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Commentaries

Prime Ministers as Leaders: Applying Self-Determination Theory on Australian Prime Ministers

Joakim Eidenfalk*[a], Vivien W. Forner[b], Michael Jones[b], Dominique Rene Parrish[c]

[a] School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia. [b] School of Management, Operations & Marketing, Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia. [c] Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.

Abstract

The leadership capability of Australia's four Prime Ministers 1996 – 2015 has been widely debated by political commentators, financial analysts and the general public. The success of these senior leaders has been questioned, as has their management of their office, staff, and colleagues. This article will investigate the performances of these four Australia Prime Ministers – John Howard, Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is presented as a framework that could provide guidance on the aspects of leadership that if attended to could result in enhanced performance of political leaders and ultimately security of their position. SDT is also used as a theoretical lens to evaluate the behaviour and provide a comparative assessment of these four Australian Prime Ministers. It is posited that SDT analysis illustrates ways that each of the four Prime Ministers could have performed better and highlights key lessons for current and future leaders around the world.

Keywords: self-determination theory, leadership, Australian politics, political psychology, autonomy, belonging, competence

The leadership capability of Australia's last four Prime Ministers has been widely debated by political commentators, financial analysts and the general public. The success of these senior leaders has been questioned, as has their management of their office, staff, and colleagues. Three out of four leaders investigated here – Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott – were replaced before the end of their term. Popular conjecture is that the behaviour of these leaders led to their inferior performance and ultimately their demise. This begs the question – what lessons could be heeded from the functional/dysfunctional leadership of these leaders that could inform the performance and success of current and future leaders (and other political leaders)? This article analyses the impact of functional and dysfunctional leaders and the impact it had on their leadership prospects. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is presented as a framework that could provide guidance on the aspects of leadership that if attended to

could result in enhanced performance of political leaders and ultimately the security of their position. SDT is also used as a theoretical lens to evaluate the behaviour and provide a comparative assessment of Australia's four most recent Prime Ministers – John Howard, Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott. It is posited that SDT analysis illustrates ways that each of the four Prime Ministers could have performed better and highlights key lessons for current and future leaders in Liberal democracies around the world. SDT is also contrasted to the literature on Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theory (SIT/SCT) to provide a well-rounded and critical discussion.

Leadership and Management

The study of political leadership has long drawn the interests of scholars (see for example Botindari & Reicher 2015; Foley, 2008; Helms, 2005; Strangio et al., 2013; Zeng, 2014). The success and retention of Party leadership is significantly influenced by the Prime Minister's leadership and management style. The extent to which a leader is functional or dysfunctional will ultimately have a significant impact on his success or failure as a leader. This is particularly true for political leaders who need the support of fellow members of their party or other key actors who have influence over the process of electing or deposing the leader. A Prime Minister's performance is greatly influenced by the quality of the relationship he or she has with colleagues and staff. Tiernan (2006) argues, staff support is crucial to any nascent Prime Minister and the voice of the staff strengthens negotiations, increases presence, and achieves results not otherwise possible. It is therefore vital for a leader to understand and manage colleagues and staff effectively.

Lasswell (1960) was the first to argue that leaders could be classified into different categories based on management style. Johnson (1974) put forward a classification scheme based on what he argued was a consistent pattern of management style among modern-day U.S. Presidents. The three categories were *formalistic*, *competitive*, and *collegial* (Cottam et al., 2010). Joseph Nye (2010) emphasised the need for leaders to understand their followers and to be able to mobilise them for a particular purpose. Nye divided up what he referred to as effective leadership skills into *Hard* and *Soft* Power.

Johnsons' collegial management style and Nye's Soft Power is of particular interest to this study as they share important similarities with SDT. Nye defines Soft Power as 'getting the outcomes one wants by attracting others rather than manipulating their material incentives. It co-opts people rather than coerces them' (Nye, 2010, p. 29). Brown (2014) makes the strong point that the success of President Lincoln was largely due to his ability to pick very capable advisers and ministers, and subsequently work collegially with them. While recruitment is a significant factor, ultimately, a political leader's success and survival is directly linked to their ability to manage and lead the people on their team.

Self-Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a contemporary theory of human motivation built on the early works of Vroom (1964) and Porter and Lawler (1968). The main premise of SDT is that human beings have innate basic psychological needs for autonomy, belonging and competence. The fulfilment of these needs, facilitates optimal motivation and positive functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

SDT Perspective on the Nature of Motivation

SDT differentiates between types of motivation, based on a person's underlying reasons for engaging in an activity. The first distinction is between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated workers do the job be-

cause they find the work itself enjoyable and interesting (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In contrast, extrinsically motivated workers do the job because it will lead to desired outcomes, such as tangible or verbal rewards. In this latter case, the satisfaction stems from what the job brings, rather than enjoyment of the work (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

The second distinction, and one which is unique to SDT, is the distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation is where the worker identifies with the importance and meaning of their work and behaves with a full sense of volition (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomous motivation is accompanied by feelings of willingness and engagement. It leads to self-regulated and sustained behaviours, ongoing persistence and employee willingness to actively support and participate in something (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For autonomous motivation, workers need to be given choices and empowerment to act of their own will, to an extent, which in turn leads them to accepting the overall goals, structures and values of the work.

In contrast, with controlled motivation the worker is being driven by external contingencies such as to gain a reward or to avoid feelings of guilt. In these cases, the worker is performing a task because of a sense of pressure or demand towards specific outcomes (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Stone et al., 2009). For controlled motivation, the accompanying subjective experiences of engagement and personal endorsement are poorer as is the sustainability of the behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Many companies today tend to use a carrot-and-stick (CAST) approach, with a controlled motivational focus that includes tangible rewards and competition between workers, external to the work itself. Research suggests that CAST often leads to poor performance, lower creativity, and even outright fraud and cheating. CAST neglects basic psychological needs, producing results, which are opposite to those intended (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009).

Basic Psychological Needs: Ingredients for Optimal Motivation

SDT posits that all people have innate needs for autonomy, belonging[i] and competence. Satisfaction of these needs facilitates high quality autonomous motivation where workers are personally committed to and recognise the value of their work (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Basic psychological needs are satisfied via one's social environment. In the workplace SDT considers the leader one of as the key vehicles through which these basic psychological needs are supported or thwarted (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Leaders who facilitate satisfaction of these three needs will support their follower's inherent interest in their work and promote optimal motivation and commitment.

Need One - Autonomy — Autonomy is the need to experience choice and feel a sense of volition in relation to one's own actions. A worker's need for autonomy can be supported, for example, through collaborative decision making, opportunities to express their perspectives and having choice and freedom to carry out their job in the way they think it could best be done. It is important to note that autonomy is not the same thing as independence. The worker still has a manager who delegates tasks and provides external influence (Stone et al., 2009).

Need Two - Belonging — Workers who feel a sense of belonging and connection to their colleagues will experience greater autonomous motivation. Managers can promote belonging and positive relationships within the team by encouraging common goals and mutual respect, focusing on cooperation rather than competition, and sharing information (Stone et al., 2009).

Need Three - Competence — Competence is the need to feel effective, to have an opportunity to express one's skills, and a sense of mastery. Competence can be supported by giving employees challenging tasks that utilise particular sets of skills while also adding to them. A sense of competence enhances intrinsic motivation and can

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palliate feelings of anxiety and depression (Gagné, 2014). Building competence leads staff to believe they have 'the ability to influence important outcomes' (Stone et al., 2009, p. 77). Non-judgemental feedback is very important to build competence and support autonomy.

Organisational research has supported the importance of basic psychological needs and leaders who have adopted interpersonal approaches and procedures that support, rather than thwart, their followers' basic needs have been shown to be more effective (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Political leaders could do well to take note of the key elements of this theory when dealing with their own staff and their party colleagues. Johnson (2011), Nye (2010) and Brown (2014) all make the point that skills akin to those of SDT are very important for the leader to succeed and ultimately survive.

Contemporary Australian Prime Ministers are particularly vulnerable to losing their job if they do not pay enough attention to the basic psychological needs of their colleagues and staff. Australia has a three-year electoral cycle compared to 4 or 5 in most Western liberal democracies, putting more pressure on Australian Prime Ministers' time to succeed. This often results in a more volatile leadership environment. After a period of relative stability in the Prime Ministership – Malcolm Fraser 1975-1983, Bob Hawke 1983-1991, Paul Keating 1991-1996 and John Howard 1996-2007 - there has been an increasing dysfunctionality in the two main political parties in Australia. Indeed, between 1997 and 2015, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had nine leaders and the Liberal Party had five leaders, (four of them from 2007). In fact, there were 73 major party leaders removed from leadership in Australia from the 1970s onwards (on a local, regional and federal level) (Tiffen, 2017). The Australian political system differs from many other political systems in that leaders are more vulnerable of losing the leadership at any time during the election cycle. Other political systems make it impossible or very difficult to remove the leader (the United States presidency for example) or because the party membership as a whole elect the leader (the German Christian Democrat leadership for example). In Australia, the party parliamentarians traditionally elect (or depose) the leader. The vulnerability is illustrated in the average length of leadership, which in the two main parties has been 2.6 years between 1997 and 2015, less than the 3-year electoral cycle (Cross & Blais, 2011).

The principles of SDT can, therefore, provide guidance to current and future leaders on how to promote a supportive and positive work climate, which may enhance the success of the leader, and increase their chance of re-election.

The next section will introduce a leader-socialisation theory to provide some perspective to the analysis and discussion of Australian Prime Ministers, which is largely focused on an assessment using SDT.

Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theory

While these two theoretical concepts evolved separately – Tajfel introduced Social Identity Theory (SIT) in 1972, and it was further extended by Turner et al in 1985/87 to include Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) (Hogg & Terry, 2000) – the two have often been used as an integrated whole since this time (Hogg, 2001). SIT states that people tend to classify themselves into social groups which are bound by the prototypical characteristics that the individual constructs from their own characterisation of these groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For example, a member of parliament might consider him/herself according to the gender groups to which they belong, and also to the political party they serve, and perhaps also to the religious group with which they identify. As these groups provide social distinction from other membership groups to which they do not belong, they gain a personal sense of social meaning through their ascribed social identity as a result of group membership (Hogg, 2001). Over time, group and social identity become stronger as members work to protect and enhance group distinctiveness and leverage

a positive social identity. For example, a member of the Green Party will develop a narrative that describes their party as the preferred choice and how they benefit from membership. This is known as a process of social categorization, where groups are divided into in-groups and out-groups which are regarded as prototypes.

SCT takes the process of social categorization further by transforming a person's conceptualisation of their own identity by having them assimilate the attitudes, feelings and behaviours of the in-group prototype to their own construction of self (Hogg, 2001). Self-categorization impacts on a person's normative behaviour, it creates stereotypes, it modifies group attitudes and cohesion, and it creates shared norms and mutual influence (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Within organizational settings, the social identification which results from SIT/SCT has been found to increase: productivity, effective communication and job satisfaction (Bizumic, Reynolds, & Meyers, 2012).

This social theory plays an important role in understanding the roles of individuals and groups in leadership. Leaders are people who hold influence over others which enables them to exercise power over followers to determine outcomes (Hogg, 2001). When considering SIT/SCT the process of self-categorization permits individual alignments with group prototypical behaviours. Leaders, either through accident or design, are able to align themselves more strongly with these group prototypes and reinforce their identification as leaders, leading to increased influence. This occurs through three parallel processes (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

First, through self-categorization some people are more prototypical than others, and these people tend to then embody the characteristics that others conform to and as such it appears that these 'leaders' are exercising influence over the others in the group. Second, social attraction works to ensure that people who are more prototypical are liked more than those who are not. Third, group members fall into the trap of applying fundamental attribution error in their judgement of the leader's behaviour. In doing so they over-attribute or mis-attribute the leader's leadership abilities as a function of their personality rather than the prototypical position they have adopted through affinities with group norms. These three processes work to construct a person who has all of the characteristics of a charismatic leader.

An understanding of SIT/SCT helps to provide an alternative view of leadership in prominent positions where group characteristics, social identity and self-categorization play a role in the development and operation of leaders.

Using SDT to Evaluate Leadership

Following is an evaluation of the functionality and dysfunctionality of the leadership of Australia's last four Prime Ministers up to September 2015– John Howard, Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott - through the theoretical lens of SDT.

John Howard

John Howard, the longest serving Prime Minister of the four investigated in this study, was Prime Minister of Australia for 11.5 years (1996-2007). Upon appointment, he immediately surrounded himself with colleagues he trusted and had known for a long time. His extensive experience in political life taught him valuable lessons of betrayal, which influenced his decision to establish and maintain a disciplined Cabinet, during his time as Prime Minister (Brett, 2006; Tiernan, 2006). Howard allowed his ministers to have great autonomy on policy within their departments (Kelly 2006); Milne (2006) described Howard as "inclusive and consultative" (p. 49). Indeed, Kelly (2006) stated that "Howard does not stamp his foot, unlike some of his predecessors. On the contrary, Howard

is a collectivist" (p. 7). With the exception of his first term (1996-1998), when five ministers resigned from his Cabinet (Brett, 2006), Howard's disciplined Cabinet, his consultative approach, and ability to give autonomy to his ministers was all a testament to the strong relationship he had with his colleagues.

In general, Howard managed the party room well and dissent was seldom evident. Indeed, when he failed to do so, it stood out, as in the case of parliamentary superannuation in 2004. The initial decision enraged backbenchers and Howard's response was to overrule Cabinet in favour of the backbenchers' line. He stated afterwards: 'I don't apologise for that, I'm not embarrassed by it. I think it's just sensible leadership. A leader who is never willing to listen to the strong views of his friends and colleagues is not a very good leader' (Tiernan, 2006, p. 317).

Howard's management and interpersonal skills vastly improved after his first stint as leader of the Liberal Party (1985-1989). He was described during that period as 'secretive to the point of paranoia, a loner who, as leader, ruthlessly rewarded his own 'dry' supporters at the expense of the 'wets' (now known as moderates)'. This served as a significant factor in his 1989 downfall (Milne, 2006, p. 48-49). At this time, his ability to properly listen to the views of colleagues was questioned, instead often dominating the discussion and wanting to run everything as much as possible himself (Errington & van Onselen, 2007).

This behaviour was not evident by the time he became Prime Minister in 1996, when he more actively sought the views of colleagues before making decisions, even if he did not always follow them (Errington & van Onselen, 2007). Howard provided guidance to less experienced Members of Parliament (MPs). He maintained personal contact with MPs (Murphy & Humphries, 2006), gave his Ministers the opportunity to 'have their say' and allowed them to 'run their empires' (Weller, 2007, p. 189), although his influence over Cabinet gave him ultimate control in the end.

This can either be seen as a way to maintain power and control (Weller, 2007), or even be manipulative (Moore, 2004). However, the picture that emerges is one of Howard building relationships that allowed him to achieve his agenda and safeguard his leadership. No real leadership challenges took place during Howard's time as Prime Minister, which is in stark contrast to the Prime Ministerships of Rudd, Gillard and Abbott.

Taking over the leadership of a political party also means dealing with the predecessor, their hurt feelings or sense of entitlement may cause ongoing issues. Howard appears to have successfully managed his predecessors. Alexander Downer was given the Foreign Affairs portfolio and permitted significant autonomy, particularly from 1996 to 2001 (Ricklefs, 2004), possibly due to having more experience in the area than Howard and thereby allowing Howard to focus on domestic issues. Howard took more and more interest and control following the September-11 attacks in 2001 (Walters, 2006) but a good partnership developed between Howard and Downer wherein Howard took on the big picture and Downer the day-to-day running of foreign affairs. Pearson (2003) described it as 'an unusual level of co-ordination between their offices'. Downer himself described the relationship as 'extremely close' and in 'constant contact with another' (Hewett, 2003). Howard aptly managed this potentially fraught situation from one of vulnerability for him as a leader to one of a close and trusting relationship.

The story is a bit different when it comes to Howard's Treasurer Peter Costello. On the one hand, they had a successful professional relationship for 11.5 years in government. On the other hand, the speculation on the 'promise' of Howard stepping down as PM at some point and handing over to Costello, made for a tense relationship between the two that had to be managed carefully. Howard and Costello's relationship was reportedly not very

close personally but they worked well together professionally. While Downer was part of the inner circle of Howard's 'mates', Costello was not (Kelly, 2009).

Examining Howard's Prime Ministership, through the lens of SDT, indicates strong leadership and management skills. Support for *autonomy* is evident in his delegation of tasks to ministers, giving them choice and freedom to carry out their job in the way they think best and seeking the views of other members of government. Howard forged a sense of *belonging* and connection through the personal contact he maintained with MPs. That there was never a real leadership challenge against him in his 11.5 years in office may also be attributed to a general sense of belonging and connection. Support for *Competence* is evident in Howard's trust in the backbenchers and overriding the Cabinets' 2004 superannuation decision, as is his efforts to develop less experienced MPs.

Kevin Rudd

Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister from 2007-2010 and again in 2013. His election as leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 2006 came after allying himself with Gillard on a combined ticket to ensure enough support to win, as neither could have defeated Beazley on their own. Rudd did not have a power base or loyal supporters within the party but came to rely on the support of the Australian public rather than his colleagues (Grattan, 2014; Kelly, 2014). This approach took Rudd to the top job but his lack of collegial support would in the end be fatal to his leadership.

Weller (2014) argues that the first years of Rudd's leadership were void of any major management issues. He claimed Rudd was a good chair of Cabinet meetings, debate flowed freely, and he controlled his emotions and incorporated opinions from his ministers. Individual ministers could put forward their views without fear of retribution. Weller's claim was strongly disputed by one of its participants; Wayne Swan's account of Cabinet meetings depicts them as 'rarely functioned with punctuality or efficiency' and often seen as a waste of time, when Rudd was chair (Swan, 2014, p. 229). Over time, more and more stories emerged of Rudd's failing leadership style, which is key to understanding the leadership challenge that transpired in 2010 and his subsequent loss of the Prime Ministership. Despite a promising start (Weller, 2014), Rudd soon insisted on an increasingly centralised decision-making process. Kefford (2013) argues that Rudd's concentration of power around himself fits with the 'presidentialisation' of his leadership, as it made him more powerful than his predecessors. Centralised decision-making manifested in several ways; for example, ministerial portfolios were traditionally decided by caucus, but during, Rudd's term this power was transferred to himself and comments such as 'Let me be clear about this, I'll be determining the composition of the Labor ministry' (Kelly, 2014), no doubt increased the irritation felt by his colleagues. Moreover, many important decisions were taken by the Strategic Priorities and Budget Committee (SPBC), consisting of Rudd, Deputy Prime Minister Gillard, Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner and Treasurer Wayne Swan, thereby re-moving further power from the Cabinet (Kefford, 2013). Cabinet ministers outside of the 'gang of four' had less opportunity and, it seems, were less daring to discuss and question key decisions (Cassidy, 2010, pp. 129-130). Ministers were not consulted on many major decisions and often expected to endorse decisions taken by the SPBC (Marr, 2013). Ministers were told what would happen or even informed after the decision had already been taken, as in the case of Immigration Minister Chris Evans who in October 2009 received a phone call from Rudd's office chief informing him that a deal had been done with great importance to his portfolio in regards to stopping Sri Lankan refugees entering Australia. Evans was told of the deal but not consulted (Kelly, 2014). Kent makes the point that rather than giving work to ministers, it was instead handed to junior staff, to ensure Rudd had control over the process (Kent, 2014).

Rudd's micromanagement stretched into most matters and positions. Ministers were allowed some freedom as long as their area of responsibility was running smoothly, but whenever a crisis emerged, Rudd would step in and take control (Weller, 2014). Kelly and Weller both describe Rudd as someone who needed ultimate control over most things, with Kelly going as far as calling him a 'control-freak' (Kelly, 2014, p. 200; Weller, 2014). Rudd was unable to delegate (Gillard, 2014; Kelly, 2014) and this, in combination with his need for control and micro-management, slowed down the process of decision-making and made it impossible to make Rudd hand over responsibility for the day to day management to someone else. Rudd lacked the autonomy to make such a move, leading ultimately to a failing working environment. Decisions took increasingly longer to determine (Combet, 2014), which ultimately caused a breakdown within the Labor Party and frustration among the MPs.

The key relationship that Rudd needed to focus on was with his Deputy Julia Gillard. As opposed to Howard, Rudd did not have to deal with his predecessor Kim Beazley, after taking power because he did not contest his seat in the 2007 election. The relationship with Gillard was positive to start with and both expressed admiration and loyalty towards the other (Kelly, 2014). However, Rudd's leadership style and perceived flaws in decision-making led to a deterioration of this key relationship. Gillard began to doubt Rudd's ability to lead and make decisions and she claimed to receive information directly from his staff, of a toxic work atmosphere where Rudd put increasing pressure on them, demanded more information and work from them, and treated them with anger and disdain. Fewer decisions were being made, with most being continually deferred (Gillard, 2014). The escalating anger and frustration associated with Rudd's manner in dealing with his Ministers, colleagues and staff eventually led to the complete breakdown of the Rudd-Gillard partnership.

The final straw was Rudd's behaviour and management style. Rudd could be a 'brilliant solo player' (Kelly, 2014, p. 138) and many had enormous confidence in his abilities (Marr, 2013). In the words of Wayne Swan (2014), 'he worked bloody hard' and had strong work ethics (p. 227). However, he demanded as much and even more from his staff, resulting in burn out and a considerable turn-over of staff in his office (Kent, 2014; Swan, 2014; Weller, 2014). There are numerous stories of Rudd being vengeful, prone to angry outbursts, holding grudges, being rude and even bullying staff, colleagues, and on one famous occasion a flight attendant (Kent, 2014; Marr, 2013). Any loyalty he may have had when he took office was squandered by 2010. His behaviour created an 'atmosphere of fear and intimidation' (Kelly, 2014, p. 6), with Gillard even recalling having a senior staff member of Rudd's crying in her office (Gillard, 2014). It is very telling that the night before Gillard challenged Rudd for the leadership in June-2010, Gillard's office was full of supporters while Rudd struggled to sure up any support for his leadership and ended up not even contesting the leadership (Kelly, 2014). Such was the lack of support, which can to some extent be attributed to poor polls but even more so to a strong aversion of Rudd as a leader. Graham Richardson recalled his 47 years in the ALP and stated 'I have not known a more hated figure' (Kelly, 2014). Rudd's management style had turned the vast majority of Labor MP's against him by mid-2010. From having started out as popular leader that led the ALP to victory in 2007, he had as Patrick (2013) stated 'needlessly alienated people' and supporters of Gillard 'were consumed by hatred of Kevin' (Kelly, 2014, p. 329). In the words of Barry Cassidy (2010) – 'He pissed everybody off' (p. 132).

When Rudd became Prime Minister again in 2013, he claimed to have learned his lesson. 'If I have learned one thing from my previous period as prime minister, and I've learned quite a lot…[it] is the absolute importance of proper, orderly consultation with cabinet colleagues on any major decision'. He concluded that 'frankly, decision-making is always much better when it can be done collegiately' (Grattan, 2014, p. 41). However, despite his newfound appreciation of consultative decision-making, Rudd's bad habits of micromanagement and control of

the decision-making process again emerged (Grattan, 2014). Kelly (2014) describes Rudd as he yet again 'became erratic, failed to sort his priorities, delivered long and tedious press conferences and engaged in a series of disconnected, almost bizarre initiatives' (p. 490). Rudd's second stint as Prime Minister was brief and there was little evidence to conclude that he had learnt any lessons.

Examining Rudd's leadership through the lens of SDT illustrates that he failed spectacularly in regard to all three basic psychological needs. *Autonomy* was evident in Rudd giving an increasing amount of work to his own staff. However, this is a misconception, since final decisions were still made by him. Some form of autonomy can also be found in Ministers being allowed to run their own departments as long as everything went well but this is all negated by the numerous reports of Rudd's micro-management and centralised decision-making. As such, it is proposed that Rudd's leadership provided little support for autonomy. Similarly, *belonging* was generally absent during Rudd's leadership. Rather than inspiring his colleagues to pursue common goals, he created an environment of alienation where MPs and colleagues were afraid, resentful, angry and even felt bullied. The strong vitriol launched against Rudd can be explained by the determined animosity, even hatred, that his staff, colleagues, Ministers and others felt towards him. Rudd failed miserably in supporting belonging and it was a major factor in his downfall. *Competence* was also an area of weakness for Rudd, rather than trusting and supporting colleagues to carry out challenging tasks, Rudd micro-managed almost everything, even making decisions without consulting key people. Instead of training colleagues and building their confidence, Rudd thwarted people's need to feel effective and competent by not delegating, not trusting, and only providing scathing, demeaning and humiliating feedback. There was a clear absence of competence under Rudd's leadership.

Julia Gillard

Julia Gillard became Prime Minister on 24 June 2010 when she took over from Kevin Rudd. She remained in this office for almost exactly three years until Kevin Rudd returned to power after winning a leadership ballot 57 to 45 on 26 June 2013 (Kelly, 2014). Gillard's leadership style demonstrated several elements of SDT, which could have been a factor in the popularity she had among her colleagues, with one clear exception at least, but in the end it was not enough to retain the Prime Ministership. In addition, Gillard was the first female Prime Minister in Australian history and the fact that she was a woman became a source of criticism in itself, albeit indirectly at times. Critics argued that she was not a "real woman"; she was not married (she had a partner Tim Mathieson), she had no children, and she had to endure being called many names, including "witch" during her Prime Ministership. Gillard showed incredible strength dealing with these issues regarding her gender. It is difficult to estimate the impact gender had on her time in office but it nevertheless needs to be acknowledged (Gillard, 2014; Kent, 2014).

Gillard appears to have been liked by a majority of her staff and colleagues. She is described as a good person, funny, down-to-earth, and often persuasive and charming (Cooney, 2015; Kelly, 2014; Weller, 2014). Kelly (2014) describes her as 'unpretentious, smart, devoid of vanity' and possessing 'charm and an appealing frankness' (p. 17). Many caucus members simply believed she was a better person than her predecessor (Kelly, 2014). She could also be resilient (Cooney, 2015) and she was particularly effective in small groups or one-on-one situations, no matter who she was talking to. She had the ability to make people relax in her company. In fact, her ability to get along and converse with anyone from different backgrounds is repeatedly mentioned (Evans & McCaffrie, 2014; Kelly, 2014; Weller, 2014). Cooney (2015) recounts her ability to be completely in charge when being in a room. Gillard is described as a 'consensus-builder' and 'consultative' (Evans & McCaffrie, 2014, pp. 313-314). She possessed skills which were not only important in her dealings with staff and colleagues but also in negotiations.

Gillard's personality shone through when she had to negotiate with key political players, such as the independent members of parliament, when attempting to form a government, after the 2010-election. Kelly (2014) describes her as a 'political fixer' in general (p. 431) and she had to utilise these skills when, in competition with the then opposition leader - Tony Abbott. Gillard had to persuade Greens MP Adam Bandt and independent MPs Andrew Wilkie, Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott to support a Gillard-government. Gillard negotiated individually with the key players and secured a deal with the four above-mentioned MPs. Gillard's ability to negotiate an agreement and support that would last for three years, with these four quite different MPs is a testament to her management style. Her success in forming a government and the role she played as a negotiator and closer is widely acknowledged (Cooney, 2015; Grattan, 2014; Kelly, 2014) however, she was not as successful in her dealings with business overall (Kelly, 2014).

Gillard's Achilles heel throughout her Prime Ministership, was her predecessor Kevin Rudd. The manner in which Gillard came to power haunted her leadership throughout her three years in power. Rudd reportedly saw her challenge to his leadership in June 2010 as a 'betrayal' and as a humiliation, especially due to the fact that he had failed to see it coming. To be challenged and replaced by his Deputy created resentment, if not outright hatred towards her (Kelly, 2014, p. 314). In a huge miscalculation, Gillard thought Rudd would emerge with a 'feeling of relief', not having to deal with the stress and problems plaguing him in 2010 (Gillard, 2014, p. 37). When it turned out that this was not the case, there was simply no clear plan on how to deal with a resentful, angry Kevin Rudd (Kelly, 2014). Leaks (widely thought to have come directly from Rudd) became very damaging in the election campaign in 2010 and it was clear that the situation had to be defused (Cassidy, 2010). Rudd was given the Foreign Affairs portfolio as a consolation prize and perhaps as a way of keeping him out of the country as much as possible, which was a tactic that had been used by other leaders, to deal with predecessors or rivals (see for example Obama and Hillary Clinton, Fraser/Peacock, Hawke/Hayden (Carr, 2014). In the end, it was not enough; Rudd returned and defeated Gillard in a leadership challenge in June 2013 (Kelly, 2014).

Examining Gillard's Prime Ministership through the lens of SDT suggests support for *Autonomy* is apparent in her management and leadership style. Her interactions with staff and colleagues illustrated a willingness to listen to the perspectives of others. Rather than being shut-out, colleagues were included and provided with opportunities to express their ideas and contribute to decisions, which is indicative of Gillard's consultative approach and support for autonomy. Support for *Belonging* is possibly the strongest feature of Gillard's leadership. With the obvious exception of Rudd, she seemed to be adept at creating an environment of mutual respect, she focused on cooperation rather than competition, which gained support from the majority. Gillard's propensity to be the main negotiator is less supportive of *Competence*. She did however, create an environment among her staff that made them feel more confident and capable. Cooney's account of his days as a speechwriter for Gillard describes the support she gave in regard to his work (Cooney, 2015). Ultimately though, she was not able to manage the one person that constituted a threat to her leadership – Kevin Rudd – and it would prove fateful.

Tony Abbott

Tony Abbott became the leader of the Liberal Party on 1 December 2009 and was Prime Minister from September 2013 to September 2015 (Kelly, 2014), having previously held several portfolios in the Howard-Governments. Abbott was close to Howard and seen by some as his 'golden boy' (Marr, 2013, p. 269). Abbott's time as Opposition Leader and Prime Minister, as well as his increasing lack of use of SDT during his Prime Ministership, serves as an illuminating case study into the consequences of ignoring SDT to your peril.

Impressions of Abbott's management and leadership style are mixed at first glance, particularly when looking back at his time before becoming Prime Minister. On the one hand, as Minister of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, he did not actively participate in the running of his department, this allowed his staff to be autonomous and to some extent make their own decisions. He was described as formal, polite and buttoned-up (Marr, 2013). Abbott would later confirm this attitude towards leadership, saying during the 2013-election campaign that 'Most of the time you've got to allow colleagues to run their portfolios; it would only be if there was a serious problem that you would yourself get deeply involved' (Grattan, 2013, p. 513). Marr (2013) described Abbott's staff as intensely loyal but made the point that bureaucrats reported them as weak, explaining that this stemmed from the fact that Abbott avoided having strong independent people around him that would challenge him.

Julie Bishop and Joe Hockey respectively described Abbott as a 'coach' and 'easy to deal with' (Kelly, 2014, pp. 476-477). Kelly (2014) stated that Abbott's consultative style meant that he was safe as leader. Abbott stated clearly in his acceptance-speech in 2009 that 'I will do my best to be as collegial and consultative as possible' (Kelly, 2014, p. 264).

However, there were signs in 2013 that backbenchers were unhappy with Abbott's leadership style and complaints that he was 'too controlling' emerged (Marr 2013, p. 320). This was perhaps a precursor to what would come. The leadership spill against Abbott in January 2014 did not start with potential rivals for the leadership, such as Turnbull or Bishop; Rather, it came from backbenchers who were increasingly unhappy with Abbott and his management style (Errington & van Onselen, 2015). At this time there seems to be two dimensions to the growing frustration with Abbott.

The first dimension was his lack of consultation over major decisions. There were several examples of this, but Abbott's 'captain's pick' to award Prince Phillip with the knighthood of the Order of Australia was the final straw (Taylor & Hurst, 2015). Abbott's chief of staff Peta Credlin made it increasingly difficult to gain access to Abbott. As a result, backbenchers were concerned she had too much power in making decisions and appointments, leading to a centralised decision-making process rather than a consultative one. Abbott and Credlin increasingly ignored dissenting opinions, which led to further dissatisfaction among his colleagues (Errington & van Onselen, 2015; Patrick, 2016; Savva, 2016).

The second dimension was a series of reported angry outbursts by Abbott against colleagues, including MP Wyatt Roy, a junior minister at a full Cabinet meeting (Taylor, 2015a) and Danielle Blain who intended to run for the Liberal presidency against the wishes of Abbott (Oakes, 2015). The lack of consultation and poor management style led to a motion for a leadership spill in the Liberal Party, which was defeated. Abbott remained leader and promised to do better, including listening to backbench policy committees and Cabinet colleagues in a more consultative way (Taylor, 2015b).

Whether Abbott learned his lesson is contentiously debated. The decision to disallow a vote on same-sex marriage to be taken to parliament was another example of a high-handed decision. This lack of consultation has left senior Cabinet Ministers, including Minister for Education Christopher Pyne less than impressed (Hartcher, 2015). His "tin-ear" ultimately led to Abbott losing the leadership of the Liberal Party and thus the Prime Ministership in September 2015 to Malcolm Turnbull. In addition, Walsh argue that the "command and control" approach that Abbott and Credlin used was a key reason for him losing the leadership (Walsh, 2016). "Command and control" is the opposite of SDT and the Abbott-government serves as an example of how it can be to the detriment of a leader.

In examining the leadership of Abbott as Prime Minister through the SDT lens, support for *Autonomy* is an area where he seems to have initially performed moderately well. This was achieved by him allowing his staff and colleagues to run their own departments and offices, and through his early commitment to being consultative in his approach. However, over time Abbott increasingly failed to provide autonomy as evidenced by accusations of him being controlling and increasingly engaging in centralised decision-making particularly in regard to major decisions. Support for *Belonging* is evident in Abbott's maintenance of relationships with former rivals for the leadership of the Liberal Party. Joe Hockey became Treasurer in the Abbott-government and spoke highly of him. Abbott's friendship with Turnbull remained intact, despite toppling him as leader and then subsequent leadership-speculation throughout 2014 and 2015. However, over time there were increasing signs of a lack of belonging, particularly among backbenchers and even Cabinet ministers, such as Christopher Pyne, ultimately leading to his demise. Support for *Competence* is, as with autonomy, an area where Abbott initially did well, trusting departments to run themselves and enabling his staff to utilise their capabilities and feel effective. Further, Bishop's description of Abbott as a 'coach' suggests that Abbott actively supported the development of others. However, angry outbursts and negative feedback would have been detrimental to staff confidence and increasingly centralised decision-making is indicative of less reliance on the skills of colleagues.

Examining the Leaderships of Howard, Rudd, Gillard and Abbott Through the SDT Lens

Examining the seeming success of the four most recent Australian Prime Ministers through the lense of SDT illustrates the importance of supporting basic psychological needs as a leader. Out of the four, Howard surfaces as the most successful in providing support for his followers' autonomy, competence and belonging. Rudd is the least successful and Gillard and Abbott reside somewhere in between. As a general observation, it is clear that all four could benefit from further integration of SDT into their leadership.

Howard attended to all three basic psychological needs. He allowed his ministers to run their own departments, which enhanced autonomy and built competence. Belonging was also evident, in his efforts to build strong and positive relationships for the entire 11.5 years in office.

Rudd can be viewed as the polar opposite to Howard. Through intimidation, humiliation, fear and bullying, any sense of belonging was absent. Rudd's attempt to centralise decision-making and micro-manage every little detail diminished autonomy and competence from his colleagues. There should be no surprise, therefore, that when push came to shove in June 2010, Rudd had very few friends by his side and subsequently lost his job.

Gillard and Abbott both displayed aspects of need support in their management and leadership styles. Abbot was better at supporting basic psychological needs during his days as a minister under Howard and later as Opposition Leader. However, centralised decision-making and a growing lack of consultation caused widespread anger and frustration, as did his increasingly angry confrontations with colleagues. So much so that he ultimately lost his job. Despite claiming to have learned his lesson, as did Rudd in 2013, he failed to adequately alter his leadership style. Attendance to the basic psychological needs of his followers seem to have deteriorated for Abbott since becoming Prime Minister.

Gillard was very supportive of the basic psychological needs of her staff and colleagues. Her consultative, consensus-building and personable approach meant that she did well in all three areas. Autonomy and competence were satisfied through her management style, and as a negotiator, while belonging was evident in her strong support from colleagues. However, these capabilities were still not enough to avoid losing her job. Kelly suggests this is largely due to the difference in her private and public persona. Gillard was someone who got along with anyone, from any walk of life (Kelly, 2014). However, she was much more reserved in public (Cooney, 2015) and her lack of ability to communicate with the public probably led to poor polls and despite generally having the strong support of her colleagues, she lost her job to Rudd because of his apparent improved chance of winning the next election. Failing to manage the one person that was a real threat to her leadership – Kevin Rudd – ultimately led to her downfall.

In summation, a comparative assessment of these four Australian prime ministers suggests that John Howard was the most successful in attending to his followers' basic psychological needs through an even focus on autonomy, belonging and competence in his leadership. Kevin Rudd on the other hand was the worst performer in each of the three needs, which could provide an explanation for his demise as Prime Minister. Tony Abbott performed better during his days as a minister in the Howard government and as Opposition Leader but his performance steadily worsened after becoming Prime Minister. Finally, the case of Julia Gillard suggests that providing a motivating environment for followers – which she did through support of all three needs – still doesn't protect you from losing your job if you are not able to deal adequately with your predecessor, especially if opinion polls are not favourable and your predecessor is determined enough to exact revenge and reclaim the leadership he once held.

Underlying this view of increased leadership effectiveness through the utilisation of the principles of SDT is a requirement for trust between the leader and their interlocutors. Trust is a principle requirement for SDT, and it is enhanced when leaders are driven to become more autonomy supportive, as opposed to controlling (Howard versus Rudd) as a result of meeting the three psychological needs of their followers (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Therefore, an outcome of SDT engagement for these leaders is an increase in trust, which reinforces leadership success.

It is important to highlight that it is not Howard's longevity in office that is the measurement of success here rather his application of SDT. In this article we utilised SDT as a novel perspective through which to explore the leadership of Australian politicians. However, a key limitation is that SDT is a theory of motivation rather than a management or leadership model. Whilst leader-follower relationships have been a primary area of focus within organisational SDT research, the theory was not intended to explain leadership effectiveness or successful management practices. Alternate theories such as leader-member exchange (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) or the full range leadership model (Bass & Riggio, 2006) may offer further insight into the leadership performance and success of these political figures. Furthermore, we expect that other factors, outside of the three needs posited by SDT, played a significant role in the success of Howard, Gillard, Rudd and Abbott. A possible explanation for why Howard performed better than his three successors could be that he had the opportunity for on-the-job-training as opposition leader in the 1980s and that he got the chance to improve through his many years as Prime Minister. Gillard and Rudd were quite new at their job when they became Prime Ministers and could consequently have suffered for their lack of experience, while Abbott seems to have had difficulties adjusting from his role as Opposition leader. Despite getting a second chance in 2013, Rudd failed to exhibit behaviours that would suggest he had learned from his previous stint and failings as Prime Minister.

Another obstacle to the use of SDT in this political environment is the culture of the political blame-gaming, where political opponents engage in a deliberate and often strategic approach to competitive behaviours. However, leaders may still embrace the benefits of SDT and use them to their advantage when it is opportune to strengthen connections, and deliberately ignore them, when their purpose is less benign.

Finally, SIT/SCT offers an alternative view of leadership to SDT. Its focus on identity and social categorisation can further help explain a leader's successful management of staff and colleagues and can provide a useful addition to our understanding of the failures and successes of the four Prime Ministers investigated in this article. Social categorisation is particularly interesting to analyse in relation to Belonging, as the identity and group that a person belong to can significantly enhance or lessen his/her sense of belonging to the leader. Furthermore, SIT/SCT can help enhance our understanding of the role of prototypical leaders in politics today. However, charisma is important but does not explain everything about a successful leader, as can be seen in the case of Gillard and to some extent Howard. SDT, in contrast, provides an insight into a different aspect of leadership of great importance that SIT/SCT not fully explain, that is, the virtues of autonomy, belonging and competence and how a leader who utilise these approaches often achieve success as a leader.

Conclusion

This article has used SDT as a framework and theoretical lens to investigate the performance and functionality and dysfunctionality of Australia's four most recent Prime Ministers (up to September 2015). It is clear from this investigation that each of the four could have better supported the basic psychological needs of their followers, particularly regarding their interpersonal relationships with colleagues and staff.

There are three prime lessons to be heeded from this examination that could inform the performance and success of future Prime Ministers and other political leaders. First, political leaders need to support the autonomy of their colleagues and staff; Howard and Gillard who delegated tasks and encouraged colleagues to contribute to decision-making effectively achieved this need. Conversely, Rudd and Abbott exhibited a lack of consultation and a preference for centralised decision-making. Second, political leaders need to address individuals' need for competence. Howard and to a lesser degree Gillard managed to achieve this by trusting and supporting their colleagues to do their job they were employed to do and not interfering. Rudd and Abbott however, diminished the confidence of their colleagues through their micromanagement, inability to delegate tasks and lack of positive feedback. Finally, political leaders need to encourage a sense of belonging, which is less apparent in the actions of the leader; compared to the other two basic psychological SDT needs but nevertheless can be evidenced in the behaviours of colleagues and staff. Howard, Gillard and Abbott have achieved a sense of belonging, which is demonstrated in the discipline of Cabinet under Howard, the support Gillard had from Cabinet to oust Rudd as Prime Minister and the relationship Abbott maintained with former rival Joe Hockey. Rudd on their other hand failed miserably in supporting belonging and the consequence was the strong vitriol that was launched against him in 2010.

The concept of basic psychological needs is useful for leaders because it provides a means of understanding how their interpersonal approach within the workplace affects the motivation and commitment of their staff and colleagues. Improvements in their management and leadership styles in a way that is more supportive of people's autonomy, belonging, and competence may significantly improve their chances to remain in their position, while disregarding them could result in their imminent removal.

SDT can therefore be a very important guide for any current and aspiring leader and/or Prime Minister.

Notes

i) Belonging is often referred to as relatedness in SDT-theory but can be used interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper belonging is being used.

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