

**APPROACHES FOR OPTIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES:
AN EXECUTIVE PROGRAM FOR LEADERS FROM
NORTHERN IRELAND, THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND GREAT BRITAIN**

July 20-25, 2003
Cambridge, MA

The Project on Justice in Times of Transition held a week-long executive training program July 20-25, 2003 for a group of political leaders from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. The session, entitled *Approaches for Optimizing Opportunities*, brought together 32 representatives from 13 political parties along with five members of the Northern Ireland Civic Forum.

This program was the Project's fifth executive program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government that gathered political leaders for a session focused on Northern Ireland. The session was part of a multi-faceted, three-year program involving politicians and community activists from Northern Ireland. Designed to provide an opportunity for leaders from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain to hear opposing viewpoints and engage in constructive dialogue, the executive program utilized the Harvard University case study method as well as interactive exercises and small group discussions. In order to best address expressed needs and anticipated challenges in Northern Ireland, the program was designed to focus on subjects related to political leadership and strategic planning.

Background

The executive program was held during a period of tremendous political uncertainty when Northern Ireland political and community leaders alike were frustrated by the October 2002 suspension of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly and its subsequent dissolution in April 2003. During the Project's two previous executive programs in 2001 and 2002, political leaders grappled with questions related to creating institutions of government in Northern Ireland; at the time of this session, however, they felt disenfranchised and pessimistic. It was not clear whether the British government would call for new elections for the Assembly to be held in October, yet given the possibility of elections, party members were

considering how to consolidate their positions and present alternatives to the electorate.

In the absence of devolved government, many people in Northern Ireland felt that the Good Friday Agreement did not deliver on its promises and support for the Agreement decreased. In particular, David Trimble's leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party was threatened repeatedly and many Unionists who initially supported the 1998 Good Friday Agreement since became disillusioned. According to polls, reasons cited for opposition to the Agreement included perceptions that the peace accord did not achieve anything and that decommissioning of weapons did not occur as expected. Demilitarization and policing were also considered critical issues that had to be addressed for the Northern Ireland peace process to move forward.

Despite the relative lack of ongoing violence in Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants continue to live in a segregated manner and day-to-day tensions between the two communities were as great or greater than before the peace agreement. In addition, there were still large economic divisions in the society and limited cooperation between the political and community sectors.

Workshop Objectives, Program and Participants

Objectives and Program

The program was designed to:

- increase dialogue and interaction among political leaders from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain
- provide participants with ideas and strategies about issues related to public policy leadership and management
- afford an opportunity for leaders from across the political spectrum to work together to analyze problems and develop strategies to address them.

The program was not designed as a vehicle to promote particular solutions or prescriptions, but simply to allow participants to explore new ideas and discuss possible applications. By bringing participants away from the context of Northern Ireland to Harvard University, the Project enabled them to focus on substantive issues, as well as to break down barriers and strengthen relationships among participants.

The Kennedy School is renowned for its intensive training for policy-makers from throughout the world who are grappling with challenging matters of governance. It does so by employing its innovative “case study method” which makes use of materials about relevant situations and allows participants, with the facilitation of highly skilled faculty members, to examine issues in depth and consider various ways of handling the situation in question. The Kennedy School executive program for leaders from Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland featured Harvard faculty members, as well as practitioners, who conducted classes, prepared and presented case studies, and led interactive exercises. In this way, participants had the opportunity to explore new ideas and discuss possible applications. The broad topics of focus included:

- campaign strategies and persuasion
- leadership and strategic management
- institutions and practices necessary to good governance
- participatory planning

In addition to classroom sessions, the program included plenty of time for participants to interact on an informal basis during meals and special events. A particular highlight of the week was the performance of “George Gershwin Alone” starring Hershey Felder at American Repertory Theater. Following the show, the participants enjoyed a buffet dinner at the home of Hershey Felder and Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada and Lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government.

Participants

The 37 participants in the executive program included national and local elected officials and party activists from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. The Project extended invitations to

the spectrum of political parties and allowed them to designate their own representatives, though the Project suggested guidelines with regard to seniority, age and gender. As a result, 35% of the participants were women and the group included young people in addition to veteran party activists and politicians.

As well, five of the participants were members of the Northern Ireland Civic Forum who were invited in order to facilitate communication and potential cooperation between the Civic Forum and political parties.

Since the group was rather diverse, participants found it interesting to become acquainted and exchange ideas, and the week was full of fascinating discussions, both inside and outside the classroom.

Campaign Strategies

Harvard Law School Professor **Philip Heymann** kicked off the program with a session that examined the campaign tactics used by Governor Jim Hunt and Senator Jesse Helms in the 1984 race for the United States Senate. In an analysis of the case study and accompanying video clips, participants considered why Governor Hunt, the candidate whose views seemed more in tune with those of the electorate, ultimately lost to Senator Helms whose extremely conservative positions were anathema to many voters. The group identified a number of reasons for this surprising turn of events, all of which had to do with Senator Helms’ strategic planning, fundraising, advertising, and clarity of message. Participants also speculated about Governor Hunt’s vulnerabilities and how he might have responded in a more effective manner and thus garnered more support. Although the example used in the case study was specific to American election campaigns, it was clear to the participants from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain that many of the themes of the case were applicable to their political contexts as well.

Gathering Support for Legislation

The group then continued its discussion in a second class taught by **Philip Heymann** which centered around the Anti-Smoking Regulation Case. The case described how the failure of proposed tobacco control legislation was due to the inability of the supporting coalition to reach compromise. At the same time the

coalition also recognized that compromise would result in a loss of support of critically important members. As with the Helms-Hunt case, this account described a situation in the United States but raised many issues with universal applications. The group analyzed the roles, beliefs, and stakes of the various members of the anti-tobacco coalition and other key figures, and considered the attitude of each toward the desirability of negotiations and compromise. In doing so, it became clear why the situation had the outcome it did, and the session offered some interesting guidelines about what to do and what not to do when seeking support for legislation.

Persuasion

In a series of four sessions over two days, Kennedy School of Government Professor **Gary Orren** took the group through a fascinating examination of the principles of persuasion, an art that he maintained could be learned. Professor Orren posited that although persuasion is not the only form of social influence, it is at the heart of leadership. He then went on to detail and give examples of the top 20 techniques of persuasion. These included, among others: simplicity; the need to know one's audience; salience; metaphors and analogies; storytelling; the "counterintuitive principle"; and credibility.

Professor Orren explained that although the substance of a message is important, the manner in which it is conveyed and elements such as environment can be critical in how it is received. In order to apply these theories in practice, the group watched the film "12 Angry Men" and spent some time deconstructing the film and assessing how it illustrated the principles of persuasion that Professor Orren had described.

Leadership

After considering the principles of persuasion, the group moved on to the topic of leadership in a series of three sessions taught by Kennedy School of Government Lecturer **Marty Linsky**. He speculated that the participants already knew about exercising leadership as they had so much first-hand experience, but he suggested he could facilitate reflection on and organization of their experiences in a way that could be helpful. As Professor Orren had asserted about persuasion, Professor Linsky maintained that the

techniques he described could be applied by anyone, and that leadership is not innate but could be learned.

The sessions covered such questions as: who gives authority to exercise leadership; what are the dangers of leadership; what is the difference between a technical and an adaptive problem; and how can exercising leadership help people deal with the loss inherent in compromise? By drawing out the participants' own examples and opinions, Professor Linsky urged them to test his theories and their own assumptions, both in terms of their individual leadership challenges and more broadly in the context of Northern Ireland. In particular, the group engaged in a difficult intellectual exercise in which members of various political parties considered how their current and potential party positions could either contribute to or prevent the resolution of problems.

Tackling Real Challenges

The group was privileged to be joined for a good part of the week by **Kim Campbell**, former Prime Minister of Canada and Lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government. In addition to sitting in on a number of classes, she led a discussion about the practical aspects of leadership and governance that built on the sessions conducted by Professors Orren and Linsky. Ms. Campbell began by conducting an exercise in which half of the group members wrote down the characteristics they most associated with the notion of masculinity, and the other half noted the characteristics they most associated with the notion of femininity. In addition, all participants made a list of the five qualities they considered most characteristic of a leader. She then tabulated the results and led the group in an animated discussion of the overlap between the categories and the factors that contributed to people's perceptions, especially in Northern Ireland.

Following this, in a second class, Ms. Campbell described several situations with which she had been faced during her years in government. She laid out the nature of the constraints, opportunities and the decisions that she had faced, and then encouraged participants to offer suggestions about the best course of action. These real-life case studies proved fascinating for the participants who were able to propose what they would have done had they been in her shoes, and then hear how the situations had actually been resolved.

Pippa Norris, Lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government, led a class on Strategies of Gender Equality in Legislative Office. She began with information related to global comparisons and outlined some of the barriers women face as well as the advantages they have in seeking elected office in various countries around the world. Professor Norris described a number of strategies for achieving gender equality in elected office, such as particular electoral systems, mandatory and voluntary quotas, and reserved seats. She then went on to analyze what might account for the different percentages of women in parliaments and the advantages and disadvantages of policy options available to those wishing to increase representation of women. Participants considered the example of Afghanistan and became quite caught up in a debate over whether engineering or evolution was a better way to achieve gender equality.

To round out the day, **Jamil Mahaud**, former President of Ecuador, gave an engrossing presentation about responding to political pressure, a challenge with which he had direct experience. President Mahaud described what had happened in Ecuador using the analogy of a storm to incorporate the elements of economic downturn, foreign intervention, conflict with a neighboring country, internal societal tensions, and limited power of government. In an animated discussion, participants asked President Mahaud about the roles of the International Monetary Fund, the opposition, the media, and developed vs. under-developed countries.

Participatory Planning

Kennedy School Professor **Xavier de Souza Briggs** taught two classes on creating effective alliances. The first session centered around a video case about Rebuilding Los Angeles, a non-profit organization created in the wake of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, California. The video described the creation of the group, its efforts, and its ultimate dissolution. Then, program participants discussed the type of tensions that Rebuild LA faced, and considered whether a different organizational structure or course of action could have ensured the organization's effectiveness. Taking the discussion a step further, they translated the example to the Northern Ireland context and speculated about the issues that would come into play there. To conclude the session, Professor Briggs outlined the stages of collaboration needed for building successful alliances.

In a continuation of the conversation in his first class, Professor Briggs drew from a case study about the Singapore Tourism Board. This case looked at strategies for engaging stakeholders by involving them in planning. Professor Briggs helped the participants to consider why such engagement could be advantageous, who might be involved, what the involvement might consist of, and how to achieve this engagement. The group was then able to relate the topic directly to Northern Ireland and highlighted the Draft Program for Government as an example of a situation in which constraints had to be taken into consideration.

Evaluation and Conclusion

In a final session and through written evaluation questionnaires, participants provided comments about whether and how the executive program had been helpful. Ninety-five percent of the participants gave the program a numerical rating of either four or five (on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest rating). But much of what the group members had found valuable was impossible to quantify numerically. There was consensus that much of what participants had gained was increased understanding --- both of issues and of other participants' views. Members of the group appreciated the range of participants' backgrounds and experiences and valued the opportunity to interact together for a week, away from the pressures of their day-to-day responsibilities. One participant in particular had been very candid with the others about his "life's journey" and, in a very personal way, had manifested the depth and complexity of the Northern Ireland conflict and the hope for its resolution.

The participants also expressed satisfaction with the models and theories that had been presented and debated throughout the week. The case studies were considered appropriate and relevant to the Northern Ireland situation, and the Harvard faculty members were widely praised for their knowledge and ability to engage participants. While the one-week session did not provide any cookie-cutter solutions to specific problems, it did offer frameworks and ideas for the participants to more effectively consider issues and develop responses.

It was also noted that the program had been quite intense --- both in terms of the issues examined and the number of classes --- and participants would need some time to reflect upon what they had learned and

determine how to apply it in a concrete manner. This sentiment was consistent with the responses of participants in past sessions and we expected that those who took part in the 2003 executive program would continue to report its benefits over the next several years.

All in all, the Project on Justice in Times of Transition deemed the executive program a success as it brought together a diverse group of political leaders and gave them an opportunity to engage in a constructive manner. They were able to exchange ideas and experiences, gain tools to better exercise leadership and create alliances, and returned home poised to take advantage of these connections and strategies.

The July 2003 executive program, which was the Project's 16th programmatic initiative focused on Northern Ireland, was part of a multi-faceted three-year plan launched in February 2001. Four parts of the program take the form of conferences or workshops for

political and community leaders in Northern Ireland, and the fifth element involves the development and use of materials documenting the experience of Northern Ireland. The overarching goals of the Project's programming in Northern Ireland are to:

- afford an opportunity for a broad representation of leaders in Northern Ireland to spend a concentrated amount of time together focused on issues of relevance to the consolidation of peace and democracy
- encourage the development of connections among the participants in order to increase trust and facilitate collaborative and complementary work on a range of subjects of concern at both the political and community levels
- provide political and community leaders in Northern Ireland with an impetus to develop solutions to some of the challenges facing their society by exposing them to examples from other societies in the world.

Workshop Agenda

Sunday, July 20

6:00 – 9:00 pm Opening Dinner

Monday, July 21

9:00 - 10:30 am Campaign Strategies: Helms-Hunt Case, Philip Heymann
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Principles of Persuasion I, Gary Orren
1:30 – 3:00 pm Principles of Persuasion II, Gary Orren
3:30 – 5:00 pm Small Group Sessions
7:00 pm Film: “12 Angry Men”

Tuesday, July 22

9:00 - 10:30 am Persuasion: Anti-Smoking Regulation Case, Philip Heymann
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Principles of Persuasion III, Gary Orren
1:30 – 3:00 pm Face-to-Face Interpersonal Persuasion, Gary Orren
3:30 – 5:00 pm Leadership I: Leadership and Authority, Marty Linsky
7:00 pm Performance of “George Gershwin Alone” starring Hershey Felder
9:00 pm Buffet dinner at home of Hershey Felder and Kim Campbell

Wednesday, July 23

9:00 - 10:30 am Leadership II: Technical and Adaptive Problems, Marty Linsky
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Leadership III: Staying Alive, Marty Linsky
1:30 – 3:30 pm Duck Tour of Boston
5:00 – 6:30 pm Small Group Sessions

Thursday, July 24

9:00 - 10:30 am Tackling Real Challenges I, Kim Campbell
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Tackling Real Challenges II, Kim Campbell
1:30 – 3:00 pm Strategies of Gender Equality in Legislative Office, Pippa Norris
3:30 – 5:00 pm Responding to Political Pressure, Jamil Mahuad

Friday, July 25

9:00 - 10:30 am Making Alliances Work, Xavier de Souza Briggs
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Planning and Deciding Together, Xavier de Souza Briggs
1:30 – 4:00 pm Concluding Session, Jim Cooney
4:00 – 5:00 pm Final Reception and Awarding of Diplomas

Workshop Participants

Northern Ireland

Alliance Party: Eileen Bell, Allan Leonard, Geraldine Rice

Democratic Unionist Party: Clive McFarland, Maurice Morrow, Mervyn Storey, Peter Weir

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Joan Cosgrove, Elizabeth Byrne-McCullough, Tiziana O'Hara

Progressive Unionist Party: Andrew Park, Rosemary Reynolds, David Rose

Sinn Fein: Lucilita Bhreatnach, Bairbre de Brún, Robert Smyth

Social Democratic and Labour Party: Dominic Bradley, James Dillon, Chris Kelly, Nuala O'Neill, Margaret Ritchie

Ulster Unionist Party: Mark Dunn, Danny Kennedy, Gail Walker, Callum Webster, Barry White

Civic Forum: Jeannette Chapman, Kevin Cooper, Brian Dougherty, James Orr, Eithne McNulty

Advisor: **Paul Arthur**

Republic of Ireland

Fianna Fáil: Brendan Smith

Fine Gael: Fergus O'Dowd

Labour Party: Finbarr O'Malley

Progressive Democrats: Noel Grealish

Green Party: Ciaran Cuffe

Great Britain

Conservative Party: Jonathan Caine

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This report was written by Sara Zucker.

The Project on Justice in Times of Transition

The Project on Justice in Times of Transition is an inter-faculty initiative of Harvard University under the auspices of the Kennedy School of Government, the Harvard Law School, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Originally founded in 1992 as part of the New York-based Foundation for a Civil Society, the Project assists states emerging from repression or conflict to engage in dialogue across national, ethnic, religious and ideological boundaries with the intention of preventing legacies of the past from jeopardizing their progress toward democracy and peace. The Approaches for Optimizing Opportunities executive program was the 37th of the Project's distinct initiatives which have provided an extraordinary stimulus to pragmatic problem-solving by offering a broad spectrum of individuals exposure to international experiences in ending conflict, establishing peace, and building civil society. Among the countries and regions in which the Project has worked are South Africa, Northern Ireland, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central America.

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