



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

*Where leaders learn*

# ALLAN GRAY CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP ETHICS (AGCLE)

## Purpose

The defining concern of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics (AGCLE) is to theorise, teach and provide expert advice on leadership ethics in ways that promote the formation of persons who can lead humanely, responsibly and effectively, in short, who can exercise their ethical agency in a maximally effective way.

A differentiating mark of the AGCLE is that, although it is a trans-disciplinary space, it is based in a philosophy department, so its guiding concerns are philosophical. The distinctive contribution that this philosophical perspective can make to the field of leadership ethics is to focus on and develop cutting edge work in the moral psychology of leadership and to design interventions that will promote effective ethical agency. But the relevant concerns with moral psychology cannot be separated from concerns with the external conditions that play crucial roles in the formation of minds. Minds are not formed in a vacuum. Political, economic and cultural conditions play crucial roles in their formation. Racist cultures, for instance, promote the formation of racist minds. And sexist cultures promote sexism. Generally, exploitative cultures promote exploitative mindsets where the humanity of those being exploited is at best a fleeting concern. And hyper consumerist cultures tend to form hyper consumerists who see their value in terms of their material possessions and the power that comes with wealth. These cultures need to be resisted, but in order for them to be properly resisted we need to be aware of how precisely they are able to affect us.

The AGCLE will focus on how to promote the well-formed ethical mindsets of leaders, something desperately needed in our country and globally. Doing this involves a careful analysis of psychological mechanisms that are responsible for the breakdown of peoples' abilities to act ethically in an effective way. How can it be, for instance, that people who hold the right sorts of values do not always or even typically act in ways that are consistently expressive of them? What are the blockages that prevent the free movement of belief to action?

It is said that we get the leaders that we deserve and there is much truth in this. So, promoting leadership ethics cannot be separated from working to create the right sorts of cultures. The project of promoting better leadership must be unashamedly political in the sense that these interventions are not solely directed at transforming individuals, but also at transforming mind-forming cultures. And the AGCLE will be working to help transform the cultures at, among other places, Rhodes University with the express aim of using these interventions as pilots for other such

interventions across South Africa and beyond. The AGCLE aims to make interventions in schools, universities, and the private and public sectors.

## Aims

### Research

AGCLE research staff (MA, Ph.D., Postdoctoral and Senior Research Staff) will be engaged in cutting edge research on effective ethical agency. They are guided by the view that intellectual understandings of ethics alone do not motivate action that coheres with these understandings. In addition to belief, emotional dispositions and context also play central roles in promoting the right sort of leadership. The precise mechanisms that bridge belief and action will need to be understood properly.

Research at the AGCLE will be wide ranging from the very practical concern with how best to promote effective ethical agency to the deeply theoretical concerns with understanding the nature of ethical agency. Theory and practice will inform each other and it is in the dialogue between the theoretical and the practical that the specific research concerns of the AGCLE will acquire their distinctive flavor.

Dissemination of findings will be via books, articles in peer-reviewed journals, in conferences and workshops, and through the media. Both public debate and specialist debate will be promoted.

### Teaching

The AGCLE is committed to making a substantial impact in the educational sector, primarily but not exclusively in the tertiary sector. It will develop a framework in partnership with relevant experts that will help guide AGCLE interventions. The framework will be piloted at Rhodes University, TSiBA Education and the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation, but the aim is to develop a framework that can be taken up by the tertiary sector as a whole. The aim of the framework is to create the conditions that will promote effective ethical agency among the students and staff. Cultures within universities located in social spaces characterized by dehumanizing practices (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) need to be transformed if universities and other tertiary sector institutions can be spaces from which ethical leaders can consistently emerge.

## Consultancy

Expert advice to the private and public sectors will be provided by the AGCLE. The aim is to have an impact on the institutional cultures of these sectors, by working on transforming management structures and mindsets. Staff at the AGCLE will be partnering with other consultants in order to help catalyze institutional and personal transformation. As with its teaching mandate, the aim of the AGCLE consultancy efforts is to help transform individuals and political cultures, so as to promote an effective ethical ethos, understood, minimally, as an ethos where all members of a given organization can prosper and, relatedly, can come to see themselves as part of an effective purposive whole, working together for the sake of the common good.