

Investing in the Four Domains of Well-Being

Success at leading without losing yourself

By

Katie Birch and Patrick J. Psaila

It's a typical rainy morning in Malta where traffic practically comes to a halt and getting to work becomes a test of nerves and bravery. You first need to drop the children off at school. They don't mind the rain and take particular satisfaction in splashing in the puddles, naturally soaking your feet. You now have wet socks that will have to dry on your feet throughout the rest of the day. You finally get to your office with a frown on your face, your body language shouting "leave me alone, I'm having a bad day!" You treat the first person who approaches you with a problem abruptly and that's it. The word spreads like fire. "If you know what's good for you stay away from our manager Mr. Grumpy!" Your day has just begun!

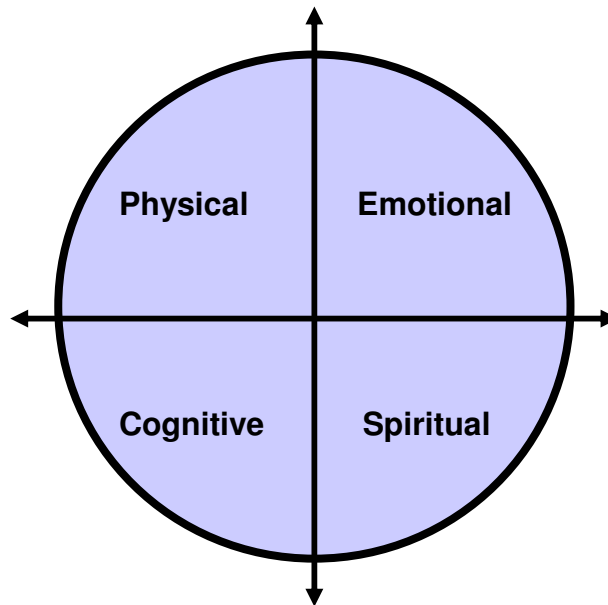
If the Lord's Prayer had to be composed today it might say "give us this day our daily stress but deliver us from burnout!"

Increasingly, our work is becoming more and more demanding, immersed in an atmosphere of gloomy words like deficit, recession, economic slump, harsh competition, cost cutting, downsizing, resizing, etc. In this context being a leader is no easy task. Perhaps the most difficult of all, is the ability to motivate others, keep their enthusiasm alive, and being a source of inspiration. What rings true to many leaders is that the higher climb up the organizational ladder, the more isolated they feel. Bearing in mind the added pressures and responsibilities that leadership carries, it is understandable that they feel alone, unsupported, often wrongly judged, tired and lacking in resources.

Leaders often complain that they are constantly being drained of energy without adequate replenishment. When this feeling begins to creep in the words "burn out" begin appearing over the horizon. In this context, we suggest that leaders who want to be truly successful in their lives need to invest in a holistic approach to self-management. We focus on leaders, not because other people do not have this need, but because leaders in particular have a tendency to immerse themselves in work. This often happens to the extent that they identify too closely with their role leaving little space for anything else. A new model, of working life emerged in the nineties which has been described by O'Neill (1993) as "long distance winners, sustainable success". He states, "These people are becoming more willing to acknowledge family life, self fulfillment, and service as motivating factors in their lives"

Our suggestion is that holistic self-management is an essential part of effective leadership. This includes an attitude towards life that reaches beyond the boundaries of the work role. The conceptual model we suggest is a holistic approach to well being that includes the physical, emotional, rational, and spiritual aspects of the self. The four domains are highly

interrelated and affect each other but for the sake of clarity we will briefly describe each one separately.



The Physical Domain: Looking after our body: This is the physical aspect of well being. We all know about the importance of eating healthy food, doing regular exercise, getting enough sleep and enough rest. Unfortunately these things tend to be the first to vanish from our life when we become too busy or stressed. This is when we need them most. Today we know from considerable research that a good diet, regular exercise and adequate sleep have a direct effect on how we think, feel, and consequently behave during the day. They are also good protection against the negative effects of stress. Caring for our body also includes going for regular physical check ups to ensure early detection of anything serious and also to take preventive measures.

At work, we need to take all the necessary health and safety measures that reduce the risk of work-related illness and injuries.

The Emotional Domain: How we feel: This is the emotional aspect of our well being. It deals with our feelings. To begin with, we need to be in touch with our feelings through a high level of self-awareness and self-understanding. This is especially important in times of stress when our emotional state may be off balance and the risk of over reacting to frustrating situations becomes higher.

It is also important that we find ways of expressing our feelings constructively. Most of us tend to implode or explode. We need to find healthy outlets to our feelings. Assertiveness, for example, is a great way of showing we you feel and what we want without exploding or keeping everything inside. On an emotional level it is also important to appreciate who we are and be grateful for what we have.

Finally, our emotional well-being is also related to the type of relationships that we foster in our work, community, and family life. We all need mutual

support through friendship, companionship, and intimacy. In other words, love in its various forms.

Hawley (1993) Talks about shyness about the “L – word” in business: Love. He goes on to say” So we stumble along trying to vanish into “toughness”, unaware that real love resides there also. And all too often we fall into the real opposite of love: fear. We lumber through life at a pace fast enough not to get caught by love, and the real thing is effortlessly pacing beside us all the way. Though elbow to elbow with it, brushing against it, we seldom recognize it.”

At work, it is important that we create an atmosphere of support, trust, friendship, and teamwork. These characteristics go a long way in buffering work related stress and creating an emotionally healthy working environment.

The Cognitive Domain: How we think: This is the area that deals with the way we process information and make sense of what we do and what happens to us. It is also the area of intellectual development. Although thinking positively has become an overused cliché, it still makes a lot of sense. In today’s reality it is very easy to get caught in a negative mind-set failing to appreciate what is positive and as a result missing out on many opportunities. Positive thinking is not fooling ourselves that the negative does not exist. Rather, it is choosing what to do with the challenges that life gives us. Every challenge is an opportunity to learn and become a wiser person. From this perspective we take a reflective/proactive approach to life and regard ourselves as works in progress constantly learning and evolving. A good exercise in gauging our cognitive health is to become aware of the nature of our conversations with others and of our inner dialogue. To what extent are these positive, hopeful, and proactive?

Today we talk a lot about learning organizations. These are organizations that regard themselves as dynamic organisms that are in a constant process of change and learning. They focus on developing their people in what they do best, providing opportunities for learning new skills and applying them to their work. Max Depree CEO of Herman Miller Inc. states that a prime function of leadership is building and preserving certain values that become associated with the organization, qualities that make the place special.

The Spiritual Domain: Care of the soul: In this context we regard spirituality in its widest sense: a belief system that helps us give a deeper meaning to life than the superficial, material things. A sound spirituality keeps us in touch with our deeply held values and helps us to live according to them. In his best selling book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen Covey (1992) explains that we all need to have a personal mission statement that guides our daily actions and short and long- term decisions. This can only happen if we dedicate time and energy nurturing our spirituality through ways that work for us.

Our work needs to be a place that respects the value of every individual and to every possible extent makes work as meaningful as possible for its employees. This can happen through constant communication of how the larger picture relates to the work they do and through the appreciation of the importance of their work.

As leaders, the more we develop and nurture the four domains, the more integrated we become, thus being in a stronger position to lead others. The holistic nature of this model ensures that every aspect of well being is developed, thus bringing about balance. Healthy leaders can be more effective in their work and sustain themselves longer, even under the inevitable pressures of leadership. The table below describes some of the skills or competencies we need to develop to help us grow in each of the four domains.

Domains	Positive Actions. Competencies & Skills
Physical	Regular exercise, healthy diet, adequate sleep, regular general physical checkups, relaxation techniques, yoga, pilates, tai chi.
Emotional	Self-awareness, self-expression, communication, assertiveness, creative work, music & art, intimacy, friendship, support.
Cognitive	Positive inner dialogue, challenging faulty beliefs, constant learning, problem solving, lateral thinking.
Spiritual	Meditation, prayer, spiritual retreats, upholding positive values and principles, clear mission statement, integrity.

Finally Jack Hawley in his book *Reawakening the Spirit in Work* (1993) talks about the new management agenda “ The key questions for today’s managers and leaders are no longer issues of task and structure but are questions of spirit. When you point this out – *pling!* – some inner chord resonates. People come awake. They lean forward; heads nod in agreement, shoulders square up, eyes become more alert, more serious, more hopeful. There’s a truth here”.

