

Leadership Across Differences: Reconciling Ethnicity, Religion, Gender, and Culture

Project Overview

Center for Creative Leadership



WHAT

The Context - Developing new solutions to the most pressing leadership challenges has been the hallmark of the Center for Creative Leadership for more than 30 years. Perhaps no leadership challenge is of greater societal concern than the one addressed by the *Leadership Across Differences* project – the need for effective leadership in the face of racial, religious, gender, ethnic, and cultural differences.

Changing demographics caused by such factors as globalization, technology, increased immigration, civil rights legislation, and changing societal norms are creating unprecedented demands on leaders and the process of leadership within organizations worldwide. These changes transpire across long-standing ethnic, cultural, and religious fault lines and create radically different landscapes in which leaders must find ways for people to work together despite their differences.

The Leadership Challenge - In an increasingly interdependent and diverse world, a major leadership challenge is, and will increasingly be, the need to lead groups of people with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures.

The Project Goals – The goals of the *Leadership Across Differences* project are:

- *To generate new knowledge necessary to understand the dynamics of effective leadership in the face of demographic and cultural differences; and*
- *To develop new tools and techniques to help leaders address these challenges in a fruitful and constructive manner.*

WHERE

Pick your country, and pick your organizational context and you will find groups of people who are being asked to work side by side with other groups whose common ground is often a legacy of distrust and suspicion. For example, Protestants and Catholics are recruited to work for high-tech computer companies in Northern Ireland. Devout Jewish nurses must care for expectant Palestinian mothers in a hospital in Jerusalem. A U.S. food processing plant suffers from poor morale and repeated work stoppages due to the inability of line managers to create an environment in which Native Americans, African-Americans, European Americans, and Hispanics can work together. An international, non-profit relief agency is incapable of delivering food to the hungry because of power struggles between top officials who represent different national backgrounds.

Conflict between different social groups is a highly disruptive factor in organizations in nearly every country in the world. Increasingly, as the previous examples illustrate, we witness societal level conflict spilling over into the workplace from the society at large. As such, our objective is to work with leaders in a wide variety of organizations – in the U.S. and internationally - including non-profits, for-profits, and organizations in the education, government, and military sectors.

HOW

A project of the scope and scale of *Leadership Across Differences* requires the total commitment of Center resources, talent, and expertise. While some of the demographic shifts we address are newly emerging, others are as deep-rooted as our history. Given this complexity, we have designed a four-phase project approach that we expect will several years to complete:

- **Stage I: Knowledge Development** – Undertake an extensive review of the literature, conduct interviews in organizations in multiple sectors around the world, and integrate these two streams of knowledge to develop a model. This has been completed.
- **Stage II: Awareness & Understanding** – Test, evaluate, and expand our model in up to 12 different countries: US, UK, South Africa, Singapore, Nigeria, Malaysia, Jordan, India, Ghana, Germany, France, and Brazil in nonprofit and for-profit organizations.
- **Stage III: Application & Evaluation** – Develop and evaluate the efficacy of new tools and techniques to enhance leadership effectiveness across differences.
- **Stage IV: Dissemination & Certification** – Disseminate these tools and techniques throughout the public domain to individuals in organizations who hold leadership responsibilities and to individuals who can teach these tools and techniques to others.

WHO

We have assembled a world-class team of Center faculty and international research practitioners who are widely recognized for their work in the areas of demographic diversity, intercultural relations, and global leadership. The eight Center faculty members, each with a Ph.D. in the social or organizational sciences, provide a balanced perspective in both learning (research and development) and teaching (application and instruction). The international team members are important contributors to the organizational sciences, and bring a unique point of view on leadership across difference issues in countries such as Israel, South Africa, and the U.K.

TO PARTICIPATE

Organizations can collaborate in Stage II of the project by serving as a study site. Study sites will receive a full report of our organization-specific findings, a full report of our overall findings, an opportunity to collaborate in the translation of these findings into practical tools, and an opportunity to have your organization recognized in external communications for its support of this critical leadership topic in return for providing access to the organization for data collection.

To learn more about this project, contact Project Co-Managers Chris Ernst at 336-286-4411 or via email at ernstc@leaders.ccl.org or Marian Ruderman at 336-286-4428 or via email at ruderman@leaders.ccl.org.