source status is material. The IAM structural paper presents a theoretical model and introduces Direct Change

Solution (DCS), an intervention process derived from it (Natseva, 2026c); a companion paper develops IAM as a model of behavioural persistence without new data (Natseva, 2026d). Natseva's educational manuscript expressly presents identity integration as a hypothesis requiring tests (Natseva, 2026b). Two published empirical studies of IAM-related constructs were identified and selected for this review; they are discussed as examples of the available evidence, not as the complete empirical literature on IAM: a questionnaire survey of 384 trauma-affected adults reporting strong associations between autobiographical mapping and resilience (Natseva, 2025b), and a structural equation model with a purposive sample of 190 adults linking autobiographical memory integration with resilience, coping and adaptation (Natseva, 2025a). Both are cross-sectional and based on self-report, neither involved managers, and both were conducted by the model's developer; Natseva's own review notes that IAM- and DCS-based interventions have not been tested in controlled studies (Natseva, 2026a). None of this evidence shows that revising autobiographical interpretations causes a change in managerial performance. Likewise, the present article did not recruit managers, collect observations or estimate any intervention effects. Its theoretical claims are distinguished throughout from findings reported in previously published studies.

Why Leadership Learning Does Not Always Become Action

Acquisition is not Transfer

Training may change what participants can explain or perform under supported conditions without changing the frequency of behaviour in ordinary work. Baldwin and Ford (1988) defined transfer by generalisation to the job and maintenance over time. Ford et al. (2018) emphasised studying transfer trajectories rather than treating an immediate post-course score as the endpoint. This makes the unit of analysis important: a response in a classroom simulation is evidence of capability under a defined condition, not evidence of independent enactment months later.

Work Environments Can Enable or Prevent Use

Burke and Hutchins (2007) grouped established transfer influences into learner, design and work-environment factors. Examples of structural obstacles include workload, missing decision authority, contradictory reward systems and supervisors who do not permit the intended practice. A manager who is penalised for delegating has good organisational reasons not to delegate, even when the skill is understood and self-congruent. Such cases should not be re-described as an internal identity deficiency.

Intentions and Planning are Incomplete But Important

Webb and Sheeran (2006) demonstrated that experimental changes in behavioural intentions generally produce smaller changes in behaviour. Gollwitzer's (1999) implementation-intention account suggests that specifying when and how to act can help bridge that gap, and a meta-analysis of 94 independent tests found a medium-to-large effect of if–then plans on goal attainment (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). If a manager's non-enactment is resolved by an explicit action plan or a revised scheduling system, an identity-level explanation becomes less necessary. The present paper treats planning as a rival mechanism to be measured or experimentally compared, not as a trivial precursor to identity work.

New Leadership Roles Can Challenge Established Self-Definitions

Lord and Hall (2005) argued that leadership development involves deeper knowledge and identity-related changes alongside skill acquisition. Ibarra's (1999) research described how professionals test provisional selves when moving to more senior roles; identity adaptation involves experimenting with conduct and interpreting social feedback. Day and Harrison (2007) describe leader development as a progression in which leader identity broadens from an individual to a relational and collective level, and DeRue and Ashford (2010) show that a leader identity is constructed socially, as people claim leadership and others grant it. These studies

justify considering self-definition and role legitimacy, but they do not imply that every leadership failure has its origins in childhood or that all managers require autobiographical interventions.

Habit can sustain old behaviour without any identity conflict

Wood and Neal (2007) show that habitual responses are triggered by recurring contexts and can persist even when people's goals have changed. A manager who has solved team problems personally for years may continue to do so after training simply because the familiar cue—a difficult request arriving—still elicits the familiar response. Habit is therefore a rival explanation that must be measured, for example through the stability of the work context and the automaticity of the old response, before non-enactment is attributed to identity.

Apparent Non-Transfer Can Be a Valid Managerial Choice

Sometimes managers reject a programme's prescription because it is unsuitable, ethically questionable, inconsistent with their team's needs or beyond their formal authority. Evaluation must therefore differentiate inability, lack of opportunity, deliberate refusal and repeated self-contradiction. Identity-related interpretations should not become an unfalsifiable explanation applied whenever programme designers dislike a participant's behaviour.

The Identity Gap: Definition and Scope

The phrase "identity gap" is used here as a proposed operational label, not a recognised diagnosis or a validated psychological scale. It describes a specific subset of situations in which a manager (1) has demonstrated adequate understanding and capability for a named behavioural target; (2) has verifiable opportunities and formal discretion to perform the target in the workplace; (3) nevertheless shows a persistent shortfall in enactment across repeated eligible occasions; and (4) reports or otherwise demonstrates a plausible tension between the proposed action and their understanding of their managerial role. The fourth condition is a potential explanatory indicator, not a conclusion to be assumed from non-performance alone.

A management example illustrates the distinction. A technical expert promoted to team leader can explain delegation and demonstrate it in an assessment. At work, the manager repeatedly takes tasks back despite team capacity and delegated authority. Interviews reveal a professional self-definition centred on being the person who personally solves the hardest problems. This is a candidate identity-gap case, but it remains only a candidate until skill deficits, workload, employee readiness, incentive structures and organisational norms are separately evaluated. The same visible non-delegation may emerge from entirely different causes in another setting.

This conditional definition prevents three errors. First, it avoids turning a training outcome into an inferred psychological cause. Second, it avoids demanding identity change for technical skills that do not threaten role-related self-interpretations. Third, it treats identity as dynamic and socially negotiated rather than a fixed internal obstacle. The expected result is better differential explanation, not a claim that identity is more important than training design or work environment in every programme.

The Internal Autobiographical Map as A Structural Vocabulary

Natseva's Internal Autobiographical Map (IAM) proposes five structural components: Core Experience, Conclusion, Rule, Role and Scenario (Natseva, 2026c). The labels are retained exactly because they belong to the source framework. The present analysis uses only this five-component structural description; it does not evaluate DCS, the intervention process that Natseva derives from IAM. IAM is a proposed framework for making recurrent patterns discussable; it has not been demonstrated to be a causal pathway in managers.

Core Experience refers, within IAM, to a significant experience that the person later interprets as self-relevant; Conclusion is the meaning or generalisation drawn about self, others or the world; Rule is the internal norm organised around that conclusion; Role is the habitual strategy of acting in accordance with it; and Scenario is

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the recurring pattern of outcomes and situations associated with the strategy. Examples in Table 1 translate these categories into managerial language. They are interpretive illustrations created for this article, not clinical assessments, empirical classifications or direct quotations from Natseva.

The logic is valuable chiefly as a question sequence. An organisational observer may begin with the recurring Scenario ("the manager takes back delegated work"), identify an enacted Role ("indispensable problem-solver"), ask whether a Rule is being stated ("I must personally guarantee every outcome"), and examine the associated Conclusion ("my legitimacy depends on having every answer"). Any suggestion about a Core Experience must remain tentative, voluntary and unverified unless the person chooses to describe relevant experiences. Organisational researchers should not claim to have established the historical truth of remembered early events, infer trauma from work conduct or require private disclosures in employment-based interventions.

There is also substantial overlap with existing scholarship. Ibarra (1999) addresses enacted and revised professional identities; DeRue and Ashford (2010) explain how leader identities are claimed and granted in social interaction; Lord and Hall (2005) link leadership development to deeper cognitive and identity structures; Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) and McAdams (2001) provide established accounts of autobiographical memory and narrative self-understanding. IAM's potential added value is the convenience of separating a repeated pattern into five inspectable descriptions. Its distinctiveness as a predictive measure, its discriminant validity and any incremental explanatory power over established constructs remain untested. The article therefore treats the five-component sequence as a sensitising framework rather than a new fact about managerial psychology.

Table 1. IAM's Five Components: Source Categories and Illustrative Managerial Translations

IAM component	Source meaning	Illustrative managerial example	Interpretive limitation
Core Experience	Personally meaningful experience as formulated in IAM	A manager voluntarily recalls being valued primarily for solving difficult problems	Private memory is not independently verified; never infer it from job behaviour
Conclusion	Self-relevant interpretation derived from experience	"I count as competent only if I have the answer."	A statement of meaning, not evidence of historical cause
Rule	Generalised behavioural prescription	"I should not hand difficult work to others."	May also reflect actual organisational incentives
Role	Recurring strategy or self-positioning	Indispensable technical rescuer rather than developmental leader	Could be a legitimate response to team skill deficits
Scenario	Repeated observable pattern across situations	Work is delegated and then repeatedly taken back	Requires independent repeated observations and counts of eligible opportunities

Note. Component names and conceptual structure: Natseva (2026c). All managerial examples and methodological cautions are the present article's interpretations, not reported empirical observations.

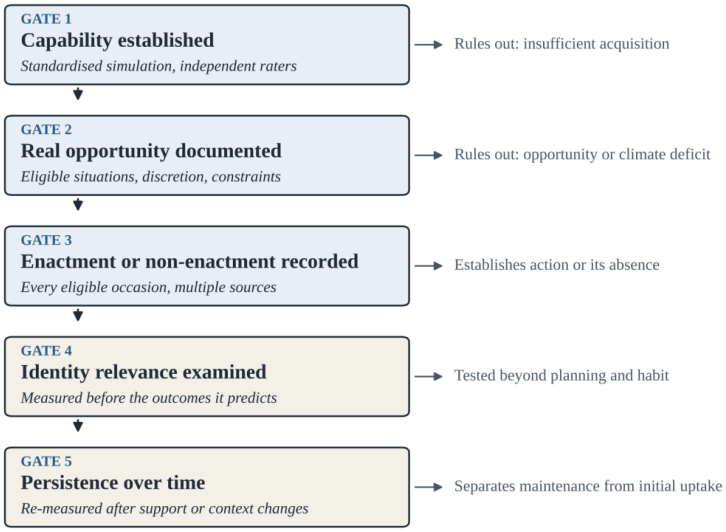
An Identity–Action Translation Framework for Management

The original proposal of this paper is the conditional Identity–Action Translation Framework (IATF). It does not revise the five IAM components or present them as the invention of the present author. Instead, IATF specifies where a role-relevant interpretation might become a *testable moderator* of a manager's transition from training to action. Its sequence of evaluation is: capability established → real opportunity documented → enactment and non-enactment recorded across eligible occasions → identity relevance examined → persistence tested over time. The five gates separate five different questions: whether the manager can

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perform the behaviour, whether real occasions to perform it exist, whether the behaviour is performed or omitted on those occasions, whether the behaviour is relevant to the manager's professional identity, and whether any change persists. The ordering is an order of analytical reasoning, not a chronology of data collection and not a proposed causal chain; passing through the gates does not demonstrate a causal mechanism. It is designed to prevent premature attribution of non-performance to identity. Figure 1 shows the five gates and the rival explanation that each gate is designed to rule out.

Figure 1. The Identity–Action Translation Framework: five evidential gates



Note. The order of the gates is an order of analysis, not a chronology of data collection or a causal chain. Identity-related data are always collected before the outcomes they predict (at baseline for P1, P2 and P4; for P3, after initial enactment but before the documented disruption), but are examined only after Gates 1–3 have been assessed and rival explanations measured. Passing the gates does not demonstrate a causal mechanism.

At the first gate, participants must show that they can perform a specified behaviour in a standardised exercise, ideally assessed by more than one trained observer. At the second, investigators document the number and quality of eligible real-world opportunities, job discretion and organisational constraints. At the third, multiple sources record, for every eligible occasion, whether the target behaviour was performed or omitted, rather than relying on satisfaction or self-reported intention. This gate therefore establishes non-enactment as well as enactment: a manager who repeatedly omits the behaviour despite capability and opportunity passes Gate 3 as a documented case of non-enactment, which is the pattern the identity-gap hypothesis seeks to explain. At the fourth, the relevance of the behaviour to the manager's professional identity is examined. The data for this gate—professional-role self-description and any IAM-informed themes elicited through non-clinical, voluntary reflection—are always collected before the behavioural outcome they are used to predict, so that they cannot be shaped by knowledge of later behaviour. For P1, P2 and P4 this means at baseline, before training; for P3, which concerns maintenance, self–behaviour congruence is measured after initial enactment but before the documented disruption and before maintenance is assessed. In every case the data are examined analytically only after Gates 1–3 have been assessed. At the fifth, behaviour is measured again after the training context changes or formal support declines.

The key interpretive safeguard is a competing-explanations rule: an identity-relevance finding is informative only if it explains variation *beyond* baseline capability, implementation plans, opportunity, workload, supervisor support and habit strength (Wood & Neal, 2007) and motivation measures. Even then, association would not show that a remembered Core Experience caused current managerial action. A more credible effect claim would require prospective manipulation of an ethically acceptable identity-oriented educational component and independent follow-up, with equal contact time and explicit consent. Two distinct failures can be located in IATF. Failure of enactment occurs when capability and opportunity are present but the target behaviour is rarely attempted. Failure of maintenance occurs when behaviour initially appears but fades as

conditions change. These failures may have different causes. A manager may need a practical cue to begin a new behaviour; another may require structural permission; a third may sustain the behaviour only while it feels compatible with their developing leadership identity. The framework earns empirical value only if it identifies these differences more accurately than existing models.

Table 2. Rival Explanations for Non-Enactment and Discriminating Observations

Candidate explanation	Evidence to collect	Prediction or discriminating observation
Insufficient acquisition	Manager fails an independently rated skill simulation	Weak performance even with support; new instruction may improve it
Opportunity or climate deficit	High workload, absent authority, punitive supervisor	Non-enactment follows the constraint; removing it improves uptake
Planning gap	Capability present; no specified cue or plan	If–then planning improves action without identity-related work
Habit	Stable work context; old response is automatic and cue-triggered	Change in cues or context disrupts the old response; identity measures add no prediction
Candidate identity gap	Capability and opportunity documented; non-enactment recorded; role incongruence measured at baseline	Role congruence adds prediction over rivals; stronger maintenance for identity-relevant targets
Reasoned refusal	Manager gives context-specific ethical or strategic reasons	Conscious non-use is not automatically a failure of identity integration

Falsifiable Propositions and Competing Predictions

P1 — Conditional identity relevance. After controlling for documented opportunities, learning, supervisor support and behaviour-specific implementation plans, role-identity incongruence will be negatively associated with repeated enactment *for behaviours assessed beforehand as identity-relevant*. The prediction would weaken if the association disappears after contextual controls or is equally strong for low-identity-relevance technical tasks.

P2 — Incremental explanatory value. A measure of role-related self-interpretation informed by IAM categories will improve out-of-sample prediction of non-enactment beyond established transfer variables and a standard professional-identity measure. If it adds no predictive value, the managerial IAM formulation offers descriptive rather than incremental explanatory utility.

P3 — Behavioural maintenance after disruption. Among managers who initially enact a trained behaviour, those who report greater self–behaviour congruence *before* a documented disruption (e.g. withdrawal of coaching support or change of supervisor) will show stronger maintenance, conditional on comparable opportunities. The primary disruption is a planned and dated reduction of post-training support that applies to all participants; naturally occurring events are analysed separately (see Proposed Empirical Evaluation). If post-disruption decay is fully accounted for by environmental changes, an identity-specific interpretation is not supported.

P4 — Added value of reflection. In a preregistered, adequately powered comparison, a voluntary and professionally bounded role-identity reflection component, added to an otherwise equivalent skills-and-practice programme, will improve independently rated delayed enactment *only when the target behaviour is identity-relevant*. A null effect or a general effect irrespective of identity relevance would undermine the proposed specificity. This proposition concerns an educational activity, not clinical treatment or a test of DCS.

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These propositions do not assume that early experience is necessary for role-related change. The Core Experience component remains a possible source of meaning in a person's own narrative, not a prerequisite for prediction. IAM might prove useful as an interview scaffold even if its components do not form independent psychometric dimensions. Conversely, a compelling narrative could still fail to predict future action. Behavioural evidence, alternative explanations and negative results must therefore have priority over the coherence of the narrative. Table 3 summarises how each proposition could be measured and what result would support or disconfirm it.

Table 3. Operationalisation of Propositions P1–P4

	Predictor, controls and measures	**Outcome and timing**	**Result that would support it**	**Result that would disconfirm it**
P1	Role-identity incongruence, rated at baseline before training; controls: opportunity counts, skill score, supervisor support, implementation plans, habit strength	Proportion of eligible occasions enacted, weeks 1–12 (three months)	Negative association for identity-relevant behaviours only	Association disappears after controls, or is equally strong for low-relevance tasks
P2	IAM-informed ratings of Conclusion, Rule and Role coded from baseline interviews, added to a baseline transfer model and a validated identity measure (three nested models)	Non-enactment, weeks 1–12; preregistered cross-validation	Better cross-validated prediction than the model with the validated identity measure	No improvement over the validated identity measure
P3	Self–behaviour congruence measured at week 12, after initial enactment and before planned support ends; comparable opportunities	Maintenance in weeks 13–26 (six months), after support ends; natural events analysed separately	Higher congruence predicts stronger maintenance	Decay fully explained by environmental change
P4	Randomised reflection component × identity relevance rated at baseline; equal contact time; receipt recorded	Independently rated delayed enactment; intention-to-treat analysis	Effect only for identity-relevant behaviours	No effect, or a general effect regardless of identity relevance

Note. Identity-related measures are always collected before the outcomes they predict: at baseline for P1, P2 and P4, and for P3 after initial enactment but before the documented disruption and the assessment of maintenance. P1–P3 can be tested in the observational phase; P4 requires the optional experimental phase and a simulation-based power analysis for the cross-level interaction.

Proposed Empirical Evaluation

Design and sample

A prospective, multi-organisation study of managers entering an existing leadership-development programme would be an appropriate first test. The initial phase should be observational and multi-method rather than assuming that a new intervention is effective. Managers should be recruited from different sectors and organisational levels; programmes should designate two observable, non-clinical target behaviours (for example, constructive feedback and appropriate delegation) and preregister the eligible opportunities for each. A subsequent randomised component could be considered only after feasibility, acceptability and measurement quality are established.

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Measurement Schedule

At baseline, collect management role, tenure, target-skill assessments, role-identity measures, motivation, plans, work demands, supervisor support and opportunity forecasts. Immediately after training, rate behaviour in standardised simulations and record programme exposure. The follow-up then has two phases. During the supported phase (weeks 1–12 after training), post-training support continues and eligible-situation counts and behaviour observations or event-based logs are collected, corroborated where possible by colleagues. At week 12 (three months), while support is still in place, independent supervisor or colleague ratings are obtained and self–behaviour congruence is measured for the managers who have begun to enact the target behaviour (for P3). Planned support then ends. During the unsupported phase (weeks 13–26), the same counts and observations continue, and at week 26 (six months) independent ratings are repeated and the work context is reassessed. Voluntary interviews can explore self-interpretations related to IAM without pressing for childhood experiences or treating recalled narratives as fact.

Operationalising IAM without Circular Reasoning

If an interview coding scheme is developed, trained coders should independently identify statements corresponding to Conclusion, Rule and Role; code Core Experience only when volunteered; and use separately collected workplace data to identify Scenario. Coders should be blind to delayed behavioural outcomes. A preregistered codebook must distinguish literal utterances from researcher inferences, report agreement and permit "not identifiable" rather than forcing every account into all five categories. Whether these categories are independent, stable and predictive is itself an empirical question.

Outcomes and Analysis

The primary outcome should be the proportion of objectively eligible opportunities in which a target behaviour is enacted during the supported phase (weeks 1–12, the three-month outcome), adjusted for baseline performance and clustering by organisation or programme cohort. The maintenance outcome—the same proportion during the unsupported phase (weeks 13–26, the six-month outcome)—should be designated in advance. Models should include opportunity counts, organisational support, workload, behaviour specificity and baseline role-identity measures. P2 would be tested with three nested, preregistered models: (1) a baseline transfer model containing capability, opportunity, supervisor support, workload, implementation plans and habit strength; (2) the same model plus an established, previously validated measure of leader or professional identity, specified in the preregistration; and (3) model 2 plus the IAM-informed ratings of Conclusion, Rule and Role coded from the baseline interviews. The preregistration would fix the comparison metrics in advance: the cross-validated change in explained variance for the proportion of occasions enacted, the cross-validated area under the curve for persistent non-enactment defined by a preset cut-off, and calibration (for example, the Brier score). Because managers are clustered in cohorts, cross-validation would leave out whole cohorts rather than individuals. Incremental value would be claimed only if model 3 exceeds model 2 by a threshold set before analysis. An improvement over model 1 alone would not be sufficient, because it could reflect identity measurement in general rather than the IAM formulation. Two coders would code every interview independently, and agreement would be reported for each IAM category (for example, Cohen's kappa or Krippendorff's alpha) before any disagreement is resolved; categories that fail a preset reliability threshold would be excluded from model 3. Missing data would be handled by multiple imputation carried out within each cross-validation fold, with a complete-case analysis reported as a sensitivity check. None of these coding schemes or identity ratings is a validated instrument; their reliability and validity are among the questions the study would answer. The risk of same-source inflation should be reduced by separating interviews, classroom performance and behavioural outcome sources (Blume et al., 2010).

Testing maintenance after disruption (P3)

A disruption is defined in advance as a dated change that reduces the support for the target behaviour. Two kinds are distinguished. A planned reduction—the scheduled end of post-training coaching or follow-up sessions after week 12—occurs for all participants at a known date and is the primary test of P3: congruence is measured before it (at week 12) and maintenance is assessed after it (weeks 13–26). Naturally occurring

events, such as a change of supervisor, restructuring or a substantial change in workload, affect only some managers; they would be recorded in a dated event log, confirmed where possible from organisational records,

and analysed separately as a secondary test. Because P3 is defined only for managers who have begun to enact the behaviour, the analysed group is selected on an outcome, which can bias the comparison: managers with higher congruence may differ from others in ways that also predict maintenance. The characteristics of included and excluded managers would therefore be reported, the analysis would adjust for baseline capability, opportunity and early enactment rate, and a sensitivity analysis would use the whole sample with maintenance defined relative to each manager's own early enactment.

Optional Experimental Phase

If the observational work indicates a plausible, measurable role-identity mechanism, managers could be randomly allocated by cohort to two equivalent-contact programmes: (A) skills practice plus structured implementation planning, and (B) the same components plus voluntary, non-clinical professional-role reflection. Both arms would retain access to ordinary training support. Because participation in the reflection activities is voluntary, the primary analysis would compare cohorts as randomised (intention-to-treat), and actual receipt of the component—attendance and completion of each reflection activity—would be recorded for every participant. A complier average causal effect could then be estimated as a secondary analysis, with the assumptions it requires stated in advance. Because P4 predicts an interaction between a cohort-level component and an individual-level rating of identity relevance, its power should be estimated by simulation rather than from a main-effect formula, using pilot estimates of clustering, the distribution of identity relevance, expected uptake of the voluntary component, behaviour frequency and attrition. Such cross-level interactions typically require considerably larger samples than the main effect of the same component, and no sample-size figure is asserted here without pilot data. Unwanted effects, privacy concerns and withdrawal should be reported as carefully as benefits. The design would test the added role-reflection component, not automatically validate IAM, DCS or an intervention for a psychological disorder.

Falsification Criteria

Evidence against the central framework would include poor coding reliability, absence of incremental prediction, improvement attributable entirely to increased coaching contact, lack of specific moderation by identity relevance, or outcomes explained by structural opportunity and supervisor support. Publishing such null findings would clarify whether "identity gap" is a useful distinction or an unnecessary relabelling of known transfer problems.

Implications for Management Development

A more precise evaluation begins by refusing to equate attendance, knowledge and personal transformation. Programme providers should specify one or two observable leadership behaviours; obtain repeated evidence of workplace opportunities; collect delayed external ratings; and record organisational obstacles. This is consistent with established transfer research and requires no acceptance of the IAM. For example, a delegation programme can measure the proportion of appropriate assignments delegated and whether employees actually receive authority, rather than relying only on managerial confidence surveys.

Where a role-related conflict is plausible, developers may add voluntary reflection that remains closely tied to professional practice: "What do you believe a good manager must personally do?", "What leadership role are you experimenting with?", and "Which evidence would allow you to update that view?" Such questions align with Ibarra's (1999) professional-identity experimentation while avoiding requirements for sensitive autobiographical disclosure. IAM labels may provide a structured way to organise reflections, provided they are offered as optional prompts and not as proof of a hidden cause.

Managers and organisations should retain the right to reject proposed behavioural change. A course may teach a practice inappropriate to the local setting, and disagreement is not pathology. Supervisors should not access identifiable private reflections for performance management. Identity-related activities must have informed

consent, confidentiality boundaries and a referral procedure if clinically significant concerns emerge, even though the educational programme itself must not diagnose or treat such conditions.

The implications for research are equally conditional. Independent investigators should compare identity-informed explanations with high-quality baseline transfer models, investigate what changes when work demands increase and allow the proposed framework to fail. The strongest contribution to the field would be a more accurate account of *when* identity matters, including contexts in which the gap is explained fully by opportunity, reward systems, habit or deficient practice.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The analysis integrates two traditions that have often been considered separately: management-training evaluation, which measures the movement of skill into work, and professional-identity scholarship, which studies the self-understandings through which people undertake new roles. Natseva's IAM adds a clearly named five-component language for recurring interpretations and role performances. But the article's originality lies elsewhere: in defining strict entry conditions for an identity-gap hypothesis, making rival explanations explicit and proposing a prospective test of incremental validity and maintenance.

Several limitations constrain the claims. The IATF is a proposed framework that has not yet been applied or empirically tested, and its gates and propositions are hypotheses. The literature selection was purposive rather than systematic. The five IAM categories have not been validated as independent causal factors in managers, and their cross-sectional measurement might reflect retrospective sense-making rather than an antecedent mechanism. Professional self-narratives are susceptible to social desirability, reconstruction and interpretation by investigators. Even longitudinal association cannot settle whether identity causes action or action gradually changes identity. The proposed study requires independent replication, robust observation of opportunities and careful handling of missing data and multi-level dependence.

Transferability is also bounded. Identity-oriented reflection may be irrelevant to procedural or low-stakes technical training. Cultural, sectoral and power differences shape how leadership roles are experienced, while organisational constraints may dominate even deeply held self-interpretations. Finally, the author's professional relationship with the organisation founded by Natseva (see Declarations) creates a potential institutional interest. Such proximity is a reason for independent evaluation and careful limitations, not for advocacy disguised as evidence.

CONCLUSION

Leadership programmes can improve what managers know and can do; whether they change what managers repeatedly do is a separate empirical question. The proposed "identity gap" identifies a narrow candidate mechanism within this difference, requiring demonstrated capability, genuine opportunity, persistent non-enactment and a separately assessed role-related self-interpretation. Natseva's IAM offers a five-part structural vocabulary—Core Experience, Conclusion, Rule, Role and Scenario—that may help organise hypotheses about recurrent managerial conduct. It does not establish the cause of that conduct or the efficacy of any intervention. A credible next step is to examine whether identity-informed descriptions predict and improve sustained action beyond established transfer explanations. The scientific value of the proposal depends on its willingness to be measured, compared and rejected.

Declarations

Conflict of interest. The author works at the Happy Life Institute for Direct Change Science, founded by Stoyana Natseva, whose Internal Autobiographical Map is discussed in this article. He serves as Director of Academic Development (Chief Academic Officer) and is a member of the Academic Council of Happy Life Academy, and he completed the Academy’s DBA programme, which is led by its founder, Stoyana Natseva.

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