

Learning to Embody Leadership Through Mindfulness and Somatics Practice

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Abstract

The Problem.

Given the unpredictable nature of organizational life, leadership development programs that rely primarily on cognitive processing and critical reflection are no longer sufficient. What is required is an integrated pedagogy that enables individuals to access and embody a “way of being,” an aligned presence and purpose that spans all contexts so that the individual and leader are not separate entities but rather a fully cohesive self. To develop this capacity, reputable organizations are experimenting with holistic learning methodologies, including mindfulness and somatics practices. However, these methodologies have yet to be fully grounded in adult learning and leadership best practices, empirical research, mind–body principles, and leadership performance.

The Solution.

Through a critical review of relevant theory, practice, and empirical research, this article conceptualizes a constructive developmental learning methodology, which integrates mindfulness and somatics practices that transform a leader’s relationship with behavior from the automatic to the consciously chosen realm. The article presents a practical model of embodied leadership where individuals learn ways to deepen awareness to include both the mind and body as an interdependent system to remain open, grounded, and engaged in a way that builds resilience, and resourcefulness, and improves relationships in complex environments.

The Stakeholders.

Human resource development professionals, executive coaches, and aspiring leaders seek a holistic and practical leadership development approach, which is conceptually and empirically linked to leadership and organizational performance.

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Introduction

In addition to navigating complex challenges, leaders are called upon to be visionary, collaborative, and creative to positively impact the performance of their organizations (Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Chermack, 2011). As a result, recent leadership development models are expanding the definition of leadership beyond situational and competency-based approaches, which reduce leadership to a particular set of behaviors and skill sets. These models distinguish leadership as a way of being and focus on the interpersonal development of the self as leader, which includes cultivating real-time awareness of mental models (Cairns-Lee, 2015) and conscious insights (Polsfuss & Ardichvili, 2008), while intentionally integrating an individual's sense of identity (Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White, & Schedlitzki, 2015; Petriglieri, 2012), which is grounded in values, beliefs, and natural talents (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Tovstiga, 2013). Developing these attributes requires learning how to access the body in a way that anchors leaders to the present moment and intuitive connection to their sense of purpose, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions (Baron & Parent, 2015; Boyatzis & McKee, 2013; Goleman, 2013; Purser & Mililo, 2015). Learning to embody leadership is a process of consciously aligning purpose with presence so that they are experienced and witnessed as one. When leaders operate from habit, without listening to the mind and the body, their actions may be experienced as inauthentic and disconnected from their intentions.

Given these demands, the field of human resource development (HRD) is always searching for new ways to help leaders adapt and thrive while contributing to organizational effectiveness. As part of this special issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources (ADHR)*, which presents cutting-edge approaches in leadership development, this article integrates the widely popular yet little understood application of mind-body awareness in leadership development. Although the developmental model presented in this article is novel, it stems from ancient traditions and aligns well with a classic assumption about leadership described by Bennis (2005), "What effective leaders understand is that there is no difference between becoming an effective leader and becoming a fully integrated human being" (p. 2).

Through a critical review of relevant literature, this article conceptualizes a constructive developmental pedagogy that integrates mindfulness and somatics practices as a means of developing ways of being that results in leaders who are resilient, resourceful, and capable of inclusive and collaborative relationships. After operationalizing the terms mindfulness and somatics and providing several examples of their current use and benefit to organizations, this article builds toward an integrated concept of *Embodied Leadership Development*. Through this holistic approach, leaders learn how to expand awareness to receive real-time insights, critically reflect upon these insights to inform new actions and behaviors, and transform their way of being so that it grows their authentic capacity and is better aligned with their needs and intentions.

Research used to inform this article first includes a critical review of literature on the prevailing philosophies, practices, and roles of mind–body approaches in the field of leadership development (Goldman-Schuyler, 2010; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2013; Strozzi-Heckler, 2007). To bridge theory and practice, this article also introduces quantitative and qualitative research that links these practices with healthy organizational climates and performance drivers. Primary sources include leadership journals as well as peer-reviewed literature from the fields of HRD, adult learning and development, mindfulness and contemplative practices, social psychology, neuroscience, neuroleadership, and organizational behavior.

Literature included in this review had to meet the criteria of theoretically or empirically informing leadership development, organizational strategy, adult learning theory, and modern application to leadership challenges. Databases utilized to compile these sources included Business Source Info, Emerald, JSTOR, ProQuest, PsycInfo, and PubMed. Primary search terms included Leadership, Leadership Development, Transformative Leadership, Transformative Learning, Human Resource Development, Mindfulness Practice, Mindful Leadership, Somatics Practice, Authentic Leadership, Resonant Leadership, Neuroleadership, and Mind–Body Connection.

Introducing Mindfulness and Somatics Practices

Defining mindfulness practice. To date, the most widely studied form of mindfulness practice in the United States stems from the discipline of *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn (2003) has operationalized mindfulness practice as an “awareness that emerges by paying attention on purpose to the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). This working definition is utilized because it provides a secular understanding and daily practice, and has become the subject of the large body of research highlighted below, which relates to stress and anxiety reduction, perspective taking, and rewiring basic personal perceptions. To characterize this process further, mindfulness practice consists of the self-regulation of awareness and orientation to experience (Bishop et al., 2004). During formal practice, the central feature of an individual’s attention can include breathing, hearing, tasting, the body as sensed in space, and overall sense of well-being (Chaskalson, 2011).

Benefits of mindfulness practice. Regular mindfulness practice has been correlated with several capabilities required by modern leaders and characteristics of healthy organizational climates, including improved task performance (Dane, 2011), enhanced relationships (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), decreased emotional exhaustion and increased job satisfaction (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013), as well as improved work–family balance (Allen & Kiburz, 2012). Several physiological and psychological benefits also occur during formal practice (Brown et al., 2007; Carmody, 2009; Hölzel et al., 2011) including reduced stress and anxiety, and these benefits extend well beyond the formal practice setting (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach,

2001). MBSR is grounded in the Vipassanā meditation tradition (Buchheld et al., 2001), which is also known as *insight meditation* because it opens awareness to revelations presented by the mind in real time versus a process of seeking ideas through content expertise or reflection upon past experience.

Defining somatics practice. Somatics, sometimes referred to as embodied knowing, is a methodology and change theory that understands human beings as an integrated system of mind, body, and spirit (Damasio, 1994; Feldenkrais, 1972; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Levine, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2015). As an emerging field of practice, somatics draws from research in psychology (Gendlin, 1982), mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), adult learning and development (Fenwick, 2003; Freiler, 2007; Mezirow, 2000), Eastern and Western philosophies (Johnson, 2007), and neuroscience (Siegel, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2015). The common premise across these disciplines is that the mind and body are interdependent; one does not exist without impacting the other. Notably, neuroscience research tells us that a significant amount of the information we take in is received through the body out of our conscious awareness (Siegel, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2015). This bodily information maintains a constant, active influence on our conscious experience as it impacts our thoughts, emotions, and ultimately our behavior. Consequently, when learners and leaders focus primarily on what is consciously known, a significant resource of information is missed, which powerfully influences their overall presence and capacity. Simply stated, individuals are not a mind over matter system (e.g., if I think this way I will *be* different) or matter over mind (e.g., a change in chemistry or medication will completely change one's experience).

Benefits of somatics practice. By accessing this information through mind–body practices, somatics integrates the body as an essential place of change, learning, intelligence, and transformation. Working somatically or *through* the body, leaders can learn to access their internal experience including sensations, emotions, and the meaning they assign to those feelings. As these conscious thoughts are reflected in physical structures including posture, gesture, and movement patterns, leaders are able to gain deeper awareness of self and others. As described by Johnson (2007), embodiment is a particular form of tacit knowledge that instills understanding deep into a person's bones, muscles, breathing patterns, and movement. Developing this insight creates critical opportunities for fundamentally changing behavior through body-based practices that support a body capable of new perceptions, emotions, behaviors, and actions (Strozzi-Heckler, 2007), all of which aid a process of transformative learning discussed later (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

Relevance and Integration With Leadership Development

Many influential authors in the field of leadership have recognized the need to reassess the way leaders operate in the 21st century (George, 2007; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2013) by suggesting new leadership principles and competencies that are central to body-based traditions including developing deep and broad awareness of self, other,

and environment; staying in the present moment to remain open and responsive; suspending judgment and approaching problems with a beginner's mind to remain open to diverse ideas and solutions; and intentionally shifting attention to and beyond oneself to engage effectively with conflict and complexity (Goleman, 2013; Johansen & Gopalakrishna, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Palmer & Crawford, 2013).

Several leadership scholars and practitioners have recently generated organizational change approaches around these holistic principles. Senge and Scharmer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have developed a practice helpful to leading innovation called *Presencing*, which involves being in the present moment and suspending judgment to clearly see the future as it emerges (Scharmer, 2009; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers 2004). Schein (2013) recently developed the concept of *Humble Inquiry*, a leadership approach akin to the Buddhist attitude of "beginner's mind" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), in which leaders learn to open their minds as nonexperts to expand their creative reach. Goleman (2013) also recently suggested that focus is essential to leveraging our ability to lead, which involves directing attention to and beyond ourselves to appreciate the interplay of larger systems within organizations.

Other human developmental fields, including psychology and neuroscience, have long addressed the pivotal role of embodied knowing as a means of holistic self-development (Damasio, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Levine, 2012). Similarly, a growing body of work in the field of adult learning references embodied knowing and somatic learning as a key means of transformative learning and change (Bennett, 2012; Goldman-Schuyler, 2010; Tobin & Tisdell, 2015).

Just as the field of HRD has sought its own common definition over the years (Watkins, 1990), this collection of mind-body approaches to leadership development is in search of a common definition, and therefore not only requires a careful examination of the current application and benefits to organizations but also theoretical grounding that may be continuously informed and refined by empirical research.

Current Application

By incorporating mindfulness and somatics in their leadership development programs, organizations such as General Electric (GE), Google, Apple, IBM, Starbucks, Goldman Sachs, Pfizer, and the U.S. Military (Brendel, 2016; Fisher, 2014) have learned that when attunement to the mind and the body is skillfully guided, a leader can learn how to regulate and act from a clearer state of mind supported by a physical presence that is aligned with and reinforces that state (Brendel, 2016). Shifting to such states positively impacts decision making, communication, creativity, and conflict management (Goldman-Schuyler, 2010). As an example of this growing trend, GE has dedicated 10% of its global training budget to fund experimental forms of mind-body leadership training (Cancalosi, 2015). The *Search Inside Yourself Program* born at Google (Chade-Meng, 2012) has since spread its mindfulness practice formula for leadership development to Ford, American Express, and LinkedIn. Similarly, the *Institute for Mindful Leadership* developed within General Mills by Janice Marturano has now been incorporated by the U.S. Air Force, Mayo Clinic, Procter & Gamble, and the

World Economic Forum (Institute for Mindful Leadership, 2015). The *Strozzi Institute* has also designed somatic programs for companies such as Apple, AT&T, Kaiser Permanente, Microsoft, Sony, Pfizer, Capital One, and Cisco Systems. Practitioners such as Palmer and Crawford (2013), Heller and Surrenda (1994), and Flaherty (2011) have authored books and designed leadership development programs that utilize somatic theory and practices within organizations.

Consultants and coaches also integrate mindfulness and somatics in their approach to leadership development (Brendel, 2016). Taking a mindful pause to transition from transactional to authentic leadership, in Korn Ferry's *Executive to Leader Institute*, is endorsed by Pillsbury, Häagen Dazs, Medtronic, and Novartis (Cashman Leadership, 2015). McKinsey's *Centered Leadership* program focuses on helping leaders connect and engage more consciously in their organizations (McKinsey Insights & Publications, 2010). New Ventures West, Newfield Network, and Presence-Based Coaching are but a few International Coach Federation (ICF) coach-training programs that specifically speak to the importance of bringing the body into the coaching conversation with clients. These practices have also permeated university programs that prepare leaders to enter the fields of human resources (HR), organization development (OD), and other management positions. These currently include the Wharton Business School, the Drucker School of Management, the New York University (NYU) Stern School of Business, Weatherhead School of Management, and Columbia University.

Toward a Conceptual Model

Leaders who wish to consistently and purposefully choose how they respond to situations and relationships require intentional practices that attend to the incessant thoughts running through their mind as well as the sensate awareness of their bodily responses. The mindfulness and somatics practices described in this article enable such awareness and create an opportunity for leaders to consistently align their purpose and intentions with more useful actions. When practiced consistently, embracing the larger spectrum of experience in this way produces an embodied leadership presence that is internally sensed and read by others as open, engaged, and trustworthy.

Learning to observe the inner self, as revealed through the body, leaders become capable of accessing largely unconscious patterns of thought, emotion, and automatic reactions to the world. These subconscious mind-sets become self-perpetuating default tendencies, or ways of being, that are stored in the hard-wiring of the body as embodied mind-sets (Levine, 2012; Siegel, 2012). This way of being or identity is reflected not only in one's expressed point of view and patterns of interpersonal behavior but also in one's posture, gesture, movement, thought, emotion, feelings, and actions—which is the self and leader one is (Strozzi-Heckler, 2007). Combined as complementary systems for accessing internal experience, mindfulness, and somatic practices provide a powerful means for developing embodied leaders who intuitively “know” how to align presence and purpose no matter how ambiguous or complex the situation may be.

When mindfulness and somatics theories, practices, and research are analyzed side by side, a developmental sequence for embodied leadership emerges. Three phases,

which may also be understood as independent leadership capacities, are described next. These include (a) transforming awareness into cognitive insights, (b) critically reflecting and engaging in relationship and dialogue with others about cognitive insights to practice purposeful action and change in the present moment, and (c) transforming practice into more attuned and responsive ways of being. This approach may be offered exclusively or added as a complementary component to existing leadership programs that wish to operationalize awareness as a leadership development approach that directly impacts the organization, as summarized in Table 1.

Phase 1: Expanding Awareness to Receive Mind–Body Insights

Mindfulness and somatics practice both serve to deepen awareness and enable participants to receive insights that bolster creativity and the potential for transformative learning in real time, yet do so in slightly different yet complementary ways. The following section explores the similarities and differences of these two practices as a means of developing insights through both mind and body.

Mindfulness practice broadens awareness without having to actively seek meaning, make judgments, or arrive at conclusions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Individuals are guided to access both foreground and background thoughts and feelings in real time, which in itself cultivate helpful leadership attitudes such as patience and letting go (Horan, 2009). Mindfulness practice also involves shifting from “expert mind” that overemphasizes content expertise to “beginner’s mind,” which involves remaining open to divergent perspectives and letting go of limiting perceptions and assumptions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Meditation is listed as one of just a few methodologies comprising a holistic approach to transformative learning (Taylor, 2010). The most common insight meditation technique involves breathing. With eyes closed, or maintaining a gentle gaze, the main instruction—whether guided by an expert or self-guided—is to pay attention to the full duration of breathing, moment by moment, and continuing to bring attention back to the present moment as many times as needed.

The results of practicing meditation on cognitive capacities are well documented. Both long- and short-term meditation are shown to expand awareness in a way that opens to unique ideas that present themselves (Colzato, Ozturk, & Hommel, 2012; Strick, Van Noorden, Ritskes, De Ruiter, & Dijksterhuis, 2012). For example, in one study, Zen practitioners who meditated in a laboratory performed better on a creativity assessment than Zen practitioners who did not (Ding, Li, & Tang, 2011). In another, new practitioners who experienced seven 30-min sessions of meditation saw an increase in their creative ability (Horan, 2009). Another study demonstrated that open monitoring meditation—which essentially is a form of insight meditation—promotes divergent thinking (Ren et al., 2011), which is a thinking style that is essential to transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Insight development is critical to the field of leadership development (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007) precisely because creativity, a process through which insight is transformed into new ways of being and interacting with the organization, is essential to both effective (Amabile & Khaire, 2008) and transformative leadership (Carmeli, Sheaffer, Binyamin, Reiter-Palmon, & Shimoni, 2014).

Table 1. Integrating Theories and Practices of Mindfulness and Somatics.

Phases	Shared theory	Embodied leadership practice	Potential outcomes
Expanding awareness to receive mind–body insights	<p>Awareness is cultivated by drawing attention to the senses, feelings, and thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2003)</p> <p>Awareness creates space to receive insights (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers 2004)</p> <p>Body and mind are an interdependent system; changes in one create changes in the other (Johnson, 2007; Levine, 2012; Siegel, 2012)</p>	<p>Mindfulness practice broadens awareness without actively seeking, thinking, or changing (Kabat-Zinn, 2003)</p> <p>Somatics operationalizes awareness around specific sensations and feelings situated in the body that connect to thoughts and actions (Levine, 2012)</p>	<p>Improved relationships (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007)</p> <p>Greater job satisfaction (Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013)</p> <p>Improved work–family balance (Allen & Kiburz, 2012)</p>
Critical reflection and dialogue around mind–body insights to transform behaviors	<p>Insights may include unnoticed and unhelpful qualities and habits of mind (Hölzel et al., 2011; Silsbee, 2008)</p> <p>Defining disorienting insights validates their importance and compels active reflection and testing (Taylor & Cranton, 2012)</p> <p>Individuals may do this before, during, and after a leadership challenge (Brendel, 2016; Chaskalson, 2011)</p>	<p>Mindfulness practice helps one recognize and intentionally improve his or her sense of clarity and wakefulness (Carmody, 2009)</p> <p>Defining and letting go of what is distracting us creates additional flexibility for creative thinking</p> <p>Somatics enables one to recognize and experience his or her operating habits of mind and body</p>	<p>Creativity (Brendel, 2016; Senge et al., 2004)</p> <p>Systems thinking (Goleman, 2013)</p> <p>Intuition development (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007)</p>
Transforming practice into more attuned and accepting ways of being	<p>Conditioning healthier quality and habits of mind requires practice and conditioning</p> <p>As these practices address deeper aspects of a leader’s mind and body, it eventually transforms his or her natural expression of self across experience (Weick & Putnam, 2006)</p>	<p>Continuous mindfulness practice cultivates healthier everyday attitudes</p> <p>Somatics cultivates more informed and useful habits of mind and patterns of behavior through intentional body-based practices that “reshape” the mind and body in alignment with one’s intentions</p>	<p>Compassion (Brendel, 2016)</p> <p>Authenticity (Boyatzis & McKee, 2013; Goleman, 2013)</p>

Physical evidence also supports the link between greater awareness and insight. In a study to determine whether short-term meditation modulates brain activity associated with insight, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans showed that when compared with a group that simply relaxed, those who practiced meditation experienced a greater pattern of activation in areas of the brain linked to insight. These areas are responsible for breaking mental sets, restructuring the way a problem is presented, detecting errors, and the “Aha” feeling that one experiences when he or she receives insight (Ding et al., 2015).

Somatics emphasizes and teaches awareness by learning to be mindful of not just thoughts but also sensations situated in the body. As neuroscience research shows (Siegel, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2015), these sensations arise as a result of neural patterns that are established early in life, and then reinforced throughout an individual’s lifetime. These patterns create the unconscious habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that become one’s embodied mind-set. The body experiences and responds to the environment through activation of these neural patterns, resulting in systemic reactions that are largely unconscious.

A central premise of somatic practice is that by building systemic, whole body awareness through body-based practices, an individual is capable of intervening with his or her own neurology, thereby creating change at a much deeper level than through conscious processes alone (Silsbee, 2008). As sensations are only experienced in the present moment, working with the physical body is a direct, practical, and sustainable way to develop cognitive and emotional awareness of one’s state in any particular moment.

Somatic practices are operationalized by teaching individuals how habitual responses are situated internally as sensations, emotions, and thoughts and ways they show up externally as their habitual and largely unconscious behaviors and actions, often in ways they often do not intend (Strozzi-Heckler, 2007). Learning how to access one’s inner states and connect that awareness to new behaviors that create different feeling states, opens up new perceptions and reveals alternative possibilities for action. This is the essence of leadership resilience and resourcefulness.

In both cases, deeper insights are presented to the individual through sensate awareness, rather than thinking alone. These insights are critical to leadership development because they often reveal limiting personal attachments, anxieties, and assumptions. All of these are embodied habits of mind that may be explored through further critical reflection in the following phase.

Phase 2: Critical Reflection and Dialogue Around Insights to Transform Behaviors

Mindfulness and somatics practices not only yield insight but also create a generative space for real-time reflection, action, and ultimately transformative learning (Awal, 2010; Barner & Barner, 2013; Beer et al., 2015; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes & Bassarear, 2015; Keevers & Treleaven, 2011; Nandram, 2014; Taylor, 2010). Transformative learning has been defined in many ways, but general agreement is that transformation involves epistemological change (Taylor, 2005). Recognizing our paradigms to critically reflect upon them requires an expansion of consciousness.

Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises. (Elias, 1997, p. 3)

With both mindfulness and somatics practice, becoming aware of and observing one's inner self as revealed through the body provide a "window into our habits, ways of being and automatic reactions to the world" (Silsbee, 2008, p. 27). This continuous awareness practice is vital to a lesser practiced form of critical reflection called "reflection in action" (Keevers & Treleaven, 2011), where learning occurs during action and meaning appears in the form of symbols before we are capable of articulating and analyzing them (Schön, 1995).

Learning to become aware of our mind-body system then becomes a practical and reliable means not only to be more present but also to critically reflect upon "what is" in any particular moment. Part of what occurs in an expanded field of awareness includes habits of mind that typically flow at a subconscious level (Mezirow, 2000).

Many times, the insight that is received during awareness practices stems from a problem or stressor that a participant is facing, which often connects to his or her deeply held sense of identity, including the deeply embodied mind-sets referred to previously (Illeris, 2014). Leaders who wish to grow and expand their identity require the kind of cognitive flexibility that mindfulness and somatics practice is shown in studies to cultivate, even in novices, which includes the ability to suppress strong habits of mind to allow for the generation of new ideas (Horan, 2009). Insights that may be reflected upon often appear as previously unnoticed anxieties, attachments, and assumptions (Brendel, 2016).

An example of a leadership anxiety that can surface for reflection during mindfulness and somatics practice is when one feels uncomfortable in his or her own skin; perhaps trying to be someone who he or she is not and therefore less congruent with his or her true self. Similarly, a leadership attachment that can surface is a desire to be heroic in times of need, rather than empowering others to solve problems. A leadership assumption that may come up is the view that rest is a manifestation of laziness, which results in poor performance. All these insights reveal deeper currents that are not only unhelpful but wired to our body's physiology. After such reflection, leaders benefit from dialogue with others about devising and testing new strategies and actions to determine whether their assumptions are helpful or not. To experience embodiment, leaders are guided by their instincts while having the opportunity to be self-aware of that guidance (Levine, 2012).

Phase 3: Transforming Practice Into Attuned and Accepting Ways of Being

To recognize insights, reflect upon their creative application, and change habits of mind-body is to create change that is not only cognitive but known, felt, and supported by the entire mind-body system. This aim of embodied leadership resembles what

Buddhism refers to as *Dharma*, a continuously mindful way of being that cuts across all experience (Purser & Mililo, 2015), whereby “one’s thoughts and feelings are recognized as events occurring in the broader field of awareness” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 2). As noted, specific attitudes cultivated by bridging formal mindfulness practice with everyday life include nonjudging, patience, beginner’s mind, trust, nonstriving, acceptance, and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mindfulness practice can be a powerful means for raising awareness around a leader’s sense of how well he or she embodies his or her values in real time, having a greater capability to detect a mismatch between what he or she does and what he or she stands for. A recent business ethics study found that when compared with leaders who scored low in mindfulness, those who scored high not only report a greater likelihood of acting ethically but also value upholding ethical standards (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). When combined with somatics practice, real-time transformation resembles not only an observable shift in these attitudes, values, and behaviors but also an inner capacity and strength to follow through with the new behavior.

Take for example a project director, who is trying to become more decisive and assertive to earn her way into a director’s role. Using somatic practices, she recognizes that under stress, her automatic *sensory* reactions include tightening in the chest, and *feelings* of anxiety and confusion. Her corresponding and immediate *thought* is “I cannot do this,” the chest further tightens and contracts, and she becomes silent throughout the meeting, which others observe as disengaged, uncertain, and uncooperative. Through a practice of grounding and centering, she learns to feel her legs and feet and use that sense of connection with the ground to connect with a felt sense of empowerment. Through repetition of this practice, when presented with a stressful situation, she is able to quickly connect tightening in the chest with her tendency to disengage, intentionally ground herself through awareness of her legs and feet, and access this somatic sense of strength to feel open and confident. Shifting to this state in the moment, she is able to speak and share her ideas, and show up as the decisive leader she desires to be.

To reflect a more genuine internalization of transformation, a leader’s way of being must first arrive and be felt in the core of the body, so that the “doing” associated with leadership practice is grounded in the being. This process, when practiced and conditioned repeatedly as part of who a leader is, results in the very deepest and most natural expression of self-as-leader. In practical terms, this deep level of experiential and mind-body insight and reflection creates the potential to stay grounded and responsive under conflict and pressure—building resilience and engaging in conditions of ambiguity and complexity with open awareness that cultivates creativity and resourcefulness. It also sustains the capacity to be accessible and inclusive to generate more effective relationships. Embodying these leadership qualities elicits a sustainable presence, which is sensed, read, and responded to by others as genuine, present, responsive, and connected.

Potential Contribution to the Field of HRD

Among many other sources, the embodied leadership model integrates and further builds upon HRD literature that incorporates mind-body awareness (Cairns-Lee,

2015; Edwards et al., 2015; Johansen & Gopalakrishna, 2006; Polsfuss & Ardichvili, 2008). By syncing this model with core aspects of HRD, including adult learning, leadership development, employee engagement, performance improvement, and reflective practice, this model has the potential to impact every level of the organization. It also evokes a number of research possibilities that could prove to be very useful to the field.

First, the embodied leadership model provides a step-by-step framework for utilizing mindfulness and somatics practice to support leadership development offerings, particularly useful to those that emphasize authentic, resonant, and transformational leadership. It may also serve to amplify the impact of reflective practice because it taps into a wellspring of knowledge that resides outside of immediate cognition. Second, this model can serve individuals as a means for deeper human connection with teammates as well as strategic challenges faced by the organization. It provides a generative space that may demonstrate a greater potential for revealing and reflecting upon anxieties, assumptions, and attachments that misalign relationships and interrupt team performance. Third, when applied systematically, this approach could reveal and potentially impact an organization's collective way of being, or culture. As organizational culture is comprised of subconscious expectations, when utilized collectively, this approach could surface shared assumptions that unintentionally detract from buy-in, performance, and healthy relationships. It also has the potential to provide a mutually understood means of observation, assessment, communication, and action in service to a more ideal organizational culture. There is also great potential for research on this approach through the lens of HRD. For instance, assuming that embodied leadership does produce a deeper level of knowing, one might study how this approach supports strategic change in a more sustainable fashion over time than traditional cognitive-based models. As this model works toward developing a way of being that cuts across context, one might also study its impact on change readiness and learning agility as organizations continue to evolve. Finally, as the body directly reflects cultural influences that impact communication, team coherence, effectiveness, and individual leadership capacity, embodied theory and practices introduce a highly practical lens through which to view and bridge cultural differences in a global workplace.

Conclusion

Assuming that the individual is a fundamentally integrated whole or embodied being, relying on cognitive-behavioral processes alone to develop effective leadership is insufficient in the face of current theory, practice, and scientific research. For optimal performance and sustainable change, leadership development programs must be designed to intervene in this holistic system.

This article presents a conceptual framework and methodology that addresses ways to tap into the greater intelligence of the body through mindfulness and somatic practices. By integrating these practices into developmental models, the leaders can learn to use the mind-body connection to become open to and gain awareness of both their internal and external experiences, and their impact on performance. Sustained over

time, new patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior emerge, resulting in a leader's "new way of being."

The developmental sequence described in this article is intended to stimulate further understanding of mindfulness and somatics theory and practice, add to emerging dialogue, and present ways to practically apply these complementary leadership development methodologies.

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