



The Impact of Gracious Space in Communities and Organizations: Results of an Evidence-Based Research Project

1. Executive Summary

With the growing popularity of Gracious Space as both a theoretical change model and a practical application, Gracious Space is at a critical point in its evolution. Over the past 10 years Gracious Space has been introduced to 15,000 people in 30 states and 35 countries. Much *qualitative* data has been collected that demonstrates Gracious Space has a permanent and positive impact on individuals, groups, organizations and communities. However, in order to advance its credibility as a model, the Center for Ethical Leadership in 2009 implemented a research project to establish a *quantitative* understanding of the impacts of Gracious Space.

The goals of the EBP study were to:

- Measure the impact of Gracious Space in communities and organizations
- Produce data that can be synthesized and disseminated in multiple formats to support the Center's goal of deepening and spreading Gracious Space
- Produce data that can help determine the specific tools and support needed by practitioners wishing to obtain reliable results from Gracious Space practice

The questionnaire was designed by Jeff Leinaweaver of Global Zen and Pat Hughes of Trillium Leadership Consulting. Jeff administered the survey and printed results. A total of 114 surveys were completed between August and October 2009 by individuals at Horizon House, Plymouth Church and the city of Billings, Montana. This report was compiled and written by Pat Hughes in March 2010.

Key findings:

- 83% of respondents said that the use of Gracious Space helps to provide better service within their organization or community;
- 83% of respondents said that the use of Gracious Space promotes more mindful dialogue and respectful interpersonal communication;
- 71% of respondents said that Gracious Space provides a form of inclusive leadership that gets results;
- 71% of respondents said that their organization or community is more effective because of the use of Gracious Space;
- 71% of respondents said that through the use of Gracious Space, they have overcome or more clearly seen individual and/or group patterns;
- Overall respondents feel quite competent (3.4) in their ability to “be” Gracious Space, that is, to possess a personal spirit of collaboration and openness:
 - 72% are very competent or masterful in their ability to learn in community
 - 72% are very competent or masterful in their ability to share power
 - 65% are very competent or masterful in their ability to be open to different perspectives
 - Only 19% are very competent or masterful in their ability to recognize and let go of old habits and patterns that do not serve
 - Only 30% are very competent or masterful in their ability to suspend and inquiry into their own and others’ judgments
- Overall respondents feel only somewhat competent (2.7) in their ability to “do” Gracious Space, that is, to know and employ methods and approaches to create and sustain Gracious Space over time:
 - 15% are very competent or masterful in their ability to align Gracious Space to the steps of a change process; 56% feel unable to do this
 - 23% feel very competent or masterful in their ability to identify and create the appropriate way to bring Gracious Space to a group; 50% feel unable to do this
 - 23% feel very competent or masterful in their ability to draw out learnings and milestones for groups during their process; 44% feel unable to do this

- When asked about the greatest impact of Gracious Space, the three areas of highest response were:
- inviting the stranger and being more of alternate views;
 - providing more trusting and open communication; and
 - providing a common language, framework and skills.

Conclusions:

These results clearly demonstrate that people who have become trained in Gracious Space enjoy measureable improvements in communication, providing service, the practice of inclusive and result-oriented leadership and the effectiveness of their organizations and communities.

The results also suggest that people who have become familiar with the principles and practices of Gracious Space are better able to see and shift individual and group patterns, a critical leadership skill in a time when many of our old ways of working and being together are unjust, unsustainable or ineffective.

People who have been using Gracious Space for a period of time have a high level of inner desire and skill with collaborative leadership approaches in general, and the practice of Gracious Space enhances that ability.

The results also suggest that people who use Gracious Space need more information about how to “operationalize” the principles and concepts into practical facilitator tools, meeting activities and change processes. They need a tool box to support their work, and the confidence and experience to know how to apply the tools toward a specific goal over time.

Finally, the quantitative results contained in this research confirm ten years of anecdotal evidence that Gracious Space is a powerful change agent and container for new actions, behaviors and leadership to emerge.