

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT ACADEMY
DYNAMIC COMMUNICATIONS:
LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS**

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BACKGROUND: THE WHITECAP EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT ACADEMY

Leaders in the nonprofit world are charged with full-time implementation of diverse and multiple responsibilities with very different groups of people. These expectations and groups include:

1. Managing their organization, including human resource development and management (staff and volunteers), operations, finances, strategic planning, and communications;
2. Interacting closely with the board, including board member recruitment and orientation, board management, and board dedication to the organization's success;
3. Delivering successful programs, including understanding the community needs, designing and developing programs, and managing others to deliver programmatic services; and
4. Obtaining funding for the organization, including funding design and development, generating funds through in-person and event solicitation, developing key relationships, and researching and writing proposals.

In 1997, the Whitecap Foundation launched the Executive Management Academy (EMA) to provide quality leadership training and technical assistance designed specifically to help its grantees develop the capacity to fulfill these expectations. The EMA trainings are presented in an environment where participants can exchange and examine new ideas and share professional experiences. Through the exchange, participants enhance their own knowledge and skills in order to lead their organizations more effectively.

Most of Whitecap's grantees are smaller, community-based organizations that otherwise have minimal access to management training. Given the profile of Whitecap's grantees, the goals for the program are:

1. Provide high quality, in-depth management/executive training sessions which are designed to improve the grantees' ability to provide quality service to clients;
2. Create a "community" of nonprofits who have developed and grown together, and can continue to share ideas, best practices, and solutions to common problems; and
3. Instill in the grantees a sense of confidence about their leadership capabilities and styles.

THE DYNAMIC COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOP

The EMA selected Bruce Thibodeau, President of the Arts Consulting Group, to facilitate a training on *Dynamic Communication Seminar and Executive Coaching*. The goals of the training were to:

- give the participants an understanding of their personal communication styles and behaviors;
- highlight for participants the fundamental values and attitudes that drive their actions;
- enable them to recognize and appreciate the styles of other individuals with whom they interact, both inside and outside their organizations; and
- help them realize how and when to adapt their behaviors for greater effectiveness as leaders.

Prior to the Workshop, participants completed two separate surveys. The first survey was designed to reveal the participants' particular communications styles and behaviors, in order to help them observe specifically how they communicate with others. The second survey assesses the participants' strongest attitudes and values, in order to highlight the underlying dynamics motivating their actions.

Participants received two personalized style analysis reports describing the "how" (style and behaviors) and "why" (attitudes and values) driving their communications, particularly as leaders. While these surveys and reports are enlightening for any individual and not just leaders, they revealed some interesting trends and patterns in the EMA group.

Therefore, this report contains observations about leaders in this particular community, as well as recommendations for employing the material to improve their effectiveness as leaders. Specifically, they will be able to:

- better assess their own strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis leading their organizations;
- gain greater sensitivity to the styles/behaviors and attitudes/values of their colleagues, stakeholders, board and funders; and
- know when and how much they can adjust their own styles and behaviors to meet immediate needs and achieve their goals regarding a particular interaction or relationship.

DISCUSSION

1. What did the survey reveal about the communication style/behaviors of this group of leaders, and how does it apply to the nonprofit leaders in general?

The first survey measured the leaders' communication style and behaviors. In addition, it gave two separate indications of their "natural" and "adapted" styles. The natural style is one's habitual or unconscious behavior, while the adapted style reflects the behaviors one employs in order to succeed.

In the EMA group, a clear trend quickly emerged among the participants adapted communication styles/behaviors. Over three-quarters of the group are highly extroverted, direct, forceful, and optimistic. They are extremely people-oriented, outgoing, very social and verbally persuasive. In addition, they tend to be creative problem-solvers, enthusiastic and humorous. They are often inspiring, trusting and convincing. Consequently, they employ influence and persuasion rather than rank or authority to achieve their goals, working through other people, rather than upon them.

It was also interesting to observe that, in this group, their natural communication styles and behaviors corresponded with their adapted styles. The majority of their natural styles reflected the very same extroverted characteristics as their natural styles. That correlation suggested that these leaders, for the most part, have chosen to work with organizations whose cultures support, or at least are compatible with, their natural styles.

Of course, there was some variance between natural adapted styles. This variance has the following significance for leaders and their organizations:

1. Individuals adapt their natural styles to meet the needs of their organizations. This is natural, expected, and required for successful leadership.
2. Leaders often show greater differences between natural and adapted styles when they are new to an organization. Over time, most are able to assert their own style within the organizational culture and may even shift the organizational style to their own.
3. Significant and sustained differences between natural and adapted styles can lead to long-term stress and dissatisfaction with oneself, one's job or the organization.
4. The most effective leaders are aware of both their natural adapted styles and are able to assess when adapting their own styles is appropriate.

In light of the list of expectations of leaders at the beginning of this paper, the EMA group reflects to a high degree what is required of leaders today in the nonprofit sector. Some participants were able to articulate how and why they had adapted their natural styles and developed the necessary characteristics to lead their organizations effectively. Chief among these are the ability to persuade and influence. For individuals whose

natural styles were more introverted, this adaptation presented a challenge which they were able to meet successfully.

It is important to note that different organizational needs will require different communications styles and behaviors. While, for the most part, the EMA participants' organizations needed extroverted, influencing, persuasive leaders, other organizations may need a high level of detailed management or attention to compliance. Others may need to focus on teambuilding, such as those with growing staff or a new or changing board. Therefore, the ability to adapt to discern different organizations' needs and adapt to them is a critical leadership trait.

2. What did the survey reveal about the attitudes and values of this group of leaders, and how does it apply to nonprofit leaders in general?

The second area analyzed was the EMA leaders' "attitude," or value base. This survey was based on the understanding that a person's choices are guided by their attitudes. If the communications style/behaviors reveal "how" a person leads, the values or belief system reflect "why" a person leads in a certain way.

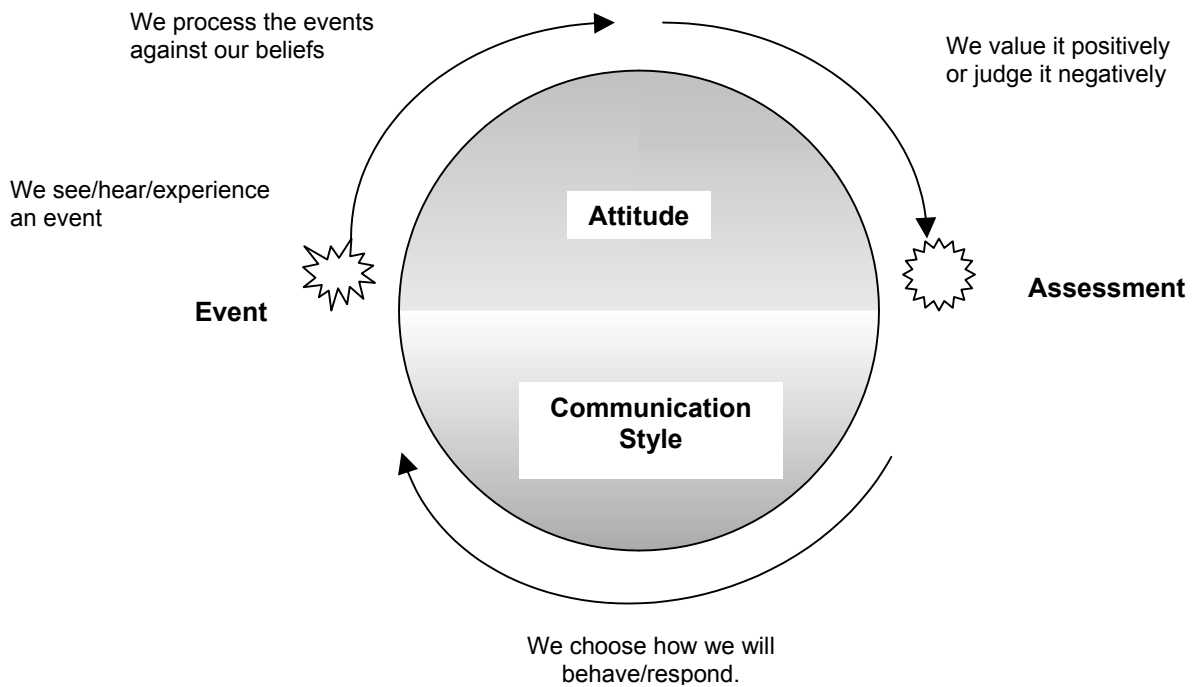
The EMA group reflected a high level of "social" attitude. Individuals with a social tend to be passionate about focus on others; a high degree of selflessness; generosity of time, talents and resources; seeing and developing others' potential; and championing worthy causes. Truly socially-oriented individuals tend not to be ego-driven, but concentrate instead on the success of their organization.

At the same time, many of the leaders in this group had "utilitarian" as their secondary attitude or value. A utilitarian attitude in an individual's personal life often manifests in terms of on wealth and material game, with a focus on the return on investments of time and material resources. While this might at first seem contradictory to the characteristics of a social attitude, in this context it reflects a practicality and a focus on results. In other words, the leaders in this group employ practical reasoning and methods, employing their time and resources efficiently and effectively to achieve their goals and realize their visions. Together, these the social and utilitarian attitudes form a potent combination of altruism and "real-world" practicality, a foundation for powerful nonprofit leadership.

3. Are communication styles/behaviors and a person's attitudes/values related, or are these just two different aspects of one's leadership style?

As illustrated in the figure below, there is a cyclical relationship between communication styles/behaviors and one's attitudes/values. It should not be surprising that "why" one acts affects "how" one acts, and vice versa. Our behaviors affect our attitudes, either challenging or reinforcing them. In a given situation, use our values and attitudes to make an assessment and choose how to behave. If our behavior elicits the desired reaction, the experience reinforces our attitude, our assessment of the quality of our assessment of the situation, or both. In contrast, if our response elicits an undesired reaction, we may feel

compelled to examine either our attitudes or the quality of our evaluation of the event, or both.



4. How can understanding one's communication style/behaviors and attitude/values improve one's ability to lead an organization?

It is apparent from this discussion that understanding these components of their leadership style provides nonprofit leaders with substantial benefits and advantages. These include:

- The ability to improve one's leadership by being sensitive to one's own behaviors and attitude, and their effect on other people.
- The ability to recognize and manage variety of styles in order to work effectively and achieve the organization's goals. Each style has its strengths and weaknesses, contributions and challenges. Leaders who are aware of their own and others' styles can adapt their own styles, and manage those around them, to balance styles and satisfy the organization's needs.
- The ability to recognize when one is over-adapting, resulting in negative impacts such as stress, dissatisfaction, and a loss of balance and personal integrity.
- The understanding that, although similar styles interact more easily and comfortably, different styles can balance each other and be complementary. A leader can help people with different styles but similar passions to accommodate each other's styles based on shared values and goals.

- The ability to understand others' intentions and attitudes more accurately, as well as evaluate where differences between attitudes might create conflict. Likewise, accurately seeing similarities helps to create opportunities for cooperation and alliance.
- The sensitivity to understand what motivates other individuals, enabling the leader to create appropriate and valued incentives and rewards.

5. How can this information highlight leadership gaps that undermine one's ability to lead an organization?

In the EMA group, there was a strong alignment between the participants' styles and values. This suggests that the leaders and their organizations are matched appropriately. As noted, the biggest gaps appeared between natural and adapted styles where the leader was new to the organization. In this situation, leaders can expect a period of stress, with conflicts between the leader's natural style and the one required by the organization.

Over time, the leader may migrate back to the natural style, as the organization adapts to the new leader and style. Otherwise, the leader will either adapt effectively to the required style, or experience a level of dissatisfaction and disharmony that will eventually lead to the search for a more compatible organization.

The important thing to note is that any style can blend into any organization, and different styles can work with one another. Indeed, organization's need to have a variety of styles reflected in their management and staff. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and different organizational functions rely on different styles.

Attitudes and values usually pose a more critical challenge. Incongruent values representing a much greater source of potential tension, either between leaders and their organizations, or among the organization's staff need to be reconciled. While leaders may need to adapt, they can also shift organizations' values where appropriate, but such a shift takes time and formal processes dealing with the organization's mission and values.

6. How does one develop good leadership skills with or without a budget?

With much expected of leaders in organizations today, individuals wishing to develop leadership skills must first be clear about who they are as leaders, and who they want to be. The abilities to strategize, motivate, decide, organize and implement are all critical. However, it is not enough just to get tangible results; today's leaders must also be able to develop teams, maintain finances, keep current on community issues and offer excellent services while keeping their egos in check. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to do all of these things finding the time and resources to further develop ones abilities.

The best process for this development is very simple. The budget can be as low or high as the organization can afford. The steps are:

1. “Know thyself” (be honest!). The process of self-knowledge can be facilitated with outside assistance, if one has the resources. But even without them, an individual can accomplish a great deal by making time to read, observe, and reflect. There is a wealth of material available through associations, bookstores, and the internet.
2. Determine your personal leadership gaps (e.g., greater ease in public) and goals (e.g., more effective decision-making);
3. Identify resources appropriate to your budget (from the inexpensive, including reading books and profiling other leaders, to the more expensive, including seminars and coaches); and
4. Set a course of action. Create a specific plan, with time and other resources clearly budgeted. Put it in writing, and monitor your progress. If you need to, enlist mentors or allies to help keep you focused and motivated.

CONCLUSION

Leadership requires a high level of sensitivity and perception, regarding both ourselves and others. Successful leaders achieve a healthy balance of natural and adapted communications styles, knowing when to bend while avoiding the stress and dissatisfaction of feeling untrue to their preferred ways of behaving.

Leaders also recognize the profound impact of beliefs and values, expressed as attitudes. They are aware of the impact of their own attitudes on others, and they are sensitive to others’ attitudes. This sensitivity enables them to shape their communications to create positive connections to the attitudes of others, whatever the communication style employed.

Truly effective leaders are models for others. They use their interactions, positive or negative, as learning opportunities for those who look to them for leadership. Their organizations enjoy improved communication and, consequently, greater success and satisfaction.