

THE MACE MODEL - 4 CAPABILITIES FOR EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

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Leaders can become more adaptive to the modern world through the cultivation of **exceptional emotional and mental capability**, thereby benefiting the leader, their teams, their organisations and relevant surrounding ecosystems at large. This article explains what is meant by this, introduces the MACE model and shows how we can use this as a framework to stay “on-track” in the middle of, to quote Jon Kabat-Zinn, the “Full Catastrophe” of modern work and life (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

1. BACKGROUND

The modern workscape (and indeed, modern life generally) is characterised by the presence of profound, simultaneous and accelerating change in a variety of systemic conditions (including demographic, social, cultural, technology, governance, consumer expectations, natural, regulatory etc.).

This “complexification”, in turn creates a sense of “*overwhelm*” and, perhaps, threatens many! To quote our friends at Potential Project, we might say we are living in the “PAID Reality (*Pressured, Always-on, Information-overloaded, Distracted* – see (Hougaard, Carter, & Coutts, 2016, p. x). In such a reality, we can no longer rely on the “*technical solutions*” found in spiral-bound operations manuals, skills training programmes or even previous “*case studies*” to solve many of the challenges we face today and will face tomorrow. Solving such challenges often requires a shift in the way we “see” things. In the assumptions we make about what is and what “should be”. In the ways we interpret and react to what arises around us. People who are “adaptive” (see below), aren’t threatened by the PAID reality, and are more likely to see opportunity and possibility rather than threat and limitation, making choices of response borne of “wisdom” and mental / emotional maturity rather than “reacting” based on “immediate concerns”.

Our approach to leader and leadership development is geared to equipping individuals to respond **adaptively** (rather than just technically) to the challenges we face, and will face at an accelerating rate in the future.

1 STAYING “ON-TRACK”

It has become evident that being adaptive and responsive to overwhelm so we can stay “on track” is the golden key that unlocks our ability to be at our best, especially when the going gets tough. For this to happen, the changes, opportunities and stresses being presented to us need to be seen for what they are. At the simplest level, happiness and professional success arises from our ability to:

1. Discover or otherwise identify what is most important to us,
2. Connect to the “why” of the above, why is this important to us?
3. Work out what embodied behaviours would arise if the above were true,
4. Understand and, more importantly, apply **all of our available and appropriate resources** at the **right time** and in the right **context**. These can include, of course, skills, behaviours, knowledge, experience and strengths but also mental, relational, “environmental” resources.

5. At the same time, we may need to understand, as best we can, what might “**interfere**” or get in the way of taking the necessary actions in the appropriate moments (“key moments of choice”) and rehearse various mental and behavioural “response strategies” for such moments. As above, this interference can come from a number of domains (mental / emotional, behavioural, environmental and relational).

The role of “mindfulness” (and what is mindfulness, actually)?

It turns out that the ability to bring your best to stressful and challenging situations and to develop competence with the “4 capabilities” described below is a function of mindfulness. It is mindfulness that allows us to keep our attention focussed on what we really care about (our aspirations, goals, values and desired behaviours) together with the resources we have that may support this. At the same time “mindfulness” allows attention to be rebalanced from focusing on problems and anxieties towards what we can actually do that serves goals and aspirations. If nothing can be usefully done, these practices help us to accept reality as it is and to move on with things that **can be done** (maybe related to different goals and aspirations), thereby managing mental, behavioural and other resources optimally.

For the purpose of this paper, and to make the definition useful in the “real world” of leadership and life, we define Mindfulness as:

1. **Immediate awareness:** Awareness of what is happening in the mind (thoughts) and body (emotions), in a moment, without **immediate** resistance or reaction,
2. **Peripheral awareness (or “self-remembering”):** In the next moment, bringing back to mind “what is skilful or “useful” (one’s goals, values, aspirations, skills, commitments, knowledge / experience and other internal / external resources, etc)
3. **Self-redirection:** The ability to redirect attention as appropriate, and taking appropriate, called for, action.
4. **Behavioural activation:** This is where the “rubber meets the road”, where we actually take an action which serves our goals and aspirations rather than serving the “default” reactive pattern.

2 AN APPROACH TO BUILDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

1.1 THE 4 CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK (MACE MODEL)

In order to remain “on target” and make best use of skills, knowledge and experience during stressful moments one can say that 4 emotional and mental capabilities are required. We call these “The 4 Capabilities” or the MACE model.

These are :

Motivational Balance (M)

Attentional Balance (A)

Cognitive Balance (C) and

Emotional Balance (E)

(For the purpose of this article we deal with these in the order Motivational, Cognitive, Emotional and Attentional, MCAE!)

1.1.1 Motivational Capability

Motivational capability is a trainable mental quality which implies an understanding of our aspirations, values and what supports, and arises from, these (including goals and behaviours). A person who has strong motivational capability knows what is important to them in the various contexts of their lives, (e.g. as a leader, a friend, peer, colleague etc.). In particular, this relates to how they aspire to “be” in these various contexts or roles under different conditions. Motivationally capable individuals are able to remember these, moment-by-moment, so that their aspirations, values and associated goals become a guiding compass for their behavioural decision-making. Motivationally capable leaders are better able therefore to make decisions which come from a place of depth, in line with how they aspire to “show up” (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011) in the context. Motivationally capable people (in combination with the other capabilities as described later), know **what** they want and **why** they want it. They can remember the benefits to self and others of the outcomes they would like. They know what they are prepared to “let go of” as they make choices of behaviour which lead to the outcomes they desire, letting go of short term concerns that might otherwise take them off-track. (including seeking of immediate “gratification” or avoidance of immediate “discomfort”. They often have a strong sense of purpose and connection to values and their goals tend to be less “hedonic” (pursuit of short-term sensory pleasure) and more towards the “eudaimonic” (concerned with “bigger picture” matters which are in service of some greater benefit to something than simply their own pleasure) in their nature. Such people have a strong sense of purpose which is capable of inspiring and motivating others, especially if this can be “connected” to the organisational or team purpose.

From a neuroscientific point of view, individuals with strong motivational capability show evidence of development in what Kathy Kolbe called the “conative circuit”. (Kolbe, 1990; Snyder, Shapiro, & Treleaven, 2012).

The Role of Aspirations, Values, Purpose and Vision in Motivation

It has become evident that being adaptive and responsive to overwhelm so we can stay “on track” is the golden key that unlocks our ability to be at our best, especially when the going gets tough. For this to happen, the changes, opportunities and stresses being presented to us need to be seen for what they are, and seen in the light of our goals, aspirations for ourselves and values (ways we aspire to “show up” under differing circumstances and contexts).

A definition we like of “values” is “A yardstick that we (subconsciously) use to measure how we feel about a behaviour”. In complex times we have neither the time nor the ability to “think things through” each time we need to make a decision of behaviour. Motivational Capability and alignment with values and aspirations provides an instantly available “compass” to guide us. These qualities provide a strong compass for our decision-making and behaviour and are extremely important in the midst of complexity. At the simplest level, happiness and professional success arise from our ability to:

- Discover or otherwise identify what is most important to us,
- Connect to the “why” of the above, why is this important to us?
- Work out what embodied behaviours would arise if the above were true,
- Understand and, more importantly, apply **all of our available and appropriate resources** at the **right time** and in the right **context**. These can include, of course, skills, behaviours, knowledge, experience and strengths but also mental, relational, environmental and “environmental” resources.

- At the same time, we may need to understand, as best we can, what might “interfere” or get in the way of taking the necessary actions in the appropriate moments (“key moments of choice”) and rehearse various mental and behavioural “response strategies” for such moments. As above, this interference can come from a number of domains (mental / emotional, behavioural, environmental and relational).
- Note that at various points in an individual’s life, often due to reflection on experience, but sometimes facilitated by “interventions” (such as coaching insight) may create increasing awareness and clarity arises to the extent that there is a “shift” in what an individual takes to be salient. When this happens, the aspirations, goals, values and behaviour can change, sometimes suddenly. A coach must be ready to notice and “re-contract” with the client as appropriate at any time in a session or a programme as these shifts become evident.

1.1.2 Cognitive Capability

Achieving desired outcomes in line with motivational aspirations will require actions from us in what we would call “key moments-of-choice”. These actions will, hopefully, move us in the direction of the goals we have set along the path to the outcomes we are looking for.

Cognitive-behavioural and rational-emotional behavioural theory and the highly evidence-based interventions which arise from these are grounded in the idea that an individual’s neurological, emotional and behavioural response to the phenomenological world....:

1. **Is often automatic** (the mind will often make automatic decisions about what needs to be attended to in a particular moment in relation to a particular situational context) and is determined through the process of “salience” (Chen, Cai, Ryali, Supekar, & Menon, 2016). In other words, the mind often decides for us, based on what are sometimes called “old reactive patterns”, what is most important to us in that moment. Behaviour springs from this “automatic” appraisal and interpretation.
2. **Involves an interplay of cognitions (mental processes) and emotions** which synergistically combine to create the observed behaviour. Again, these interplays are often encoded into the brain in the form of “patterns” or “mental / emotional highways”.
3. **Relate to a situation that triggers a set of conclusions or beliefs** about:
 - the situation
 - its consequences and impacts, and
 - what we need to “do” about it (sometimes described as “coping strategies”).

These automatic “conclusions” or “assumptions” are sometimes known as “self-limiting beliefs”. They may have had protective benefits to us at earlier stages in our lives and are often supported or driven by strong emotions which create immediate impulses to act in a particular way related to the situation that has arisen (Neenan, 2018, pp. 10-19).

Generally, the “stories” which drive these cognitions and emotions are either not true and / or not relevant to our current situations / lives. When we are not aware of their presence, they unfortunately are able to exert powerful influences in the moment and derail our attempts to progress goals.

Having been “installed” early on in our lives when we were much more vulnerable, these patterns often run deep and, making matters worse, are often beneath our awareness (operating sub-consciously). The problem with this is that new behaviours necessary to achieve or move towards developmental goals can be easily replaced in the moment of choice by these (often powerful, self-protective and hidden) cognitions and emotions. When this happens, we find (often later on) that

we have, once again, missed the opportunity to practice the new strategy necessary to move towards our goals.

A mind which can “see” these processes operating in the moment and keep the developmental goal front and center is a mind which possesses “cognitive capability”. In other words, cognitive capability implies that we are able to notice when our attention has been “hijacked” by an “old reactive pattern” and to bring our mind back to our goals, aspirations, behaviours and supporting “practices”, leading to the optimal behaviour.

1.1.3 *Attentional Capability*

The mind is the forerunner of all behaviour

Simply put, attentional capability allows us to do 2 simple but not necessarily easy things, namely to:

1. **“focus on what we choose”** and,
2. **“ensure that we choose the right thing (to focus on)”**

Even (especially) in the midst of mental, emotional or physical phenomena which are “trying” to distract us from our aspirations or goals.

Adapting from the work of our partners - Potential Project, we call this **“The 2 Rules for ‘Staying on Track’”** (see also Hougaard et al. (2016)).

The big question is, what is it that an individual needs to remain attentive to (focused on) in order that they can do what they need to do in order to be who they would like to be? This question can be answered through the use of the MACE model and its associated sub-processes (see later chapters).

Even assuming we know what we want (Motivational Capability) and we know what might get in the way and how to ‘deal’ with it (Cognitive Capability), then, Attentional Capability is also necessary for behavioural change. Attentional capability implies that we are able to know what we are about to do before we actually do it (which is dependent on what is occupying the mind at that “moment-of-choice” described above). With this knowing, if need be, we can make a conscious adjustment of attention which re-orientes the mind with what we **really** want (goals and aspirations).

Attentional capability is a trainable quality of mind which, perhaps, is best correlated with what we could describe as **“actionable self-awareness”**. Actionable self-awareness in turn has 2 main components :

1. **Immediate Self-awareness:** Knowing what is in our mind and knowing what is in our “emotional field”, moment-by moment (and particularly in those key “moments-of-choice” where we need to choose an appropriate (often novel) action in line with desired outcomes. **AND...**
2. **Self-remembering or “peripheral awareness”:** Knowing our goals, values, commitments, desired outcomes, strengths, skills, knowledge and next steps towards these outcomes.

With the above 2 aspects of attentional capability, we are able to make a conscious adjustment of attention if this is the **“right thing to do”** in the moment. Attentionally balanced minds can remain oriented to outcomes, benefits to self and others of such outcomes, and all the resources available and necessary to support forward movement. Distractions which may come from physical (e.g. noise or other sensory phenomena) or cognitive / emotional phenomena will not trouble the attentionally capable mind. Such a mind will be able to notice the “distraction” and move attention back to our “resources”.

Strengthening attentional capability necessarily involves neuroplastic changes to important structures in the brain including the Insula Cortices (the seat of “interoception” and heavily involved in “telling” the brain that “I am possibly off track”), the Dorsolateral Pre-frontal Cortex (“dlPFC”). This brain region supports “doing the ‘right thing’ when the right thing is the more difficult thing” in the moment (e.g. giving up short term reward in favour of a possibly bigger reward later) and the “Anterior Cingulate Cortex”, sometimes known as the “error processing center” of the brain. This “structure” concludes whether we are off track or not and helps “switch attention” back to what is necessary.

The case for “Mindfulness”

Such interventions as mindfulness have been shown to develop these brain regions both in terms of both their size AND the level of activity and connectivity with other parts of the brain ((Lazar et al., 2005). Attentional capability, as defined above, is very similar to the state of awareness known as mindfulness.

There is also emerging evidence that certain styles of coaching help cultivate the physiological state and traits which correlate with mindfulness, thereby helping strengthen each of the 4 capabilities, particularly attentional.

1.1.4 Emotional Capability

Emotions are powerful drivers of behaviour and create very fast (often automatic) reactions borne of (often subconscious, and, very often, unreliable) predictions of how what is happening in the moment might impact on our future “flourishing” (Pally, 2007). “Afflictive” emotions (meaning emotions that are not “adaptive” to the situation), once triggered, create a cascade of physical (feeling) and psychological (thoughts) and behavioural reactions designed either to get us away from *predicted* threat or move us towards goals / *predicted* rewards (Ekman, 2007) - the little word “predicted” here is important, as often the threat that we are reacting to is, in fact, non-existent, or, the reward we think we are driving towards may not be a source of happiness or success for us. It behooves us to work out, and help others work out, whether the predictions we are making are, actually, accurate.

Emotional capability implies that we are able feel the emotions of ourselves, and others, without an immediate reaction to these feelings. Emotional capability implies that we are able to insert a temporal space after the initial noticing of the feeling tone. Into this space we are then able to insert a (skilful) choice of response in line with our aspirations, goals and “practices”.

Emotional capability also implies that we are able to see our emotions as being “physiological” rather than “existential” phenomena (Nummenmaa, Glerean, Hari, & Hietanen, 2014). We are able to notice the somatic component (feelings in the body) and how it is acting upon us to create thoughts and behaviours in the moment. An emotionally capable mind knows that “unskilful attention” to emotion (being “caught up” in the emotion – often termed the “Amygdala Hijack”), often leads to behaviour which is soon regretted. And it tends to happen again and again, simply because the existence of the emotion causes us to “forget” what our goals and aspirations are and focus instead on ‘perceived’ threats!

Emotional capability implies the ability to notice this “spark before the flame”, thereby getting ahead of automatic reactions in favour of “wise” responses in line with who we really are and what we really want.

Emotions are the primary signal that there is something to look at. To pay attention to. Maybe, in the world that we were evolved into, they needed immediate attention and action, as they may have signalled a genuine threat to survival. Today, however, we do, at least, have the time to take a

pause and reflect back on what we really want and what behaviour is most likely to lead us there, taking all goals and aspirations into account (rather than the goal that the emotion has presented to us). Therefore the ability to be skilful with our own emotions and with the emotions of others is the key to self-management in service of our goals, relationships, values, success and, ultimately, long term flourishing.

3 CONCLUSION

The MACE model provides a framework for firstly, discovering our aspirations, values, goals and desired ways to show up in various contexts of our lives and work. The model also provides a scaffold for being as sure as we can be that our behaviour is adaptive to the circumstances and most likely to lead to our (and others') success and well-being. The model is supported by trainable mental qualities which we will explore in a following chapter.

The end result is that we are able to bring the best of ourselves to our lives and our work. When things are going well, when things are difficult, when facing change, loss, or stress, with family and friends, co-workers, acquaintances or even people we (think we) don't like or are in conflict with. We can only bring our best to all these situations.

And, knowing that we can be "at our best" in all these situations has its own rewards. This is what we call flourishing !

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