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George Gotsis Katerina Grimani

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# Diversity as an aspect of effective leadership: integrating and moving forward

Diversity as an aspect of effective leadership

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George Gotsis and Katerina Grimani  
*Department of History and Philosophy of Science,  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to elaborate an integrative framework that positions diversity considerations in a continuum of various leadership theories. The authors thus seek to differentiate between distinct leadership styles and assess their potential in fostering inclusive leader behaviors.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors proceed to a brief review of the extant literature on diversity leadership by distinguishing between diverse followers and diverse leaders on one hand, and leadership styles in diverse and heterogeneous teams, on the other. The authors then provide a rationale for leadership theories that are more likely to support leader inclusiveness and foster inclusive leader and follower behaviors.

**Findings** – Four distinct theoretical frameworks capturing the importance of emerging leadership theories (ethical, authentic, servant and spiritual leadership) for informing caring and inclusive climates, are introduced. The authors thus seek to delineate leadership styles effectively entrenched in organizational environments valuing, affirming and supporting diversity, which can better fit to inclusiveness goals.

**Practical implications** – In view of designing and implementing inclusive initiatives, organizations should consider the specific context in which diverse leaders operate and through which diverse followers interact with diverse leaders. In so doing, corporations should encourage leadership styles that effectively combine goal attainment with an unconditional affirmation of the intrinsic value of diversity.

**Originality/value** – The paper offers certain insights into the particular conditions that may help organizational leaders implement inclusion strategies facilitating thriving and fulfillment of diverse employees. In this respect, the authors elaborate on distinct leadership frameworks that are more pertinent to, and commensurate with inclusiveness objectives.

**Keywords** Authentic leadership, Ethical leadership, Servant leadership, Spiritual leadership, Diversity leadership, Leader inclusiveness

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Despite the increasingly diverse contexts in which leaders operate, diversity issues are often underexplored in leadership theories. Chin and Sanchez-Hucles (2007) encourage researchers to advance new models of leadership that incorporate diversity and multiple identities in the formulation of more inclusive leadership theories. Eagly and Chin (2010) advocate a fruitful integration of these two research streams, one pertaining to leadership and the other to diversity, as akin to an attempt of enriching extant knowledge and providing an impetus for optimizing leadership effectiveness. Beyond existing challenges that social identity group members have to cope with in the face of adversity, we are in need of understanding the formation of dual identities of these individuals both as leaders and minority group members, as well as their added-value in leadership functioning.

Indeed, there is a dearth of research with respect to the particular entwinements between leadership and diversity in the corpus of the most established leadership



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theories. In today work environments, being sensitive to diversity can by no means be reduced to a mere representation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the higher ranks of leadership. As Chin (2010) convincingly argues in the introduction to the special issue devoted to diversity and leadership by American psychologist, attention to diversity amounts to a substantial paradigm shift in our theories of leadership so as to make them more inclusive. In view of incorporating explanations of how specific dimensions of diversity contribute to shaping our understandings of leadership, paying attention to the perceptions and expectations of diverse leaders by diverse followers has now become an imperative. Albeit leadership theories have significantly evolved so as to reflect changing social contexts, there is a paucity of research on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion viewed through the lenses of leadership experience. Concomitantly, this necessitates an expansion of leadership scope to incorporate diversity, given the societal embeddedness of leadership practices, as well as their growing relevance to twenty-first century social contexts, emerging global concerns and changing demographic trends. In the same vein of reasoning Klein and Wang (2010) encourage the formulation of leadership theories that strongly acknowledge and promote diversity as a valued input, in congruence with the idea that an increased participation of scholars and practitioners from non-Western cultural settings in current academic debates could prove beneficial to leadership theorizing *per se*.

As far as we know, the issue of specifying an overall framework underlying the efficiency of distinct leadership theories in addressing diversity and inclusion issues has remained relatively unexplored in the organizational sciences. For instance, the attempt of employing particular leadership styles as endemic to a successful implementation of policies supportive of inclusiveness climates, has not yet received due attention in the literature. The paper seeks to fill this gap, by placing an emphasis on the importance of inclusive leadership philosophies for managing differences on a more humane and concomitantly, non-instrumental basis. The paper is thus intended to explore the potential impact of distinct leadership styles on the formation of inclusive behaviors, processes and outcomes. In this respect, the study aims at elaborating an integrative framework that positions diversity considerations in a continuum of various leadership theories. We seek to identify in which way inclusive leadership principles shape inclusiveness climates, the latter being entrenched in organizational environments valuing, affirming and supporting diversity.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, we briefly review the organizational underpinnings of engaging in a diversity leadership agenda: in this section, a concise discussion of why leaders have to engage in diversity considerations is provided. The interaction of leadership and diversity practices is then examined in more detail, by placing an emphasis on the need to explore the varying effects of different leadership styles on diversity-related outcomes. We then proceed to discuss the foundations of inclusive leadership that highly values and celebrates diversity, as well as provides a rationale for constructive interactions between diverse leaders and diverse followers, a theme further explicated in the section that follows. The next section inaugurates the core elements of an integrative framework by elaborating on four distinct leadership theories that are likely to be more pertinent to, and commensurate with inclusiveness objectives. We hold the view that ethical, authentic, servant and spiritual leadership styles are in a position to provide a more satisfactory response to persistent discrimination experienced by socially disadvantaged groups. Finally, research suggestions on the potential of other leadership theories to meet inclusiveness goals, as well as implications for practice are identified and briefly discussed.

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## Leadership and diversity: conceptualizing diversity leadership

### *The underlying rationale*

Leadership and diversity are entwined at a variety of levels and through various ways reflective of distinct orientations to diversity. Accordingly, group demographic diversity is viewed as a resource to leadership complexity. In their pivotal paper on leadership in diverse organizations Hooijberg and DiTomaso (1996) advanced a comprehensive research agenda focussing on examining core issues, such as: leader-member dyads, the effects of stereotyping processes on leadership evaluation, particular styles in leading diverse groups, status and networks concerns, gendered pursuits in leadership emergence, influence tactics and multidirectional approaches to leading diversity. Chen and Van Velsor (1996) suggested that diversity leadership must consider the impact of social identities embedded in organizational identities, the unconscious socio-psychological processes, the political aspects of leadership and finally, the follower perspectives. They thus highlighted four leadership frameworks invested with full potential to contribute to diversity leadership, namely attribution theories of leadership and followership, theories of leadership prototypes, the leader-member exchange (LMX) model and the behavioral complexity model. Chrobot-Mason *et al.* (2013) reviewed the diversity leadership agenda on the grounds of how leaders lead themselves, others and the organization. They thus examined the very way leaders' social identities interact with followers' identities as integral to effective leadership. In so doing, they analyzed leaders' qualities in managing diverse workforces and more specifically, the need for developing quality relationships, cultivating an inclusive climate, spanning boundaries and framing of diversity initiatives. Equally importantly, they underscored leaders' role in setting diversity strategies, implementing diversity practices, managing tensions, enhancing responsiveness to diversity issues and assessing progress.

In briefly reviewing the extant literature on diversity leadership we employ a different perspective by distinguishing between research that focusses on the role of diverse followers and diverse leaders in effective leadership development on one hand, and on the importance of distinct leadership styles in managing diversity-related outcomes, on the other.

### *Diversity leadership: leading diverse followers*

Why should leaders display commitment to diversity issues? Ng (2008) elaborated a theoretical framework that integrates diversity with strategic leadership literatures. Beyond those factors that comprise a typical business case for diversity, leadership commitment to diversity originates in instrumental, normative or affective grounds and informs practices that can in turn predict beneficial employment outcomes for women and minorities. Ng and Wyrick (2011) identified three primary motivational bases of top executive commitment to diversity issues: utility maximization, moral obligation or a set of personal convictions. Concomitantly, leaders' devotion to diversity is expected to be stronger in the presence of instrumental reasons; normative and/or affective motives prevail when their instrumental counterparts tend to significantly weaken. Interestingly, CEOs commitment to diversity shifts from instrumental to normative/affective motives with increasing tenure and/or age.

Rupert *et al.* (2010) showed that cultural minorities exhibit increased levels of normative commitment to their organizations: this motivation was influenced by certain contextual factors, in particular socialization and acculturation processes and most importantly, effective leadership. The organization in turn, should exhibit a

leadership commitment to diversity as a moral issue, communicate diversity-related issues both internally and externally, and develop effective recruitment and retention strategies for diverse potential and current employees. Diversity leadership comprises strategies intended to incorporate diversity into the proper function of the organization, and enact initiatives generating beneficial organizational outcomes, as well as diversity-related societal relationships.

Leaders are generally perceived to allocate their efforts and differentiate their levels of engagement across multiple teams, fact that exerts significant influences on structural team empowerment and effectiveness (Luciano *et al.*, 2014). Pittinsky (2010) argues that leaders are expected to manage encounters not only between diverse individuals but also between the subgroups to which they belong without resorting to a superordinate group identity imposed upon specific subgroup identities. In this view, leading diverse individuals and their subgroups presupposes promoting positive interactions among subgroups, the distinctive identities of the latter remaining unchallenged. Concomitantly, leaders seeking to shape a unifying framework that respects particular social identity subgroups should reduce negative, as well as increase positive intergroup attitudes.

Leadership in general is integral to mitigating the expected negative relationship between relational diversity and outcome variables, such as performance. Fernandez *et al.* (2010) posited that integrated leadership, consisting of five essential leadership roles performed at multiple levels (task-, relations-, diversity-, change-and integrity-oriented leadership) was positively correlated to organizational performance. From a learning perspective, Watson *et al.* (2002) focussed on the effect of ethnic diversity on group processes and team performance: they demonstrated that emergent interpersonal leadership activities were more pertinent to team performance in diverse teams, whereas task leadership was the critical leadership dimension for homogeneous teams. Lim and Yingqin (2006) conducted a laboratory experiment to investigate the effects of perceived cultural diversity, group size and leadership on learning efficiency. They thus found that leadership lowered learners' satisfaction with the process in perceived homogeneous (as compared to perceived heterogeneous and smaller) groups.

Women and minorities may be negatively affected by the gender composition of the work environment, in particular with respect to the gender of their immediate supervisors. In a nationally representative sample of 594 male and 430 female Swedish medical doctors Konrad *et al.* (2010) examined the association between gender composition of the work context and perceived social outcomes for both female and male populations. Findings indicated that women working in male-dominated medical units or under a male supervisor reported more gender harassment, less organizational support and increased levels of gender discrimination. In this respect diversity leadership, fairness and perceived organizational support assume a critical role in reducing the pernicious effects of exclusion. Susmita and Myra (2013) provide a rationale for diversity leadership centered on the notion of empowerment of diverse stakeholders: embracing diversity amounts to an overall transformation of values, beliefs and behaviors informing processes and decisions that empower a highly heterogeneous workforce. Such an approach is founded on the premise that leaders who promote self-directed learning and empowerment at all levels of their organization are harnessing diversity leadership, the latter capitalizing on the potential benefits of diversity to secure sustained organizational change. Context is of paramount importance to shaping both conceptualizations of, and leaders' orientations to diversity, as well as enacting initiatives to address diversity issues.

*Diversity leadership: fabricating diverse leaders*

A substantial body of literature focusses on examining the demographic composition of senior leadership positions, demonstrating the difficulties experienced by women and minorities aspiring to a higher ranking in organizational hierarchies, as well as identifying the contextual factors that reproduce gender inequalities and significantly reduce women's likelihood of being promoted to leadership positions (e.g. Cook and Glass, 2014a, b).

A related body of research investigates the potential beneficial effects of demographic diversity in leadership positions on various organizational outcomes. For instance, female leadership was found to be positively associated with team cohesion, cooperative learning and participative interaction norms contingent on teams' functional diversity, size and geographical dispersion (Post, 2015). Zona (2014) provides empirical evidence that board leadership structure and board diversity are in a position to shape innovation investment among Italian firms. In examining survey data collected from executives intended to shape their succession planning Virick and Greer (2012) tested hypotheses about diverse leadership succession. They found that the nomination process of female successors was positively associated with the performance of incumbent managers who nominated them, and that the performance of these managers moderated the relationship between diversity climate and the act of nominating women leaders.

Diversity dimensions can enrich leadership effectiveness in a more complicated manner. Roberson and Park (2007) demonstrated that the potential economic benefits generated from diversity reputation were distributed in terms of a curvilinear, U-shaped relationship among leader diversity and financial variables. More specifically, firm performance declined as a result of an increased representation of racial minorities in leadership positions up to a critical point, beyond which increased diversity leadership levels were positively associated with performance. In another vein of reasoning, Miles and Kivlighan (2010) elaborated a team cognition-team diversity model of co-leader similarity and dissimilarity. Focussing on potential effects on group processes, they suggested that the relationship between co-leader similarity (in terms of shared cognitions) and group processes was more complex than that predicted by a co-leadership, team cognition-team diversity model. We proceed to examine the variety of ways by which these diversity aspects have been articulated with distinct leadership styles, at both theoretical and empirical levels.

**Leadership theories and diversity-related outcomes: adopting particular leadership styles in diverse teams**

Beyond those studies that focus either on issues of leading diverse followers or on issues of a better representation of social identity groups in leadership positions, the adoption of particular leadership styles is not unimportant to the organizational efforts to capitalize on the potential benefits of diverse work groups. Among various leadership theories, there is cumulating empirical evidence on the decisive role of shared, team, LMX and transformational leadership styles in fostering beneficial and reducing detrimental diversity-related outcomes. More specifically.

*Shared leadership in diverse teams*

Shared leadership occupies a prominent position as an effective way of leading diverse teams. Shared leadership adopts a perspective according to which leadership is

primarily viewed as a group quality, rather than remaining an attribute of a single group member (Pearce *et al.*, 2011). As a result, this perspective favors distribution of roles and responsibilities among a group of individuals; followers are expected to rely on other group members, sharing their valued resources through processes of reciprocity that are in a position to generate beneficial follower outcomes. More specifically, this may be the case in diverse teams. Hoch *et al.* (2010) for instance explored the effects of shared leadership on team performance: findings demonstrated that shared leadership predicted team performance and that this impact of shared leadership was moderated by both age diversity and coordination. Interestingly, shared leadership was found to be more strongly associated with team performance in more diverse teams, and less in less diverse teams (Hoch, 2014). Lee *et al.* (2015) examined the subsequent effects of shared leadership and functional diversity on both knowledge sharing and team creativity. Findings showed that role diversity directly influences team creativity, with shared leadership and knowledge sharing positively contributing to such an outcome. Distributed leadership has also been proposed to foster creativity and innovation in multigenerational workforces (Rose and Gordon, 2015).

The importance of shared leadership to diversity issues has been found to be more complex than previously indicated if viewed through the lenses of moderation mechanisms. In exploring the specific conditions under which functional diversity benefits performance Zhou *et al.* (2015) identified a moderating effect of shared leadership on the relationship between informational diversity and entrepreneurial team performance. They thus advocated a positive impact of managerial skill diversity on team performance in the cases in which leadership was shared among group members. Tentatively, shared leadership improves entrepreneurial team performance, the outcome depending on the level of team personality diversity (Zhou, 2016). In another vein of reasoning Acar (2010) examined the interplay between surface-and deep-level diversity, and emotional conflict across time; empirical findings lent support to the hypothesis of a moderating role of shared leadership in the relationship between work group diversity and emotional conflict, yet not in the direction of a buffering effect to the potentially detrimental relational diversity outcomes. Unexpectedly, shared leadership encouraging group members to suppress stereotyping processes yielded ironic consequences for the group: surface-level differences were more likely to trigger emotional conflict in the cases of a relationship-oriented shared leadership.

Based on the extant literature on negotiating cultural differences in multicultural teams as well as on the positive dimensions of intercultural competences, Ramthun and Matkin (2012) elaborated an integrated model of cultural diversity and shared leadership. Their multicultural shared leadership model is based on the premise that the dimension of intercultural sensitivity is critical to meeting the challenges stemming from the ongoing participation of culturally diverse employees in workplace teams. From an entirely different point of view, Muethel *et al.* (2012) examined a set of socio-demographic factors inherent in dispersed teams that serve as potential antecedents of shared leadership effectiveness: they thus found that a high female to male ratio and national diversity predicted both team-directed and self-directed proactive leader behaviors.

#### *Team leadership in diverse teams*

Team leadership represents another leadership style pertinent to meeting the needs of diverse work teams. Team leadership consists in cases in which team settings become the focal level of analysis that involves groups at the mid-and lower-level echelons of the

organization. Van Knippenberg *et al.* (2013) viewed team leadership as an antecedent of diversity mindsets, defined as team members' mental representations of team diversity. They thus proposed that the development of the accuracy, sharedness and awareness of diversity mindsets is positively influenced by team leadership processes: advocating an understanding of diversity as an informational resource, stimulating experience with elaboration of these resources and finally, engendering team reflexivity. Team leadership efficacy is dependent upon members' motivation and task complexity on one hand, and on lower salience of sub groupings and subjective challenges to team members' identity, on the other (Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2013, pp. 189-190).

A wide array of issues such as the nature of leadership in diverse teams, the determinants of team performance, procedures for facilitating team learning, as well as leadership function in both team building and decision making provide the foundations of diversity leadership. Mohammed and Nadkarni (2011) examined the ways in which team temporal leadership affects team performance: their findings revealed a moderating role of team leadership in the relationship between team urgency and pacing style diversity on one hand, and team performance on the other, as well as a positive, direct impact on performance. In a survey of 225 students in undergraduate and graduate programs at a private Texas University Herrera *et al.* (2011) explored factors that predicted participant's ratings of CEOs support of diversity. With regard to leadership dimensions, they found that both humane-oriented and team-oriented leadership were in a position to predict ratings of diversity management evidenced in a more collectivist rather than individualistic culture, fact that necessitates a shift in policies to embody changes in organizational cultures.

#### *LMX in diverse teams*

LMX is a leadership theory with a relational focus based on the quality of relations between leader and followers. In this perspective, the leader provides group members with resources critical to success, thus shaping followers' beliefs in attaining shared goals that in turn enhance positive outcomes including affective commitment, perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. In their study of a sample of supermarket departments Nishii and Mayer (2009) explored the critical role that leaders play in influencing the relationship between diversity and turnover through the patterns of inclusion they created in their units. Drawing from LMX, social categorization and expectation states theories they examined LMX at the group level as a moderator of the relationships between demographic and tenure diversity, and turnover. Findings yielded support to the hypothesis that through their particular pattern of LMX relationships, managers influenced inclusion and reduced turnover within groups.

Positive fairness perceptions underlying high quality LMX are akin to diversity climates. Stewart and Johnson (2009) found that in contrast to a homogeneous work group in which high aggregate LMX was deemed sufficient to facilitate performance, leaders had to effectively combine high aggregate LMX with LMX differentiation in increasingly diverse groups: role differentiation, clarity and most importantly, interpersonal styles associated with trust and fairness climates were resulting in higher performance outcomes.

#### *Transformational leadership in diverse teams*

Vision based leadership theories are endemic in fostering diversity given that vision is elevated to an important asset on which diversity policies can profoundly capitalize.



To explain inconsistent or contradictory findings regarding the effects of ethnic diversity on team performance Greer *et al.* (2012) analyzed the joint impact of leader behaviors and categorization tendencies in ethnically diverse teams. Findings demonstrated that leaders exhibiting high levels of visionary behaviors but prone to categorizing followers into in-and out-group members generated a negative effect of ethnic diversity on both team communication and financial performance, whereas leaders displaying visionary behaviors but refraining from social categorization fostered positive outcomes.

The importance of transformational leadership in addressing diversity outcomes has been adequately emphasized in the literature. A transformational leader is unique in not only presenting a strategic vision to followers and bestowing the necessary resources, but also in enabling followers toward goal achievement: followers are encouraged to transcend self-interested aspirations, thus transforming themselves through participation in shared goals. In addition, such a leader is viewed as an exemplary symbol of humanity through her/his realization of a specific charisma that allows followers align themselves with leader's vision and empowers them to realize genuine work identities. Mitchell and Boyle (2009) advanced this view in positing that transformational leadership facilitates knowledge creation, as well as mitigates emotional barriers in diverse teams. They elaborated a theoretical model involving decision making and social categorization perspectives based on constructs such as functional diversity, cognitive heterogeneity and affective conflict. They in turn proposed that transformational leadership exerted a dual moderating effect on the relationships between functional diversity and cognitive heterogeneity and functional diversity and affective conflict on one hand, and cognitive heterogeneity and knowledge creation and affective conflict and knowledge creation, on the other. Transformational leadership was also found to increase the effectiveness of diverse teams through both interprofessional motivation and openness to diversity, contingent on negative affect tone (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014).

In investigating the conditions under which cognitive team diversity influences team member creativity Shin and colleagues (2012) found support for the hypothesis that transformational leadership and team member self-efficacy moderated the relationship between cognitive team diversity and individual creativity. Using a sample of 62 research and development teams, Kearney and Gebert (2009) examined transformational leadership as moderator of the relationship of age, nationality and educational background diversity with team outcomes. They suggested two mediated moderation mechanisms to help explain their findings: transformational leadership moderated the relationship of the aforementioned diversity dimensions through the elaboration of task-relevant information that in turn was positively associated with team performance. Moreover, transformational leadership moderated the relationship of the above diversity types with team identification, which in turn was positively related to the elaboration of task-relevant information.

A number of empirical studies posit a moderating role of transformational leadership in harnessing the effects of demographic diversity. Wang *et al.* (2013) indicated that diverse groups enjoyed stronger innovation climates when transformational leadership was high: overall, transformational leadership positively influenced innovation climates that in turn predicted employee creativity. Findings lent support to a mitigating role of transformational leadership on the negative effects of group demographic diversity on climate strength.

In another study of an employee sample from the Australian public sector, Muchiri and Ayoko (2013) explored the direct and indirect effects of demographic diversity

variables on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), affective commitment, collective efficacy and overall productivity. Their findings indicated that transformational leadership was in a position to moderate relationships between organizational tenure and OCBs, as well as tenure and productivity. Furthermore, transformational leadership exerted a moderating effect on the relationships between women in work unit and OCBs, and women in work unit and general productivity. The authors contend that organizations should nurture HRM programs proliferating transformational leadership practices in order to attenuate the potentially detrimental effects of demographic diversity on relevant outcomes.

There is empirical evidence hardly conducive to uncontroversial results. Hüttermann and Boerner (2011) elaborated a comprehensive framework that integrates a conflict mediation model on the functional diversity-team innovation relationship, and a moderation model on the effects of transformational leadership on the diversity-outcomes relationship. They posited that task-and relationship conflict mediated the relationship between functional diversity and team innovation; transformational leadership mitigated the emergence of innovation-impeding relationship conflict through higher team identification, yet two opposing intervening processes (facilitating conflict openness norms and dependency on the leader) rendered its effects on innovation-enhancing task conflicts rather ambivalent. Drawing on social identity and self-categorization theories, Seong and Hong (2013) formulated the hypothesis that both cooperative group norms and transformational leadership would exert a moderating effect on the relationship between gender diversity and team commitment. Interestingly, negative team diversity outcomes were attenuated by cooperative norms, but not by transformational leadership.

### **Expanding the scope of diversity leadership: a rationale for leader inclusiveness**

We have so far discussed leadership styles involved in affecting diversity outcomes through a wide range of mechanisms. These empirical studies exhibit an added-value for diversity research insofar as they indicate the critical role of distinct leadership styles in affecting diversity outcomes, yet they do not attribute a primary emphasis on recognition and respect of differences that should underlie diversity issues in today workplaces.

Equitable treatment of minority groups is akin to diversity leadership insofar as respectful treatment is pertinent to fostering more humane organizations. Leadership styles are deemed of vital importance to enhancing equity perceptions of social identity groups, as well as to shaping inclusiveness climates through work group identification and increased psychological well-being of diverse group members. Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) found that the effect of diversity policies on employee affective commitment was partially mediated by the inclusiveness of the organizational culture, as well as by the potential of transformational leadership in generating inclusiveness. Guillaume *et al.* (2014) elaborated an integrative framework of employee dissimilarity, work group identification, motivation and work-related outcomes: employee dissimilarity yields beneficial outcomes (innovation, self-efficacy and psychological well-being) in groups that foster climates for inclusion. They posited that policies reinforced through transformational and transactional leadership, and aligned with equitable employment practices, diverse employees' empowerment and integration of differences, are expected to result in a strong climate for inclusion: the extent to which diversity initiatives inform inclusiveness climates seems to be contingent upon a mixture of these leadership styles.

For Guillaume *et al.* (2014) a climate for inclusion consists in integration of differences, equitable employment practices and inclusion in decision making. Integration of differences is expected to alleviate employees' identity concerns (maintenance of distinctive identities, uncertainty reduction, need for belongingness) that moderate relationship between employee dissimilarity and work group identification. Equitable practices facilitate acceptance of performance standards that affect group identification-work-motivation relationship and finally, inclusive decision processes enhance self-efficacy beliefs, the latter moderating relationship between motivation and work-related outcomes.

Undoubtedly, inclusion is of paramount importance to diversity leadership. Inclusion is a multifaceted construct (Hays-Thomas *et al.*, 2012; Roberson, 2006). An inclusive workplace is defined as one that "values and utilizes individual and intergroup differences within the workforce, cooperates with, and contributes to, its surrounding community, alleviates the needs of disadvantaged groups in its wider national environment, and collaborates with individuals, groups and organizations across national and cultural boundaries" (Mor Barak, 2011, p. 253). Shore's *et al.* (2011) two-dimensional framework embodies belongingness and uniqueness considered jointly to advance research in the area of diversity.

A climate for inclusion denotes "the shared perception of a work environment comprising the policies, practices and procedures that guide a shared understanding that inclusive behaviors, which foster a sense of belongingness and uniqueness are expected, supported and rewarded" (Boekhorst, 2015, p. 244). Inclusive leadership is an intrinsically relational construct, emerging as a consequence of mutual influence and collective adaptation to fluid environments; beyond care and compassion, it consists in fostering deeper and authentic relationships, modeling courage and embracing humane ideals as components of inclusive organizations (Gallegos, 2014). Inclusive leader behaviors involve: accountability for creating an inclusive culture, engagement and dialogue, bringing one's true self to work, fostering transparent decision making, understanding and engaging with resistance, and communicating how inclusion relates to mission and vision (Ferdman, 2014, p. 42).

Leader inclusiveness has a potential to reduce perceived status differences as well as to enhance team performance by ensuring that differences and professional contributions are attributed full respect (Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Ethical leadership for instance was found to partially mediate the relationship between follower status and desirable outcomes, among which organizational fairness climate and follower affective commitment (Pucic, 2015). We focus on leadership styles that have a strong potential in fostering leader inclusiveness. We also expand on how inclusive leader behaviors allow for the expression of multiple identities of vulnerable groups, help to alleviate those experiencing social disadvantage and shape practices addressing the concrete needs of specific target groups.

### **Integrating leadership styles and leader inclusiveness: framing the context of inclusive leadership development**

We have so far discussed precisely how diversity concerns are incorporated in the extant leadership theory, by placing an emphasis on rationales for leader inclusive behaviors. We now turn to advance four alternative frameworks that substantially embody more humane considerations, valued in an inclusion agenda. We thus seek to investigate pro-social commitments and other-centered orientations of leaders epitomized in how they shape inclusiveness climates, with an emphasis on

promoting diversity leadership on more humane rather than utilitarian grounds. We proceed to examine leadership theories that share a core focus on ethical and altruistic behaviors. Beyond ethical leadership theory, servant, spiritual and authentic leadership (AL) perspectives can be classified in this specific category (Dinh *et al.*, 2014, pp. 41-42). More specifically, we argue that ethical, authentic, servant and spiritual leaders can encourage and support initiatives that are effective in reinforcing equity and fairness perceptions of diverse group members through fostering experiences of belongingness and uniqueness of vulnerable groups. We posit that, by valuing differences, these leadership styles are in nature inclusive.

#### *Framework 1: ethical leadership and leader inclusiveness*

Ethical leadership reflects “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relations, and the promotion of such conduct to followers” (Avolio *et al.*, 2009, p. 424). Drawing on positive character strengths and virtues ethical leadership explores antecedent and outcomes of ethical beliefs and perceptions: this approach integrates virtues (such as integrity, humility and benevolence) with follower-oriented processes involving intrinsic motivation, follower mindfulness, moral emotions and encouragement underlying work-related well-being (Brown and Trenino, 2006; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Eisenbeiss and Giessner, 2012; Eisenbeiss and van Knippenberg, 2015). Ethical leaders are expected to display inclusive behaviors that capitalize on the benefits originating in the core orientations of ethical leadership: she/he treats others (irrespective of individual differences) with dignity and respect, thus viewing subordinates not as means, but as ends in-and-of themselves, in accordance with one’s intrinsic worthiness (humane orientation). More specifically, an ethical leader engages in fair decision-making process, refraining from discriminating against disadvantaged groups (justice orientation), and is deeply concerned for the welfare of society in its entirety (responsibility and sustainability orientation). Last, but not least she/he is apt to exhibit temperance striving to balance legitimate interests of all stakeholders, thus shaping trustful relationships (moderation orientation).

To our knowledge, there is a dearth of research with regard to ethical leader’s inclusiveness. Eisenbeiss (2012, pp. 801-804) describes a typical case in which an ethical leader addresses complex moral dilemma situations when handling diversity issues on the basis of non-discriminatory treatment. Interestingly, gender TMT diversity has been related to ethical leadership. In examining leadership characteristics of females CEOs Ho *et al.* (2015) found that two main features, risk aversion and ethical sensitivity were related to attitudes reminiscent of an ethical leader (conservatism in financial reporting, steadfast opposition to fraud). Consistent with Guillaume’s *et al.* (2014) framework, we suggest that:

- P1. Organizational processes and strategies reinforced through ethical leadership styles which provide sufficient cues with respect to equitable treatment, avoiding overt and covert forms of discrimination, care for societal welfare and balancing of aspirations of all subordinates, are expected to establish a strong work group climate for inclusion.

#### *Framework 2: AL and leader inclusiveness*

AL is conceptualized as a developmental process encompassing life experiences, psychological capital and moral perspective and culminating in a highly supportive

climate to yield self-awareness, self-development, self-regulated positive behaviors, intra-team trust and helping behaviors (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Remus *et al.*, 2005; Yammarino *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2014). AL reflects “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers’ inputs” (Avolio *et al.*, 2009, p. 423). AL theories have predicted a wide range of beneficial outcomes including follower empowerment and OCBs; in addition organizational identification, trust in leadership, leader/follower well-being and follower work happiness have been posited by extant models of AL (Gardner *et al.*, 2011, pp. 1138-1139). Authentic leaders display four types of behaviors, most of which can foster inclusiveness climates. Balanced processing refers to solicit views that challenge prevailing positions, a core issue in functionally diverse work teams. Internalized moral perspective informs leader behaviors through internal moral values, while relational transparency consists in personal disclosure which, if combined with salient diversity beliefs, reflects leaders’ sensitivity and openness to diversity issues. Finally, self-awareness is central to leaders’ appropriation of how diverse employees perceive leadership enactment.

Authentic leaders assume a significant role in influencing employee’ perceptions of inclusion. Berkovich (2014) identified eight interrelated components of dialogical pedagogy adopted in AL development: self-exposure, open-mindedness, empathy, care, respect, critical thinking, contact and mutuality. These components can be linked to the principal pillars of dialogical philosophy: candor (avoiding impression management tactics, exhibiting sincerity), inclusion (experiencing an empathic relationship with others), confirmation (acceptance of otherness through respectful interactions) and presentness (listening attentively and responding confidently, jointly shaping future). Boekhorst (2015) argues that authentic leaders who share cooperative goal structures with followers display inclusive leader role modeling which, if reinforced by vicarious learning of inclusive behaviors by followers, is expected to yield a climate for inclusion, in alignment with organizational support systems that encourage inclusiveness. Cottrill *et al.* (2014) explore AL as a predictor of inclusion that in turn promotes employees’ work-related self-esteem and willingness to engage in extra-role behaviors. Findings showed that perceptions of inclusive organizations mediated the relationship between AL and self-rated OCB through organization-based self-esteem. Consistent with Guillaume’s *et al.* (2014) framework, we suggest that:

- P2. Organizational processes and strategies reinforced through AL styles which provide sufficient cues with respect to balanced processing, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective and self-development are expected to establish a strong work group climate for inclusion.

### *Framework 3: servant leadership and leader inclusiveness*

Servant leadership occupies a preeminent position as a theory that combines the motivation to lead with an innate need to serve others: as a proximal predictor of both high quality leader-follower relationships and a psychological climate of trust and fairness, servant leadership is conducive to self-actualization epitomized in beneficial follower attitudes, work engagement, enhanced performance, organizational commitment and OCBs (Van Dierendonck, 2011; Parris and Peachey, 2013; Winston and Fields, 2015). Servant leaders capitalize on core servant identity attributes to achieve inclusive pursuits: servant leaders’ belief in the intrinsic value of each human person will enable subordinates to realize their true potential (empowering and

developing people), properly benefiting from diverse employees' experiences (humility). In addition, servant leadership helps reflect one's true intentions and commitments (authenticity), cognitively adopting the perspectives of diverse others, exhibiting empathy and compassion toward disadvantaged group members (interpersonal acceptance), as well as enabling new approaches (providing direction), and stimulating others to act and behave for the common good (stewardship).

Sun (2013) identifies four core attributes comprising a servant identity, calling, humility, empathy and agape love: these may allow a leader to adopt and embrace diverse employees' perspectives through attitudes of genuine and unconditional care, even for divergent subjectivities. Enhancement of the psychological needs of followers remains a crucial outcome of servant leadership insofar as it, i.e. related more strongly to follower need satisfaction. Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) posit that a leader's compassionate love informs virtuous attitudes (humility, gratitude, forgiveness and altruism) that in turn encourage servant leadership behaviors (empowerment, authenticity, stewardship and providing direction), conducive to followers' well-being. In this respect, meaningfulness, a sense of community and employee personal growth are critical dimensions of diverse teams' optimal functioning. Thus, in alignment with Guillaume *et al.* (2014) we can infer that:

- P3. Organizational processes and strategies reinforced through servant leadership styles which provide sufficient cues with respect to empowerment, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, valuing other identities and securing societal welfare, are expected to establish a strong climate for inclusion.

#### *Framework 4: spiritual leadership and leader inclusiveness*

Spiritual leadership places an emphasis on intrinsic motivation triggered through a sense of community and membership stemming from positive leader-followers interactions, as well as on sense of calling, both of which are promoted through vision, hope, faith and altruistic love (Fry, 2003, 2008; Fry and Kriger, 2009). According to Benefiel *et al.* (2014, p. 178) spiritual leadership involves two distinct, yet interrelated processes:

- (1) creating a transcendent vision of service to others culminating in an experience of a sense of calling substantiated in meaningfulness and purposefulness in life; and
- (2) establishing or reinforcing an organizational culture founded on the values of altruistic love that shape a sense of membership through which one feels appreciated and understood, and displays genuine care, concern and appreciation for both self and others.

Proponents of these views convincingly argue in favor of a deep respect to others' subjectivities, fact that necessitates the construction of leadership frameworks for negotiating multiple and intersecting aspects of diverse identities in the workplace. A spiritual leader can facilitate an inclusiveness agenda through a transcendent vision that reveals the salience of universal spiritual values: she/he proceeds to establish an organizational culture in which subordinates feel appreciated and understood, and display genuine concern for each other, epitomized in caring relationships. Moreover, spiritual leadership affirms belongingness in fostering connectedness, thus mitigating relational conflict and strong faultlines, as well as uniqueness, thus encouraging diverse employees to bring their genuine selves to work and unleash and fulfill their

innate potential. Tentatively, much in alignment with Guillaume's *et al.* (2014) framework, we suggest that:

- P4. Organizational processes and strategies reinforced through leadership styles that denote a transcendent vision of service through calling and foster cultures founded in altruistic love, are expected to establish a strong work group climate for inclusion.

### **Moving forward: recommendations for future research**

The framework advocated in this paper may be significantly expanded through the elaboration of articulated models that will examine each case separately. Servant leadership and inclusion for instance can be viewed through the lenses of a particular model introducing a set of propositions, identifying relevant processes and mechanisms, and specifying boundary conditions as a basis of subsequent testing in empirically orientated research. More substantially, future research endeavors should consist in providing a rationale for leadership styles that are in a position to satisfy two primary requirements, one for fostering experience of belongingness to a work community and another for uniqueness, accommodating fragmented identities of diverse members. Leadership styles embedded in social contexts and sensitive to societal expectations, would better fit to inclusiveness pursuits. Beyond the four leadership styles examined, other styles may equally serve as potential foundations of inclusive leadership. For instance shared, team, LMX and transformational leadership enhance beneficial diversity-related outcomes, as argued earlier, thus invested with a potential to generate inclusive behaviors. In view of moving forward, inclusive leadership styles should address.

#### *The need for inclusive leader behaviors*

Leaders displaying a personal interest in concrete followers embody relational diversity concerns in their way of leading. For instance, leaders employing an individualized leadership style can adjust and shape behaving and acting to fit abilities and individual differences of each separate follower. Leaders are thus expected to encourage followers to cultivate their different strengths, provide resources and support followers in pursuing opportunities to constructively meet these needs.

Equally importantly, and distinct from an initiating structure style through which the leader articulates clear objectives and provides guidance to this direction, a leader that exhibits a consideration style through building viable relationships with group members, will embrace diversity. The entire group is thus expected to support positive interpersonal relationships as well as to respect diverse ideas and perspectives, in view of securing increased task performance and personal achievement. Homan and Greer (2013) found empirical support for such a view in their advocacy of a functional/contingency approach to diversity leadership: considerate leadership may be more efficacious in diverse teams insofar as it not only helps constrain detrimental group processes (such as subgroup formation), but it also affects leaders' perceptions of team members as unique individuals and fosters motivation of subordinates whose needs are entirely considered and fulfilled.

In a similar vein of reasoning and drawing on four interrelated paradigms (morality, spirituality, positivity and community paradigm) benevolent leadership is an emerging construct that can by no means be unimportant to creating caring and compassionate climates (Karakas and Sarigollu, 2012). This type of leadership encompasses these dimensions (enhanced ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and

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community responsiveness) that have a potential to inform inclusive strategies. Acting in conformity to a set of moral values, yearning for meaningful contribution to humanity, enacting new forms of positive change and building sustainable relationships with multiple stakeholders is deemed to be the cornerstone of inclusive leadership.

*The need for reducing ambivalence in leadership styles*

Certain leadership styles may not pertain to fostering inclusion. For instance, leaders adopting a laissez-faire leadership style are aware of not influencing followers in pursuing work-related goals, the accomplishment of the latter being contingent on personal achievement of self-efficacious employees. This leadership style proves to be ineffective in both shaping a climate for inclusion and in reducing tensions arising from stereotypic representations of otherness. Vertical dyad linkage can be equally inappropriate in leveraging diversity insofar as it reflects a leadership style centered on differential treatment of followers, epitomized in bestowing more resources to favored, in-group members: the latter are afforded the opportunity of greater access to valued resources due to their higher negotiated level of involvement in leader's decision-making process. Based on extant demographic similarity, in-group members will enjoy preferential treatment stemming from shared meaning making, whereas out-group members appear deplete of negotiating latitude, thus experiencing frustration that will negatively affect quality of relationships with the leader. In another vein of reasoning, social identity theories viewing leaders-followers as embedded in social systems bounded by group membership that favors and rewards a group's most prototypical member and not unexpectedly an in-group member, might be less appropriate in highly heterogeneous work teams.

*The need for leadership embeddedness*

Inclusive leadership is in a position to provide a rationale for practices that affirm the diverse other as a valued end. Such practices that are likely to reinforce equity perceptions of diverse group members through equal treatment, foster connectedness and enhance wellness of minority groups are expected to incorporate a contextually embedded view of leadership development that has to take status inequalities into consideration. Rather than imposing a shared identity, organizations can benefit from employing strategies that simultaneously affirm core aspects of valued subgroup identities and enrich leadership endeavors to achieve social harmony (Huo *et al.*, 2005). Lawton and Páez (2015) decisively move to that direction by embedding ethical leadership in a set of virtues, practices and societal norms that resonate with a focus on the cultural, social and political connotations of ethical beliefs and behaviors. Beyond ethical leadership, follower-centered approaches draw on premises that may effectively harmonize multiple and intersecting identities, no more considered as an impediment to career advancement and personal fulfillment.

*The need for delineating context-specific styles: a focus on contingency*

Certain leadership styles are more pertinent to efforts primarily, if not exclusively, addressing a certain type of diversity. For instance, path-goal theory may be useful in attempting to harmonize diverse perspectives and innovative ideas in functionally diverse work teams. In this approach, the leader appears to be concerned with selecting the most appropriate leadership style for a given situation in order to optimize



employee skills by allowing followers to perceive they are being directed toward a mutually desired goal. Leader behaviors dictated by follower, task- and situation-related characteristics are central to shaping a sense of shared identity that integrates the different perspectives of diverse employees and orientates them toward goal attainment. Through different lenses, De Poel *et al.* (2014) found that transformational leadership was generating beneficial leader outcomes (organizational commitment, creativity and job satisfaction) only in teams exhibiting high organizational tenure diversity, whereas participative leadership was more germane to teams low in organizational tenure diversity. Cicellin *et al.* (2015) highlighted the role of different types of paternalistic leadership in affecting the likelihood of success in family firm succession with respect to the gender of the successor.

Transactional leadership can inform task-related diverse groups. Transactional leadership reflects a leadership style in which the leader's primary goal is to obtain the resources required for the successful completion of tasks and outcomes. Ng and Sears (2012) found that transformational leadership was apparently directly related to the implementation of diversity practices, whereas transactional leadership yielded a similar effect primarily in the case of CEOs' value orientations reflecting an appreciation for diversity. In sum, leader's vision, intellectual stimulation and contingent rewards' methods can contribute to the psychological empowerment of employees in procedural justice work climates, fact that accrues potential beneficial outcomes in functionally diverse teams.

#### *The need for an emphasis on diverse followers' perceptions of diverse leaders*

Theories that prioritize the follower in the leader-follower relationship are worthy of further consideration. Scholarly interest in followership theory focusses on "the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process" (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014, p. 84) viewed through two lenses, followership as a rank or position and followership as a social process (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014, p. 89). More specifically, constructionist approaches that investigate follower attributes (social identities, motivation, beliefs and values), as well as role-based views highlighting the active roles followers play in leader-follower dynamics through specific followership behaviors, are germane to conceptualizing diversity leadership. Leroy *et al.* (2015) for instance, found that follower basic need satisfaction mediated the positive relationship of the interaction between authentic followership and AL with follower motivation and performance behaviors: these findings are of paramount importance in unstable work environments.

Furthermore, insofar as power differentials can be hardly disentangled from inequality concerns, minority status attributes often stimulate negatives perceptions in terms of relative deprivation of valued resources, fact that accounts for constructing more complicated articulations of leadership, power and status in work settings (Lovaglia *et al.*, 2006). Followership attributes (motivation, orientations, abilities, affect), followership behaviors (voicing, resisting, deferring) and outcomes (leader responses to followers, follower advancement or marginalization, leader trust in followers) should be adequately considered in future operationalization's of inclusive leadership.

#### *The need for enhancing leaders' responsiveness to global challenges*

Openness to diversity is a core attribute that enables leaders to effectively meet global concerns. Ongoing globalization tendencies permeate conceptions of leadership informed by identities, tacit worldviews and shared meaning pursuits of diverse

leaders. Among those attributes that occupy a prominent position in people-oriented leadership in multicultural teams, intercultural competences (cultural intelligence, global mindsets and a profound sense of cultural sensitivity) leverage global team diversity through integrative acculturation strategies (Aritz and Walker, 2014; Lisak and Erez, 2015).

To address complexity dynamics in which global leaders operate O'Connell (2014) advanced a comprehensive framework grounded in three groups of leadership theories (complexity, shared/distributed and AL theories) and three paradigms for leader development (developmental, social constructive and universal connective values paradigms), as well as articulated through five webs of belief (learning, reverence, purpose, authenticity and flaneur, respectively). Most importantly, the reverence web of belief substantiated through a universal constructive values paradigm encompasses those relational and collective capacities that foster leader-follower interaction on the basis of global citizenship and cosmopolitan values. Underlying leader inclusiveness is a process that fosters interdependence, ensures different voices and identities, minimizes inequities through power sharing, promotes equitable and participative governance mechanisms, recognizes inherent value of differences and enables respectful interpersonal interactions.

A distinct body of literature has devoted attention to comparative approaches to cross-cultural leadership to discern if universally held assumptions are applied to diverse settings (Eagly and Chin, 2010; Kirkman *et al.*, 2009; Lewis *et al.*, 2001; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2007). Drawing on positivity in positive organizational behavior and positive psychology literatures Youssef and Luthans (2012) advanced the positive global leadership construct, a response to persistent global challenges: positive global leadership leverages diverse strengths and capabilities and relevant developmental potential to facilitate efforts to address structural distance, cultural differences and cross-cultural barriers in the global arena.

### Implications for practice

Diversity leadership is situated at the intersection of multiple initiatives employed to enrich perceptions of prototypical leaders: treating diversity as a form of social capital is deemed a prerequisite for developing inclusive leadership practices. Leaders of pluralistic organizations are expected to establish and maintain inclusive cultures: they should design systems and structures, as well as shape multifaceted policies that are in a position to move beyond employment equity compliance, in view of fostering commitment to inclusion. Accordingly, organizations should encourage leadership styles that combine goal attainment with an unconditional affirmation of the intrinsic value of diversity.

DiTomaso and Hooijberg (1996) encourage leaders to “do” diversity in the origination, interpolation, and use of structures as well as to undertake responsibility for the politics of diversity through engaging in adaptive and emotion work, insofar as they are implicated not only by their actions, but also by their inertia on their corporations' impact on a diverse world. Successful interventions consist in an ongoing accountability for implementing inclusive practices that nurture inclusiveness climates (Byrd, 2007; Kilian *et al.*, 2005). Inclusive leadership styles are in a position to drastically eliminate inequities and eradicate stereotypes that pose impediments to diverse employees' success.

Leveraging leader inclusiveness necessitates efficacious role models to mitigate aspects of intergroup relations that thwart career advancement of minority members

(Hopkins and Hopkins, 1998; Mosley, 1998), as well as to shape psychological safety climates (Hirak *et al.*, 2012). Based on previous argumentation, we deem that ethical, authentic, servant and spiritual leaders are in a position to effectively cope with such challenges, primarily due to both humane orientations and societal connotations entrenched in these leadership styles.

### Concluding comments

Diversity has been elevated to a core dimension for leadership development, as well as for designing and implementing inclusive practices that capitalize on the potential benefits of a diverse workforce. Certain leadership styles (shared, team, transformational, LMX) have been theorized as positively affecting organizational efforts in managing diversity, yet research has to shape a more comprehensive view of the added-value of various strands of leadership theories in informing inclusiveness interventions. Taken for granted that ethical concerns permeate the socially constructed nature of diversity issues, theories that place an emphasis on moral perspectives, intercultural values and leadership embeddedness are promising in leveraging leader inclusiveness in diverse work settings.

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#### About the authors

George Gotsis is an Associate Professor at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. His main research interests comprise, among others, diversity management ethics, emerging leadership theories, workplace spirituality, religion in business, and organizational politics. George Gotsis is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [ggotsis@phs.uoa.gr](mailto:ggotsis@phs.uoa.gr)

Dr Katerina Grimani holds a PhD Degree from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. Her main research interests include employee relations, health and safety at the workplace, and leadership-follower interactions.

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