

Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR CULTURALLY INFORMED LEADERSHIP : MOVING TOWARD THE FUTURE



Kathy L. Guthrie  
Darren E. Pierre

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# **Considerations for Culturally Informed Leadership**

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# Contemporary Perspectives on Leadership Learning

Series Editor  
Kathy L. Guthrie

This series is dedicated to contemporary perspectives on leadership learning, which includes leadership teaching, education, development, and scholarship. It is intended to appeal to academic researchers, leadership scholars, leadership educators, and university instructors looking for thought-provoking reference material for classroom use. The purpose of the series is to highlight foundational knowledge and emerging innovations in scholarship on curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology of teaching and learning in leadership. Each book showcases a different topic critical to the research and practice of leadership teaching and learning. With this approach, the mission of the series is to examine the complexities of leadership learning from a variety of perspectives to give the audience access to breadth and depth of scholarship in this area, as well as provide contemporary reference material and textbooks for leadership learning in the classroom.

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# **Considerations for Culturally Informed Leadership**

**Moving Toward the Future**

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**Kathy L. Guthrie**

*Florida State University, USA*

*And*

**Darren E. Pierre**

*University of Maryland-College Park, USA*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
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# CONTENTS

1	Situating Self in Culturally Informed Leadership Learning .....	1
2	Understanding Self in Various Cultural Contexts.....	13
3	Self as Learner .....	25
4	Self as Engager .....	35
5	Self as Connector .....	45
6	Embracing the Journey.....	57
	About the Authors .....	67
	References.....	69

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## CHAPTER 1

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# SITUATING SELF IN CULTURALLY INFORMED LEADERSHIP LEARNING

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The world is a big place. The United Nations (2022) estimated that by 2058 there will be approximately 10 billion people in the world. 10 billion people. Wow, just that number is hard to conceptualize. When you think about those billions of people, there are countless diverse ways of living, communities, and cultures. The diversity of our world continues to expand with multi-ethnicities, ways to worship, abilities, lived experiences, and so on. With the diversity of the world's population, not only learning about different cultures and ways of being are important, but so is understanding how to engage in leadership, connect with others, and create positive change. The focus of this book is to explore the process of leadership in various cultural contexts, a global context. More specifically, the focus of this book is YOU. Not the authors, but YOU and how you are situated in the multi-faceted, multicultural world around you. We are situating this book with self by exploring how to understand ourselves (Chapter 2), how we learn and more specifically learn leadership (Chapter 3), how we engage in diverse cultures around the world (Chapter 4) and how we connect culture and ideas to the leadership process as both a leader and a follower (Chapter 5). Below you see the progression of culturally informed leadership learning (Figure 1.1), which is the journey you are about to embark on.

It is important to note we believe that anyone can be a leader and that you do not need a title or hold a specific position. We also believe leadership is a process that includes leaders and followers engaging together in



**Figure 1.1** Progression of culturally informed leadership learning.

a specific context (more on that later). With those things in mind, we are excited to engage on this journey of leadership learning and self-exploration with you.

### **PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK**

We hope you picked up this book because you are interested in leadership and how the process of leadership can and should be considered in global contexts. We hope you are excited to reflect on yourself and how you engage in various cultures, as well as excited to learn more about leadership and moving your leadership learning journey forward. This book is about just that. As mentioned above, we situate the entire book in self, meaning each person reading this book has the opportunity to reflect on themselves and deeply think about themselves as a learner, engager, and connector in various cultural contexts. This book is relatively short and hopefully you will observe how the material is shared in multiple ways and asks you to pause and think about yourself, leadership, and engaging in global contexts in new ways.

What signifies the difference between “leadership” and “global leadership” is the emphasis on the need to be responsive to cultural differences and relationship complexities (Mendenhall et al., 2018). We understand and acknowledge the term global leadership has often been the traditional language around leading in various cultural contexts. However, after much reflection and conversations with colleagues and friends around the world, we decided that global leadership might not be the best terminology for what we want this book to be. For some that term may mean that you strive to lead the world in a specific area, which may be true for some, but not what we are intending for this book. We also debated about intercultural leadership but felt that was not quite right because it may represent various cultures within a Western context, as the word intercultural is so often used in the United States. We also considered culturally influenced but felt the word influence signaled a passive verb then active. However, those conversations led us to culturally informed leadership, which nailed what this book is about. Learning, engaging, and connecting with and in various cultural contexts are critical to **culturally informed leadership**. Culture refers to customs and social beliefs that create the norms of a specific nation, people, or larger social group. Informing yourself about various cultures other than yours, perhaps by watching the news, immersing yourself with others from

a culture different than yours, learning about the history and significant traditions of a culture are all aspects of informing yourself about contexts.

Hopefully, after reading this book you will not only reflect on your thoughts, behaviors, and engagement with others more deeply, but also lean into exploring how your leadership learning journey can drastically develop in different cultural contexts by informing yourself. The first chapter will discuss the definition of leadership as well as provide tips on how to fully use this book. Chapter 2 will explore the process of better understanding self. The third chapter will discuss how we are all learners and more specifically how we need to situate ourselves in various cultural contexts as learners and how that influences our leadership learning journeys. Chapter 4 will explore how we can and need to focus on engaging in cultural contexts to enhance our leadership development. Chapter 5 will focus on how being a connector of ideas, people, and context is critical to leadership learning. Finally, in the last chapter, we will bring it all together.

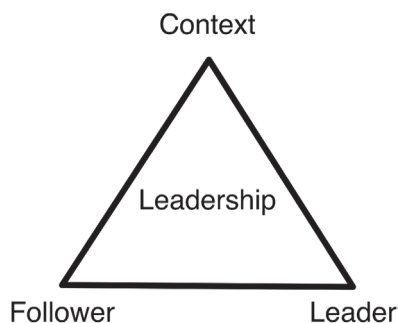
## WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Let's first discuss leadership as a broad concept. You see the word leadership everywhere. Think about all the places you see the word leadership and how people talk about it. Even doing a quick Google search of the word "leadership" you will see it being used as a noun, verb, and adjective. Over four billion results come up when you do a search for the "definition of leadership." This can be overwhelming—four billion (eek)! To make sure we are all on the same page about this complex concept of leadership, we want to dig more into what leadership means.

Leader and leadership are often confused and misused. Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) stated it clearly, "Confusion frequently results in carelessly interchanging the language of the person (leader) and the process (leadership). When used interchangeably, leadership becomes the work of one versus all" (p. 5). We believe that **leadership is socially constructed**, which means this multifaceted phenomenon is defined and practiced differently depending on one's lived experiences (Billsberry, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2021). We believe it is important to clarify the language of leadership so that learning about and practicing it can be easier.

Another way to think about the process of leadership is in a visual of a triangle (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). In this triangle (see [Figure 1.2](#)), the process of leadership is at the center. Leader, follower, and context are located at each of the points around the triangle.

To engage in the process of leadership, you need the three aspects of leader, follower, and context. Context can be the situation, setting, or environment in which leadership unfolds. The origin of the word context is Latin meaning "weaving together" (Harper, 2024). Think of context as the



**Figure 1.2** Leadership triangle. Reprinted with permission from Devies, B., and Guthrie, K. L. Copyright 2023.

physical space, the actions of everyone involved, including the complexities and nuances of how others engage with each other and the physical space. In other words, it is being able to see the big picture of what is going on. Although most leadership theories do not take context into account during the leadership process, we are centering this book on how to lead in various cultural contexts. We cannot overstate the importance of context here. Think of it this way: how you lead in your student organization or with friends likely looks different than how you lead at work which probably looks different than how you lead in your family. You are still the same person, but how you lead and follow likely shifts depending on the context. It is important to be congruent with your personal values, but also adaptable depending on the situation you are in. This is especially true for the various cultural contexts you may encounter.

**Implicit leadership theory** (Lord & Maher, 1991) is another concept important to keep in mind when exploring leadership, especially in various cultural contexts. This theory suggests people have preconceived ideas and mental models about what is considered effective leadership. However, this definition of effectiveness varies depending on the person. This is like the idea of social construction that we previously mentioned because these mental models are formed through personal experiences and influences of the culture one grows up in. Implicit leadership theories especially vary greatly across different cultures.

## **BELIEFS ABOUT LEADERSHIP IN VARIOUS CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Now that you understand that leadership is a process that includes leader, follower, and context, we want to share some additional foundational beliefs regarding the leadership process in various cultural contexts. You may or

may not agree with all these points, but it is important to know where we are coming from as authors. These beliefs include:

- **Anyone Can be a Leader.** Yes, anyone can engage in the process of leadership as a leader. Our first exposure to leaders is to those in positions of power, whether that is a parent, older sibling, teacher, or coach. However, leaders do not need to have a formal position of authority to work with others to collectively reach a goal. That can be anyone from any cultural context!
- **Leadership is Learned.** An outdated belief about leadership is that leaders are born, not made. This was a historic understanding of leadership, when people thought that the characteristics a person held determined if they were a leader or not. However, most skills and competencies needed for leadership can be learned. When focusing on leading in various cultural contexts, leadership is not what only needs to be learned, but also learning about different cultures. Recognizing cultural differences and learning to navigate various countries with diverse cultures within them is important. We will discuss more about being a learner in Chapter 3.
- **Being Open to Discomfort.** Striving to develop as a leader in various cultural contexts requires being open to learn, listen, and understand others' perspectives (Nirenberg, 2002). Discomfort will certainly arise as you interact with people from different cultures and have new experiences. It is important to remember that a global mindset does not come naturally for most (Nirenberg, 2002) because it is constantly challenging your way of knowing and being with new ways.
- **Leadership is Relational.** Relationships are important. Period. In the process of leadership, especially in various cultural contexts, relationships are important. Leaders and followers need to foster and cultivate genuine, authentic, and meaningful relationships when navigating cultural contexts. Some cultures lead from a collective framework and place community ideals at the heart of their leadership engagement. Focusing genuine relationships can lead to effective change while honoring community ideals in many cultural contexts.
- **Best Leaders are Also Followers.** As discussed, the process of leadership requires both leaders and followers in a specific context. The interactions of leaders and followers occur between them and are fluid in nature. In some contexts, you may be serving as a leader one minute and the next as a follower. The best leaders know when to follow and when to lead.
- **Effective Leadership Requires Management Skills.** Leadership and management are two concepts intricately connected. Oftentimes

leadership and management are discussed as opposite concepts; however, they are connected. Mastery of both sets of skills and understanding when to use what is essential in becoming a great leader and follower. When being a culturally informed leader, connecting how to use both leadership and management skills in various cultural contexts are essential for success.

### LEADING IN VARIOUS CULTURAL CONTEXTS

This book focuses on learning leadership in various cultural contexts. As we mentioned, it is focused on self, that means you. There are several concepts, skills, and values that enhance one's leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy, especially in various cultural contexts. To learn, engage, and be a change agent in the world, we need to explore these different skills and how we can work to enhance our own knowledge and practice of them. When we practice leadership, we are building our identity as global leader, enhancing our capacity with skill development, and increasing our efficacy to lead in various cultural contexts.

We visualize the concepts, skills, and values we are discussing as a puzzle. As you see in the visual below (Figure 1.3), this global puzzle is something



**Figure 1.3** Culturally informed puzzle.

that takes time to understand and put together. In fact, it is a puzzle that you will continue to work on for your entire life. This puzzle is your leadership learning journey.

## LEADERSHIP IDENTITY, CAPACITY, AND EFFICACY DEVELOPMENT

Since this book is based in YOUR development as a learner, engager, and connector, focusing on leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy development is critical. Identity, capacity, and efficacy are pathways to learning leadership. As you can see in the figure below, identity, capacity, and efficacy are the pathways to learning leadership. Active exchange between the individual and the leadership process is essential to leadership development (see [Figure 1.4](#)). These three aspects of leadership development are interconnected, as you will see throughout this book.

Just like leadership, identity is socially constructed (Jones & Abes, 2013). Your identity is constantly evolving and has multiple dimensions at any time. When looking at your whole self, exploring these multiple dimensions are best appreciated when looking at it in relation to each other. More on this later. Another important aspect of leadership learning is capacity. This is the knowledge, skills, and talents that contribute to the overall ability to engage in leadership (Dugan, 2017). Efficacy is believing in your overall ability to be successful in leadership (Beatty & Guthrie, 2021). We will touch on identity, capacity, and efficacy throughout this book to support your leadership learning in various cultural contexts.

## USING THIS BOOK

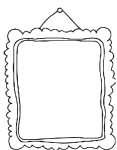
This book may have words that you are unsure what they mean. If you see a bolded word (which you should have already seen a few), these are key terms we think are important for your leadership learning journey.



**Figure 1.4** Pathways to leadership learning. Adapted from Beatty & Guthrie (2021).

Some may have formal definitions we share, and some may need more exploration. We think these terms are a good start in building a strong foundation of engaging in culturally informed leadership. Also, there are images throughout the book that will encourage you to pause and reflect on content, and hopefully engage you in ways that will enhance your leadership learning. Although most of these questions and activities are at the end of each chapter, there will be moments of pause throughout each chapter as well. Brief descriptions of these ways for you to engage with the content are below, as well as questions and activities for you to start.

In this chapter, we have discussed the puzzle pieces of leadership, leader, follower, and context. In Chapter 2, we discuss understanding self through experiencing cultural shock (Ferraro & Broidy, 2017), emotionally intelligent leadership (Shankman et al., 2015), and interrelated aspects of culture (Ferro, 2009). Throughout several chapters, we will discuss the culturally relevant leadership learning model (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016) specifically leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy development. Self as a learner is the focus of Chapter 3 in which topics include unconscious bias (Stanford, 2022) and the leadership learning framework (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). In Chapter 4, we discuss self as an engager where cultural competencies will be highlighted. Contributing to positive change is discussed in Chapter 5. Finally in Chapter 6, we discuss how being a culturally informed leader is about thriving and being in a constant state of growth.



**Chapter Framing.** In each remaining chapter, you will see this image of a picture frame. This icon will be seen at the beginning of the chapter, as it will be used to frame the content of the chapter. This will help you engage in the learning by giving you thoughts and perhaps offer questions to consider as you work your way through the material.



**Stop! Think About It!** This image of a stop sign is to alert you to critical moments throughout the chapter. These moments are for you to pause and think about the information we are providing. At these points we might ask you to reflect on the content meaning or ask you to apply what we are discussing to your own experiences.



### REFLECT ON YOUR OWN

You will be provided questions in this section to reflect on the chapter content. Take some time, by yourself, to consider these questions and how you can apply the concepts discussed in your own life.