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# Introduction

## *Tightening the Connection*

*During the first half of the twenty-first century, our understanding of the human brain will revolutionize how we think of ourselves and our interactions with other people.*

—Restak (2006, p. 1)

### PERCEPTION OF CONNECTION

The universe in which humankind resides and thrives is an endless system of systems within systems in which everything is connected to something that is connected to everything else. As Wheatley (1992) advises, “We inhabit a quantum universe that knows nothing of itself, independent of its relationships” (p. 39), be they the relationships within and between atoms, molecules, ecosystems, galaxies, machines, families, corporations, governments or ideas. Two exemplars of this universal pattern are the relationships that exist between leaders and the people they lead and the relationships that make up the most intricately connected system in the universe: the human brain. What, then, of the relationship between leadership and the brain?

#### A True Story

Some years ago, as we were in the early stages of developing this book, a woman who was attending our presentation on the topic at a national conference shared her master’s thesis proposal that also addressed the implications of emerging knowledge about the brain for leadership practice. It pleased her to know that we were investigating the same issue. She also expressed concern that her proposed thesis had received a less than

enthusiastic response from her graduate adviser, as demonstrated by his comment, “What makes you think that there is a connection between leadership and the brain?”

### **A Reasonable Question**

The adviser’s question may have been Socratic, sarcastic, or cynical in intent. Perhaps it was merely an attempt at humour, an observation that the collective behaviour of people in positions of authority implies a brainless nature. Whatever its intent, the question is both legitimate and revealing. It is legitimate because it is human nature (i.e. the nature of the human brain) to question the what, why, how, when and where of things, including the relationship between leadership and the brain. It is a revealing question because it suggests that the relationship between leadership and the brain has not been adequately investigated, much less understood or appreciated.

### **An Underlying Question**

The question lurking beneath the adviser’s inquiry is not whether leadership is connected to the brain. The answer to that question is obvious, given the brain’s physiological presence and mediating role in all human activity—that is, the brain is always at the party and leadership always dances to the tune of the brain. However, this natural connection may be at risk if not well understood and nurtured. Accordingly, the more important connection question is not whether but *how* the brain is accessible to leaders who seek to influence others toward the achievement of goals.

### **A Question to Be Refined**

It might also be anticipated that the adviser, in the responsible manner of an academic mentor guiding proposed scholarship, would have further questions for his graduate student. One such question would surely be, “How are you interpreting the term *brain*?” Again, this is a reasonable question. If one is going to explore the connection of leadership to something, it is best to know what the interpretation of that something is—and here arises a bit of a problem.

The good news is that the beginning of the twenty-first century is witnessing a convergence of information from investigations in diverse fields of study (neurophysiology, neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, evolutionary biology, primatology, ethology, linguistics, psychophysics, mathematics, philosophy,

(Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), *Changing Minds* (Gardner, 2004), and *Social Intelligence* (Goleman, 2006)—extend a historic human interest in the leadership–brain connection.

## HOW THE BOOK UNFOLDS

This book presents a framework for bridging emerging knowledge about human intelligence to effective leadership practice. It is a framework that supports leadership that is *mindful* (i.e. thoughtful and attentive) rather than *mindless* (i.e. unaware and heedless) of the nature and nurture of intelligence in influencing others toward the achievement of goals. In essence, it is a framework for better connecting leadership behaviour to how people naturally think, learn and achieve. This purpose is motivated by three assumptions:

- *A new day requires a new perspective.* Given a rich and growing convergence of new information about the nature and nurture of human intelligence from ongoing investigations in neuroscience, cognitive science and many other fields, it is both appropriate and necessary to reassess established perceptions of many aspects of human behaviour, including leadership.
- *A framework facilitates reflection toward perceptual shift.* Productive reflection about the nature of intelligence and its implications for leadership practice requires a framework that structures *attention* to relevant information, *articulation* of perception about nature and nurture relationships, *application* of perception to behaviour in practice, and *adjustment* of perception and practice from application experience.
- *A universal prescription for leadership is not possible.* Given the powerful influence of context on the exercise of leadership, a universal prescription for how a leader engages the capacity of others towards the achievement of goals is not possible. However, the *mindful* discernment of compelling leadership purpose and guiding principles is both possible and advisable.

### Part I: Breaking Through

Part I reviews the breakthrough in knowledge about brain-enabled intelligence that supports a new sense of human nature and leadership. It also introduces a practical framework for proactively processing the breakthrough in knowledge to leadership advantage.

*Main idea:* Given that most leaders are not and will never be neuroscientists or cognitive psychologists, the technical and rapidly evolving knowledge base about the brain and human intelligence must be organised and applied to leadership behaviour in a purposeful and practical manner. A framework that structures attentive articulation of knowledge towards practical applications and adjustments in behaviour (as both standard and prescribed practice) is useful to that end.

## Part II: Minding Revelation

Part II models the first two components of the framework introduced in Chapter 4. That is, the reader will mindfully *attend* to information about brain-enabled intelligence to *articulate* perception of the essential nature and nurture of human capacity.

Chapters 5–10 engage the reader in processing information about the *physiological, social, emotional, constructive, reflective* and *dispositional* dimensions of intelligence. Each chapter is organised to describe the following:

- The *gist* of the targeted dimension of intelligence (i.e. a foundation of information that is useful in forming a general sense of the phenomenon)
- The *essence* of the dimension (i.e. a discernment of essential qualities)
- The *implications* of the dimension for practice (i.e. compatible behaviour)

This format both models and facilitates the distillation of essential knowledge about the nature of intelligence from a large and expanding information base. Each chapter visits one of six dimensions of intelligence (think of this as visiting six windows or elevations, each offering a particular view of intelligence). Across the six chapters, you will observe brain-enabled intelligence to be a multidimensional and integrated phenomenon. You will also construct a knowledge base that supports subsequent articulation of the nature and nurture of intelligence. For example, you will discern that:

- The *physiological nature* of intelligence is big, mind–body connected, high maintenance and malleable.
- The *social nature* of intelligence is expectant, dependent, extended and virtuous.
- The *emotional nature* of intelligence is attentive, judgmental, motivating and managed after the fact.
- The *constructive nature* of intelligence is sensory, social, emotional, reflective and susceptible to a double bind.

- The *reflective nature* of intelligence is manipulative, executive, unifying and promising.
- The *dispositional nature* of intelligence is macro, mandatory, malleable, and either maximising or minimising.

After the construction of personal understanding about the *essence* of intelligence (e.g. essential qualities of *physiological, social, emotional, constructive, reflective* and *dispositional* dimensions), each chapter models the articulation of relationships between the essential nature of intelligence and compatible nurturing behaviour. That articulation of perception process is structured by the following format:

The nature of intelligence is \_\_\_ } **If-then** { Compatible behaviour is \_\_\_.

### Part III: Following Through

Part III brings the framework introduced in preceding chapters into sharper focus by examining *mindful leadership attributes* and further modelling the final two components: how to *apply* articulated perceptions about the nature of intelligence to compatible behaviour and *adjust* perception and behaviour from application experience. This concluding part also engages summary reflection about proactive next steps.

Chapter 11, “Mindful Leadership”, is a putting-it-all-together chapter. It begins by examining adherence to mindful purpose and principles within the framework introduced in Chapter 4. The ultimate purpose of mindful leadership, it is proposed, is a mindful organisational culture that collectively attends to the nature and nurture of intelligence, a culture in which the cultivation of capacity is a goal in itself. The principles of mindful leadership are the components of the mindful framework (i.e. attend to information, articulate perception of nature and nurture, apply perception of nature and nurture to behaviour, and adjust perception and behaviour from application experience). Those components are revisited and fleshed out with specific examples and active referencing to reader context. Within the principle of applying perception to behaviour, six *standard applications* are described:

- *Support the physiological platform that enables intelligence* (e.g. attend to brain fitness, stimulate neural development).
- *Promote social relationships* (e.g. facilitate meeting of minds, cultivate common purpose, extend the mind’s reach).