

## Intergroup Leadership

### **Original Publication by Todd L. Pittinsky and Stefanie Simon**

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### Synopsis by **Ben Forster** '11

Although leadership studies often examines the relationship of leaders and followers, Todd Pittinsky and Stefanie Simon from the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard University, examine leadership from a different perspective: intergroup leadership. The study of intergroup leadership addresses the key question of how leaders mobilize and direct positive intergroup relationships despite internal or external ideological, cultural, or political divides. This field of research pertains especially to leaders in business or government who often find themselves struggling to address subgroup differences amongst followers and constituents, or to reach out to other political groups or businesses of a different ideological, cultural or political background. According to Pittinsky and Simon, the complications of intergroup leadership are often compounded by the fact that in many contemporary leadership models leaders derive authority due to the fact that they are “prototypical of the group”.

In this study, Pittinsky and Simon offer five approaches to encourage positive intergroup relations as well as possible directions for future research. According to the authors, one such way of creating positive intergroup relations is through increased exposure of members of the ingroup to those of the outgroup. Intergroup contact is also more readily accepted when it is condoned by group leaders. Furthermore, positive intergroup contact is often the result of leaders establishing shared goals between the ingroup and the outgroup. The authors also acknowledge, however, that positive intergroup contact can be hindered by competition for scarce resources. This, according to the authors, suggests another reason why shared goals are important. Thirdly, the establishments of superordinate identities (e.g., the European Union) that encompass both ingroup and outgroup are essential in developing positive intergroup relations. Despite this potential, establishing superordinate identities can also breed conflict when subgroups feel that their subgroup identities might be threatened. To mitigate potential conflict, the authors argue that leaders should actively seek to value and support both subgroup and superordinate identities. However, leaders need to be wary of the fact that their membership to a particular subgroup can often divide the superordinate group along subgroup lines. As noted in the article, particularly in international politics, subgroup identities often overshadow superordinate ones, though this effect can be mitigated by shared goals, and particularly by shared threats. Finally, the authors examine the Two-Dimensional Model of Intergroup Attitudes (TDMIA), which asserts that positive and negative intergroup attitudes are not mirror opposites of each other, but are rather two distinct dimensions of intergroup attitudes. This essentially implies that leader promotion of less negative intergroup attitudes is not the same as promoting positive intergroup relations, and that positive relations are dependent upon positive attitudes, not less negative ones. The model allows that establishing positive relations between groups may be a beneficial alternative to establishing superordinate identities where they are either too costly or unfeasible.

The authors then propose directions for future research. In the field of intergroup leadership, the cultural traits and skills of the leader are undoubtedly an important factor in promoting positive intergroup relations. The often intertwining complexities of subgroup and superordinate group identities, stresses the need for leaders to express the cultures of both superordinate and subgroups. Also, the interpersonal skills of leaders are highly influential, and would warrant further research. Despite the potentially positive role a leader can play in promoting intergroup relations, leaders nonetheless have the potential, in the pursuit of common intergroup goals, to use immoral means to achieve positive goals. Further examination of this phenomenon would greatly benefit intergroup leadership studies. Additionally, the authors acknowledge that further study of multigroup models, comparable to multiethnic states or governments would be beneficial as well. Although culturally similar subgroups can often work well together, in many instances addressing similarities between groups can often create negative relations between groups. As such, further research would need to identify other operant mechanisms that promote intergroup cohesion. Finally, the authors also suggest a further look at the role of intergroup emotions, as well as the procedural fairness of leaders in promoting positive intergroup relations.