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## CHAPTER 12

### Practice Eight:

# Embodying

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*Somewhere out there he is practicing, and I am not.  
And when we meet, he will win and I will lose.*  
-- Anonymous Coach

*Body refers to the shape of our experience.  
We learn through our bodies, through recurrent practices.*  
-- Richard Strozzi-Heckler

The innovator's challenge is to get the members of a community to embody a new practice. When that is accomplished, they will speak differently, act differently, feel differently, and even see the world differently. To meet that challenge, the innovator has to manage and maintain coherence among the three dimensions of every practice: language, body, and moods-emotions. This chapter is about how to achieve coherence, not only for the community, but in the innovator's own practice.

It should be obvious that the dimensions of language, body, and moods-emotions are interconnected and mutually interacting. We just need to recall times when we said we would do something, but did not because we did not get our body moving or we were not in the right mood. Or times when we learned a new technique and experienced elation at our success and began speaking differently about what we can do.

It is easy to separate the three dimensions and forget their coherence. For all three, we have distinctive vocabularies and professions -- notably linguists, physical trainers, and psychologists. If we are too good at the separation, we might get caught up in the language patterns behind the seven practices studied so far and be blindsided by breakdowns in body or emotional reactions. For example, we could become fixated on "offering" as a language act and forget that our offers will be listened as valuable only if they make sense to our listeners in the context of their moods, emotions, and body reactions.

Our purpose in this chapter is to focus on the coherence of language, body, and moods-emotions. We will show not only how to be observers of these dimensions, but how to manage them. We will discuss a core practice called *blending* that helps us embody the sense of coherence and successfully manage change in a community.

The field we are about to discuss is large and draws on mind-body methods, psychology, biology, and neuroscience. Its name is *somatics*, a word derived from the Greek "soma", referring to the unity of mind, emotion, and body. We will say just enough about somatics to show how to learn to blend with the

concerns, listening, and intentions of the people you want to adopt a new practice. Our bodies are constantly interacting through “body language” -- posture, gestures, contractions, gracefulness, energy, resistance, openness, and the like. Somatic communication goes on even when there are no words, for our living presence always stimulates reactions in others.

There is plenty of data to support the claim that the feeling and energetic body can be more important than talk. We mentioned earlier the work of Albert Mehrabian (1971) who found that, in conversations where people spoke about feelings and attitudes, their listeners on average weighted the their body 55%, emotional intonation 38%, and words 7% in assessing their credibility. Although these percentages do not apply to every type of conversation, they do demonstrate that people can respond significantly to body and emotion as well as words. Allen Wiener (2007) also how important our body is in determining how we are listened to. Paul Eckman (2007) discusses how emotions are “wired” into the body where they can be triggered by linguistic events.

Alignment of language, body, and mood-emotion is crucial in innovation conversations, where trust is a big issue and the innovator's credibility is on the line from the start. Misalignments are likely to cause innovation train wrecks.

### **A New Common Sense**

The somatic idea flies in the face of centuries of Western tradition, inherited from René Descartes in the 1600s, that tell us that mind and body are distinct and that our actions are controlled from the mind.

Our modern culture honors the power of the mind and discounts the power of the body. We tend to ignore our bodies except when we are concerned about health, appearance, sex, sports, and fashion. Our common approach to understanding communications breakdowns is to analyze the words we spoke rather than the actions we took or the dispositions of our bodies in the communications. Our cultural common sense puts the brain as the master that reasons and decides, and the body as the servant that implements the brain's decisions. A consequence of this is that we do not see that most innovation breakdowns originate in the body in three ways:

1. *Lack of awareness*: We are unaware of signals from our listeners that reveal their real concerns, or of how our own behaviors are affecting them, and so we do not connect.
2. *Conditioned tendencies*: Some of our automatic behaviors, called “conditioned tendencies” by Strozzi-Heckler (1984), disconnect us from our listeners or push them away.

3. *Lack of blending*: We lack automatic behaviors and skills that enable us to join with others in a smooth and graceful flow in harmony with their responses.

The field of somatics, founded in 1976 by Thomas Hanna (1928-1990), has developed a different common sense that is very useful in revealing how to overcome these breakdowns and amplify the effectiveness of the other practices. Somatics is concerned with the unity of mind, body, and emotions. This field has developed these principles and a rich literature<sup>1</sup>:

- The mind and body are not separate, but form and act as a unity.
- The brain is influenced by experiences of signals carried by the nervous system from all parts of the body.
- Emotions and moods predispose how we think and act.
- The history of our experience and practices conditions our perceptions of the world and shapes our capabilities.
- Communication is not just the transfer of information – it is the interaction of people that produces interpretations, emotions and moods, and body reactions.
- Practice is the foundation for learning and mastery.

Our own work has been inspired by Richard Strozzi-Heckler's work on leadership (1984, 2003, 2007). Richard Strozzi-Heckler has been the leading expert in the somatics of leadership. He studied Thomas Hanna's mind-body philosophy and psychology for his PhD thesis and developed a discipline of leadership training around it. He has published numerous books on the subject. Because embodiment means that the electro-chemical pathways of the brain and nervous system are modified, Strozzi-Heckler likes to say "body is the shape of our experience". And because new behaviors can be learned and replace less productive behavior, he says that "body is a domain of action."

In this chapter we will show you a series of somatic practices that reveal and teach blending, the central somatic skill of innovators. The reason for the practices is that we cannot be effective at blending unless we understand it as an *experience* in our bodies. These practices incorporate three basic principles:

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<sup>1</sup> Selected books that address aspects of somatic practice include: *You Are What You Say*, Matthew Budd; *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven R. Covey; *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M. R. Covey; *What Computers Still Can't Do*, Hubert Dreyfus; *Emotions Revealed*, Paul Eckman; *Social Intelligence*, and *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman; *Anatomy of Change*, and *Being Human at Work*, and *The Leadership Dojo*, Richard Strozzi-Heckler; *Mastery*, George Leonard; *A General Theory of Love*, Drs. Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, Richard Lannon; *Silent Messages*, Albert Mehrabian; *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*, Robert Solomon; *So Smart But*, Allen Weiner.

- *Awareness creates choice.* Every practice is based on distinctions that give you choices. Initially, the distinctions may be unfamiliar; you will have to practice until you notice them and make the choices effortlessly.
- *Energy follows attention.* Focus your practice on what you want to accomplish, not what you want to avoid. If you focus too much on what you want to avoid, you will have trouble avoiding it.
- *Your body is always practicing something.* It is easy to develop unproductive habits if you do not deliberately focus on the outcome that you want from the practice. You cannot cut corners or put up with unwanted outcomes, for then the sloppiness and tolerance will become part of your habit.

Before we discuss blending, we need to explain the somatics of communication and listening, which we will do in the next two sections.

### **Somatic Dimensions of Communication**

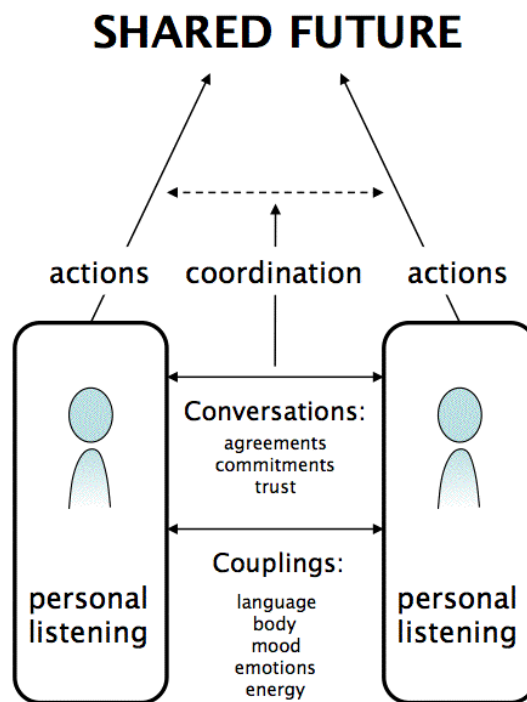
Our paramount interest in innovation is listening to, and connecting with, cares and concerns of others. This is the platform for us to move in alignment with them and redirect them in a more productive direction.

We have noted many times the prevalent notion that ideas originating in the mind drive innovation. Somatic awareness discerns many challenges to this notion in the large number of oft-cited examples of body phenomena that initiated new practices -- urges, hunches, gut feelings, cravings, emotional reactions, frustrations, anxieties, sensibilities, sensitivities, or spontaneous improvisations. Other body phenomena that influence innovation are connection, care, moods, defensiveness, trust, and the experience of blending.

We use the term "embodied action" for actions the body takes without thought. Practices are the most common way of accessing, developing, and expressing embodied action. Similarly, let "mind action" refer to actions generated from thought processes in the mind. Language is the most common way of accessing and expressing mind action.

Embodied and mind action are only loosely connected. In the body-to-mind direction, we cannot put to language much of what we know in our bodies, often called tacit knowledge (Polyani 1966) and practices (Spinoza 1997). We often find ourselves utterly unable to explain how we do our skillful actions. High-end performers and masters cannot articulate what they do in a way that others can learn from them. Their talent is expressed through their embodiment, not through their language. In the mind-to-body direction, we know that talk, will power, and good intention are often ineffective at getting the body to change its habits. Just ask the smoker who cannot stop reaching for the cigarettes.

Somatic practices align embodied and mind action. Figures 1 and 2 sketch the richness of the possibilities. Figure 1 depicts two parties interacting to create a shared future. They interact through conversations and “structural couplings” mediated by their personal listenings. The biologists Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela used the term structural couplings because biological entities interact only by stimulating one another; they react to stimuli according to their respective structures, which are a product of their individual and genetic histories (Maturana 1980, 1987).



**Figure 1.** Two individuals in separate worlds (personal listenings or individual frameworks of interpretation) take actions to achieve a shared future. They couple through spoken language and unspoken body dispositions, energy, moods and emotions. They engage in conversations in which they reach agreements, make commitments, and develop trust, and coordinate their actions.

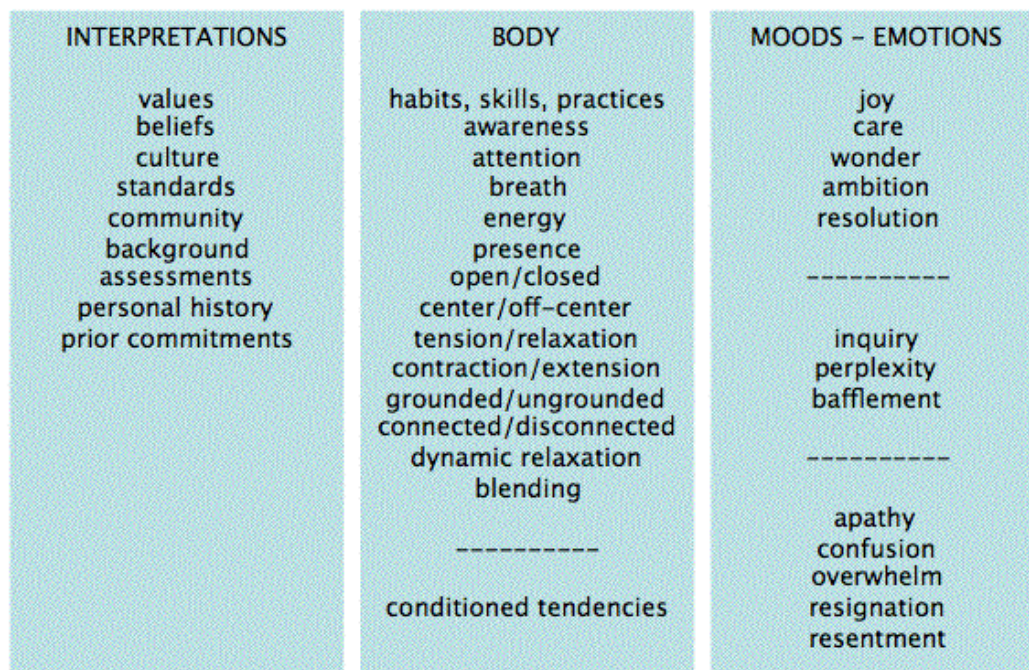
Figure 2 enumerates the many aspects of personal listening. They fall along the three main dimensions of interpretations (language), body, and moods-emotions. They all affect how sensory information is filtered before being perceived, what sense we make of it, and what actions we take. To observers,

our embodiment of these three aspects reveals (or “discloses”) our world to others (Spinoza 1997).

## Personal Listening

Let us examine more deeply the meaning of personal listening as we use it here. Many of us were taught that good listening is a special form of paying attention to another person's words. This teaching is misleading in two ways: it assumes that inattention is the main reason we do not listen well, and that words are the main carriers of the meaning we are listening for. We have already seen that inattention is only one of many reasons we may not listen well, and that in many conversations somatic signals convey more meaning than words.

## PERSONAL LISTENING



**Figure 2.** A person's listening, or way of interpreting and experiencing the world, embraces three dimensions: interpretations, body, and moods-emotions. Interpretations are ways we make sense of sensory input according to our concerns. Body includes behaviors that we can train through practice (such as habits) and our automatic, first reactions to stimuli (conditioned tendencies). Moods are general predispositions toward the world; they can be energizing (such as joy), neutral (such as inquiry), or de-energizing (such as apathy). All three dimensions are connected to and influence the others; a change in one will produce a change in the others.



Neuro-Linguistic Programming offers the idea of an “internal map of reality” as a metaphor for personal listening. NLP sees a person’s brain as a complex system with filters that delete, distort, and generalize sensory input; the system uses the filtered input to update an internal representation (map) of the world. The internal map in turn influences the filters, emotional states, and action. Thus, what one listens is the result of a dynamic, ongoing, complex feedback process. Bill Harris (2002) offered ways to help people observe and reprogram their filters and become more effective listeners and goal-achievers. Of course, there is no internal map. There are only neurological structures that set up how we, as biological entities, respond to external perturbations, and learn by changing the structure of our neural couplings (Doidge 2007).

The somatic perspective goes deeper by considering the profound influence of the body (not just brain functions) in *how* we listen, make sense of the world, and interact with others. When we seek action, as we do in innovation, it is not enough to try to listen by turning off our brain filters and paying attention to what others mean by their words -- we want to “*listen to their listening*” in order to *connect to their concerns and open them to our offers*.

As an example, consider an apparently simple request: “Come here.” The words “come here” can be listened to as a command, an invitation, a playful provocation, a threat, a plea, a tease, a complaint, or plaint of despair; the differences are conveyed by the tone, posture, mood, and energy of the speaker’s body. These are not simply brain interpretations because each is accompanied by a different emotional reaction and bodily sensations.

How does the speaker of “come here” tell which of these possibilities is the one actually in the listener’s listening? The same question comes up with all conversational acts including requests, promises, declarations, assessments, and disclosures. What does the speaker listen for to tell if these acts actually showed up as intended for the listener? That process -- listening for listening -- is deeply somatic and operates simultaneously at multiple levels:

- the sounds and intonations of the spoken words,
- the meanings of the words,
- the unspoken concerns behind the words,
- the unspoken background of practices that shape the concerns,
- the primordial drives behind the concerns, and
- the history of interpretation and cultural practice behind the practices.

The more we are aware of these levels, the better at identifying their real cares and concerns so that we might be able to shape our innovation conversations to address their concerns. Our “conversation” is no longer simply an exchange of words; it is a complex set of somatic interactions. Many of these



communications are very subtle. Skilled innovators have learned not only how to pick up the subtleties, but to generate them.

### *Interpretations*

Our interpretations are automatic. They place meanings directly on the sensory input, amplifying input judged important and discarding input judged meaningless. Interpretations may also modify the stored memory of the sensory input to more closely match the interpretation (Harris 2002).

Our interpretations are built over time in our interactions with the world and with other people. Many are acquired cultural patterns that may date back centuries of millennia (Gladwell 2008). When people speak to us, our ability to hear what they say is affected by our many automatic interpretations.

To become better listeners, we can learn to observe our own interpretations and retrain them (Strozzi-Heckler 2007). That gives a strong foundation to listen for interpretations others make. The more we are involved with a community, the better we can learn a person's community history, interests, values, and concerns. As shown in Figure 2, there are many distinctions that we can use to listen for what interpretations our audience is listening from. These distinctions can help us align our offers with their values and beliefs, fit their cultural norms, and avoid their taboos.

Frank Barrett and Ron Fry are pioneers with the Appreciative Inquiry process, a facilitated conversation that helps representatives of communities resolve wicked problems (Barrett 2005). Prior to their workshops they conduct extensive interviews with the participants. From these interviews, they gain knowledge of community interpretations that helps them guide their workshops to successful outcomes. Since writing their book, they concluded that getting participants to start talking in blogs or wikis is even more revealing about what concerns them and how they interpret the world. The key thing for them is to observe conversations and, using the distinctions listed in Figure 2, discover the background of interpretations in the community they are working with.

Learning to observe and listen to the background of interpretations of others is an important ingredient of blending. We all do it to some degree already, but in innovation conversations we must be good observers of the listenings of others.

### *Body*

The body is the arena in which our intentions, interpretations, moods, and emotions play out as actions. Our experiences and skills at performing actions are embedded in the physical, chemical, and electrical structures of our bodies and nervous systems.

Richard Strozzi-Heckler (2007) says that our bodies achieve beginner's status with a skill after about 30 recurrences of a movement, advanced beginner status with 300 recurrences, and basic competence with 3000 recurrences. These repetitions strengthen neural connections in the muscles and the parts of the brain that control them. Malcolm Gladwell (2008) says that people whose embodiment of a practice is so deep that they stand apart from most others have spent at least 10,000 hours practicing. This is an enormous amount of time that takes many years. Because the quality of the resulting skill depends on the focus and quality of the practices, it is essential to have standards to good practice from the beginning.

Modern research in brain and cognitive science explains why embodiment is so important and fundamental. Our cortex, the site of consciousness, can process sensory input at about 40 events per second; in contrast, our limbic system, the site of the unconscious, can process about 20,000,000 events per second (Lipton 2005, p166). Conscious thinking is mostly serial, unconscious mostly parallel. The body, therefore, moves our practices from conscious performance to unconscious so that they can be done far faster and better. The process of embodiment puts more and more of what we pay attention to into our unconscious. Experts and masters, who fully embody a practice, have no conscious awareness of how they actually perform it.

To be an effective innovator, you must embody the eight practices of innovation. Fortunately, you can achieve competence relatively quickly by aiming for Strozzi-Heckler's 3000 recurrences. If you aspire to masterful innovations, you will need much more time; we will discuss this in Chapter 16.

Practice Eight (Embodying) is aimed at making you a competent blender, and at helping you deepen your embodiment of the other seven practices by making you a better observer of their somatic aspects.

### ***Emotions and Moods***

Our moods and emotions, and those of our listeners, affect our abilities to connect and elicit commitments. We will not get far with an angry, resentful person; we may get an easy adoption from a grateful, appreciative person.

Emotions are feelings triggered by events and stories. Emotions trigger instant assessments that dispose us or indispose us toward certain actions. For example, anger can make us want to strike at people, sadness to contract, happiness to celebrate with them, and love to shower them with affection. Some emotions are cultural; the Germans experience *Schadenfreude*, but not the English. However, most people share the same basic emotions.

In *Emotions Revealed* (2003), Paul Ekman saw the same basic emotional expressions on faces in many cultures around the world, and found that people in different cultures recognize the same emotions. In *A General Theory of Love*

(2001), Lewis, Amini, and Lannon concluded that emotions shape how we listen and respond. Marketers appeal to people's emotions all the time to get them to remember messages and buy products (Heath and Heath, 2007). Emotionally charged conversation can be difficult (Patterson 2002, Scott 2004, Stone 2000). Skilled innovators learn how to blend with people's emotions and elicit emotions conducive to shared commitments and adoption.

Moods are predispositions toward the future. Unlike emotions, moods can last for a long time. Emotions tend to be triggered by events or situations, whereas moods precede events and color our interpretations of them. We embody tendencies toward certain moods; we can, for example, be ambitious or resigned without any triggering event.

There are three categories of moods. *Energizing moods* open possibility and stimulate action; examples are joy, wonder, resolution, ambition, serenity, gratitude, and determination. Energizing moods predispose us to a bright future. *De-energizing moods* close possibility and discourage action; examples are apathy, confusion, resignation, resentment, despair, jealousy, panic, anxiety, overwhelm, and boredom. De-energizing moods predispose us to a dim future. *Neutral moods* are in between; examples are inquiry, serenity, acceptance, and perplexity. Neutral moods predispose us to search for possibilities without knowing what we will find. Figure 2 includes a few examples of these three kinds of moods.

Moods are more difficult than emotions to observe in ourselves. Our mood just seems to be part of the reality of our world. When we are resigned, for example, we see few possibilities to change our situation and we see little point in working for change. We find it hard to step back and observe that we are in a mood of resignation. Skilled leaders read moods, blend with them, and change them. A leader can, for example, break resignation by inspiring hope or opening new possibilities for productive action.

Moods are manifested by their felt experience in the body and by their linguistic aspects. The body aspect includes postures, gestures, facial expressions, and readiness (or reluctance) to act. The linguistic aspect manifests as a story with assessments about the future; an ambitious person, for example, is full of stories about upcoming achievements, a resigned person of futility. These aspects provide numerous clues that a good observer can use to identify someone's mood.

As with other bodily dispositions, moods can be shifted. We do this by consciously engaging with stories, body dispositions, and practices associated with the mood we would rather be in. For example, we can listen to music we associate with the mood we want. The centering practice, discussed shortly, is very good for putting ourselves into a mood of nonreactive openness, creating an opening for a positive mood. Managers and leaders shift group moods by telling

stories and getting people to engage with practices associated with the different mood.

### Conditioned Tendencies

Sometimes, despite our best efforts at the eight practices, a breakdown blocks our way to the outcome. How we react strongly influences our success at resolving the breakdown. Our conditioned tendencies are the biggest sources of unproductive reactions.

Conditioned tendencies are automatic reactions to stimuli. They are patterns learned at an earlier time that show up without a conscious choice. Some are energizing, such as jumping away from a hot fire. Others are de-energizing such as tensing up and becoming confrontational when someone disagrees with you.

Joe was a client who decided to buy his first house. After a diligent search, he found a house that satisfied his long-term goals. His friends backed him enthusiastically. On the day of the closing, however, he could not bring himself to sign the papers. He broke into a sweat and sounded like he was gasping for air through his trembling voice. Afterwards he said, "I was suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of foreboding. It happened so suddenly, I had no chance to do anything about it. It was *logical* to sign, but I could not make myself *feel* like signing." Later we learned that when Joe was a teen-ager, some older boys tricked him into lending them his bicycle. When it became clear they would not return it, he fought them and they beat him up. He vowed never again to allow someone to trick him out of something valuable. He developed a conditioning that kept him out of bad deals. But, years later, his conditioning from that old event prevented him from closing an important good deal.

Joe's story illustrates how a conditioned tendency can look like a skill as long as it produces positive outcomes; but it became an impediment when it prevented him from attaining his goal. His conditioned tendency always took over fast and outside his awareness. He had no choice in how he could respond.

A couple we know had a period of crisis in their marriage. Liz thought Jim jealous and clinging. Jim thought Liz flirtatious with other men. Her conditioned tendency for freedom and his for jealousy had come into conflict. A counselor got them to agree to a 30-day experiment in which at social events (where these behaviors were most troublesome to them) they would circulate separately and not be together at all. He would seek others to talk to, but not her. Three times during the party, at her choice, she would come to him and offer a compliment. At first they found this very uncomfortable. After a month they found they liked it so much they stayed with it. They are still together 30 years later. After that, whenever they found themselves stuck in a conflict, they would step back and define a 30-day experiment that started with scripted

behaviors and retrained their tendencies. Almost invariably the new behaviors became natural for them and eliminated the conflicts.

Liz and Jim's story illustrates how different conditioned tendencies can interact and produce breakdowns, and how they can be retrained by engaging with a new behavior until it is embodied.

As innovators, we need to be sensitive to the conditioned tendencies in our selves and in our audience. Our own tendencies can interfere with our success in any of the eight practices. Audience tendencies can derail them from accepting our offers.

Here are more examples that show a range of conditioned tendencies we can encounter in innovation conversations.

In the martial arts, novices almost always tense up when confronted by an attacker. Tensing up blocks effective response and lands them on the mat in a compromised position. The instructor tells them to relax, but they cannot. With training and practice, they gradually learn to maintain a relaxed, centered stance that enables them to move toward, and blend with, the attacker. Tensing up is a tendency hardly confined to the martial arts. Many people tense up and respond poorly in a conversation where they think they are under attack. Somatic training can help them learn how to maintain their center and blend with the other person to take action more effective than just tense resistance.

A second example is a person who comes from a family in which saying "no" was not accepted. When grown up, these people cannot decline requests. They wind up feeling overwhelmed and stressed from having too many commitments. They feel intensely uncomfortable when it is time to say "no". Their automatic "yes" avoids the immediate discomfort, but produces ongoing breakdowns for both the person saying yes, and the people who rely on the yes.

A third example is the difficulty of cross-culture negotiations. Japanese think direct eye contact is impolite; Americans think avoided eye contact is impolite. The Japanese person feels uncomfortable when talking with what seems to be a staring American, and the American person feels uncomfortable when talking with what seems to be an evasive and noncommittal Japanese. Their cultural conditioning makes them behave in ways that prevent agreement. The parties feel uncomfortable in a situation out of tune with their conditioning, and they cannot act effectively.

A fourth example was discovered by Fernando Flores in the late 1970s. It is a tendency to accept, and act on, gratuitous negative assessments, such as someone calling you a "pointy headed boss". To help overcome the tendency, Flores invented a "negative assessment exercise". The people took turns giving negative assessments and observing their body reactions. He gave them a script to retrain their tendency to grant permission for anyone to make assessments.

After a few repetitions of the exercise, most people learned to choose a different reaction from the original "What is wrong with me?"

A fifth example is the common inability to learn from mistakes because emotional reactions such as fear of rejection or punishment get the better of a person. With practice, these reactions can be managed so that a person is willing to face a mistake and learn from it (Shepherd 2009).

A sixth example concerns tendencies that can appear at the organizational level. During the 9/11 terror attack in New York City, the police helicopter noticed signs that one of the World Trade Center towers was starting to crumble and issued an evacuation order. No one in the police department thought to notify the fire department of the order. As the police were coming down the stairwells, the firemen were going up. Later, the 9/11 Commission determined that, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, individual policemen and firemen fell back on their old conditioning, which was to communicate only with their immediate buddies and not with others. The Commission recommended new training programs for police and fire in preparation future emergencies (Denning 2006).

A powerful somatic antidote to conditioned tendencies is developing the skill of centering. We'll introduce the skill of centering shortly as one of the necessary prerequisites for effective blending.

## **Blending**

Let's turn now to blending, the essential somatic skill for innovators. We will dissect the skill into ten components, show how to practice each one, and show how to integrate them into the blending skill.

In innovation, blending is the embodied skill to engage with another person in a way that they feel connection and rapport with you, and yet no resistance or pressure from you, and together you flow smoothly into collaboration around their concerns. Your energies do not clash; they move together. When we blend with another, we experience flow and engagement. It is a physical experience, not a mental assessment.

Strozzi-Heckler (2007) describes blending as moving in the other person's shoes, seeing their perspective, engaging with their interpretation of the world, feeling their feelings, and channeling their energy toward partnership and collaboration. "Blending is a deep listening that produces connection." We are born with the sensibilities for doing this. We seek and cherish limbic resonance, "a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's internal states" (Lewis et al, 2001).

When we blend, we experience a single (blended) entity rather than separate parts. In music, a chord is a resonance among a set of notes; we experience the

chord as a single entity, not a separate notes playing simultaneously. So it is with innovation: when we blend with the concerns of a potential adopter, we experience the conversation as a chord of collaboration; “we” appears in place of the separate “you” and “I”.

It is important that you understand *blending as an experience*. There is a whole-body “feel” to it that can be learned only by doing it. You cannot get the feel by reading about it in a book. We ask that you do the practices we describe below and learn that feel for yourself.

If you play a musical instrument, you are familiar with the whole-body experience of blending. When you were a beginner, you learned how to read musical notation and how to place your fingers on the instrument to get each note. You learned about tempos, themes, and movements. When you first tried the instrument, your brain was furiously trying to remember all the rules and get your fingers into the right places so that you would hear some semblance of the music. After a while, everything you learned moved into your unconscious brain; you found your fingers automatically going to the right places, and you played music. You eventually found that you could play music without thinking at all. When you played with other people, you learned how to play chords, then pieces, and maybe symphonies together. Each of these moments was an experience of blending that probably defies description. Your whole body just did them in a smooth and coherent way.

Athletic skills are the same. As a beginning golfer, for example, you learned many components of stance and swing and struggled to get them to work as a smooth flow that hit the ball straight and far. Eventually all the components came together and you experienced the “swing” as a single, whole-body movement. Your hands, foot positions, hips, straight left arm, pivoting around the head -- all those details were gone and only the swing remained. The same is true for other ball-using sports including baseball, football, soccer, and tennis.

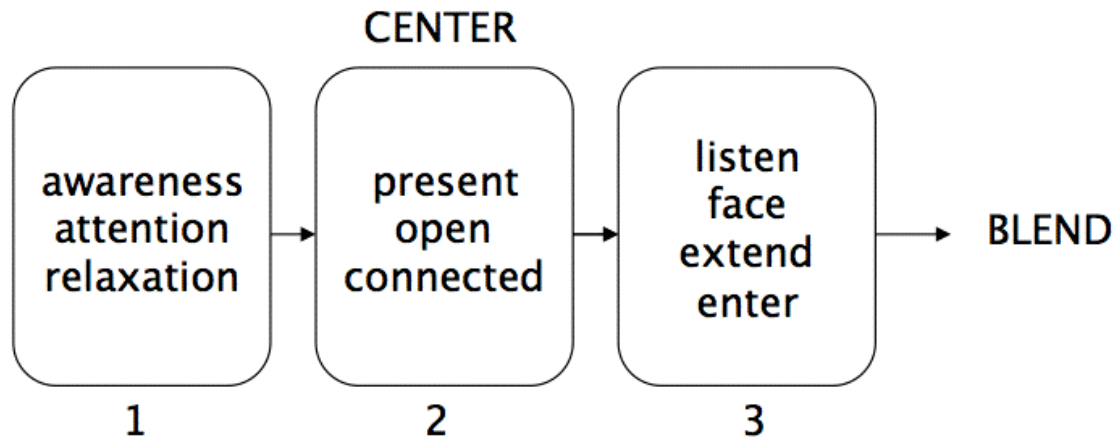
That is what you must aim for with innovation. All seven previous practices involve interactions with other people. The more you can organize your interactions as blends, the more successful will you be.

Somatic awareness and blending are not part of our mainstream common sense about innovation and leadership. For most of us the practices we are about to describe therefore present significant opportunities for learning, developing, strengthening, and refining our skills as innovators. Do them as you read about them: some will remind you of what you already know, others may surprise you with new distinctions.

The first step toward improving our skill at blending is to become an observer of the elements of blending. Figure 3 gives a map of three groups of somatic skills that combine to enable the blending skill. The foundation of awareness, attention, and relaxation gives us the capacity to center. Centering



enables us to be present, open, and connected with other people. In turn, that permits us to interact with others by listening, facing, extending, and entering. We will discuss each of these elements in the sections following.



**Figure 3.** The skill of blending is enabled by three sets of component skills. Strozzi-Heckler articulates the principles that ground “leadership presence” as centering, facing, extending, entering, and blending. Presence is a quality of connection that makes other people feel included; leaders with presence attract followers.

### Somatic Practice

**About the Boxes:** In these boxes we will introduce practices that enable you to experience and practice embodied skills. Can you become proactive rather than reactive in the body domain? Can you go beyond the conditioned tendencies in your own body and in your audience to produce a positive coupling? As we examine the components of blending, we will suggest practice exercises that will help embody them. There is a pattern in these practices:

- Notice your own conditioned tendencies and what your body is doing. Practice “somatic self awareness”.
- Notice the reactions you see in others. How are their reactions related to your state? Practice “somatic awareness of others”.
- Notice when people’s conditioned tendencies in some situations will turn into resistance; for example, I insist, you withdraw. Practice blending with the resistance.

Reflection is an important part of practice. After you engage in the practice we suggest that you make notes in a journal about what you experienced, observed, and concluded. Ask someone else to give you feedback. If you can, work with an experienced coach.

As you do any of these practices, keep in mind these guidelines:

- Reflect regularly on your practice. You can unwittingly reinforce an unproductive behavior by not being aware of it.
- Be patient. Your level of skill as innovator will increase over time as you practice the practices and learn from your mistakes.
- Start small. Begin with small innovations and then move to progressively larger ones as you become effective.
- Expect breakdowns. Your ability to deal with breakdowns and win adoption grows as the depth of your embodiment of the practices grows.
- Seek mentors and coaches. Work with more experienced innovators to elevate your own skill.
- Expect discomfort. It is normal to find that changes of practice motivated by new learning are uncomfortable. Keep practicing and the discomfort will fade. You can generate a productive new practice by starting with a script that leads you through the steps.

Remember that our descriptions of practices are aimed at your mind. You have to actually do the practices to get the experience into your body. You will not get far by treating these distinctions only as intellectual understandings. And since many practices involve interacting with others, you cannot really do them alone. If you try to learn them on your own, you will be unable to observe deficiencies in your own practice, and you will produce many unwanted outcomes. We therefore recommend that you find a partner or coach who can give you feedback and work with you in these distinctions.

### *Awareness*

Awareness means that something has been distinguished in our perceptual field, giving us the potential of paying attention to it and putting it into language. Awareness is the foundation of our power to act and interact with another. To be unaware is to be blind. When we are aware of something, we have a choice in our response to it. When we are unaware, we have no choice. The realization that awareness is the foundation of all action is behind the principle "awareness creates choice".

Much of our sensory input never makes it into our perceptual field because of various filters in our brains and nervous systems. We are literally aware of only of what our bodies are trained to be aware of.

We refer to an unaware person as a “bull in the china shop.” To develop new skill we must become aware of what we have previously been blind to. We have to see the china before we can avoid breaking it. The most efficient and effective way to do this is to find a competent coach in the area we are learning who shows us how to make distinctions and see what was previously unavailable to us.

**Awareness Practice.** Develop your somatic self-awareness by spending time paying attention to what is happening in your body. What are your sensations -- for example, hot, cold, tightened, contracted, or tingly? What are your moods, emotions, and automatic assessments? Are you centered or off-center? Open or closed? Relaxed or contracted? Extended or withdrawn? Connected or disconnected? Blending or resisting? After you become good at noticing these things when you're alone, pay attention to what happens when you're in conversations. Don't judge, just observe. Keep a journal of your observations. At intervals make assessments of your developing capacity for somatic awareness, self-awareness and awareness of others.

### *Attention*

Attention means to consciously focus on something of which we are aware. It is the choice of where we place our focus from among everything we are aware of. We can only act effectively when we focus our attention productively. What we are attending to? Where does our energy need to go? Which of the many aspects of a situation are important to put our attention on? “Energy follows attention” in consciousness, in the body, and in organizations.

The process of embodying skill includes developing attention skills appropriate to our level of learning. When we learn to drive a car, we first pay a lot of attention to our hands and feet. After we embody the skill of driving, our hands and feet become transparent in the practice, and we put our attention on safety in the midst of everything going on around us. We learn to focus on what will make our actions have the most desired impact. As our embodiment makes parts of our practice transparent and automatic, we can transfer our attention elsewhere, enabling us to develop the next level of skill.

Many guidelines for innovators call their attention to speaking and presentation, but not to how their audiences are listening and reacting to them.

It is easy to develop enough skill and confidence in our speaking so that we do it as automatically as moving our hands and feet while driving. It is more difficult to pay attention to our audience and adapt to their listening, reactions, and concerns (Yaffe 2009). That is where our attention must go.

**Attention Practice:** Try putting your attention on areas that you normally ignore in conversations. Notice what is happening with the body, mood, and emotions of the other party in the conversation. What kinds of assessments are you having in reaction to their gestures, urges, habits, and conditioned tendencies? What are you doing with your own attention? Is it wandering? Staying focused on the other person? What is happening with your face? Your posture? Your energy? What do others respond to with their own attention? What do you call their attention to? Keep a daily note in your journal until you become good at these observations.

### *Relaxation and Tension*

Our bodies tend to respond to each other by mirroring the energy of the other. If you are tense, the first reaction of others is likely to be tense. If you are calm and relaxed, the first reaction of others is likely to become calm and to relax.

Tension is a condition of the body in which muscles are contracted. In this state, we are less aware, less flexible, less open, less adaptable, restricted in available actions, and resistant to suggestions. Tension tends to bring our attention inward out of our contraction. When we are tense, we cannot blend with an audience because our tension inspires their tension and possible resistance, we are less able to adjust to them, and we don't appear open. In communication, relaxation is much more powerful than tension. Instead of producing a responding tension, we can practice to relax in a way to produce a responding openness and connection with others.

Relaxation often carries the connotation of sitting quietly or winding down prior to sleep. We are talking about a different kind of relaxation -- the absence of tension while in action. We call this *dynamic relaxation*. It allows us to open energy, heighten awareness, focus attention, and be flexible and adaptive. It is a fundamental skill in public speaking, martial arts, relationship, connecting, and innovation. In dynamic relaxation, we are more alert, not less, and flexible to be able to blend with whatever shows up.

**Breath and Relaxation Practice:** Our breath is the pacesetter for our body's energy, moods, and our focus. The breath is the only autonomous process

in our body over which we have some voluntary control. When we are tense we tend to hold our breath or breathe more shallow and rapid. This reduces oxygen to the brain and limits our ability to pay attention. We can calm our nervous system, produce dynamic relaxation, and enable ourselves to be more ready for a wider range of action by taking slow, deep breaths, with exhales longer than inhale, allowing relaxation on the exhale. Most somatic practices begin with a few deep, slow breaths with relaxation. Make a regular practice of noticing your breath and state of tension. When you notice tension, take a deep, slow breath and relax.

**Tension Attention Practice:** Pay attention in conversations to whether you are tense or relaxed and to what degree. Where is your tension? Around your eyes? In your jaw? Your shoulders? Chest? Belly? Where is your habitual tension? Get someone else to watch you in conversations to see where you hold tension. Once you have identified the tension, take a deep breath and release the tension on the slow exhale. You can also release the tension by simply letting relaxation flow into the area; you don't have to move or twitch. Pay attention to how others respond to your relaxation. Keep notes in your journal.

### *Center*

We are centered when our body, mind, and emotions are in a state where we can choose our actions. When we are not in a state to choose our actions, we are "off-center"; our reactions and tendencies choose for us. We cannot blend when we are off center. In centering we attain complete balance and focus regardless of our situation:

1. Our mind is alert, we are connected to what we care about, and we are free of distracting mental chatter.
2. Our mood is serene and open to the current situation.
3. Our physical state is dynamically relaxed, alert, balanced around our center of gravity, and ready for action.

These three aspects are mutually connected. We can center ourselves by starting with any one; the other two will follow. With practice, we can center within a fraction of a second.

Well known in the martial arts, centering is a somatic principle applicable to any human moment. The centered state is proactive and mindful. The off-center state is reactive and mindless. Reactions that remove our choice in the moment

put us in the state of being “off-center”; anger and fear, for example, can overwhelm our bodies and sweep us into unproductive behaviors. An essential somatic skill is noticing when you are off-center -- and then “re-centering”.

**Centering for Beginners.** First enter a state of dynamic relaxation, releasing tension in your body, eventually with a single breath. Then bring your attention to the present moment, letting go of thoughts, sensations, and emotions that would distract your attention. Then let your awareness drop from your head and upper body down to your belly area, where your physical center of gravity is located, and from there connect to your entire body. Then open and extend your attention to what is around you, and connect to your care or your commitment in the moment. Remain relaxed and flexible, and move from your choice. With practice, these steps become single act, completed within a single breath.

It is impossible to remain in the centered state all the time. A random thought can distract the mind. A physical blow can disrupt balance. An emotional trigger can bring up anger or fear. It then matters how quickly we notice that we have gone off center and return to center. A re-centering practice can help us learn to do that rapidly. Students of the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, told him that they saw him centered all the time. He replied that he also experienced being off-center, as they did, but that he had learned to come back to center very quickly.

**Grab Practice** (from Richard Strozzi-Heckler): A “grab” is an event that startles you, seizes your attention, and creates an emotional reaction. You can practice a physical “grab” with a partner, say Alice. You stand and center. Alice makes a yell (“Ha!”) and grabs your wrist or forearm. Most likely this will startle you and throw you off center. Observe exactly how you went off-center and then re-center. Repeat this several times. Have Alice experiment with the grab pressure. Does a tight grab throw you more than a light one? What is the right pressure to get best get your attention? This exercises gives Alice the experience of getting your attention and you the experience of recentering after a grab for your attention. Discuss what you learned. Keep notes in your journal to track your learning.

**Re-centering Practice:** After moments of intensity, breakdown,

stimulation, or stress, ask if you were in a state of reaction or choice. Were you captured by an emotion, mood, or conditioned tendency? Recenter. As you keep doing this, the time from the event until you recenter will gradually diminish. Eventually, you will be able to recenter rapidly enough to make centered choices in a triggering situation.

The skill of rapid centering is particularly important in moments of high stress and significant consequence -- such as conflict, danger, high risk, emotional intensity, distrust, and disconnection. We need to practice centering so that we can do it automatically -- within a single breath -- when we do not have the time to pause and reflect, when our first action will be our only action. Stephen Covey once likened centering to an autopilot -- it keeps the plane moving toward its destination despite the perturbations it encounters.

Richard Strozzi-Heckler defines centeredness by calling attention to its three components: present, open, and connected. Present means that our attention is focused outwards on other people. The most common way of being not present is to focus inward on mental activities, feelings, emotions, and concerns. We can be worrying, daydreaming, planning a schedule, thinking about email, or almost any form of "being in our heads". An innovator reciting a memorized script or "elevator speech" will not seem present to listeners.

Open means that we are receptive to what surrounds us and what others offer us; we are willing to give them a hearing. When we are closed, we are not receptive. De-energizing moods such as resignation and distrust will close us. As innovators, we want our listeners to be open to what we offer. The easiest way to generate that openness is to be open ourselves.

Connected means that we feel the presence and energy of the other, and of ourselves, and we stay in contact with them. Close somatic connection results in limbic resonance, where bodies seem to be in a shared state. We feel a sense of relationship and engagement. We are disconnected if we avoid relationship and engagement. We can be disconnected from our own bodies if we get lost in our heads and pay no attention to its sensations.

We cannot blend if we are not present, open, and connected. If we experience difficulty blending, our best move is to pause and get present, open, and connected. Returning to being present, open, and connected becomes second nature with practice.

**Present-Open-Connected Practice:** Sit with another person. For one minute both of you act out your versions of being not present with the



other. Notice how it feels for you and what you notice about your partner, then discuss it. Repeat the same exercise being present, but not open. Repeat it again, being present, open, but not connected. Can you be open but not present? Connected but not open and present? Once you have practiced with a partner, observe yourself in everyday conversations, noticing when you and your partners are present, open, and connected. What happens in the conversation if either is not present, open, and connected? Note at least one observation a day in your journal, and draw conclusions about how your ability to present, open, and connected affects your outcomes.

Centering is the skill that enables us to intervene in our conditioned tendencies. When the tendency takes hold, we lose our center, and with that our balance, our ability to choose, and our ability to extend and connect with others. The retraining of our conditioned tendencies consists of two parts.

1. Become an observer of the tendency by asking others what they see and by noticing what throws you off center.
2. Retrain your body so that when you notice that the tendency has gripped you, you take a moment to re-center.

Once centered you can deal with the triggering event in a more productive way. In his *Anatomy of Change* (1984), Richard Strozzi-Heckler has an excellent discussion of conditioned tendencies and how to overcome them.

### *Listen*

Listening is the way in which individual bodies interpret what they see and hear. No two listeners are identical: they have different histories. The skilled listener produces a connection that enables sensing the concerns and care of the other. The sense is not just intellectual, but is a felt sense of what the other cares about, of what deeply matters to them. The skilled listener connects to another's world and their experience of it. Suzanne Zeeman (2008) has an excellent collection of somatic exercises to improve listening.

**Simple Listening Practice.** Ask a partner to talk about something they care about. Then give your partner a summary, in your own words, of what you listened as their deep concerns and intentions. Discuss how accurate you were. Did you miss anything? Can the other person tell you what was missing? What signs did you use to "read" the other person in this deep way? If possible get a skilled listener to do this with you. What

signs did that person use to “read” you?

### *Face, Extend, and Enter*

In *The Leadership Dojo* (2007), Richard Strozzi-Heckler outlines five elements of leadership presence: centering, facing, extending, entering, and blending. We recommend this book as a much fuller treatment of these skills than we can provide here. His distinctions are essential for observing and enhancing the embodied skills of innovation. It is important to understand that these five elements are observable somatic skills that can be developed with practice.

To face is to physically turn fully toward another, an audience, or a situation, and to prepare to direct our full attention and energy there. This seems simple enough -- until we face a challenge. Then a conditioned tendency is likely to seize us. We will avert our gaze, turn away, go away, run away, direct attention elsewhere, procrastinate, or ignore the challenge completely. The skill is to automatically face the challenge -- or to notice that we are not facing, re-center, and then face the challenge.

To extend is to project our attention and energy toward the challenge or our object of attention. The skill is to feel your attention and energy move toward the challenge -- or to notice that we are not extending, re-center, and then extend toward the challenge.

To enter is to move forward into engagement with the challenge or our object of attention. We do not hang back in observation, tentativeness, doubt, or fear. We do not avoid the challenge. Entering can be the most difficult of the three skills. Can we engage productively with the challenge of distrust? Conflict? Disrespect? Skepticism? Anger? Fear? Or a host of other triggered emotional situations? When we are not entering, we re-center, extend again, and then move toward the challenge.

**Face, Extend, and Enter Practice** (from Richard Strozzi-Heckler): Do these exercises with a partner. Stand not facing your partner at a distance of several paces. Your partner calls your name. Center, then turn and face your partner. Extend your energy and attention toward your partner by raising your arm in the horizontal with palm projecting energy to your partner's upper sternum. Then walk toward your partner and stop just when your hand contacts your partner's sternum below the throat. Keep a relaxed arm and pay attention to the quality of connection. Debrief with your partner, noticing all the places where you found these moves difficult. Did you lose center at any time? Switch places and repeat. Now notice what it's like to be faced,

extended to, and moved toward. Do any of these moves throw you off center? Did you re-center?

Now take this into actual conversations. When someone brings up a difficult or challenging subject, do you face it? Reach out toward it? Move to engage with it? What happens when you choose to face, extend, and enter? Do you achieve a better outcome?

Keep notes in your journal about these experiences.

### ***Blending***

Blending is the culmination and integration of the preceding practices. It is the heart of the innovator's somatic skill. It means to join the other in engagement and flow with them and their concerns without triggering defensive reactions. Blending is not agreeing, surrendering, or copying, since we hold our own center and choose to align with another for the sake of opening a shared future. It is "a deep listening that produces connection," and allows an exploration of possible shared action.

**Basic Blending Practice** (from Richard Strozzi-Heckler): To experience physical blending, do this physical dramatization with a partner, say Alice. Stand facing each other, centered. Alice walks toward you, right arm extended toward your upper sternum. You start walking toward her. (Do not wait until she reaches you; the practice of entering should start you moving toward her right away.) Just before Alice's arm would strike you, you make a 180° turn on her right (your left) and begin walking with her, shoulder to shoulder. As you complete your turn, raise your left arm and touch the back of your left wrist to her right wrist. With a little practice you will discover how to make the turn gracefully without disturbing her flow. This exercise simulates a physical blend between you and your partner, and gives an experience of what blending can feel like.

When done, discuss with your partner. Where did you have the most difficulty? Did you lose center anywhere? What does it feel like to blend? To be blended with or not? Did you remain relaxed, open, and connected?

Now translate this experience into the flow of energy you bring to your everyday conversations. Can you blend with the mood of your conversational partner? Can you feel the same sensations as when you did the walking blending exercises?

Keep a journal with one written observation a day.

**Intermediate Blending Practice:** Once you master this, try a variation. When you are walking wrist to wrist, see if you can redirect Alice's direction by gently extending energy through your left wrist to a new direction. With a little practice, you will discover that you can redirect your partner without actually exerting force on her arm, and without producing tension or pushing. Try redirections to the left and right.

Now bring this into everyday conversations. Can you blend with the mood of your conversational partner? After blending, can you redirect your partner? Can you feel the same sensations as when you did the walking blending exercises?

### *Trust*

People are strongly influenced by a speaker's somatic presence when deciding to trust. Trust is especially important to innovators because the risks for adopters are likely to be (or seem) significant. What grounds do listeners have for believing the speaker is competent, sincere, committed, and reliable? What are the risks and how well can they be managed?

People trust when they *feel* like trusting. They are making a bet that under the other person's care, everything will turn out well. They rely heavily on somatic signals to decide whether to make this bet. Many will decide to trust based solely on their feelings. Others will go through the analysis and discover that their feelings do not support their rational conclusions. If you wish to explore this further, the book *The Speed of Trust* (2006), by Stephen M R Covey and Rebecca Merrill discusses thirteen somatic practices that inspire trust: Talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, get better, confront reality, clarify expectations, practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust.

Blending inspires trust. Innovators who inspire trust are the most likely to succeed. Those who rely on power and authority of office, or on psychological tricks, will not be trusted and are much less likely to succeed.

### **Responding in Chaos**

Under stress, embodiment is your *only* access to effective action.

Many examples above illustrate how an unfamiliar, stressful situation or a reaction can bring out a conditioned tendency. Centering exercises are helpful

because they teach how to maintain awareness, avoid becoming flustered, and make choices that are not limited to the conditioned tendency.

Centering is a way to cope with a conditioned tendency after it arises. To shift our response to situations that trigger the tendency, it is helpful to practice training for the stressful situation. Thus, airline pilots undergo extensive training with simulations of engine failures, severe turbulence, loss of control surfaces, loss of navigation, and much more. Lawyers condition their clients for intense cross-examination by subjecting them to mock cross-examinations. Military use war games to simulate battle situations and train themselves to respond favorably should the real thing happen. Police, fire, and other first responders train in simulations of various emergencies so that they will respond well in the real emergency.

However, many situations are so new and unfamiliar that no strategy of prior training can be designed. Organization leaders and innovators often find themselves in chaotic situations, where the rate of unexpected and confusing events can become overwhelming. When that happens, the brain cannot figure out what to do and drops out.

When the brain drops out, the body falls back on what it knows -- some embodied practice. The most common default is the hunker-down reaction in the face of uncertainty and fear. We gather in all our resources and go it alone. We stop communicating with others. If that does not ameliorate the fear, the body can itself become chaotic in a mood of panic.

Donald Schon discussed this problem as he considered whether data gathering is even a useful strategy in a complex, fast-changing situation (1971, p220). He quoted a long, graphic passage from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in which a commander is bombarded with new, often conflicting proposals, each demanding a quick decision. Even if the commander could have all the data about every proposal, inherent conflicts and inconsistencies would render many data useless. The commander is forced to take action and then see how things play out. The armchair critic who later determines what the commander should have done has no appreciation for the chaotic nature of the situation. Schon concludes:

The conflict of incompatible perspectives cannot be resolved by waiting to hear more of what the data say. New data may yield new perspectives, or may aggravate old differences. In one way or another, conflicts of perspective must be resolved through action. (Schon, 1971, p213)

In other words, in chaos, the leader cannot hope to figure things out and plan optimally. The best strategy is to face the problem and create joint action with others.

Malcolm Gladwell (2008) discusses this in connection with air crashes. When the pilot, copilot, and flight engineer stay in conversation they are far more likely to extricate themselves from emergencies than if they fall silent. Reconstructions of the events preceding crashes from voice recorders show that most crashes were preceded by lengthy periods of silence, lack of communication, and lack of sharing information. The airlines instituted "mitigation training" to teach people that in the cockpit they must stay in communication and be truthful about expressing concerns or demanding action. The frequency of air accidents diminished markedly since this program went into place.

Donald Snowden (2007) has extensively studied how to cope with complex and chaotic situations -- the ones in which known solutions, approaches, and even problem definitions do not apply. In complex situations we must give up the notion that we can figure out what to do in advance. He recommends that we "probe, sense, respond," meaning to experiment and get reactions to find out what we are dealing with. For chaotic situations, where things are changing too fast and sensory data are quickly obsolete, our only choice is to stay in communication with others, to intervene to produce some area that is stable, and then move to other states where actions can be effective.

The conditioned tendency to stop communicating in chaotic situations, to apply inappropriate solutions, or to wait for more data in complex situations, can be overcome by the practices of facing, extending, and entering. A team can often do this better than any individual.

This lesson should not be lost on innovators. They often find themselves in chaotic and complex situations. They need to keep their centers and help their communities find a center of effective action.

## Conclusions

All our lived experiences, interactions with others, and communications occur in our bodies, and our body reactions are the most powerful and fundamental part of our impact on others. Although the first seven innovation practices have somatic dimensions, the eighth practice is crucial for advanced skill in the other seven. It emphasizes somatic awareness, overcoming conditioned tendencies, and blending. Blending is the highest attainment of the innovator's somatic skills.

Blending is an experience, not a mental calculation. We suggested a few practices that can teach components of the experience, and then integrate them into the full experience of blending. In Appendix 4 at the end of the book, we offer more examples of somatic practices that can help deepen your skill with the innovation practices of this book (from Denning 2004, Dunham 2004).

Your appreciation for your own discomfort as your body changes can help you appreciate the discomforts your adopter community will experience as they adopt your proposed new practice. Your success will increase as you learn to help them tolerate the discomfort and learn the new way.

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