

Wednesday 15 June 2011 The Medicine Wheel

A group of 13 of us met first of all on the lovely sunny terrace at Résidence Colladon and engaged in some very relaxed and enjoyable networking.

In the meeting itself, Virginia Guerrero introduced us to the Medicine Wheel, A thousand year old leadership style assessment framework. I apologise for the lack of photos, but we were all so involved that no one took any.

So what is a 'medicine wheel?'

Originally, and still today, medicine wheels are stone structures constructed by certain indigenous peoples of North America for various astronomical, ritual, healing, and teaching purposes.

You can google to find all kinds of wonderful descriptions of the original and physical stone structures and the medicinal, spiritual and ritual implications they had for the ancient and indigenous peoples of North America.

The 'Medicine Wheel' instrument is a self assessment tool developed by Napier, Roberts and Sanaghan and available as a free download. The tool reflects the traditional teachings of the opposing parts of life, spirit, personality that come together to form the whole.

Medicine Wheels are circles divided into parts (usually four), which relate with and counterbalance one another to form a whole. Many cultures have some variation of the Wheel, and the Traditional Knowledge and views of the various first peoples of North America are more compatible with the circle concept than with linear, European-based forms of thought.

The Medicine Wheel represents and unites various aspects of the world, both seen and unseen, and emphasizes how all parts of the world and all levels of being are related and connected through a life force originating in the creation of the universe. Some wheels teach about the four cardinal directions, the seasons, times of day, or stages of life; others represent the races of people, animals, natural elements, aspects of being.

The instrument is a short self assessment based on choices of opposing descriptions on how we prefer to communicate and interact in our professional lives. It has many similarities to other tools that you may have used. If you are familiar with the DISC profile it also has a nice complementary part that addresses our back-up behaviour under stress.

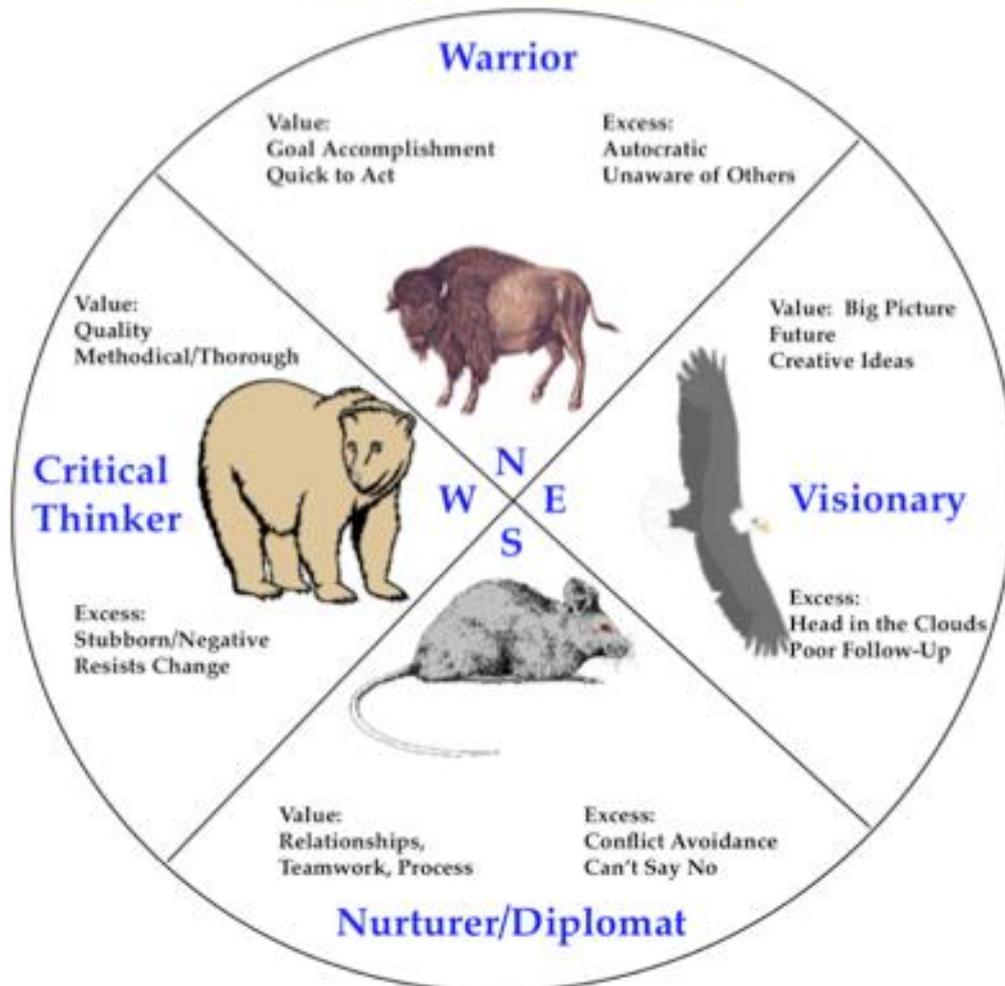
The implications of the assessment for group work were quite obvious: All parts of the wheel are important, and depend on each other in the cycle of life; what affects one affects all, and the world cannot continue with missing parts. For this reason, the Medicine Wheel teaches that harmony, balance and respect for all parts are needed to sustain life.

In a meeting it can help to establish and encourage a harmonic, balanced and respectful dynamic in a group which has come together to deal with issues, problem solve or be creative. Without every ones' contribution a solution will be flawed

We all completed part one of the instrument as there was not the time to address both components. We identified with our representative animal as you see below.

The Medicine Wheel

A Thousand Year-Old Leadership Style Assessment Framework



Assessment

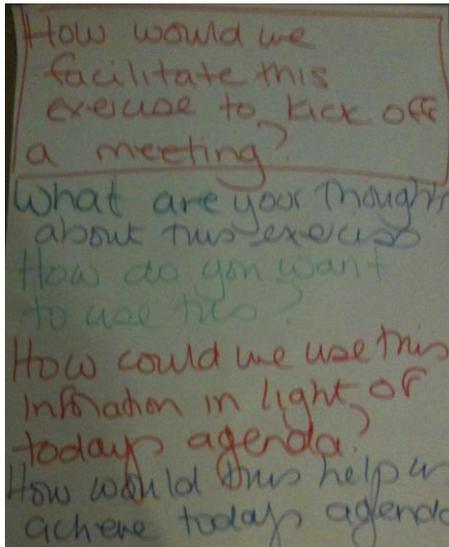
Instrument developed by Napier, Roberts and Sanaghan. Used with permission.

We had an interesting discussion about the perception and value of the instrument. The perceived face value was rated between 80-100% accurate by the group. Obviously some people expressed that one should not put too much faith in a self assessed instrument – I usually tell groups that all self-assessed results are delusional and that they need to be validated by someone who lives or works closely

with you. However having said this, we all agreed that it could be a useful tool to introduce to a group before an event.

After a period of operating like participants, I challenged the group to put on their facilitator hats and imagine how they might proceed in a meeting having just introduced this tool to the participants.

In small groups we came up with several ideas for questions to promote discussion and insight, among them:



1. What are your thoughts about this tool?
2. How could you use this information in light of today's agenda?
3. How would these insights help us achieve today's objectives?
4. Do you recognise other peoples strengths and weaknesses?
5. How valid do you think the scores are?
6. How true is this?

The basic point is to encourage the group to be reflective of the possible implications. It was noted that the group may not agree that it is a useful tool to help the discussion. If this were the case then there is no point pushing or insisting. The tool can only have true value if it is accepted by the group. However other people present noted that if the facilitator had prepared well and understood the meeting purpose and the participants and decided that such a tool as the medicine wheel would be useful then it would be unlikely that the group would dismiss or reject it.

After a reflection of our suggested debrief we noticed that a useful model for arranging and preparing these discussions could be a 'structured dialogue' or focused discussion.

A structured dialogue simply allows you to pace and lead a conversation by asking questions that organise the thinking and the discussion. A typical framework is Fact, Feelings, Implications, Decisions and Actions.

Fact: What do you notice about the distribution of the scores?

Feelings: Where do you feel particularly good about? What do you have reservations or negative feelings about?

Implications: How do you think this information can help us today?

Decisions: What shall we do to make this more likely?

Action: Could be writing up a charter or agreeing ground rules or working culture for the meeting.

These questions simply provided as examples of each kind of question. They aren't intended to be the correct or only ones to ask.



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