

Political Acuity

Session Description:

Political acuity is among the hardest concepts to teach or employ. Traditional thinking suggests you either have it, or you don't. New research and the real-life experiences of the course instructor combine to provide a candid and insightful conversation about what it means to be politically astute. The workshop will use case-based discussions to explore new approaches to thinking and analysis that will remove the mysteries of what it means to think "politically" and enhance the quality of our analysis and capacity for strategic thinking.

This module will introduce participants to the skills and abilities needed to understand and cultivate your political acuity and strategic thinking. Participants will focus on building skills to better work with formal and informal systems, practices, relationships and cultures so that you can identify impacts, influence decisions and achieve organizational objectives. Participants will develop skills to better predict the way new events and emerging issues will affect their municipality, the public and stakeholders. We will delve into techniques for providing that will ultimately meet the needs and expectations of elected officials and their political staff and build skills for problem solving when there is a 'disconnect' between short-term and longer-term objectives.

Political Acuity involves the ability to identify real decision-makers and understand how an organization really works. It is the ability to appreciate, understand and use formal and informal power relationships within organizations and within the political structure, and predict how new events will affect individuals and groups.

The workshop explores what political acuity means in a practical sense in your role as a public servant working in a political environment. Political acuity will be defined, its importance set out and application explored in your daily work in the current environment.

Session Objectives

- You will understand what political acuity is and why its valuable.
- You will learn how to appreciate and understand the informal and formal power relationships, especially where the public service and political systems intersect (hierarchies and reporting structures)
- You will learn to predict the way new events and emerging issues will affect individuals and groups
- You will identify and explore how to build and strengthen key relationships with stakeholders.
- You will understand the current environment and its implications for your work.
- You will strengthen your ability to provide strategic advice and direction to ensure it gets used.
- You will develop an action plan to strengthen your own political smarts

The Approach

Module 1: Introduction to political acuity

- Shift from “surprise and survive” to effective analysis, advice and leadership
- What is political acuity?
- Self-assessment tool and analysis
- Leveling up tools and techniques
- Understanding formal and informal context and players
- Building our political antennae
- Being political but not partisan

Module 2: Proactive and strategic stakeholder engagement

- Identifying goals and objectives in stakeholder engagement
- Categorizing and analyzing stakeholders differently
- Tools and techniques for in-depth stakeholder analysis
- Building networks and strategic alliances for stakeholder engagement

Module 3: The proactive-strategic thinker – influence, reading the room and crafting the ask

- Achieve your goals and objectives by better understanding influence and influence techniques and tools
- Get more out of every meeting and encounter - active listening and body language exercises
- Crafting the ask - how can I be more concise and precise in briefings?

Module 4: Managing Optics

- Apply your political acuity to understanding optics
- How to avoid bad optics and reputational damage
- Effective tools and best practices for dealing with optics in a crisis
- Case studies and real-live examples from every level of government
- Building values and ethics into decision making

BIO for Peter P. Constantinou



Dr. Peter Constantinou is one of Canada's leading practitioner-academics and an award-winning university lecturer. He has been both a civil servant at both the federal and provincial level, and as Chief of Staff to the Ontario Minister of Education and Training. He has also worked as a senior administrator and lobbyist in the college and university sector. He is currently President and CEO of the Political Acuity Institute and Academic Director of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme at Queen's Park.

For more than 27 years, Dr. Constantinou has been active in teaching and research in the area of public policy and administration. He holds a full-time tenured appointment at the School of Public Policy and Administration at York University, as well as part-time appointments at five other universities in Canada and Europe.

Dr. Constantinou's study "Political Acuity and Council-Staff Relations" in the Canadian Journal of Local Government has been the basis for development of training programs for staff and executive teams in hundreds of municipalities throughout Canada and abroad, including working with clients in Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Israel, Peru, United Kingdom, Vietnam, among others. To date he has worked with 480 Chinese partners at the municipal and provincial levels and delivered over 500 lectures and workshops. He is currently a Consultant Expert for the International Financial Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group and has lead training programs in Peru and Ghana.

In addition to a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Toronto, Dr. Constantinou holds an MA in Public Policy and Administration from McMaster University and a BA (Specialized Honours) in public policy and administration from York University.