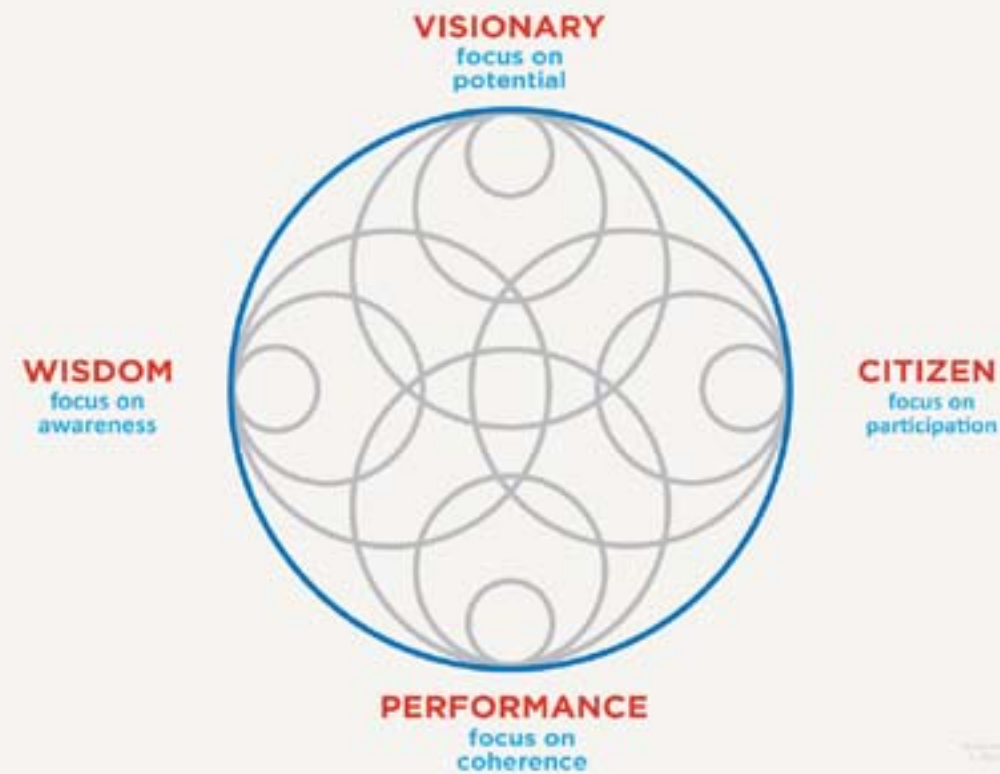




LEADING ENERGIES

Do your Conversations and Dialogues lead anywhere?
If not, try defining the Leading Energy.



The Leading Energy will give focus to the Dialogue...

Leading with a different Energy requires setting different conditions.
At a minimum, Visionary Dialogues need time, Performance Dialogues need data,
Citizen Dialogues need recognition and Wisdom Dialogues need perspective.

Dialogue is a mode of talking and thinking together that...

...helps people to find a common understanding and a common purpose. The decisions and actions that result from good dialogue make common sense to everyone involved. Good dialogue requires a set of simple and practical skills that can easily be learned and bettered with practice. In dialogue people express their own views, needs and aspirations, listen to others, agree and disagree with one another, support and challenge each other, become aware of their own assumptions and impact on others, come to appreciate diversity and to accommodate differences in ways that may not have been obvious at first. With the benefit of dialogue it is possible to undertake participatory change with people rather than imposing change by doing it to people. Change of this kind is sustainable over time because it feels right and is based on collective common sense.

WHAT ARE THE LEADING ENERGIES?

The Dialogue Skills Training is being made available to all staff in the VADOC to raise the quality of communication across the agency. These Dialogue skills are designed to enable people to think well together and to make better-informed decisions. They help people to engage by giving attention to each other (through a Check-in and the appropriate Mode), to ensure the interaction functions well (by using the Dialogic Actions), and to develop a high quality of conversation or Dialogue (by activating the Dialogic Practices). The Leading Energies build on the skills learned in the Dialogue Skills Training, and are a simple and useful way to focus the thinking in a Dialogue and lead it in a particular energetic direction.

A successful conversation or Dialogue leads people into a new understanding, and as a result, changes what people choose to do and how they relate to each other. Rather than leaving this to chance, the Leading Energies provide a simple vocabulary to determine where to lead the conversation. There are four directions to focus attention, whatever the subject under consideration, and these are the Visionary, Citizen, Performance and Wisdom Leading Energies. By naming the Leading Energy, and therefore the intended direction, there is more chance of getting there together. Otherwise you may find the conversation or Dialogue going around in circles with people heading in different directions and confusing each other without much progress being made.

Although there are many reasons that you may want to talk with others, it is only these four Energies that lead any conversation. For example, whether you want to check the progress of a piece of work, to encourage people to sign-up for an activity, to understand how best to use your time or to think about where the Department might be in a couple of year's time – the kind of conversation you want can be described by the Energy that leads you into that thinking. The Energy of checking the progress of a piece of work leads in a Performance direction, encouraging people to sign up leads in a Citizen direction, understanding how best to use time leads in a Wisdom direction and thinking where we want to be in a couple of year's time leads in a

Visionary direction. These considerations each have a different energetic direction and purpose, and different conditions are needed to follow each of them well. For example, it is not possible to have a good Performance conversation without data, and it is not possible to have a good Visionary Dialogue without setting aside enough time to slow down the thinking. A Citizen Dialogue depends on being interested in the experience of other people, and a Wisdom conversation requires perspective.

All the Leading Energies are needed at different times to take forward a successful operation, business or team. What can be confusing is when some people want or expect a different Leading Energy from others. For example, one person may be trying to discuss delivery issues (i.e. Performance) while others keep missing that by talking about relationship issues (i.e. Citizen). Naming the Energy, and being clear about a sequence of Leading Energies will help to address this confusion and bring people together into one conversation.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Leading with a Visionary Energy means thinking about the potential of the future, and the kind of future we would like to have. There are particular conditions you need to set a Visionary conversation. You need to step out of the immediate detail of daily demands, emails and telephone calls, and clear the space in your mind and take the time to think creatively about the future.

You can start to set these conditions with a Check-in question like: "Where do you hope we will be in a year's time?" (or whatever time period might be appropriate). This could lead into a Dialogue about potential scenarios for the future as people use their imagination to explore possibilities and think about what is really worth doing.

Rev. Martin Luther King was leading with a powerful Visionary En-

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WHAT ARE THE LEADING ENERGIES?

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ergy in his “I have a Dream...” speech. He was painting a picture of a future that he and others longed to have. Visionary Energy results in a common aspiration and coordinated efforts to achieve something of value. If Vision is lost by an organization, team or an individual, they tread water while others pass them by. An example of Visionary Leadership in the VADOC is the introduction by the Director of the Healing Environment. As this vision is explored and developed by the staff, as we currently see happening, then strategies and plans can be made locally and centrally to realize the potential inherent in the Vision.

CITIZEN LEADERSHIP

Leading with Citizen Energy involves being interested in people and how fully they are participating. The key is to acknowledge that everyone has a part to play, and help people find how they can contribute and add value. It is natural for people to want to join in and contribute to the overall effort. It is also natural for them to feel reluctant, resistant or alienated if they do not know how to participate or feel unable to do so. You can set the conditions to lead into a Citizen consideration with a Check-in like: “Where do you get the most pleasure in your job and where are you of most help to those around you?” This could lead into a conversation that addresses further questions like: “Do we know where our colleagues or staff are most fulfilled in their work? Do we know how what we do contributes to their challenges and successes? Do we know how to do the things that are requested or expected of us? Do we need more information, skills or support?”

When there is a strong Citizen Energy people feel like they are a part of a community or large, healthy family. They enjoy coming to work, and are fulfilled by the hard work that they know adds to the overall progress of the Department. This is reinforced when we take the time to acknowledge others, formally or informally. But when the Citizen Energy is lost, cynicism becomes common place along with back-biting, sarcasm and complaint. We experience this as ‘noise’ in the system. Then it is time for someone to lead people into a Citizen Dialogue to re-establish this Energy in people’s daily experience.

PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP

Performance is about delivering the goods, on time and in the manner requested. It is the most familiar Leading Energy to many, and is the basis of most organizational measures, rewards and penalties. When Performance Energy is strong in the culture, people’s actions are coherent with their words and they deliver their commitments, and more. This requires clear boundaries and the ability to say “no” to requests that are not in the plan and would affect the timing or quality of the delivery.

The conditions can be set for a Performance conversation with a Check-in like: “What were your figures for last week compared to budget, and what actions are needed in consequence?” Performance involves tracking progress, being decisive, prioritizing, meeting deadlines, exceeding targets and celebrating achievement. This can only be done well if there is accurate information and the relevant data.

Performance is highly rated in most organizations and without this Energy no organization can succeed. When there is a strong Performance Energy in a team, people pride themselves on meeting their targets. But when the Performance Energy is weak, people tend to ignore the leaks and the fact that the ship is slowly sinking. In this situation the Performance Energy and boundaries are held by just a few who tend to be judged by others as single-minded and uncaring - which is unfortunate because it takes a kind of courage and resilience to lead with the Performance Energy.

WISDOM LEADERSHIP

Leading into a Wisdom Dialogue requires people to draw on their experience and see how it applies in the current situation. In a fast and busy world where it is not feasible to read every email and attend to every request, it is necessary to prioritize. Which are the key things to do to ensure everything else starts to fall into place? This is the core of the Wisdom Energy. The Wisdom Energy requires perspective and reflection to become aware of the larger purpose as well as the smaller details that get us there – and to be aware of the past history and the future aspirations and how they both affect the present challenges.

One could lead in this direction with a Check-in like: “How can we turn this problem into a creative advantage?”, or “If we can only attend to three things during the next week, what must they be?”. Those who lead with Wisdom tend to say less, but people listen to them when they speak because what they say is worth hearing.

An example of Wisdom Leadership in the VADOC is the decision to introduce Learning Teams into all Units. These are designed to develop Wisdom Energy and to ensure people keep learning from everyday practice and experience - and thereby to develop the overall Agency as a Learning Organization. When there is Wisdom there is assurance. But when the Wisdom Energy is lost, rash decisions have a high cost in terms of delivery, comraderie, safety and future prospects.

LEADING FROM WHERE YOU ARE

Inherent in the Leading Energies is the idea that we are all leaders, whatever our current role or job title. We can all lead through conversation and Dialogue by using the Leading Energies to openly propose the most productive direction to go.

Those who have the formal role and title of Leader will benefit hugely from being adept with the Leading Energies. Knowing which Energy is needed at any time is fundamental to good leadership: Do we need to focus our attention on our direction and purpose (Vision) our sense of belonging (Citizen), our output (Performance) or how to be smarter rather than working harder (Wisdom)? Discerning this, and following through in a way that bears fruit, is what makes a great leader.

Submitted by Peter Garrett