

Executive Book Summary

Vertical Growth

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

“Leaders who are willing to make a lifetime commitment to their own continual self-regulated growth can make any leadership theory or technique look brilliant.”
– Edwin Friedman

Over the past two decades of leadership development researching, teaching, and writing, we have learned that developing great leaders is not an intellectual or skills challenge. It is not just about knowing evidence-based leadership techniques and theories. Despite the fact that great leadership practices and techniques are rather obvious, we find no shortage of poor leadership, even in organisations that have invested millions in leadership development.

The primary reason is that most of the focus is on horizontal development, and little to no attention is given to vertical growth. We define horizontal development as gaining new skills and acquiring more knowledge to bring about a new competency. Vertical growth is much deeper and involves developing new mindsets, insights, and deliberate growth practices to shift our thinking and behavior in a sustainable way. It is as much about unlearning existing habits as it is about developing new ones.

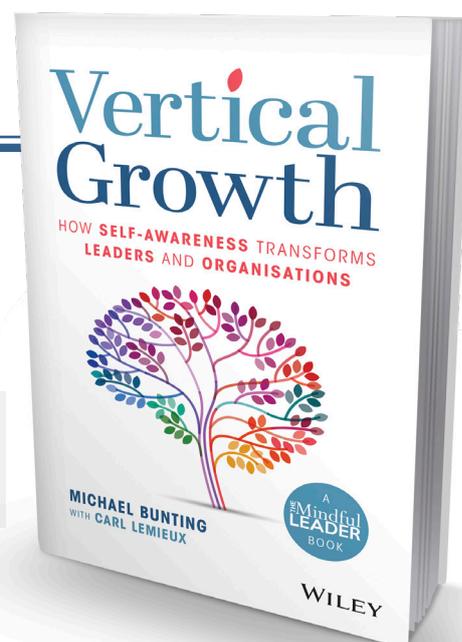
Vertical growth fundamentally depends on self-awareness as the starting point. Self-awareness is the ability to look within ourselves honestly and to develop a much greater understanding of the unconscious drivers and values behind our thoughts and behaviours.

In terms of leadership development, personal behavioural change, or culture change, research shows that horizontal development is just not enough. Horizontal skills and knowledge compete with fears, limiting beliefs, and other mental models that keep us stuck in habitual patterns and reactive loops. Seeing and changing these loops is the function of vertical development.

Horizontal development is like having a computer operating system, such as Microsoft Windows, and adding apps and programs to it like MSWord, Teams, WhatsApp and other useful programs to facilitate our work. But vertical growth is about changing the entire operating system to generate more power and manage greater complexity. That then enables a more advanced use of the apps and programs.



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by Michael Bunting
with Carl Lemieux

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: VERTICAL GROWTH

by Michael Bunting

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Michael has kept a disciplined personal mindfulness practice since 1993 and has taught mindful leadership to businesses and government since 2000. Michael holds two business degrees and a postgraduate diploma in mindfulness-based psychotherapy.

He lives with his family in Sydney, Australia.

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Through vertical growth, we escape one of the biggest trap that keeps leaders and organisations stuck: image management. This refers to the time and energy we waste in organisations on blame, denial, deflection, defense, gossiping, politics, saving face, covering up our weaknesses, and other fear-based strategies to make ourselves feel safe or look good. This arrests growth, damages leadership credibility, shuts down innovation, and impacts mental health, while inevitably keeping relationships superficial. One research study we performed involving more than 5,000 people from various global organisations indicated that image management sucks up about 40 percent of people's time and energy on average. This is a staggering waste of time and energy, costing billions of dollars.

When leaders grow vertically, this enables them to inspire and lead their teams from a psychologically safe space. Furthermore, with vertical growth tools and practices, they are able to systematically transform toxic cultures and improve organisational behaviour and performance.

In this summary you will learn:

- The differences between horizontal development and vertical growth, and why vertical growth is the key to developing great leaders and healthy working environments.
- The importance of consciously-chosen growth values that pull us in the direction of what matters most to us.
- How to use growth values to transform our personal behaviour, and that of our team members.
- Why self-awareness and self-regulation is the starting point of all vertical growth.
- How to use mindfulness as a doorway to self-regulating, self-awareness and vertical growth.
- Why seeing and accepting the things we unconsciously deny and ignore (the shadow) is critical for growth and organisational alignment
- How to apply vertical growth within your team and organisation to transform counter productive cultures and behaviour.
- Why psychological safety is key to the whole process, and how to cultivate it within yourself, your team and organisation.

SUMMARY: VERTICAL GROWTH

Complete Summary

The Vertical Growth Imperative

Horizontal development is developing new skills and acquiring more knowledge to bring about a new competency. While improving horizontal competencies may require repeated practice, it typically requires no growth in self-awareness or self-regulation. Easy examples would be learning planning skills, or learning how to master MS Word or Excel, developing strategic planning skills, or even learning coaching skills.

Vertical growth involves both downward seeing and upward growth. We see downward (vertically) into our unconscious patterns of thoughts and behaviours and learn to transform them with open awareness, patience, and compassion. The more we do this, the more we increase our ability to grow upward in the direction of our values, aspirations, and ideals. Through vertical growth, we are able to train our mind to engage less in the reactive and programmed algorithms of our mind and body, and more into a deliberate and flexible set of behaviours based on our aspirations and values.

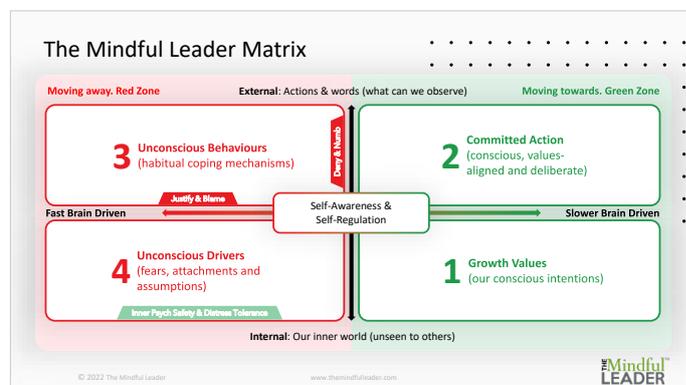
We could briefly summarise the two forms of development as:

- **Horizontal Development (new skills and knowledge):** Developing skills and gaining knowledge I need to work in the organisation to get my job done efficiently, effectively, and safely.
- **Vertical Development (new mindset & behaviour):** Developing the ability to change how I perceive and value my inner and outer world (mindset), and then developing the self-regulating awareness to support the development of new behaviour/s in a sustainable way, aligned with my core values.

In the arena of leadership development and culture change, investing in horizontal development without vertical growth is largely a waste of time, money, and energy. The engine of horizontal development can't run efficiently without the fuel of vertical growth.

The Mindful Leader Matrix

The Mindful Leader Matrix is a tool we use for both personal transformation and organisational change:



The Mindful Leader Matrix can be summarized as follows:

- **The red (moving away) and green (moving towards) sides of the matrix** are primarily driven by the “fast brain” and “slow brain” respectively. These terms come from neuroscientists Joseph LeDoux and Matt Lieberman. According to LeDoux, our brain has two pathways through which the amygdala’s fear responses can be triggered: a fast “low road” from the thalamus to the amygdala, and a slower “high road” that passes from the thalamus to the prefrontal cortex and only then to the amygdala.

Lieberman refers to these two pathways as the “X-System,” which is reflexive (i.e., fast pathway), and the “C-System,” which is reflective (i.e., slow pathway), meaning it gives us time to reflect and make more conscious choices.

The fast brain thus engages the parts of the brain that act spontaneously and impulsively (our emotional centers). The slow brain on the other hand is linked to our more recent brain development that differentiates us from other mammals. These more evolved neural structures, such as the prefrontal cortex and its executive functions, engage parts of the brain that enable us to act with intention and awareness before our fast brain reflex response takes over. This system also helps regulate the emotional fight, flight freeze reactivity of the fast brain. By using the the matrix, we are consciously pulling ourselves into our “slow brain,” where we can make more conscious behavioural choices.

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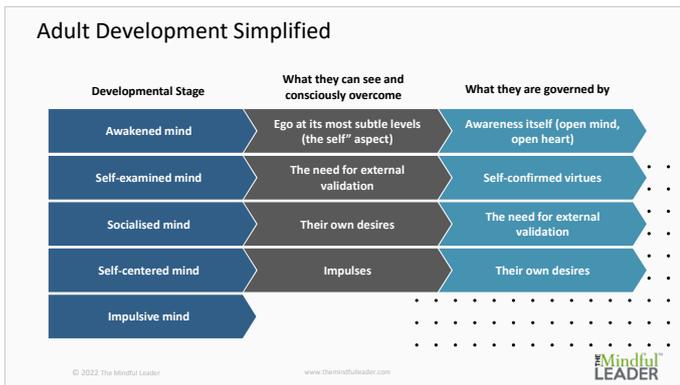
- **Quadrant 1** in the lower right represents our growth values, which pull us in the direction of our conscious intentions. Rather than assumed values that have been handed down to us from parents and society, this is where we consciously choose values that will enable us to vertically grow to become more self-aware, balanced human beings, leaders, and organisations that make the world a better place.
- **Quadrant 2** in the upper right represents the conscious, committed actions we take to move towards Quadrant 1 and change our unconscious behaviour. From a leadership perspective, this is what we commit to and practice to ensure we actually walk the talk we formulated in Quadrant 1.
- **Quadrant 3** in the upper left represents our behaviour that flows from habit and our unconscious fears, attachments and assumptions. This is what we are doing when we are not moving towards the right or green side of the matrix. These are the habitual coping mechanisms that provide us with short-term relief from our discomfort or quick rewards while usually damaging our relationships, diminishing our influence, wasting our time and energy, and preventing us from achieving our intent and commitments in Quadrants 1 and 2.
- **The “Deny and Numb” and “Justify & Blame” tabs in Quadrant 3** are important to understand, as they keep us locked into Quadrant 3 behaviours and prevent us from exploring Quadrant 4’s unconscious drivers. The numbness and denial element, what we call the “first line of defense”, literally enables us to not fully notice or take accountability for our reactive “moving away” behaviours. The “justification and blame” element is what we call the “second line of defense” against ownership and accountability for our “moving away” behaviours. This occurs when we pierce through the first line of defense, numbness and denial, and acknowledge Quadrant 3 behaviours, but very quickly justify them or blame others. In doing so, we fail to take the next step into understanding our deeper fears, attachments, and assumptions in Quadrant 4, while continuing to engage in our Quadrant 3 behaviours.
- **Quadrant 4** in the lower left represents our unconscious fears, attachments, and assumptions (our conditioning) that drive our moving away behaviours and ensure resistance to our commitment in Quadrant 2. This is the realm of our internal mental and emotional baggage that holds us back from achieving our full potential. Along with seeing and taking accountability for our Quadrant 3 behaviours, this is what Carl Jung called “shadow work,” as it describes the exploration of our unconscious behaviour and its drivers, our ego or the unknown and darker side of our personality which we wish to ignore or repress. This part of ourselves has often been conditioned in our earlier, formative years or through traumas or difficult experiences.
- **The “Inner Psychological Safety” and “Distress Tolerance” tab in Quadrant 4** represent what we need in order to skillfully explore our shadow. Without them, inner work is too confronting and we fall prey to the first and second line of defenses. Among other factors, inner psychological safety refers to self-compassion and curiosity. Distress tolerance refers to our ability to accept and handle difficult emotions without running from them through defense or numbing mechanisms. The more distress tolerance we cultivate, the more able we are to stay curious and growth-minded in the face of emotional discomfort and pain.
- **Self-awareness and Self-Regulation** are in the middle of the matrix, as without self-awareness and the ability to consciously regulate our behaviour, we cannot deliberately live a value-based life, nor can we learn to see, accept and compassionately take accountability for the content in our shadow that moves us away from our best intentions.

Why Leaders Struggle with Walking Their Talk

Why do some people adhere to virtuous leadership principles like honesty, generosity, kindness, or curiosity, even under pressure, and some people don't? Why do some people see value in virtues, while others stay invested in old patterns? Why do some people think they are acting from these virtues when they are not? Why are some people more honest with themselves than others? The obvious answer, of course, is that incongruent, un-self-aware leaders, no matter how skilled and competent, are lacking in vertical growth.

Adult development psychologist Robert Kegan developed what he termed “Subject-Object theory,” which gives a model of how the human mind develops vertically over time. “Subject” stands for things people are not aware of and fused with. “Object” refers to things that people can reflect on, handle, look at, take control of, or be responsible for. The process of vertical growth is about making “object” what we were previously “subject” to.

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Babies start at stage zero of development, completely subject to their reflexes. They cry, urinate or kick with no conscious awareness or control over these natural reflexes. The first stage of development, the ‘impulsive mind’, starts around age two, when the child can begin to hold her reflexes as object. She is subject to her impulses — like grabbing from another person’s plate.

Before too long, the impulsive mind naturally develops into the self-centered mind. The self-centered mind is subject to our desires, and we don’t have the awareness or discipline to put them aside. At this stage, there is little to no empathy for others. The value system of people in the self-centered mind is “getting what I want.”

As most people mature, they naturally move into a third stage called “socialised mind.” In this stage, we begin to have control over our own desires in order to fit into a family, group, team or organisation. We are able to have empathy for and connect with others. However, this is not necessarily driven by a selfless sense of care for others. Rather, it is usually about us seeking approval and belonging. In socialised mind, our sense of self-worth comes from other people, rather than internally.

The shift from socialised mind to what we call self-examining mind begins when we ask the question, “What is important to me and what do I stand for aside from what anyone else thinks?” We connect with our own heart and find our own values, our own life compass. The self-examining mind can see its need for external validation in the socialised mind. Once that need can be seen as object, we can consciously choose our own values and adopt behaviours that are best aligned with what is most important to us.

We stop being so swayed by what society values and choose our own path in life. In this more self-aware stage, values are not only clear and self-confirmed, but are also utilised as a means to consciously interrupt fear-based, habitual reactions. Over time fear is reduced in the mind and body, while awareness, inner stability and ease increase. Here, we begin to really walk our talk.

In the highest and rarest stage of adult development, what we call the awakened mind, one develops the understanding that our awareness itself is closer to who we really are than our values and thoughts. We develop greater flexibility where we become unattached to identity and roles, shifting and updating our mental models to best respond to life’s challenges and changes in an objective way.

To lead effectively, it’s critical that we live from at least the self-examining mind and become very clear on who we are, what we stand for, and the core values that govern our behaviour and decisions. We must cultivate the ability to withstand disapproval and still stay true to our principles. This is how we self-author our lives and discover a much deeper congruence within ourselves.

How Values Help Us Grow

We define values as “virtues or human qualities that, when cultivated, create long-term harmony within us, and connection, trust and harmony in the environment or groups we live and work in.”

Values help us to be happier by cutting through our mind’s conditioned responses to whatever we experience in life. Following values also makes us more engaged with and committed to our work.

This introspective work behind identifying one’s values is key to becoming consciously developmental while fostering psychological well-being, both foundational to achieve a self-examining or awakened mind. Clarifying one’s values typically requires many iterations and requires us to ask fundamental questions such as:

- What really matters to me aside from what anybody else thinks?
- What is life asking of me?
- Where is my life not working and what value/s could I follow to help me grow and deal with this more constructively?

Choosing Your Growth Values

When we meet new clients who are in the socialised mind development stage and we ask them about values, it is rare for any of them to clearly express their values. Those who can express them, typically view them as a personal brand, and assume that they live them unquestionably in all circumstances. Ironically, their values appear to be used as an image management tool, instead of a daily growth practice. Growth values explicitly invite us to acknowledge the gap between our best intentions and some of our behaviour. They invite us to consider what qualities we most want and need to develop to overcome the fears, attachments and assumptions detracting from our lives.

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On a personal level, if you struggle with impatience and anger and begin to acknowledge the negative impact this is having on your life and leadership, you might choose “patience” or “kindness” as a growth value. Or if you find yourself constantly avoiding conflict and you fully realise the enormous cost this is having on your mental wellbeing and leadership, you might choose honesty as a growth value. (Interestingly, few of our new clients realise that conflict avoidance is in fact an integrity/honesty values violation.)

Committing to Action

Values are far more than lofty, intangible ideals. When applied properly, they are living, breathing forces that direct our behaviour.

Here are a few questions to help you gauge whether or not your values are alive in your life:

- How did the “talk you are trying to walk” shape your behaviour the last few weeks?
- At any point in the last few weeks, did you refer to your “talk you are trying to walk” and modify your behaviour?
- Can you describe a moment in the last few weeks where you had to actively work through fear, or a loss of approval, or embarrassment, for the sake of walking your talk?

If you struggle to answer these questions—as most leaders do—there’s a good chance that you’re not clear on your “talk,” nor do you have an aligned development practice or “walk.” The result, as researched by my co-authors Kouzes and Posner, is a loss of trust and credibility among those you lead.

It’s pointless to choose values without a daily commitment to deliberately cultivate that value in action. People don’t experience your aspirations—they experience your behaviour.

The point of holding values isn’t to pat ourselves on the backs and assure ourselves that we’re good people. Rather, it’s to help us identify our values breaches, address them, and change our behaviour to grow in the direction of our values. Growth values are not a statement of who we already are, but rather areas which we deliberately choose to cultivate.

By taking committed action in the direction of our values, our cognitive dissonance decreases while our inner wellbeing increases. And ultimately, the more closely we align our behaviours with our values, the more we create a healthy environment for all to grow and lead meaningful lives.

The Role of Mindfulness in Personal Growth

When working or living under challenging conditions or perceived threats, our reactive “fast pathway” brain can easily kick in. When it does, our noble intentions can easily fly out the window in the service of protecting ourselves from emotional or physical discomfort. Training the mind to non-reactively and non-judgmentally observe our mental and emotional patterns is therefore the hidden gem to cultivate self-awareness and self-regulation, which are the cornerstone to sustainable vertical growth and value-based living. Mindfulness training has been around for millennia and has been popularized in recent decades as powerful way to train the mind and mitigate the undesirable reactions of our unconscious mind. We’ve been applying it within a leadership and organisational context for the past twenty-five years.

We define mindfulness as maintaining an open-hearted awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and environment in the present moment. It is paying attention in the present moment purposefully, warmly and non-judgmentally. It is experiencing, knowing, and accepting the present moment as it really is—not how we want it to be, think it should be or perceive it to be, but as it really is. We can be mindful in any life situation, from driving, to swimming, walking, conversing, eating, writing, etc.

Through meditation and other developmental mindfulness practices we become more aware of our habitual reactions, expand the gap between stimulus and response, and make wiser choices. We learn to see the innermost motivations for our actions and become more honest and compassionate with ourselves. We learn to be the observer of our perceptions, thoughts and judgments, rather than identifying with them and getting caught up in the mental stories we create.

Developmental mindfulness training helps us develop:

1. A mind that is not in constant reactivity and is more interested in reality versus the fantasy world the untrained mind is constantly lost in. This leads to enhanced perspective-taking, wiser decisions, and value-based actions.
2. The inner capacity to feel uncomfortable feelings and embrace them, instead of resisting, reacting and numbing. This develops a profoundly clear, peaceful mind and deep self-understanding and wisdom.
3. The ability to see through false assumptions, beliefs, judgments, etc. It can literally take you all the way to the highest level of adult growth and facilitate the journey of shifting the entire mind’s contents from “subject” to “object.”

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Using developmental mindfulness, we can train the mind to stay present, curious, balanced, aware, and connected—not just when we feel good, but especially when we feel discomfort. As research shows, heightening our present-moment awareness increases our emotional distress tolerance, which in turn decreases our chances of reacting from habitual, conditioned responses to emotional discomfort.

Overcoming Numbness and Denial

Carl Jung, one of the fathers of modern western psychology, coined the phrase “the shadow” in reference to what we explore on the left-hand side of the Mindful Leader Matrix. What he meant by this is that we humans have this capacity to hide and deny our own behaviour, feelings and beliefs from ourselves. We keep them in the shadows of our mind through defense mechanisms like numbing, denying, blaming and justifying, instead of bringing them into the light of our awareness.

Literally everything we are “subject to” or fused with, is held in the unconscious, which is why Jung was so insistent that we look at the shadow element of our unconscious and deal with it in order to grow and rediscover wholeness. In adult development language, we would say, “Until we make our shadow object to ourselves, we will continue to be subject to our shadow.” In other words, vertical growth is heavily dependent on our willingness and ability to look at, work with, and take accountability for our shadow. However, in order to do that, we have to be able to withstand the difficult feelings that arise when working with the shadow, and not back away from them.

Unfortunately, the human mind has many mechanisms to avoid difficult or unpleasant feelings. To the untrained mind, the common solution to dealing with unpleasant feelings is numbing. Instead of looking inward, we numb out the unpleasant with obvious things like food, TV, smartphones, overwork, alcohol or sex. We may also engage in less obvious patterns like controlling, manipulating, avoiding, gossiping, lying, rationalising, one-upping, etc.—anything and everything to escape the unpleasant.

Numbness is like a fog in our brain. It covers up our shadow, but it doesn’t resolve it and so it remains in the unconscious, generating stress and lifelong cognitive dissonance. In the process, it also obscures the sun of connection and joy. With numbness we may avoid immediate pain, but the price tag is that we are less and less able to experience happiness, growth and fulfillment.

We refer to numbness and denial as the “first line of defense” against seeing and owning our shadow. Our mind has an extraordinary ability to literally be in numb denial of what we are doing—like a person shouting,

“I am not angry!” If we’re able to break through this first line of defense using developmental mindfulness, and acknowledge our unconscious behaviour and the associated painful feelings that come with that admission, a second line of defense usually kicks in: justification, rationalisation, and blame. These are designed to once again numb us from the shadow.

Seeing and Resolving the Shadow

Initially, when we begin exploring and owning our shadow, it can be very challenging. However, seeing and understanding our whole selves, warts and all, is the best long-term path to happiness and fulfillment. It enables a profoundly mature and relaxed mind, free of defense and denial.

Exploring and resolving our shadow requires curiosity and compassion. With curiosity, we expose our unconscious fears, attachments, and assumptions. With self-compassion, we help ourselves accept and bear the fear and pain that arises when we see and own the truth of what is driving our dysfunctional behaviour. We are allowing our evolved and wiser brain (slow brain) to observe the older reactive brain (fast brain) to enhance emotional regulation and then re-align our behaviour with our values.

In today’s turbulent organisational context where human suffering is on the rise, these deeper practices found in clinical psychology and contemplative practices are increasingly required to help people find the psychological well-being to support healthy organisational performance.

The Mindful Leader Matrix gives us a framework for exploring our shadow mindfully and resolving it so that we can more easily live up to our aspirations. We can actually take any aspect of our lives that we want to improve and take it through the Mindful Leader Matrix. First, we start in Quadrant 1 by describing how we want that part of our lives to be. We identify our growth values and write our aspirational statement. Next, we move to Quadrant 2 and attach behavioural commitments to our growth values—in other words, the actions we want to take to move towards our aspirations.

Then we move to the left side of the matrix to explore our shadow. In Quadrant 3, we identify and take accountability for the specific behaviours that are incongruent with our growth values. Lastly, we explore our fears, attachments, and assumptions in Quadrant 4, which are creating our misguided behaviours in Quadrant 3.

Using the Mindful Leader Matrix, we can consciously and systematically explore and resolve our shadow in order to transform our behaviour for good.

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Vertical Growth in Teams and Organisations

Setting and Living Team and Organisational Values

On a personal level, the Mindful Leader Matrix helps you transform your values and aspirations into living, breathing, measurable forces in your life. On an organisational level, this is often referred to as bringing the values from the wall onto the floor. In other words, the values on the company website are actually lived and taken seriously in the organisation, serving as a catalyst to deliberately develop individuals and teams.

Have you ever worked in an organisation that has a great sounding set of values, like “Integrity,” “Inclusion,” “Teamwork,” “Curiosity,” “Transparency,” “Respect,” etc., that failed to make it meaningful in terms of concrete action, leadership role modelling, rituals, rewards, and accountability? It’s not enough to simply state values and ideals. Organisational values must be backed by committed actions and behaviours, with real rewards and accountability.

This lack of concrete role modelling, rituals, rewards and accountability is the core reason why it’s so normal in most organisations to find the values on the floor being different from the values on the wall/website. This gap between what we experience and what we aspire to in our organizations can only be resolved through a values-aligned, vertical growth mindset, psychologically-safe culture. And this can only be achieved by leaders who are willing to do the vertical growth work needed to role model their own stated values, with alignment and consciousness of the organisational values.

A vertical growth mindset-organisation is one where everyone sees and accepts themselves as a work in progress. They are more concerned with personal and team growth than protecting their image or status. They make a genuine daily effort to live and lead from a deeper sense of purpose, intent or set of values. This cuts through image management and unleashes enormous amounts of energy, growth, and trust in teams and organizations. The 40 percent of our time and energy that has previously been devoted to image management can now be used for better purposes.

Using the Mindful Leader Matrix Within Teams and Organisations

Applying the matrix to teams or organisations follows the same general process as how we apply it personally. We name unconscious behaviours in our

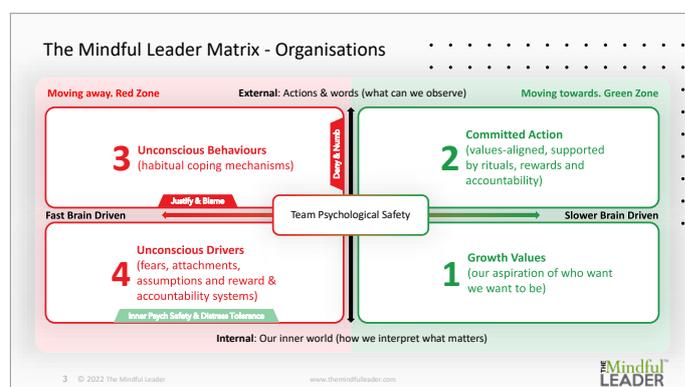
team that are creating distrust, conflict, and a host of other problems. We understand that these behaviours are merely symptoms of deeper underlying factors: the unconscious fears, attachments and assumptions of Quadrant 4. To overcome these issues, we first identify the organisational values we want to instill that will change our culture. We then identify specific behaviours and rituals to embed the values. We implement a system of accountability to ensure that the new behavioural standards are followed.

In an organisational or team context, there are a few changes to the matrix. First, we change the “Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation” piece in the middle of the personal matrix with “Team Psychological Safety.” Just as self-awareness and self-regulation are the fuel of your personal growth process, team psychological safety is the fuel of team/organisational growth.

Next, we apply specific practical tools and systems to organisational change. When we help organisations with culture change, we use the three “R’s” as the core levers for change:

1. Role Modeling of Leadership
2. Rituals
3. Rewards and accountability

Here is the graphic of the Team/Organisational Values Matrix:



When setting growth values at the organisational level, we use the same process through the Matrix as we do personally. The first step is to “make the unconscious conscious” by choosing what is important to us—in other words, choosing our growth values.

In order for organisational values to be truly meaningful, they must be translated into observable behavioral commitments.

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When cultivating or embedding values for your team or organisation, our rule of thumb is to collectively work on only one value and one related behavioral commitment at a time. The team or organisation needs to develop a shared understanding of which value is most needed to move the team or the organization forward. This focus generates collective energy and accountability to begin the complex process of moving away from elements of the existing culture that no longer serve the team or organization and toward a growth value (the cultural aspiration).

Creating a Container of Team Psychological Safety

Harvard organizational behavioral scientist Amy Edmondson introduced the construct of “team psychological safety” and defined it as a “shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.” It’s a shared assumption that others on the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish you for speaking up or sharing honest mistakes. It’s an environment where vulnerability is rewarded instead of being punished.

Over the course of two years, Google performed a massive study to determine what makes teams effective.[1] They found that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychological safety.

Psychological safety it is not to be confused with a lack of accountability. In fact, accountability for behaviour that damages psychological safety needs to be very strong. At the same time, performance accountability is also essential, but it must come from an intention to support growth, rather than blame or punish.

Dr. Timothy Clark is the author of *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation*. According to Dr. Clark, the four stages are:

1. **Inclusion Safety:** Team members feel safe to be themselves and are accepted for who they are.
2. **Learner Safety:** Team members are able to learn through asking questions. Team members here may be able to experiment, make (and admit) small mistakes, and ask for help.

3. **Contributor Safety:** Members feel safe to contribute their own ideas, without fear of being shamed or ridiculed. Ridiculing anyone for their ideas is a basic values violation. This is once again why values are so precious for the growth journey. They are themselves a container of safety.
4. **Challenger Safety:** Members feel safe to challenge the status quo. In our context of vertical growth and values, they can also challenge each other’s behaviour and actions in the context of the team values and commitments. This includes the team leader. Challenger safety is the level of safety that is needed for an environment of vertical growth to be fully supported. Nothing short of this will do.

The more psychologically safe your team members feel, the easier it will be to work with your organisational shadow.

4 Key Elements of Psychological Safety

There are four key elements to building and sustaining a challenger level of psychological safety and therefore a values-aligned, vertical-growth environment within your team and organisation:

1. A self-examining, values-based team leader is non-negotiable.
2. Triangulation must be eliminated because it kills trust and disables vertical growth.
3. All team members must be fully accountable for their behaviour and agreements, and be enabled to hold others accountable. Defensiveness, blame and denial kills challenger safety.
4. Feedback needs to be totally honest, but handled with respect, empathy and care. Respect and honesty are non negotiable values for challenger safety.

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Personal Transformation and the Hero's Journey

The process of growth and transformation can be scary, lonely and challenging. It requires discipline and courage. As my late father put it “Inner work is not for wimps”. It forces us to shed our false assumptions and habitual coping mechanisms to shift into a brave new way of thinking and behaving.

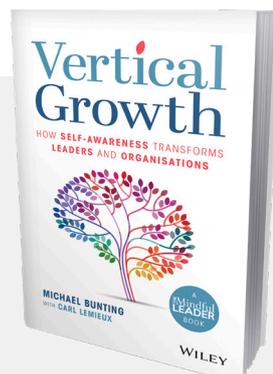
This journey is what mythologist Joseph Campbell referred to as the “Hero's Journey”—the most common and archetypal story of man, where the hero ventures into a new world to encounter new forces and win a decisive victory. In the case of adult development, the “new world” is our own mind. Developmental mindfulness, which cultivates deep self-awareness, is the tool we use to navigate that region successfully.

Living and leading from wholesome values is truly the “hero's journey,” the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into the butterfly. In this state, our fundamental source of wellbeing has shifted from the fluid and unpredictable external world to an inner compass of goodness. The journey challenges us to the very core. But we courageously take it to gain the wisdom and peace that can only come from living in alignment with our most core, life-serving values.

The more we align our behaviour with our growth values and cultivate deep integrity, congruency, and inner harmony, the better leaders we become. In turn, the better our organisations perform, while also making a positive difference in the world.

ENQUIRIES

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