



ERM Benefit from the Four Faces of Communication Programme

by Harriet Griffey

In the middle of the biggest global financial downturn yet experienced, there has never been a more important time for good leadership, or a more difficult time to be a good leader, as all the old certainties of the working environment change. Now, alongside the need to manage the bottom line, comes the need to motivate, inspire and unify an often disillusioned workforce, and to nurture resilience and adaptability in the face of organisational adversity. And for many, it is at this point that external support proves invaluable in helping to creatively realign company goals and their execution.

The Four Faces of Communication Programme developed by Olivier Mythodrama, is a powerful opportunity for exactly this possibility. The archetypal characters of the Good King, the Medicine Woman, the Warrior and the Great Mother have provided a diverse range of organisations with a way forward in times of radical change and uncertainty. Many management styles focus on what can be identified as the Good King and Warrior faces of communication, especially in times of crisis, while the other two are ignored, to the detriment of the workplace. At this critical point, identifying, examining and utilising all four faces of communication proficiently is crucial for healthy leadership, and provides a resolution tool that enables renewed progress.

“Commercial companies are at a point of more uncertainty than ever,” says Michael Boyle, Senior Associate at Olivier Mythodrama (OMA) who facilitates and delivers its leadership programmes. “The monetary system is under unprecedented strain and there’s more uncertainty around these companies. People are feeling paralysed – they can deal with things going down, or going up, but can’t deal with uncertainty. When companies are under pressure, we see a lot of overplayed behaviours where, for example, warriors will tend to push and bully others to try and maintain stability. Growing ourselves and our leadership is our single best survival tactic.”

One of the biggest values of the programme is the simplicity of its model, and the fact that these four archetypal characters are so immediately recognisable, and resonate so strongly with many. “The programme is particularly useful both for organisations under a lot of pressure and for teams getting into difficulty whether this is with what they are doing or with each other,” agrees Richard

Olivier, OMA's Artistic Director. "Working with the four faces archetypes gets them to recognise the value in all four, and a lot of personality conflicts can be understood and moved through using this model, while most problems can be effectively addressed by the right balance of all four characters."

"What the programme provides is very different from other programmes," says Keryn James, Managing Partner at UK and Ireland ERM (Environmental Resources Management) a global company that has worked with OMA on a number of programmes for senior development, and which has an ambitious two year programme to fulfil, requiring a cohesive and strong team. "There's not a lot of what I call psychobabble. I'm a strong believer in and have used Myers Briggs a lot, but the OMA approach and its Four Faces of Communication programme is a very simple concept and a lot of its power comes from this simplicity. Organisational life is much more complex these days and unless you can get comfortable with the emotional aspects of leadership – and this is a core competency – you will struggle. What I like about OMA programme is that it helps address this."

"Consultation with Michael Boyle ahead of this programme was important because our aim was to specifically to inspire the partners to understand that leadership is not management," continues James. "And to really understand how and why that's different. Using the four faces model helped them understand what their leadership preference is and what their particular leadership styles are. It also helped them to understand not only how their leadership preference gave them strength but what the downside of that might be, and how that downside could potentially prevent them leading in a way that works."

"We began with some input on vision" explains Boyle, describing the events of the one-day programme he facilitated for ERM. "What followed was some input on personal sense of purpose, and the 'most inspired/least inspired' exercise we do which helps participants consider what really matters to them, how they show up as leaders, what they are communicating when they switch off, and how the way they say things is at least as important as what they actually say."

After a brief introduction to the four archetypal characters of the interactive model, the group were invited to take part in an experiential exercise, self-diagnosing their favourite/most familiar and least favourite/unfamiliar character to play in their everyday leadership. Just by asking participants to stand in one of the four areas of the room that indicated their leadership preference, they could all see and reflect on what was essentially a snapshot of the company's leadership team as expressed through the four archetypes. What was also revealed was that perception is key, and that different people can see exactly the same decision or behaviour in entirely different ways, according to their individual perspective – "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are," says Boyle.

A deeper scrutiny of the model revealed the apparent archetypal oppositions between the Good King (order) and the Medicine Woman (change) and also between the Warrior (action) and the Great Mother (care and relationship). "These can often present as potential conflicts and negative

projections from one to the other,” says Boyle. “Although, in fact, such potentially conflicting archetypal relationships, if seen in terms of being complimentary partnerships, can be favourable and highly effective. We can see the very practical creativity of bringing together a combination of Good King and Medicine Woman, and the product of a Warrior and Great Mother combination can be one of collaborative action.”

“We often say that someone’s least favourite character probably has the most to teach them,” Boyle continues. “And so at this point participants were asked to pair up for a co-coaching conversation with someone whose favourite is on the opposite side of the model. Each was asked to consider what their “big challenge” (ie. what project they want to win through on, or the territory they wish to be victorious on over the next 12-24 months) and then think about what could derail them in that ambition in terms of either over-playing their most favourite archetype (particularly under stress or pressure) or by under-playing their least favourite.”

What makes the OMA programme so unique is that it combines head, heart and physical experiential learning, using theatrical metaphors with which everyone can identify. “A lot of traditional consultants will give you an intellectual or an academic model, or some psychologist will come along and assess why you’re behaving in a certain way and give you an insight into how you feel,” reflects OMA artistic director Richard Olivier. “And then others with their ‘outward bound’ style, or from a more traditional acting base, will come along and try and change how you do it. So we bring together a number of different learning styles, which basically means that 99.9% of the people we work with can find a way to engage with the material.

“But it’s our job to get people involved, engaged and to facilitate this,” continues Olivier. “And the vast majority of people want to be involved rather than just sitting in a lecture, that sort of experiential learning is much more sustainable. We very deliberately take the metaphor of the rehearsal room into the work we do, because there are two things you hold dear in the rehearsal room: that there are no mistakes and everything happens for a reason, and if you can trust those two things then there is joy and learning in whatever happens. And this is enormously liberating.”

“What was also good about this programme,” concludes Keryn James, “is that the approach really encourages people to leverage their strengths, but also to be aware of the ‘dark’ side, that they are less comfortable with. So this can give them the confidence to develop their own leadership style, rather than copying someone else, to look at their own style and to recognise and see what it looks like, what it feels like to be inspirational.”

“I’m just coming up for annual appraisals and I have someone who is an excellent manager but they need to be more “warrior-like” and now they get that. So when I say “we need more inspirational leadership from you”, it’s much easier for me to communicate with them what we need. Now that

all the partners and partners in training have done this programme we can use it to share traits and concerns, because it frees up the discussion. Our partners in training, for example, with whom we do a lot of training found it hugely valuable. I think that for them this difference between leadership and management was much more of a revelation.”

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