

THEory into ACTION

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Lead with Purpose: A Training Program on Responsible Leadership in the Middle East

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In the midst of the mounting challenges the Arab World is facing today – politically, economically, environmentally, and socially – there is also an increasing level of engagement, activism, and a feeling of belonging to a country and a nation. Citizenship, governance, engagement, and belonging are definitive concepts of our region, which have never been discussed, debated, and promoted as much as they are today. As we face regional turmoil, we also notice that citizens are more aware than at any time before of the significance of engagement, good governance, and the need to give back and contribute to positive change.

Within that realm of challenge and opportunity, Silatech, a dynamic social initiative that works to create jobs and expand economic opportunities for young people throughout the Arab world, realized the significance of promoting and introducing the concept of responsible leadership among youth through its program called Qasd [kas-d].

Background and Rationale. The program is based on the notion that young people are key to creating and leading change in the Arab world today. Despite our challenges, according to the 2013 Arab Youth Survey young people in the region are optimistic about the future and believe that “our best days are ahead of us.” Their optimism, force, passion, and enthusiasm are what Qasd is building upon, enhancing and mobilizing for the benefit of youth and societies alike. Ultimately, Qasd aims to develop a new generation of socially-conscious and responsible young Arab leaders who will create and lead positive change in their own communities, countries, and the region.

Program Design and Development. The design and development of the program relied on the participation of different organizations and the inclusion of youth from varied Arab countries. Through conducting focus groups with youth, the design and structure of the program

considered youth's ideas, suggestions, and circumstances to ensure that the program was responsive to their needs, and could create positive and sustainable change in their communities, societies, and the region at large.

Created by a core group of Arab experts in human and social development, the program is composed of 12 modules. These modules, which were based on the multiple consultations Silatech had with stakeholders and youth, feed into three key phases of the program:

- A. Me (the personal phase), addressing Paradigm Shift (positive thinking), Personality Types (strengths and limitations) & Emotional Intelligence (socially adept), My Values, and Critical Thinking
- B. My Relationships (my team), addressing Social Awareness and Empathy, Diversity and Inclusion, Working in Teams, Communication / Listening, Leadership, and Conflict Resolution
- C. My Community, which focuses on sense of community, citizenship, and social entrepreneurship.

The program was reviewed by a group of external technical experts, then piloted in Egypt and Palestine; with a total of 28 participants; 16 in Palestine (9 males and 7 females), and 12 in Egypt (8 males and 4 females), between the ages of 21 and 25. The participants were both university students and job seekers. Partner organizations in each country were defined; trainers from the local communities were then trained prior to implementing and testing.

Evaluation Design. Throughout the program, trainers were asked to provide their feedback to Silatech on pre-defined forms. In addition, a technical review meeting with the lead trainer in each country was conducted to discuss key outcomes, participant feedback, and recommendations. Additionally, a pre and post-evaluation was conducted and followed by personal interviews after program completion.

Outcomes. *Participation and Confidence.* Several questions did not exhibit any change, since participants scored relatively high on these questions in the pre- as well as the post-test. Nevertheless, the pre-post evaluations showed that more than 50% increased their levels of optimism upon completing the training, with an average increase of 33% in Palestine and 35% in Egypt. A 40% increase in confidence levels to direct their own future was reported in Palestine

and 60% in Egypt. The numerical level of increase was not very high because participants' self-confidence was relatively high at the outset (an average pre-score of 7.6 out of 10 in Palestine and 7.9 out of 10 in Egypt).

Leadership. Since the pre-test scores were high (as they also were in the self-efficacy section), the increase/change in the post-tests was relatively low. The leadership section of the evaluation was a relatively straightforward measure, based on multiple leadership assessment tests; however, it relied on self-assessment of what one would do or think in relation to leadership capacity. Examples include: "I understand the impact of my values on my attitudes and behaviors" and "I listen carefully to others and care for their needs and feelings."

Self-assessment did not prove effective in the leadership section of the evaluation, particularly in that youth would easily choose what they thought was the "right" answer, rather than what they would actually do. For that reason, the leadership section of the evaluation form will be replaced with situations/cases that would give a better reflection of the participants' leadership capacity, and consequently of any changes occurring after participating in the program. It is worth noting that the only question that exhibited positive change in both countries was the first statement of the measure: "I know my values and its impact on my life."

Self-efficacy. For the self-efficacy section of the evaluation, an internationally used self-efficacy measure¹ was *Arabized*, meaning contextualized and translated to Arabic, to assess youth's general sense of perceived self-efficacy and the changes that might have happened following the program. The average post-test score in Palestine was 32.9 out of 40, a 9% increase compared to an average pre-test score of 30.7. However, a few areas on the scale exhibited greater positive change compared to other questions; seven participants reported increases in their ability to handle circumstances that come their way (an average increase of 17%) and six participants reported an increase in their ability to handle unexpected circumstances (an average increase of 21%). On the other hand, in Egypt there was a decrease in self-efficacy score (an average pre of 32.7 compared to an average post of 31.82). From interviews it appears that this has to do with scoring high on the pre-test simply because they

¹ Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.

knew the right answer and wanted to leave a good impression rather than being honest with oneself. Specific questions with a negative change in score were “I can usually handle whatever comes my way” (six participants) and “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events” (four).

Participation and sense of community. As for participation and sense of community, based on the pre/post test scores, youth from Palestine exhibited high levels on both variables. More than 60% of participants in Palestine and 50% in Egypt have worked with someone or some group/organization to solve a problem in their community. In the last 12 months, 60% of participants in Palestine and 70% in Egypt have participated in a fundraiser, clothing, or food drive, or have boycotted products from a company because they disagree with its social or political values. More than 70% in Palestine have worked as a canvasser for a social cause, and more than 50% have participated in a protest, march, or demonstration, or donated money to a group or association such as charities, political, or social groups, youth groups, etc. At the same time, 80% of the participants in Palestine and similarly 50% have never walked, run, or bicycled for a charitable cause, or contacted a newspaper or magazine to express their opinion about an issue. In Palestine 80% of the participants have never contacted a public official to express their concern or opinion about a particular issue, while 80% of the Egyptian participants have.

Volunteering. In terms of volunteering, 100% of participating Palestinian youth and 90% of Egyptian youth have volunteered; 70% volunteer often or on a regular basis. Two participants indicated that they had started an initiative to solve a particular problem in their community or/country prior to the program, while three more started an initiative upon the completion of the training. For example: “After completing the training, I decided that I want to serve others and structure volunteering in my weekly schedule. I currently volunteer 6–10 hours a week in the Hani Qaddoumi Scholarship Fund to assist other scholars.”

Next Steps. The program has now completed its pilot phase in Egypt and Palestine. Following participants’ recommendations for promotion and enhancement of the training, it will soon reach out to other countries in the region. The program has proven to be replicable among different youth in different countries, and hopes to spread in the region to build a strong network of young responsible leaders who benefit their communities. We definitely believe that a strong

network of socially-conscious and responsible young Arab leaders will create and lead positive change in their own communities, countries, and the region.

This is one of a series of bulletins highlighting the use of community psychology in practice. Comments, suggestions, and questions are welcome. Please direct them to Bill Berkowitz at Bill_Berkowitz@uml.edu.