



Evaluating Clear Leadership's Impact on Individual & Organizational Performance

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executive summary

THIS REPORT DESCRIBES THE IMPACT OF A LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM ON 38 PARTICIPANTS from a regional, multi-site health care institution in the Province of British Columbia, Canada and on the institution itself. The focus is on the second phase, Clear Leadership, which sought to increase competence in interpersonal communication and organizational learning. The central issue explored is how participation in this course impacted individual and organizational performance.

Interviews were conducted (and videotaped) with participants who had completed the program through one of six cohort groups selected from a random, stratified sample of 40 participants. The use of open- and close-ended questions allowed for both a quantitative and qualitative review of the program's impact. Participants were routinely encouraged to provide workplace examples to illustrate their responses.

Highlights *Impact of Clear Leadership Training*

used skills daily or all the time	40%
described experiencing empowerment	70%
rated the program outstanding	76%
reported being a better leader	100%
engaged conflict using skills	95%
witnessed organizational benefits	54%

Supporting previous findings, this study found evidence of high level of skill transfer. More than 40% of participants report using the skills daily or all the time, with the most popular skill being the CUBE, followed by the curious and descriptive self. Remarkably, everyone stated that their effectiveness as a leader had been positively impacted. About 60% were able to reference examples of feedback that told them they were being more effective. A little more than 70% described experiences that strongly suggested an increased sense of empowerment.

Although many participants stated that not enough time had elapsed for benefits to organizational performance to have occurred, more than half identified some aspect of improved organizational performance. Retention, healthy workplace, and support for organizational goals were the three most common aspects of workplace functioning identified as

having been impacted or which participants believed would be positively impacted in the future. Individuals were generally very optimistic about the training's impact with 76% rating the program's return on investment as outstanding. Participant recommendation's for improving the program most often centred around maintaining and reinforcing skill use. The second most popular form of recommendation was concerned with increasing enrolment in the program.

This report suggests that future studies of Clear Leadership examine how skills are spread across the organization from individual to individual. There is evidence to suggest that the extent to which Clear Leadership skills are transmitted to others who haven't been trained serves as another important characteristic that differentiates it from other training programs.

preface

THIS REPORT DESCRIBES THE IMPACT OF a leadership training program on 38 participants from a regional, multi-site health care institution in the Province of British Columbia, Canada and on the institution itself. In this report we will call this program Advanced Leadership Skills. It was comprised of three phases (Personal Mastery, Clear Leadership, and Power, Systems & Partnership) spaced over about six months and was specifically designed for the organization's managers and directors. This study focuses on the second phase, Clear Leadership, which sought to increase competence in interpersonal communication and organizational learning. It aimed to transfer a leadership skill set required to get great results from an empowered organization. The central issue explored is how participation in this course impacted managerial functioning and empowerment at the individual and organizational levels.

Delivery of Advanced Leadership Skills began in 2003 in cohort groups of about 25, with about 3 cohorts a year. In the summer of 2005, interviews were conducted (and videotaped) with participants who had completed the program through one of six cohort groups. A random, stratified sample of 40 participants, based

on managerial level and cohort group, was created by the organization's Learning and Development group. They were contacted by the Learning and Development group and invited to participate in a study to assess the impact of the program. Thirty-eight volunteered to do so. The videotapes were later analyzed for content themes and data matrixes developed to capture the items of interest in this and another study.

Anywhere from one week to 30 months elapsed from the time participants completed the training to their interview session. Interviews lasted between 30 to 55 minutes and consisted of both open- and close-ended questions. Some of the close-ended questions used a rating scale. Participants were routinely encouraged to provide workplace examples to illustrate their responses. This allowed for both a quantitative and qualitative review of the program's impact.

The paper begins with a brief explanation of the principles behind the Clear Leadership course and then describes the methodology of this study. The results section looks first at the impact on individuals, specifically at their use of the skills and the impact on their leadership and sense of empowerment. Then the impact on the organization is examined followed by a look at relationships between various findings. The final results section describes recommendations respondents made for increasing the value of the course. The study concludes with

a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

clear leadership

THE CLEAR LEADERSHIP COURSE IS predicated on the theories and techniques described by Bushe (2001). In this book, Bushe argues that two things make it difficult for people in organizations to learn from their collective experience. The first is that everyone creates their own experience. A person's history, education, culture, current emotional state and a variety of other factors contribute to shaping their observations, thoughts, feelings and motivations at any time. Since everyone is having a different experience, and anyone's experience is as valid any other's, learning collectively from experience raises difficult dilemmas not accounted for in most descriptions of organizational learning.

The second barrier to collective learning is that as sense-making beings, people are compelled to make sense of each other, which they do by making up stories about each other's experience. Rather than check these stories out with the individual, people tend to go to third parties to test out their stories and compare notes. Bushe (2001) describes the resulting situation

as “interpersonal mush” – a condition that leads to numerous interpersonal and organizational problems. He contends that 4 out of 5 organizational problems can be traced back to the mush and if replaced by “interpersonal clarity”, will be resolved. The course teaches participants how to have “organizational learning conversations” – conversations that replace interpersonal mush with interpersonal clarity.

The Clear Leadership course helps participants to see their organizations as filled with stories people are making up to make sense of other’s actions. It provides skills for breaking through the interpersonal mush to increase organizational learning and improve working relationships. Bushe (2001) argues that this breakthrough state of interpersonal clarity is essential for creating and sustaining empowered organizations, and for building cultures of collaboration (Bushe, 2006). In previous research, it has been found that the Clear Leadership Course is significantly more effective than most leadership training programs when it comes to skill transfer (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, in press). This study focused more on the impact of that skill transfer on individuals and the organization.



methodology

THE STUDY SOUGHT TO INVESTIGATE THE impact of the Clear Leadership course on tangible performance outcomes by asking participants to rate the impact of the program on a set of outcomes and to ask for concrete examples to support their rating. Mainly open-ended questions, with a few survey type questions, were used to explore participant experiences since taking the course. (See the Appendix for the interview guide). Although the results presented below are based on interviews with 38 individuals, one interviewee had to cut their interview short and is consequently not included in all of the quantitative data. After the interviews, the video-tapes were content analyzed to uncover the frequency of common experiences. Many of the results presented below were generated by aggregating comments and patterns provided by participants. With regards to findings calculated using this approach, it is important to consider that they (1) probably under represent the Clear Leadership course’s impact and (2) primarily confer an estimate of frequency and not strength. The reasoning behind this first caution stems from the fact that much of the information raised by participants was at their discretion. As you can see from the interview guide, respondents were asked about the overall Advanced Leadership Skills - they were not prompted to talk about

the Clear Leadership segment. There are an indeterminate number of ways a participant can respond to, “please tell me about any examples at work where you have used knowledge or skills learnt from the program.” If a respondent does not relate a specific experience (such as encouraging others to participate in the course), it does not mean they did not have this experience. This is particularly important in assessing the impact on the organization. We did not ask participants if any specific impact had occurred, so the percentage saying that taking the course improved retention, for example, is a measure of those who spontaneously offered that impact. We don’t know how many, if asked specifically “did the course increase retention”, would have agreed or disagreed with that.

The second caution is also a result of using an open-ended interview technique. For example, when an individual reports feeling empowered by the course, this does not tell us the degree of empowerment experienced. As such, many of the results presented below reflect this present-versus-absent approach to evaluating impact. This study used this open-ended approach in asking participants to describe their own experience in their own words, without prompting, to guard against leading respondents to “say what we want to hear”. It is a conservative research strategy and, as such, allows for much greater confidence in positive findings.

results

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT

USE OF SKILLS

CONSISTENT WITH GILPIN-JACKSON & Bushe’s (in press) findings there was a high degree of skill transfer from the course to the work setting. Participants reported that they had used, on average, 5.9 different skills since the training. The frequency with which skills were used ranged from occasionally to all the time. Average skill use came out between daily and weekly, with a little over 40% of participants reporting using the skills daily or all the time. With regards to specific skills used, the CUBE – a tool used for disaggregating and understanding experience – was identified most frequently. 75% named the cube by name during their interview, and nearly everyone described the CUBE or a skill necessitating its use. Not surprisingly, the CUBE was also the mostly likely skill participants first identified or implied when asked what skills they had used since participating in the program.

It is interesting that many participants differentiated between automatic, unconscious use of the skills and

Table 2 - Clear Leadership Skills Used

Cube or skill requiring Cube	97%
Cube explicitly named	75%
Curious Self	76%
Descriptive Self	68%
Aware Self	64%
Learning Conversation	64%
Differentiation	41%
Clear Language	35%
Appreciative Self	27%

more deliberate, conscious use. Some offered different estimates for the frequency with which they likely use the skills in each manner. Others suggested that although they could not provide an estimate of their unconscious use of the skills, they believed it was higher than their conscious use. Participants also reported that, over time it became more difficult to identify skill application because they were integrating the skills into everyday thinking and acting. For these individuals, it was challenging to identify when any skill was used because of its seamless and implicit utilization. One individual remarked, “I’m not using the skills explicitly, it is more about asking people to describe their experience and giving them cues.” There was also diversity in terms of where individuals were using their skills. One-on-one interactions were the most commonly reported (including emails). About two-thirds discussed the use of these skills in meetings.

Although the interviewees were not specifically asked if they used the skills outside of work, one in three described using the skills at home or in their personal lives, usually with great success.

With regard to skill application, every individual interviewed described having engaged others differently as a result of the program, and 95% described using learned skills to engage conflict in some form. Forms of engagement varied from direct one-on-one experiences to more sophisticated forms that involved working through others. For example, one in five individuals (22%) described teaching others Clear Leadership skills, one third (32%) described coaching peers or staff with the skills to help them engage others, and two thirds (65%) described mediating or facilitating conflict between others using the skills.

Comments indicated that skill use was impacted by external factors. For example, most individuals indicated that skill use was improved when used with others who had gone through the program. Others reported feeling more limited in their skills with those who were not similarly trained. However, there were a few individuals that did not ascribe any difference interacting with those who had gone through the program and those who had not. The following statements demonstrate some of the more common aspects of communication that were impacted.

Table 1 - Use of Clear Leadership Skills

	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation
Average Number of Skills Used	5.9	3-10	1.7
Average Frequency of Skill Use	4.4	3-6	0.9

Note: For frequency of skill use 6=all of the time, 5=daily, 4=weekly, 3=occasionally, 2=seldom, 1=never

“Having others that have taken the course helps keep me using the skills.”
Director

“There’s a huge impact having others go through the program... it’s easier, and there’s a shared language, and an agreement to not make up stories [about each other].” Coordinator

“Having had my director go through the program made it easier for me to have a learning conversation [with him], because we understood where we were coming from.” Manager

Another factor that came up periodically was the use of artefacts to facilitate skill use in an individual, dyadic, or group setting. The most common artefacts represented the CUBE. These took various forms from three dimensional objects that sat on desks, stickers stuck to the back of ID cards, and even tape on the floor of a workplace to literally help people move through the CUBE.

LEADERSHIP

Every respondent reported that their leadership ability was positively impacted by the program. Not one individual reported that their leadership abilities were unaffected or hampered as a result of participating in the course. When one individual was asked to elaborate about the program’s impact on their leadership, they answered, “Learning about myself makes me a better leader, and

I think that makes other people want to work for me.” For many, improved leadership abilities centred around an improved interpersonal skill set. They discussed changes in how others responded to them, or they responded to others. One individual stated, “I now look at what constitutes a good working relationship differently.” For others, the benefit was more general as reflected by this statement, “I’m more willing to take risks and get stuff done.” When probed, this individual explained that their increased willingness was in regards to what they said, how they said it, and the work they were willing to undertake.

As a follow-up, individuals were asked if they had received any positive feedback that indicated they were more effective as a leader. Almost 60% were able to relate a comment they had received that indicated to them that this was the case. The following are statements that participants provided in response to this question.

“Some people have told me that they really appreciate working with me.”
Manager

“Staff are more likely to come to me and verbalize their thoughts” Manager

“People have told me that they like how I’m doing things.” Manager

EMPOWERMENT

70% of individuals directly described achieving a greater degree

of empowerment as measured by changes in confidence or self-efficacy. For example, two individuals expressly stated that they no longer fear their performance reviews. The following are some of the statements that participants gave that indicate this change.

“I am more confident in what I’m saying, and how I’m saying it.” Director

“The program validated how I wanted to do business.” Manager

“It [the program] gave me permission to approach things the way I wanted to... the permission was internal, not from others.” Manager

“This course gave me the opportunity to speak up to people I wouldn’t have before.” Supervisor

A reoccurring comment that combines the issue of empowerment with leadership falls into the category of earning a license to lead. One individual explained, “I felt this was the best program I’ve ever done. I’ve always believed in doing things this way, but before I didn’t have the information to do it.” Others shared the experience of having attained the permission or affirmation needed to do things differently more explicitly. In reference to this issue, another manager explained emphatically, “They unleashed a monster”, meaning that people felt a great deal more confidence in taking initiative and acting powerfully.

All participants reported that they had used the skills in their interactions with others. However, even though skill use and engagement showed up extremely strong, only 16 percent of participants described being more engaging. This is not entirely unexpected as they were never asked directly if they had evidence that they were more approachable or inviting than before the program. That said, those who could evidence this experience said things like, “More staff come to me to work out situations... before they just spoke amongst themselves.” As well, more than half reported being more demanding or having higher expectations about workplace behaviours, and 84% reported an experience this study identified as an increased understanding of others. The following are examples of statements illustrating that participants being more demanding and understanding in their workplace - “I don’t know how it was received, but I didn’t care, because I knew it was right for me and right for my staff.” and “I am more patient and less frustrated by what I see around me.”

Table 3 - Percentage Citing Common Themes of Leadership & Empowerment

Improved Leadership	100%
Positive feedback on change leadership	60%
Increased sense of empowerment	70%
More demanding/exacting of others	54%
More understanding of others	84%

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

The majority of respondents believed that not enough personnel had taken the course and not enough time had

elapsed for Clear Leadership to have had the impact on the organization they wanted it to have. After each interviewee was told that their organization had invested approximately \$2,000 per person in the program, they were asked to rate the organization’s return on investment from the course. 76% rated it as outstanding, 11% rated it somewhere between outstanding and adequate, and another 11% rated it adequate. Nobody interviewed rated the program as being inadequate or a waste of time.

Table 4- Return on Investment (% citing each level of return)

Outstanding	76%
Between Adequate & Outstanding	11%
Adequate	11%

Note: percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding

Respondents identified several aspects of the organization’s functioning they believed would be affected by wide spread training in Clear Leadership. The most commonly anticipated benefits were increased retention, a healthy workplace, increased support for organizational goals, improved productivity, and improved customer service. These were reported at least 25% of the time.

These statements were often accompanied with reasoning to explain their belief. For example, one individual affirmed their

belief that the program contributed to a healthy workplace by stating, “An organization will always benefit if it has healthy people working [in it]”.

With regards to why another individual believed there would be greater support for organizational goals, they explained, “If there is clarity, there is much better decision making and buy-in.” Table 5 summarizes the various aspects of organizational performance respondents believed would be positively impacted by the course and the percentage of people citing the same theme. These have been organized into people, business, and goals. The latter group includes improvements to collaboration or networking because numerous individuals identified this outcome as a stated strategic priority of senior management. As such, participants tended to discuss improved collaboration and networking as an end in itself.

Table 5 - Areas Expected to Benefit from Clear Leadership Skills (percent citing each)

People	
Retention	38%
Healthy Workplace	32%
Morale	14%
Recruitment	14%
Employee Satisfaction	11%
Absenteeism	11%
Business	
Productivity	27%
Customer Service	24%
Efficiency (time or money)	24%
Effectiveness/Quality	14%
Union Relations	14%
Goals	
Support for Org Goals	30%
Collaboration/Networking	27%
Buy-in	11%

More than half of those interviewed (54%) identified at least one aspect of organizational performance where they had witnessed an improvement attributable to the course (see Table 6). Retention was the most commonly stated benefit, either anticipated or realized. Three different participants commented that if not for the course they would have left, and two were able to identify others who had stayed as a result of taking the course. When discussing retention, one individual stated, "I'm still working... I would have been gone. I know I would have been gone. And I probably would have been out of health care altogether."

Increased retention appeared to come from improvements in interpersonal relations and work life following the course and was also supported by those people who pointed to improved relationships with unions. For some, this meant having improved dealings with union representatives, for others, it meant having greater success dealing with staff such that they did not have to manage workplace challenges through and with the union. Interestingly, a few individuals stated that they did not believe the Clear Leadership skills could be effective in a union setting. One individual remarked, "It doesn't work well in union setting, the trust isn't there. It is confrontational, taking sides, and one doesn't feel free to trust." One possibility that may account for this difference is that some individuals may have found that the

Clear Leadership skills helped prevent union involvement as a result of preventing escalation and mediation, and thus improved relations with the union representatives. Conversely, those individuals who did not experience a similar benefit may have been contending union difficulties that were well beyond a prevention stage thus limiting the skills' potential effectiveness.

Improved efficiency at the workplace was another aspect of improved workplace functioning. The most common source discussed was improved meeting interactions. A few individuals suggested that decision making had sped up, but most explained that what made the difference was not having to return to the same issues time after time. Instead, individuals using the Clear Leadership skills were better able to discuss an issue, move it forward with a action plan, and provide ample opportunity for others to continue the discussion if they believed something did not yet make sense. Participants described this process as much more effective and as saving considerable time in the long run. The benefit of supporting or furthering organizational goals came up repeatedly in various forms. For some, it was a new found commitment toward organizational outcomes. For others, it was a greater appreciation for their part in organizational functioning. Many also stated a greater appreciation for the importance of providing personnel with a big picture or context

to help them make sense of their jobs and organizational decisions. Examples of these types of experiences include:

"It helps create a healthy workplace and this certainly appears to be the catch phrase of the year." Manager

"Has helped my team think bigger, which is important for a growing organization." Administrator

"I think [our organization] is always racing so fast... it's important to understand the context." Manager

"I now appreciate values and mission. I never did before." Manager

Table 6 - Observed benefits of the Clear Leadership course

improved	Retention
improved	Recruitment
improved	Healthy Workplace
improved	Morale
improved	Customer Service
reduced	Absenteeism
reduced	Grievances & Complaints
achieved	Organizational Goals
increased	Collaboration/Networking
increased	Efficiency
increased	Effectiveness
increased	Productivity
increased	Creativity

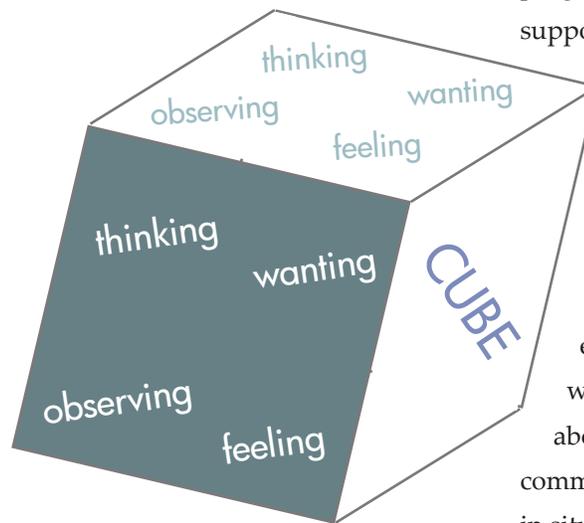
Given the number of positive comments about Clear Leadership individuals made during their interviews, it was not surprising that there was considerable endorsement of the program between participants and their workplace colleagues. More than half

of those interviewed (54%) described having recommended or encouraged others to participate in the program, and 22% explicitly described having passed on their learnings to others. Putting the two groups together revealed that more than 60% of those interviewed were actively trying to spread the training's teachings. It is important to note that participants were not directly asked if they had participated in skill transmission behaviours. Consequently, these results are based only on information that interviewees spontaneously offered.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OUTCOMES

Some relationships between outcomes and variables were found to be statistically significant. Where findings were not found to be statistically significant, the results occurred in the expected direction in the vast majority of cases. Not surprisingly, the frequency with which learned skills were being applied in the workplace was positively correlated with judgements about the program's return on investment ($r = .49$). Frequency of skill use was also positively correlated with the extent to which participants believed their ability to build effective working relationships had been positively impacted ($r = .41$).

Whether individuals had encouraged others to participate in the program was related to the number of skills we categorized them as using. Those who reported encouraging others identified having used an average of five (5) skills since their training. Those who did not report encouraging others to participate reported using fewer skills, with an average of four (4) since training. Additionally, individuals identifying retention as an experienced or anticipated organizational benefit reported using the skills with greater frequency (daily on average) than those not identifying retention in this manner (weekly on average). Those identifying retention as a realized or anticipated benefit were also almost twice as likely to have reported encouraging others to participate in the program.



participant recommendations

SOME PARTICIPANTS PROVIDED USEFUL feedback when asked how the program could be improved, while some were at a loss as to how this could be done. The most common request was for additional support to maintain learnings and support integration between managers or networks created during training. Forms of support identified included refresher courses, online forums, and follow-up courses that included the possibility for learning more advanced skills. For some, maintaining integration between managers who had participated in the program was also a form of training support. As one individual explained,

“I would like to hear from other people who have gone through the program about their experience, learning from that.” With regards to advanced skills, individuals showed interest in building and mastering what they had learned, learning about conflict management, and communicating with individuals in situations with an extreme power imbalance, such as with a superior or union leader.

To facilitate participation in the program, a few individuals recommended that alternative sites be provided for

Table 7- Statistically Significant Correlations

Frequency of Skill Use & Return on Investment	$r = .49$
Frequency of Skill Use & Improved Relationship Building	$r = .41$

employees working at more remote locations. One idea involved delivering the course at work sites so that individuals who work together could benefit from participating together, which was also a reoccurring theme. As one individual explained, "I wish I had done this with the people I work with." On the other hand, many did point out that to deliver courses to employees working together would deny them the experience of meeting new people from across the organization. Many claimed this helped them get a bigger picture of their organization and which others said helped them identify the individuals from who they were supposed to get specific services and resources. As discussed earlier, the desire to integrate with others from across the organization was considerable. Unfortunately, many felt that given the extreme geographic dispersal of the organization, this was next to impossible without organizational support.

The issue of who should participate also surfaced repeatedly. The most popular request was for front-line employees to also participate. There was concern that they shouldn't be denied the opportunity to improve their working relationships, most especially as they are the ones being asked to deliver services and work with clients, often in extremely difficult conditions. One participant argued, "There needs to be more line people involved. Why shouldn't they have the opportunity to make the same connections?"

The second most common comment was that everyone needed to participate. One individual remarked, "I think everyone should do it, especially senior management. That way it becomes a way of life... like immunization programs." For many, delivering the course to everyone introduced another challenge – mandating the program. The recurring concern was that those who most needed to go were not participating. The only suggestion provided for overcoming this challenge involved having the organization fully cover the training cost, although many were careful to point out that this might not be a good idea. Another concern that several participants raised was the observation that some individuals did not want to take the program because of a perception that it was too "touchy-feely". A common recommendation to deal with this challenge was to pre-test program participants. Their idea was to group participants together that may benefit from a modified version or method of delivery. However, as with the above suggestion, participants were quick to point out that this would again compromise the course's ability to bring a diverse group of employees together in a meaningful way.



conclusion

IMPACT

USING A RANDOM, STRATIFIED SAMPLE allows one to confidently predict that the Clear Leadership course is fairly consistent in delivering valued impacts on individuals and organizations. Supporting previous research, the evidence indicates that Clear Leadership results in very high skill transfer and that skill use is, for most people, mediated by the presence of others having also gone through the program. During interviews it was not uncommon to hear statements such as, "I now have allies in getting clarity. Before I felt like I was on my own."

Almost all individuals reported having used the CUBE or a more complex skill that necessitated its application. That said, it was also common for participants to qualify their skill use by differentiating between deliberate and unconscious use. Some suggested that their unconscious use was considerably more frequent and pervasive than their conscious use. One individual explained, "I don't notice that I'm using them until someone tells me I'm using them." The extent to which individuals reported being positively impacted by the training suggests that skill use is indeed widespread.

Every manager that was interviewed described at least some change

in their leadership abilities and how they engaged others. At the high end, a few described having being changed as a person and reported using the skills all of the time. Others reported changes in their behaviour. These were usually described as taking greater care in how they described their experience or listened to others. The 70% of people interviewed who described a greater degree of empowerment is probably a conservative estimate for two reasons. First, individuals were not specifically asked if they felt empowered, but were left on their own to raise personal outcomes. Second, it does not take into account that all managers reported improved leadership abilities and that 95% reported an increased willingness to engage conflict. Given the high rate of skill transfer, it is not surprising that the impact on individuals was this pronounced and that 75% of individuals rated the program's return on investment as being outstanding. One individual commented, "I feel honoured for the [organization] to have invested in me like this... a course about me." Related to this statement were remarks that the organization's commitment to programs like Clear Leadership were an example of senior management walking the talk. "We often get emails from the executive," one individual explained, "that say that communication is really important." Many individuals expressed that the course's positive impact bestowed

considerable credibility to both the organization and the organizational development unit. As one participant exclaimed, "[The organization] rocks in this regard!"

In exploring the training's impact on organizational performance many individuals were hesitant in suggesting that much had changed, though they were quick to identify several aspects of organizational functioning that they believed would be impacted. The most commonly cited performance measure that individuals believed would benefit or had benefited were retention (38%), healthy workplace (32%), and support for organizational goals (30%). The strength of the retention finding was supported by the statements of three individuals who said they would have left if it had not been for the program. What they believed was keeping them around was an increased ability to work with others and get things done. Using the formula that posits that employee replacement costs are 1.5 the individual's annual salary (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999), the expense of putting these 40 individuals through Applied Leadership Skills has already been paid for.

Even though many individuals did state that they did not believe enough time had elapsed to have realized an organizational impact, about half (54%) did point to a specific area of organizational performance that they thought had benefited. It is perhaps

somewhat surprising that this result is not higher given that three-quarters of those interviewed (75%) rated the program's return on investment as being outstanding and that none provided a rating lower than adequate. There were, however, several other aspects of workplace functioning that participants regularly pointed to as benefiting from the course, either potentially or manifest at the time of interview.

There was an interesting lack of differences between participants who had recently completed the course and those who had completed years earlier. Many of the responses provided by interviewees suggested that there may be a galvanizing process following the course in which skills are solidified. For some this process involved reflecting on learnings before applying skills. Others described a learning phase following the program as they experimented with skill application. In both instances, skills appeared to become better ingrained over time. Interview responses also indicated that there may be skill attrition over time. This was most evident in the common request by respondents for follow-up sessions to refresh and reinforce learnings. However, it was not possible to determine any temporal milestones that corresponded with predictable changes in thought. One possibility that might account for this finding is that although participants are forgetting the course lexicon, the key messages are being retained.

Consequently, over time participants may no longer distinguish between particular skills, instead grouping various behaviours into a broader and more general understanding. For example, the course material might be reduced and reorganized into three catch phrases: everyone's having a different experience, don't make up stories and create clear conversations. Unfortunately, without using a larger sample size and tracking impact over a greater time frame, it's difficult to be any clearer about this phenomenon.

The types of recommendations that individuals provided to further improve the program's effectiveness generally fell into one of two categories. The first pertained to maintaining and building on program learnings. This included refresher courses, support networks, or simply doing the course again. The second set of recommendations was concerned with increasing enrolment in Clear Leadership. This second set of recommendations included broadening the list of eligible personnel, mandating the program, and minimizing logistical challenges such as location. Somewhat surprisingly, however, was that many individuals were not able to provide any suggestions for improving the program. Indeed, many individuals readily shared their mental maps that they used to explain the program's effectiveness. For example, "[It] works, because it is so personal. And people leave [the training] feeling part of the organization." Another respondent

gave a more complex account. "One, it raises the bar. Two, it provides better understanding about what good leadership looks like. Three, it makes for a more positive organization, and four, it makes for 'an anything is possible' organization, which is more attractive."

LIMITATIONS

This study was successful in uncovering several findings. Some of these were statistically significant while others served a useful explorative function. However, this study is limited in several respects. The greatest challenge involved having to make sense of all the information provided by participants, most of which were in response to open-ended questions. Although this allowed for a rich overview of the program's impact, it has made it difficult to precisely determine some outcomes or the degree of impact for others.

Another challenge was the exploratory nature of the study. The result is that some of the conventions and approaches used to quantify information may compromise validity. Another concern is with the reporting method. It has been demonstrated numerous times in the last century that humans do not have perfect access to their cognitions (Landrum, 1990).

Some other challenges are indicative of the interview process itself. One issue is a concern for demand charac-

teristics – characteristics of the interviewer that influence the interviewee's responses. This might be partially negated by not having fully formulated how the study would be carried out during most of the interviews. Also problematic was the practice of videotaping the interviews. Although the video camera was invaluable for following up and in-depth study, it was somewhat inimical to some of the sensitive material under investigation. Participants were often very careful not to use names and some outright stated that they would not discuss workplace strife other than in the most general form. While all participants had the option to opt-out of the videotaping, only two individuals did so while many who cooperated in this fashion were visibly cognizant of the video camera's presence.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several interesting and unusual findings emerged from this study. The following suggests further steps for understanding the impact of Clear Leadership on individual and organizational performance.

Clear Leadership has distinguished itself as a training program with an extremely effective skill transfer rate. Less well understood is how the program's learnings spread through an organization. As discussed above, 62% of those interviewed shared an

experience that indicated they were trying to spread the Clear Leadership skills. There is evidence to suggest that the extent to which Clear Leadership skills are transmitted to others who haven't been trained serves as another important characteristic that differentiates it from other training programs. A better understanding of how skills are transmitted could help organizations provide support for promoting the transmission of skills and help persuade personnel to participate in advanced training. Many participants discussed the challenge of trying to explain the course to others. Part of the difficulty appeared to be in presenting the program in such a manner that it would not discourage them from enrolling. One individual commented, "Those who go through it don't tell others how tough it is, they can't prepare for it". Indeed, another individual who was interested in participating had a difficult time learning anything specific about the course from those who had participated as they often provided only general and vague descriptions. Future work and research could examine how to facilitate this process. One possible approach is to look at academic literature investigating cultural transmissions, such as meme research. That several participants discussed the program's impact on organizational culture points to potential benefits in taking this approach.

Another point of interest pertains to how skills are used, and how skill

use might change over time. Many individuals discussed a difference between using learned skills consciously and unconsciously. For many, skills became increasingly automatic over time such that they were no longer aware of the frequency or extent to which they were using skills. Better understanding of the processes by which skills galvanize and atrophy could be helpful in identifying how to best reinforce skill retention and application.

Other issues worth exploring include a better understanding of why a few individuals report that their use of the skills is not effected by whether others have gone through the program despite the finding that the vast majority of participants reported that skill use was easier, quicker, or more effective when used with people who had also gone through the program. Are those who describe being unaffected simply more effective in their communications, or are they referencing a different aspect of interpersonal communication that lends itself to a different conclusion about impact? Another issue that deserves attention involves learning the circumstances under which individuals are most likely to find skill application useful in a union setting. It is likely that this issue is closely related to how individuals think about conflict, and how they believe the skills can be used to deal with conflictive situations.

Alternative research methods would likely prove useful in better understanding the impact of Clear

Leadership on individual and organizational performance. A survey would perhaps be the most economical and effective next step for attaining a better understanding of Clear Leadership's impact. It is important to note that organization that serves as this studies basis has begun widely implementing Gallup's 12-question survey of employee engagement. This provides a unique opportunity to investigate Clear Leadership's impact against a widely publicized and accepted tool. More specifically, future studies of Clear Leadership would be able to evaluate a relationship between organizational empowerment and managerial effectiveness.

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appendix

interview question guide

1. Please tell me about any events at work where you have used knowledge or skills you learned from Advanced Leadership Skills.
2. How often would you say that you use skills you gained from the program at work?
1- never 2- rarely 3- occasionally 4- weekly 5- daily 6- all the time
3. Has the program changed who you are as a person?
4. Are there other people that you work with regularly who have taken the training program? If so, has that influenced your use of the skills?
5. How you ever observed others using the skills from the program?
6. It costs about \$2000 per participant for the whole program. Looking back on the time and money it cost you and the organization to participate in the program, please rate the overall return on investment on the following scale:
1- waste of money 2- inadequate 3. adequate 4. outstanding
7. What are the key skills you learned from the Advanced Leadership Skills program?
8. What kind of things would you point to as direct benefits to your organization.
9. As a result of the program do you think about conflict differently? If so, how?
10. Have you managed any conflicts, or potential conflicts differently as a result of the program?
11. Have you ever used the skills or knowledge from the program to mediate or resolve conflicts between other people?
12. Have you ever used the skills or knowledge from the program to manage conflicts in a group or between groups?
13. Do you think the program has impacted your effectiveness as a leader?
14. Have you received feedback that tells you that you are being more effective?
15. How has the program impacted your ability to build effective working relationships?
1. not at all 2. slightly 3. moderately 4. extremely
16. From each of the phases, what has had the most impact on you.
17. What do you think is the next edge for your own learning?
18. What kind of leadership development experience would you be most interested in doing next?