Personal Growth and Leadership:
Interpersonal Communication with Mindfulness into Action

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INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness into Action (MIA) is a methodology for developing leadership skills through indigenous knowledge and organizational learning techniques (Vergara, Wallace, Du, Marsick, Yorks, & Tamariz, 2016b). Participants become more aware of their unconscious behaviors, more in tune with other people, and increasingly skillful in engaging in conscious and intentional action. Participants develop the ability to connect with their thoughts, emotions, and hearts in ways that enable them to counteract the negative effects of stress, dissonance, and self-limiting beliefs. They learn to nurture the development of harmonious, sustainable, and healthy relationships in communities and organizations (Vergara, Wallace, Mewani, Reyes, Marsick, Yorks, & Tamariz, 2016c). Participants can achieve a new awareness that is vital in cross-cultural interactions; they can become what Boyatzis and Mckee (2005) refer to as resonant leaders. According to Vergara (2016a), a participant's achievement of the "third head" is the most prominent characteristic of the MIA methodology. The "third head" is described as a state of neutrality/harmony where the participant is able to "take a step back" and observe thoughts and emotions before taking action. This study is an attempted replication of a previous Mindfulness into Action study (Vergara, 2016a).

Mindfulness into Action in a Vygotskyan Notion to Develop Personal Growth

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky paid great attention to the socio-cultural part of psychological development. Rieber and Robinson state that Vygotsky paid greater attention to the social part of psychology (2004). He valued interactionism more than reductionism and criticized dualism in the sense that dualists believe that the mind is separate from the body or that a human being is an entity that is isolated from social or historical events. When we think or have an interactive dialogue with ourselves it is often related to something that originated outside our own mind. Human nature is extremely complex, and no single principle can account for human development; mental abilities can emerge both internally and externally in the organism. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cogni-

tion as an individual's community plays a central role in the process of understanding the world. Social learning is often a precursor to human development. To understand an individual's development, one must understand the cultural and social context that surrounds and internalizes within the individual. This implies that different cultures and social factors, such as traditions and belief systems, will affect a humans' cognitive development. Vygotsky believed that humans are born with fundamental abilities for cognitive and intellectual development: attention, sensation, perception, and memory. Higher mental functions are developed from these basic abilities through interaction with the sociocultural environment. When the basic abilities are developed and fine-tuned through cultural influence, they are referred to as tools of intellectual adaption and they vary across cultures. Cognitive functions are affected by values, beliefs, and tools of intellectual adaption- adaption of the culture, made by the individual. Data suggests that when participants are first introduced to MIA reflection exercises they feel it is an unnecessary task that was only accomplished because they knew they were going to share their reflections during the upcoming meeting (Vergara, 2016a). However, these reflection exercises quickly grew in importance and impact within the group as they facilitated the emergence of storytelling. Storytelling became a meaningful and joyful activity for participants during the MIA meetings. For some, the intention and motivation to reflect in the beginning seemed to come from the need of social interaction: the need to learn, share, provide and receive feedback from others. This is echoed in Vygotsky's concept of a more knowledgeable other (MKO), which refers to someone who possesses more knowledge about a particular task than the learner. The social interaction between a learner and a MKO can result in a greater understanding of the phenomena they are interacting with. Even though Vygotsky emphasized the important effect adults have on the development of children, the MKO can also be peers with expertise, and even non-human items such as electronic devices and methodologies. Another concept for understanding human development is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Rieber & Robinson, 2004) which describes the difference between what a learner can achieve independently, and what a learner can achieve with the guidance and motivation from a more knowledgeable other (MKO). The ZPD is an important area for Vygotsky, it is here the learner develops new higher mental functions, it is here the quality and sensitivity of the guidance from the MKO is of most importance. Since MIA meetings gather different people with different backgrounds, experiences, skills and perspectives; a more knowledgeable other (MKO) can be anyone attending the meeting. This was key for the action inquiry process of MIA (Torbert, 2004). During the second person action inquiry participants question and comment on each other's reflections, providing new perspectives through speech and social interaction. When these new perspectives are clarified in dialogue, the participant is enabled to reflect on the dialogue and reformulate his/her own thoughts. By being made aware of something/given new perspective/knowledge, the participant can gain conscious control of the new insight/knowledge. It is what Piaget called a taking into consciousness (Rieber & Robinson, 2004).

According to Rieber and Robinson (2004), Vygotsky discussed the interaction between humans, their tools and the symbolic tool of language. Vygotsky was fascinated with how language affects the human mind. He even postulated the idea that language creates consciousness and free will. Language enables us to communicate with the world around us, and Vygotsky viewed language as the greatest tool of the human species. He argued that for the purpose of communication, language develops through social interactions and is the most central canal of information transfer between adults and children. Language also serves as a powerful tool of intellectual adaptation. Furthermore, Vygotsky believed that thought and language in an infant are two independent streams that flow together through social interaction and that language gives shape and conscious direction to thought, making the streams interdependent. There is a distinction between three types of language: social speech which is communication with oth-

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