

Increasing Leadership Integrity through Mind Training and Embodied Learning

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Abstract

*This paper offers foundations for an integrated approach to leadership integrity consultation, melding somatic learning methods with practices for training the mind, known as lojong in Tibetan Buddhism. Embodied learning and mind training are grounded in similar perceptions about the importance of attention and awareness for developing effective, powerful action in the world. Fundamental to both methods is developing the capacity to act with awareness: the capacity to be fully present to what is taking place, rather than being distracted by expectations, habits, or fears about either oneself or others. Experience with coaching leaders suggests that such awareness is essential for leadership integrity, which requires a leader to act with wholeness from deep values in ways that can be sustained over time. The paper describes these methods, identifies how they have been addressed in research, shows how each has been used in consulting, and suggests that they may be used together synergistically within processes of leadership development.**

Keywords: *integrity, leadership, mindfulness, embodied knowing, compassion*

I have been strongly influenced by Argyris' repeated demonstrations that almost no one lives by the values they espouse (Argyris, 1986, 1991). This has made me accord less importance to the values that my clients espouse and more to methods that might enhance their capacity to live with less of a gap between what is espoused and what is actual. After years of practice as both an internal and external organizational consultant, coaching 200-plus executives at the VP level and higher, and supporting roughly 50 projects of organizational change, I began to feel that the work we did together was helpful, but did not go as deeply as needed. Executives became better leaders in their colleagues' eyes, and many attained significant promotions. Nonetheless, something was missing. I sought to develop this missing element.

In recent years, consultants have gone beyond methods commonly used in organizational psychology, supporting the development of leaders and their organizations in a variety of ways, including drawing on ancient wisdom (Holliday, Statler & Flanders, 2007; Kriger & Hanson, 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006), incorporating mind-body research (Rudisill, 2005), learning from contact with horses (Goldman-Schuyler & Kaye-Gehrke, 2006) and building on stages of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan, 1994). Nonetheless, as Boyatzis (2006) pointed out "there are few models or theories of how individuals change and develop in sustainable ways, and most programs and the research on them

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focus on single characteristics, rather than on transformational shifts in a leader's way of being and leading" (p. 610). In reviewing published studies on the impact of MBA training, as one example, Boyatzis' (2006) found that changes in emotional intelligence competencies ranged from only 3 to 11%.

In their seminal book on knowledge management, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996) asserted that "the most powerful learning comes from bodily experience" (p. 239). Nonetheless, only a relatively small percentage of organizational and leadership consultants regularly incorporate what is known about the contribution of embodied knowing (Johnson, 1995, 1997) in support of leaders' ability to live with high levels of stress, understand systems change personally, and explore the physical foundations of integrity (Barrett, 2004; Strozzi-Heckler, 2003). One meaning of *integrity*, as will be discussed later in this paper, is the engineering notion of structural solidity – the capacity to hold together and resist the pressure of external forces. This context has not often been used in looking at leadership integrity and will be developed here.

As research studies show (Begley, 2007; Doidge, 2007), such bodily experience-based learning is grounded in the increasingly understood domain of brain plasticity. Some neuroscientists are interested in the implications of eastern ways of training the mind, as studies have shown that those with such training appear to develop a higher level of control over brain functioning than many psychologists thought possible. Within the field of organizational studies, Weick has been one of the most well-known scholars to address the relevance of Buddhist mind training (Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). There are empirical studies of its use in management development (Cayer & Baron, 2006), as well as considerable discussion of the term mindfulness in the behavioral science literature (Allen, Blashki, & Gullone, 2006). Embodied learning and mind training are grounded in similar perceptions of the importance of attention and awareness in developing effective, powerful action in the world.

This paper proposes an integrated approach to leadership development consultation incorporating somatic awareness and intentional mind training as a foundation for acting with integrity. It draws on what is known from over fifty years of refinement of transformational somatic learning practices and many centuries of Buddhist practice in training the mind, called *lojong* in Tibetan Buddhism. A "somatic" approach to personal development means one that involves awareness of oneself physically, from the Greek word *soma* or sensed body (Strozzi-Heckler, 2003, p. 2), used by Paul in the New Testament to distinguish "the luminous body transformed by faith," from *sarx*, which designates the body as "a hunk of meat" (Johnson, 1995, p. xiv). As described by Hanna (1988), somatics is an evolving field, which "holds that first-person human experience must be considered of equal scientific and medical importance as outside, third-person observation" (p. xiv). Within the array of existing somatic practices, this paper addresses solely the *Feldenkrais Method*®, because this approach is more oriented toward learning and the role of the brain than other somatic practices.

Somatic learning methods and Tibetan mind training will be described in more depth later in the paper, but a quick overview may be useful now. The Feldenkrais Method is respected internationally for producing dramatic change in people ranging from children with severe neuro-motor disorders to top athletes and musicians. Although relatively small as a profession (roughly 5000 certified practitioners working in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and Asia), research has been carried out on many continents. Most of it is from medical, physical therapy, or psychotherapeutic perspectives. This research shows that use of the method leads to decreased pain and improved function (Alexander, 2006; Bearman & Shafarman, 1999), improved functioning after strokes (Nair, Fuchs, Burkart, Steinberg, & Kelso, 2005), improved functioning after spinal injury (Ginsburg, 1986), improved balance among the elderly (Hall et al., 1999; Vrantsidis, Hill, Moore, & Webb, 2009), reduced perceived stress (Johnson, Frederick, Kaufman, & Mountjoy, 1999), improved balance (Stephens, DuShuttle, Hatcher, Shmunes, & Slaninka, 2001) and quality of life (Stephens, et al., 2003) among people with multiple sclerosis, reduced state anxiety (Kerr, Kotynia, & Kolt, 2002), and increased self-confidence and improved body image among people with eating disorders (Laumer, Bauer, Fichter, & Milz, 1997). Although Feldenkrais himself was most interested in developing flexible minds, more than on bodies (Personal communication,

Mann Ranch Training Program, 1979), Feldenkrais research has focused on the latter. Having reviewed the most recent lists of research on the method, I am not aware of any empirical studies of its use in organizational consulting or coaching, other than my case study (2007b).

Feldenkrais was a world-renowned physicist and engineer who developed his method for enhancing learning and performance and taught it around the world from the 1950s until two years before his death in 1984. Described by thought leaders including Karl Pribram, Margaret Mead, and Jean Houston as a genius, Feldenkrais used touch and “non-habitual” movement patterns to help his students to change the way they moved and learned. His method is grounded in distributing movement throughout the body and particularly the spine and ribs, so that no one part of the structure has to bear the burden for the rest. Combining such core insights with in-depth knowledge of the human nervous system and the function of the brain in movement, he recognized that the physical bases of learning happen only in intimate interdependence with all other aspects of a person, such as how they feel, what they sense and notice, and what they want to accomplish in life (Feldenkrais, 1949, 1972, 1977, 1979, 1981).

The Feldenkrais method uses non-habitual movements, sometimes facilitated by gentle touch, to enable learners to sense how to move more easily and powerfully in order to enable both physical and broader change (Baniel, 2009; Feldenkrais, 1949, 1972, 1981). Learners are encouraged to experiment and to be attentive to the *way* that they move, rather than to focus on attaining an outcome at all costs. In the process, learners notice how they approach the given task and where they hold on and use force unnecessarily. Such holding on reduces the fluidity and power of all actions that involve movement – and what actions do not? Practitioners guide the learners through increasingly complex and varied movement patterns, which, in ways comparable to the learning of young children, tap into the inherent plasticity of the brain. Although existing research has shown the effectiveness of these methods with respect to the reduction of pain and improved physical performance, anecdotal evidence shows that by learning to move more easily, people experience surprising outcomes with regard to learning – which was Feldenkrais’ main interest and my own. I studied with him from 1979-81, was internationally certified to practice in 1983, and was authorized to assist internationally in training new practitioners in 2003, so have extensive experience with the method.

I have incorporated a somatic approach alongside more traditional organizational development and clinical sociological methods in my coaching and graduate teaching (Goldman Schuyler, 2003, 2007b). I have been intrigued by the potential offered by combining somatic methods for awareness training with experiential approaches to training the mind that were developed centuries ago in India and Tibet, in order to enable clients to more completely and deeply shift their habitual responses to the many difficult situations faced constantly by leaders. Some readers, accustomed to regarding Buddhism as a religion, may assume it is primarily a set of beliefs and institutions. I am writing instead from the perspective of spirituality as an array of change practices, using Ray’s (2002) definition: “By spirituality, I mean those kinds of activities that directly serve the inspiration for maturation, transformation, and ultimately, realization” (p. xii). Note that even by referring to these practices as *Buddhism* (which is an etic, not emic term), one overlays an outsider’s assumptions on these practices. In fact, they are viewed by their “users” as practical, effective tools, tested over centuries for understanding and changing the way people unintentionally cause problems for themselves and one another in the course of daily life and work. The *dharma* (Buddhism) might actually be considered to be a historically early Asian approach to applied social science. Since the dharma is how insiders refer to this set of practices, I will use this term in place of *Buddhism*, since the latter elicits connotations, based on people’s beliefs about religion, which are not relevant to this paper. My focus is not on religion, but on the transfer of methods from one arena to another – a process that is applicable to bringing somatic learning and Tibetan mind training into use among western corporate leaders.

The tradition of mind training (*lojong*) is at the core of the Tibetan approach to life. Two classical texts, both written during the 11th century, provide the foundations for the widely used practice. The simplest is a short set of statements entitled the *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* (*Eight Verses*) written

by Geshe Langri Tangpa (1054—93), which can be read in the Appendix to this paper. These methods enable a student to notice and shift his or her relationship to the thoughts that emerge spontaneously as he or she moves through daily life. They are intended to overcome selfishness: the belief that one's own desires and concerns are more important than those of others. According to a study of the impact of *lojong* in Tibet over the centuries (Semilof, 2006) the *Eight Verses* are the most widely practiced version of mind training.

Recent writings by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) presented mindfulness as a source of renewal for burned-out executives on the path toward *resonant leadership* and as a key tool in intentional change. However, they based their practice and research on Kabat-Zinn's (2005) extensive work, which is the approach referenced in most western behavioral science research. There are distinct differences between Kabat-Zinn's approach and the Tibetan mind training described in this article. Over the centuries, the Tibetan approach to the dharma came to emphasize the importance of compassion and relieving the suffering of all beings, rather than just one's own, while Kabat-Zinn's (2005) mindfulness training, which has been taught in hospitals throughout the world, focuses more on relieving a person's individual stress. This aspect of the Tibetan perspective is referred to as *Mahayana* or the *great vehicle*. This paper identifies how mind training and somatic learning have been discussed in research, clarifies how they work, shows how they have been used in consulting, and describes how they can be used synergistically in processes of leadership development.

These two approaches to learning and life (the *Feldenkrais Method* and *mind training*) differ in their underlying assumptions about reality, yet are compatible with one another as practices. Both are designed to generate deep change in how a person views life and takes action. While dharma practitioners emphasize that everything in what people call "reality" (the world of material objects and action upon and between them) is impermanent and can be expected to change, the Feldenkrais Method grounds all learning in movement – which is also changing and impermanent. "Movement is life," Feldenkrais often said (Personal communication, Amherst Professional Training Program, 1980). Tibetan mind training focuses on bringing a person in touch with what is "behind" the changing relative reality to what exists "ultimately," which is often referred to as "the sky-like nature of mind" (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, pp. 48-49) or the "luminous nature of mind" (The Dalai Lama, 1998, p. 18). Feldenkrais did not posit anything other than this life of moving, sensing bodies. However, both methods are designed to train a person to slow down and pay attention to what is actually happening.

Leadership training tends to be primarily cognitive and conceptual, using language to think about actions. These two approaches instead focus a learner on close observation at a micro-level of movement, breathing, and one's state of mind, so that the student will develop the habit of paying close attention to what is taking place at a given moment, rather than being distracted by expectations based on past experience. They cause change at the level of *tacit knowledge* – familiarity with a subject that lets a person act effectively without being able to fully describe how. It is from this part of human "knowing" that change in values and long-standing habits is possible.

A small number of organizational practitioners have been incorporating somatic learning combined with spirituality for several decades. Strozzi-Heckler is a well-known practitioner of a martial arts-based approach to embodied learning. He brought his work into corporate venues after projects with the US military. His vivid presentation of his work with the Green Berets (1990/2003) addressed the spiritually grounded self-awareness that can be developed through training in aikido and its importance for leadership development. Other scholars and consultants have also incorporated aikido-based somatic awareness and spirituality into their organizational consulting and discussions of management (Clawson and Doner, 1996; Phillips, 2002/2008; Rudisill, 2005). Among these authors, Phillips explicitly linked his approach with the development of integrity: he opened his book with a quote from a manager:

"I have to wear a lot of faces. And I hate it. I wish I could be the same person at work, at home, and with friends. I want my life to be all one piece, not a lot of fragments working against each other. Isn't that what integrity means?" (Phillips, 2002/2008, p. 1)

There appear to be two differing approaches to somatic awareness development. The more common one, referred to above, is based in the martial arts (most often in aikido). This is useful in leadership development, because successful leaders need to manage power dynamics, and this approach may bring about a comfort with oneself and the uses of power in action. The Feldenkrais Method is different, although it was created by a master of one of the martial arts (judo). It involves learning to observe and sense oneself in action, without acting “against” anyone. There is no overlay of combat – only a focus on learning to observe oneself in action and finding ways to vary the way that one does anything while reducing the effort involved.

What Does it Take to “Adhere to a Code of Values”

It seems to me that when we are in tune with ourselves at many levels, we can move through the world with a higher level of integrity. Lying to others begins with lying to oneself. Across the globe, there has been considerable evidence of lack of integrity among leaders.

Integrity is typically addressed in the leadership literature as “adherence to a code of values” (Johnson, 2009). Since the intent of this paper is to find tools to enable this to happen, I sought a definition that would ground the approaches described here. Argyris and Schon (1988) defined the term as it will be used in this paper.

Webster’s unabridged dictionary offers as the first meaning of integrity (from the Latin *integritas*, ‘integer’) ‘the quality or state of being complete; wholeness; entireness; unbroken state.’ ... In the conventional sense, then, a person of integrity is a whole moral person (like the biblical Job, who is described as *tam v’ yashar*, ‘whole and straight’), and a person who lacks integrity is ‘broken’ or ‘incomplete.’ (p. 197)

As Argyris (1986, 1991) has shown in his writings, few leaders act in accord with their espoused values. His method for shifting this situation is to ask people to observe themselves in action and write in two columns what they say and what they actually think (which is expected to be at odds with what they espouse). The somatic approach proposed here is quite different. Both require self-observation, but somatic learning and mind training take a less cognitive approach than Argyris does and build more directly on neuroplasticity.

In order to provide a cross-disciplinary theoretical foundation for thinking about integrity, I suggest integrating Buckminster Fuller’s (1981) notion of integrity as structure and function, Feldenkrais’ use of physical movement as a foundation for all learning, and principles of Tibetan Mahayana mind training in order to transform the underlying tendencies of the everyday mind. As described above, each of these are complex, subtle systems approaches to change that have been employed with great effectiveness in arenas outside of management, but which are little known within this community of practice. Somatic learning has been shown to transform a person’s way of moving to such an extent that children and adults with severe neuro-muscular and cognitive disabilities have become able to speak, move, and think in ways that their physicians had stated could not happen (Goldman Schuyler, 2004; Johnson, 1997; Johnson & Grand, 1998). Similarly, although methods from mindfulness training have been widely used to enable people to manage stress and improve health, they have only occasionally been applied to improving executive performance (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). There appear to be no formal research studies that investigate the use of such methods in executive coaching, although they are occasionally used in this arena. Leadership development can be enhanced by drawing upon such widely used and tested approaches to human development.

Whereas most definitions of integrity focus on following codes of values, Feldenkrais and Fuller addressed it concretely in relation to structure and function. According to Fuller (2008), integrity meant having the capacity to hold one’s shape in the face of external forces

What most people don’t understand is that most building and other manmade structures do not have true structural integrity because in a structure with true structural integrity, tension and compression are evenly balanced. Most buildings, however, have the majority of the tension

component buried deep in the ground with heavy foundations. Thus, when the Earth moves during an earthquake, the tension component of a building shifts often causing the building to shift or collapse. This is not true for the structure that Bucky invented, the geodesic dome. (<http://www.bucky-fuller-synergy.com/integrity.html> downloaded on April 26, 2008).

What is the equivalent in a human being? One might regard it as the capacity to “hold the shape” of our actions, both physical actions and those undertaken with regard to other people or systems. “Adherence to a code” makes it seem that living with integrity is a cognitive or mental act, whereas viewing it from a structural / functional perspective brings in a more corporeal element. What is it, in the way people sense themselves, move, and feel that allows them to retain their values in the face of perhaps unimaginable difficulties? What kinds of training in change would enhance a leader’s capacity to have such integrity while still being able to change what needs to change? What would enable a person to feel Fuller’s “true structural integrity”?

Structural and Functional Integrity Through Somatic Learning

From the Feldenkrais perspective, the structural integrity of a human being is based on being able to rely on the skeleton for support. Typically, this is how a healthy child maintains balance, but by the time a person reaches adulthood, most people use their muscles constantly to maintain a stance that involves leaning somewhat forward or backward with parts of the body (Hanna, 1988). When a person develops such a “skeletal awareness,” relatively less work is done by the muscles, and the sense of ease in action increases. Feldenkrais (1972, 1979) believed, or at least hoped, that such physical transformation was all that was needed for people to live the life they dreamed. My practice suggests to me that the method has such a transformative impact on a person’s life only when it incorporates values and *being*, as well as movement. Combined with compatible deep training in ethics and being, such as mind training (*lojong*), it may generate leaders able to live from a physical and spiritual sense of integrity.

The Feldenkrais Method provides an approach to change that is grounded in how humans learn to move. The more aware one is of the feel and details of oneself in movement, the more present one is, the more ready to act appropriately to what is actually happening. Feldenkrais called one facet of the learning process he created *Awareness through Movement* (1972). The student is guided through movement sequences of “non-habitual” movements in order to pay more attention to the *how* of what one is doing, as compared with our more customary focus on *what* one is doing. Whereas most training and education address learning to do something in what is deemed the *correct* way, this learning process instead asks the student to move slowly with awareness in order to notice the quality of movement. The learner is taught to reduce effort and to experiment with variations of the original movement, until the action feels easy and even effortless (Goldman, 1998). In this way, one discovers a “right way” for oneself, which is a type of learning process that can be extrapolated to many areas of life.

While the Feldenkrais Method is commonly regarded as a tool for improving movement, Feldenkrais himself saw it as a means for crafting a healthy life. As he wrote, in defining what it means to be a healthy person

If a human being needs no medical services for years and has no complaints of pains or aches, is he or she healthy? If, on the other hand, this same person leads a dull, uninteresting life with marital difficulties that end up with suicide—is that a healthy person? And is a person who never brings his or her work to an end one way or another, and who keeps changing employment only to avoid his duties time and time again—is he in good health? ... A healthy person is one who can live his unavowed dreams fully. There are healthy people among us, but not very many. (1979, pp. 26-27)

Having practiced the Feldenkrais Method for approximately 30 years and observed many clients, I have seen the method be quite effective in teaching people to slow down and pay attention to subtle aspects of how they move, as well as to reflect on implications of such changes for their lives (Goldman Schuyler, 2003, 2007b). However, the method does not necessarily impact the way a person thinks about ethics and

values. It can influence these areas of life (Goldman Schuyler, 2007b) but this is not inherent in the process, whereas it is core to the dharma.

Mind Training and Mindfulness as Foundations for Living With Integrity

Within the dharma, *mind training* refers to a process of “ridding ourselves of negative mental states and fostering and developing constructive ones” (Rinchen, 2001, p. 7). It can be distinguished from *meditation*, a practice that typically involves sitting tall and still to focus and clear one’s mind. As defined by Sogyal Rinpoche, one of today’s foremost teachers of the dharma, meditation is a process intended to bring the mind “home” and allow it to rest in natural peace so one is spacious and at ease (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993). This is distinct from *mindfulness*, although they are closely related, as mindfulness generally refers to learning to pay attention and be aware of what one is sensing and noticing. Mind training does not necessarily involve meditative practices. It is a learning process that can be invoked in the midst of activity, in order to shift one’s attitude to compassionate action. Mindfulness, meditation, and mind training all have centuries of teaching and practice associated with them.

Mindfulness in Recent Behavioral Science Research and Interventions

Mindfulness training has been popularized in the United States as a way of reducing stress and enhancing health (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Over the last two decades, it has come to be used in hospitals throughout the US and the world for stress relief, cancer care, reducing blood pressure, dealing with autoimmune disorders, controlling eating disorders, and many other pathologies (Kabat-Zinn). A review of the literature on its use in psychotherapy concluded “that mindfulness-based approaches will become helpful strategies to offer in the care of patients with a wide range of mental and physical health problems” (Allen, Blashki, & Gullone, 2006, p. 292).

Mindfulness has been discussed in the organizational sciences, but not as extensively as it has been with regard to psychotherapy. Interest is growing: for example, a workshop on mindfulness research at the 2009 Academy of Management Annual Meeting filled the room with over 50 participants. Levinthal and Rerup (2006) emphasized the difference between mindful behavior and mind-less routines, addressing situations in which mindful action is useful in organizations or presents an added cost. Weick’s recent writings (e.g., Weick & Putnam, 2006) suggested the value of incorporating such thinking into the study of organizations. His recent papers on mindfulness (Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006) distinguished between “the prevailing way to conceptualize mindfulness ... has been to borrow from Langer’s... ideas that are essentially a variant of an information-processing perspective” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 516) and a non-conceptual approach, building on Tibetan dharma’s epistemology. His writings implicitly support the use of this latter for management development: “...as people become more aware of the workings of the mind and accept those workings as the resources for collective action, they are in a better position to produce wise action” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 515).

Mindfulness, the Practice of the Feldenkrais Method, and Management Training

I see common ground between mindfulness training and the practice of the Feldenkrais Method. Both the Feldenkrais Method and mindfulness training produce what Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) discussed at length in the context of organizational learning as *tacit knowledge*: familiarity with a subject that lets a person act effectively without being able to fully describe how. Weick and Sutcliffe (p. 520) contrasted conceptual Western mindfulness with the direct knowing of Eastern mindfulness, suggesting that “when people work in the conceptual mode, they develop knowledge by description rather than acquaintance” which leads to increased categorical knowing, with the unintended consequence of increasing the distance from the phenomena itself. Just as mindfulness training brings one into the present by sitting still and focusing on the subtle flow of the breath, so does Awareness through Movement train one to slow down and sense small, almost imperceptible differences in the way one carries out an action. The latter can perhaps translate more readily into the workplace than traditional meditation practice, since it involves observing oneself in action, rather than in stillness. Both bring one in closer, more direct contact with the phenomenon, rather than increasing distance.

Extrapolating from Weick's and his colleagues' insights to the development of ethics and integrity in leadership development, it seems that leaders learn a lot *about* integrity and ethics, but little about how to feel and live by it. This latter would require *embodied knowing*, which Johnson (1995, 1997) describes as being a particular form of tacit knowledge that instills understanding deep into a person's bones, breathing patterns, and movement. When integrity is addressed through conceptual learning, which is the normal western mode, it is not surprising that such training has little impact. Wiley (2000) shows the influence of professional codes of conduct to be roughly 11%, whereas the influence of one's family upbringing (which generates tacit knowing) is roughly 68%. Training can increase the likelihood that people will notice how they feel when making a decision or acting, rather than ignoring such somatic feedback. This increases the likelihood that they will be aware of the kinesthetic responses that take place when one begins to act in a way that lacks integrity. There is almost always some sign when a person attempts to falsify feelings, either to themselves or to others, as Ekman noticed regarding facial expressions (see Goleman, pp. 128-131, 2003). Ekman's extensive research, now being used for practical applications such as airport screening of travelers, shows that people can learn to distinguish between a genuine smile and one that is artificial. With sufficient training, anyone can perceive the inevitable small differences in the use of the facial muscles.

Because I am concerned with how embodied learning transfers to daily life activities and the extent to which a leader will act with integrity under pressure, I decided to focus on mind training, where the practice takes place *within daily perceptions and actions* rather than on meditation, which takes place primarily in retreat or while sitting on a meditation seat.

Mind Training – Transforming Ordinary Reactions

Adherents to varied theoretical perspectives on human behavior agree that it is useful for managers to be able to respond to people thoughtfully rather than react automatically, particularly when the reaction is anger. The research on emotional intelligence shows the value of being able to resonate positively with people (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2004).

Over the last decade, many research-based conversations have taken place between the Dalai Lama, advanced meditative practitioners, and western behavioral scientists addressing the societal importance of overcoming those emotions that are defined by the Tibetan meditation traditions as *destructive*: “those that cause harm to ourselves or to others” (Goleman, 2003, p. xx). These discussions and related research have addressed the neurological basis of behavior, introducing scientists to Buddhist understanding and familiarizing eminent Buddhist practitioners and scholars with contemporary research on the brain (Begley, 2007; Goleman, 2003; The Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998). Reducing the impact of such emotions is core to the practice of *lojong* and could help leaders be able to act with integrity.

These traditions have a distinctly different perspective on emotions such as anger from that of western psychotherapy. From the Tibetan dharmic perspective, destructive emotions are not part of who a person really is. From this perspective, at one's most essential core, a human being and all sentient beings have an ultimate nature of mind that is referred to as “luminous”: it is pure, clear basic awareness, “without any coloration from mental constructs or emotions” (Goleman, 2003, p. 80).

Learning to ground one's sense of oneself in identification with one's essential luminosity, rather than in one's personality, could have significant impacts on leaders. As we know from our work as consultants, our leader/clients often take on the responsibility for moving an entire organization from failure to success. This may require hundreds or thousands of people to change their behavior and to respond in new ways in the face of difficulty. Recent organizational writings have addressed what this demands of leaders by describing systems change in terms of leaders' *presence* (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004) and *resonance* (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). In the context of *lojong*, transformational change requires that people not be controlled by negative emotions. The leader must be free of such emotions, or how can s/he help others?

When I promised to liberate from their disturbing emotions

Wandering beings in the ten directions
As far as the ends of space,
I myself was not freed yet from disturbing emotions,
And didn't even realize the extent of my (being under their control);
Wasn't it crazy to have spoken (like that)?
But, as this is so, I shall never withdraw
From destroying my disturbing emotions. (Shantideva, 8th Century/2005, p. 29)

The inclusion of such practices in leadership development gives a method for uprooting destructive emotions before they take over and dominate the leader's actions unintentionally. According to the Dalai Lama, "the longer you are accustomed to the afflictions within you, the more prone you become to their re-occurring, and then your propensity will be to give in to them" (2000, p. 120). "Such emotional states impair one's judgment, the ability to make a correct assessment of the nature of things" (Ricard as cited in Goleman, 2003, p. 76). It is a serious problem when a leader's judgment and ability to perceive are interfered with, yet this is common and probably a major undiscussed constituent of why "smart people can't learn" (Argyris, 1991) – or act with integrity. While the *lojong* practice is not easy to master, learning to notice negative emotions as they arise and uprooting them immediately, can, with practice, generate an inner calm that is different in nature from what is often called self-discipline: simply controlling the outer expression of anger or other such emotions.

The *Eight Verses* train the practitioner in a sequence of attitudes and actions that over time can profoundly transform one's habitual states of mind. The foundation is what the Dalai Lama and others call a "good heart" (The Dalai Lama, 1998, p. 102). Rather than assuming that temperament is innate and lasting, from this perspective the foundation of happiness is learning (The Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998). One uses the *Eight Verses* as a process of training (or "taming" or disciplining) one's mind, so that the negative emotions described previously do not remain habitual and ultimately will not arise.

Rather than regarding oneself as more important than everyone else, one learns to treat others with respect, whatever their status or role. One commits to watching one's mind attentively during all actions, so as to notice and immediately "face and avert" any negative emotion as soon as it arises "since it endangers myself and others" (The Dalai Lama, 2003, p. 98). If removed immediately, the negative emotion becomes easier to remove in the future. From this perspective, emotions are seen as addictive: if one becomes accustomed to them, they become habitual. Going beyond this, one trains oneself to value meeting what popular business training books often call "difficult people:" "ill-natured people, overwhelmed by wrong deeds and pain" (The Dalai Lama, 2003, p. 101). Meeting such people and not reacting negatively to them helps the practitioner to reduce the tendency to view oneself as better than others and to excuse one's own behavior while judging others and their actions. As one works through the successive verses, the challenges become greater to the "natural" tendency to value oneself over others. At each step, one learns to demand more altruistic attitudes and actions of oneself, reducing what is labeled "self-cherishing." The final verses remind the practitioner of the interdependent nature of all human actions, so that he or she increasingly perceives and acts from a systemic mindset, grounded in compassion.

In an exploratory qualitative study of entrepreneurial leaders (Goldman Schuyler, 2007a), I found that those who used these practices said that the people they managed became more loyal and dedicated, even when wages were low. One leader emphasized how helpful he found these practices in cross-cultural contexts. He described his experience as follows

In other countries and cultures they have different ways of communicating, so it's a lot more normal to get angry. I've found that being patient in those situations really pays off. With the angriest people, it usually takes three attempts. They'll get super angry and I'll deflect it... After three times, that person totally changes. All of a sudden my relationship with that person changes,

and we become kind of friends or allies to solve the problem together.... I can't tell you how many times I've seen this! (p.52)

The core notion expressed by the interviewees was that all dharmic practice involved changing one's own state of mind while focusing on cherishing others rather than oneself – which is the heart of *lojong* practices.

Applications in Leadership Coaching and Consulting

Given the absence of research studies about consulting that address these approaches, I opted to present and discuss the experiences of two management consultants in addition to my own, so as to convey a concrete sense of the potential these methods offer for generating deep and lasting change. Based on interviews I conducted with them in March 2009, I will first discuss the work of these consultants, who ground their consulting in over twenty years of study and practice of Tibetan dharma, and will then describe how I brought the principles of the Feldenkrais Method into processes of career development.

Susan Skjei has been consulting in leadership coaching and organizational transformation for over twenty years. Formerly Vice-President and Chief Learning Officer of a large technology company, she was responsible for developing its learning and change management strategy and implementing it across 40 countries and 8,500 employees worldwide, as well as for implementing a virtual corporate university to provide education and training throughout the world. She is a senior teacher in a particular Tibetan tradition known as Shambhala, which focuses on societal change grounded in personal transformation. She has taught in the United States, Canada and Europe, and is the founder and director of the Authentic Leadership program at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, which has over 250 alumni from organizations such as Sprint, AT&T, Sun Microsystems, state and federal government, and many small businesses and non-profit organization. John "Karuna" Cayton is a business psychologist and psychotherapist who has been counseling leaders, groups, and families since 1989. He worked for over 12 years with Tibetan refugees in Nepal and is a teacher in a Tibetan tradition that is different from Skjei's, emphasizing study and dialog more than meditative practices. One of Cayton's coaching clients was profiled in *Fortune* (Mehta, 2007), generating widespread interest in his approach, which draws on much of what I have described above.

Both address integrity in their individual coaching, but tend not to use the term itself, and describe their work as fundamentally involving transformative learning. Skjei describes her focus as "developing authentic leaders through self reflection, conscious conversations and embodied action." The core competencies she emphasizes are the ability to be fully present, to engage skillfully and compassionately with others, and to lead systemic change with insight and compassion. Cayton emphasizes training in "how thinking works" in the context of "not just changing the specific behaviors that are resulting in leadership and interpersonal difficulties, but in transforming the mindset, attitudes, and belief systems that underlie the behavior." Both have worked with some clients for many years and with others for a short series of coaching sessions.

Skjei's Authentic Leadership Training Program is grounded in Tibetan mind training, but does not explicitly refer to classical texts or use dharmic terms. A basic premise is that all people have significant blind spots with regard to how they shape their world. Students learn to look at how the mind creates assumptions and beliefs that then create their world. One of the most widespread Tibetan practices related to mind training is a breathing and visualization practice called *tonglen*, referred to in the last two lines of the *Eight Verses*, and taught in the Authentic Leadership Program. In the first part of the course, students learn and practice basic mindfulness meditation, which involves watching the breath and the mind in order to be present to whatever is happening. The course then teaches students how to cultivate compassion for themselves and others through the *tonglen* practice, which involves picturing that one is taking in one's own and others' negative emotions and suffering on the in-breath and sending out openheartedness, confidence, and well-being to others on the out-breath. Although they have not

collected data systematically, which could be a further step for the program, Skjei said that the students describe being able to notice when negative emotions color their views and proactively use this method to change their perception of situations in the workplace.

Skjei's experience with one client shows how she incorporates the fundamentals of such Tibetan mind training in a way that yields practical outcomes. The executive director of a not-for-profit organization was a student in the Authentic Leadership Program. As Skjei described her, "she was a highly mission-driven person who approached her work from a fierce sense of fairness and wanting to protect the disadvantaged." However, "she took on others' jobs and responsibilities, not allowing them to fail, which weakened the group." As Skjei described it,

through coaching that addressed her early experiences of fairness and unfairness, and experience in the tonglen breathing practices, she was able to breathe space and openness into her reactions to her staff in meetings. During one session, she began crying, realizing how exhausted she was, and that she was not developing her people, much as she wished to do so. Later, she reported back that she was increasingly able to wait and not jump in so fast, so that staff members took on more responsibility and worked out their own conflicts. This freed her time for additional projects and was a huge breakthrough.

Cayton's coaching draws explicitly on mind training as well. He believes that

Mindfulness gets considerable exposure, but it's not enough. It brings awareness, but is not proactive. In mind training, you have a difficult situation arise and then use the difficulty to create higher qualities in yourself, such as compassion, empathy, wisdom, courage. Mindfulness doesn't have this effect: it helps you not be triggered by difficult situations, without going further. A good lojong practitioner even invites the triggers: 'Oh good, this is great!' This means that uncomfortable situations are confronted and through a particular kind of dialog, people begin to re-evaluate their own understanding of their values, and the relationship between their values and what they are doing. Once you have such a conversation, it never goes away, even many years later. (J. K. Cayton, personal communication, March, 2009).

He sees his greatest value as being his ability to help executives challenge and shift their mindsets, developing their capacity to confront and deconstruct their beliefs about themselves and their values. In describing his work with one executive, he emphasized that the man was not interested in spirituality per se, but realized after a number of coaching sessions that he wanted to be a full human being and bring this into the workplace. After some time, the client began to view any situation that came up as an opportunity to be fully human – fully engaged, passionate, oriented to learning. "He likes intensity, as do most executives in start-ups. Lojong has that intensity." As he described his work with this client, much of the process was educational, challenging him to deconstruct his fixed ideas about the meanings of things like "success," "being compassionate," and "being cut-throat."

Cayton regards the core of this approach as being a process of becoming continually engaged in learning from every experience, inviting all experiences to be viewed as a way for a client to become more fully the person one wants to be. To convey what he believes too often happens in today's business world, in which executives often lack such deep willingness to challenge themselves and each other, Clayton described a start-up that was sold for a high price – despite the fact that the company's only product never worked. As he described the corporate culture, "their key value was 'being an expert'. Their product was 18 months behind schedule and it didn't work. They hid these facts and were bought for huge amount. Everyone was afraid to say that they didn't know."

The following brief case studies show how the Feldenkrais approach to embodied learning and coaching has been used for transformational learning and suggest the potential of this method for use in management development. They describe how I have brought somatic learning into my work with managers and students of consulting.

Jeanne (pseudonym) was a young project manager working in Silicon Valley at the height of the boom years (1997-2001). In working with her over a period of four years, incorporating the Feldenkrais Method and career coaching, she became a person who was quite confident about the choices she was making, instead of having wide-ranging interests and skills but considerable uncertainty about how to use them. A published description is available (Goldman Schuyler, 2007b), so I will not describe what transpired in detail, but instead provide a high-level overview of the case and its implications.

Jeanne had been a project manager in several companies and had been doing quite well, but the work had ceased to be satisfying to her. We blended Feldenkrais and career coaching sessions by conducting them sequentially within the framework of two-hour sessions that were initially held weekly and then took place as needed. I regarded my role as being to initiate a direction, both in movement or discussion, and also to be open to following where Jeanne's focus and energy at that moment might lead us. From a Feldenkrais perspective, the practitioner needs to be ready to build on whatever the person brings that day – which is how I approached both the somatic learning and Jeanne's exploration of her ideas and feelings about herself and work.

The experience shifted her perspectives on work. She moved from trying to figure out where she fitted in, to becoming aware of how she actually felt and what energized her, and then building her life around that. Our work together progressed through several stages. What brought her to me initially was physical discomfort. This is what draws many people, since the method can help to reduce or eliminate pain. After Jeanne discovered how she could feel at ease, she began thinking about reviewing and perhaps changing her life, and inquired about career coaching. She knew what she was unhappy about, but not what she wanted in life. In the coaching process, I moved back and forth between helping her to sense what she was actually feeling and helping her to articulate her values and interests. Although she had asked initially for career coaching, we discovered that in reality, the traditional western notions of “career,” “goals,” and “focus” made her uncomfortable. Over time, as I helped her sense herself as “delicious” and flowing, she began being willing to let herself know and state what she truly loved and disliked.

My original intent was to help her in a more traditional way to set career goals and develop a plan for actualizing them. I had done such work countless times before in business settings. But by adding the Feldenkrais awareness and movement, Jeanne went to deeper levels of self-knowing and honesty. Just as Cayton spoke of helping his clients deconstruct their values in conjunction with the concept of mind training, I found that moving into increasingly deep awareness of her feelings inspired Jeanne to deconstruct her ideas of success and career.

As neuroscientists have shown in recent years, movement with attention is core to the learning of children and can change the brain of adults (Baniel, 2009; Begley, 2007; Doidge, 2007). However, little or no research has been conducted yet on the extent to which it can impact adults' mindsets and actions in such areas as life choices and leadership. The published case study of coaching Jeanne (Goldman Schuyler, 2007b) was an attempt to carefully document such a process.

I have also incorporated somatic learning based on the Feldenkrais method into courses taught to graduate students at two universities studying to become organizational consultants. In describing the learning process, most of the students said that they had experienced far greater change than they had expected. A detailed description of this work is in print and can be downloaded (Goldman Schuyler, 2003). In the graduate course described in this paper, which has been offered as an elective to students in organizational, sports, and clinical psychology programs, students were given a brief experience of the types of movement sequences used in the method and a description of the core principles and were invited to use these to make a change in any area of the work or personal lives that they wished. They have made applications in areas ranging from physical activities (e.g., losing weight or exercise), to improving their relationships with their children to reducing stress in the workplace and changing their management style.

Usually people experiencing the Feldenkrais Method only participate in guided movement sequences or in hands-on individual “lessons,” without any particular cognitive input, but in these courses

students experienced movement (although less of it) and also read about it and were asked to use this as a lens to reflect on their lives. This combination seemed very powerful, as again and again the course had significant impacts on the participants.

Implications

Similarities Across These Methods

I have found that Feldenkrais Method sessions at times evoke a state of mind which is quite similar to what many people experience in mindfulness training. As Allen, Blashki and Gullone described the psychological mechanisms involved in mindfulness in their survey of published research (1996), mindfulness involves “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 288). This statement could equally well be used to describe what develops in effective practitioners and students of the Feldenkrais Method. Traditional mindfulness develops awareness through stillness, whereas Feldenkrais develops awareness through movement. Both develop awareness. Both are processes of deep learning that foster new approaches almost subliminally, reaching around, beyond, or beneath the discursive, analytical mind. Neither focuses on developing explicit knowledge or information about one’s patterns, instead enabling them to change gradually, almost imperceptibly, by eroding their foundations through slowing the person and causing them to pay attention in the present to simple actions. This combination of heightened awareness, attention to detail, and calm can be useful in many leadership situations involving crisis management, as well as in distinguishing among the varied needs of different individuals and groups in an organization.

At the heart of these methods is a focus on enhancing awareness – bringing learners into the present to sense subtle shifts in the body or mind. In doing so, they develop parts of the mind that pay attention, that simultaneously feel and notice differences and quiet the more discursive mind that runs a seemingly endless commentary on one’s actions.

Both Tibetan practices and the Feldenkrais Method focus on and appreciate the body as a way to gain the broadest possible learning. Moshe Feldenkrais was not interested in movement for its own sake: he was interested in it as a way to improve the way people learn. Through the process of varying movements and experimenting with them, a student improves his or her ability to learn from experience. Because the movements are not done in order to get to a specific result, but are carried out in a spirit of exploration, to discover what happens, the student uses his or her own movements as a subject of a quasi-scientific experiment.

Both mind training and somatic learning provide tools to move into greater harmony with oneself and to notice when such a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1982) is not present. This sense can be regarded as the somatic foundation for integrity; in its absence, actions lack grounding.

Having a choice of approaches that accomplish similar ends is in the spirit of both methods: both rely on what might be called *the repetition of discovery*. I coined this term to refer to their unique way of working with repetition. Both methods involve repeating processes mindfully. In working with clients, I help them see that learning of new ways of moving cannot be “held onto.” Instead, the student is encouraged to rediscover the learning in as many ways as possible. By learning how to find ease of movement over and over again, a student learns multiple things simultaneously. At the tacit learning level, he or she discovers the importance of generating situations that foster discovery, in contrast to learning to seek the “right answer”. This is profoundly different from much business training; most students expect there to be “an” answer that they must learn and hold onto. Both the Feldenkrais Method and dharmic practices teach instead that nothing can be “held onto”- that the very effort of holding on changes what was being held into something else that was not wanted. Only by finding out how to recreate over and over again the important discoveries can the learner retain them.

Enabling Transformational Change

Feldenkrais believed that learning directly from the body and movement would be sufficient for deep life change - not just for improvement of movement and relief of pain. I believe that in order to impact arenas of social action such as leadership development, a practitioner needs to incorporate tacit learning of values and self-structuring. This is comparable to the way Tibetan mind training teaches that emptying one's mind is not sufficient, as the mind will always return to its former patterns after one stops meditating, unless one learns about the nature of mind and life (The Dalai Lama, 2003). People "... cannot eliminate mental obscurations merely by familiarizing themselves with calm abiding meditation alone. It will only suppress the disturbing emotions and delusions temporarily" (p. 82). The "latent potential of the disturbing emotions" can only be destroyed by wisdom, which means understanding that things always will change (*impermanence*) and that everything takes place only in interdependence on all other things (*dependent origination*).

Ethics and self-discipline teachings about the importance of a good heart and caring for others' happiness are the foundation for all learning in this tradition. Mindfulness alone is not sufficient for fostering integrity in leaders; such development would need support from somatic awareness and the commitment to serve others - which develops through mind training.

Designing Non-Conceptual Leadership Learning

How does one learn to put others first, to eradicate negative emotions, and to value difficult people? As a New Yorker, I used to hear the old joke in which someone asked a cab driver "How do I get to Carnegie Hall? I'm in a hurry!" The unexpected answer was "Practice, practice, practice!" A true musician practices not with mindless repetition but through mindful exploration and expression of the structure of the music itself. Neither playing an instrument nor having inner peace and a "mind wishing enlightenment for all" (*bodhicitta*, or *mind of awareness*) are innate nor learned through mindless repetition. This has major implications for the design of executive development. Somatic learning can be incorporated to accelerate the process: it can help a learner sense the difference somatically when he or she is acting with integrity and when not.

A study by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) on psychological safety and leader inclusiveness provides another empirical base for use of such an approach in leadership development. Defining *leader inclusiveness* as "words and deeds by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions... in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent" (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006, p. 947), they described such inclusiveness as a way to create psychological safety and moderate the impact of different levels of status within teams. The impact was particularly noticeable in lower status members of the teams that they studied, who normally did not feel free to speak and were unlikely to participate actively unless the leader was inclusive. This suggests that what is taught in *lojong* (not placing oneself above others and cultivating genuine respect for them) has a measurable value with regard to team performance. Aspects of their study could perhaps be replicated with the incorporation of mind training and somatic awareness to see whether the use of these practices shifted non-inclusive leaders toward greater inclusiveness over time.

Conclusions

Consultants often recognize that leaders need to integrate systems thinking with deep awareness if they are to be effective. Cultivating integrity requires that one be aware of oneself in action and generate attitudes appropriate to the situation, rather than being reactive. The combination of mind training and somatic learning can foster this type of aware, appropriate action.

While most leadership training tends to be primarily cognitive and conceptual, the use of somatic approaches develops a different and important set of skills. Focusing the learner on close observation at a micro-level of movement, breathing, and one's state of mind can yield change at the level of *tacit knowledge*, an arena where we "know" but usually cannot articulate what we know. It is from this part of human "knowing" that change in values and long-standing habits is possible.

The methods described in this paper can, I believe, be used to develop leaders who can remain calm and aware, who can notice and immediately uproot negative emotions, who can be inclusive of people whatever their status in an organization, and who can truly appreciate all the people they lead. It is unrealistic to expect humans to develop these competencies quickly, but years of experience in these various practices have shown that they do produce the desired effects when used with intention over a sufficiently long period of time. Bringing such methods into the leadership development arena could help leaders face the complex set of challenges presented by this fast-moving time of change.

Appendix

The Text: *Eight Verses for Training the Mind* by Geshe Langri Tangpa

1. With a determination to accomplish the highest welfare for all sentient beings who surpass even a wish-granting jewel, I will learn to hold them supremely dear.
 2. Whenever I am with others, I will practice seeing myself as the lowest of all, And from the depths of my heart, I will respectfully hold others as supreme.
 3. In all actions I will learn to search into my mind, and as soon as a destructive emotion arises, since it endangers myself and others, will firmly face and avert it.
 4. I will learn to cherish ill-natured people, overwhelmed by wrong deeds and pain, as if I had found a precious treasure, for they are difficult to find.
 5. Whenever others, out of jealousy and envy, treat me in unjust ways, may I accept this defeat myself and offer the victory to them.
 6. Even if someone whom I have helped or in whom I have placed my hopes does great wrong by harming me, may I see that one as a sacred friend.
 7. In short, may I offer both directly and indirectly all joy and benefit to all beings, my mothers, and may I myself secretly take on all of their hurt and suffering.
 8. May they not be defiled by the concepts of the eight mundane concerns and, aware that all things are illusory, may they, ungrasping, be free from bondage.
- (Combination of multiple translations of classical text from The Dalai Lama, 1998 and 2003; Gyeltsen, 2006, and Rinchen, 2001.)

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