

CEJS Fellowship End-Year Report

“The Elders, Earth’s First Transcendent Leadership Circle: Organizational Implications for Global Renewal and Sustainability”

**John Jacob Zucker Gardiner, Ph.D.
Professor of Leadership, College of Education**

The research project involved a comprehensive organizational analysis of The Elders, Nelson Mandela’s powerful global initiative of 2007, which created the world’s first transcendent leadership circle. The Elders is a collaborative leadership circle of twelve elder statesmen, peace activists, and human rights advocates serving as a conscience to the world (see TheElders.org). How does the organization aim to resolve issues of global sustainability, promote dialogue, and alleviate human suffering? Who are the twelve founding members and what are their recent reconciliation activities? Using the five organizational assessment questions of Peter Drucker and five organizational principles of Jim Collins, what can be learned about the local and global effectiveness of The Elders? What are the organizational implications of The Elders for global renewal and sustainability?

Activities and Progress to Date:

Three organizational processes used by The Elders identified to date include: 1) working together as a group of the whole to identify the goals that will inform their efforts on behalf of the global good; 2) working together in smaller groups of Elders to lend behind-the-scenes advice and support to world leaders regarding crises and challenges; and 3) working together in smaller groups of Elders to speak out on topics of great controversy that national and global leaders are unable to address for reasons of political survival.

A refereed paper of early research on the organizational implications of The Elders for global renewal and sustainability was accepted and presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Leadership Association (ILA) held in Barcelona, Spain on October 14-17, 2015; a copy of the paper is available in the conference’s proceedings found at the ILA website.

On March 7, 2016, 5:00 pm, Gardiner presented his findings to the Seattle and SU communities at a CEJS Social Event held in the Boeing Room of the Lemieux Library.

Organizational implications of The Elders emerging in the research included six the hypotheses earlier tested now in organizational analysis:

- 1) Global sustainability is best served by transcendent leadership;
- 2) Transcendent leadership, with values of discipline, love, and grace, offers the best path to higher levels of trust;
- 3) Shared governance, with each of its six important attributes, is key to success,

- 4) Moving to decision making by collective will;
- 5) Moving governance from leader to a leadership circle; and
- 6) Calling on the elderly to serve as elders at all levels of global society.

Mohandas K. Gandhi stated that “The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would solve most of the world’s problems.”

Every person has unlimited potential - largely untapped. Tapping that individual reservoir of potential is the hope of our stressed world. Imagine changing our focus from elderly to elder. Imagine tapping the unlimited potential of every elder to change our world for the better. What if an idea of The Elders were to spread to all human organizations and associations?

On April 11, 2016, a paper summarizing major action conclusions of the research study entitled, “Elders as transcendent leaders: From success to significance” was accepted for presentation at the Conference *Just Sustainability: Hope for the Commons* (August 7-9, 2016). Other papers and articles will be submitted over the next academic year.

A comprehensive study of The Elders, Nelson Mandela’s powerful global initiative of 2007, which created the world’s first transcendent leadership circle, had been conducted as part of a SU CEJS fellowship (2015-2016). Focus of the research was on organizational implications of The Elders for global renewal and sustainability. The Elders offers us a global model for transformation from elderly to elders. Instead of marginalizing older people among us, elders could be given important roles in calling dysfunctional/ toxic leaders to task and in helping us to identify the servant leaders among us who might help to transform our world. The Elders of Nelson Mandela could offer insights about the work needed at all levels of global society to see with eyes of wholeness and, thus, help to renew and sustain our world. Grounded in a consciousness of wholeness, transcendent leadership offers a revolutionary frame for viewing human interaction in organizational settings. The Elders represent a world organizational imperative for transcendent leadership circles at all levels of human organization: local, national, regional, and global. The more the elderly are called upon to serve as elders at all levels of society, the better are the chances for humanity to preserve our home planet.