

LEADING WITH INTEGRATION IN MIND

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What is it that leaders are leading? People? Profits and results? Processes? Do they lead toward empowerment or power? Should they respect diversity and encourage the sometimes messy complexity that arises from its connections; or should they appreciate order and advocate conformity to standards? Is there really one best way to lead, or do different people need different forms of leadership? Perhaps, since we find leaders in every human sphere and in most human interactions, we all need varying forms of leadership in differing contexts. If that is true, can we still define any common factors found in optimal leadership, in all its manifestations?

Even the question of who is a leader has a multi-faceted answer. Sometimes a leader is in a designated leadership role (e.g., CEO or director), and sometimes a leader emerges from a group interaction, or in a specific situation. Often some aspects of leadership are shared among all the people involved, whether this *pervasive leadership* (Love & Estanek, 2004) is recognized or not. In all relational professions, like coaching, healing, or educating, practitioners are called upon to exercise leadership toward growth and health. And we are all challenged daily to be leaders to ourselves and people around us, when we regulate nervous systems and support human potential through conversations and actions.

In the political sphere, we clearly have some contradictory ideas about what kind of leadership humanity needs to face upcoming global crises. In moments big and small, the key question of the day is: can we define and implement ways to lead that are supported by what we know scientifically about human and relational well-being—ways that promote health for people, communities, institutions, organizations, and the planet? Using the lens of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB), we see the answer: Yes.

THE IPNB LENS ON LEADERSHIP

The growing field of IPNB creates an incredibly useful meta-framework for relational endeavors, including leadership. By looking through the lens of IPNB, we are guided to reflect upon and within ourselves and our relationships, organizations, and beyond—recognizing these different realms of lived experience as emergent complex systems with an interconnected living flow of energy and information moving among them. The authors apply IPNB in leadership, consulting, coaching, psychotherapy, training, and teaching. Information for this article has been gathered from our original work in applying IPNB to leadership and organizations, our review of other existing applications of IPNB to leadership, and

conversations with several Advisory Board members of the Global Association for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies (GAINS) about their current thoughts on leadership.

One of the overarching principles of IPNB is *integration*, grounded in complexity science. Defined as “the linkage of differentiated parts” (Siegel, 2017, p. 253), and considered to be both a verb (integrating/integrative) and a noun (integrated), IPNB underscores the importance of integration across all dimensions of human experience (Goleman & Siegel, 2016; Siegel, 2012a). Considering this, we propose that leaders take the pulse of integration in the systems they lead. Optimally, this information would inform the direction of their attention, intentions, and energy. For example, they may decide to influence or direct individual and group efforts toward integration, or to hold space for discomfort or uncertainty, fostering adaptive changes a leader observes emerging in and among individuals, teams, and the organization itself. The essence of leading emergence is described by Pat Ogden, founder of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy and GAINS Advisory Board member, in this excerpt from a longer reflection on the commonalities between therapists and leaders:

The term ‘organicity’, drawn from the work of Gregory Bateson (1979), conveys that each living system has its own unique intelligence and unfolding. This wisdom is emergent, mysterious and cannot be predicted. . . . Organicity [implies] that

each client has the answers they seek within them . . . and the therapist, with the client, creates a context—or container, or atmosphere—within which healing wisdom is inspired. . . . There is organicity in a group as well, a mysterious relational alchemy that brings people together for a common purpose. The group is greater than the sum of its parts, and it is the leader’s task to assume—indeed, to know—that the creativity of the group alchemy will produce the sought-after experience, answers, or solutions. A good leader draws forth that collective intelligence by recognizing its existence and creating an atmosphere in which it can emerge. The group wisdom is already there—the leader, like the therapist, only needs to have faith in that wisdom, ask the right questions, make the right contact, and facilitate the right connections so that that wisdom is revealed. (P. Ogden, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

In order to facilitate this, an IPNB-informed leader is open to and observant of their own and others’ energy and information patterns, which may be tending toward chaos, toward rigidity, or toward the more balanced places on the continuum in between. Of course, we should note that with or without intention, leaders can also influence patterns toward remaining at the dis-integrative extremes, decreasing systemic and individual health. The field of IPNB has gathered consilient research findings from dozens of disciplines that clearly support the correlation of human

well-being by promoting the balanced emergence of moving “toward” and leading in a more harmonious in-between range, an ongoing integrative flow found in healthy living systems.

Ponder the moment a shared work team accomplishment is announced: physiological and emotional responses to the news surge through members’ brains and bodies as the energy and information is shared among the leader and team members through what Cozolino (2014) calls the *social synapse* or “the space between us” (p. xv). The shared energy and information are then taken within, through the senses, and can be measured in electrochemical signaling, blood flow, and more. The subjective experience of this integrative sharing might be feelings of personal satisfaction and a sense of resonant warmth between team partners, while the success and the felt sense and storied memories of that moment will be added to their ongoing narrative about themselves, the team, and their work. The integrative and emergent team leader can mine the potential of times like this, working with the flow of energy and information to facilitate an increase in trust and confidence, resulting in the team feeling safer, more connected, and ready for more creative risks.

All this can happen in an instant and on numerous systemic levels, particularly the three primes (irreducible elements) of interwoven human experience IPNB-informed leaders work with: mind, brain/body, and

relationship. In IPNB, mind is defined as a relational and embodied process that emerges from and regulates energy and information flow. Siegel (2017) states that the mind is not limited by skull or skin, rather it is recursive, emergent, and embedded in relationships that form energy and information patterns throughout development and across the life span. Brain is “the embodied neural mechanism that shapes the flow of energy and information” (Siegel, 2012b, p. AI-11) and refers to the entire distributed nervous system; relationships are the exchange and sharing of energy and information (Siegel, 2012a). From an IPNB perspective, relationships both shape and are shaped (or influenced) by mind and the embodied brain.

These three interconnected primes of human experience create an “emergent triangle” (Siegel, 2010; Siegel, 2012a; Siegel, 2012b), and human well-being is found in the integration that emerges through the ever dynamic process of differentiation and linkage within and between each prime, represented as each point of the triangle of human experience (Siegel, 2012a; Siegel & Pearce-McCall, 2009). When defined in the direction of health, found in resonant and respectful relationships, coherent minds, and integrated nervous systems, the Triangle of Well-Being (Figure 1) offers a visual metaphor that illuminates internal, interpersonal, and systemic processes within organizations, and can be quite useful for leaders learning and embodying *how* to lead instead of developing specific skills about *what* to do. In other words,

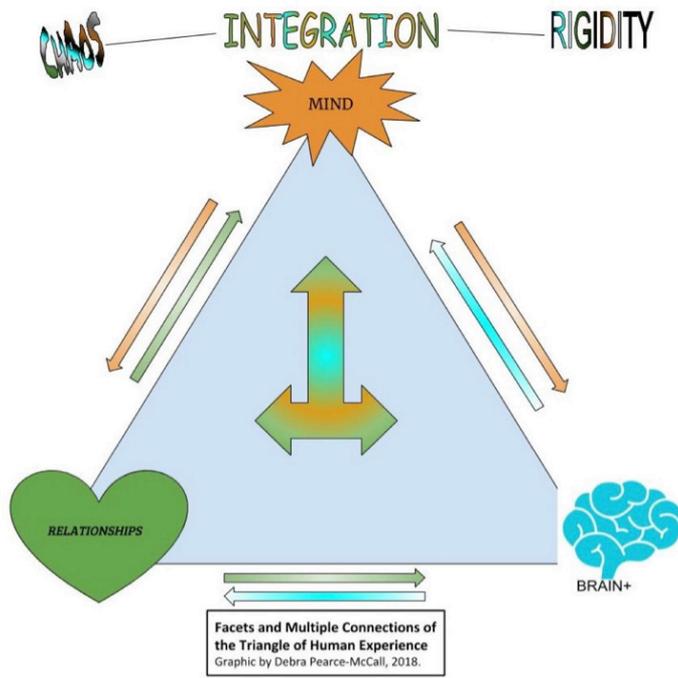


Figure 1. The Triangle of Well-Being. Adapted from *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* by Daniel J. Siegel, 2010, p. 11. Copyright by Bantam Books.

to use a common analogy, this approach teaches leaders how to fish rather than giving them the fish (Goleman & Siegel, 2016). When ongoing integration and emergence is created in all these levels, we will invariably find healthy systems, with qualities that are flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable (easily recalled through the acronym FACES; Siegel, 2012a). In much of the available literature and webinars that discuss IPNB in leadership, integration is considered to be foundational, giving us a way to foster the well-being of leaders, individuals in the workplace and teams, entire organizations—even cultures and countries (Goleman & Siegel, 2016; Pearce-McCall, 2010; Pearce-

McCall, Hill, & Olson, 2017; Siegel & Pearce-McCall, 2009).

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

This can all sound a bit complicated at first: IPNB does rest on a vast array of scientific data, an inductive and consilient framework consistent with research in neuroscience, psychology, biology, physics, network theory, and at least a dozen other fields. This way of understanding our human experience doesn't require knowing all that detail, however. What is

more helpful is actual practice of mind and relational skills that allow us to bring these understandings into our daily lives, especially in situations where we feel stressed—which of course occur all too often for most people. Learning to lead minds starts with an openness to considering one's own mind and the core understanding that our minds emerge from our relationships and our physiology, and that leadership influences the minds, relationships, and brains of those who make up the organizational whole. This premise can be startling to some leaders, as it highlights the extent of our interconnectedness and underscores the importance of developing

mind and relationships skills in leaders, which is contrary to the idea of leaders as individual and dominant, having or desiring free rein and power over others. Increasingly, more leaders are aware that what they do relies on others, and the truth is they never lead alone. Carl Marci, a GAINS Advisory Board member who has researched physiological and emotional synchronicity in relationships and works with leaders at the highest levels, highlights that leaders must be relational and emotional to lead well. He notes that we live in a world where so many people are starving for authentic connection that leaders must develop authentic listening skills. Moreover, the notion that feelings don't belong at work is scientifically passé, for, as he reminds us (C. Marci, personal communication, September 25, 2018), emotions drive our behaviors and inform everything we do; thus, leaders must learn to use them wisely to inform their decisions and how to manage people and organizations.

Attending to the development of greater self-awareness as well as social or relational awareness is considered fundamental to a leader's capacity to facilitate an organizational culture that promotes integration (Goleman & Siegel, 2016; Kryder, 2009; Pearce-McCall, 2008; Phipps, 2009; Siegel, 2007, 2015). When we work with leaders, we encourage them to create consistent mind *and* relational skills development practices, including mindful awareness, and more. Choices of *how* they do this are made by considering which methods interest and benefit them most and

what fits best in their busy lives. Leaders are also encouraged to support their "followers" as well as all their colleagues in learning how to mind their brains (Goleman & Siegel, 2016; Hougaard & Carter, 2018; Kryder, 2009; Pearce-McCall, 2008). The recent explosion of interest in mindfulness in leadership and organizations shows that attention to some aspects of the mind is being brought into workplaces more widely, and we hope the IPNB expansion into leadership will join and magnify this "wevolution" (word coined by author DPM).

Demonstrating this, Ross Ungerleider, pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon and GAINS Advisory Board member, and his partner, wellness expert Jamie Ungerleider, bring IPNB-informed leadership coaching into the medical community with what they term whole brain leadership. In a recent publication (Ungerleider & Dickey Ungerleider, 2018), they include a personal example of mind and relational leadership: Ross shares how he has learned to respect and meet his need to be alone, to center himself before and again after the intensities of surgery. He further discusses how he ensures that his assistant and others understand the closed door and don't misinterpret it or take it as a personal rejection. Ross Ungerleider has also introduced the concept of "center before you enter", which he learned in part from a golfer's book on life lessons that included advice to let your mood determine your game and not to let performance impact your mood—a meta-lesson on how we can prepare

ourselves for life's challenges. In a personal communication, he recounts how he takes preparation time in his office each morning before going to the operating room:

My partners call it my Zen time. During that time, I breathe and calm myself. I visualize the case and make sure I am prepared for unexpected occurrences. I do more breathing and then spend some time in tender loving kindness (*May I be happy. May I be healthy and strong. May I be safe and free from danger. May I be at ease with myself and in the world around me. May I know loving kindness for myself and all things living.*) By the time I get to the operating theatre, I am centered, resourced and ready. (R. Ungerleider, personal communication, October 30, 2018).

The work of GAINS Advisory Board member and neuroscientist Stephen Porges, gives us solid scientific understandings about how purposeful and mindful transitions before entering and after leaving adrenalized work situations can help us center and calm. He explains why, in polyvagal theory, that is essential for our health and why a sense of relational and personal safety is necessary for our nervous systems to function in ways that support behaviors often measured in organizational metrics, such as engagement, morale, and productivity (Porges, 2007; Porges, 2011).

In any given moment, leaders can practice mindfulness, or work on their emotional intelligence and conversational skills, or

gain an understanding of how the embodied brain might be influencing their employees' functioning—in decision-making, for example. Over the past decade, a number of leadership coaching and organizational development methods have come to incorporate some of these aspects. We suggest that the meta-framework of IPNB enhances all theories and models of leadership and leadership development, as it has done for almost two decades with psychotherapy models, while also encouraging co-creative and coherent coordination among approaches. Further, IPNB adds that ongoing tripartite view, or “trinocular vision”, which brings minds, embodied brains, and relationships into focus at the same time—differentiated yet inextricably interconnected. Louis Cozolino, one of the co-founders of IPNB and a GAINS Advisory Board member, illustrates the interweaving of neurobiology and subjective and relational experiences when he discusses how the three separate executive systems identified within the human brain all require significant levels of development and neural integration in leaders. He also describes how they functionally correspond with and support the skills needed by high-performing executives:

Executive functioning in our brains, like the successful skills of a corporate CEO, is an amalgamation of multiple skills and abilities. . . . The first system, the primitive executive, centered in the amygdala and the bodily systems that it drives, is in charge of survival via arousal and approach–

avoidance behaviors. The second system, centered around the frontal and parietal lobes, guides our ability to navigate the world, enables problem-solving, and allows for language and abstract thinking. The third, sometimes called the default-mode network (DMN), is involved with the experience of self and connection with others. For optimal functioning, we need to have all three of these systems well developed, well integrated, and able to communicate and collaborate with one another.

It is no coincidence that successful corporate executives usually exhibit skills that reflect a significant level of development in each of these areas. For example, a well-developed primitive executive network is demonstrated through good affect regulation, emotional maturity, and the ability to cope with high levels of stress. A well-functioning frontal-parietal system will be reflected in day-to-day problem-solving, abstract abilities, and strategic planning. Finally, a well-developed DMN will be highlighted by someone's ability to understand and care for others, her self-reflective capacities, and self-awareness. Together, these skills and abilities, integrated in a well-balanced way, can create inspirational managers and visionary leaders who drive, support, and inspire good results. (L. Cozolino, personal communication, September 28, 2018)

Considering these three versions of executive systems in brain and behavior serves to highlight that we do indeed need different behaviors and forms of leadership in different contexts. (If someone knows how to lead us to the exit in a fire, we don't need them to encourage shared discussion about our plans and goals.) As Cozolino concludes:

Certain situations call for higher levels of authoritarian control while others are better served by a more collaborative and reflective approach. It is my belief that the neurodynamics and psychodynamics described above provide for the best chance to assess, evaluate, and implement the type of leadership required across situations and circumstances. (L. Cozolino, personal communication, September 28, 2018).

While some people may be able to assess and respond to all kinds of situations and provide all forms of leadership as needed, others are wise to know what they do well and when the situation calls for engaging someone with strengths in a different, more appropriate way of responding and leading.

So, while we do need different forms of leadership in different contexts, the key to leadership in any context is found in taking the integrative pulse, attending to the FACES flow, and thereby knowing whether or when more top-down, or ordered, influence is needed to accomplish a task, or when a situation will blossom with the co-creativity, supporting the emergent leadership that facilitates imagination and possibilities.

As integrative flow is a continuous living process, leaders can frequently provide both of these in the same context (e.g., facilitating a meeting that stays with an agenda and has space for some humor and spontaneity as well). An easy way to think about integration is the idea of both/and, where we see the false polarizing of an either/or perspective and acknowledge all elements *and* their interrelatedness. In relationship, this takes the concept of *I* or *thou* (“you”) and prods us to see *I* and *you* and *we* simultaneously. Taking the integrative pulse can be compared to the navigation of the coxswain in a rowing crew, who keeps eyes on the path ahead and helps each and all crew members do their part so that left and right rowers move their boat forward in balance. Complete this image with the river having a hard cliff of rigidity on one bank and a swamp of chaos on the other, and their journey is toward integration.

ONE CASE EXAMPLE—TWO SCENARIOS

Consider a leader who has relocated across the United States to take over an operation. One year into this new role, the market changes. She is still overseeing dozens of employees managing a large and complex business that impacts significantly on its customers’ lives. But the office is now going to shut down in a year and everyone knows about it.

Scenario 1: Dealing with difficult news—leading toward chaos

You can possibly imagine many ways this situation could go wrong. Rather than grasping onto rigidity, let’s explore the shift toward chaos. Perhaps it begins in the dysregulation of the leader’s nervous system, as she lives with being placed in a very stressful situation with high demands and shrinking resources. Her blood pressure rises, and she works daily to suppress her feelings of fear and grief, flooded by the neurochemicals involved in the stress response. She begins spreading confusion with unclear decisions as her prefrontal cortex works to inhibit the neural cacophony, which is soon fomenting an emotional contagion of fear with her anxious communications. As weeks go by, people talk and worry about what is going to happen in the months ahead, their brains and bodies dysregulating, and then they begin to look for other jobs. As each one leaves, the work load and chaos increases. It’s hard to hire anyone when you are closing your doors. The stakes are high, as wrong decisions in this business can lead to complaints, lawsuits, and worse: real human tragedy. Inevitably, some of these poor outcomes start to occur as the leader feels more frantic and unsupported, and the team communication becomes increasingly impulsive and negative. Two people develop major illnesses and leave. This organization is lucky if it lurches through the year without a major catastrophe.

Scenario 2: Dealing with difficult news—leading toward integration

Consider this same situation with an

IPNB-informed leader.

The leader quickly recognizes the enormity of the challenge, and commits to applying her years of mindful awareness and self-regulation skills, systemic perspective, and relational wisdom to all aspects of the situation. She makes it clear to everyone that she plans to stay through the year, and that she will negotiate severance deals for everyone else who does so. Her office door is open as often as possible. She increases her exercise, consults with the vice-president she reports to, and prioritizes other activities to support her own well-being and stress response. Limbic reactivity is not shutting down access to her prefrontal cortex, so she can use her emotions, her intuitions, her logic, and her creativity. With full thinking and feeling capacity, she is present, responsive to her team, and able to motivate and inspire. Integrative initiatives she launches include cross-training all employees in other marketable skill sets during the rest of their tenure, creating flexible time policies that outpace the corporate norm, and bringing in ways to attend to emotions and morale, from viewing breaks for amazing sunsets out the office window to shared celebrations of life events. All the customers are well cared for, and all that can be done to smooth the transition, from this side of it, is done. No one in the whole regional office leaves before their time; all quality and performance goals for the year are still achieved; and everyone departs with training that makes them easily employable in new positions. (Note: This

tale of integrative and emergent leadership in action is a real-life example from the experiences of author DPM.)

SUMMARY

This brief introduction to an IPNB perspective on leadership, leads us to a definition of optimal leadership: to help individuals and human systems (from dyads to countries) continually interact with the emergent flow of energy and information across body/brain, minds, and relationships to orient toward the states and possibilities that support ongoing integration (the continuous linking and interconnecting of differentiated elements) so they remain flexible and adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable. These are the scientifically supported qualities of healthy complex systems including our nervous systems, our minds, and our relationships. And the human qualities that emerge and are sustained by this level of systemic health—compassion, connection, a calmer consciousness, a more considerate and communicative culture—are so needed in our world. Let this be a call to all of us, wherever and however we lead. IPNB offers a framework that ripples across all our human domains and invites us to be part of an integrative movement necessary in a world crying out for consideration, kindness, and inclusion across all of our differences, combined with wise, disciplined, reality-based planning for the global imperatives we are all facing. Leaders exist or emerge

in human groups, at work, at home, and everywhere. And we need this integrative leadership in all arenas and in all our everyday leadership moments, now and ongoing.

Patty Wipfler, founder of *Hand in Hand Parenting* and GAINS Advisory Board member, says it well:

At the very least, as we lead our families, our children and friends have before them a vibrant example of leadership: not someone who never makes mistakes; not someone who succeeds at everything he or she tries; but a parent who appreciates the good in people, who notices difficulties, who treats people well in spite of those difficulties, who thinks both about today and about how to move the whole family forward. (P. Wipfler, personal communication, September 26, 2018)

Various forms and amounts of integration in complex systems, along with the triangle of human experience, can define health and dysfunction in human systems and give us a meta-map to guide us forward. When we look at the triangle of human experience, each leg is actually a bidirectional flow of energy and information. To understand and utilize that meta-map of integrative flow, leaders need to have the means to develop capacities in all the elements and interactions of the triangle, such as ways of relating to others that invite their nervous systems to states supporting curiosity and engagement and methods of self- and co-regulation that facilitate leading calmly and compassionately in stormy

waters. In addition, they must develop trinocular vision or a capacity to see and sense the full flow of energy and information among themselves, their co-workers, and throughout their business or community.

An IPNB-savvy leader, providing integrative and emergent leadership, has the tools needed to bring clarity to navigating the complexity that is every individual, team, and organization, in any context.

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Please contact either author for further inquiry into IPNB-informed leadership coaching and organizational consulting. Concept papers and webinars produced by the Global Association for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies (GAINS) are available for members at www.mindgains.org