

Case Study

Using *Dimensions of Leadership* with a Volunteer Organization

The Client:

The board of a volunteer organization wanted help to plan a new, more effective style of leadership in their organization. Many volunteer organizations are struggling to maintain an active membership. My client is an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism and to improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

The Business Need:

The organization wanted help identifying new methods of leadership to keep their group moving forward. They needed help figuring out how to implement new styles of leadership in their work. Leadership wasn't an unfamiliar concept for these board members, many of whom are either small-business owners or employed in high-level positions. The board did have an established vision statement for the organization: "Our organization envisions a community that values literacy and leadership. We are committed to providing our youth with innovative literacy programs and leadership opportunities supported by strong collaborative partnerships."

The Solutions:

I used the *Dimensions of Leadership Profile*® as a gap analysis tool to determine the board's leadership strengths and weaknesses. The gap analysis served as a starting point for a discussion around new leadership strategies.

The Delivery:

The board organized a one-day retreat for its 15 members to focus on leadership issues and to set goals for the next year. Participants began by completing the *Dimensions of Leadership Profile* with a focus on their current, personal leadership style. Then they completed the profile again, this time focusing on what kind of leadership they felt their organization needed right now.

To complete a gap analysis, we mapped the results. I blew up an image of the *Dimensions of Leadership Wheel*. First, we mapped the current leadership styles of the group. Then we used a second wheel to map the desirable leadership styles. That helped us focus the discussion on where the group needed to go: "Now that we understand who we are, what do we need to do and what processes need to be put in place to collectively demonstrate this kind of leadership to our organization?"

Once we'd identified desirable leadership styles, the board members were eager to focus on concrete action items. We used the "Start-Stop-Continue" format that I learned many years ago from Shayne Tracy, an Inscape distributor in Canada. Flipcharts around the room were displayed with headers:

1. We need to Stop...
2. We need to Start...
3. We need to Continue...

Each board member took nine minutes to reflect privately on these three areas, using sticky notes to capture their own comments. After separating into three groups, each member posted her comments and discussed the reasoning behind those ideas. Then individuals rotated to a new "station" with new group members and repeated the process of discussing their ideas for Stop-Start-Continue. After finishing the group rotations, we organized the ideas, eliminated duplicates, clarified any misunderstandings, etc.

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The rest of the retreat was spent on strategic planning, particularly focused on identifying action that the board could take to consistently demonstrate their desired leadership styles. Board members voted on the ideas the group had generated. We identified the most important ideas and brainstormed ways to accomplish those goals of Stop-Start-Continue. This helped the board determine next steps for implementing new leadership strategies.

The Results:

The client organization was responsible for compiling the results and distributing a summary to the board members. At their next regular board meeting, they established next steps and deadlines. We closed the retreat with a round of comments; everyone shared why the day was meaningful. Most board members were thrilled that the *Dimensions of Leadership Profile* brought them two sets of insights — not only their personal leadership preferences but also the leadership needed by their organization. The visual presentation of the gap between the two was mentioned repeatedly.