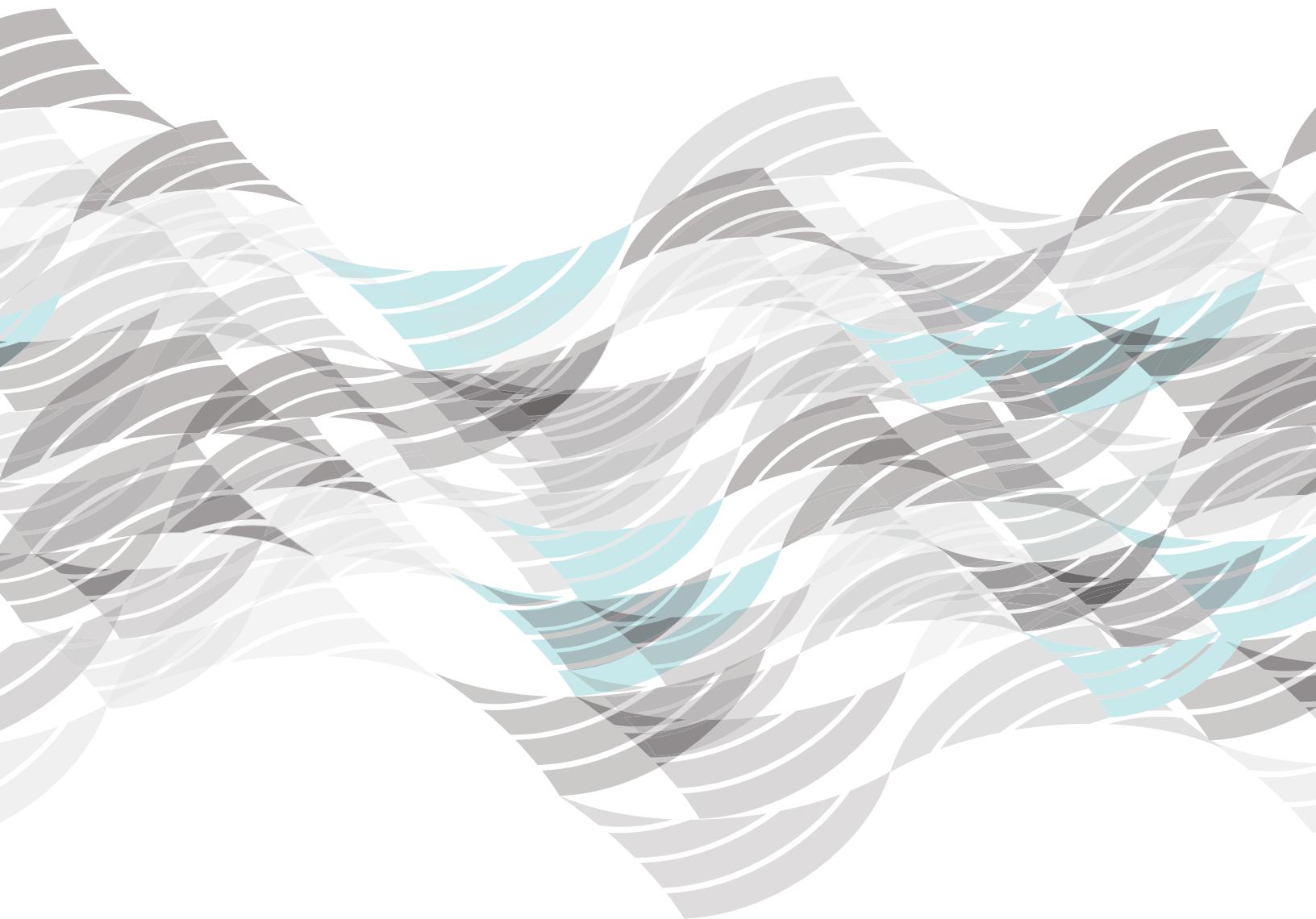


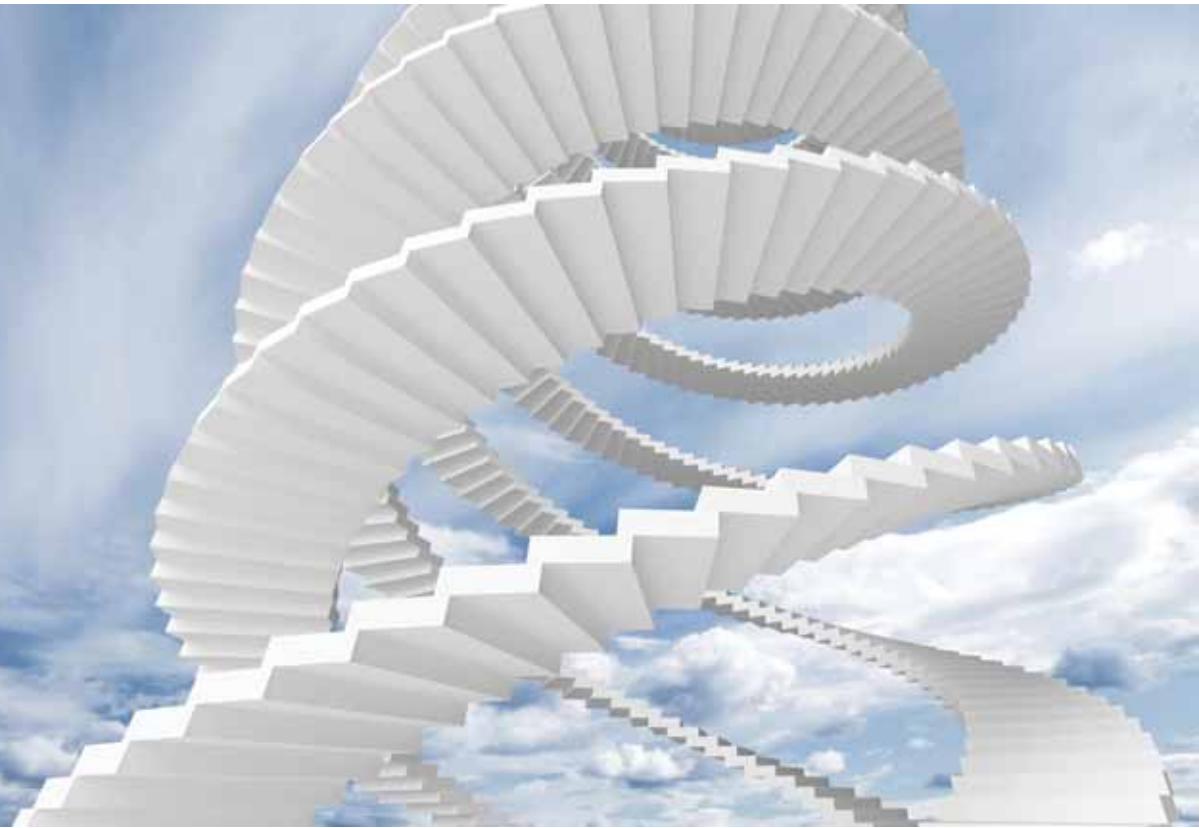


Leadership Development Beyond Competencies

Moving to a Holistic Approach

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Introduction

Late one night a police officer sees a man on his hands and knees searching the ground near a streetlight. The officer asks him what is wrong. The man replies, “I am looking for my car keys.” The officer helps him look for several minutes and after no luck, asks, “Are you sure you dropped them here?”

“No,” replies the man, “I lost the keys somewhere across the street.”

“Then why are we looking here?” asks the surprised police officer.

“Because,” the man explains, “The light is much better here.”

Versions of this humorous tale have been told for centuries across many cultures. It describes what scientists have dubbed the “streetlight effect”—the idea that we often search for answers where it is easy to look, or where we are used to looking, rather than where the answer is actually most likely to be (O’Toole, 2013). Time and time again, this error has limited the progress of science. In the field of leadership, our streetlight has shone on behavioral competencies as the

standard for all leadership development. But leadership encompasses much more than behaviors—what happens inside leaders’ minds also plays an important role in creating effective leaders. As a field, we have long considered the mind a “black box”—an unknown and unknowable area—and so, like in the streetlight story, we have looked elsewhere. In this paper, we suggest that it is time to expand the light to include the mind¹ and its interplay with behaviors.



¹ Please note that we use Dan Siegel’s definition of mind. In *Mindsight* (2010, p. 52), he writes: “The human mind is a relational and embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information.”



Behavioral Competencies: The Current State of the Art

Traditional leadership development has focused on behavioral adaptation and the acquisition of competencies. Competency models came into the HR picture in the 1970s as a means of codifying the behaviors necessary for a particular leadership position. It was a step away from models that relied on general intelligence and skills as signs of potential. Today, competencies are carefully determined through study of what has distinguished the most competent performers from the mediocre performers in the past. Leadership development efforts focus on experiences to develop these behaviors. Training, coaching, on-the-job experiences, and mentoring are all intended to facilitate the development of observable behaviors. Typically, these efforts follow some type of assessment of individuals with regard to a competency profile that identifies current strengths and areas in need of improvement.

This model has made monumental contributions to the growth of leadership development and has provided structure, common language, and consistency the field previously lacked. This behavioral approach has also brought important attention to the interpersonal realm, something overlooked in models that emphasized technical and administrative skills. Additionally, competencies have allowed for frameworks that help organizations to articulate strategy and link behaviors to corporate goals. In short, behavioral competencies have transformed leadership development from an abstract and amorphous concept into a structured and measurable strategy.

Limitations of a Competency Model

Yet despite clear contributions, behavioral competency models have also constrained the field of leadership development. Firstly, this approach has focused solely on tangibles, largely ignoring the not so readily observable internal and/or automatic processes that lie below the surface, such as personal life experiences, emotions, or mind-sets. Thus, traditional models of leadership have focused on fragments of leadership—specific behaviors—rather than examining leaders as a complete people. Secondly, behavioral competency models draw upon information from previous successes. They are based on identification of behaviors that were effective in the past rather than mind-sets needed for the future. This is not ideal given changeable work contexts and the ever-evolving nature of leadership and leadership development. Thirdly, behavioral approaches assume that leadership can be divided into a finite number of competencies that can be equally developed by all leaders. This may not always be possible or desirable given leaders' responsibilities, performance goals, experience, time, and the increasing categories of competencies.

Finally, behavioral competency models approach leadership in a highly structured manner. Real-life leadership is often fluid, chaotic, and less clear-cut. Behavioral models do not account for individual differences or underlying social structures and, therefore, have limited ability to cope with complicated social, organizational, and industrial conditions. Behavioral training is often void of context, yet many competencies are context dependent. For example, political savvy may require vastly different skill sets depending on whether you are interacting in France or China, in the military or in the arts.

Behavioral models imply that there are clear boundaries between competencies. In reality, the boundaries between competencies can be fuzzy, and segregating them out into separate categories may not be useful across leaders and contexts.

Together, this evidence suggests that competency models are incomplete, too simplistic, and inadequate in today's business environment. **Competency models have taught us a great deal about leadership development, but we believe it is time to question whether we are still focusing on competencies simply because “the light is better here” and perhaps need to turn on new lights to achieve improved outcomes.** It is time to adopt a broader view, one that opens the door for knowledge from the brain-based sciences and contemplative practices.



Moving Beyond Competencies

There are many underlying factors that shape and drive behaviors. We believe that leadership development models need to encompass more of the structures, relationships, and dynamics necessary to enact leadership. In this paper, we propose a multi-dimensional model of leadership that we refer to as the *Beyond Competencies Model*, which includes the workings of leaders' *inner experiences* as well as their visible actions. **We argue that examining less visible forces such as leaders' physiological, emotional, and mental processes are needed to broaden the focus and increase the efficacy of leadership development.**

We think that calling attention to the dynamics of a leader's internal landscape can aid leadership development. Renowned psychiatrist Dan Siegel calls this awareness "mindsight"—the ability to observe mental processes unfold, "the capacity to perceive the mind in yourself and others" (Siegel, 2010, p. x). It is important to note that mindsight is different from self-reflection typically practiced in leadership development contexts, which focuses on reflecting on past experience in order to improve behavior. Instead, mindsight is a metacognitive practice invoked in the present moment to focus awareness on internal processes. Siegel argues that this ability to tune into our mind and the minds of others is the basis for emotional and social intelligence and the key to learning, personal growth, and transformation.

To explore the interior life of leaders, we shine light on disciplines not traditionally associated with leadership development, such as neuroscience, contemplative practices, and positive psychology. We seek to integrate their contributions into the current understanding of how leadership works. Up until recently, such a model has been unfeasible and impractical, but now advancements in science and technology have begun to illuminate the black box of the mind. The model we introduce here is one of the first to bridge some of the epistemological differences between disciplines and integrate them into the field of leadership development. It focuses on leadership development in the singular sense of developing individuals and the process of personal improvement. In the future, we hope to explore leadership at a collective level using this model. In the current paper, we provide an overview of how to begin to think about advancing our understanding of leadership development through expanding leadership models beyond competencies.

The Beyond Competencies Model: Adding the Inner World

Our proposed model of leadership development recognizes the complexity of leadership by adding aspects of the mind and lived experience for a more holistic look at leadership—one that includes elements of the inner existence of leaders in addition to their outward behaviors (see Table 1). This model addresses three elements of the inner world—**circuitry**, **inner content**, and **conscious engagement**. We argue that all three of these elements individually and collectively influence and are influenced by leaders' behaviors and outcomes in important ways (see Figure 1), and that this holistic lens provides a rich and deep tool for better understanding individuals in organizations.

Figure 1 The Beyond Competencies Model

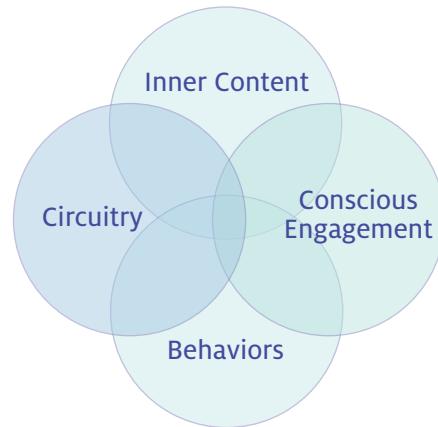


Table 1 Comparison of Models for Developing Leadership

APPROACH	CHARACTERISTICS	ASSUMPTIONS
Behavioral Competencies as the Basis of Leadership Development	Oriented toward observable behaviors and gaps between behaviors observed and behaviors desired Static snapshots of select behaviors	Behaviors are a result of deliberate and conscious processing Leadership is the function of explicit behaviors Holding leaders accountable for certain behaviors helps them to become better leaders
Beyond Competencies: Both Behaviors and the Inner World as the Basis of Leadership Development	Oriented toward the interplay between internal elements (physiological, psychological, emotional, thoughts, memory) and external behavior and activity Holistic assessment of leaders as beings with complex inner worlds that can influence, explain, and shape behaviors and actions	State of mind and body influence how leadership is enacted; behaviors can reflect automatic processing, emotions, thought patterns, past experiences, and level of self-awareness Leadership is a function of circuitry, inner content, conscious engagement, and external behaviors. The four are inherently interconnected Helping leaders understand their inner world leads to increased self-awareness, adaptive behaviors and responses, and more effective leadership

Circuitry

The first component in our Beyond Competencies Model is something that all leaders share, the **circuitry**—physical, chemical, and neurological functioning—of our bodies. Much of our behavior is influenced by the basic network of interconnected neurons in the brain and nervous system. Therefore, it follows that this internal wiring affects how we develop as leaders. We believe that increasing awareness of our circuitry can help leaders better understand their own and others' behaviors. At its heart, leadership development rests on self-awareness, but development practices fail to include awareness of the body's neural circuitry.

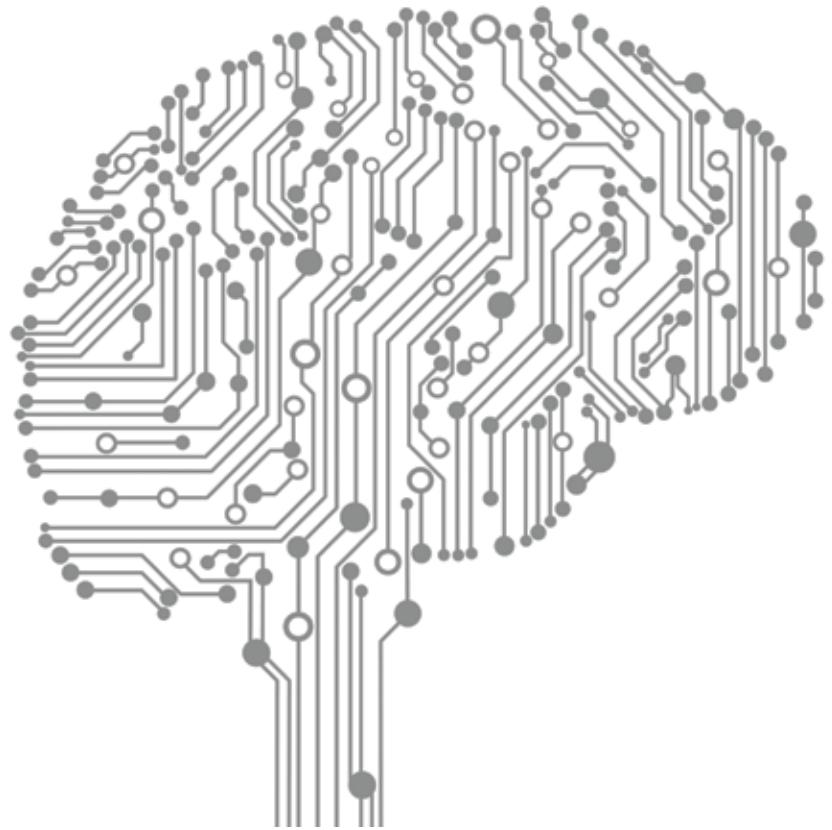
As humans, our circuitry has evolved over centuries to react and adapt to different environments, keeping us safe and fully functioning. Over the past several decades, research in the field of neuroscience has helped us improve our understanding of how our internal systems interact to process information and influence behavior. For example, our reticular activating system (a circuit of neurons in the brain stem) influences our behaviors by regulating sleep and wakefulness. In turn, the proverbial “good night’s sleep” improves our memory, problem-solving, decision-making, and ability to regulate our emotions—factors critical to leadership roles (Maas & Robbins, 2011). Likewise, external stimuli can set off hormonal and chemical reactions in our central nervous system, leading to fight-flight-freeze behaviors. This cascade of hormones and chemical reactions can create the experience commonly known as stress and result in a variety of negative psychological and physiological reactions.

A great deal of our behaviors can be more fully understood by learning how the brain processes pleasure and pain. Our brains have a reward circuit and a circuit that activates when we are in pain. These two basic forces subconsciously motivate much of how we navigate the world. As John Medina, author of *Brain Rules*, puts it simply: “Almost everything we know about how the brain generates behavior can be couched as combinatorial activations of these two broad sets of purpose-driven circuits—seeking pleasure and avoiding pain” (Medina, 2010, para. 6). Neuropsychologists such as Rick Hanson believe that these two circuits have so much influence over us because evolutionarily, they helped us react quickly to potential threats to our survival (Hanson, 2013, p. 20). At one point in time, feeling pain was a warning that we were in mortal peril, while feeling pleasure was a reward for acting in ways that would promote our survival. Given this, it is not surprising that neuroscientists have also discovered that the brain is programmed to be more sensitive to negative or painful experiences. After all, remembering bad experiences, such as the sites and causes of danger, is critical for survival.

But, like our bodies, threats to our well-being have evolved over time. Today, threats are more likely to be social than life endangering. Most of us who work in organizations don’t have experience with true predators. There are a myriad of ways we can feel pain in organizations—not making a deadline, being passed over for a promotion, getting a project cut, dealing with insubordination, losing a client, or anger from a key stakeholder.

However, a problem is **that the brain does not differentiate between physical pain and modern, organizationally generated pain**, so while contemporary triggers of pain are unlikely to have dire consequences, our bodies still react as if it were life and death, secreting cortisol and other hormones that gear up the body for quick action. Likewise, although at one point in time, attending to real physical danger was a necessity, today preoccupation with perceived, psychological threats can hinder our health and happiness.

This has clear implications for leaders and organizations. David Rock (2009) has identified five basic psychological needs that drive feelings of threat and reward in organizational life. Positive psychologists also have emphasized the importance of rewards and positive environments on human functioning, demonstrating that people are more open-minded and better at problem solving when in a positive versus a negative state (Fredrickson, 2001). They have also created interventions to develop positivity. Moreover, we know that leaders' radar is far more likely to pick up stimuli perceived as potentially threatening or negative than stimuli that is pleasurable and rewarding. Therefore, it is important to understand that during times of stress and fatigue, the negatives may be all we take in, process, and remember (Hanson, 2013). Because of our bias toward negativity, leaders may benefit from better understanding how to activate reward circuitry so as to benefit from positivity more purposefully.



Perhaps one of the most exciting recent discoveries from neuroscience about our circuitry is that it is not set in stone. “Neuroplasticity” refers to the brain’s ability to grow new neurons and neural connections over the course of our life. Considering that learning agility has been identified as critical to leader effectiveness in the 21st century, the malleable nature of our neural circuitry is good news for leadership development and suggests that more effective, adaptive brain responses can be learned and developed (we refer to this as conscious engagement—the third component of our model). This is not to say that rewiring our brains is fast or easy. However, it is possible through effort and practice to develop new neural connections.



Inner Content

The second component of our model is the **inner content** of the mind. This includes our raw emotions, gut reactions, and inner dialogue. These inner experiences define our relationships with ourselves, as well as shape our beliefs and emotional reactions to thoughts and situations. Worrying about the future, feeling joy when holding a newborn, or feeling nervous before giving a big speech are all examples of our inner content. Inner content also consists of the constant “mind chatter” going on in our heads. Every waking moment, our minds give us unfiltered and unsolicited commentary on “shoulds,” “ifs,” “ought tos,” and “wish I hads.” This dialogue with the self is a product of both present and accumulated experiences of life—implicit and explicit memory, beliefs, cultural norms and mental constructs, adaptive responses based on past experiences and interactions, and the emotions tied to these experiences. Other people influence our inner content as well, from shared genetics and predispositions to shared experiences, relationships, and culture. Notably, our parents, families, peers, and pop culture can influence what we see as satisfying, exciting, and relaxing as well as threatening or harmful. We are group animals and thus, much of our inner experiences are intrinsically connected to others in the external world. These narratives, in turn, shape how we see ourselves and how we respond and behave.



For instance, think back to a time when you were very disappointed in yourself: perhaps a presentation that did not go well, a sales goal that you did not meet, or a conflict that you did not handle gracefully. What went through your head at the time? How did you feel afterward? If you are like most people, you probably replayed the scenario over and over in your head, analyzed what went wrong, and/or berated yourself for saying or doing something you feel that you should not have done. You probably felt a mix of complex emotions as well—embarrassment, frustration, anger, guilt, sorrow. These inner reactions and ruminations may have changed how you see yourself. You may have concluded that you “hate public speaking” or “have poor sales skills” or “have a low tolerance for insubordination.” These self-assessments, in turn, may have curbed your future behavior—avoiding certain people or situations that remind you of this particular scenario.

Leaders often use their inner content to evaluate their experiences and feelings and to help them determine how they will act. As such, inner content can be considered a hidden compass that shifts the direction of leadership behavior. Inner content can influence how a leader takes in information, ultimately influencing decisions and actions.

Science has begun to shine light on this aspect of the mind, including how our inner content shapes our behaviors, as well as what can be done about it. For instance, research has shown that ruminating (repetitive, obsessive, self-focused thinking) activates mood centers in the brain, impairs critical-thinking and problem-solving ability, and is linked to dysfunctional attitudes and depression (Cooney, Joormann, Eugene, Dennis, & Gotlib, 2010; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Similarly, neurological studies have shown that the amygdala (an area of the brain related to emotions) and the prefrontal cortex (an area of the brain related to decision-making) are linked, and that patients with damaged amygdala have impaired decision-making abilities (Bechara, Damasio, Damasio, & Lee, 1999). This suggests that our emotions influence our decision-making. **Thus, the age-old adage of making decisions by “following your heart” may be a moot point—it seems we do it automatically.**

However, as with circuitry, the good news is that maladaptive inner content can be modified as well. Positive distractions (such as jogging or connecting with friends) can break negative ruminative cycles; and mindfulness training can halt depressive thought spirals (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Likewise, the type of language that we use during introspection has been found to influence how we manage social stress. In particular, avoiding first-person pronouns during self-talk can lower social anxiety and regulate thoughts and emotions during anxiety-provoking events (Kross et al., 2014).

Conscious Engagement

The third element in our model is **conscious engagement**—the ability to observe, modify, and regulate mental processes. As we have described in previous sections of this paper, our circuitry and inner content flow constantly, continually, and often automatically. However, with awareness and practice, we can learn to direct these processes. We believe that this area offers the most potential for development in leaders and leadership, as conscious engagement allows individuals to choose a more mindful response to difficult situations. It gives leaders the ability to “hit the pause button” in a heated situation or take in complex, discordant information more accurately. Conscious efforts can increase feelings of reward and positivity. While we cannot change our past experiences, we can learn to change the influence they have on us, our relationships, and our behavior through conscious awareness and active engagement with our inner world. Learning to become aware and identify sensations, emotions, and thought processes helps us to manage them. By observing reactions to different stimuli, it is possible to learn what triggers an emotion, a pattern of thinking, or a physiological change. The experiences we chose can help to shape the brain. **With time and dedicated training, leaders and nonleaders alike can develop the ability to tune into thoughts, emotions, and inner processes to promote healthier physical and psychological responses.**

Conscious engagement also allows for the possibility of *shifting* the response. Once we understand our circuitry and have identified our inner contents, we can begin to recognize how our minds influence our behaviors and actions. The next step is to learn how to break down unwanted automatic reactions, emotional cycles, and thought spirals to actively redirect our minds in ways that will help support desired behaviors and responses. Thus, we can learn to both witness, as well as shape, how we think, feel, and behave.

Contemplative practices, such as meditation, yoga, or mindfulness are time-honored ways of learning to monitor and modify our inner world. There are a multitude of styles and practices, and an increasing amount of scientific evidence demonstrating their effectiveness with regard to well-being (Lazar, et al., 2005). Such contemplative practices also offer an array of approaches for modifying thoughts and intercepting automatic reactions. Engaging in contemplative practices allows for new perceptions, alternative interpretations of events, and the possibility to respond to them flexibly. For example, breathing meditations have been very successfully used in the health care field to help people cope with stress by learning how to recognize the physiology of emotions and shift the experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). They allow people to be more consciously aware of the body and to notice different inner states. All major cultures have some practices intended to help people be in the present and to be aware of inner states.



Similarly, research in positive psychology has shown not only that emotions influence people's behaviors and actions, but also that people can learn to influence their own emotions. A recent review of research suggests that up to 40% of people's happiness is under their control (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Moreover, studies show people can learn to regulate and change their mind through training and practice. However, it is important to note that learning to change our internal processes takes time and skill. Even something as simple as meditative breathing when practiced consistently can be a catalyst for change in a leader's behavior, health, and life. **Conscious engagement is a lifestyle, not a crash diet.**

Understanding your own engagement processes is also vital to the development of empathy and emotional intelligence needed for effective leadership. It allows for leaders to consider what others may be noticing, how they may be interpreting events, and what they can do about it. Understanding how your own thinking is influenced paves the way for understanding others. For example, we once worked with two leaders from the same organization. One leader was exceptionally attentive to his own emotional needs as well as

the emotional needs of his employees and used this to help them respond effectively to challenges; the other was not tuned in to either his own inner world or that of his employees and simply directed people to fulfill administrative requirements without considering how his directions were perceived. Unsurprisingly, the latter group was plagued with high turnover and a lack of creativity, while the former group thrived under a vibrant and productive work environment. An employee who transferred between groups found the differences stark, describing the first leader as helping people to work from a base of security and the second leader as unaware of the feelings of others, creating a sense of threat.

In sum, the importance of conscious engagement for leadership development is twofold. Firstly, these practices can help leaders become more aware, proactive, and deliberate around their thoughts, emotions, actions, and behaviors. Secondly, in building these abilities, leaders will also sharpen their understanding of others' thoughts, emotions, actions, and behaviors—skills both necessary and invaluable to leading others effectively.

The Beyond Competencies Model in Action

We believe that understanding human circuitry, how the inner content of life experiences gets expressed in leadership roles, and the development of leaders' conscious engagement through mental training should be included in leadership development initiatives along with the emphasis on behaviors. **At a most basic level, understanding the inner world is another area of self-awareness that leadership development should be paying attention to.** Leaders need to understand a deeper level of human drives, psychological processes, and neural physiology in addition to which competencies they have mastered and which they need to work on.

Some researchers and practitioners have begun this process already. For example, leadership expert David Rock (2009) has developed the SCARF Model to explain how our circuitry is programmed to react to external threats. In his model, he argues that there are five major areas that trigger potential threats in the workplace:

Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

Moreover, depending on leaders' inner content, they may be more sensitive to threats to title (status), to the potential fallout from a reorganization (certainty), or to control over their time and work (autonomy). Rock proposes that learning to recognize both your own reactions to these types of threats, as well as what will threaten people you work with—in other words, developing conscious engagement skills—is central to successful leadership. The SCARF model aims to help people in leadership positions better understand how internal sources can guide and improve work life for both the leader and his or her colleagues.

For instance, a CCL career coach noticed that a particular client was very high in desire for status and urged the client to pursue awards, seek out a high-profile mentor, and join a high visibility task force. These actions helped the talented client feel less anxious and more secure and confident in her position.

Another example of moving beyond a competency model is the work of Kopelman and Gewurz (2014), and their exploration of leaders' emotions and cognitive processes. Kopelman and Gewurz have developed a self-narration template that helps leaders employ a more mindful approach to emotions and social interactions in organizations. They stress that it is important for leaders to monitor their feelings resulting from challenging situations, to flexibly interpret events, and to strategically impact emotions. They also argue that in order to develop desired behaviors, one must first understand the inner dialogue associated with the behaviors.

Many companies are also starting to recognize that the mind is important and that cognitive health matters. The *Financial Times* reports that 25% of large U.S. companies now have stress-reduction programs and that many world-renowned companies such as General Mills, Target, and Apple have begun to offer time and space for contemplative practices such as meditation, yoga, and mindfulness (Gelles, 2012). Some companies are also emphasizing the importance of taking breaks and getting an adequate amount of sleep. For instance, Google has "MetroNap" sleeping pods so that employees can honor their need for sleep and catch up when needed (Delo, 2001).

Appreciating the mind offers many new pathways for development. These new and innovative approaches to leadership and the workplace highlight what we hope is a key takeaway from this paper: **By expanding our gaze to look beyond competencies, many new supportive leadership practices come to light.** This is in essence the practice of conscious engagement—to actively notice and be with what is happening in order to employ a broader repertoire of responses. To quote Apple founder Steve Jobs:

“If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there’s room to hear more subtle things—that’s when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before.”

(From the book *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson, p. 49)

Exploring the Inner World

For those interested in exploring the inner world and implementing the ideas outlined here, there are many ways to start. There are an increasing amount of self-support tools and resources useful to inner work, many of which are available for free online.

- Dan Siegel and David Rock's Healthy Mind Platter (http://drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy_mind_platter/) describes the elements necessary for cognitive fitness in a riff on the healthy food platter. They offer examples of how to get the necessary cognitive nutrients for a healthy mind.
- Dan Siegel (www.drdansiegel.com) and Richard Davidson (<http://richardjdavidson.com/>) each have websites that offer resources for developing conscious engagement as well as the research papers that support their efficacy.
- Barbara Fredrickson has a website sharing ways to build positivity and moments of love (www.positivityresonance.com).
- Rick Hanson's website offers many tools for building happiness and reducing stress (www.rickhanson.net).
- There are many websites that offer meditation recordings for free such as (<http://marc.ucla.edu/>; <http://www.mindfulnesscds.com>; www.tarabrach.com).

It is our hope that leadership development experts will begin to explore these resources and begin to ask how these new methods can support leaders and leadership development.

The Challenges of This New Frontier for Leadership Development

Practitioners are hungry for new models, but as with any discussion of new framework, we need to be deliberate and in dialogue. New approaches are best vetted and prototyped in an open system where we can benefit from input and experience of the collective. It is important to carefully examine the results of experimentation to understand how new approaches can best be designed to challenge and support leaders in their development and provide information along the way about their progress.

We believe that our Beyond Competencies Model is promising; however, a number of questions and concerns still remain. The solutions are not straightforward and will require time and dedication to address. The answers we come to are important to advance our field, and we should be prepared to move forward with careful consideration. Some of the key issues we have identified at this time are as follows:

1. What information is most relevant to developing leaders?

Research and practices involving the inner world are vast and span physiology, neuroscience, positive psychology, cognitive science, contemplative practices, and many others. Practitioners and researchers alike must examine this sea of information and consider which areas of research are most insightful for the field of leadership development. We must determine which are the key findings and which are too tangential to be useful in leadership development.

2. What are legitimate, evidence-based practices?

Although the findings that the inner world shapes our behaviors is mounting, evidence that these findings can be generalized to leadership is still limited. There is a lot of hype over new neuroscience technologies and the “power of the mind,” but there are also a great deal of “pseudo-science” claims. Leadership practitioners and researchers need to carefully examine which findings are supported with scientific evidence. More research needs to be done.

3. What is the appropriate role of leadership development experts in translating this material?

So far, little research on the inner world has entered the field of leadership development. Researchers and practitioners need to begin to bridge the gap between disciplines without losing knowledge along the way. Leadership development experts should connect with experts in other fields to promote optimal solutions while preserving practices that have been effective in the past.

4. How can we deal with the new complexities that come with a holistic view of leadership development?

Leadership development is inherently a complex process. One of the advantages of traditional competency models is that behaviors are fairly easy to assess and understand. In contrast, the inner workings of our minds and internal systems are much more complex. When incorporating aspects of the inner world, it is important that leadership researchers and practitioners make these concepts simple enough to teach and understand and yet make sure that the information is accurate and not overly reductionist.

5. What is the best language to use?

Lack of common language limits understanding and transference of knowledge—and this area of research is decidedly lacking in standardized terminology. We ourselves struggled in this paper to find language that unified very different areas of research. One of the reasons that behavior competencies have been so successful is that the vocabulary used has been straightforward and easy to understand (e.g., had limited “jargon”). The very word “competency” helped to shift the narrative of leadership development. We need to consider our word usage carefully and begin to standardize terms that are easily understood and self-explanatory.

Summary and Conclusion

Behavioral competency models have shed a great deal of light on the field of leadership development over the years. However, the streetlight effect suggests that it is time to examine new, further reaching perspectives; the current sole focus on competencies highlights certain aspects of leadership development while casting shadows over others. **We are not suggesting that we should turn away from behavioral competencies at this time, but rather, that we should begin the work of turning on more lights to illuminate additional paths to understanding leadership development.**

We believe that a Beyond Competencies Model will strengthen our understanding of leadership development by emphasizing that leaders are multidimensional. They are mixtures of internal and external forces; therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership emphasizing only behaviors doesn't always work. Holistic leadership development goes deeper than traditional behavioral models to recognize our complexity. It should be noted that this model is intended to go beyond the dualism inherent in competency models designed to simplify and distinguish the parts. We see the outer "doing" of a leader as blending and interacting with his or her inner "being," and the internal landscape and external stimuli as cocreators of behavior. In order to move leadership development forward, we need to be able to share common language and distinguish differentiated parts of these landscapes and integrate the linkages between them. In his studies of interpersonal neurobiology, Dan Siegel (2012) emphasizes the importance of integrating different approaches. By themselves, behavioral models can be overly rigid, while models of the free-floating mind can be too chaotic. Rigidity and chaos are helpful markers to signal a need for integration. It is this integration that we hope to promote and aid through our model.

The current model outlined in this paper takes into account what we share in common, the physiological systems at work in the human body—our circuitry. This model also recognizes our differences, that our inner content is unique and that different leaders may react differently to different situations based on their past. Finally, this model points to what is needed to create healthy and effective leaders and leadership—conscious engagement—developing our ability to monitor and modify our circuitry and inner content and be aware of the inner world of others with whom we work. We believe that understanding and integrating these components into leadership development programs will result in more holistic leadership strategies and will create more mindful leaders.

In closing, we would like to put forth a call to action: we propose that the field of leadership development needs a more comprehensive model as the foundation of leadership learning systems, moving the field forward beyond competencies to include more emphasis on understanding the mind and inner world. Leadership does not purely lie in behaviors that are seen and observed, but also in those that are at the core of our internal experiences. In particular, we draw on the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology to give us an innovative lens for understanding human circuitry and inner content; and positive psychology and contemplative practices to provide wisdom about how to develop inner perception and to cultivate inner strength. We believe that there is great potential here and that the inner world is the next frontier for leadership development. However, there is also a great deal of work to be done. We call upon leadership developers to work together as a concerned community, to move beyond the established competency approach to offer deeper levels of leadership development. We invite you to create this future with us.

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Carol Connolly takes an interdisciplinary approach to leadership development, having developed leaders for 25 years and practiced leadership since 1975. A former senior faculty member at the Center for Creative Leadership, she designs and delivers customized engagements that address both business and leadership challenges. During her CCL tenure, Carol cosponsored CCL's Neuroscience & Leadership Initiative, which applies brain-based research to leadership practices and programs. Prior to joining CCL, Carol was an executive coach and senior consultant at two leader and talent development firms. In addition, Carol has 12 years of line, portfolio, and risk-management experience with two global financial institutions. Carol earned her MBA at A. B. Freeman School of Business, Tulane University, and BA from Connecticut College. Since 2006, Carol has traveled to India to explore the functioning and development of the mind in a holistic approach to learning, growth, and transformation. Carol lives in the San Juan Mountains of western Colorado where she hikes, bikes, and skis when she can.



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