

ACT Leadership Cycle and Professional Leadership Habits –
Acting-Communicating-Thinking Process for Leading in Creative Community

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Revised September 18, 2006

Introduction and Purpose

This paper describes the *ACT Leadership Cycle*, a pragmatic action leadership process, developed by Ecojazz Leadership for the real-time intention-and-improvisation leadership in the rapidly changing ‘permanent white water’ of the 21st century. The *ACT Leadership Cycle* provides an advanced and systematic leading and learning process for *men and women of action* in private, public, or non-profit enterprises. This pragmatic action-leadership process applies to those leading professionals in any field with practical *leading* responsibilities, requiring timely and decisive action in the face of uncertainty and limited knowledge. Ecojazz Leadership developed the *ACT Leadership Cycle* and nine associated *Professional Leadership Habits*, to meet the demands of the increasing complexity and dynamics of organizational systems in the fast changing interrelated world of the 21st century.

ACT Leadership Cycle

Leading professionals in the 21st century must necessarily engage in the pragmatic practice of real time *acting-communicating-learning*, necessary for successful leadership in a world of dynamic and unfolding challenges. The ACT Leadership Cycle provides professionals with a powerful reflective process of acting-communicating-thinking for effective leading in creative community in any field.

The basic cycle of this three-part *acting-communicating-thinking reflective leadership* process is shown in Figure 1 – ACT Leadership Cycle. Professional competence grows, organizational performance improves, and leadership value increases by repeating the real-time leadership cycle as shown in Figure 2 – ACT Leadership Cycle Value Creation. When the leadership cycle is repeated over and over again in the same or similar challenging situations, leading professionals as well as their organizations grow in leadership effectiveness and value creation.

Leadership value increases with each turn of the *ACT Leadership Cycle*, since the community of leadership achieves higher levels of adaptive learning and commitment responding to the unfolding waves of change in the ‘permanent white water’ world of the 21st century. Every adaptive leadership turn of the *ACT Leadership Cycle* brings forth new creative intellectual and social capital from communities of leadership. This is an extremely significant since:

Creativity of leading professionals in community – the innovative intellectual and social capital of enterprise – is the primary source of wealth and power in the post-modern, post-industrial, and post-stability world of ‘permanent white water’ in the 21st century.

This importance of creative knowledge professionals is supported by these landmark studies: [The Rise of the Creative Class](#) by economist Richard Florida; [The Knowledge Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation \(1995\)](#) by Ikujiro Nonaka; and, [Post-Capitalist Society \(1994\)](#) by Peter Drucker.

Figure 1 – ACT Leadership Cycle

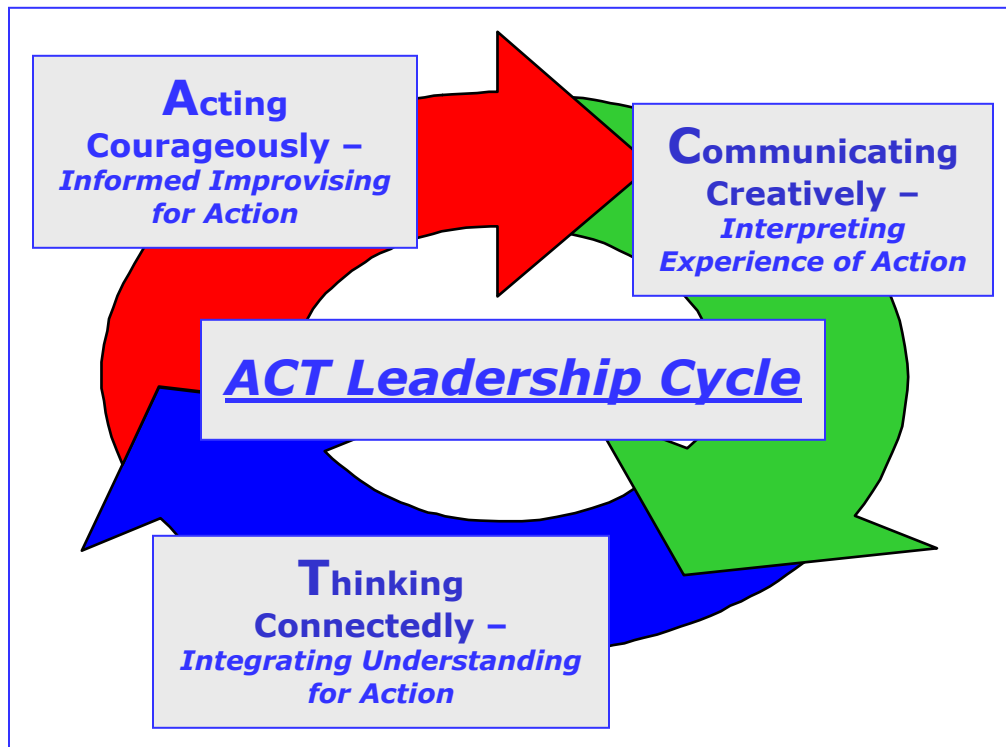
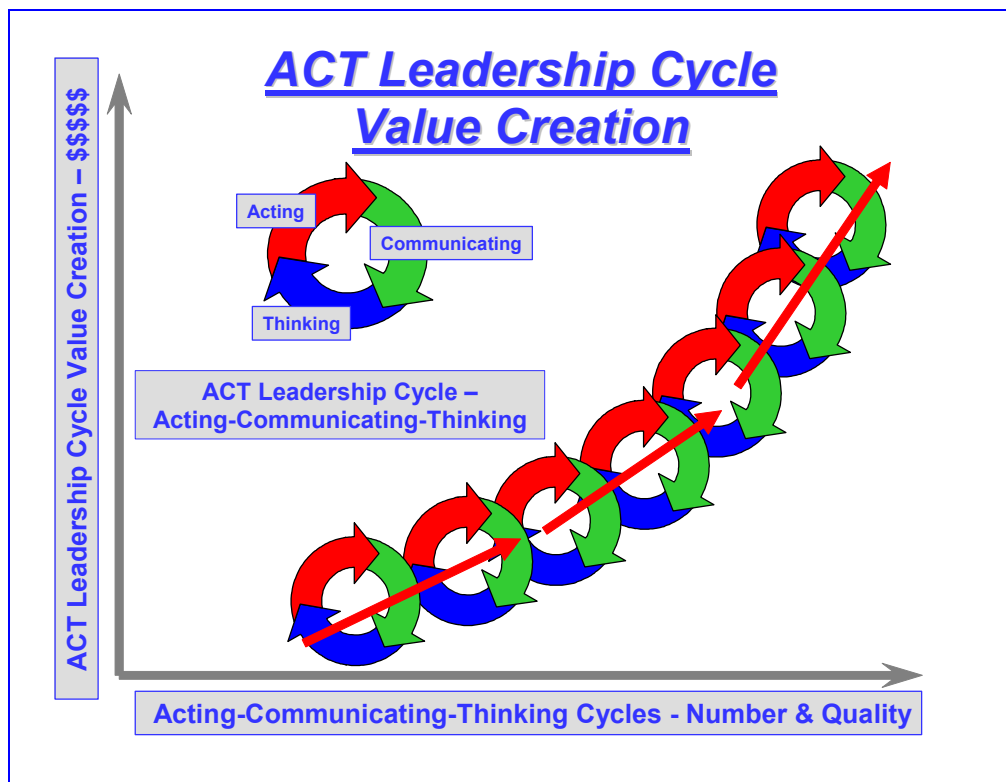


Figure 2 – ACT Leadership Cycle Value Creation - \$\$\$\$\$



Practicing real-time leadership, in the ACT Leadership Cycle, requires professionals to develop a powerful set of interrelated Professional Leadership Habits for leading. The nine Professional Leadership Habits supporting the ACT Leadership Cycle are shown in *Figure 3 – Professional Leadership Habits*. These professional habits for leading can improve the effectiveness of leading in any challenging organizational situation.

**Figure 3 – Professional Leadership Habits –
Acting-Communicating-Thinking for Leading in Creative Community**

- **Acting Courageously**
 - **Acting with Authenticity**
 - **Acting with Strategic Imagination**
 - **Acting in Collaborative Teamwork**
- **Communicating Creatively**
 - **Communicating in the Language of Leadership**
 - **Communicating to Create and Sustain Community**
 - **Communicating to Create Many-Colored Truth**
- **Thinking Connectedly**
 - **Thinking for Integrated Action**
 - **Thinking as an Integrated Person**
 - **Thinking in an Integrated Worldview**

Professional Leadership Habits

Acting Courageously

Acting courageously is the beginning of the pragmatic work of leading with the ACT Leadership Cycle. Leading professionals must necessarily participate in shared leadership to take action to actually get something positive done, move some project forward, change some situation for the better, create some value that would not otherwise exist, deliver some goods and services to satisfy stakeholders, or all of these things together.

Courage is the essential quality a person needs to take action. Leading is taking purposeful action to make a positive difference. It is not just meeting and discussing an issue endlessly, or only researching and analyzing a problem, or going-with-the-flow of what was going to happen anyway. Nothing of value in leading happens without purposeful action, no action of value can happen without courage.

Courage is so important to action because: When you take action you are making a defining statement about the challenging situation, When you take action you are making a commitment to dealing with the situation, When you take action you are accepting responsibility for the consequences of your action, When you take action in a complex situation you are recognizing that the results of action cannot be fully predicted in advance; and finally, When you take action you are revealing your character.

Acting Courageously includes three related *Professional Leadership Habits*:

- Acting with Authenticity – Leading professionals act with the authenticity of commitment, character, and trust deeply rooted in the fertile and creative leadership ground of ‘living in truth’.
- Acting with Strategic Imagination – Leading professionals act in the immediate tactical present with strategic imagination to meet unfolding new challenges and to create new possibilities, rather being limited by pre-defined problems and routine solutions.
- Acting in Collaborative Teamwork – Leading professionals act in collaborative teamwork with others, recognizing that most serious challenges require the active engagement of multiple talents and multiple perspectives for success.

Courage is intimately involved with the practice of these *acting* Professional Leadership Habits. It takes courage to take an imaginative action that is not officially sanctioned as conventional practice, even if the challenge is clearly not a conventional problem. It takes courage to work collaboratively with others. It takes courage to take tactical action in the here and now to further a strategic future, rather than taking the path of least resistance for as little immediate difficulty as possible in the present.

Communicating Creatively

Communicating creatively is the crucial middle link in the *acting-communicating-thinking* process of the pragmatic real-time ACT Leadership Cycle. Communication as a creative activity is emphasized because leadership in creative community requires leading professionals to: Create meaning by communicating to make sense out of the ambiguous experience of taking action; Create working relationships out of communicating in constructive dialogue with others; and create common purpose and collective intelligence by communicating to lead symbolically.

This is a broad conception of the power and purpose of communication, beyond the simple transmission of information from one person to another. Communication is a creative art that is essential for both acting and thinking. In the complex 21st century world, the results of most leading actions are rather ambiguous, with meanings that are not immediately obvious at face value. It takes truth-seeking creative dialogue, with colleagues across diverse points of view, to create '*facts*', many-colored truth, by socially constructing meaning out of the experience of action.

Leading requires communicating in symbolic language. It is a performance art practiced in the symbolic theatre of the imagination, which can open new possibilities, reassure and contain anxieties, reconcile seemingly irreconcilable worldviews, and engage the heart in common endeavor. Leading professionals need to master the creative dimensions of communicating to be effective for leading in the 'permanent white water' world of continuing chaotic change.

Communicating Creatively includes three related *Professional Leadership Habits*:

- Communicating in the Language of Leadership – Leading professionals communicate in a *symbolic pattern language of leadership* (using image, metaphor, story, ritual, as well as generative ideas and ideals) to create shared purpose, meaning, and commitment in a diverse leadership community of distributed intelligence and power in the enterprise ecology.
- Communicating to Create and Sustain Community – Leading professionals communicate in constructive dialogue to create trusting and empathetic relationships with team members and stakeholders, as well as to reach mutual understandings. This is communicating to build relationships constituting a *creative leadership community*.
- Communicating to Create Many Colors of Truth
Leading professionals communicate to socially construct meaning out of ambiguous experience, by engaging in pragmatic truth-seeking dialogue of rich diversity and multiple perspectives, to create an understanding of the 'many colors of truth'.

Creativity is central to the practice of these *communicating* Professional Leadership Habits. These are powerful forms of communication that create meanings, community relationships, and shared symbolic communities of leadership. On this last point three concepts are implied: First, every professional has some level of participation in the work of leadership, depending on the situation; Second, leading is seen as a shared capacity of the professional community, not burdened entirely on formally designated 'managers' or 'leaders'; and Third, the distributed

power and distributed intelligence of a *creative leadership community* is enabled and energized primarily by symbolic communications, to open the ‘voice-mind’ of the organization to possibilities, to nurture purposeful action, to contain the anxiety of change, and to evolve organizational identity. The hyphenated word ‘voice-mind’ is used to recognize the significant reality of human cognition, that ideas and concepts must generally be given ‘voice’ with the expression of language in order for the ‘mind’ to think cognitively about the ideas and concepts.

Thinking Connectedly

Thinking connectedly is the end of one leadership cycle of *acting-communicating-thinking*, as well as the beginning of another leadership cycle. Thinking connectedly is the reflective process of both *rational organizing* and *emotional valuing* of the ‘facts’ of the situation. These ‘facts’, seen as multi-perspective and multi-colored truth, are socially constructed through the creative communications of creating meaning out of the ambiguous experience gained by action. In this *thinking* process the lessons of prior success and failure in the previous leadership cycle are carefully identified, assessed, and interpreted.

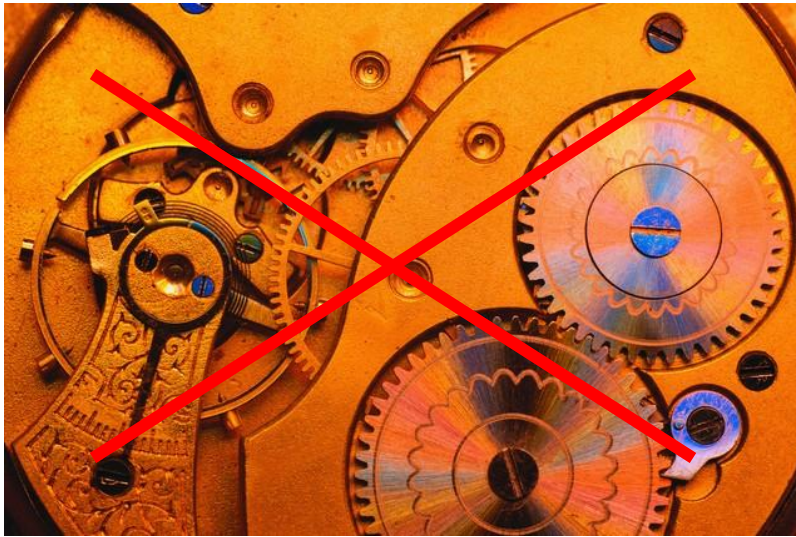
Next the thinking turns to: *How to do it better next time?* Leading professionals must learn to see themselves as *authors* of a *theory of the situation* and a *theory of action*, to create the mental models or maps of reality to anticipate and guide the next *acting* phase in the ACT Leadership Cycle. This is the necessary planning for action in the next cycle that will create new possibilities and better understanding.

Thinking connectedly in an *integrated* sense is emphasized here as central to high quality thinking by leading professionals. Integrated thinking includes both *reason* and *emotion*, engaging the whole human being. In addition, high quality professional thinking is inseparable from the personal and citizenship dimensions of a whole human being. Ethical and wise behavior is extremely difficult or at times impossible, when the ‘professional’ is compartmentalized and separated from ‘personal’ values and ‘citizenship’ responsibilities. Thinking connectedly as a high quality professional is thinking as an integrated person, who is an integrated *professional-person-citizen*.

Thinking connectedly requires explicit attention to the *worldview* we use as a lens to see and interpret our experience of the world. For hundreds of years between the 16th and 19th centuries the *Modern Industrial Worldview*, a *fragmented-static-mechanical* worldview, has *unconsciously* and *unquestioningly* guided the thinking of most educated ‘rational’ people in the Western world until recent decades.

Strange as it may seem now, the Modern Industrial Worldview is premised on the assumption of a precisely working, fragmented, non-changing, non-living, and predictable ‘Clockwork Universe’, which is expressed in the metaphors of ‘machine’ and ‘control’. The validity of the ‘Clockwork Universe’ metaphor and the associated Modern Industrial Worldview has now been put into serious question by the great 20th century scientific discoveries on the real nature of ‘reality’, which is now better understood as a highly interconnected, dynamically changing, and organic living system.

Unrealistic 'Clockwork Universe' of the Modern Industrial Worldview



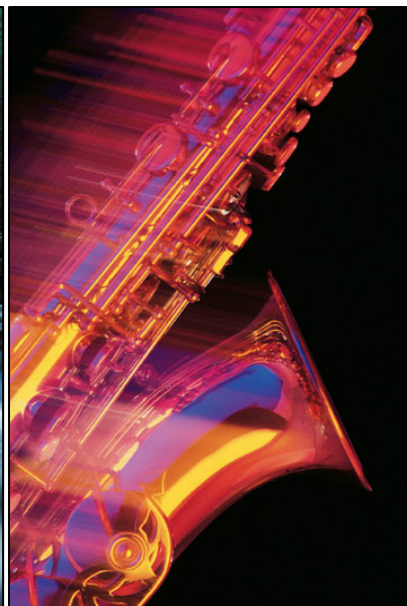
After 100 years of new science discrediting the validity of the obsolete and unrealistic 'Clockwork Universe' and Modern Industrial Worldview, it is now time to move beyond it to a worldview that more realistically models 'reality'. This is just what is happening. The traditionally dominant Modern Industrial Worldview is now being quietly replaced by an *Integrated Worldview*. This Integrated Worldview, of an *integrated-interconnected-dynamic* reality, is emerging as a more realistic guide for the thinking of an increasing number of people in the Western world. The Integrated Worldview is premised on an 'Ecological Universe', expressed in the Ecojazz Leadership strategy with the metaphors of 'ecosystem' and 'jazz', representing the concept of 'creative community'.

'Ecological Universe' Metaphors of the Integrated Worldview

'ecosystem' metaphor



'jazz' metaphor



An Integrated Worldview is more valid and useful, than the Modern Industrial Worldview, as a guide to thinking because it is a worldview that more realistically models the integrated-interconnected-dynamic nature of reality. In this transition period between worldviews, leading professionals need to be consciously aware of the worldviews they and others are using to guide their thinking. Leading professionals need to learn to become ‘bi-lingual’ to think in two worldviews: Modern Industrial Worldview, which still imprisons many people in unreality; and, Integrated Worldview, necessary for thinking realistically.

Thinking Connectedly includes three related Professional Leadership Habits:

- Thinking for Integrated Action – Leading professionals think connectedly by engaging in theory-making for action – ‘connecting-the-dots’ in a *theory of the situation* and a *theory of action* – to anticipate and guide the pragmatic work of integrated action in complex systems of change, uncertainty and limited knowledge.
- Thinking as an Integrated Person – Leading professionals think as an integrated person, by connecting *reason-with-emotion*, as well as integrating the whole *professional-person-citizen* in thinking.
- Thinking in an Integrated Worldview – Leading professionals think connectedly in an Integrated Worldview (in ‘ecosystem’ and ‘jazz’ images), as well as recognize that the transition in worldviews requires seeing the world through the eyes of others to negotiate common understandings and joint actions.

‘Connecting-the-Dots’ is the crucial essence of these *thinking* Professional Leadership Habits, because thinking for Integrated Action requires an Integrated Person and depends on an Integrated Worldview for seeing and interpreting interconnected experience.

The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and therefore intelligent... Intelligence is the capacity to feel as well as to reason; and until we approach life with intelligence...no political or educational system in the world can save us...

Krishnamurti, 1953 – Education and the Significance of Life

Contact Ecojazz Leadership for 21st Century Leadership Development

To learn more about the *Ecojazz Leadership*, including the *ACT Leadership Cycle* and *Professional Leadership Habits*, please contact Allen Jaisle at 612-929-4242 or ajaisle@ecojazz.net. This article, reference resources, and additional information on Ecojazz Leadership as a solution to the ‘leadership crisis’ are available at <http://www.ecojazz.net/>.

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