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Three Contributing Factors to Effective Utilization of Technology in Management Education and Practice: Personhood, Mindfulness, and Meditation

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Three Contributing Factors to Effective Utilization of Technology in Management Education and Practice: Personhood, Mindfulness, and Meditation

Georgia Lee Eshelman, Maria Lai-Ling Lam, Martha J. B. Cook

INTRODUCTION

Existing and evolving technology and the effective utilization of that technology are vital to twenty-first century management education and practice. All current and developing technology has evolved from earlier technology. Film on reels evolved into Beta Videotapes which evolved into VHS video tapes are currently formatted as DVDs or Bluetooth. Cylinder recordings invented by Thomas Edison also evolved into records and into reel to reel tape recorders and into smaller and smaller hand held or ear mounted devices. At one time, people's only option to go from place was pedestrian. In this current age, while people can fly to anywhere on the planet fewer than twenty-four hours, they can be face-to-face with professional colleagues on the opposite side of our planet through video conferencing without leaving their home or office. Having technology available twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week is of both great benefit and great risk. It is a great benefit that so much work can be accomplished so easily and so quickly through the effective utilization of technology. It is a great risk that the management educator, student, and/or practitioner may feel he or she needs to be on call to anyone on the earth during every moment of the twenty-four hours of each day because technology makes that possible. It is impossible for human beings to continue to function for very long when the basic needs, especially homeostasis, proposed by the psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1943), are spurned. As the Greek philosopher, Socrates and others have observed over the centuries, an unexamined life is a life not being fully lived. To be a person of thought and reflection requires time set aside and tranquil stillness for potential energy to be accessed. Many, in today's global economy and "twenty-four seven" technologically engaged, information intensive world, consider such a choice as non-productive uses of resources. In this paper, three authors grounded on combined hundred years professional and educational practice, propose three major contributing factors to effective utilization of technology: Personhood, Mindfulness, and Meditation.

Over the past decades, a few scholars (Buscaglia, 1978; Palmer, 1983; Vaill, 1989) urged educators to become serious about their own well being as well as the well being of the students entrusted to them. They urged management educators to pay more attention to the inherent possibilities of human beings rather overly relying on technology. Recently, Cameron (2006) addressed the development of virtues as the only "fixed point to guide individual and organization behavior in times of ambiguity, turbulence, and high-velocity change." Several business educators (e.g., Donaldson, 2002; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Schoemaker, 2008; Vaill, 2005) have voiced their concerns about the ineffectiveness of management education as the complexities and uncertainties of the business world have been trivialized and decontextualized by the prevalent analytical models and reductionist paradigm in business and managerial education. Little, if any, time and attention are devoted to adequately developing students' sensitivity to issues of ethics, morality, and politics in their professional practices (Catterall, Maclaran, and Stevens, 2002; Lam, 2005; MacIntyre, 1984; Smith and Robins, 1991). Management educators are called to develop a new approach and to develop students' abilities to "live with these ambiguities, and periodically to reconceptualize them" in a world with ambiguity as the result

of high rate of change (Schoemaker, 2008:135). The new approach must enhance students' interpersonal and intrapersonal effectiveness. However, "how to powerfully convey a process view and consciousness to students and executives is an unsolved problem in education" (Vaill, 1989:138). Many theories in management education do not view human beings as "continuously becoming" (Vaill, 1989: 137). A lack of attention to the personhood of the student is one part of Vaill's "unsolved problem in education."

Many students cannot immediately master the dynamic process of managing the interconnected consciousness in organizational settings. Some educators have introduced intuition awareness through classroom based mindfulness and meditation practices to help students deal with workplace tasks (Sadler, Smith, and Shefy, 2007) and increase their passion for sustainability (Shrivastava, 2010). Gunnlaugson introduced sitting meditation and helped students to "cultivate the capacity for deepened attention and mindfulness in their conversations" in her on-line text-based dialogue course (Gunnlaugson and Moore, 2009:174). This course was conducted in the WebCT forum but was grounded on the traditional form of meditation proposed by Senge and Wheatley (2009). Her approach of dialogue education has successfully facilitated the process of transformation learning—"the process of undergoing significant shifts in one's *self-view* and *worldview*, which in turn brings about changes on all levels, from the individual lives of student and educator, to the classroom culture as a whole and the current structures and norms of higher education" (Gunnlaugson and Moore, 2009:171). Indeed, the idea about relationships among dialogue, consciousness, mindfulness and meditation have been discussed by many thinkers in our civilizations.

Solomon said, "Nothing is truly new; it has all been done or said before" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Socrates demonstrated, when he used his Socratic approach by questioning students concerning their dilemma, what gives them the unique power to choose. Abraham Maslow (1943), with his Hierarchy of Needs, portrayed the basic values (needs) and took them to a climactic self actualization. Using personhood we (the authors) use the progressive tense that we are always becoming. Using mindfulness we realize that we cannot be mired in the past but can be mindful of the present and use the past and present to form a productive future. Meditation is a dialogue (yes, we dialogue with ourselves) in silent thinking of choices by Socratic questioning which will climb the triangle of "arriving" at the trilogy of personhood, mindfulness, and meditation as a combined process of using what has been done before. Has the technology of "tools" short circuited the progression? Does it need to? Keep the dialogue active!

PERSONHOOD, MEDITATION, MINDFULNESS

We, the three authors, propose that awareness of and attention to the three contributing factors of personhood, mindfulness, and meditation, which have the potential to support the effective utilization of technology, is an important tool of management education and practice. We propose that it is important to invite and encourage professional management educators, university management students, and management professionals to fully experience personhood, mindfulness, and meditation in their own lives. It is hoped that by doing so that management education and practice would be enhanced by modeling. Each day, educators, students, and managers would be able to experience a freshness and joy in being present in each classroom or workplace. Such enhanced individuals could better utilize all available technologies as well as be better equipped to engage with evolving technologies as they are introduced into the academic and business venues. We realize that one or more of these terms may be unfamiliar to the reader so each of these contributing factors are operationally defined:

Personhood

While the concept of personhood has been addressed by a number of authors over the years, the works of three authors have been selected as most relevant to the proposal this paper reports. Thomas Merton, a Catholic Priest and theologian, addressed a variety of aspects of personhood in his book, The Inner Experience : Notes on Contemplation. Margaret Benefiel, an educator and theologian, reported the

results of her study on management leadership in her book, Soul at Work : Spiritual Leadership in Organizations. Leo Buscaglia, an educator in the theory of Love, wrote of personhood across the life span of human beings in his book, Personhood : The Art of Being Fully Human. Within these works, the authors offered views, comments, and findings regarding the importance of acknowledging, accepting, and affirming the personhood of each human being.

In reality, the practice of many management educators, the time schedules for classes, the preparation time for these classes, office hours, committee work, advising, research and preparation for publications, department meetings, and attendance at various co-curricular activities can make daily professional life more a sprint than a marathon. Little time and energy seem to be available for reflective attention to the tasks to be completed. In the life experience of many university level management students, attendance at classes, preparation for classes, monetary necessity for part-time or full-time jobs, practice and participation in team sports and campus clubs leave little available time or energy for self-examination of life and the students' developmental becoming. For the management professional applying knowledge and skills in a workplace, traveling to and from a workplace, devoting time to team or department meetings, responding to requests sent via a variety of media, generating reports, preparing presentations, supervising employees, coordinating training of new employees, conducting exit interviews with employees who are leaving their positions voluntarily or otherwise, leaving the same small amounts of time and energy to devote to personhood. As described above, many humans are conducting themselves more as human doings than as human beings. Merton observed "reintegrate your compartmentalized being into a coordinated whole and learn to live as a unified human person" (Merton, 2003, p. 3). We need to question the paradigm of not missing anything or maximizing output when our personhood is under attack in the fast-paced changing technology. We must not let technology be the "opium of personhood."

A terse definition of personhood is a vital element of each man, woman, or child (Benefiel, 2005: 20). Benefiel assumes that "humans are inherently spiritual" (Benefiel, 2005:9). Each human being has choices to make about time and talent. Benefiel (2005: 11) called those people, who "exercised spiritual practices and who underwent spiritual transformation in the midst of the nitty-gritty of daily business life" as "ordinary saints." It means management professionals can be "ordinary saints" when they acknowledge, accept and affirm their own personhood and the personhood of others.

When the term personhood was recently entered into a computer search engine, 4, 870, 000 results were located. For the purpose of this paper, personhood is defined operationally using Buscaglia's even shorter definition from his book Personhood : The Art of Being Fully Human. The concept of maturity in personhood is "a concept of both being and becoming" (Buscaglia, 1978: 42). To be a fully functioning person requires time to be, to reflect, and to grow at a healthy and nurturing pace. It is Buscaglia's view that "personhood is an inalienable right" (Buscaglia, 1978: 135). To celebrate personhood is to "truly actualize the beauty, strength and meaning of existence" (Buscaglia, 1978:ii).

Each management educator, each university student of management, and each management professional is a human being. Each human being has a limited amount of life, energy, health, talents, knowledge, and skill. No human being can continue to function for very long if sufficient rest, nourishment, and hydration are denied (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). Practicing personhood invites and encourages each professional educator, university student, and management professional to acknowledge, to accept, and to affirm personhood. Each human being who is fully alive has lived through a past of experiences, is in a present reality of being, and has a potential reality in who he or she will yet become.

When individual human beings are not perceived as having value by the society in which the individuals live and work, they experience a "complete disrespect for their personhood" (Buscaglia, 1978:12). When the rights of those who have wealth or position—dependent on technology—are viewed

as more important than taking responsibility for the needs of others, personhood is under attack. When more actions are motivated by fear than by love, personhood is under attack. Technology can paralyze personhood in-depth learning when technology is becoming the master rather than the servant in our learning process. For centuries, competition has been and is a model for action celebrated in sports around the world. To have a winner, there must be losers. Personhood invites a new consideration of collaboration and cooperation as models for action that can result in win-win situations in many life events. Technology should be wisely used to serve students' personhood and driven by a spirit of collaboration which is grounded on honoring each one's personhood.

Mindfulness

When the term mindfulness was recently entered into a computer search engine, 2,560,000 results were located. The operational definition for mindfulness utilized within this paper is from the writing of Jon Kubat-Zinn, "mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness" (Kubat-Zinn, 1990:2). A similar definition is found in the Buddhist tradition. "The mind should always be fully in the present, being mindful of the here and now" (Suzuki, 1956). "Keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality" (Hanh, 1976:11). Mindfulness invites the individual to bring awareness into the present moment and encourages the mind to focus on it but not dwell on it. Mindfulness increases our abilities to discern and be aware of unrecognized experiences and consequences. We can be mindful of our intentions and extend kindnesses to ourselves and others.

Before mindfulness can be practiced, an individual must have acknowledged, accepted, and affirmed personhood. Attention to and awareness of events occurring in the present moment are abilities reserved to a fully functioning human being. Choices are required of the professional educator, the university student, and the management professional who is going to narrow the field of attention to the here and now. Setting some time aside from various technologies and current life practices each day to practice mindfulness has been found to improve the quality of life for research subjects at the University of California Los Angeles and at the University of West Virginia among others. While multi-tasking has been advocated and promoted as increasing efficiency, a number of research studies do not support this view. Multitasking is mechanistic. Carr (2008) said, "The more distracted we become, the less able we are to experience the subtlest, most distinctly human forms of empathy, compassion, and emotion." While much existing and evolving technology can operate on twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week basis, the individual human being cannot. Mindfulness and personhood need deep thoughts because of never-ending becoming.

Mindfulness invites each person to become one's own laboratory, and to become a participant observer of life as it is being lived. Each person can practice a balanced creative interest in the people, places, and events being experienced in each here and now. While many, in this fast paced twenty-first century world, may object to simplifying and slowing the pace of life being lived to any degree, the authors of the paper invite, encourage, and highly advocate this paper's trilogy for the positive benefits of acquiring the skill of mindfulness. Technology can enhance, but not replace, mindfulness and personhood.

Meditation

When the term meditation was recently entered into a computer search engine, 58,500,000 results were located. Meditation is operationally defined for the purpose of this paper as one or more methods of calming and centering a human being so that personhood can be acknowledged, accepted, and affirmed and mindfulness can be experienced for some portion of each day. Many people have considered meditation as a faith-based practice within a variety of religions and cultures over the past years of the world's history. Meditation is not a synonym to prayer. While some people have used the term meditation

within other practices and terminology, the operational definition of meditation utilized within this proposal is not tied to any one faith or cultural tradition.

The Mayo Clinic's internet site describes meditation as, "all share the same goal of inner peace" (www.mayoclinic.com/health/meditation/HQ01070). There are six major ways to meditate:

Guided Meditation—This type sometimes called guided imagery or visualization, with this method of meditation, you form mental images of places and situations you find relaxing. You try to use as many senses as possible, such as smells, sights, sounds, and textures. You may be led through this process by a guide or teacher.

Mantra Meditation —This type requires you silently repeat a calming word, thought, or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts.

Mindfulness Meditation—This type of meditation is based on being mindful, or having an awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions but let them pass without judgment.

Qi gong —This type generally combines meditation, relaxation, physical movement and breathing exercises to restore and maintain balance. Qi gong (chee-kung) is part of traditional Chinese medicine.

Tai chi —This type is a form of gentle Chinese martial arts. In tai chi (Tie-chee), you perform a self-paced series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner while practicing deep breathing.

Yoga—This type requires you to perform a series of postures and controlled breathing exercises to promote a more flexible body and a calm mind. As you move through poses that require balance and concentration, you're encouraged to focus less on your busy day and more on the moment.

While meditation, as a component of Eastern religions, has been practiced for over 5000 years, many of the Western world's people and religions have included meditation or contemplation within religious practice for hundreds of years. During the past one hundred years, a growing number of individuals have looked to meditation as a valuable tool in secular practice as well. For example, organization theorists, Senge and Wheatley (2001) practiced meditations in their learning communities and made a comment about meditations:

Increasingly, we're directly incorporating into our work different practices that have been around for a long time, such as various types of meditation. It started with the work on dialogue. We found that dialogue often involved silence, and so maybe we needed to actually cultivate the capacity to sit in silence. And guess what? That started to look a lot like traditional forms of meditation or contemplation (29).

While the pace of life in recent years has accelerated through transportation, assembly-line manufacturing, and utilization of existing and evolving technologies, each human being still requires rest, nourishment, hydration, clothing, shelter, and many other things each day at the various developmental stages of life. The seasons of the year, the variety of weather possibilities, the time it takes for a seed to germinate and grow to maturity and so many other aspects of life are still functioning at a pace consistent with the date of its origin. Having stores, hospitals, police departments, fire departments, military installations, etc.... operating twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week can't function on any one

human being's efforts. Even though robots may be manufactured, which can function with little fuel and with limited downtime, people are not technological robots.

Personhood, mindfulness, and meditation are not new ideas. However, the terms, as they are operationally defined in this paper, may be unfamiliar. Professional educators, university students, and management professionals are human beings with personhood available to be experienced unless they choose to function as caricature robotic human "doings." Mindfulness is available to each person who is willing to look and listen and smell and feel the here-and-now of life through purposeful attention. The benefits of meditation can be realized without classes and coaches and books and websites. When a person is willing to stop (or at least slow down), to look (with eyes and mind), to listen (with ears and heart), and to breathe (with rhythmical consistency) a sense of calm and inner peace may be attained and the positive results will be multiple homeostasis. This reality can be enhanced if the new and existing technologies are effectively and wisely tempered.

IMPLICATIONS

Meditation and mindfulness allow management educators and professionals to nurture their own personhood and their teammates' personhood when they "uncover, develop and hold onto our unique selves" (Buscaglia, 1978:15) in their process of leading, teambuilding and communicating activities. As they are learning to embrace their beings, be mindful of their inner beings and external environments, and make personal adjustments in the process, they can learn how to master the art of self-renewal in their teams and their organizations and develop their skills of managing complexities and uncertainties in their technologically sophisticated and diversely cultured global working environment.

Mindfulness requires us to be attentive without judgment to what is happening in the present moment. It is a good way to facilitate the leaders to gain greater self-awareness with a minimum amount of negative judgment as they become aware of their immediate thoughts and feelings. Leaders can distinguish their inner conscience from external robotic programming. They can "release from habitually reference patterns of thinking and the explicit re-examination of things normally taken for granted" (Sadler-Smith, and Shefy, 2007). They can practice the double-loop of learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978) and become more reflective practitioners (Schon, 1987; Vaill, 2007). They can affirm their group members' journey of becoming in their personhood and accept that their groups are at different stages of self-awareness and authenticity (Avolio and Wernsing, 2008).

Mindfulness helps leaders become more self-aware of the current flow of thoughts and feelings they are having in the present moment. This meta-cognitive (thinking about the way one thinks) capacity for this kind of awareness allows for greater immediate adjustments and adaptive flexibility. Mindfulness allows leaders to interrupt automatic or habitual reactions and to select alternative pathways of thinking and responses based on insights gleaned from self-reflection (Avolio and Wernsing, 2008:159).

PRACTICE

One author has conducted a workshop on Saturday to help her graduate students discover their values through the sharing of life stories. The sharing process was guided by the principles of personhood, meditation, and mindfulness. These graduate students were employed adults and have more in-depth experiences and opportunity for thought on their moral character and their future than the novice. The workshop was not graded and did not focus on particular functional areas. Students had to write reflection papers after the workshop. The author encouraged students to develop a community of spiritual learners by answering some simple questions about themselves in the introduction phase (Appendix A). Students were very surprised to know their fellows as persons even though they had been in the same academic

cohort for more than one year. When the trusting relationship was established, the instructor asked the students to have moments of silence and meditate their working environment through answering the questions mainly created by Mitroff and Dentoff (1999):

- (i) Please list the top three things that give you the most meaning and purpose in your job.
- (ii) Do you think that you are more able to show your intelligence than your emotions or feelings at your work? Explain your answer.
- (iii) What are the basic values that guide you in making important decisions in your lives?
- (iv) How often are you forced to compromise those values in making important decisions at your work? Why?
- (v) Have you ever had a strong spiritual experience at your work? What was this?
- (vi) Have you ever cried or felt depressed by the nature of your job or your organization? Why?
- (vii) Do you wish to be able to express and develop your complete self at work? Explain your wish.

Later, these students, arranged in teams, shared their ideas about the above questions in class after a short period of meditation. One student described his experience in tears and other students responded. When students and the instructor listened to the strong spiritual experiences recalled from each one's work, we not only reflected on our pre-existing knowledge but also felt being present in a caring community. Some students realized the importance of nurturing their souls in their work and experienced spiritual strength when their professional decisions were related to their personal conscience. Students would like to have more courage to express their personhood in their corporate world. Some students learned how to reconcile the conflicts between their individual values and system values by developing support groups in their workplace, and even choose jobs in which they can express their complete identities. Some learned to prepare themselves to be present and to work in a team with never ending-becoming beings. In the workshop, some found that the practice of being attentive in their listening and speaking enabled them to know, learn, and think together with others. They meditated their new knowledge in their workshop through their reflection papers. These students began "to connect with the sources of their highest creativity as a vehicle of sensing and articulating new knowledge" (Gunlauson and Moore, 2009:173). Through the workshop, many graduate students experienced the art of being present in the dialogues and asserted the importance of ethics and morality in the future development of leadership. Students also learned how to reflect on their paradoxical situations and develop some skills to cope with ambiguities and complexity in their working environment described as a permanent white water situation (Vaill, 1989). Some students learned how to maintain communication with other students and waited for the emergence of new knowledge in the team without putting negative judgment upon each other (Vaill, 2007). Their abilities to be mindful and to be flexible in their communication enabled them to be open each team member and to respect to each one's journey of being and becoming fully human.

When the instructor chose to include the concepts of personhood, mindfulness, meditation in the workshop, there were healthy self-affirmation and preservation of the inner wholeness of human beings (Haring, 1986, Palmer, 1983, 2004). The instructor felt she was truthful to who she was and could be present with her students in the process of transformation learning. Palmer (1998:29) commented:

A vocation that is not mine, no matter how externally valued, does violence to the self in the precise sense that it violates my identity and integrity on behalf of some abstract

norms. When I violate myself, I invariably end up violating people I work with. How many teachers inflict their own pain on their students, the pain that comes from doing what ever was, or no longer is, their true work. (Palmer, 1998: 29)

Wolterstorff (2002:273) reminds management educators and professionals that “if we are true to who we are,” we can “perform works of obedience as acts of gratitude.” We are grateful to our Highest Power and to many people on our journey toward being fully human when we increase our awareness of our being and becoming. We are also grateful for many people and life events. We will tend to forgive and trust more in our professional practices.

Management educators must develop their students to master the skills of dealing with the contingencies that cannot be foreseen by our engineering, technology and planning. Students must develop new ways of knowing, learning, and working together with other people coming from different cultural backgrounds. When future management leaders practice mindfulness and meditation, they are more likely to be thoughtfully engaged in what they do and how they do it. Leaders can become more sensitive to the context and learn to practice the art of constructive dialogues with diverse global stakeholders. They can work collectively, reflectively, and spiritually wiser through the realization of their personhood and the development of a better institution for increasing realization of other individual’s personal potential.

CONCLUSION

The authors of this paper advocate that personhood, mindfulness, and meditation is a trilogy of three contributing factors to the effective utilization of technology in management education and in professional management practice. Each management educator, each university level management student, and each management professional, is a human being. As a human being, he or she possesses personhood which can be acknowledged, accepted, and affirmed or which can be denied, rejected, and devalued. It is hoped that each human being will make the choice to acknowledge his or her personhood. When it has been acknowledged, personhood can then be accepted and affirmed as each life option is considered and acted upon.

Each management educator, each university level management student, and each management professional who has chosen to acknowledge, accept, and affirm personhood, has the opportunity to exercise mindfulness within daily life. Each life option encounters can be considered in the here and now or can be considered as part of a hyperactively fast-paced, technologically-enhanced blur in which focus is impossible. It is hoped that each human being will recognize that he or she is just one person among the many currently sharing this world. In this recognition, he or she may choose to attend to those options that are truly in each here and now as it is encountered. The authors firmly believe that implementation of this proposal can address and hopefully solve one of the important unsolved problems in education and develop students to be responsible and authentic leaders. Technology, used wisely is not versus, but enhancement of the practice of personhood, mindfulness, and meditation in our management education!

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APPENDIX A—DEVELOP A COMMUNITY OF SPIRITUAL LEARNERS

Interview 1: Questions I thought you'd never ask!

1. Your first name is _____
2. A nickname you have been called is _____? Why?
3. Name something you have kept for a long, long time _____
4. Name three qualities you look for a friend _____
5. When you are feeling down, how do you pamper yourself _____
6. Name one thing you would like to change about yourself _____
7. What bugs you about some people? _____
8. What are you doing when you "lose" track of time? _____
9. What is something no one would know about you, just by looking at you? _____