Chapter 2
Coordinating Meaning and Joint Identity: Cultivating Leadership and Cross-Cultural Communication in a Divided Community

Samuel Peleg
Rutgers University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on an ongoing research of intercultural relationships in a mixed Jewish-Arab town in Israel. The goal of the project is to establish patterns of constructive communication between the two groups, using the methods and models of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) practical theory (Pearce, 1997) to promote the viability and sustainability of the community. Our case-study depicts Jews and Arabs in the human organization called the town of Ramla, where two cultural communities are divided along several reinforcing rifts including ethnic, religious, lingual and cultural (Horowitz & Lissak, 1989). These dissimilar backgrounds generate psychological, emotional and communicational difficulties, which encumber coexistence and impairs prosperity for the town’s 62,000 residents. The keys to grapple with such challenges are prudent and inspiring leadership and effective cross-cultural collaboration. These two goals—finding adept leaders and establishing cross-cultural cooperation—are primary in the strategic intervention in the divided society of Ramla.

A. THE CHALLENGE OF RAMLA

Ramla is a deeply-divided society in the middle of Israel. The separation between the two communities is perpetuated in every aspect of daily life as Jewish and Arab live in secluded neighborhoods, and their children go to different kindergartens and schools and play in disparate playgrounds. This division is further augmented by fear, suspicion and mistrust anchored and preserved in a broader context of bitter historical rivalry between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine. The two adjacent communities are locked in an accusative and vilifying discourse of mutual defamation, fueled by negative images, labeling and stereotyping of each other. In such context, the role and responsibility of local community leaders become indispensable. They carry the burden of urging their prospective
Coordinating Meaning and Joint Identity

communities to embark on a new path of communication with the Other. “Other” is an exclusion mechanism that delineates the ‘us’ from the ‘them’ in order to more effectively consolidate our own identity in contrast to all those who are not us (Rabinowitz, 2001; Hammack, 2006; Bresner, 2010). They must create and cultivate a new social reality in which the other transformed into a partner rather than an enemy to enable a new beginning for their town. The research focuses on a bottom-up endeavor of building a shared identity to Arab and Jewish Ramlians beyond their apparent differences. The gist of this undertaking is to initiate cross-cultural collaboration which traverses labels, generalizations and stigmata and lowers the walls of animosity and rancor.

The chapter depicts the Ramla project and its progress. The Ramla involvement has three basic phases: the first is selecting core groups of community leaders from both nationalities and running constructive communication workshops and training sessions with them. Then in the second phase, these leaders, acting as agents of change, will mobilize and stimulate their respective communities to participate in the workshops. Finally, once acquaintance with the Other, including mutual dignity and empathy and a shared vision for the future, is achieved, Arabs and Jews will jointly initiate and carry out public projects in Ramla as a realization of their newly established relationships and shared identity. The CMM intervention is depicted in detail culminating in preliminary conclusions and prospective suggestions for the expansion of the study.

B. LEADERSHIP AS A LEADERS-FOLLOWERS NEXUS

Several key terms and concepts converge in the Ramla Project: communication, culture, identity, conflict, acculturation and leadership (Peleg, 2010). They are all linked and jointly supply the theoretical backbone for this experiment. Communication is understood in an existential and substantive way rather than instrumental: it is the explaining factor which ties together human behavior. Communication is the opportunity and the path to construct reciprocal reality, shared and mutually accepted by people who decide to live together: a couple, family, tribesmen, a nation, a culture (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Pearce, 2007). Culture is a system which facilitates and promotes communal life and carries the potential of transforming divergence to coexistence. In other words, culture is “the tending of natural growth” (Williams, 1970). This chapter describes an endeavor to promote meaningful change in cross-cultural relationships between Jews and Arabs. Leadership is the decisive factor in the success or failure of change processes. This is valid to all types of human engagement including family, business, politics, education and spiritual (Ahmad, Franciss, & Zairi, 2007; Sommers & Nelson, 2001; Yukl, 2001). The common human default is status-quo; change can be daunting and unnerving. It takes people who deviate from conventionality to harbor breakthroughs in every field of human progress. Overcoming categorical thinking and vestiges of animosity and hostility should be exercised with prudence and caution by people who can motivate, animate and empower others. In short, reconciliation is best handled by visionary, passionate and responsible leaders. But what is the most effective kind of leadership to be employed in an intercultural conflict, in which two communities share the same sociopolitical space? What is the basis of authority from which leaders of cross-cultural communication spring?

If we go by elimination, Machiavellian realistic authority bases such as cunning, deceit and instilling fear (2004) are not suitable. Max Weber’s three sources of power—legal-rational, traditional-emotional, and charismatic (2009)—are equally inappropriate in a context of eliciting voluntary dedication to social and cultural interaction. Charisma, one of the most enigmatic qualities of leadership, is not tantamount to being visionary
Related Content

Relating Software Quality Models and Process Methods to User Value
[www.igi-global.com/article/relating-software-quality-models-and-process-methods-to-user-value/78900?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/relating-software-quality-models-and-process-methods-to-user-value/78900?camid=4v1a)

Contrastive Rhetorics and World Englishes
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/contrastive-rhetorics-world-englishes/62103?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/contrastive-rhetorics-world-englishes/62103?camid=4v1a)

Identification and Assessment of Mental Tasks Using Task Flowcharts
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/identification-and-assessment-of-mental-tasks-using-task-flowcharts/174867?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/identification-and-assessment-of-mental-tasks-using-task-flowcharts/174867?camid=4v1a)

A Survey and a Case-Study Regarding Social Media Security and Privacy on Greek Future IT Professionals
[www.igi-global.com/article/a-survey-and-a-case-study-regarding-social-media-security-and-privacy-on-greek-future-it-professionals/218195?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/a-survey-and-a-case-study-regarding-social-media-security-and-privacy-on-greek-future-it-professionals/218195?camid=4v1a)