

Being, Thinking, and Acting: Blending Approaches to Individual Transformation in Organization Change

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Section 1: A challenge and a dilemma

A scary characteristic of organization change is that it often implies transformation of some sort by individuals in the organization. This individual transformation may be as shallow as learning how to follow new procedures, or it may be deeper, leading individuals to enhance, for instance, their ability to work effectively in teams.

Individuals are notoriously picky about their pathways to personal transformation. They balk at the prospect of undergoing "processing" to emerge as "effective high-performance team players," especially when the details of such processing are unclear at the outset. Researchers such as Argyris (1990) have strongly suggested that change initiatives that violate the values they espouse—such as "support free and informed consent"—are doomed to create new and serious patterns of defensiveness in the organization. At best they may result in a merely compliant and privately cynical workforce. This seems to lead away from the kinds of effective team learning that most initiatives champion.

Therefore, there is a challenge for designers of organization change initiatives: how to clarify for stakeholders what they have personally to gain and what they have personally at stake during a change initiative, before they are asked to give assent to organization change. There is also a dilemma in this challenge:

stakeholders may feel so threatened by the prospect of personal transformation—even if it could help them—that they may decline the process and choose, instead, the safety and comfort of their habitual ways of thinking and getting things done.

Given this challenge and this dilemma, the broad aim of this paper is to suggest a framework for organization change in which individual transformation may play a more effective and pivotal role.

Section 2: Two approaches to individual and organizational transformation

My explicit intention is to show that blending and integrating key insights and practices from two independent transformation approaches could result in a significant increase in the effectiveness of these approaches as they are used to support organization change initiatives. I seek to show how each approach has weaknesses that are compensated for in the strengths of the other. In this sense I argue that the two traditions are complementary, and that, skillfully integrated, they can provide a powerful foundation for individual and cultural change that will make more sense to stakeholders up front, and that will allow for greater congruence between principles and behavior in the evolving culture.

Additionally, I maintain that each field of practice—separately or together—could benefit by incorporating mindfulness training such as that taught in some forms of spiritual practice.

Finally, I wish to sketch a general context or logic of organization change that suggests how these integrated traditions can fit within an overall set of relations among organization change initiative components.

The two transformation traditions I seek to integrate are:

(1) An ontological approach to personal leadership transformation through which individuals take increasing command of who they are being and how they are speaking and listening. The approach is rooted in the being-oriented philosophy of Heidegger and in the speech act theory of Searle. It has evolved into a process for organizational leadership and change in the hands of practitioners such as Tracy Goss, Nancy Dorrier and Judith Underwood, and others. I will refer to this tradition hereafter as "being-oriented self-reinvention."

(2) The "theory of action perspective" of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, later to attract the name "action science." This approach to facilitating change in organizational behavior embodies an explicitly "systems" method for revealing structural patterns of organizational defensive thinking and action. These systemic structures can explain why people in organizations act in ways that harm the organization, even while they espouse alignment with the organization's vision, values, and mission. This approach helps participants become aware of the unseen consequences of routine work behaviors, and provides a systematic, skill-based process for them to invent and produce new, more effective behavior patterns.

Section 3: Being, Language, and Leadership

Some philosophical foundations. The first tradition, that of being-oriented self-reinvention, offers individuals a process in which they may reinvent who they are *being* in the world. It takes the stand that we have available to us many more choices of who we may be than we imagine. Moreover, implicit in our choices of who we may be is our estimation of the boundary of those choices; beyond that boundary lie possibilities that we cannot realize. For instance, one may believe that s/he cannot speak in front of groups. While effective public speaking may not be a possibility for such a person, being embarrassed in front of a group may be a routine way of being present.

But thinking of our ways of being in the world as a mere menu of potential choices conflicts with the widespread notion that we actually are someone in particular, and that we actually may not "be the kind of person" who can speak comfortably in front of groups. Thinking of ourselves as having a particular identity can be frustrating when what would work for us is to be present in ways beyond the capabilities we ascribe to ourselves; yet, it can be comforting to us also, allowing us to reassure ourselves that we are unique individuals in the midst of a chaotic, confusing world.

This approach to personal transformation suggests that our description of ourselves, our likes, dislikes, talents, and shortcomings is a powerful *story* that we tell ourselves. This suggestion leads us to another central notion of this approach, one that seems also to contradict traditional sensibility: the declaration

that everything that exists does so because we have brought it forth in language. Following the assumption that in speaking we actually create, it begins to make sense that we create ourselves as the people in the story, simply in the act of telling the story to ourselves. But we rarely take credit for this act of self-creation, relegating ourselves instead to mere reporters of what was already there.

Declaring that our world is brought forth in language does not mean that things only exist in text; it only means that we distinguish things and processes through the use of language. This distinguishing activity, speech, can itself create a powerful opening for the impossible to become real. For instance, John Kennedy made the declaration that by the end of the decade of the '60s humans would walk on the moon. That speech act created a kind of "future-pull" for human moon-walking to become realized.

The notion that what we distinguish is what we have brought forth in language grates on our sensibility because we have grown to believe instead that our speech is a way of referencing objects and processes in the external world. According to this default custom language is a mere means of communicating representations that correspond, hopefully accurately, with an objective fact of the matter. Yet, drawing on the philosophy of Heidegger, being-oriented self-reinvention declares that, whether or not there are actual things in the external world, our stories about them will always and forever be our interpretations of reality rather than faithful representations of matters of fact.

Not only can reality be woven through speech, but through listening (actually, a form of languaging itself) as well. Since our experience may be all and only our interpretations, then our listening, as a filtering vehicle of ascribing meaning to such experiences as the speech of others, becomes a powerful factor in mutual speech, or conversation.

Because of the power of language to create, a great deal of significance is placed on the art of conversation and on the interconnectedness of speakers in conversation. For instance, a speaker may wish to take into account the needs of the listener, as the speaker interprets them, when crafting a spoken communication. When we speak with elderly family members we may speak slowly and a little louder than usual, so they can hear clearly what we say. In nurturing the conversation we explicitly practice taking responsibility for the other's listening. That means that we craft our speech act consciously in a way that it respects both the content we wish to communicate and the context of the listener.

If the meaning of the distinctions we make is grounded in our constructions or interpretations of reality, then how do we ever manage to communicate anything? How do we have conversation? The response to this, drawing from Heidegger, is that meaning is not to be found in correspondence with external referents, nor is it to be found even in singular meaning-giving transmissions between speakers. Instead, meaning is to be thought of as a system of interpretation that is the product of extended social interaction. In other words,

meaning is a fundamentally socially determined system that becomes the *context* for effective speech (Winograd & Flores, 1985). Characterized as a circular feedback system, context can be seen as both the social source of meaning in language and as the evolving product of the social use of language.

According to this approach, we humans share a common context for our daily conversations: *there is a way things should be, and when they're not that way, there is something wrong with the situation, or there is something wrong with those around me or with me* (Goss, 1996).

Associated with this default context is a hypothetical core value driving our behavior aimed at making things work out the way we think they should:

- We must *win* at life's game, or at least *survive* or *get by* (Goss, 1996).

From within the context that things should be a certain way, a predicament arises when things appear in danger of turning out some other way. We win when we control the situation so that it turns out the way it should despite such danger.

A typical behavioral strategy driven by this value is:

- We shall act in order to *be right* about (the fact that. . .), (why we can't. . .), (what's wrong with. . .), etc.¹

We design behavior aimed at demonstrating that we are "right" about our positions on various issues, that we are "right" to press others to see the rightness

¹The role of this behavioral strategy was explained to me in private conversations with Andrew Lustig and Judith Underwood of Dorrier Underwood.

of our positions, and, often, that we are "right" about our evaluations of others when they do not agree with us. The use of this action strategy sets up a closed feedback loop in which any and all evidence is considered a confirmation of the basic declaration: that we are right.

Since context can be a function of the use of language, a context can be created that is different from the one we inherit. An alternate context could be characterized as: *there is no such reality as that things should or should not be in any particular state, nor is there any inherent rightness or wrongness in anything*. Things simply work out the way they do, yet we can act to imagine and realize future possibilities, all while things turn out the way they do (Goss, 1996).

At the heart of this alternate context lies a teaching familiar to students of Buddhism: that the road to freedom is through the experience of complete and utter abandonment of the notion that there is a meaning to life that we can discover and know in some intellectual fashion. Deeper still, this context makes sense when we release from our attachments and longing to be someone in particular—the person in our story about ourselves. Tracy Goss calls this "getting to zero"; the samurai of 17th century Japan called it "dying before going into battle." It is the peaceful, focused aftermath of our abandonment of the need for ultimate meaning, to be someone in particular, and to have things turn out the way we want them to.

The transformation method. Essentially, the practical method provides a way for individuals to learn to create themselves, through an act of self-linguaging, as a

being or presence that embodies leadership. Additionally the method seeks to help individuals show others a pathway to leadership. An act of leadership would be one in which language is used to create momentum for future possibility to be realized, regardless of any stories about the past. Conversely, an act of leadership would not be one in which language is used to explain why the record of the past is ample reason for some future, imagined or not, to remain impossible and unrealizable.

The process of learning and transformation manifests around a series of conversations. These conversations, led by a trained facilitator, are designed for participants to become aware of their stories about themselves, and to become able to distinguish these stories as sources of both power *and* limitation.

Participants may begin to consider that these stories about themselves do not capture and define their identity as they may have for them in the past. The stories become more like conversations that they may have with themselves.

Once participants are aware of their stories they investigate them for their life's "game." It is the game they habitually and reflexively play in order to win, be right, or at least survive in whatever they do. When they become aware of this unconscious game and its key role in their story about themselves and what they're up against they can begin to learn to recognize when they are enacting it. Following this awareness, they can distinguish whether or not this game reflex can be put aside in favor of an act of leadership, an act that realizes something beyond the payoffs of their habitual life games or survival strategies.

This process can nurture in participants a growing capacity for reflectiveness. That capacity helps participants review their habitual actions which they trigger in the service of their particular game. Such a review may take the form of a "breakdown conversation." A breakdown conversation is a mode of talk aimed at focusing awareness on what's currently missing for a future possibility, to which we are committed, to be realized. Sometimes it is our own behavior that is out of step with our commitment.

When our actions become disconnected from our commitment, breakdown conversation can initiate productive, reflective inquiry. It can open a mode of conversation in which we slow our automatic ways of being in the world in order to unconceal hidden meanings and personal attachments, and to explore new ways of being.

The door is opened to transformation when people learn to accept that they may never fully escape their story about themselves, and that regardless of this, they may reinvent themselves anyway in a form of being that would have been impossible under the old story. In a sense, perhaps, they are consciously disconnecting from the old story to allow for the realization of something new, while at the same time no longer believing that their story—old or new—defines their identity. This becomes possible when the individual "gets to zero" since from that vantage s/he releases the need for a unique identity and the need for life to work out in some particular, preferred way.

Apparent gaps in the approach. A leadership approach that helps individuals to focus on and expand their modes of being, at the same time helping them to release their need to conform always to a limiting sense of personal identity, can provide powerful leverage for deep individual and organizational transformation. But the approach appears also to have some weaknesses which, if left unaddressed could lead to new and powerful patterns of thinking and behavior incompatible with effective organizational transformation.

The first of these arises when individuals may become attached to the ideology of the leadership program itself. In an effort to move beyond the confines of their own past stories, they end up falling into the trap of strengthening these stories with new chapters—chapters about how properly to do transformational leadership. I call this a trap because it seems to lead individuals to simply retool their life games to allow them to "win" at the leadership game. In effect, individuals can "get caught up in their leadership underwear" and stumble painfully for themselves and others.² Organizations begin to show signs of this happening when the issue of "loyalty" or "commitment to leadership" of individuals arises in conversation. An individual or individuals may begin to question the commitment of others to the leadership program, or they may simply harbor secret doubts about the commitment of others. These loyalty issues can create powerful dilemmas for people, leading them to unspoken but cynical withdrawal from all but mere compliance with the leadership program.

²This metaphor was given to me in private conversation by Robert Putnam of Action Design.

Another, more serious weakness of this approach is its apparent lack of a systematic process for helping participants gradually build new behaviors consistent with their sincere commitment to being leaders. As powerful and perhaps even necessary as it is to commit to inventing new modes of personal being, the systematic, hard work of inventing and producing new behaviors consistent with this commitment remains to be done. Researchers such as Argyris, have shown that even the most sincere desire and commitment to behave a certain way does not make such behavior possible. Overwhelmingly, research has shown that, instead, people will continue to behave in ways they always have, regardless of their recent commitments to new espoused values and behaviors, and that they will be unaware of this as it is happening (Argyris and Schön, 1974, 1978).

A transformational leadership program that brings us to making the commitment to be leaders, but does not offer systematic, theory-based behavioral workshops for practicing and integrating new leadership behaviors, in a skill-based environment of mutual coaching and support among individuals, may end up creating new, unintended consequences.

One such consequence may arise when an individual repeatedly perceives that s/he seems unable to behave as a leader in key situations and instead, falls back into a repertoire of defensive actions that could actually harm the organization. A possible result of this might be that the individual may begin to harbor secret doubts about his or her ability to arise to the leadership challenge. Yet, because

this failure is perceived as a fatal handicap in an organization committed to leadership, these doubts are held secret. In the end, such individuals spend huge resources keeping up appearances, while reinforcing their private stories about why transformational leadership won't work.

This pattern can replicate among individuals beneath the surface of the organization's culture, and a new and destructive system of hidden thinking and action can become established.

Being-oriented self-reinvention can help individuals create vast new sources of power and leadership in their lives, which may be a transformation necessary for deep organizational change. Yet, it appears to lack the theoretical and methodological tools to facilitate changes in organizational behavior once individuals have made the commitment to being effective leaders.

Section 4: Transforming defensive thinking and behavior: action science

Some philosophical foundations. Action science, a practice for understanding and overcoming cultural patterns of defensive thinking and behavior, can be a powerful catalyst for individual and organizational behavioral transformation.

This approach, drawing on the Action Research tradition of Kurt Lewin and developed into a field of practice by Chris Argyris and his collaborators (Argyris and Schön, 1974, 1978; Argyris, Putnam, Smith, 1985), rests upon some singularly non-traditional assumptions about learning and knowledge.

In contrast with the traditional view that knowledge is amassed by the passive imprint of absolute facts upon the spectator mind, this approach declares that knowledge arises in action. That kind of knowledge that leads to and embodies effective action, is set apart from traditional knowledge and labeled "actionable knowledge." Actionable knowledge can arise when two key items are specified: (1) the action skills required to produce the knowledge, and (2) the contextual conditions required to maintain it (Argyris, 1993).

On this view the arising of knowledge is the result of a dynamic interaction between the learner and the world of experience. Knowledge of the world, therefore, is evaluated on a more pragmatic basis. We no longer search for knowledge which corresponds with some truth about the world, but are content to think of knowledge a contingent product of continuing disciplined inquiry. John Dewey termed this knowledge "warranted assertibility" (Dewey, 1938). When an inquiry becomes "settled," Dewey cautions, there is no guarantee that the particular situation "will always remain settled" (p. 8). The criterion for knowledge is not its correspondence with truth but its availability "as a resource in further inquiry."

This stance leads to a breakdown between the separation of science from practice. Lacking the appeal to absolute truth, a theory, for instance, is usefully stated when it leads to inquiry that settles, for the moment, the issue. Such inquiry feeds back to elaborate (or not) the theory, which then, in a benign circularity, informs further testing or inquiry. Lewin elaborated this idea to state

that a useful theory clearly implies the conditions under which it may be tested (Argyris, 1993).

A complicating factor intervenes, however, when we rely for such testing upon human experience rather than measurement against an ideal realm of purely conceptual knowledge. Everyone's experience, and the conclusions or inferences they draw from it, may differ. The result of denying the separation of science from practice and experience was that the "settlement" of scientific inquiry became based on a foundation of meanings flowing from human experience and interpretation and not from irreducible facts about the world (Argyris, Putnam, Smith, 1985).

Ultimately, what we abandon in this view is the belief that there is a "knowable" absolute fact of the matter to which knowledge corresponds. Instead, there are indefinitely many different "facts borne of interpretation" arising in the momentary experience of indefinitely many different observers.

Operating within this realm of meaning drawn from interpretation, action science aims to inform practical learning in specific situations and at the same time to provide a test for the informing theory.

This grounding of knowledge in human experience and interpretation, has direct implications for organizational team-work, communication, and problem-solving. Decoupling of experience from correspondence with external facts creates in conversation much different stakes for participants. Instead of

advocating their different "correct" positions on a matter, speakers recognize that while there is no universally discernible "correct" position, each individual's different position may have merit insofar as it reflects a particular interest within the context of the conversation. Since correspondence with reality is no longer what's being claimed, there is room for many varied positions to be explored. This process of exploration in conversation is usually much richer and more productive than the alternate process by which individuals try to impress their views of the one truth upon one another.

Action science recognizes a default, socially-inherited context or *frame*, within which our routine "rules for action" make sense. This frame, and the "mental models" we may develop within it for getting specific things done, features a set of core values that drive behavior across a wide range of situations (Argyris and Schön, 1974):

- Set clear goals and achieve them
- Win, and do not lose
- Suppress negative feelings
- Always appear rational

In typical problem-solving situations we design behavior to realize these core values. One behavioral strategy driven by these values is:

- Own and control the task (Argyris, Putnam, Smith, 1985).

We organize these values and action strategies into systems that amount to programmed sets of rules for action (Argyris and Schön, 1974). These systems of values, thinking, and action are what Argyris and Schön call our "theories-in-use." In routine action we tend to be unaware of these theories-in-use and the values that drive them. They become our automatic ways of dealing with the world.

The transformation method. This approach rests on Lewin's (1947) foundation model of organizational behavioral change, within an atmosphere of psychological safety (Schein, 1996). In the hands of later researchers such as Argyris, Lewin's model evolved into something close to the following.

1. *Unfreezing.* Participants become aware of the incongruence between their actual behavior and the values they espouse, and understand the cultural forces—patterns of thinking and action—that may restrain the behavioral changes needed to eliminate such incongruence.
2. *Cognitive restructuring.* Participants learn of or imagine new possibilities for thinking and action through either watching role models or scanning for new ideas (Schein, 1996).
3. *Refreezing.* Participants practice behaving consistently with the new possibilities in situations of increasing stress so that the new behaviors, leading to greater success in managing difficult situations, become increasingly automatic.

In using this model Argyris and Schön stumbled upon a riddle: Even after individuals had become aware of the disconnect between their behavior and their espoused values, and had committed to realigning their behavior, they continued to produce the old, dysfunctional behaviors. This anomaly led these researchers to postulate a default set of values—those listed above—that drive our theories-in-use and, thus, our automatic behaviors.

This hypothesis resulted in a remarkable conclusion: that defensive thinking and action, and the considerable behavioral skills we employ to distort information to avoid discomfort or threat, are not mistakes or errors. Instead, these complex behaviors are expertly crafted and enacted routines that accomplish their goals: the avoidance of blame, embarrassment, or threat. On this view, these programmed sets of rules for action and the behaviors that result from their use are skillful and successful. And even though they may result in harm to the organization, we cannot consider them as errors, since the result produced was the result intended. Argyris terms this phenomenon "skilled incompetence" (Argyris, 1990; Argyris, 1993).

A problem for the researchers was to find a way to surface this hypothetical set of hidden values that they claimed was driving actual behavior. You couldn't walk up to someone and ask them to list these values for you; they'd just give you the espoused values they sincerely believe in. So Argyris and Schön began to develop a way of making testable, public inferences, based on observed behavior, of the possible consequences of such behavior and of the values

driving it. Moreover, they sought to develop in themselves the skill to illustrate these inferences in ways that people could listen to even when they were feeling defensive and embarrassed.

Ultimately, it is these communication skills that this method aims to help individuals develop in themselves for use in stressful communication situations as organizational life unfolds.

The process that embodies this approach usually has two general components, though different practitioners vary widely on the details of practice.

1. *Diagnosis*. In this phase organizational problems are viewed as systemic symptoms fueled and maintained at least in part by cultural patterns of thinking, decision making, and behavior. Often, these patterns are diagrammed as feedback systems to illuminate possible structural reasons why well-intentioned routine action seems only to intensify the problems and dilemmas people face. Individuals grow increasingly aware of instances in which their own habitual rules for action lead them to inhibit organizational learning and effectiveness.
2. *Practice*. If individuals commit to inventing and producing new patterns of thinking and action, then they begin a series of periodic facilitated group sessions. Participants in these workshops analyze and role-play real-life episodes or cases, and they work to invent and produce new, more effective, behaviors in the case situations.

Gradually, through trial and error, individuals become more skilled in communicating about difficult issues, and they tend to create less defensiveness in others through the increasingly expert use of these skills. This process can last years, and it is not likely to show measurable effect for at least a year.

During the practice phase of this learning participants may become increasingly able to produce behavior consistent with a new set of core values (Argyris and Schön, 1974):

- Propagate valid information
- Promote free and informed consent to choice
- Promote internalized commitment to choice

In view of these new values, the more traditional approach of moving individuals through a behavior change process that they don't fully understand is to be avoided. This highlights a key commitment of the consultant-practitioners: in helping others to behave consistently with their espoused values it is important to avoid processes and behavior that violate these values. This is important simply because clients do recognize it when practitioners systematically violate the values that they profess to be helping the clients learn to uphold. This recognition leads to a loss of credibility for the practitioner in the eyes of the clients. Such a loss of credibility usually means that the practitioner is no longer useful to the client.

Apparent gaps in the approach. There is a dilemma for practitioners of this approach. They are committed to facilitating behavioral transformation in ways consistent with their value: "promote free and informed consent." But one thing most key stakeholders are uninformed about is the extent to which they routinely behave in ways that violate the organization's espoused values, resulting in harm to the organization. Often if this disconnect between values and behavior is sensed it remains, by unspoken social accord, undiscussable.

Since it may appear safer from within the culture to leave the undiscussables alone and muddle through, the external practitioner often perceives scant leverage for opening a sincere investigation into any patterned cultural or behavioral roots to organizational problems.

The action research tradition's lack of conversation about modes of being, and about the potential power and flexibility that can result from personal reinvention, can handicap its practitioners as well as those they serve.

Practitioners of action science who do not experience their being as a conscious act of self-creation may consider the dilemma illustrated above as a challenging obstacle to their effectiveness. Those practitioners who do consciously reinvent their being may see that, even though there is evidence for the dilemma, what's really missing is that they haven't reinvented themselves for those particular clients yet in a way that opens the door to a warranted intervention.

For clients who are likewise unused to thinking of their *being* as a momentary act of self creation their choices of *being* are obscured, and people take their stories about themselves, their basic beliefs about the world, reality, and people, as given and unassailable matters of fact. The lack of conversation about being in this approach has an additional unfortunate consequence: talk of investigating peoples' basic assumptions about how to behave implicates, like it or not, their sense of self-identity. Without any sophisticated inquiry into the possibility that this self-identity is a free choice, languaged into being, people are more likely to feel threatened at a deep, personal level.

Lacking inquiry into the power of language to create, action science practitioners and clients alike may fail to consider a striking dual notion: (1) that the reality of the dilemmas people face is established as they tell the stories of these dilemmas, and (2) that these speakers are simultaneously creating themselves in language as people who suffer these dilemmas. Action science interventions could proceed more smoothly and productively if participants shared agreement about the power of language to create both the stories of these challenges and the stories that define these peoples' momentary choices of who they are being.

The outcome is that many organizations which could benefit from a systemic exploration of cultural patterns of thinking and behavior, followed by competently facilitated behavioral workshops, do not undertake them, seeking instead to resolve organizational problems with more structural remedies, such

as process reengineering, and hoping that the structural program can "pull" the behavior of participants into alignment with espoused values automatically.

Section 5: A Role for Mindfulness Practice

As powerful as these approaches may be for transforming individuals and their behavior, there is a relevant additional approach to individual transformation that neither of them appears to recognize, to the detriment of both. That approach is embodied in the reflective practices of mindfulness at the heart of many new and old traditions of spiritual transformation. The spiritual focus of these traditions has masked the fact that their mindfulness practices are eminently practical approaches to being in the everyday world (Kornfield, 1993).

For the most part, mindfulness practice is rarely taught in the west. However this may be changing. Rick Ross's exercise, "moments of awareness," is a reflective activity analogous to being mindful (Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, Kleiner, 1994). And recently the relevance of mindfulness practice for reframing western cognitive science and the sciences of mind has been explored by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1992). They characterize mindfulness practice as

a gradual development of the ability to be present with one's mind and body not only in formal meditation but in the experiences of everyday life (p. 60)

In mindfulness as a state of being awareness is absorbed completely in experience, without the clutter of thoughts. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch

distinguish two types of mindfulness practice: the sitting practice most of us have heard of, and the less well recognized practice of mindfulness in everyday life. In the latter practice, one sustains mindfulness even as one goes about one's day of activities. If a thought comes, one notices it: "Oh, there's a thought about the money I owe," and lets it evaporate, instead of turning to dwell upon it. If a desire comes, one notices it: "Oh, I want that new car," without *reflexively* moving to satisfy it. If one begins to become upset, one notices it: "Now I'm getting angry," and enjoys the option to let the anger pass.

Developing the ability to sustain even short sessions of unbroken mindfulness is difficult and challenging for the beginner whose awareness is used to being driven about by thoughts and desires. Kornfield says the early mindfulness learning experience is like "training a puppy."

You put the puppy down and say, "Stay." Does the puppy listen? It gets up and it runs away. You sit the puppy back down again. "Stay." And the puppy runs away over and over again. Sometimes the puppy jumps up, runs over, and pees in the corner or makes some other mess. Our minds are much the same as the puppy, only they create even bigger messes. In training the mind, or the puppy, we have to start over and over again (Kornfield, 1993, p. 59).

Mindfulness practices evolved in traditions committed to the belief that emptiness lies at the heart of reality. These mostly spiritual traditions hold that while emptiness can be experienced directly through mindfulness, all else, all facts and distinctions about the world, including one's self-identity, are illusions. This posture echoes directly the suggestion, from within the being-oriented approach, that power flows from releasing our attachment to a particular self-

identity. "Getting to zero" in the being-oriented tradition is identical to the mindfulness practice of experiencing the emptiness that lies behind our supposed selfhood. And while action science appears not to have addressed directly the impermanence of self, it remains true that in both approaches absolute facthood (such as that of the self) is abandoned and replaced with interpretation. Mindfulness practice simply elevates interpretation to the status of illusion.

It is interesting to note that Gregory Bateson, a primary contributor to the field of systems thinking, had, by the mid-1960's, developed a classification of learning capabilities that rested, at a certain level of sophistication, on the release of attachment to a particular self-identity (Bateson, 1972). He was explicitly modeling a progression of human learning that accounted for achievement of states of being such as those of the mindfulness enacted by Zen practitioners.

The value of mindfulness practice for the two transformation approaches treated here is that it can build a capability for reflectiveness and disattachment from self-identity that could powerfully support an individual's commitment to either (1) being an effective leader, or (2) overcoming his or her habits of defensive thinking and action.

Being-oriented self-reinvention could be enhanced by supporting mindfulness training because effective leadership is more likely to be embodied in an individual who's ego is not invested in a particular self-story or vision of the future. A leader able to avoid the attachment to desires and need for ego-

fulfillment may also avoid the potential for tyranny and abuse noted above as a trap in this tradition. The abandonment of self and increased reflectiveness that result from mindfulness practice can reassign the ego to a merely supportive role in being, demoting it from its customary defining role. If a leader is able to stand mindfully beyond attachment to his or her own personal identity, it is more likely that he or she will earn trust, engender hope, and provide direction for others, mindful or not. Also, mindfulness practice provides a direct experience of "getting to zero," allowing the practitioner to understand this pivotal experience as more than just a concept but as a mode of being. An individual capable of mindfulness is more likely to be reflective enough, even under stress, to accept coaching from another, even if this coaching is unskilled.

Participants in action science learning, in which they seek to overcome their habitual patterns of defensive thinking and action, could benefit from mindfulness insofar as it enables them to reflect on their thoughts and actions without needing to defend them. Becoming unattached to a particular self-identity can reduce the likelihood that a participant will lapse into such defensiveness. Additionally, since this is an approach for learning to speak more effectively in stressful situations, mindfulness can provide a way of noticing the pressure—and the reflexive responses at the ready—and avoiding the temptation to act ineffectively.

Section 6: Complementarity of the two approaches

While the philosophical foundations and learning theories of being-oriented self-reinvention and action science appear strikingly similar, the two exhibit methodological differences that, in some cases, make them seem complimentary.

Similarities: Both fields are in accord that the "facts" of experience that we usually take as given are, at best, our interpretations. This stance amounts to a declaration that we do not have access to absolute facts; that we are better off becoming adept at dealing with our interpretations about what exists, and with the interpretations of others.

Theoretical similarities between the two fields are also striking. The theories of learning in both fields are highly action-oriented, invested in the commitment that learning is gathered through processes of inventing and producing real-time, interactive speech behavior. Both approaches declare that speech is action.

Each field suggests that habitual, reflexive action strategies are driven by a value or values of which we are usually unaware. Table 1 compares some governing values and action strategies identified by the two approaches:

	<i>Being-Oriented Self-Reinvention</i>	<i>Action Science</i>
<i>Value</i>	Win, survive, or at least get by!	Win, do not lose!

<i>Action strategy</i>	Be right	Own, control the task
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Table 1

Both fields claim that we inherit, through social programming, contexts or frames from which we act to realize the governing values. It is the focus of transformation in both approaches to rebuild new behaviors and ways of being consistent with alternate, consciously created contexts or values.

Complementarity: The methodological approaches of the two fields, however, appear more divergent. Yet, these differences suggest, when the two fields are compared, that they are closely complimentary. A comparison of strengths and weaknesses of the two fields is found in Table 2.

	Being-Oriented Self- Reinvention	Action Science
Attention to modes of being	Strong	Weak
Motivate commitment to learning beyond comfortable boundaries	Strong	Weak
Provides process for building skills for effective communication	Weak	Strong

Table 2

Being-oriented self-reinvention is explicit training in the conscious art of being.

While action science currently lacks this explicit focus on being, it provides

systematic training in the art of skilled communication under stressful circumstances which is less likely to be found in the former.

With practice in experiencing new ways of being, participants in reinvention are more likely to comfortably imagine themselves going beyond their habitual mental models or rules for action. In action science participants are motivated more by the pragmatic suspicion that what they're currently doing is getting them into trouble. If they don't causally connect their actions with persistent dilemmas, there may be little motivation to expand their behavioral skills.

While both fields acknowledge the role of values in driving behavior, being-oriented self-reinvention lacks a systematic process, tools, and skills for use by participants in building new behavioral patterns that can lead to durable organizational transformation. Such a systematic process, however, lies at the heart of the action science practice.

Differences to be reconciled: Despite some methodological complementarity between these two approaches, the individual coaching styles that have evolved within the two approaches appear to differ somewhat, occasioning potential difficulties for clients when the two approaches are deployed side-by-side.

While coaching styles vary widely even within each tradition, reflecting the art, imagination, and temperament of individual practitioners, some generalizations may be made.

Coaching in the being-oriented self reinvention tradition often takes on a warrior-like aspect. The coach/educator may intervene sharply and directly, cutting to the heart of a participant's clinging to his or her accustomed game in order to win or at least get by. The coaching is aimed at helping free the participant to create him or herself beyond the boundaries of past habits of being.

Such coaching comes often in the form of highly generalized conclusions about what a participant is doing. For instance, a coach may sharply intervene, "you're just running your game!" in response to a statement by a participant. It represents a conclusion drawn by the coach, based on observed data and other attributions the coach may be making but not revealing in the act of coaching. This works when the participant agrees, in a flash of insight, with the evaluation the coach has made of their speaking: that they were unconsciously "running their game."

The use of highly generalized conclusions in coaching speech requires for its effectiveness that the coach accurately understand the participant's being, as revealed in speech. If the coach has misunderstood the meaning of the participant's speech, the intervention can result in undesirable consequences. These may include a loss of trust by participants in the coach, and the coach may have difficulty, using warrior-like speech, in winning it back. An additional consequence is that participants may begin mimicking this extremely general and abstract mode of coaching, attempting to cut through the layers of another's attachments to past habits of being in ways that they have seen the instructor-

coach do. In this case the dangers of misunderstanding may be even greater since the participant coaches may be less expert listeners than the instructor coaches.

Practitioners in this field are skilled in listening, and from artfulness and intuition draw upon a variety of coaching skills for keeping difficult conversation productive. Often this coaching demonstrates and triggers profound knowledge. However, there appears in this field to be no systematic, skill-based approach for artful confrontation and management of defensiveness by participants.

Coaching in the action science tradition focuses on the use of particular speech skills, and it explicitly is enacted to reflect values that have been endorsed by coaches and participants alike. The skills the instructors use are precisely the skills they are in the act of teaching to participants, and their modeling of these skills in action is an important part of the learning experience for participants.

While coaching in this tradition may be warrior-like too, more often it is slower and more measured. A typical coaching episode may begin with an inquiry about the intended meaning of a participant's words, words that the coach faithfully recounts as data. The coach may reveal that s/he infers a different intended meaning from the words than that claimed by the participant. If so, the coach will test this inference with the participant and others at the table. If the instructor-coach's inferences are deemed plausible, then the participant is given space to reflect and challenge the coach's attributions. In this way coaching

proceeds more slowly, sometimes ponderously, but offers more opportunities for participants to question the coach's attributions about the participant's actions.

Another, even softer method of coaching in the action science tradition is simple prediction of consequences of a participant's speech act. The coach may intervene with a declaration that "when you say [abc] to Joe, Joe is likely to feel you are attacking him and he may not feel free to answer you candidly, Secundarily, others listening may wish to distort or hide information from you in order to avoid hearing [abc] from you at some later date. Does this make sense?" The prediction is an inference about consequences that the instructor is testing with the group. The query at the end is an explicit request for feedback about the plausibility of the inference by the instructor-coach.

A possibility exists, in cases of these two approaches deployed side-by-side, for a conflict in coaching values and styles. This can result in confusion and consternation by participants who are trying to learn new more effective ways of being and acting. This confusion can be amplified when participants are already feeling vulnerable and reflective about their habitual ways of being and acting.

Both fields of practice aim at individual transformation: the first as a transformation of who an individual is being; and the second, as a transformation of the way individuals think and act to deal with difficult issues. Yet neither alone offers as comprehensive coverage of factors important to the potential success of the effort as would both fields blended into a unified practice. To blend these two traditions—expanding the power of both with

mindfulness training—and integrate them into a systemic framework for durable, effective individual and organizational transformation is a future possibility I wish to explore in section 7.

Section 7: New possibilities for practice

Integrating practice. In the previous sections I have suggested that the expansion and integration of two powerful approaches to individual transformation could produce an emerging field of practice more comprehensive and useful than either one currently appears to be on its own. While the broad characteristics of such an integrated practice remain to be elaborated, at least one focal point emerges.

One ready opportunity for integrated practice is to be found in managing breakdown conversations. As I have observed above, breakdown conversations arise when the flow of action has been slowed to unconceal hidden meanings and attributions within a sphere of reflectiveness by one or more participants. In the being-oriented approach the coaching may involve artful but generalized conclusions, somewhat removed from observable data about what a participant may have said or done. If the participant remains coachable, then the intervention can result in a quick insight and potential learning. But if the intervention is misguided, or if the participant lapses into defensiveness—a common response to highly generalized attributions—then shifting to a more data-focused coaching strategy may be more effective.

Under such a strategy a coach could initiate skilled inquiry into the "system" of conversation created by both coach and participant. Using the speech tools of the action science tradition, the breakdown conversation may proceed systematically from data to generalized conclusions, with meanings checked along the way.³ This shift in coaching action would be more likely to reduce any defensiveness by either participant or coach than the continuation of warrior-like speech characterized by highly abstract generalizations based on unshared attributions.

Additionally, as client teams begin to facilitate their own breakdown conversations, the use of the action science communication tools can be a highly effective addition to the general repertoire of leadership competencies.

It is noteworthy that Winograd and Flores appear to appreciate the importance of skill in organizational conversation, and it is revealing to hear them suggest that such skill may routinely remain to be developed.

. . .there exists a domain for education in communicative competence: the fundamental relationships between language and successful action. People's conscious knowledge of their participation in the network of commitment can be reinforced and developed, improving their capacity to act in the domain of language (1985, p. 162) .

³These "tools" include (1) The Ladder of Inference, for grounding inquiry in observable data and then checking conclusions drawn from the data, (2) Advocacy with Inquiry, for crafting one's position in a way that invites challenges, and (3) The Left-Hand Column, for surfacing hidden attributions and action strategies in a collaborative way (Argyris, Putnam, Smith, 1985; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, and Kleiner, 1994)

A systemic intervention model. Henceforth I wish to sketch a preliminary model of how integrated practice may fit within the larger scope of organization change intervention. Let us characterize such an intervention model as a system in its own right, exhibiting a unique organization of component processes. The context of this model is to provide a holistic approach to the design and implementation of individual and organizational transformation in accordance with the viability needs of the organization, its existing social context, and in keeping with the individual needs of the stakeholders.

The model, shown in Figure 1, features a set of foundational learning programs aimed at clarifying a domain of shared language from which all the other conversations in the intervention draw context and meaning. These learning programs are (1) being-oriented self-reinvention and (2) the general field of systems thinking.⁴ Additionally, these programs are supported on a more fundamental level by mindfulness practice, as well as with a methodological nod to recognition of variety in types of intelligence (Gardner, 1983) and learning styles (Kolb, 1984).

Following Checkland and Scholes (1990), the model exhibits explicit, separate streams of inquiry for cultural intervention and structural intervention. Within the cultural intervention stream the tradition of action science is deployed for the purpose of creating emancipatory conditions in which organizational behavior may increase in effectiveness over a period of years.

⁴James Throneburg, a client and business owner, introduced me to the idea of systems thinking

On the structural side of the intervention is found the particular type of restructuring initiative that appears to be most promising based on the organization's strategic situation within and without. Typical initiatives of this sort are TQM, Process Re-engineering, or restructuring to elevate constraints.

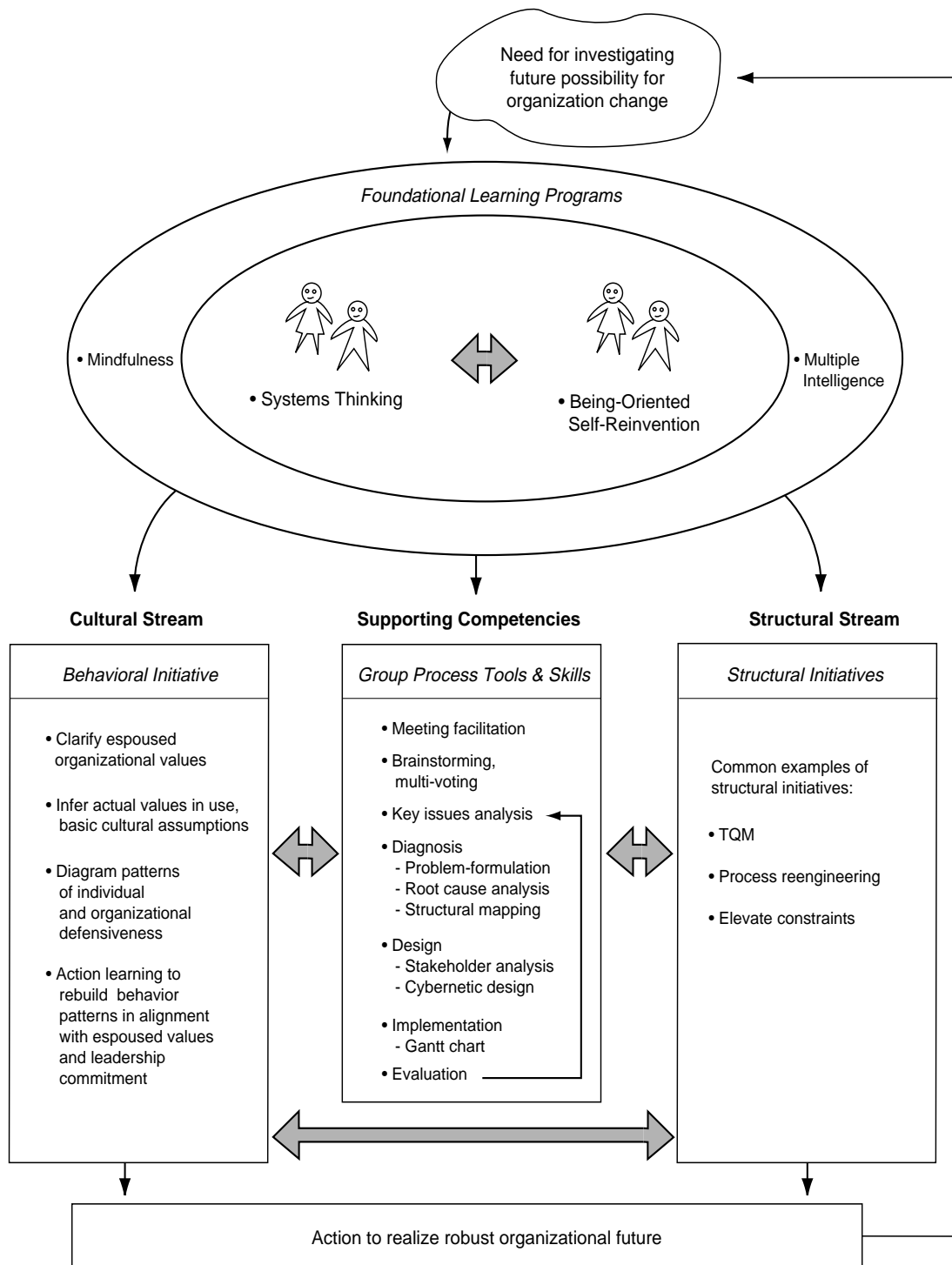
Supporting competencies are those group skills and tools that can be used to further the effectiveness of the intervention team as it tackles the complex field of coordinating change activities. These competencies include skill in meeting facilitation, basic group process tools such as brainstorming and multi-voting, and range through classes of more complex skills gathered under such headings as "diagnosis," "design," "implementation," and "evaluation."

Action to initiate and guide organizational change is the coordinated result of all these capabilities, processes, and conversations integrated into a single system of intervention.

The logic of the system is to establish the domain of conversation and meaning with the foundational learning programs prior to launching the streams of inquiry leading to cultural and structural change. This fundamental domain of conversation pervades all aspects of the change initiative; it becomes, as Judith Underwood says, "the water we're all swimming in." Supporting competencies are learned best by experience so they may be left to be elaborated in the course of the actual change initiative.

and personal reinvention as co-foundational learning programs.

A Systemic Model for Integrating Individual and Organizational Transformation Processes



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Figure 1: A total systems model for organization change⁵

⁵ This model draws from a variety of sources which I wish to acknowledge here. First, the notion

Section 8: Conclusion

I have declared in this paper that a powerful opportunity exists for enhancing the value, durability, and effectiveness of individual transformation in organization change. We may pursue this opportunity by integrating the independent practices of being-oriented self-reinvention and action science. We may further support and enhance the effectiveness of this integrated practice by recognizing a role for mindfulness training for practitioners and participants alike.

I observe that where these individual transformation fields fall short it is in large part because of a lack of skill or knowledge that can be gained readily from the other field. Theoretically, especially in the realms of ontology and epistemology the two approaches appear to rest on identical foundations. When strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches are compared they appear methodologically complementary to one another. The action science tradition lacks the practical ontological focus which is a keystone of the being-oriented self-reinvention tradition. At the same time, the being-oriented self-reinvention approach lacks a skill-based process for systematically transforming organizational behavior at the individual and organizational level such as that found in action science.

of blending cultural and structural intervention dates back to the Sociotechnical Systems interventions of the 1950's, and it was further elaborated by Peter Checkland and Jim Scholes (1990). I proposed the use of action research in cultural inquiry in Dooley (1995). The role for supporting competencies emerged out of separate conversations with William Reckmeyer of Mithranders, Ltd. and with Andrew Lustig of Dorrier Underwood. Finally, the idea of systems thinking and being-oriented self-reinvention as co-foundational learning programs came from James Throneburg.

Some challenges may arise for practitioners attempting to integrate these two fields. Among these challenges are the different coaching styles exhibited in the two domains. On the bright side, clear opportunities arise for an integrated practice in dealing effectively with breakdown conversations.

Blending these two traditions is done within the context of a holistic model for balanced cultural and structural change, within the language context of systems thinking and the being-oriented self-reinvention process, supported by appropriate group process skills and tools. This model is to be considered a heuristic template for organization change, not a systematic sequence or exhaustive series of steps to follow, or even leading to one. Rather, it is offered as a systemic attempt to fit some appropriate pieces together in a network of action that can lead individuals and organizations to realize a robust future.

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