

**MALAK OUSSIDHOUM**

m.oussidhoum@gmail.com

**MALAK OUSSIDHOUM LEADERSHIP ADVISING, MOROCCO**

## **BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF INCLUSION THROUGH SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY**

### **ABSTRACT**

Europe has always been, intrinsically, a space which expressed, showcased and witnessed identity as an issue away from its quest as a culture, a citizenship or a nationality. As a matter of fact Identity can be defined as having an awareness, a fulfillment and a leadership of the Self within and beyond one's diversity and affiliations; Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) in their relevance can be complemented with learning one's identity through these terms to construct more welcoming, inclusive and peaceful societies. Growing generations need to learn and acquire self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-management, a combined set of competencies leading to a process of self-leadership literacy. An expanded self-leadership methodology is based on having a developed sense of who we are and where we are going, combined with a developed ownership on influencing our communication, emotions and behaviors. A better understanding of one's mechanism of influence empowers postures of mediation, conflict resolution and dialogue, to the ultimate impact of generating positive narratives. Self-leadership theory has been widely used in management and has brought about tangible results with a direct impact on cohesion and organizational inclusion. Social innovation is also a field domain that started to use components of self-leadership as bringing about inclusive and added-value oriented citizenship awareness. This paper draws on concrete examples taken from the corporate world and a non-profit social innovation platform having applied self-leadership as part of their action-training programs, and last from a personal experience with the UNAOC Fellowship program, to build on the necessity to further explore and investigate self-leadership literacy as a complementary discipline to the UNESCO MIL core competencies that mark the framework of the educational systems promoting MIL as a platform for Intercultural Dialogue.

### **KEYWORDS**

Identity; inclusion; selfleadership literacy; dialogue

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of Identity is changing as many paradigms of social sciences are being reviewed to try to understand and model the evolution that characterizes current and future societies. In today's mixed society, having an identity and claiming a strong identity is becoming a growing need, to the extent of jeopardizing the benefits and richness of diversity; people are looking for strong identities, inside and outside of diversity. The quest for a strong identity is not absolutely new in human kind history and the varied social theories that have been nourishing the topic of Identity have proposed many explanations to it. In this sense this paper will explore and cross social and systemic theories of Identity, in its monocultural and multicultural dimensions, to build the base towards a new layer of personal identity; this notion being at the core of self-leadership literacy. The notion of self-leadership literacy will be progressively defined and constructed starting from the very first components of the concept of self-leadership, followed by a concrete look at the power of its impact as applied in three different contexts, with three different purposes, but with common results in terms of inclusion and dialogue. The detailed unfolding of the notion along with the examples and cases displayed are intended to evince the pertinence of further exploring and investigating its application as a Media and Information Literacy core competency, to be included in the Unesco's MIL curriculum in order to affirm its role in contributing to foster information literate societies and intercultural dialogue.

## THE QUEST OF IDENTITY

### PERSONAL IDENTITY

Back in the 50's, Clare W. Graves, an American psychologist and professor from New York University, developed an epistemological model on human psychology under the theory of values with the aim to reconcile different approaches on human nature and its psychological maturity. His theory defined an individual's psycho-social *reality* as consisting of the interaction of two main elements: life conditions and the mental/thought capacities to face up those conditions. According to him, this reality is what creates a system of values and visions of the world: every person is influenced by these two elements to define their own perception of the world, which in its turn impacts the person's system of identity. His article "Levels of existence: an open system theory of values" (1970) has led to further

research and resulted into what is commonly known as the Spiral Dynamics Theory (Beck & Cowan, 1996). This theory establishes a cyclical model under which human evolution has gone from Stone Age, to nowadays. In this model, also called the “stages of human development”, it is remarkable to see that human beings have been naturally and subsequently been going through “individual” and “collective” phases or ways of living; thus, highlighting the natural necessity of people to distinguish themselves and affirm a strong identity when the group takes too much significance, in what is called, in the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a strong necessity of self-categorization inside and outside of the group. According to the social identity approach, a person’s social identity is seen as the outcome of three processes: social categorization, social comparison and social identification; these three processes inherently operating in each human being result in the process of defining a personal identity. The knowledge acquired by implicitly operating them can be referred as the self-knowledge that each person acquires and associates with their own unique attributes. However, this idea involves a meaningful question to be asked, that is: to which extent do people acquire and own knowledge related to their unique attributes? Furthermore, are people aware that they are naturally unique and distinct, this distinction being the result of the *unique combination* that comes out of their affiliations, talent, intellectual property, vision of the world and contribution? The combination of these elements has empirically proven to constitute an additional layer to the concept of personal identity as an extension of the process of self-categorization, that is: building a personal identity based on criteria that are relevant to an individual’s added value and contribution. At this stage the processes of social identification and social comparison start diluting as the person gains confidence and ownership of the personal identity defined in terms of an in-group and out-group contribution. Crossing Grave’s theory of human development together with Social Identity theory with the aim to understand what makes *social change*<sup>1</sup> or *social mobility*, shows that throughout human evolution one of the essential drives of claiming a strong and distinct identity was the quest of exploring and taking advantage of the personal human resources and potential; there was and there still is *an unconscious drive for self-valorization*. Thus, the process of social identification with the group is challenged if self-categorization includes a strong process of self-valorization. This conception could be showcased through an example around identity threats,

---

<sup>1</sup> Social change, in sociology is the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organizations, or value systems.

as named by the Social Identity Theory. The notion of threat in itself arises from the existence of the group and the identification that comes with it; if self-valorization in the terms of individual distinctiveness acts as a primary categorization criterion, on top of the group affiliation, then the threat has a diminished instance and significance. This quote from Professor Naomi Ellemers' article in *Encyclopedia Britannica* inspires the example:

group-status threat occurs when the perceived competence of the group is devalued. Group members may also experience various forms of social identity threats, one of which takes place when the moral behavior of their group is called into question [...]. In addition, categorization threat occurs when individuals are treated as group members at times when they would prefer not to be, as when a woman who is a lawyer is addressed in court on the basis of her gender instead of her profession. Acceptance threat occurs when individuals fail to gain acceptance and inclusion in the groups of which they consider themselves members, such as when a manager of Asian descent is not invited to join a local Asian business club. To cope with identity threat, group members will respond differently depending on the degree to which they identify with the group.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to read over this analysis through self-valorization lenses: if the woman was to present, affirm and assert her personal identity based on her specific self-valorized contribution as a lawyer, people would cognitively associate her with those particular topics, attributes or competences, rather than focusing on the gender specificity; her in-group could be a professional focus group rather than a diversity or gender focus group. On the other hand, the Asian who considers himself implicitly welcomed and included into the Asian Business Club because of his ethnical affiliation, would have had a different experience if he had presented himself through a personal identity that would focus on his particular contribution as a person, be it in business or any other topic that would represent a uniqueness, an added value or a contribution. Having that valorized look and perception about himself puts him in a situation to either be called to join the Club because of his contribution, on top of his Asian affiliation, or either himself not being interested joining that Club; in this case the identity threat is not only reversed but also the emotions that could happen behind the threat (i.e. the emotion of feeling excluded and rejected) are null.

---

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory>

## MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES

Dealing with the topic of Identity cannot be complete without covering the subject of multicultural identities. It is an increasing trend, disseminating as globalism is occurring and Europe is a large example of it. It is interesting to look at this topic in particular where not only individuals have progressively multiple identities, but in addition to that, they seem to be asserting different identities in different circumstances and moments in their lives, according to the context and the people they are interacting with. This observation is significantly in line with the agility and resilience required in a world of constant and disruptive change; what was before conceived as intercultural adaptability and sensitivity will soon become a question of resilience and agility as multiculturalism is becoming an *implicit must* that triggers changes in all areas of life, resulting in identities that are in a permanent flux: “we are constantly adding new layers to identity and often without giving up our own roots” (Di Mauro & Gehrke, 2018, p. 9). This profound and thorough observation undoubtedly highlights the notion of increased diversity as a source of strength. However, the same question arises here about how to differentiate and identify the Self in the midst of this diversity, and how to make the most of this strength to induce a sense of inclusion rather than falling into the course of differentiation as extremely leading to segregation? To be able to assimilate and display agility in terms of identity requires having a level of awareness and consciousness beyond self-valorization. It is a level where the individual learns and knows how to articulate the different components of the own diversity and identity to build the necessary bridges and commonalities with counterparts without giving up on personal differentiation. The ability to process this mental articulation and communication requires first self-awareness, second and not the least, self-fulfillment in the knowledge acquired and third, to lead the Self on the basis of that knowledge and awareness. Multicultural identities are no longer a static concept, but rather, a dynamic one that will certainly be in the future associated with the notion of *Agile Identities*. Till then, the main idea that is worth remembering is the *relevance* that comes out of the construction of one’s identity, be it multicultural or monocultural, and for that relevance to emerge it becomes visible and meaningful to define Identity in terms of *who we are* through a self-valorization process that defines our contribution to a collective dimension.

## SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY

### UNDERSTANDING SELF-LEADERSHIP

The self-leadership concept was first introduced in 1983 in a practitioner-oriented book by Charles Manz, as an expansion of the already existing concept of self-management. From there the concept gained academic interest and seminal work on self-leadership led to its basic theoretical foundations, and was then defined as: “a process through which individuals control their own behavior, influencing and leading themselves through the use of specific sets of behavioral and cognitive strategies” (Houghton & Neck, 2006, p. 270). In the early 1990’s self-leadership started to be closely linked to the concept of psychological empowerment and how to lead others to lead themselves. Applications of the concept to the management field started at that same period of time encouraging a decade of publications with the objective of expanding the field of implementation, and at the same time, trying to simplify its psychological and cognitive foundations to progressively render it more accessible as a self-development tool with impacts at both personal and professional levels. A current and expanded self-leadership definition is: “having a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions and behaviors on the way to getting there” (Bryant & Kazan, 2012).

### SELF-AWARENESS

Though self-awareness is largely defined as a skill, it is an overall process that evolves as long as a person engages into the observation, reflection and tuning of feelings, behaviors and abilities with the aim to appropriately respond to different situations and learning from them. In the framework of the self-leadership approach, as it is the case in personal development in general, self-awareness is frequently used to answer questions related to identity in the form of *who we are*. There are different levels of self-awareness resulting in different levels of self-knowledge, hence different levels of answering the identity question. While this process usually helps in enlightening a person’s own vision and perception of the Self, it does also allow the person to take the freedom to question beliefs, principles and assumptions to choose and take large ownership of true personal values to the extent of defining a fresh new identity ready to evolve in a reconciled way. One of the great benefits of self-awareness is to learn the ability to take a balcony-view of what’s going on in our inner and outer world to

give us the power to choose, in addition to behavioral flexibility. If the process is well developed it can lead to finding the essence of the leader that naturally exists in each and every individual.

### **SELF-EFFICACY**

Self-efficacy is defined in psychology as the belief that we, individuals, are able to handle whatever comes our way. It is an individual's preparedness to take action, try new things, overcome obstacles, take feedback, build on it and advance towards an objective; it fosters the individual's ability and capacity to become more resilient, creative and innovative. Some people are naturally set on this mindset, however building on self-awareness as a previous or complementary step includes the behavioral habit of reflexively checking assumptions and be in a growing mindset, while adopting the required adjustments when dealing with any new situation. Self-efficacy should not be mingled with self-confidence: a person can have the self-confidence to take an action in the present, and then build the acceptance of any consequences that might emerge from that action when adopting the self-efficacy mindset. Self-efficacy requires utilizing strategies, while tapping into inner personal resources, to align intentions and actions. It also requires being able to influence the Self in order for that alignment to happen.

### **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

Self-management is at the core of the self-influence process. If with self-awareness comes the ability to observe and read in our personal behavior and thus control it when needed or wanted, self-management comes as the third component of the self-leadership process, comprehending one's ability and capacity to not only control, but to manage emotions, inner resources and impulses ensuing in a two way result: a developed ownership on influencing the Self, and a better understanding of one's mechanism of impact. Setting goals, monitoring behavior and evaluating progress are considered to be critical elements of self-management. However, and alike self-leadership, the concept of self-management has expanded while simplifying, to become nowadays a key area in the personal skills required to make up Emotional Intelligence. In other terms, emotional maturity does enhance self-influence; the influence an individual exercises on the Self to align intention with action in order to achieve the intended impact. The strategy to align intention with action can include: reflecting on one's intention to achieve focus, being able to address an inner narrative to empower

the Self, communicating authentically and establishing a balanced relationship, being mindful and manage emotions, or influencing through listening and understanding other's intentions (Bryant & Kazan, 2012). The idea of adopting self-leadership *strategies* was part of the very first definition of the concept as Manz (1986) utilized it. Today the term strategy is more understood and disclosed as a *reflected path* that draws, combines and articulates an individual's inner resources and potential towards the achievement of a goal. Being able to guide and direct the Self throughout this path requires a combined set of self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-management competencies that make up *self-leadership literacy*.

### SELF-LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT

One of the first and immediate benefits of self-leadership development is the clarity that a person acquires concerning personal identity as well as a positioning with regards to the personal and/or professional environment. If the self-awareness process is done accurately it does include a process of self-valorization as described earlier, resulting in reconciliation and personal fulfillment from the mere fact of identifying and recognizing one's ultimate added value, or what is called in Personal Branding semantics, the *unique promise of value*. Through this identification and positioning the person feels *unified* with the collective dimension through his personal contribution. It is already a first step of *feeling* and being included. The second step after clarity is gained is the social interaction and communication that happens as a result of the renewed identity. At this stage, it is remarkable to look at Social Penetration theory: as Altman and Taylor (1973, p. 169) note, "people seem to possess very sensitive tuning mechanisms which enable them to program carefully their interpersonal relationships". Then the self-knowledge acquired by means of the clarity of the promise of value renders these tuning mechanisms a powerful tool to establish social interaction in a way that could possibly let the person skip the first two stages of the *Onion theory* to easily engage into stage three of communication (i.e. the affective stage) without omitting that the degree of self-disclosure is always culturally-dependent. The more identity is reinforced at a layer of added value and contribution, the more self-disclosure is facilitated. At the Affective stage, self-leadership can help in setting up a strategy that opens the venue for communication that conveys openness, curiosity, and valorization, sowing the seeds of trust and understanding between counterparts, which in turn enhances the feeling of inclusion along with setting the scene



for further dialogue. Finally, if self-leadership development serves self-influence, it does also empower the capacity to influence others. Influence is understood here as the impact of one's intention, or in other words: how and what to communicate in order to achieve the intended impact. Self-leaders, as well as good communicators, listen actively to what the others are saying and doing knowing that words and actions are communicating intentions: whatever the person says next is a belief, a value or an intention that will drive a future behavior. Connecting our intention to theirs, or to what is important to them, facilitates the impact of the intention. Self-leadership development is ultimately intended to serve and connect the Self to the social context as illustrated in the following figure.

Self	Social
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	<b>Social-Awareness</b>
<b><u>Self-Confidence</u></b>	<b><u>Empathy</u></b>
Emotional self-awareness	Organisational awareness
Accurate self-assessment	Understanding the environment
<b>Self Management</b>	<b>Social Skills</b>
<b><u>Self-control</u></b>	<b><u>Influence</u></b>
Trustworthiness	Inspirational Leadership
Conscientiousness	Developing others
Adaptability	Influence
Drive and motivation	Building bonds
Initiative	Teamwork and collaboration

Figure 1: Social impact of self-leadership

The basics displayed in the previous figure help in setting the foundations for a truly intended dialogue. If the intention is to establish a dialogue to create linkages and common ground, then that dialogue can unfold with a higher level of understanding if each part adopts a self-leadership approach. As continuity to that notion self-leadership also empowers postures of mediation and conflict resolution. As a matter of fact, in addition to facilitating the take of leadership and responsibility in conflict situations,

connecting intentions is already a common ground for counterparts to start developing resolutions towards the intended impact.

### SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY APPLIED

Self-leadership methodologies can be implemented in a varied range of formats from coaching programs to combined action-trainings, to field education and sensitization. This chapter will describe the self-leadership approach adopted throughout three different contexts, with three different purposes, yet with a common target and drawing line: achieving a *collective transformation through individual transformation*.

### CORPORATE CASE: FROM LEAN MANAGEMENT TO INCLUSION

This case is drawn from a company operating in the food industry implementing a plant transformation to adopt lean management along with operational productivity. To this aim an organizational transformation was targeted in order to level up the competencies and capacities of the operating human structure, bottom up. The following scheme shows the capacity-building and structural leveling offered as part of the transformation project by qualifying and developing technical and managerial competences: operators are leveled-up and converted to conducting technicians, supervisors to master-agents, and master-agents to engineers.

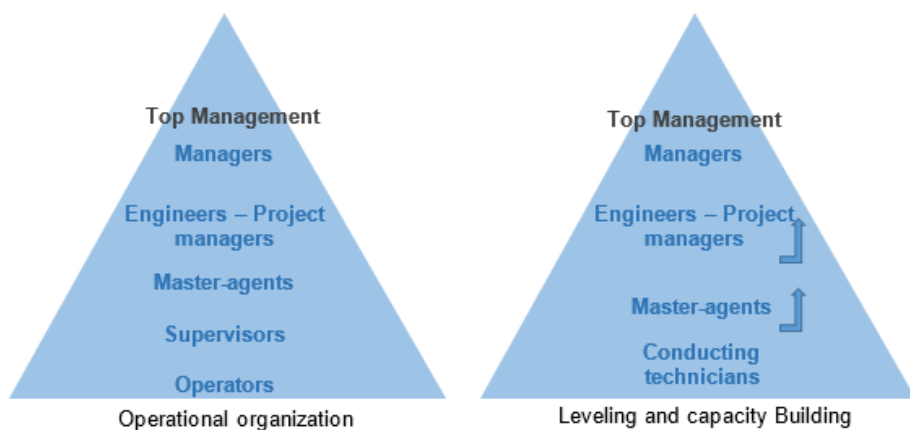


Figure 2: Plant's operating human structure

In this framework change management consultants were hired; however the top management of the plant understood that in order for the human structure and mostly the management to completely adhere, be pro-active and lead the transformation, instead of just executing the steps and directions as *obligations*, they needed some more personal leadership. A self-leadership approach was proposed according to the following model:

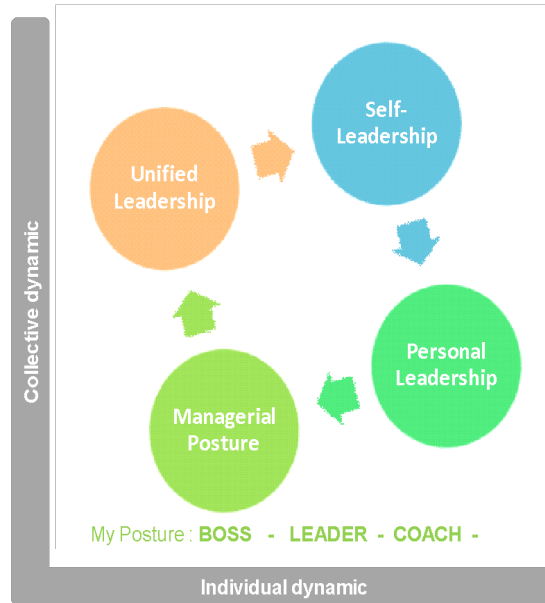


Figure 3: Deployment model of the self-leadership approach

An approach supported by the message that *we have to lead ourselves first before leading others*. The program was designed as a combined individual coaching – collective training series with the management team, with the objective of exemplifying through the line management the managerial behavior required to achieve the managerial transformation objectives.

### THE FIRST IMPACT OF SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY

The demographics of the management team, which was the first target of the program, varied between 35 to 50 year old male managers, hence making the impact of the program – at the individual level – vary

accordingly. Meanwhile results could be gathered into the following trends: 1) increased personal accountability: after a period of six months managers started to feel incorporated in a dynamic that included their own initiatives, point of views and most importantly, their own decisions. Taking their own decisions and knowing how to justify them, as well as thinking critically instead of just executing, were two major mindset transformations; 2) responsibility: managers felt more responsible about the changes required to be adopted in their own departments and as part of the whole organizational transformation. They also took responsibility of exemplarity and giving the right accompaniment to their teams in order to help them implement the change and be *actors* of it; 3) self-innovation: the sense of being able to achieve more than they thought they could achieve, gave them the self-confidence to explore with themselves new habits, asserting new ways of thinking and allowing their creativity to be a force of proposition. After a period of nine months of implementing the program managers, on their own initiative, started to adopt a *participatory* approach with their teams involving from middle managers to technicians in the brainstorming about the best way to improve operations. This significant cultural shift which was neither targeted nor envisioned at the beginning of the program had the effect of generating an organizational inclusion based on the valorization of the operating human structure and the creation of a peer-to-peer dialogue.

## THE SECOND IMPACT OF SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY

After the achievement of the first phase, the focus was then oriented towards a unified leadership and how to build over the individual's contribution, a collective one. The challenge was to train the collaborators to look at each other in terms of one's added-value as a person, beyond their functions of managers, and absolutely beyond any other interpersonal or cultural consideration. The mere starting point of being aware of the Other as having a leadership on the same equal foot changed perceptions on each other; there are filters that unconsciously exit from the mind allowing the talk between counterparts to rise to a higher level, letting go off many other preconceived or constructed perceptions based on personal experiences or cultural differences. The quality of communication changed as a result of a change of identity perception. The type of dialogue that occurred in order to resolve problems was constructed on the base of the communicated added-value of each member, as well as a constructed underlying belief that all together they have the capacity to find a solution that works for all; that is cohesion. There are in management, many other successful methodologies

and approaches to resolve the kind of problematic described in this case; however it is worthwhile highlighting that the distinction about adopting self-leadership literacy is in the multitude of benefits, sometimes unexpected, that this development offers. It is like a building ground, or a starting block to build many other blocks of achievements.

### **SOCIAL INNOVATION CASE: FROM CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT TO INCLUSION**

The T. Community Foundation for Human Development is a social innovation platform created to contribute to social transformation and change through community empowerment. As a co-founder of this platform our motivation to act on disadvantaged communities to induce social change came from the belief that poverty is not a material poverty but rather a psychological poverty. A belief that gave ground to the foundation's mission: to fight poverty by contributing to fight against the structural causes of psychological poverty. Thus, the foundation does not offer services or activities to beneficiaries, but creates the conditions so that members of a given community become actors of their own development, allowing them to sustainably improve their life conditions. The main action behind creating the conditions is the facilitation approach: going to the field and facilitating the awareness necessary for them to change perceptions about themselves, and their potential as individuals and citizens, followed by the empowerment of their *collective action power*: members of the community are the ones who define what they want to do and manage and self-organize their initiatives of development. There were different population targets each with the corresponding projects and tools of facilitation: youth, adults, women, kids. The three main axis of self-leadership literacy in the terms of self-awareness, emphasized in self-valorization, self-efficacy and self-management nourished the tools and methodologies of facilitation according to the target; for instance in the case of Adults self-efficacy was oriented towards the development of autonomy or self-reliance and self-confidence, in the case of Youth the focus was on self-valorization combined with emotional intelligence. Once self-leadership literacy started its process, community empowerment took place by itself through the creation of self-organized group initiatives. After facilitating citizenship sensitization allowing them to gain awareness of their capacity to exercise fully their rights along with duties, the *living* of citizenship emerged when they first started to have the reflex and thinking that as citizens belonging to an organized and recognized community they could be supported in their actions by local actors,

government, and national institutions, as they bring value to their community, followed by the positive feedback and support they received while doing it. Thus the belief behind the sense of belonging begun to radiate, flourishing the seeds of inclusion. Members of the community are now talking about the dynamic of their quarter to their neighborhoods and proudly offering them to join their activities.

### **INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE CASE: FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION**

In 2014 I was selected to be part of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations fellowship program which aims at fostering intercultural exchange and interfaith understanding by engaging with emerging leaders and young professionals. It is framed around two-week exchange trips between EUNA and MENA countries, sending participants from each geographic area to their counterparts' region. Though I was part of the MENA region fellows as coming from Tangier, Morocco, previous international city with a cosmopolitan and multicultural heritage, from which I inherited a passion and advocacy for cultural diversity, tolerance and mutual understanding, I knew this experience was going to represent, for me, a first-hand exposure to the cultural diversity of the MENA region. There were fellows from Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Palestine, with a rich diversity of professional backgrounds, all of them speaking middle-eastern Arabic dialects; which was not my case. I spoke official Arabic, which sounded awkward in casual communications and I spoke in English with some Egyptians and it sounded outrageous that, as a Moroccan, I was unable to speak Egyptian. The language began to implicitly cause a lack of communication and from my part, the feeling of exclusion installed very quickly. As part of the intercultural exchange experience I was curious and excitingly apprehending many questions, however what was just a secondary detail, raised several inner personal thinking about identity, commonalities and aspects we were supposed to share. My reflective thoughts brought about the one single aspect that was obviously common: we were all here together because of our capacity to learn and acquire from an intercultural experience, which unreservedly includes opening our minds to differences, accept them and understand them. The self-leadership strategy that I adopted after three days of self-observation was to explore and find connections with their capacity to welcome and enjoy differences. Hence, I started to speak Moroccan dialect, instead of English, triggering curiosity about what's common and what's different, and that was a turning point in the whole situation. It

even opened the door to some of them to speak to me in French; each one chose the most convenient way or path for them to establish an enjoyable dialogue on the basis of balanced strengths. I consider that one of the key criteria of the self-leadership exercise was to generate inner positive narratives thanks to self-awareness of personal abilities and capacities along with personal goals. In self-leadership literacy the generation of positive narratives does not only take off the veils that emotions most often put on people's minds and vision, but does also impact the content of the new communication, to ultimately establish a constructive and intentioned dialogue. In this case the dialogue established, as a mean to be in touch with the richness of the group members beyond language, nationality or region; a dialogue that effectively conducted to inclusion. I definitely find this experience to be another example of how self-leadership helps in including the Self into a group dynamic without omitting one's individuality but rather using it as a distinction that unites. In addition to the personal occurrence just described, the richness of the learning, eye opening and benefits acquired from this fellowship were incommensurable.

### **EXPLORING SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY AS AN MIL CORE COMPETENCY**

The cases covered in the previous section substantiate the benefits and impacts of self-leadership literacy and at the same time attest that capacity-building in the terms of acquiring competences is fully harnessed if the person has the ability and capacity to lead the Self. If self-leadership has become part of some exclusive university's core curriculums, it is worth *democratizing* and even more, at an earlier level of education; in today's hyper-connected societies having self-leadership is turning out to be increasingly crucial. To this end and given the impact of media and information in building bridges between people, societies and systems, it is worth looking at self-leadership literacy as a complementary discipline to the concept of media and information literacy.

### **UNESCO MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY CONCEPT**

Media and information literacy has become a priority to Unesco since the latter took position that MIL equips citizens with the skills and competencies needed to seek and enjoy the full benefits of the fundamental human right stated in the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights<sup>3</sup>. Unesco's conceptualization of Media and Information Literacy seeks to combine two distinct areas – media literacy and information literacy – under one umbrella. On the one hand, information literacy emphasizes the access of information along with the *evaluation and ethical use* of it. On the other hand media literacy emphasizes the ability to understand the functioning of media, to evaluate how they are performed and to use them for *self-expression*. The key elements of each notion are detailed in the following figure.

Information Literacy						
Define and articulate information needs	Locate and access information	Assess information	Organize Information	Use information ethically	Communicate information	Information processing skills using ICTs

Media Literacy					
Understand the role and functions of media in democratic societies	Understand the conditions under which media fulfil their functions	Critically analyse and evaluate media content	Engage with media for self-expression, democratic participation, intercultural dialogue and learning	Produce user-generated content (UGC)	Review skills (including ICTs) needed to produce UGC and engage with media

Figure 4: Key elements of MIL

## THE ROLE OF SELF-LEADERSHIP LITERACY IN FOSTERING INFORMATION LITERATE SOCIETIES

Self-leadership literacy, as explained, can simply be assimilated as having the knowledge, the skills and the competences to be able to lead the Self. Nevertheless, self-leadership literacy is also a transformational process through which the individual defines, communicates and radiates an identity and a leadership persona that is focused and centered on the notion of the *unique promise of value*. Self-valorization is fundamental in self-leadership literacy, that is: being literate about the Self with a valorized content to diffuse and communicate together with the awareness of what's common and different with regards to one's context. In this sense, educating and training individuals to know how, when and which information

<sup>3</sup> This article states that: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". Retrieved from [http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr\\_article\\_19.html](http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr_article_19.html)



content to talk, put forward and communicate can be assimilated as one of the results of self-leadership literacy. The three main goals of Unesco's MIL are defined as: "to empower future citizens, to impact basic skills necessary to critically evaluate information and media content, to foster the development of knowledge societies and the promotion of free, independent and pluralistic media" (Carlsson & Culver, 2013, p. 303). Moreover, the Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers published by Unesco in 2011 draws the framework to construct a program for turning out teachers who are media and information literate. The self-leadership literacy approach as applied to the context of education, and particularly to educators, gives the preparedness and readiness in terms of skillset, attitudes and knowledge to give power and to facilitate the harmonized articulation of not only the goals, but also the skills in order to become media and information literate; because media and information literate people: "make informed and independent decisions, learn about the world around them, build a sense of community, maintain public discourse, engage in lifelong learning, produce information, think critically, use media for self-expression and creativity" (Tuominen, Kotilainen & Lundvall, 2013, p. 311). Throughout the objective to increase the capacity of teachers "to evaluate sources and assess information", and "to evaluate how students interpret media messages and information from a variety of sources" (Carlsson & Culver, 2013, p. 304), they also could be trained to exemplify the self-leadership experience as bringing about effective critical thinking, global and community mindfulness, as well as learning by doing, in addition to the behaviors and attitudes that promote inclusion, dialogue and the generation of positive narratives. MIL has been further promoted as a platform for intercultural dialogue when in 2012 Unesco and UNAOC joined forces to create the MIL Clearinghouse which also hosts the multimedia, multi-language, interactive web-based version of Unesco's Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers. It is a participatory platform opened to user-generated content and has become since then a unique global platform for outreach and sharing of MIL relevant content. Including self-leadership literacy as an MIL core competency and throughout this platform can be a leverage to elevate the consciousness of people towards them and their social environment. While it is worth to dedicate a full paper to the investigation of a purposeful incorporation of self-leadership literacy in the Unesco MIL curriculum, it becomes apparent that it enhances as well as fosters the development of information literacy and creative self-expression. Last and not least the Unesco constitution states that:

the States Parties to this Constitution, believing in full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, are agreed and determined to develop and increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purpose of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives.<sup>4</sup>

While reading over these lines through self-leadership lenses, it becomes understandable that self-leadership literacy can accurately contribute to the purpose of mutual understanding and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

People are adding layers to their identities sometimes taking away ancestral identifications and origins to adopt new ones. Among these layers there is one that is intrinsic to whom they are as an added value and potential that can grow as long as they continue melting, sharing and acquiring knowledge from each other. This last layer comes from the essence of what they offer, value and deliver as a person. It is a kind of identity layer that can be as agile as the agility required to live in nowadays world of connectivity. When individuals learn to value themselves at the level of identity, they also learn to value the Other; the fulfillment that comes out of the delivery of whom they are, can ultimately bring peace to the Self, a feeling that allows peace to radiate in the attitudes, behaviors and intentions. This identity layer as linked to the core of ourselves has a very strong power that requires to be guided and signified as a contribution to a collective dynamic. Self-leadership education, and as an outcome self-leadership literacy, trains the mind to be curious about the Other as the individual becomes curious about the Self, it trains the mind to understand and empower the Other as it does with the Self. It trains the mind to take responsibility for the Self, instead of being a victim of circumstances, and it definitely trains the mind to start taking the lead to achieve impact. While a self-valorized identity layer is at the core of the concept of self-leadership literacy as a foundation for inclusion, having self-leadership literacy is also having a look from individuality to collective and vice versa; a dynamic and exchange that happens in the framework of the value contribution, where different values get together

---

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261751.page=6>

to compose a union with a larger value than the sum of all the values added, this result being the ultimate expression of inclusion. Implementing self-leadership literacy as a core competency in education certainly trains individuals to adopt a self-innovation mindset resulting in constantly acquiring the skills and knowledge for them to reinvent themselves in their value; thus developing resilience and leadership with the positive mindset of bringing a value into action. This inquiry-based learning behavior can be considered as being essential to develop more literate societies, hence putting into relevance the role of self-leadership literacy in empowering citizens to use media and information to exercise fully their rights. These conclusions are thus intended to set the base for a further investigation into how to include the notion and the application of self-leadership literacy in the Unesco's MIL curriculum, as being a precursor of inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments to the people, companies and organizations that have put their trust in working and collaborating with Malak Oussidhoum Leadership Advising; through their involvement, reliance and belief in change and betterment, they have permitted the foundational analysis and content of this paper.

## REFERENCES

- Altman, I. & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: the development of interpersonal relationships*. New York: Holt McDougal.
- Carlsson, U. & Culver, S. H. (2013). *Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue MILID Yearbook 2013*. Goteborg: NORDICOM.
- Bryant, A. & Kazan, A. (2012). *Selfleadership*. New York: McGraw Hill Education.
- Beck, D. E., Cowan, C. C. (2005). *Spiral dynamics: mastering values, leadership, and change*. Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Di Mauro, M. & Gehrke, B. (Eds.) (2018). Multicultural identities: challenging the sense of belonging. In *Conference proceedings IX SIETAR ITALIA's Annual Conference*. Italy: Fondazione Intercultura and SIETAR Italia.

- Graves, C. W. (1970). Levels of existence: an open system theory of values. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 10(2), 131-154. DOI: 10.1177/002216787001000205
- Manz, C. C. (1986). Self-leadership: toward an expanded theory of self-influence processes in organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 11(3), 585-600. DOI: 10.5465/amr.1986.4306232
- Neck, C. P. & Houghton J. D. (2006). Two decades of self-leadership theory and research: past developments, present trends, and future possibilities. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21, 270-295. DOI: 10.1108/02683940610663097
- Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: a historical review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(1), 204-222. DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information*, 12(2), 65-93. Retrieved from <http://ssi.sagepub.com/content/13/2/65.full.pdf>
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-48). Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.
- Tuominen, S., Kotilainen, S. & Lundvall, A. (2013). Handbook on the pedagogies of media and information literacies. In *MILID Yearbook Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue* (pp. 309-317). Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Quote:

Oussidhoum, M. (2019). Building the foundation of inclusion through self-leadership literacy. In A. M. Costa e Silva, I. Macedo & S. Cunha (Eds.), *Livro de atas do II Congresso Internacional de Mediação Social: a Europa como espaço de diálogo intercultural e de mediação* (pp. 320-339). Braga: CECS.