

BRIDGE-BUILDING LEADERSHIP IN A POLARIZING WORLD

CALL FOR PAPERS

LEUVEN
8-9 OCT 2021

Bridge-building leadership around a shared vision or goal is increasingly challenged in today's polarizing world. Increasing pluralism and diversity in our societies – at macro, meso and micro levels – results in fragmentation of shared hope towards a common future. Without a common vision, and with increasing risks of social and digital bubbles, emotions of fear and suspicion are easily manipulated to create local identities that create strong boundaries in an effort to protect one's own perceived privilege and prosperity against invasions and abuses of 'the other.'

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On the other hand, people have a vital need to belong to specific communities, networks and organizations, since human beings are relational. In a global village, people need local and networked identities to belong and to flourish. Yet, hope for social justice and environmental sustainability necessitates building bridges among various constituencies, communities and identities in the form of inclusive leadership, where 'the other' becomes partner and collaborator, rather than stranger and enemy.

Leaders engage in various levels of identity construction. Hence, leaders in various sectors of society have a responsibility to nurture healthy local identities on the one hand, while on the other to build bridges to other communities in a way that genuinely honors and respects various identities with their distinct boundaries and values. Sometimes leaders are able to construct new encompassing identities that draw together values and actions of various constituencies to build a common hope and vision for social justice and sustainability.

In a polarizing society, a leadership focus on bridge-building is direly needed. The focus for this conference is the need for bridge-building in a society with increasing levels of division and polarization among different segments of the population that threaten not only the political system of negotiation and compromise, but even the very social fabric that sustains the workings of our societies. Bridge-building leadership takes many forms. Sometimes, it refers to political leadership with visions of radical democracy, aiming at equality and cooperation across all sorts of social distinctions. It may also refer to models of distributed or shared leadership that aim to include others in leading and decision-making. In addition, it may point to HR hiring policies to include people with disabilities, various ethnic backgrounds, or those from 'other' religious or sexual orientations. Overall, bridge-building leadership aims to foster cooperation across social boundaries. Hence, this

conference aims to contribute to understanding the dynamics of various styles of bridge-building leadership, as well as to offer insight into the dynamics of identity construction as it promotes or overcomes the observed polarizing tendencies.

At ILSE, we recognize the role of particular faith narratives in inspiring bridge-building leadership for new forms of hope. Specifically, we consider the narrative of Jesus Christ as significant, but we strongly encourage scholars from other religious perspectives to reflect on their own faith narratives in this context. How can religious figures and traditions inspire us with a vision of the common good that builds bridges towards 'the other' in terms of shared life and human flourishing?

Interdisciplinary Approach

This conference promotes interdisciplinary approaches to these issues. Contributions from leadership studies, (social) psychology, sociology, philosophy, religious studies and theology, among others, are welcome. These contributions may be empirical or theoretical in method, and may have an academic or a practitioner focus.

The following questions suggest more specific areas of contribution that would fit the above description and goals of the conference.

- How can leaders enable their constituencies to renew their hope and vision for a shared future in this world?
- How can leaders build trust, not only within their own constituency or community, but towards other constituencies and communities?
- How can leaders enable followers to function as learning community, to find new pathways towards social justice and sustainability?

- What are the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that are part of the identity construction in which all leaders engage, at least to some extent? How can leaders influence these mechanisms?
- How can particular moral and religious sources enable people to build bridges to 'others' outside their own identity bubbles, while supporting the relevance and value of their own identity?
- What particular leadership processes would defuse rather than promote polarization?
- What should new encompassing identities look like and how should they be build?
- How can a critical vision of current leadership theories, such as authentic leadership, distributed leadership (and others), address the polarizing forces in our societies?
- Building on an ethics of responsibility, how do we shape our actions as response-able to the many 'others' with whom we live?

Bridge-building leadership takes place in many different contexts. Hence, this conference welcomes contributions from such fields as public leadership, politics and government, religion, education and health, or business.

The Focus and Research of ILSE

The Institute for Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE) is a research institute connected to the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium) The institute aims at developing a Christian perspective on aspects of leadership and social ethics, specifically as they contribute to a just and sustainable society. For more information, see: etf-ilse.org.

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A New Way in Gods Mission

This conference is embedded in ILSE's ongoing research, in particular in the project "A New Way in Gods Mission." This project is carried out by Prof. Dr. Jack Barentsen and Drs. Oeds Blok who research how church leaders can inspire their communities towards a new vision for social engagement and religious presence.

See a recent interview with the project leaders for more information about this project: etf-ilse.org/news-agenda.

Abstracts and Deadline

Scholars are invited to submit an abstract for a paper. Abstracts should be maximum 500 words and fall within the theme of the conference as described above. Each abstract will be assessed by blind review. Abstracts are to be submitted by email to Cees Tulp, at cees.tulp@etf.edu.

Please attach two separate Word documents to your email:

- **Document 1:** Your paper proposal, include key bibliographic sources consulted (max. 5). In this document, all references identifying you as author should be removed.
- **Document 2:** Your last name, first name, email address, institutional address, the title of your abstract, as well as a short CV (maximum 1 page).

Deadline: **June 14, 2021**.

You can expect to receive a response by **June 28, 2021** at the latest.

Date & Location

The conference will be held on **October 8-9, 2021**, at the Leuven Center of Christian Studies, part of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit.

The address is: Sint-Jansbergsesteenweg 95, 3001 Leuven, Belgium. Registration information will be made available on the website: etf-ilse.org.

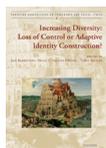
Publication

A volume of our academic peer-reviewed series Christian Perspectives on Leadership and Social Ethics (Peeters Publications) will be dedicated for the publication of selected papers. The papers will be submitted to a double-blind peer-review process.

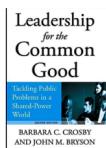
Some Literature for Initial Orientation



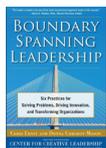
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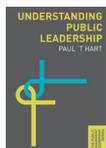
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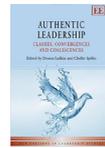
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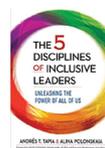
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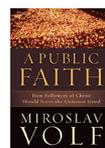
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