



The Leadership Landscape

July/August, 2007

A bi-monthly periodical published by the faculty of the Federal Executive Institute to help you continue your growth as a public sector leader.

“To achieve greatness, start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.”
Arthur Ashe

Upcoming Programs and Courses at FEI:



The ABCs of Effective Relationships, August 21-22, 2007, Los Angeles, CA

Building High-Performance Organizations in the 21st Century, August 21-24, 2007, Washington, DC

Public Sector Leadership, September 9-14, 2007, San Diego, CA

Collaborating Across Organizational Boundaries, September 18-19, 2007, Washington, DC

Planning and Organizational Strategy for Public Sector Employees, September 25-26, 2007, Washington, DC

Welcome from the Dean of Faculty:

With summer comes longer days, rejuvenating vacations, and of course, great opportunities for personal and professional development – including a new edition of the Leadership Landscape. In this issue, our faculty and research fellows provide a range of truly useful and thoughtful tips and tools for improving your day-to-day leadership – from lessons from the Jesuits to finding the silver lining in conflict. All part of a day’s work as a public sector leader. And speaking of which, FEI’s new and well-regarded Public Sector Leadership seminar still has a few spaces available for its September run in San Diego. See you there – and in the meantime, happy reading.

~Dr. Peter Ronayne, Dean of Faculty

Values-Based Leadership: FEI Executive in Residence Carol Gold explores the limits of intuition. Find out when and how to best understand and use those unavoidable “gut instincts.” [Read more...](#)

Values-Based Leadership: What does it mean to be a heroic leader? Sheila Gant, FEI Faculty member, examines Chris Lowney’s concept of “heroic leadership,” and the lessons we can learn from a 450 year old organization. [Read more...](#)

Policy in a Constitutional System: Does your organization have a “conflict competent culture?” There has been a recent and noteworthy shift in the way leaders are asked to manage conflict with organizations. In light of a new Executive Core Qualification, FEI Faculty member, Michael W. Rawlings, continues his discussion of conflict management and collaborative problem solving. [Read More...](#)

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Transforming Organizations: Beverly R. Fletcher, FEI Faculty member, and Alfred L. Cooke, Director of FEI's Center for Organizational Performance, discuss part three of their own model for implementing an Action Research agenda to ensure continuous learning throughout your organizations. [Read more...](#)

Wellness and Balance Tip of the Month:

Burdened by Exercise?

"I'm sorry but I have to go exercise."

You hear it all the time don't you. You might even say it to yourself before an early morning workout or after a draining afternoon in the office. Like an unfinished email, executives often state that aerobic activity is just something they *have* to do. The average federal employee finds it increasingly difficult to carve specific active time into their day. As a result, the *National Institute of Health* published a small booklet titled "Tips to Get You Active" in order to assist busy professionals to maintain an adequate active working lifestyle. Here are some of the suggestions that I have found helpful and easy to implement.

- **Build physical activity into your routine chores.** Rake the yard, wash the car, or do energetic housework. That way you do what needs to get done and move around too.
- **Make family time physically active.** Plan a weekend hike through a park, family softball game, or an evening walk around the block.
- **Break your workout into three 10-minute segments each day.** Taking three short walks during the day may seem easier and less tiring than one 30-minute workout, and is just as good for you.
- **Sneak physical activity into your days.** Take stairs instead of elevators, park further away in parking lots, and walk in place while watching TV.
- **Join a class or sports league where people count on you to show up.** If your basketball team or dance partner counts on you, you will not want to miss a workout, even if your family and friends are not involved.

Don't let exercise burden you; find a way for it to enhance the quality of your life.

~ Brandon Addison, FEI Research Fellow

Values-Based Leadership

The Limits of Intuition

By Carol Gold, J.D., FEI Executive in Residence

Given the current pace of events, the vast amount of information (and disinformation) at our fingertips, and the enormous consequences of the decisions executives are asked to make, it is understandable that we seize upon anything that will help us make better decisions. Reliance on intuition, unconscious thought, or a “gut feeling” may be helpful only to the extent we understand how and why our brain sends us signals that, for purposes of this discussion, we will group together and refer to as “intuition.” In addition, understanding how and why intuition occurs reveals important limitations.

Our brains process huge amounts of information continuously, but information is not processed objectively. How we filter information is dependent on our memory banks of previous experience as well as conscious and unconscious biases. In his paper, “Don’t Trust Your Gut,” (Harvard Business Review, May 2003) Eric Bonabeau points out that we favor information that

- is received first,
- confirms our assumptions, or
- permits us to maintain the status quo.

In “When to Trust Your Gut” (Harvard Business Review, February 2001), Alden M. Hayashi adds additional human traits that cloud intuition, like a tendency to take unnecessary risks to recover loss. Another important characteristic is the human propensity to remember when we were right. As Hayashi notes, we often remember when a gut feeling turns out to be right, but tend to forget inaccurate instincts. Add overconfidence in our abilities and absence of feedback or reflection, so that we might learn from our mistakes, and the case for reliance on intuition begins to weaken.

Bonabeau reserves his biggest caveat, however, for “our deep-seated need to see patterns” which Hayashi acknowledges as leading to a “tendency to see patterns where none exist.” Pattern recognition, prompts to the limbic system that cause a split-second reaction (e.g. avoiding spiders and snakes), is a strong drive. Thus, human survival often depends on a strong instinct to quickly analyze information by fitting it into a pattern within our experience.

For much of human history, the amount of information to which a decision-maker had access was usually balanced against a time frame for making a decision and whether a process for deliberative decision-making was possible. As the amount of instantaneously available information increases, the complexity of the process and the need to timely resolve ambiguity overwhelms a rational decision-making process. In a perfect world we would carefully analyze all the facts and painstakingly evaluate alternatives. In the words of Richard Abdo, former Chair and CEO of Wisconsin Energy Corporation, “At the point when you’ve gathered enough data to be 99.99% certain that the decision you’re about to make is the correct one, the decision has become obsolete.”

Bonabeau suggests that the answer to the dilemma is technology and artificial intelligence to help us with the increasingly complex task of searching for and evaluating potential solutions. Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future and despite their unreliability, we will continue to incorporate intuitive signals in rational deliberation for two reasons. Sometimes those signals are right, and we simply run out of time and technology to engage in an exhaustive inquiry. The question then is how do we test our instincts? Hayashi stresses the importance of feedback and reflection. When a decision turns out to be wrong, try to understand what you missed and remedy the situation if you can. Continue to process new information as your decision moves into implementation. Don’t be afraid to adjust your direction.

FEI offers many courses on decision making strategies. Please attend or recommend our *The ABCs of Effective Relationships* program that will be offered August 21-22, 2007, in Los Angeles, CA

[Back to Top](#)



Values-Based Leadership

Heroic Leadership in a 450 Year Old Company that Changed the World

By Sheila Gant, Ph.D., FEI Faculty

As a former Jesuit seminarian, Chris Lowney, a consultant for the Catholic Medical Mission Board, “was intrigued by what sixteenth century priests might teach twenty first century leaders about leadership and how to cope effectively with rapidly changing and complex, environments.”

His descriptions of leadership best practices are as relevant to success today as those practices were 450 years ago. In *Heroic Leadership*, Lowney connects the challenges Jesuits faced some 400 years ago with those we face today as leaders in a rapidly escalating and complex environment. This book offers new ideas and insights about how best to build a great place for people to work and how to successfully grow other leaders while achieving long-term organizational success.

The book itself is a story of how ten men with no money and no business plan were able to establish thirty operational schools “with a culture of leadership whose originality and expertise have stirred admiration for nearly five centuries.”

The four principles of Jesuit leadership (self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism) have “equipped their recruits to succeed by molding them into leaders who; understood their strengths, weaknesses, values and world view.” Lowney offers compelling historical examples that illuminate these principles. While some of the examples are a bit simplified and most probably gloss over some unflattering instances, these examples do provide insight into some stunning successes in the face of uncertain and overpowering odd.

One of the most astonishing concepts the early Jesuit’s displayed was to “understand the importance of an atmosphere that empowered others by creating a supportive, encouraging and positively charged environment.” It was against this backdrop that the Jesuits grew their leadership talent. Loyola and his colleagues believed that we can all be leaders and that leadership opportunities are everywhere.

Lowney describes the hardships faced by these new, young recruits; and, how through their belief in and commitment to a shared vision, they were able to make such a lasting impact. With little in the way of resources and utilizing their core values and key leadership skills each one instantiated revolutionary ideas for their time.

To support these values, every Jesuit trained every recruit to lead. They believed that the key to organizational success was the development of individual acts of leadership distributed throughout the organization. As Lowney writes, such self-leadership requires self-awareness and continuous self-reflection and learning.

Think about your organization. Do your colleagues believe that every member is a leader? Does your organizational culture embrace the idea that everyone needs some leadership development and that leadership occurs everywhere in the organization? If not, what would happen if you and your colleagues made sure that leadership skills and talent were developed at every level?

As Lowney writes, the Jesuits long ago recognized that “leadership springs from within and it’s about who I am as much as what I do.” Becoming a leader is a life long journey, an on-going process of maturation and self-understanding.

In *Heroic Leadership*, Lowney’s asserts that “leadership is not an act: it’s a way of living and an on-going process of self-development.” The key point of all leadership is how we lead our selves. Each of us must decide what personal leadership legacy we want to leave behind. Ultimately, our legacy will be created less by helping to make a great organization and more about creating and maintaining a culture of leadership.

To learn more or register for FEI’s *Public Sector Leadership: Vision, Values and Vital Strategies* course September 9th-14th, 2007 at the Hotel Solamar in San Diego, CA, please call Barbara Goldman 434/980-6383 or Bonnie Boston 434/980-6277

[Back to Top](#)



Policy in a Constitutional System

Creating a Conflict Competent Culture

By Michael W. Rawlings, J.D., FEI Faculty

This is the second in a series of articles on Conflict Management and Collaborative Problem Solving.

In the first article of this series we looked at recent changes in the Conflict Management ECQ. This ECQ requires us, as leaders, to “Encourage creative tension and differences of opinion. Anticipate and take steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations. Manage and resolve conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner.” This is a significant shift from the former wording which for many years has guided leaders to “Identify and take steps to prevent potential situations that could result in unpleasant confrontations.” For many of us, this shift is easier said than done, and it represents a change both in philosophy of conflict management as well as in the tools necessary to harness the creative potential of conflict. We began with a working definition of conflict: “Those inevitable differences that arise between people that cause challenges or concern.”

We also introduced the possibility and value of creating a conflict competent culture. This powerful vision is being embraced by public and private sector leaders. By actively and broadly embracing conflict as normal and inevitable, and by offering skills and support, leaders are able to guide their organizations to effectively manage conflict for growth, creativity, and productivity. Shared concepts, language, and

skills are foundations for such a culture.

The development of conflict-handling techniques and strong interpersonal skills helps us to manage conflict effectively and move toward collaborative problem solving. One useful tool to assist individuals and teams in this pursuit is Alexander Hiam's *Dealing With Conflict Instrument (DWCI)*. The DWCI and accompanying material (see especially Lewicki, Hiam, and Olander, *Think Before You Speak: A Complete Guide to Strategic Negotiation*) measures and describes the five commonly recognized behavioral conflict styles:

- Accommodate
- Avoid
- Compromise
- Compete
- Collaborate

Through a relatively simple self-assessment (also available as a 360° assessment), one can identify behavioral style preferences and learn the benefits and challenges that each style brings to relationships and problem solving. An additional tool in the DWCI helps individuals distinguish and then choose when each of the five styles might be most appropriate in any specific conflict. The key is the relative importance of *relationship* between the parties to the *outcome* in the given conflict. DWCI encourages individuals and teams to consciously flex depending on the situation and, thus, enhances creative and effective approaches to conflict.

Hiam also provides an excellent introduction to the value and approaches to collaborative problem solving – which is the recommended approach to situations in which both the *relationship* between the parties and the *outcome* are of high importance. Collaboration is the style most likely to produce a win-win solution for all parties in workplace and personal conflicts. The DWCI points out that “On average, about 47% of people rate themselves as collaborators in conflict situations, and 25% to 33% of people are rated as collaborators by others. This means that in the majority of conflicts, at least one of the participants is not a collaborator by instinct.”

When intact teams use this assessment and the supporting material, it helps to create mutual understanding and respect for each conflict behavioral style and provides guidance for collaborative problem solving. This ultimately leads to strengthened relationships and more effective team performance. The DWCI is a good starting point for leaders wishing to help their teams “encourage creative tension and differences of opinion” and channel this energy into creativity and productivity through strengthened relationships.

Some questions you might ask for reflection:

- a) To what extent are you and your team distinguishing and discussing what is working and what is not working in your approach to conflicts?
- b) What would be possible in the workplace if problem solving was organized around key principles of collaboration toward a win-win situation?
- c) To what extent is your team's current approach producing “win-win” solutions that produce effective outcomes while strengthening interpersonal and team relationships?

FEI offers this and other tools through a variety of courses and custom programs to support the development of conflict management and collaborative problem solving skills. For more information on these programs please contact Barbara Goldman 434/980-6383 or Bonnie Boston 434/980-6277

[Back to Top](#)



Transforming Organizations

Action Research

A Guide to Change and Continuous Learning in Organizations (The third article in a series)

By Beverly R. Fletcher, Ed.D., FEI Faculty and Alfred L. Cooke, Ph.D., Director Center for Organizational Performance

Like the blind men in the poem below, leaders often approach organizational problems from a single perspective, and from that vantage point they fail to see the many ways to approach a problem. Expanding the possibilities beyond one's limitations is not an easy thing to do without a guiding process. Action Research serves as that process.

The Blind Men and the Elephant By John Godfrey Saxe

There were six men of Indostan
To learning, much inclined
Went to see the elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The first approached the elephant
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! But the elephant
Is very like a WALL!"

The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an elephant
Is very like a SPEAR!"

The third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quote he, "the elephant
Is very like a SNAKE!"

The fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quote he:
"'Tis clear enough the elephant
Is very like a TREE!"

The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact, who can?
This marvel of an elephant
Is very like a FAN!"

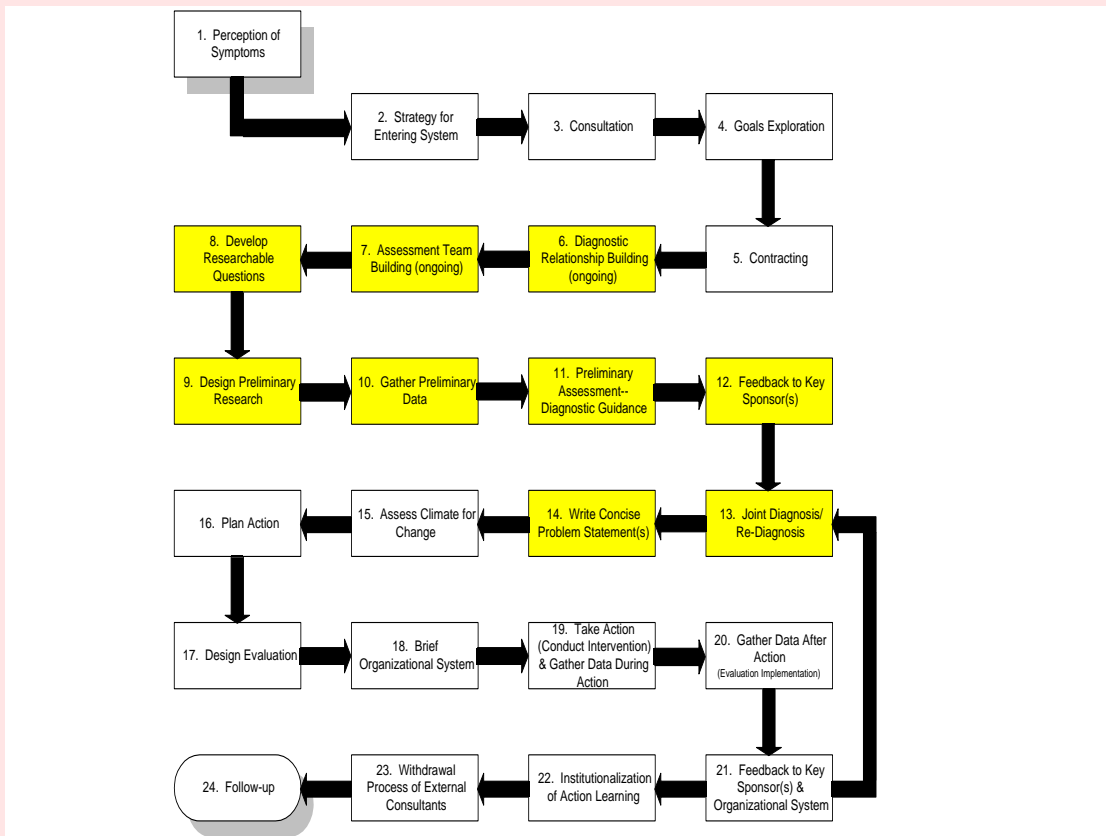
The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quote he, "the elephant
"Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
All were in the wrong!

In the previous article we discussed the first five stages of the expanded action research model. We emphasized that the leader must create a clear agreement with key stakeholders in the organization as a starting point for assuring the effectiveness of the action research process. The following are steps 6

through 14, which continue the discussion of the purpose and use of the expanded action research model:

The Expanded Action Research Model (Phases 6 through 14)



6. Diagnostic Relationship Building (Ongoing)

Careful attention to establishing a trusting diagnostic relationship helps to obtain *valid* (verifiable/accurate), *reliable* (repeatable), *sensitive* (represents reality) information about organizational functioning, and rallies energy for constructive organizational change. Leaders must pay close attention to developing the collaborative diagnostic relationship necessary for effecting positive organizational change. Establishing a diagnostic relationship is similar to forming a contract—like contracting, it involves a process of ongoing trust building in the organization. Answers to the following questions provide the substance of a diagnostic contract between data gatherers and data users.

- What do we want from you and why?
- How will we protect your confidentiality?
- Who will have access to the raw data? To the final report?
- What's in it for you to provide us with this information?

7. Assessment Team Building (Ongoing)

The Assessment Team is a *collaborative* work group comprised of key people who represent a cross-section of the organization's structure and levels. This team will carry out the primary Action Research process. This team must become productive within a short time frame. Therefore, a well designed *team building* effort is necessary to bring the team up to speed quickly. Key components of team building include clarifying purpose and goals of the effort, establishing norms, trust building, and member training in basic diagnostic and research processes.

8. Develop Researchable Questions

This is the first tangible task that the Assessment Team working collaboratively must accomplish. Because action research is a cyclical and iterative process, the mere *selection* of a place to start the investigation is more important than determining exactly "*the right place*" to start. Preliminary *variables* are "preliminary" in that the Assessment Team selects them as a *point of entry* into the investigation. This task answers the question "**What will we investigate?**" and "**Where will we start in our investigation?**" Understanding diagnostics is a crucial skill necessary for the Assessment Team to accomplish the task of establishing the preliminary variables of interest and asking researchable questions.

9. Design Preliminary Research

Research questions provide the necessary focus and the research design ensures the gathering of useful information for the preliminary diagnosis. The research must be designed to answer the question "**How will we collect and analyze data?**" This design must be comprised of data collection methods that are sensitive (represent reality), reliable (repeatable results), and valid (verifiable and accurate). There are a number of useful methods for gathering data, including questionnaires or surveys, interviews (structured or in-depth), observations, and archival searches. There are advantages and disadvantages to using each method. It may be most effective to use an appropriate combination of methods to compensate for any one method's disadvantages.

10. Gather Preliminary Data

This is the *actual gathering of data* using the preliminary research design planned by the Assessment Team. In this phase, the Team needs the cooperation of people in the organization. If the *diagnostic relationship* has been properly attended to ahead of time, organizational cooperation will be more likely and the collection of sensitive, reliable and valid data assured.

11. Preliminary Assessment—Diagnostic Guidance

The Assessment Team must use their research skills and knowledge of the organization to understand the data and put it in a form that will help the key sponsors and stakeholders of the organization to understand these preliminary results. The concept of *equifinality* is important to keep in mind during this phase. It suggests that these results are preliminary and may be viewed a number of different ways by different people.

12. Feedback to Key Sponsor(s)

Communication is essential throughout the process. However, feeding back information to key stakeholders and sponsors is a critical step in the action research process. Who attends this feedback session is important. The key sponsors and all critical decision makers must be present. The general guideline is that the meeting should be attended by everyone who must not be surprised by the resulting actions that will be taken. Feedback involves giving relevant information regarding the performance of the organization, groups, or individuals targeted in the diagnosis. Feedback involves giving diagnostic data and analyses to the key sponsors and helping them to interpret the data and define the problem. Effective feedback is relevant (meaningful), understandable, descriptive (linked to "real" organizational behaviors), verifiable, timely (as quickly as possible after the analysis), limited (to what can be realistically processed at one time), impactful (limited to things that clients can do something about), as much as possible comparative (reference points or bench marks are given to help clients understand the data), and unfinalized—remember "*equifinality*:" this is just the beginning! It should not only be a stimulus for current action, but should spur further diagnosis if needed)

13. Joint Diagnosis

The diagnostic meeting between key stakeholders and decision makers may be a continuation of the feedback meeting. If it is a separate meeting, it should be scheduled as close to the feedback meeting as possible. Two distinct groups are involved in this process: The Assessment Team and the key sponsors

and stakeholders to whom the feedback was directed. These groups are *jointly involved* in determining causes of organizational problems. It is critical that key stakeholders and sponsors participate in analyzing and interpreting the results to provide decision authority and impetus for the next phases of the process.

14. Write Concise Problem Statement(s)

The primary outcome of data analysis and interpretation from the joint diagnostic meeting is the creation of a clear concisely stated ***problem statement***. The core underlying problem must be defined in order to give the remaining action research process focus and direction. In addition, organizational members must own the problem as defined in order to move forward with the remaining action research processes.

In conclusion, steps 6 through 14 give specific guidance for the *preliminary research* part of the expanded action research process. Failures in a change process can result from the misuse of diagnostic tools, premature finalization of a preliminary diagnosis, the ineffective implementation of an intervention, an ineffective evaluation process, or the failure to reiterate and complete the action research process (i.e. failure to continue the cyclical iterative process) by re-diagnosing and adjusting or changing the intervention. Article number four (the final article of this series) will complete the expanded action research model by examining phases 15 through 24: starting with *Assess Climate for Change* and ending with *Follow-up*.

If you want assistance with implementing the action research process in your agency, contact Dr. Alfred Cooke, Director of the Center for Organizational Performance at the Federal Executive Institute (Alfred.cooke@opm.gov or 434-980-6360).

[Back to Top](#)



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