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EMBODIED LEADERSHIP THROUGH PRESENCING

Unlocking Intelligence in the BodyMind

Colin Skelton

Embodied Design Practitioner

Abstract: This article explores the vital role of embodied awareness in presencing leadership, challenging the enduring cultural bias that privileges intellectualism over the body's innate intelligence in how we understand leadership and human potential. Drawing on theatre-making traditions and contemporary leadership practices, it introduces the concept of dual intelligence via the embodied and conceptual, examining how their integration enhances presence, adaptability, and leadership effectiveness. Central to this exploration are three channels of sensory awareness: exteroception, proprioception, and interoception. Through examples from both theatre and leadership, the article shows how cultivating embodied awareness can result in more authentic, responsive, and impactful leadership. Emphasis is placed on centering and other regular embodiment practices as tools for deepening somatic intelligence and sustaining presence. The article further considers imagination as a bridge between conceptual and embodied knowing, proposing that when imaginative capacity is grounded in sensory awareness, it can catalyze both personal and collective transformation. By confronting the prevailing bias towards intellect, this work advocates for a more integrated, sensory-based approach to leadership. Particularly, one that builds resilience and capacity for leading holistically in today's complex and evolving environments.

Keywords: Embodied leadership, presencing awareness, embodied sensing, embodied intelligence, embodied storytelling, relational leadership, somatic awareness, centering practice.

I. Introduction

Many theatre-making traditions create and express by working with the performer's somatic landscape. The genres of theatre that have inspired me in my creative journey align with this tradition.

I've spent countless hours over many years in theatre rehearsal spaces, including in Tokyo, Moscow, Bali, India, and across Europe, diving into the felt sense of my body. It has been a long, ongoing process of slowly shedding layers of expressive inhibition and learning to trust the wisdom beneath the surface. My path brought me especially to the rich, ensemble-based traditions of Asia and Russia, and these experiences were nothing short of life-changing.

Together with collaborators, following movement scripts or exercise directions, we allowed our bodies to explore through physicality and movement, learning to listen and respond to the information we perceived. In these contexts, we developed by playing with ideas and concepts in conjunction with sensory experiences. By paying attention to our internal and embodied landscapes, we laid a strong foundation for exploration, reflection, and creative discovery. We engaged in physical conversations with our bodies through gesture, sound, and sensation, while moving in new and unexpected ways to seek novel expressions.

I discovered that when we filter questions, conversations, ideas, data, and stories through embodied channels, our bodies reveal hidden insights, wisdom, and knowledge. This discovery eventually led me to wonder, many years later, if embodied awareness could unlock such creative potential in theatre, what might it offer to leadership practice and the experience of becoming present?

A performer's deep engagement with embodiment, in the collaborative dynamic of the theatre ensemble, offers valuable insights for presencing leadership. By harnessing the body's wisdom, leaders can cultivate authentic, adaptive, and impactful practices. This think-piece will explore these concepts more deeply, examining how embodied awareness can transform the leadership experience.

Presencing leadership invites a deeper orientation to the body as a source of wisdom, one that includes subtle intelligences arising through stillness, sensation, and relational immediacy. Theatre-making embodies many of these principles: sensing into the moment, suspending habitual responses, and responding from enlivened awareness. Just as performers remain attuned to themselves and others through the immediacy of the body, leaders can cultivate similar somatic skills for more adaptive and impactful leadership. This applies to both the self and social dimension

of leadership.

Working with an ensemble in a theatre-devising tradition can be highly stimulating of one's senses, curating deep focus, and often conjuring a profound sense of momentary connection. With this understanding of the creative process, I have been exploring the convergence of theatre, creativity, and social innovation in various contexts for the last 20 years.

As an embodied art form, theatre is inherently preoccupied with what the famous Polish Theatre director Grotowski called "*the closeness of the living organism*." To discover aesthetic nuances in expression, performers incorporate an awareness of their bodies in space, together with feelings and sensations, into their artistic choices. Intuition is also highly developed through sensory discernment, playing a crucial role in how performers improvise or respond to different audiences and each other. This heightened sensitivity can lead to organic and unique relationships that emerge in the moment, despite existing scripts or staging, allowing for dynamic interactions that are attuned to the present moment. Just as actors rely on their physical instrument and intuitive senses to guide their performance, outside of theatre contexts, leaders can cultivate similar abilities to respond with agility and authenticity in complex and ever-changing environments. This integration of intuition, body awareness, and collaboration can enhance both individual and group performance.

Consider the parallels in theatre-making dynamics with performances in social innovation. In theatre, the individual performer needs to develop a personal creative sensory competency before and in conjunction with the activation of the collective, shared body of the ensemble. Can this also be true for social innovation leadership, where the individual, personal dimensions of the sensory body are a part of the collective social 'body'? In working intentionally with immediate experience, we could discover aesthetic nuances and competencies concerning self and others and begin to think with our bodies, *and* with our minds. Embodiment is not about rejecting the marvels of our intellect. Instead, this cultivation extends our minds into the extra-neural landscapes of our bodies and beyond. This allows for intentionality and conscious awareness of undesirable habits and reactions, bringing greater choice in action, and ultimately sharper self-leadership.

Before proceeding, it feels important to initially clarify what we mean by 'embodiment' and 'presence.' Embodied leadership may be understood as a holistic approach that values the role of our physical and emotional experiences in shaping how we lead. Presence, in this context, invites us to engage with the moment, which is only possible through the felt sense of the body. In this way, we can connect with others with authenticity and refined attention. Taken together, these concepts highlight the integration of mind, body, and emotion in cultivating a leadership style that is both grounded and responsive. Throughout this exploration, and especially towards the end of the article,

theoretical insights will be grounded in practical applications, including specific centering practices and embodiment exercises that can be integrated into daily leadership practice.

II. Thinking Outside the Brain

The premise of this article is that our bodies hold insights that, when cultivated and integrated, can enhance personal and social transformation. Through consistent practice, embodied awareness complements intellectual development, offering more responsive and meaningful outcomes. Being fully present with oneself shapes how we show up for others, which is the nature of embodied leadership.

This piece also identifies a blind spot, a persistent bias, regarding how intelligence is understood and cultivated. Two seemingly distinct yet interrelated forms of intelligence introduced are embodied awareness and conceptual awareness. Merging these two forms of knowing - conceptual and embodied - can deepen our sense of self and empower our embodied wisdom. The opportunity to practice sensory awareness in every moment is highlighted, enabling the effective application of embodiment skills when needed. One grounding practice that will be mentioned is called ‘centering,’ where it is important to note the pragmatic distinction between practice and application. Centering, as a grounding and rebalancing practice, is considered a gateway to a deeper somatic opening and a foundation for impactful habits in embodied presencing.

The role of imagination as a faculty of intellectual awareness is also briefly explored. The felt-sensory experience of an imagined future, through present-moment awareness, is a playground for powerful collaboration between our intellect and sensation. With increased embodiment skills, individuals become equipped to discover the creative spaces between embodied and intellectual exploration. These spaces are pockets of liminal thresholds that bridge the dimensions of our extended intelligence in space and time. The article poses the question of whether new ways of learning and innovating can be co-created. By nurturing conscious connections between intellectual and embodied experience, we can develop a more holistic understanding and practice of presencing leadership.

III. Dissolving the Intellectual Bias

Since Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am,’ Western culture has prized intellect over sensory awareness, reinforcing a split between mind and body. Despite efforts to include embodied awareness, cognitive habits often dominate, leading to shallow listening, over-talking, and reactivity. In response, science author Annie Murphy Paul asserts that “Our pronounced bias in favour of brain-bound thinking is long-standing and well entrenched - but a bias is all that it is, and one that can no longer be supported or sustained. The future lies in thinking outside the brain.” (Paul, 2021, *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* | June 2025 | Vol. 2, No. 1

pp. 14).

While our minds interpret the world, our bodies shape how we feel and respond. Even when we value the idea of embodied intelligence, ingrained thought patterns often override it. The intellect tends to dominate, narrowing the landscape of information available to our conscious minds. This is not a flaw, rather, it's how our nervous systems keep us safe and efficient. They detect patterns in our environment and streamline our responses by relegating familiar reactions to the unconscious. This saves energy, but it also means many of our interpretations and actions are simply habits on repeat. To shift this default mode, we need to attune to the body's extra-neural wisdom, the subtle cues and sensations that arise beneath conscious thought. When we bring awareness to these signals, we begin to rewire our nervous systems, creating new pathways for perception, choice, and action into the future.

Developing embodied awareness provides an essential counterbalance to a head-centric orientation. Recognizing where this bias persists in our experience helps us overcome its limitations. Embodied awareness cannot be conjured up by the mind alone, as intellectual understanding does not lead to embodied wisdom. However, our intellect, which is undeniably remarkable and essential, plays a crucial role in guiding us toward this embodied awareness. By intentionally integrating embodiment with the capabilities of our minds, we can open new channels for perceiving, reflecting, and acting that were previously unavailable. Embodied leadership incorporates physical awareness, helping leaders self-regulate, manage their state, communicate nonverbally, and build resilience. By becoming more mindfully aware of their internal landscape, leaders can manage their emotions more effectively, make better decisions, and communicate more authentically. This, in turn, fosters trust and clarity. Practices like mindfulness and conscious movement enable leaders to stay centered under pressure, respond to diversity, and adapt to complexity. In team settings, shared embodiment generates collective energy and alignment, making the group more engaged, cohesive, and resilient. This approach connects the mind, body, and environment, enhancing collaboration effectiveness. Integrating embodiment, therefore, becomes a powerful practice for advanced forms of personal and collective leadership. In other words, leaders should intentionally practice these foundational embodiment skills to consciously apply their benefits.

Sensory attention, as a practice in embodied intelligence, allows us to notice and shift unwanted habits. It's only when we become aware of the tendencies that unconsciously shape our thoughts and actions that we gain the power to change them. In theatre work, these conditioned habits often show up in the body in familiar movements or holding patterns. Maybe it's a clenched fist, a swaying arm, or a tight jaw that kicks in during a certain moment or to a particular character or scene partner. The first step is simply bringing awareness to these unconscious patterns. Then,

through breath, or even just softening the focus, we can begin to let the tension dissolve. A clenched fist becomes a loose hand. A tight jaw finds space to release. These adjustments might seem small, but they often open the door to a different, sometimes more honest, more impactful response in the moment. As Anthony de Mello once said, “What you are aware of, you are in control of; what you are not aware of is in control of you. You are always a slave to what you’re not aware of.” (1990, pp. 13)

Emotions, which arise from sensations, are our predispositions for action. Without slowing down to observe, listen, feel, and sense more deeply, our interactions with the world may remain stuck in old, unconscious, and reactive interpretations and behaviours. Deepening our personal embodiment practice nurtures new lenses of perception, which can benefit the collective ‘body’s ability to listen more deeply and intentionally change reactive patterns. In this way, our emotional responses to the world become less reactive. In theatre, we are constantly training our primary instrument of expression - our bodies - to be attuned to the reality of our immediate surroundings and the presence of others, enabling us to ‘act’ with intention and choice. Mindfulness of sensations and emotions cultivates an enhanced personal leadership presence, which naturally extends into broader social interactions, and therefore also the physical spaces we occupy.

IV. The Extended Mind

While our main focus here is on embodiment in presencing leadership, it's worth expanding our thinking to include the concept of The Extended Mind (Murphy Paul, 2021), which broadens the way we understand cognition. Murphy Paul’s earlier quote that “the future lies in thinking outside the brain” points to how aspects of our physicality, such as breath, movement, gesture, and emotional state, actively shape our cognitive abilities. This challenges the traditional view that cognition is solely confined to the brain and instead advocates for a more integrated approach into the future, where the mind extends into both the body and the environment. By adopting this view, we move away from relying solely on intellectual processes, opening up new pathways for deeper, more holistic engagement in leadership. In my own work, this shift has helped me navigate uncertainty with more flexibility and presence, qualities I see leaders increasingly needing in today’s ever-changing and complex world.

Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), developed by Arawana Hayashi with Otto Scharmer, brings the Extended Mind into practice. As part of Theory U, SPT activates the collective body through movement and awareness, bridging conceptual understanding and embodied experience to support adaptive, relational leadership. In SPT, the social field is activated by directing attention to the collective body, allowing participants to sense and shift underlying social dynamics through

physical movement and presence. It bridges the gap between intellectual understanding and embodied experience, demonstrating the effectiveness of embodied approaches. By integrating sensory, emotional, and rational awareness with movement, SPT helps develop leadership capacities that support adaptability and the ability to fluidly navigate between intellectual and felt experiences. In this sense, Social Presencing Theatre is a perfect example of The Extended Mind in action. As we explore further, we'll look at how embodiment functions as a vital expression of intelligence.

V. Clarifying *Embodiment*

Embodiment encompasses a diverse range of practices, methods, and techniques that can serve personal and collective presencing. Embodied awareness involves developing a vocabulary for the layers of sensations we are perceiving, and the felt sense of who we are, which is arising moment by moment. Actively investigating our sensory experiences with the world around us and taking appropriate action from these insights is a form of embodied intelligence.

Our bodies perceive through aesthetic, sensorial, emotional, and experiential knowledge, often overlooked in favor of intellect. This intelligence, though rarely acknowledged, offers powerful insight when we learn to listen. Neuroscientist and embodiment coach Amanda Blake (2018, pp. 43) points out that we:

Tend to dismiss our sensations, urges, hunches, and gut feelings as unimportant or unreliable. We treat our bodies as vehicles to get to the next meeting, objects to polish for the next party, or machines that we hire an expert to fix. Rarely do we consider that our bodies might have wisdom worth listening for.

Accessing this wisdom can significantly influence our perception of, and response to the world around us. By honing an ability to feel more, we can cultivate state of the art system sensing abilities, as coined by Otto Scharmer. We can then apply these skills to the practice of social presencing leadership, but not from a place of intellect dominance, but through an expanding range of sensory tools. Another nugget of wisdom from Amanda Blake is that we do not see the world as it is, but rather as we are. Our embodied state fundamentally shapes our perception and understanding of the world, as our biology influences how we experience and interpret reality. As such, embodied intelligence works with a set of concrete embodiment skills that can be practiced, developed, and applied to enhance our social innovation efforts.

VI. Towards Body Mind

Cognitive science emphasizes the concept of the "distributed brain," which recognizes the ongoing neural conversation between the brain and the body (Blake, 2018). These connections run from the tips of our fingers and toes up to the brain and back again, forming a dynamic network of communication. Physiologically, the brain and body are interdependent, and each relies on the other to function effectively. Yet these connections aren't fixed. They can be shaped. Through intentional practice, we can move beyond automatic patterns and cultivate what Amanda Blake calls "neural agility", the capacity to consciously intervene in our nervous system's default settings to create new, more adaptive responses. In this view, our intelligence isn't confined to the brain; it's distributed throughout our nervous and sensory-motor systems. Building on this, Lakoff & Johnson (1999, pp. 18) offer a powerful insight into how deeply our reasoning itself is grounded in our physical experience:

The mind arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experiences. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment... Thus, to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanism of neural binding.

The mind and body are so intertwined that Cartesian dualism can only be rejected. In life and work, bringing 'head and heart' together, both in practice and understanding, may be the next frontier for social presencing and innovation.

With regular practice and application, we become better able to build conscious bridges between the scaffolding of our minds and the subjective experience of our bodies. As we build these connections, so too do we lay the foundations for powerful social collaboration. This is a form of deep learning, as Otto Scharmer has called it, where we transform consciousness to change a system at scale. (2009)

In theatre, the rehearsal space is a laboratory for bridging intellect and sensation. Over time, performers develop neural agility and the ability to shift fluidly between analysis and action, thought and sensation, becoming a bridge into a more refined awareness of both mind and body.

In the rehearsal space, we always began with some form of embodiment practice. This involved different types of movement across the space, syncing with breath cues and visualization exercises, all aimed at grounding the mind-body connection right from the start. Only after activating these connections would we engage the mind with reflection and discussion. But we never stayed in the mental realm for too long. We would always come back to the body, exploring through movement and sensation.

In theatre, the intended relationship between mind and body is balanced, allowing practitioners to move easily between the two. This skill can be honed through training, and for performers, the ability to shift between these realms becomes second nature. Similarly, in presenting leadership, the capacity to toggle between intellectual processing and embodied awareness can be cultivated. It's crucial to note, though, that we're not advocating for the mind to be sidelined or rejected. Instead, we seek to expand our leadership capacity by incorporating both intellectual understanding and a deeper exploration of our embodied reality.

As we embrace the integration of intellectual and embodied awareness, we move toward the idea of dual intelligence, an approach that values both intellectual and embodied knowledge. This shift enables us to tap into a richer, more adaptive form of leadership that bridges the conceptual and sensory domains, potentially creating a more expansive and flexible leadership practice.

VII. Dual Intelligence

Amanda Blake identifies conceptual and embodied awareness as distinct yet complementary dimensions of self-awareness. Conceptual awareness engages the mind, thinking about the self through language, logic, and symbolic and abstract thought. Embodied awareness, by contrast, is the 'self', experienced as a body, in the present moment, through sensation, emotion, and creative action. Bridging these two forms of intelligence through practical experimentation and collaboration, much like in theatre practice, expands our capacity for integrated personal and social presencing leadership. This expanded intelligence offers a broader lens, accessing more of what the world and our bodies reveal, thus widening the range of choices available to us. Crucially, it is through direct, embodied experience that this deeper wisdom emerges, ready to be shared, reflected on, and integrated toward meaningful outcomes.

Our embodied state, which has a resonant frequency experienced as a quality of presence, determines our resonance in the world and our ability to perceive and act upon it. Ginny Whitelaw (2020) emphasizes that resonance is a fact, but *how* we resonate is a choice that depends on our state of embodiment. She goes on to explain that our nervous systems are shaped by the experiences and interactions we've accumulated over time, and that we "see the world as we are". Our bodies essentially become the lens through which we interpret the world. So, when we intentionally make shifts or try to reshape this lens, it changes the way we perceive reality. This shift in perception plays a crucial role in leadership presence: our embodied presence and resonance act as a signal we send out into the world, influencing how we impact both ourselves and those around us. By actively engaging in this process, we can expand our intelligence and our ability to act from a more grounded, mindful place.

VIII. Opening Channels of Sensory Awareness

Our physical and sensorimotor capacities are closely tied to our cognitive processes. The way we inhabit our bodies shapes how we perceive, interpret, and respond to the world. By developing embodiment skills, through focused sensory attention, we can disrupt habitual patterns of thought and behaviour, raising our awareness threshold and creating space for intentional action.

Three primary channels of sensory awareness support this work: *Exteroception* involves the five senses of touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. These evolved for survival, yet when consciously honed, they offer a wealth of hidden information about the present moment. Attuning to what we see, hear, and sense externally increases our receptivity to what is.

Proprioception helps us locate and orient our bodies in space. It influences our sense of self, boundaries, and belonging. Through gesture, movement, and metaphor, proprioception supports the embodied expression of how we relate to ourselves, others, and our environment. Social Presencing Theatre exemplifies how this can be applied to leadership development.

Interoception is perhaps the least utilized of the sensory channels, and the type of sensing where small calibrations can lead to the most profound shifts. Sensations, feelings and emotions, though confined to the present moment, often arise in response to mental elements such as memories, thoughts, ideas, fears, expectations, and imaginings from the past, present, and future. Sensations generated throughout the body send signals to the brain, which are then merged with other streams of information into a single moment of our present condition, creating a sense of "how I feel" in the moment. So, while we typically think of the brain as guiding the body, the body also guides us through an array of sensory cues. Bringing awareness to the sensory landscape of our body and considering how this information can be useful in maintaining internal balance and more accurate interpretations of sensory information about the world is a form of embodied intelligence.

Although all three channels of sensation are in constant communication with each other, understanding and honing awareness within each channel can be a useful approach to utilizing these zones of embodied intelligence in social presencing work. Think about actors and performers in a theatre-making process. Training involves learning how to simultaneously tune into both internal (interoceptive) and external (exteroceptive) cues, all while being aware of how their bodies move and position themselves in space (proprioception). For example, an actor needs to be in touch with their internal sensations, like their breath or heartbeat (interoception), while also staying alert to the external environment, like the energy of the audience or the interactions with fellow actors (exteroception). At the same time, they must stay aware of their body's movements and alignment, adjusting to the space and other performers (proprioception). Theatre is a deeply embodied practice, and for the work to have a real impact, all three channels of awareness must come together. An

actor adjusting posture (proprioception), emotions (interoception), and audience response (exteroception) embodies all three channels in real time. Similarly, leaders can develop this integrated sensory awareness to become more attuned, responsive, and grounded in their leadership.

In social presencing leadership, a similar strategy can make a leader more present and responsive. Like actors tuning into the energy of a scene, leaders who stay aware of their inner signals and external cues can respond with more clarity, connection, and confidence. By developing this embodied awareness, leaders can make more thoughtful decisions, create real connections with their teams, and stay agile when facing challenges or opportunities. The practices of embodied intelligence in theatre-making offer valuable ideas and insights for leadership, helping leaders become more connected, mindful, and impactful in their work. As we become more in tune with our bodies, we also become better at understanding and making sense of the world around us.

IX. Embodiment as Practice

Presencing, as a practice of embodiment, can be seen as a form of holistic intelligence, integrating intellect with the wisdom of the body. To fully sense the social field, as described by Otto Scharmer (2007), requires the patient and collaborative effort of deepening our capacity to feel beyond just presencing at specific stages, such as the bottom of the 'U'. Building on this foundation, Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) extends the notion of social sensing into presencing as a way of being. Instead, we can view every moment, regardless of where or how we work, as an opportunity for embodied presencing. This allows us to gradually bring previously unconscious or overlooked aspects of the mind-body connection into awareness, and explore how they may be useful in exploring innovation questions.

Establishing a consistent embodiment practice builds empathy, listening, and responsiveness, key traits in both personal and social leadership. This beautiful invitation to sensation from a journal entry by author Jeanette LeBlanc (2018, pp. 3) serves as a poignant reminder. I have included this here as the poetic aesthetic offers a compelling invitation to return to the felt sense of our bodies.

Be gentle. Pay attention. Offer purposeful healing. Seek Equilibrium. Unfreeze, slowly.
Stretch yourself out into the world. Let your eyes calibrate to this new light and notice how it caresses the lines and curves and soft and hard of you. Allow your mouth to twist and stumble around new shapes. Be so very sensory. Notice everything. From every angle. The way your bones feel. The way you orient to space and time. Invite your whole being into this new way of living, into the totality and wholeness of it. Let it be strange and uncomfortable

and painful and stiff. Let it be magical and novel and unfamiliar and entirely wonderful. Follow the whispers where they lead.

X. Presencing as a Form of Centring

Centering enhances emotional regulation, self-awareness, and resilience, qualities essential for grounded leadership and collaborative presencing. It allows leaders to shift their embodied state and connect more intentionally with emerging possibilities. Furthermore, centring can mitigate physiological and mental stress, which undermines our ability to be creative and perceive possibilities. Stress is anti-creative.

The numerous benefits of centring positively impact our leadership resonance and extend to the social domain, influencing the quality of our collective presencing. Centring is a crucial practice for leaders seeking self-mastery in what can be called creative self-leadership. By practicing centring, we become better equipped to access our highest potential, leading to more responsive creativity in sensing into the emerging future within the collective field.

Various centring practices can be combined for significant benefits when practiced regularly. However, it's important to distinguish between centring-in-practice and centring-in-action. Our bodies are wired to respond in certain ways under stress, so to change our body's response, we need to cultivate state regulation skills during non-stressful times, so we can apply them effectively in real work and high-stakes situations that trigger stress. Therefore, a regular practice of centring is needed to reap its benefits. However, even a few seconds of centring can influence your internal state to be more present, receptive, and alert.

This aligns closely with what I've experienced in theatre: that movement, breath, and physical intention don't just express feeling, they create feeling. By shifting posture, breath rhythm, or muscular tension, we access entirely new emotional and relational possibilities. Claire Dale, a leading researcher in the field of *Physical Intelligence*, the study of how bodily movement, posture, breath, and visualization influence our neurochemical state and performance, offers insights that give language to what actors have long known in practice - that the body can lead the mind. Practices like breathwork, movement, and visualization don't just help us feel grounded, they also shift our internal chemistry. As she writes, "We are able to shift and change the levels of key neurotransmitters and hormones in the body and brain through how we move, how we breathe, how we visualise situations and engage, how we create relationships..." (Dale & Wesson, 2020, pp. 11).

This scientific lens complements the experiential insights from theatre, affirming that embodiment practices not only influence our subjective state but can physiologically prepare us for presence, decision-making, and creative leadership. Similarly, leaders can apply these principles by

using intentional movement or breathwork before high-stakes interactions, such as meetings, presentations, or negotiations, to regulate internal state and enhance clarity, calm, and interpersonal resonance.

In the theatre rehearsal space, while we may not always use the term *centering*, or even *embodiment*, for that matter, we regularly practice bringing our awareness back to the present state of our bodies. Centering builds the capacity for discernment of attention, creates space for refined reflection, and often serves as preparation for action.

I'll never forget a moment sitting cross-legged on the rehearsal floor, focusing on my breath to ease my nerves before presenting a difficult role, playing someone on the edge of madness. As I sat there quietly, trying to gather myself, my teacher passed by and simply said, "I'm glad you came today." I believe that in witnessing me *gathering myself*, he too was affected, becoming just a little calmer and present, himself.

The joy of centring is that it's available in every moment, wherever you are or whatever you're doing. Centring in action takes the practice beyond stillness and into the flow of everyday experience. It is the art of remaining centred in the moving body while simultaneously orienting toward what we care about, what holds meaning, purpose, or value for us in the world. This quality of attention allows us to stay connected to our inner steadiness even as we move, speak, decide, and relate. Theatre offers a compelling example of centring in action, as the activation of bodies moving in conjunction with creative awareness is presence in motion: a felt coherence between body, intention, and action. In this way, centring becomes not only a practice of returning to ourselves, but a way of simultaneously staying connected to world around us, anchored and aligned, as we engage with the unfolding and relational moment.

Try some of the following suggestions to build your centring practice. Start with mindfulness as the foundation. Bring your attention to the present moment without judgment. Notice sensations in your body, your breath, and the environment around you. Focus your attention to be objective, simply notice feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations without needing to change them. Incorporate breathwork, such as deep belly breathing or alternate nostril breathing, to calm your nervous system. Use your senses to anchor yourself in the here and now, tuning into what you can see, hear, feel, and smell, and become more attuned to your body's inner signals.

Body scans are another helpful tool. Slowly bring awareness to different parts of your body, inviting release where you find tension or discomfort. Practice grounding techniques. You might stand barefoot on the earth, press your feet firmly into the floor, or visualize roots extending from your body deep into the ground. These practices help connect you to both your body and the earth beneath you. Engage in mindful movement. Theatre exercises, still-image work, gesture-based

exploration, dance, or yoga can all help you develop a deeper, embodied connection to yourself. Physical constellations, which are spatial arrangements that bring ideas or emotions into form, are also powerful tools to turn conversation into embodied experience. Another potent centring tool is reconnecting with what matters most to you. What do you care about deeply? What are you committed to? Some people find that asking a question, and using inquiry itself as a centring practice, opens valuable insight and presence. Try some of these centring questions:

Who am I, and how is that embodied here?

What has meaning to me, ultimately, and here? Why am I doing this?

What do I most value, ultimately, and here?

What do I serve, ultimately, and here?

For social centring, explore shifting the 'I' to 'We' when collaborating and remain curious about how this changes the essence of the inquiry. As the inquiry shifts from personal to the collective, can you notice how the personal body merges with the social body? Who are we and how is that embodied here? What has meaning to us? These kinds of questions invite a deeper exploration of the embodied nature of our relationships.

Cultivate self-compassion and be kind to yourself as you practice centring, remembering that it takes time and practice. Set aside regular time for practice, integrate it into your daily routine, and be patient with yourself as you progress at your own pace. Experiment with different approaches and find what works best for you. With consistent practice and attention, you can cultivate a deeper sense of centred presence and enhance your overall well-being and leadership resonance. Centring well, and remembering to stay under pressure, takes practice. Developing a regular centring habit will greatly benefit the social domain of work, where collaborators can co-sense and co-centre around issues being addressed, and appropriately incorporate these insights into their creative innovations. A centring practice will enable stronger metaphoric bridges between head and heart and between body and mind. With this foundational practice, we begin to become co-creators of our shared future.

XI. Imaginative Sensing

As we cultivate our sensory awareness, it's important to embrace experimentation and play, harnessing the growing intelligence within us. While embodied awareness is limited to the present moment, imagination, which is part of conceptual awareness, lets us transcend space and time. Through the imaginative vehicle of our mind, we can recollect the past, reflect on the realities of the present, and envision possibilities for the emerging future. This almost magical capacity allows us to conjure up realities, outcomes, situations, and futures that do not yet exist. However, these projected

imaginings do not vanish into thin air. Rather, they have a sensory influence on our current state of embodiment, thanks to the role of mirror neurons at play. Our minds do not know the difference between our flights of imagination and what is real. In other words, the ability to discern sensations and related emotions that are stimulated through future casting, through our felt-sense in the present moment, allows us to physically and consciously sense the emerging "field of the future" in the here and now. This is a profound idea where the head and heart merge.

For example, when I imagine myself as an old man living a simple yet empowered life, surrounded by nature and a community of friends, my sensorial experience comes alive. I can hear the sound of the ocean's waves, see the vivid green hues of nature, and feel supported and enabled to do work aligned with my purpose. I feel a warm softening and an expanded sensation in my chest, my breath deepens, and my jaw relaxes. I smile.

Expanding on this idea, imagine a collective of people imagining together, merging sensory experience with the faculty of the mind. Strategically connecting the intelligence of body and mind to deepen understanding, collaboration, and a shared vision for the future is simply a matter of shifting attention. Imagining possible futures and bringing them into our consciously felt sensorial experience requires deeper sensing into our somatic field. If we can imagine it, we can sense it. Applied to the collective community, this becomes a powerful, practical technology.

XII. Closing Reflections: Deepening our Shared Humanity

Embodied intelligence is vital not only as an individual pursuit but also as a foundation for holistic, integrated, and sustainable collaboration. Deepening our sensory awareness sharpens our thinking and unlocks extended cognitive capacities, enriching the quality of our social innovations. For leaders engaged in presencing, this means learning to perceive through the body's deeper intelligence. By softening ingrained cognitive biases, we create space for more grounded, attuned ways of knowing.

When the rational mind collaborates with the felt sense of our body, a bridge forms between conceptual understanding and lived experience. By aligning to this inner coherence, we heighten our sensitivity to emergence and deepen our relational presence. Orienting from the body's intelligence allows us to attune more fully to the present and connect more meaningfully with others. This embodied awareness enhances our responsiveness and supports a leadership that resonates with clarity and care.

Throughout this article, we've seen how integrating embodied and conceptual awareness provides a fuller, more dynamic foundation for leadership practice. The three channels of sensory intelligence - exteroception, proprioception, and interoception - offer practical gateways into this integration. Imagination, when intentionally paired with somatic awareness, becomes a powerful ally,

allowing us to sense future possibilities as tangible, felt realities that shape our experience of the present.

Presencing leadership is ultimately a shift in being. Like theatre-making, it opens new possibilities for creativity, connection, and transformation through the convergence of mind and body. In this way, presencing becomes a path to becoming more deeply human together, creating the conditions for collective transformation to take root, and, ultimately, for a theatre of connection to emerge.

XIII. Works Cited

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COLIN SKELTON, MADA is a creativity facilitator, applied theatre maker, and storytelling consultant who works at the intersection of strategic storytelling, design thinking, and physical intelligence. Having travelled to over 50 countries, he brings over 25 years of global experience, helping leaders and teams communicate with impact, collaborate with purpose, and show up with presence in a rapidly changing world. Rooted in his background in theatre-making, including devising and directing in traditions from Tokyo and Moscow to Bali, India, and Europe, Colin brings a deeply embodied and culturally informed approach to leadership, learning, and innovation. His work is influenced by the *Extended Mind* framework and grounded in contemporary neuroscience, exploring how intelligence is distributed across body, environment, and relationships. Now based in Johannesburg, Colin supports clients across sectors to craft strategic narratives, build high-trust teams, and develop creative, resilient leadership. He integrates theatre practices, somatic intelligence, and experiential learning to help organizations practice creativity, shift culture, and cultivate human connection.

Contact: colin@moveyourthinking.co.za