

# A Developmental Progression Model for Intercultural Consciousness: A Leadership Imperative

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**S**ocial and cultural realities that previously orbited safely in distant cultural galaxies collide daily in our businesses, educational and government institutions, and communities. Leaders across the United States—and across the world—are faced with the demands and consequences of a rapidly shrinking globe and an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

The recent leadership failures and governance crises in corporate, communal, national, and international arenas serve as examples of ethically compromised leadership. Wheately (2002) noted that we have entered a “dark age” in which local and global organizations are driven solely by growth and profit. She stressed that leaders must aspire toward a higher calling than mere economic growth. As the physical and tangible boundaries of our world shrink, the psychological boundaries of people deeply divided by race, ethnicity, ideology, politics, region, inequality, and marginality seem to be headed toward greater impermeability. The increasing globalization of business does not necessarily mean that cultural differences are diminishing (Javidan & House, 2002). A considerable number of businesses and other organizations “cross cultural boundaries” every day of the week. They may have physical offices in several countries; they may work on

**ABSTRACT.** The issues and challenges posed to leaders by cultural differences and human diversity are not being addressed adequately in leadership education. In this article, the author proposes the concept of intercultural consciousness for inclusion in leadership training. He identifies the requisite domains of knowledge and skills associated with intercultural proficiency and presents a developmental progression model of intercultural consciousness for leaders. The model provides a framework for understanding how people make sense of the world and engage accordingly in leadership actions at different levels of intercultural consciousness.

multinational projects; and they may deal with customers, counterparts, and employees in their local offices who are culturally diverse. Never before has the need for interculturally competent leadership been greater.

Lipman-Blumen (2000) suggested that we have entered the “Connective Era.” Leaders who survive and thrive need to be flexible to meet the ever-changing demands of this new reality. She concluded, “Only those leaders with the capacity to harness the tensions spawned by interdependence and diversity will gain the connective edge” (p. 45). As business faculty members, we must ask ourselves the following question: Are we adequately preparing our students to meet the demands and challenges of this

Connective Era? There is no escaping intercultural contact, regardless of the organizational size and market focus of any business. It is evident that we can no longer cling to the old ideas and notions of leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2000; Terry, 2003).

## Statement of Purpose

Leadership is inherently a value-driven concept (Terry, 2003). Our notions and assumptions about ethics, power, influence, relationship dynamics, organizational vision, change management, human motivation, work place productivity, responsibility to constituents, integrity, and other functions and actions associated with leadership are influenced by our world view. We carry our world view into all human interactions and relationships. Teaching leadership theory without discussion of cultural contexts results in a great void in students’ preparation to meet the contemporary demands and challenges facing leaders in an increasingly interdependent, diverse, and culturally pluralistic world. Therefore, my purpose in this article is to introduce and discuss the concept of *intercultural consciousness* in the context of leadership education, identify the requisite domains of knowledge and skills associated with intercultural proficiency, and offer a develop-

mental progression model of intercultural consciousness for leaders.

## Leadership and Culture

According to Rost (1991), the definition of leadership has changed over the last century from the enforcement of the will of the leader among the followers to an influence relationship intended to bring about change reflecting mutual purpose. Ciulla (2003) defined leadership as a relationship whose hallmarks are power, influence, obligation, and responsibility. She noted that leadership and ethics share common central issues that revolve around responsibility; interest in self and others; authenticity; and moral obligations of justice, duty, and the greatest good. Those two definitions depict the dynamic nature of leadership as a continuously evolving concept. The operative elements of the two definitions that are important in an intercultural context are mutual purpose, responsibility, and the greatest good.

Leadership is a universal concept in that it occurs in all cultural contexts, and at the same time it is culturally encapsulated, in that its meaning is open to interpretative differences and variations across multiple meaning-making and value-belief systems (Ciulla, 2003). House, Javidan, Hanges, and Dorfman (2002) proposed a conceptual model (GLOBE) that promotes the premise that the attributes distinguishing one culture from another are predictive in the practices of leaders from a specific culture. Therefore, leader and follower assumptions and expectations may vary across differing cultural contexts.

Yukl, Gordon, and Taber (2002) outlined a hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behavior consisting of three metacategories: task, relationship, and change. Each category involves expected leadership behaviors. To effectively discharge leadership responsibility in an intercultural context, leaders must be able to engage in interculturally proficient behaviors in all those arenas. Regardless of the model or theory under consideration, the one mitigating element across the board will be the impact of culture in the interpretation and application of these principles and processes (Nikandrou, Aspopori, & Papalexandris, 2003).

House et al. defined the concept of culture in its broadest sense, not limited to national and ethnic notions, as the following: "[s]hared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations" (2002, p. 5). The effect of culture on everyday functioning of individuals, groups, and organizations can be neither ignored nor underestimated. A number of scholars have articulated the need to recognize the importance of cultural variables in the leadership process and management behavior (Adler, 1997; Dorfman, 1996; Hofstede, 1991; Lane, DiStefano, & Maznevski, 1997; Lucas & Chambers, 2003; Triandis, 1993; Trompenaars & Hamden-Turner, 1997). The monetary loss associated with intercultural failure is estimated to be in the billions of dollars, and this does not account for the psychological strain and emotional distress of the individuals who are unsuccessful in negotiating the demands of crossing cultures (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Hopkins & Hopkins, 1998). The majority of *Fortune* 500 firms acknowledge that they do not feel adequately staffed with global leaders, and they affirm the need for additional training and education for existing staff (Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998).

## Intercultural Consciousness and Leadership

I propose *intercultural consciousness* in leadership as a metaconcept. It is conceptualized as a synergistic combination of essential cognitive, emotional, and behavioral knowledge and skills for intercultural competence and a commitment to consistent, caring, and ethical application of those skills and knowledge. Intercultural consciousness differs from intercultural competence in one critical dimension: ethical and moral responsibility.

Leaders can exercise intercultural competence either ethically or unethically. A culturally competent leader may or may not be an ethical leader if motivated by egocentric and ethnocentric concerns and interests at the expense of those across the cultural

divide. Global and local businesses and organizations that engage with diverse counterparts and customers with the sole purpose of advancing their self-interest at any cost may be interculturally competent, and yet be completely bereft of intercultural consciousness. This does not mean that businesses should not compete and negotiate aggressively, but rather that ethical parameters should govern the limits of such competitive behavior, particularly in intercultural contexts. Intercultural consciousness demands that leaders consistently hold themselves to high ethical standards when engaging across intercultural contexts.

## Primary Assumptions and Suppositions

The leadership developmental progression model to be presented later in this article is intended to further the integration of intercultural consciousness education into the leadership curriculum. The model is based on the following nine assumptions and suppositions about human tendencies and inclination:

1. Most people are culturally encapsulated and ethnocentric in their world view.
2. People tend to behave differently in their dealings and action with in-groups versus out-groups.
3. People feel cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally challenged in unfamiliar situations and settings.
4. People prefer to avoid uncertainty and reduce anxiety.
5. People tend to behave in self-protective ways if they perceive threats to their psychosocial identity.
6. People attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance.
7. People repeat or avoid behaviors and experiences that have pleasant or unpleasant outcomes, respectively.
8. People's evaluation of self and others is influenced by violation or confirmation of their expectation, and their attribution processes.
9. Most people perceive themselves as morally decent, interpersonally sensitive, and socially just.

Given those assumptions, I propose that leaders, by virtue of their human

status, need to address these tendencies to improve their efficacy in intercultural contexts. I argue that not understanding the ramifications of each assumption and supposition most likely will result in the emergence of a stumbling block on the path to intercultural consciousness on the part of a leader.

### Training for Intercultural Consciousness

Personal characteristics such as attachment styles, communication, empathy, motivation, respect, tolerance for ambiguity, and self-confidence have been considered important for improving crosscultural success (Gertsen, 1990; Hannigan, 1990; Manning, 2003; Searle & Ward, 1990; Van den Brouche, De Soete, & Bohrer, 1989; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Three categories of personal and nontechnical skills identified for effective collaboration across cultures are adaptive skills, crosscultural skills, and partnership skills (Kealey, 1996).

The intercultural training literature outlines three culture-general goals for training programs. These are the ability to manage psychological stress, communicate effectively, and establish interpersonal relationships (Cushner & Brislin, 1996). On the surface these goals may appear overly simplistic, but on closer scrutiny one discovers that a very complex learning process is involved in achieving them. Each goal can be broken down into cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Each of these components requires content and process skills. Content skills include awareness and knowledge, and process skills include experiential and behavior competencies to implement this learning (Levy, 1995).

In addition, training approaches may be classified by a two-dimensional system: culture-specific versus culture-general and didactic versus experiential (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1996). In the developmental progression model developed for this article, the focus is on increasing learners' understanding of culture's influence on behavior. Therefore, culture-general skill-building using a didactic-experiential combination approach is an integral part of the instructional model proposed.

### Cultural Skill Sets in the Developmental Progression Model

Effective education and training programs must lead to changes in people's thinking, emotions, and behavior (Paige, 1993). The developmental progression model proposed emphasizes developing and honing students' content and process skills in eight areas. I propose the following culture-general skill set as an extension of the research and writings that have been conducted on the nature and importance of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills involved in intercultural adjustment and functioning (Bennett, 1998; Brislin, 2000; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Gudykunst, 1998; Paige, 1993; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Leaders may already possess and use these skills generally, but they might not use them in an intercultural-specific context.

1. *Cognitive complexity and critical thinking.* Leaders who are cognitively complex tend to have very differentiated and detailed information and knowledge schemes with regard to cultural information. They are able to think deeply and more meaningfully about related issues, concepts, and challenges. From an intercultural perspective, this means that they have a sophisticated, well-developed understanding of how culture might affect behavior. Cognitive complexity allows thinking that moves from concrete to abstract, as well as meaningful integration of incoming or new information to construe the various associations that might exist between apparently independent concepts and ideas. Simply put, cognitive complexity increases the leader's range of sense making about incoming information and may reduce simplistic stereotyping of diverse groups.

2. *Perspective multidimensionality.* An important function in intercultural interactions is the ability to meaningfully engage and understand a different worldview, position, and perspective. Individuals who are unable to create perspective shifts have difficulty in accurately and empathically understanding the counterpoint being offered by a culturally different colleague. Perspective multidimen-

sionality is the ability to see issues from one's own as well as the other's perspective. This ability to look at information from multiple vantage points in an intercultural context can assist in clarification of the culturally different viewpoint.

3. *Interpretative multiplicity.* A significant amount of tension and friction in intercultural encounters emanates from differences in meaning-making systems. The ability to interpret concepts, ideas, and experience in a variety of ways is extremely useful in improving communication. This increases the opportunity to make better choices in understanding intercultural communication. The availability of plausible alternative interpretations of a given experience, concept, or idea increases the probability of arriving at contextually appropriate conclusions.

4. *Contextual analysis.* Context provides us with a frame of reference for making sense of available information, experiences, and reactions. Contextual analysis usually demands that the analysts take a hard look at the bigger picture. It also demands that leaders analyze their own impact on and contribution to situations in which they are active participants. Typically, reaction to and engagement with only the content aspects of issues, challenges, and dilemmas result in attribution errors. Contextual sensibility is very important when leadership issues and situations occur in the shadow of historical and traditional group narratives. It is unwise to judge or attempt to understand actions, reactions, and experiences of culturally different people while dismissing, ignoring, or minimizing the context within which those behaviors or experiences occur.

5. *Affective resilience.* Emotional arousal and reactivity are inherent in intercultural interactions. High states of emotional arousal or negative emotional reactions may hinder the leader's capacity to function optimally, complete tasks effectively, and build relationships. The ability to manage emotional states is therefore a necessary skill. Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997) is particularly salient in preparing leaders to function in intercultural contexts. Inability to manage anxiety and stress can lead to physical and psychological withdrawal from unpleasant experiences and

drastically hinder the functioning of a leader. Despite our attempts at rationality, decision making is greatly influenced by our affective state and experiences. A stress response triggered by intercultural anxiety may affect significantly the quality and efficiency of our decision-making and problem-solving abilities. Kotter (2003) admitted that feelings, not reason, promote or inhibit change.

6. *Tolerance for ambiguity.* An inherent characteristic of intercultural interaction is the unfamiliar context within which one is expected to operate. This not knowing and not being able to make sense of the world according to well-developed cultural cues often leaves people floundering. Simple deviations in behavior from expected rules can create ambiguity and leave the interculturally naïve individual paralyzed with doubt and uncertainty. They may fill in the blanks, make assumptions, and engage in other activities to decrease the ambiguity and uncertainty triggered during intercultural interactions.

7. *Identity integration.* Knowledge of one's cultural identity is integral to intercultural success. Culturally self-aware leaders are able to discern the sources of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions more accurately in an intercultural context. They are able to recognize the impact of their cultural learning, identify potential psychological stumbling blocks to intercultural success, and act to neutralize them. Leaders firmly grounded in a clear sense of who they are can reduce the fear of loss of or damage to identity during intercultural interactions.

8. *Cultural empathy.* Cultural empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and acknowledge the identity, experience, and position of a culturally different person without denying one's own cultural identity. Empathic behavior does not presuppose agreement with the position of the other person. Cultural empathy differs from sympathy in that it is grounded in affirming and recognizing the differences of experience and identity of the cultural Other. This is possibly the most important concept in intercultural relationship building.

In the developmental progression model for intercultural consciousness, this eight-part skill set is necessary for

building a foundation for generating intercultural competence. Once leaders are comfortable with this skill set, their ability to understand and address the challenges posed by intercultural interaction is enhanced. As leaders, they are able to make sense of themselves as cultural beings, understand their emotional triggers in interpersonal and intergroup interactions, and recognize and reconcile the importance of cultural identity in building relationships, thereby enhancing their ability to complete their assignments and discharge their leadership responsibilities in a culturally appropriate manner.

### **Five Mindsets for Categorizing Intercultural Perspectives**

Intercultural consciousness goes beyond mere recognition and knowledge of cultural differences and language acquisition (in case of language differences). *Intercultural consciousness is a state of mind that requires holistic engagement of one's cognitions, behaviors, emotions, and beliefs.* It requires extensive self-reflection and critical self-analysis. It demands intentional inquiry and comprehension of the lived experience and world view of the Other. It requires patience, tolerance of uncertainty, creativity, and flexibility in behaviors and thinking.

Intercultural competence is a developmental concept. Leaders who embark on this journey typically travel on a path that moves away from cultural naiveté and toward cultural sophistication. The following five leadership mindsets are offered to categorize the functioning of leaders in an intercultural context. The purpose of the developmental progression model for intercultural consciousness is to provide a framework for understanding how people might make sense of the world around them and engage in leadership actions accordingly. This developmental progression model is based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1998).

*Naïve universalist.* Leaders with this mindset believe in the universality of their own cultural context. They inaccurately assume that all human beings are governed by the same frame of refer-

ence, follow the same code of conduct, and make sense of the world in a very similar manner. They do not recognize culture as a salient influence on the value- and meaning-making systems that exist across cultural divides. Their strategies for decision making, problem solving, motivation, performance evaluation, acknowledgement, and affirmation tend to be one-dimensional and monocultural. They apply management and leadership strategies without accommodations or modifications for cultural and contextual differences.

Leaders with this mindset tend to be content driven and to make dispositional attributions to understand and evaluate the actions of others. They evaluate intercultural experiences and events from a monocultural perspective, often arriving at culturally and contextually inaccurate conclusions. Their contextual parameters are limited, as are their information schemata. So leaders born and raised in the United States who have this mindset may view the world and its inhabitants as reflections of America. They may believe that the American way is the universal way. Their information schemata about other cultural and contextual realities are very simplistic and contain very little information. They have undifferentiated schemes for classifying and understanding differences. Because they view the world from a very narrow, monocultural perspective, they are unable to attend meaningfully to cultural and contextual differences. In addition, culturally different constituents and counterparts may feel ignored, manipulated, and marginalized.

*Intentional supremacist.* Leaders with this particular persuasion do not necessarily believe in the universality of their cultural frame of reference, but they believe in its inherent superiority. They may believe that their cultural frame of reference is the most advanced, sophisticated, moral, and just of all available cultural alternatives. They believe that a myriad of challenges and problems could be resolved successfully if all other value systems adopted their cultural frame of reference. The intentional discrimination inherent in this mindset

is usually communicated by referring to the inferiority of other cultural realities, describing them as less developed, deficient, and inferior. The evaluative criteria are skewed excessively in favor of the behaviors, beliefs, and values that are closest to their own cultural frame of reference. Evaluation of others' success and failure is conducted from within this distorted, pseudopolycultural frame of reference. Other realities are experienced as different and deficient.

Typically, these individuals follow the saying, "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts." An example is a male leader who engages in chauvinistic beliefs and behaviors resulting from his mistaken assumption about the inherent superiority of male gender cultural values and behaviors. He might be unwilling to understand, endorse, or accept female gender cultural values and behaviors. Such leaders can use their cognitively complex skills to further their ethnocentric agenda or affirm their deeply held beliefs about the inherent superiority of their cultural context. They refuse to engage in perspective multidimensionality, interpretative multiplicity, contextual sensibility, or cultural empathy. They view those skills as unnecessary for success.

They may suspend ethical integrity when dealing with culturally different constituents and counterparts. They tend to choose and impose ethnocentric solutions because they believe that those are the best solutions available. Failure of leadership responsibilities and actions is attributed to dispositional deficiencies or resistance and oppositional tendencies of their cultural counterparts. Culturally different constituents and counterparts may feel coerced and oppressed within such a leader's sphere of influence.

*Reluctant minimalist.* Leaders with this mindset acknowledge that different cultural systems exist, and they do not consciously judge them as superior or inferior to their own cultural frame of reference. They are reluctant to focus on differences, are inclined to minimize the importance of differences, and insist on overcoming cultural differences by

emphasizing the commonality of the human condition and experiences. These individuals may experience themselves as nonjudgmental, capable of leaving their value system at the door when they deal with culturally different individuals. They similarly believe that human beings in general are rational and also capable of leaving their salient identities and value systems at the door when they come to work. They refuse to address race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic, and other salient identity variables in decision making, problem solving, or strategic planning.

They are genuinely hurt and disoriented when their authenticity as culturally sensitive leaders is questioned. They are intellectually aware of the importance of the aforementioned skills in culturally and contextually pluralistic situations as leaders, but they do not know how to engage those behaviors effectively in the course of fulfilling their assignments and discharging their responsibilities. They are vulnerable to identity disintegration. Therefore, they unconsciously prefer to operate from their own monocultural frame of reference. They may consider culturally encapsulated strategies appropriate for diverse cultural settings. Their culturally different constituents and counterparts may feel minimized, dismissed, disenchanted, and marginalized.

*Fragmented relativist.* Leaders with this mindset accept the validity of cultural identity, acknowledge the importance of attending to cultural difference, and are interested in obtaining a deeper understanding of various cultural contexts. They attempt to understand and engage with the world in relativistic terms. Unlike the reluctant minimalist, they overemphasize differences and downplay commonalities. They are unable to balance and integrate multiple perspectives effectively in a meaningful fashion when discharging their leadership duties in an intercultural context. They lack the integrative skills necessary to be effective, and because they feel tugged this way and that they ultimately may be indecisive. They may be paralyzed from overanalysis of intercultural differences.

They tend to be deficient in identity integration skills and continually struggle with how their cultural identity should come into play in an intercultural context. They are typically inefficient at managing the anxiety and stress responses that are triggered by the fear of functioning inappropriately in an intercultural context. Their relationships with their constituents and counterparts may reflect this fragmentation, and they may suffer identity fragmentation.

*Integrated functionalist.* Leaders who possess this mindset have very differentiated and complex information schemata about cultural and contextual differences. They generally understand the dynamics of cultural diversity and know when to focus on commonalities and when to attend to cultural differences when engaging in leadership actions. They are able to attend to and affirm the identity of their culturally diverse constituents holistically. They find appropriate micro- and macrolevel solutions as determined by the context of the challenge or problem facing them. They are able to engage in cultural empathy and to create cognitive shifts to understand a culturally different perspective. These leaders have multiple strategies and skills to address contextually and culturally driven dilemmas and challenges.

### **Implications for Leadership Studies and Research**

I hope that I have made a strong case for integrating intercultural proficiency education into the leadership studies curriculum. Educating leaders who are driven by their "intercultural consciousness" is a demand of our interdependent and diverse world that should not be ignored by leadership studies educators. The developmental progression model for intercultural consciousness is designed to assist educators to better understand the cognitive, affective, and behavior skill sets that enhance leader efficacy in intercultural contexts. In other words, intercultural proficiency training can add value by improving the overall efficacy of leaders in culturally familiar and unfamiliar settings. Using the framework for understanding the complexities

surrounding the concept of intercultural consciousness in this article, researchers can investigate further the relationship of intercultural skills education and training on leader efficacy in intercultural settings and may generate answers to the feasibility of such training.

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