

EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, PRESENCE AND SOMATIC INTELLIGENCE IN BUSINESS

Dancer and organisational facilitator Daniel Ludevig explores embodied knowledge and Social Presencing Theater as paths to unlocking innovation, creativity, and intelligence in businesses

Embodied knowledge is a third intelligence (alongside IQ and EI) that has piqued the interest of progressive, forward-thinking business leaders, conferences and academics, and appears in discussions within such fields as psychology, sociology, dance and leadership as paths to unlock organisational potential and business success.

Dance and Movement-based exercises

Since 2009 I have been exploring the potential of embodied knowledge to support corporate leaders and employees to get in touch with their inner-knowing and intuition so that they can use this intelligence for better decision-making. I began by using movement-based exercises such as dance for communication and leadership learning. Through my background as a professional Latin and Swing dancer, I learned the importance of connection, trust and rhythm while trying out a variety of lead-and-follow models with my dance partners. I was amazed at how much could be communicated and understood between two people in only a two-minute dance. Later, through obtaining degrees in psychology and economics, I developed a greater sense of how the metaphor and experience of dance and other movement-based exercises could inform topics like leadership, conflict, team dynamics, values, team collaboration, change management, decision-making and presence in organisational culture (this is echoed by a field of supportive research and literature).



Participants during the BMW/Guggenheim Lab embodying their various communication styles and exploring non-verbally topics such as trust, respect, purpose and values

The workshops aim to be eye-opening, high-energy and fun, and to encourage participants to re-think their leadership models. They engage in activities like body sculpting, group rhythm tests, and improvised leading and following with their partners; they find themselves embodying behavioural styles similar to those which they identify or witness in their company. Simultaneously, followers are

also encouraged to explore various possibilities of leading from the follower role. Through this it becomes clear to them that they can also empower, enhance, support and influence their leaders from the following position. In the debrief leaders and followers talk about their experiences during the movement exercises. This enables them to feel safer and more open, as managers and employees, to talk about their company culture, organisational experiences and challenges, and to connect the learning from the exercises to their daily work and personal and company objectives.

Client examples

As a continuation of this work, over the years I have included and partnered with a variety of embodiment methodologies in my facilitation, from martial arts, acting and dance to music, painting, and sculpture making. A recent study by Harvey Seifert (2016) demonstrates that the use of arts-based methods in training results in statistically significant increases in creative and critical thinking, sharing leadership, emotionally intelligent behaviour, empathic listening, mutual respect, trust, active following and transparency, as well as insight, clarity and problem-solving. The study also revealed that participants in arts-based training are able to make more transfer from the training to their daily work and lives than in other types of training.

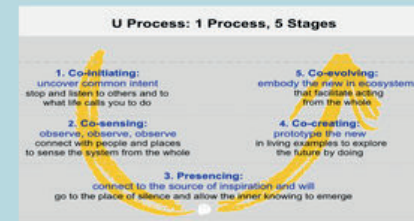
Through referring and reflecting on their embodied experiences, these methods have allowed my clients to learn about and feel often hard-to-grasp but nonetheless critical topics. In one programme we used lead/follow movement exercises to create a common language among 150 participants from three separate nationalities at a multi-national energy company where a common verbal language did not exist. Partner and group movement exercises were used to explore trust issues within the company culture affected by a large-scale international merger. In an environment dominated by fear of possible layoffs, this movement-based activity allowed participants temporarily to leave their concerns aside and try something new. Despite the preceding tensions, several minutes into the workshops the participants were seen entering curiously into a space of becoming 'comfortable with the uncomfortable.' Movement acted both as the glue that brought the team together and the lubricant that eased them into openly having a difficult conversation with each other and their leaders: creatively exploring how the company leadership culture could shift towards more openness in order to support everyone affected by the organisational transition.

During the planning phase of a workshop to support a five-year strategy off-site programme with the leadership team of a central

European bank, it became clear that major gaps of information-sharing existed. This caused insecurity and vulnerability, and left the management team isolated and exposed to criticism. Movement and a 3-D sculpture-building method proved to be turning points in helping to bring the fragmented leadership team together and find common ground. The subsequent participation and openness noticeably improved throughout the rest of the programme. The visual dimension of these activities allowed for insight on strategic possibilities and how to communicate these to staff and stakeholders. Having used a variety of movement-based approaches to address this company's challenges and development over the past four years, we have witnessed their continuous transformative evolution towards being more unified, aligned and connected when approaching difficult decisions.

Social Presencing Theater

Since 2013 I have also begun using a set of embodiment practices, based on Otto Scharmer's social and systemic change framework, Theory U, and the accompanying art form called Social Presencing Theater, co-created by Arawana Hayashi, Scharmer (2014) and others from the Presencing Institute. Theory U offers a process and structure for leading, learning, innovating and sustainably supporting social systems and organisations undergoing transformational change by looking to the emerging future as a source of knowledge in addressing complex issues.



The 5 main steps of the Theory U model, supporting organisations' journey from ego to eco-awareness through an exploration of source and purpose

Social Presencing Theater makes visible the current and emerging realities of groups through a mindfulness- and awareness-based presencing approach that includes eight movement-based practices. As its main instrument, Social Presencing Theater places and rests attention on the body. Using the body as an instrument invites participants to increase their sensing capacity, thus allowing them to recognise the difference between actual embodied sensing and subsequent cognitive meaning-making.

The first and most fundamental of the eight practices is the '20 minute dance': participants are invited to notice and let go of thoughts they may have about past, present and future, and encouraged to allow their attention to land on the feeling and observation of their own bodies, maintaining a sense of groundedness while doing so. During this individual dance participants shift between moments of stillness and movement while lying, sitting, standing or walking. The experience develops the capacity to sense through the body, to learn how to let go of habitual movement and meaning-making patterns, and instead pay attention to what is emerging. Clients report feeling greater presence, clarity of mind and ability to let go of distracting

thoughts. It also allows them to notice that they possess a natural sense of awareness that connects them with others.

Awareness in Social Presencing Theater is defined as a 360-degree sensing capacity that connects our own bodies with the groups or social bodies in which we operate. Through various practices participants extend their embodied awareness into the larger social field around them. With increased curiosity they notice aspects like space, ambiguity and the intangible, as well as group dynamics such as leading, following, mirroring, accepting, rejecting, soloing, supporting, controlling, and manipulating. For many, the embodied experience is the first time they discover that such topics even exist, not to mention the critical role they play in all social groups of which they are a part.

Duets, The Village, The Field Dance

Duets are non-verbal, movement-based exchanges between two individuals to explore topics such as leadership, conflict, communication, presence, collaboration, patience, and deep listening. Both persons obtain more understanding and information about a real situation by (1) embodying their own body-shape when reflecting on the situation and learning from that, (2) seeing and sensing into the embodiment of the other, and (3) noticing and feeling into what can emerge from the space between them. In one instance, this practice helped two competing leaders to better understand the difficulties and pressures of the other, while simultaneously allowing them to explore what they shared and could co-create together, unlocking new ways forward.

The Village invites participants to extend their attention outwards to groups of five or more while moving freely around a space. They are encouraged to notice their own motives, behaviours, reactions, habits, impulses, judgements and feelings, as well as paying attention to the dynamics of the whole. It is a powerful tool for allowing groups to see themselves from the outside, one of the key competencies of high-performing groups



Participants during a MOVE Leadership workshop using Social Presencing Theater to make visible underlying dynamics, relationships patterns and habits within the group

For a group of food entrepreneurs all working at the same institution, this surfaced observations around the group's tendency to shepherd in anyone who strayed too far from what the majority was doing. For a group of innovators, this was a surprising and important observation that led to a deeper dialogue around how they might be unconsciously limiting new ideas and opposing opinions. They have continued using the Village as a check-in practice to keep track of current and emerging group dynamics.

The Field Dance explores existing unconscious expectations and

projections inherent when an individual communicates to a group. Through its exploration of unconditional confidence, presence and speaking on behalf and through the collective, the Field Dance reveals the deep 'invisible' forces at play between speaker and audience. The awareness achieved through this simple practice is the groundwork for real innovation and idea generation. Clients are able to let go of their prejudices and tap into the collective potential between them and their audience. They report greater connection, confidence and co-creation resulting from stronger trust.

These embodied practices enable participants to pay attention to those voices or ideas which often get overlooked: marginalised ideas or people are often sources of new creativity. Participants develop the capacity to pay attention to their attention, and to realise that the quality of our attention dictates the outcomes we see.

We develop a panoramic awareness that lessens the sense of separateness between our self and others ... When we rest in that awareness, letting go of preconceptions, we tap into our highest future self and the greatest potential of the situation. Awareness gives birth to insight, innovation and skillful action. Something fresh crystallizes out of open perception that can then be put into action. (Hayashi, 2014).

Further advanced practices, like the Stuck Dance, Case-Clinic 1.5, Seed Dance, and 4-D mapping, enable a deeper understanding of the systemic relationship between the various elements. Indirectly and directly, these experiences allow leaders to connect with an embodied knowledge that opens up their minds to cultivate curiosity, opens up their hearts to develop compassion, and opens up their will to build courage.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Daniel Ludevig facilitates deep conversations for organisations and systems using embodiment and creativity to create transformational change around culture, communication and strategy. His work is informed through His work at MOVE Leadership and his training as a professional swing dancer. Born in the U.S.A, currently living in Berlin, Daniel works internationally. He explores the ways in which company culture and values, and the capacity to access our different intelligences, influence professional and social development and interaction in the workplace and everyday life.

Coaching Perspectives