

Presentation at IAACP
Maxine Dalton

Good afternoon. My name is Maxine Dalton. It is my pleasure to kick off this double symposium about the Leadership Across Differences Project. I had the opportunity to meet many of you in Xian in 2004. It is good to be with you again in another beautiful place.

Our symposium is about the need for effective leadership in the face of social identity differences in organizations and we will present research examining how leaders can reduce social identity-based conflict at work. Our presentations are intended to guide you from a general introduction to the research through the findings and frameworks to the implications. Each presentation will offer a different perspective on a multi - country in depth study investigating leadership approaches for preventing or ameliorating social identity conflicts in organizations.

The framework we will share in this symposium is based on a literature review, pilot interviews, extensive input from academic and practitioner colleagues, and data collection using a variety of methods in a variety of countries.

Our premise is that issues of *identity group history* -- particularly as related to gender, nationality, ethnicity or religion -- in the world at large precipitate social identity conflicts in organizations. The conflicts may erupt in light of a variety of triggering events. Responses to the social identity conflict can be taken by those in *leadership* positions. *Organizational elements* such as policies and procedures can also alleviate the conflict but organizations do not exist in a vacuum and must be considered within their particular context. Our framework indicates the *cultural values* of the country reflect judgments of what is right and wrong. *Societal factors* reflect the laws and social norms of the country in which the events take place.

I have three tasks to accomplish during my time with you. The first is to introduce our speakers. The second is to provide you with the order of the presentations so that you may follow the sequence in which each presentation builds on the preceding one and the third is to tell you the story of why and how we came to do this study and to describe some of the pilot work we conducted in an effort to find our way through this complex topic. And so let me begin.

In addition to myself, there will be 7 speakers on today's program. Four of us will speak in Part I to be followed by a short break. There will be more speakers in Part II followed by our discussant and the opportunity to take a few questions.

Following my introduction, the next speaker will be Dr. Donna Chrobot-Mason, Graduate Director & Assistant Professor at the Center for Organizational Leadership, University of Cincinnati in Ohio. Dr. Chrobot-Mason will provide a

review of the literature on intergroup conflict, workplace diversity, and social identity theory and identify four potential leadership strategies for managing identity based conflicts described in the literature.

The next speaker will be Dr. Todd Weber, a post doctoral fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro NC. He will speak about the research design and conceptual framework that is being used to examine how leaders can manage social identity-based conflict within organizations.

The next speaker will be Dr. Kelly Hannum, project manager and Enterprise Associate at the Center for Creative Leadership and convenor of this symposium. Dr. Hannum will share the survey results from those countries where we have completed our data collection activities. If time permits, Dr. Hannum will facilitate your questions.

Following the break between sessions, we will hear from Dr. Marian Ruderman, Group Director of Global Leadership and Diversity at the Center for Creative Leadership. Dr. Ruderman will look at events that trigger social identity conflicts in organizations around the world.

We will hear from Dr. Lize Booysen, Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Leadership, University of South Africa. Dr. Booysen will offer two case studies of organizations in South Africa.

Dr. Booysen will be followed by David Dinwoodie, Deputy General Director at EADA in Barcelona. His presentation will explore social identity issues causing conflict in Spanish society, also using a case study approach.

And finally Dr. Lilach Sagiv, Professor, School of Business Administration at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem will comment on the first set of presentations.

Hopefully there will be time for a few questions following Dr. Sagiv's presentation.

So now let me move to telling you about how we came to do this research and a bit about some of our pilot work.

In the fall of 2001 a number of us working in the research group at the Center for Creative Leadership [an organization with headquarters in Greensboro, North Carolina dedicated to studying and teaching methods of effective organizational leadership] had each coincidentally come to the end of the projects that we had been working on.

We had each, for whatever reason, chosen in our careers to study the issues of difference and minority status – the work challenges of Americans who were not white and male as well as the challenges facing dominant majorities when they began to try and work across country and cultural boundaries.

And so, we came together to decide what to work on next – especially if we all decided to work together.

After weeks of meetings, many arguments and long discussions, we came to realize that although women and African American managers were more or less finding their way in U.S. organizations, new social identity groups, for example – Hispanics, gays, Muslims, immigrants, were entering the workforce in increasing numbers and facing the same struggles as women and African Americans had previously faced.

And two particular events that received a lot of press in the U.S. also caught our attention, specifically the boycott of Coca Cola by African Americans following the reported disrespectful treatment of African American employees by some white managers at Coke in Atlanta and a law suit at Xerox by women complaining of sexual harassment. What struck us about these two blow ups was that both Coke and Xerox had very good reputations regarding the treatment of women and non dominant groups in the work place.

And so we wondered if an organizational culture or the skills of a given manager, can ever off set the deep seated animosity that exists between members of certain social identity groups when members of those groups work together – particularly groups identified by gender, religion, ethnicity, or immigrant status?

Then – because the treatment of social identity conflict in the workplace was now salient to us – we turned to the international workplace – we read about Indonesian construction workers being expelled from Malaysia; about the struggles of black and white workers in post apartheid South Africa; about patients in hospitals in the U.K. refusing to be cared for by Pakistani nurses – Any country we looked at was struggling with social identity conflict in the workplace – some of these animosities were ancient in origin and some only few years old. And we asked ourselves –

If a job in an organization is one way for a person to earn a living and develop esteem, create a place in the community beyond the sometimes limiting and contentious boundaries of ethnic, religious, gender based, or national identity, what can managers in organizations do to reduce the probability that social identity conflict will break out in the work place and if conflict does erupt, what can managers do to reduce the intensity and duration of that conflict? How can we create a work place where anyone may enter and earn a living within a relatively benign setting? What is the role of the manager or of the organizational policies and practices in creating such an atmosphere? To what extent do cultural values or societal factors constrain the possibilities?

And so this issue became the focus of our project, which we named the Leadership Across Differences project –to investigate how organizational leaders

might best manage a workforce comprised of social identity groups who bring a history of mistrust and suspicion of one another into the work place.

Once we settled on our research issue, we needed to verify that this issue existed in other countries and we needed to see what the existing literature could teach us and so we set about conducting a major literature review of leadership, social identity theory, conflict resolution, cultural values, diversity, attribution theory and the like. We collected and read hundreds of newspaper stories from the international press describing identity based conflict in the work place and we conducted pilot interviews in 9 countries, chosen to represent a diversity of cultural values and social identity issues -- the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Israel, Zimbabwe, Great Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa, and Singapore. Working through native speakers who understood the focus of the project, in the pilot project we simply asked individuals if they could tell us a story about a time that they had seen disruption in the workplace based on gender, nationality, ethnicity, or religious differences. We asked what had happened as a result of this conflict and who if anyone had stepped in to resolve the issue. We conducted 49 interviews in all. These data were very rich, confirming that our research issue was internationally relevant and providing us with stories and strategies to use in the design of our data collection tools and a working framework that would incorporate the various sources of data.

This preliminary work also presented with some real dilemmas – some of which we have been able to address and some of which remain a problem – for example, how should we define leadership? Should we gather data in for profit or not for profit organizations or both? Given constraints of time and budget, which countries should we collect data in? Should we collect data in international organizations or in nationally bounded organizations? Dr. Weber will speak in some depth about our research design and conceptual framework but at this point it might be helpful to tell you how we answered some of these basic questions in the early stages of our project. We decided to define leadership as a set of functions rather than as the attributes of a person and so we agreed that leadership embraced the acts of setting direction, gaining commitment to the direction and maintaining alignment. We also agree that because of the structure of organizations, we were particularly interested in the leadership behaviors of those who held official executive, managerial, or supervisory roles in the organization.

Secondly, we agreed that we would gather data in both for profit and not for profit organizations. We wanted to be able to compare the relationships between social identity groups in organizations driven by different motives and missions.

Third in terms of which countries to gather data, we were extremely fortunate to have Dr. Shalom Schwartz, Dr. Peter Smith, and Dr. Stella Nkomo advise us on many of these issues and after many conversations with Dr. Schwartz, we

determined to choose countries across the spectrum of cultural values, although you can see that we still have a hole in the harmony dimension.

And finally, we agonized over whether we should try to gather data in the same types of industries across countries as the GLOBE group did, or gather data only in international and multinational organizations in order to control to some extent for company culture, or to gather data solely in national organizations. This issue resolved itself in a less than ideal way since we ultimately had to gather data in organizations that would allow us to come in and obtain this potentially sensitive information.

In the design and implementation of this research project we have learned a great deal and we continue to learn. We have been fortunate enough to be able to find colleagues from other institutions and in other countries who have helped us create a research design that we hope make sense in a variety of countries, who have contributed to research interviews and questionnaires, translated research materials, gathered data, and helped make sense of that data and I would like to acknowledge some of them at this time. [overhead of all who have helped us as last slide]

We have learned – as I am sure many of you have done in your efforts to conduct valid cross cultural work, that this is a humbling business. We have sometimes asked irrelevant questions and only discovered the questions we should have been asking after it was too late. We interviewed in organizations where there seemed to be no social identity conflict only to find that there was only one social identity group present in the work place. We learned that members of the dominant groups in organizations rarely recognize social identity tensions. We have seen anecdotal evidence that just because a person is a member of a despised or poorly treated social identity group, it does keep him or her from treating members of yet other groups badly. We have seen that class appears to dictate to some extent, how candid interviewees will be – with blue collar and manual laborers often more willing to express negative opinions of members of other groups than are white collar workers.

And we continue to struggle to understand those cultures most different from our own. But, as you also know – it is an exciting journey of discovery and I hope we can convey some of that excitement and struggle to you as the story of this research project unfolds before you this afternoon. We believe the issue is of vital importance and we appreciate your taking the time to be here with us today.

Leadership Across Differences

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- Peter Smith
- Stella Nkomo
- Muhsen Makhamreh

Co-Plot Map of 76 National Groups on Seven Cultural Orientations (Countries in LAD study highlighted in yellow)

