

Tolerance Is Not Enough

Allophilia—a framework for effective intergroup leadership

by Todd L. Pittinsky

THE VERY THINGS a leader does to promote strong identification and cohesion within a group can exacerbate conflicts with other groups. This creates one of the most painful dilemmas of leadership: the tradeoff between ingroup and outgroup effects.

For some leaders, of course, this may not seem to be much of a dilemma at all. Shortsighted leaders or those whose positions are threatened will often accept the tradeoff quite readily—exploiting, or in some cases creating, intergroup hostilities to secure their hold on power. Thus, instead of establishing credibility, defining constituencies, and motivating followers through ingroup identities that claim, in effect, “we are X, and X is good,” such leaders will often resort to intergroup identities that say, “we are not Y, and Y is bad.”

For leaders who define their sphere of concern more broadly than their own ingroup, however, balancing the ingroup/outgroup tradeoffs is a constant struggle. Intergroup conflict—whether it’s turf battles between different organizational units, gridlock between rival political parties, or outright war between nations—is ever-present.

Prejudice, defined as negative regard for another identity group, often fuels these conflicts, or else it is used to add fuel to the fire of some other conflict. Efforts to promote tolerance, therefore, are mainstays of leaders’ attempts to resolve intergroup conflict.

Although such efforts are important, they are not enough. Tolerance, after all, is not the logical antithesis of prejudice, but the midpoint between negative feelings and positive feelings toward others. Something more robust is needed to pre-

vent tolerance from sliding back into prejudice. *Allophilia*, the term I’ve given to that something more, refers to a positive attitude toward another group. It represents the core of what I believe to be an emergent model of effective intergroup leadership.

The limitations of tolerance-promotion strategies

Tolerance promotion comprises four types of activity: prejudice reduction (trying to minimize or eliminate the prejudicial ideation), recategorizing members of a different identity group as part of one’s own ingroup, increasing the contact between groups, and encouraging followers to see members of an outgroup as individuals instead of as members of a group. Examining each in some detail reveals why they are not sufficient, alone or taken together, to prevent prejudice from promoting intergroup conflict.

Prejudice reduction. Attempts to diminish prejudicial thinking run up against the hard fact that much intergroup conflict is more than just a matter of perception. Many groups engage in competitive activities in which one group’s victory necessarily harms the other’s interests. Such “real” conflict leads to frustration, antagonism, and, ultimately, prejudice. What’s more, as the past three decades of social cognition research have demonstrated, categorical thinking is hard-wired into the human brain. Prejudices, in other words, are largely a byproduct of the way our minds naturally organize information—efforts to reduce categorical or prejudicial thinking can go only so far.

Recategorization. When one group expands its self-understanding to include people who were formerly seen

as an outgroup, negative attitudes toward that outgroup tend to lose their intensity. Such recategorization can occur through the emphasis of similarity or the de-emphasis of differences between the groups. It can also be achieved by creating superordinate identities—overarching categories such as national identity in a nation comprising distinct ethnic populations—or superordinate goals, for whose achievement the groups are willing to hold themselves mutually accountable.

The problem here is that some differences—real or imagined—between social identity groups can be exploited to subvert the most ardent efforts at recategorization. This was the story behind the genocide in Rwanda: rival leaders were able to undo the superordinate national identity—600 years of intermarriage and shared commerce, language, and culture between Tutsis and Hutus—by emphasizing and even exaggerating differences in the two groups’ physical features. Differences between social identity groups can also erode superordinate goals, which are often a response to a threat from another outside group. For example, the positive attitudes that resulted from the alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II failed to outlast the common threat that created them.

Intergroup contact. The work of sociologist Gordon Allport suggests that contact between groups can reduce intergroup prejudice when the right conditions exist: when the groups have equal status, share common goals, and work cooperatively, and when their work has the support of authority (for example, law or custom). Creating these specific conditions, however, is often beyond a leader’s

power; indeed, when conflict already exists between groups, it may be impossible to arrange any contact between them at all. Furthermore, research has shown that intergroup contact under suboptimal conditions can actually increase prejudice.

Individuation. Instead of trying to instill positive attitudes toward an outgroup, wouldn’t it be easier to encourage followers to view outgroup members as individuals? The chief limitation of this approach is, once again, the strong human propensity for categorical thinking. Then, too, many important political and policy decisions are made about groups, not individuals. For example, immigration policies represent, to some extent, people’s attitudes toward outgroups. If leaders promote no attitudes about outgroups, then followers are most likely to maintain their negative or neutral attitudes, with deleterious effects on policy.

Moving beyond tolerance to allophilia

Tolerance-promotion strategies seek to make the “other” vanish into “us.” But closer examination reveals this to be an elusive hope. Some differences between people simply cannot be ignored or eliminated, and the neutral stance of tolerance is not sufficient to keep these differences from festering—leading to prejudice, open conflict, and sometimes violence. Just as current thinking about diversity emphasizes the celebration of differences, intergroup leadership, if it hopes to reduce conflict, must include efforts to help one’s followers develop positive attitudes toward outgroups.

The term I’ve coined for this positive regard for members of outgroups, *allophilia*, derives from the Greek words meaning “liking or love of the other.” *Allophilia* can apply to a wide range of leadership: political, religious, organizational, even athletic. But it may not be manifested very frequently, which may be an indication that it is related to transformational leadership. For example, when Nelson Mandela was president of South Africa, he attended the

1995 Rugby World Cup finals, cheering for his country’s national team—previously regarded as a powerful symbol of “white” nationalism—and even wearing a team jersey with the captain’s number on it. He found within himself a means of embracing aspects of the Afrikaans language and culture—and of encouraging others to do likewise—despite all the injustice and violence that culture had visited upon him and his people. This symbolic act went beyond the mere promotion of tolerance. Although it is risky to make inferences about leaders’ motives from a distance, Mandela seems to have understood the importance of a posi-

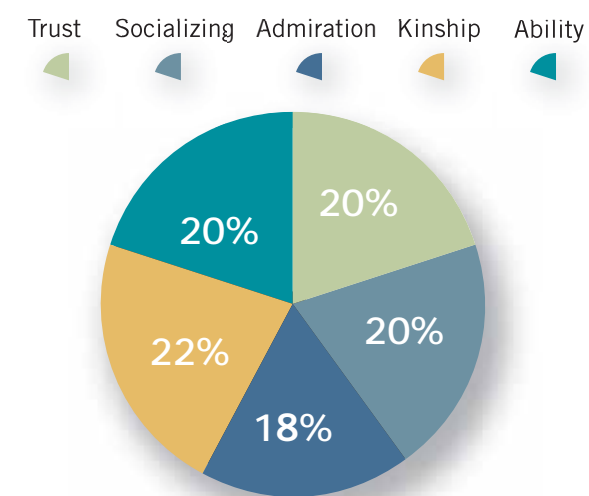
this preliminary work suggests that *allophilia*’s components include believing that members of the other group are dependable and moral (trust), interacting with members of the other group (socializing), having a high opinion of them (admiration), feeling connected and close to members of the other group (kinship), and, finally, believing that members of the other group are intelligent and wise (ability). Using these factors, we have developed a scale for measuring *allophilia* in individuals. Such a self-assessment tool could prove invaluable for diversity training programs, which are often hamstrung by participants’ view of themselves as “not being part of the prejudice problem” simply because they don’t hate members of a certain outgroup. More broadly, it could help leaders in all fields determine whether their efforts to quell intergroup conflict are going far enough.

Providing strong ingroup leadership without bolstering negative attitudes toward outgroup members is one of the salient challenges of contemporary leadership. By helping leaders see how their actions are—or are not—accomplishing both objectives simultaneously, the concept of *allophilia* can help leaders choose conflict-reducing interventions that will have longer-lasting effects.

For leaders, the work is arduous, ongoing, and risky. Not only does the promotion of *allophilia* mean eschewing easy tactics for consolidating power that unscrupulous leaders have learned to employ very effectively, it also calls for the courage to push people beyond their natural predisposition toward prejudice. It is, in short, the domain of the loftiest of leadership ambitions. ♦

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The Five Components of Allophilia



tive attitude toward the “other” in bringing about his vision of a multiethnic South Africa.

Martin Luther King Jr. was explicit about the importance of moving beyond mere tolerance promotion toward the creation of positive intergroup attitudes. Although he originally believed that love was limited to the sphere of individual relationships, he later concluded that it could be a “potent instrument for social and collective transformation.”

Research that my colleague Seth Rosenthal and I are conducting is helping create a more nuanced and empirical picture of what *allophilia* comprises. Specifically,