

Personal Development of consultants' maturity and leadership with the help of Functional Fluency

More News from IT company OELAN about their Staff Development

Introduction

In our previous article we wrote about how OELAN, an unusual IT company in Amsterdam, began to use Functional Fluency with their staff. OELAN has a policy of investing in the personal development of their consultants, playing an active role in promoting a healthy work/life balance for them. At the beginning of 2012, to support this policy, licensed TIFF Providers Iluska Adriaansens and Richard Hamaker introduced the Temple Index of Functional Fluency (TIFF), a new psychometric personal development tool, to OELAN consultants. As a result of this experiment, the management decided to extend the work with Functional Fluency and TIFF company-wide to enhance the personal skills of all staff. This initiated some ongoing developments at OELAN.

In 2012 and 2013 all OELAN consultants, management and staff completed the TIFF personal development tool. It then became standard introduction procedure for all new members of staff to complete the TIFF tool and have a feedback session with the HR manager Richard Hamaker. In addition, the Functional Fluency model with TIFF has become the preferred coaching tool for individual personal coaching in the company.

The value of people skills

OELAN no longer seems quite so unique as a company totally committed to investing in people skills alongside their investment in IT skills. This is because more and more companies in Holland are realising that “people are indeed the business”. OELAN aims to build sustainable, effective ways of working with staff members as well with customers, because it believes strongly in the value of long term customer relationships. To make this possible they invest in the relationship building and people skills aspect of the professional development of their consultants. This way the consultants get the opportunity to reach their full potential. They gain the self-awareness and understanding from their TIFF experience to use in times of stress, and can keep themselves in balance by using the ingredients of the FF model. This balance entails staying open in attitude and ready to respond flexibly. Learning to use the various effective FF modes of behaviour in turn enhances the consultants' self-confidence. It is helpful that FF can be used in any situation because of its easy transferability.

Functionally fluent management is responsible and authoritative

Oelan is a relatively young organisation and is therefore in a process of maturing. This process involves development of a management that exerts authority and responsibility for staff in a way that fits with the company ethos and brings benefits for everybody. In this maturing process we see that managers and consultants are learning how to put their authority and professional responsibility for their people and process into practice. They need to be flexible, aware of how they behave and what the effect of their behaviour is on

other people. As well as these two aspects, coaching with TIFF also helps them to be more aware of how they use their energy on their own behalf, in relating to others and also using their own creativity and individuality. This means they manifest their own personality as a leader as well as their authority role.

Responsibility for “response - ability”

The FF model offers a highly practical approach for helping the consultants become more emotionally literate and able to deal with the daily challenges that they face in a company that offers high quality and innovation. However, being able to ‘respond’ to challenges by taking responsibility for one's own behaviour is only possible if the consultant knows how to. Skill in choosing effective ways of behaving is what they learn from the FF model and doing TIFF. The FF model offers a map of options for choosing how to behave, showing the differences between 'responding' and 'reacting'. The goal is to learn how to 'respond' more and 'react' less. 'Responding' includes taking all aspects of the situation into account, while 'reacting' is more of an automatic impulse lacking sensitivity to the situation. Consultants gain a holistic awareness that they can choose how to behave and take responsibility for the way that they communicate. This comes with practice and with working in an environment that actively encourages this development. Communication becomes more effective and everyone benefits. As the consultants take on the responsibility of responding more and reacting less, they realise that this “response - ability” is a natural human capacity and everyone can manage it. They also find out that in business, as anywhere else, - 'If you use reactions, you get reactions back; if you respond, you will get responses.'

Dealing with stress

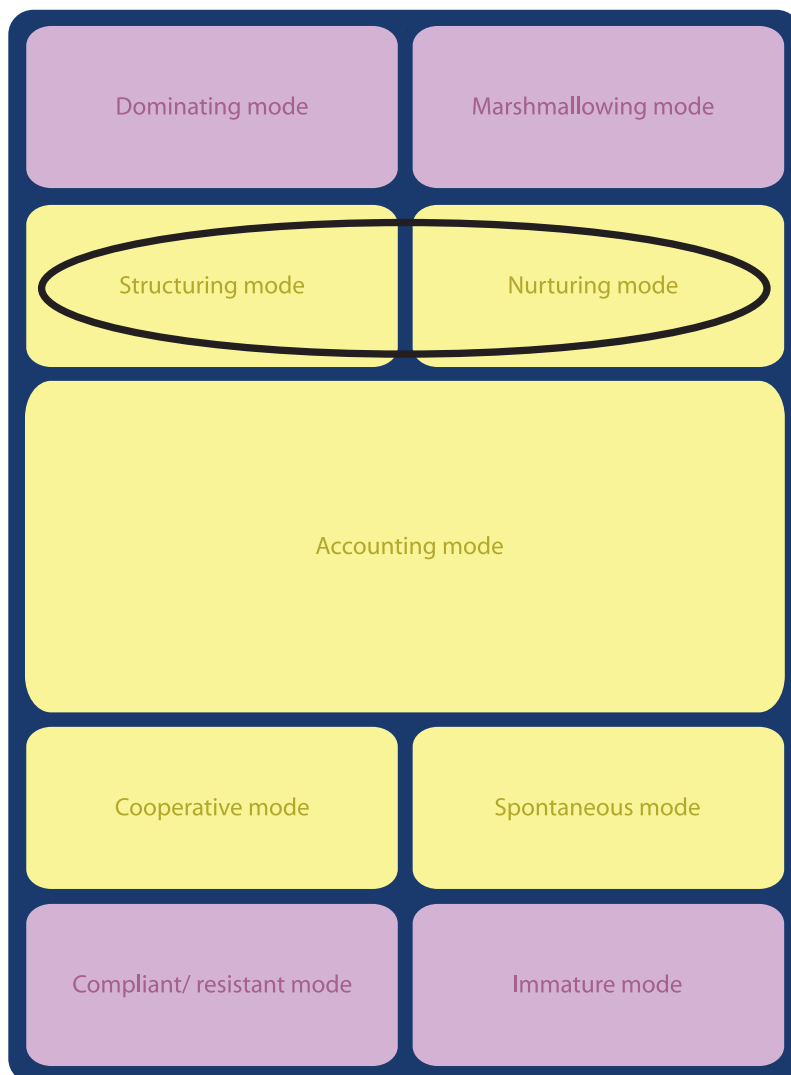
Stress is regarded as one of the parameters at OELAN which either enhances or compromises good performance. Stress and deadlines are inevitable aspects of projects where the stakes may be high. What matters is the effect stress and deadlines have on the behaviour of a good consultant. Maintaining composure, and staying effective in communication are essential. Those who use the reflective practice of the FF model remain effective and are recognized as amicable, productive people to work with. Being both pleasant and productive is a combination of qualities that every employer appreciates. Only being pleasant or only being productive is not enough. Without amicability people lack positive ways of relating and are more likely to 'react' to each other which is ineffective and wastes energy. Without productivity, people fail to meet their targets and again others are more likely to 'react' which is again ineffective and wastes energy. Being aware of how they behave and able to use the effective FF modes, in other words demonstrating emotional literacy, can benefit themselves and the team that they work in. This is important in all projects.

Development of consultants' maturity and leadership

The consultant leadership role sometimes requires emphasis on the guiding and directing (controlling) element of the FF model. As the consultants become more functionally fluent, they are more aware of the need to use and develop positive ways of doing guidance and direction (called Structuring in the FF model) in order to be effective in their role. One way for them to develop their Structuring skills is to ask ‘how do I usually play this role’ and 'how

else could I play it?' The FF model appears to be a very effective tool to support this development by using reflective practice in coaching. We can see that the consultants' development of functional fluency skills in communication increases both personal and professional maturity.

To lead and inspire others well, the FF caring element is also essential, in order to respond to their needs. It is important to be sensitive to the talents and points of view of others, and to be willing to understand people deeply, without judgment. In FF this is using positive ways of caring called Nurturing mode. There is a danger that the value of Nurturing could get overlooked when developing consultancy skills. Empowering other people means holding a safe place for them to develop their own skills with the security to experiment and cooperate. Sometimes we observe that a manager or consultant has a tendency in discussions to try to coerce the other person by persuasion. In this situation, if the other person also has strong beliefs and resists, both parties may take sides. If they will not meet halfway or try to understand each other, the discussion will not be effective, and trust and cooperation may be damaged. What works best is an appropriate combination of Structuring and Nurturing.



Using the FF model in coaching

For example, a consultant had several job interviews but kept failing to get the assignment. Building up tension before each interview, things went from bad to worse. Using a floor layout of the FF model and going through the interviews in fantasy by standing on the various modes of the model, the consultant came to understand his unconscious way of thinking and realised which positive modes he could actually choose to use during an interview. This physical experience of standing on the various modes on the floor let him see and feel how he could change his energy and behaviour. Using the positive modes and being firm, creative and alert gave him a positive attitude at the next job interview. Not surprisingly he got the assignment and his peers and manager are very happy with him as a member of their team.

As a coach using FF, it is easy not only to let people find out for themselves how to handle situations but also to give them feedback on their deliberate choices of behaviour. For those that receive the feedback it is also fun because they can be creative and experiment with new behaviour. This is a natural and enjoyable way of learning that raises energy and brings a childlike inner satisfaction.

OELAN uses a variety of ways to train their staff to become more functionally fluent

Working with suppliers, in projects and helping other companies innovate and grow does not mean that you can experiment randomly with your skills. Care is needed.

Oelan has developed a training in which behaviour and feedback can be practised using the FF model actively. Because it is enjoyable and fun to work with FF and become more effective, the training itself should be fun and enjoyable also.

At first we go through the FF model again and then “put” people in certain situations.

One experiential exercise needs a volunteer pair from the training group.

Both partners choose an animal to draw in a short period of time, neither knowing what the animal of the other is. They each have to draw their animal both using the one marker, which they hold together to draw at the same time, silently, with no communication. This can be thought of as a metaphor for team working!

What happened in one case was that both colleagues made up both animals, but combined them together. They ended up with a rhino that had the legs of a spider and a web!

Both benefited from the shared creativity, were sensitive to the needs of the other one, but also to their own needs.

The rest of the group gave feedback on the behaviour and communication that they saw.

Feedback was given positively using FF model terminology for practice. Time was given to reflecting on what others would have done if they had been in that same situation.

Variations could include having more pairs, having people take turns as observers etc. A variety of issues usually come up for discussion and it is important at the end to relate the exercise demands to real life situations.

Benefits from the OELAN Functional Fluency strategy so far

The consultant workforce

All the consultants are more aware of how to make use of the FF effective modes. Because IT consultants are so driven by the work that they do, they sometimes get out of touch with

themselves or their surroundings. The FF model provides a consistent, clear internal map that supports their staying in contact with themselves and the situation they are in. They actually remain grounded, are alert, and overall are more aware of the needs that they and others have. Effectively this means that in situations of stress or possible conflict, they have a language for making sense of their own behaviour, and can respond more appropriately. They can also make sense of others' behaviour and respond more effectively to that too. Working with people and technology together can be very stressful. The FF map, with its internal Accounting mode, gives them an anchor for staying calm and objective, relaxed and positive towards others and themselves, showing true leadership. Instead of reacting, they are able to respond in an effective manner.

OELAN clients

OELAN's clients find working with happy, relatively stress free consultants inspiring. Working contexts are congruent with the working behaviour and projects are completed in an effective way. Consultants spend more time delivering the actual product instead of getting stressed out and having communication problems with others.

In the end, everybody wants to work with people who are good at what they do, and who are helpful and considerate as well.

In conflict situations

Sometimes confrontations are needed. These could lead either to an argument or to a good discussion. Arguments tend to produce very stressful and painful interactions resulting in winners and losers. Working with FF means that everybody takes responsibility for their own needs and for expressing them clearly in a positive way, while being willing to take the other side's needs into account. Repeating the mantra "How can I and others both benefit?" clearly helps the positive flow that most of us want to have in a working environment where output, delivery and sustainable relationships are all important.

For personal issues that can interfere with professional life.

FF can also give people a first step in solving personal issues that they may have. Frequently a habit that a person has at home, will be brought into the working environment repeating the same sort of conflict or ineffective behaviour in the work place. With awareness and understanding from TIFF that this is an old habit being repeated, a consultant can take it into account and keep conflicts and their solutions where they belong.

Company Effectiveness

When consultants notice that they tend to use a particular sort of ineffective behaviour they use the FF map to choose different modes of communication that work for all parties in the relationship. Trying to understand where the other person is coming from, giving helpful feedback and avoiding arguments saves OELAN much time, energy and money.

This is what Functional Fluency promotes and challenges us to do: "Be effective; set a good example with your positive communication; give feedback that works using your Functional Fluency skills; remember your hidden talents that you discovered from your TIFF and try them out. It all results in less stress, a positive working environment and also people that will produce more and better. And isn't this the outcome for which a business starts out in the

first place? To deliver a skill, product or something extra to the world, giving everyone involved a positive experience to enjoy while doing so!”

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