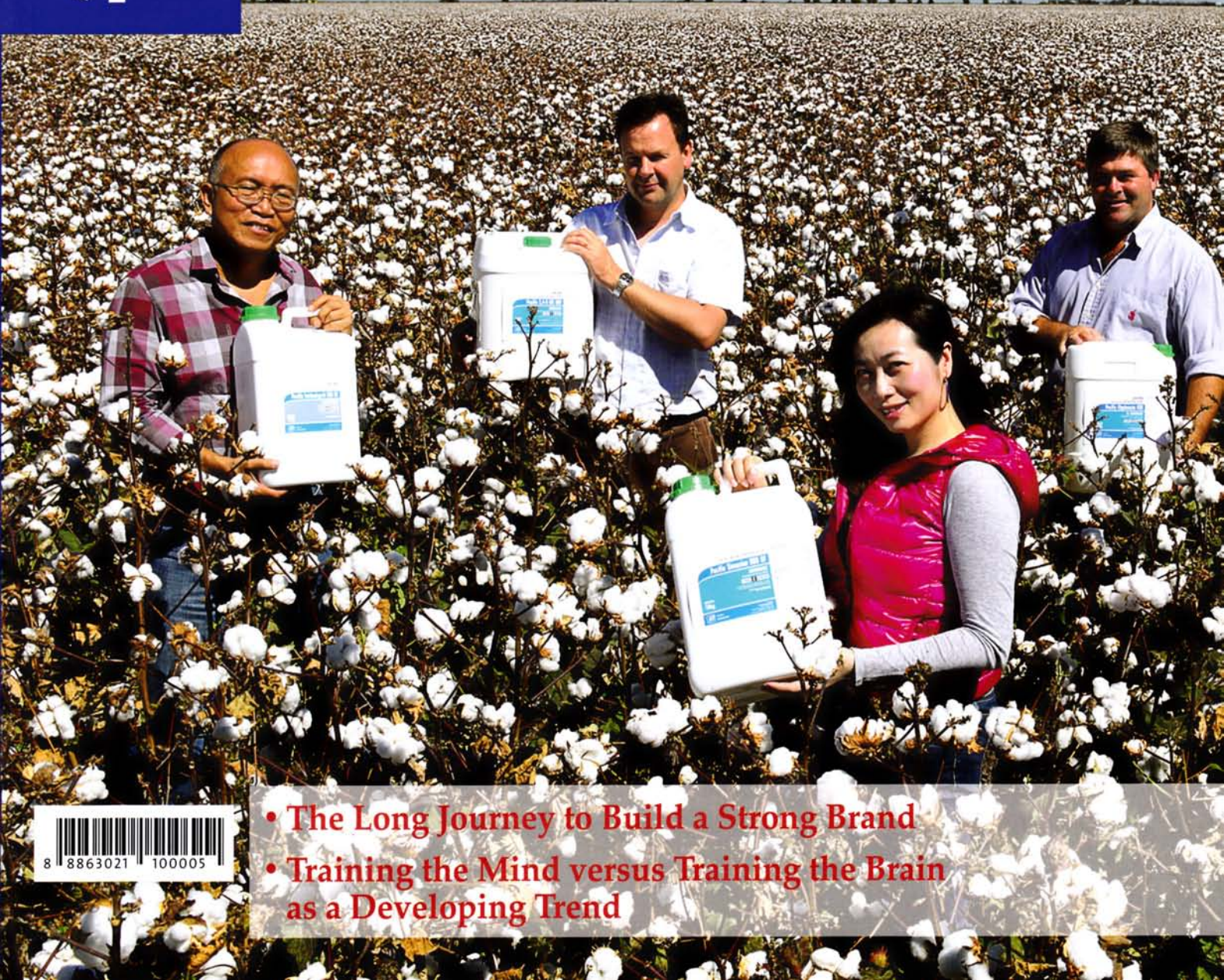


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Today's **Manager**

Shortening the Supply Chain from Factory to Farm



- **The Long Journey to Build a Strong Brand**
- **Training the Mind versus Training the Brain as a Developing Trend**

Training the Mind versus Training the Brain as a Developing Trend

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To find balance one needs to train the mind. Balance can only be attained if the mind is calm.

Some of the limitations of training and coaching as personal and professional development vehicles are acknowledged. The author suggests that quantum-leap breakthroughs can be achieved in terms of personal and professional development, and organisational performance with the addition of mind-training efforts to human capital management initiatives.



By Paula Marcondes

Is Corporate Training and Coaching Delivering on Its Promise?

MARK Twain once wrote: "There is nothing training cannot do. Nothing is above its reach. It can turn bad morals to good; it can destroy bad principles and re-create good ones; it can lift men to angelship".

On a corporate level, research has indeed demonstrated that practical training that supports organisational goals is one of the human capital management practices that can be tied directly to improvements or declines in organisational performance¹.

I have been a corporate trainer and coach for 14 years. More than a job, personal and professional development is a passion of mine and one that is aligned with my calling to my purpose. I tend to agree with Twain. This is provided that training is practical in terms of what is

happening and what needs to be done back at the office as well as aligned with the organisation's strategic goals.

My belief that training can contribute to improvements in organisational performance has been consistently reinforced over the years. This is based on feedback received from the individuals who attend our programmes, their bosses, and the clients who bring us into their organisations to deliver training. They say that our programmes work and that they offer great return on investment because the "learnings" get transferred back to the office and, sometimes, even to participants' lives.

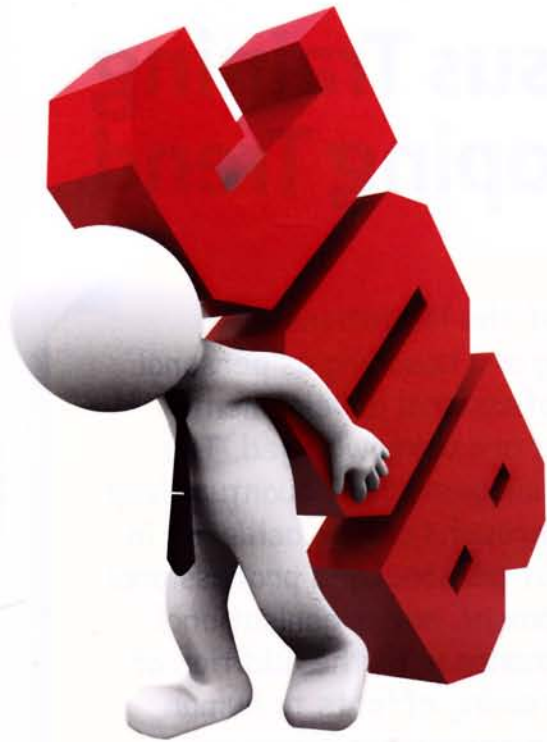
However, even when training is paired with coaching to support the development of new habits over time, I often come across comments such as "Most people attending a course are already behind in their work. They spend the next one to three weeks after the programme trying to

catch up. By the time they are up to speed again, it's all forgotten and they are back into the daily overwork grind."

This mindset hinders beneficial changes. Being unable to find the "space" to "switch off" can lead to serious consequences from an individual as well as an organisational perspective as "stress undermines performance and productivity and directly impacts a firm's bottom line²."

Targeting "Human Doings" Versus Targeting Human Beings?

Jon Kabat-Zinn, associate professor of the Massachusetts Medical University and former director of its world-renowned Stress Reduction Clinic, which he started in 1979, often makes the distinction in his talks over "How much 'doing' we do over the course of the day, as opposed to what you could call 'non-doing', or what I like to call 'being'."



Stress undermines performance and productivity and directly impacts a firm's bottom line.

We are called human beings but, as the old cliché goes, it might be more appropriate for us to be called “human doings” as we spend most of our lives doing, and most of the “doing”, especially in the corporate world, is done with our heads, rather than with our hearts.

When I look at our offerings and those of most other market players in the training and coaching industries in Singapore and around the world, I notice that in general terms, the focus is placed almost exclusively on doing, and that is accomplishing tasks.

The “doing” approach to professional development happens at many levels:

- Learning strategies such as role-plays, case studies, games, and activities,
- Training frameworks and programme takeaways that generally involve assimilation at a cognitive level and subsequently the deployment of new skills, techniques, strategies, and step-by-step processes back at the office, and
- Post-programme support which generally involves coaching.

The senses are essentially the only way we know the world. Yet, when was the last time you attended a session in awareness or in how to “come to your senses”? When was the last time that you considered the possibility that the ability to develop awareness was even relevant, especially at a corporate level?

Until very recently I could only speak from my experience. The time in my life when I was the happiest, the most fulfilled and when I developed the most personally and professionally was when I was consciously placing a bit more effort on “non-

experiences or incorporate some forms of awareness exercises into our programmes. I was afraid that I might be perceived as being too alternative for the corporate world and, therefore, not be seen as being professional and reliable. Most importantly, until now most people used to automatically associate meditation with religion and faith, and I did not want to alienate any of the participants in our programmes.

This has changed because I am now aware that quite a few scientists are working to back up what I have known all

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doing”, rather than directing all my energy into my usual super busy “doing” mode. This was when, a few years ago, I started meditating every morning for only five minutes at first and for 20 to 40 minutes after about a month.

After only a couple of months focusing for only a few minutes every day on “non-doing”, I experienced something completely different: a transformation in the way I used to relate to my life, my body, and my calling to my purpose. Nothing had changed in my reality, but extraordinarily out of my ordinary routine, I was living a more balanced life and feeling a profound sense of satisfaction, I had never experienced before and have never experienced since. On the professional level I was able to double our company's profits that year.

Maybe Marianne Williamson is right and “our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, but that are powerful beyond measure”.

Despite the fantastic results that I have experienced meditating, I have been very wary to talk about my “non-doing”

these years.

Can Development Take Place in a Stress-free Way When We Focus on Doing Nothing or Almost Nothing?

When we feel stressed, a set of physiological changes takes place in our bodies: we experience higher blood pressure and an increase in our heart, metabolism and breathing rates³.

I use the definition of stress by Dr Wayne Weiten, teacher of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, as being “any circumstances that threaten or are perceived to threaten one's well-being and that thereby tax one's coping abilities”.

Herbert Benson, president of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind/Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, and an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, has been studying how stress affects health and how it can be minimised or eliminated. He is the author of more than 175 scientific publications and 11 books.

Dr Benson explains that “virtually every disease has a component of stress. In



Practising yoga or a sport can be ways to train the mind.

some, it is 100 per cent, like tension headache. In others it is 50 per cent⁴.”

He has been studying meditation for 40 years as a potential stress management tool. While studying meditative religious rituals all over the world he discovered, to his great surprise, that in every single culture of humankind that has been recorded in writing, the meditation rituals had two things in common:

- Focused repetition—the person meditating would repeat a word, a sound, a prayer, a phrase or a movement or a combination of them,
- Ignored thoughts—when other thoughts came to mind the person meditating would ignore them and come back to the repetition.

Most importantly, he found out that when practising these two actions simultaneously something extraordinary happened to the body: a set of physiological changes came about that was exactly opposite to what we experience when we feel stress—decreased blood pressure and heart, breathing and metabolism rates. He calls this the Relaxation Response, RR, a state that we have within ourselves that comes about during both religious and non-religious meditation practices.

Relaxation Response is the first phase of a two-phase process that Dr Benson has identified to evoke our natural capacity to counteract the harmful effects of stress. “This process quiets your mind. It opens your mind. There is less static, less noise—and you are then more subject to phase two. You will be more receptive

of a visualisation, of talking to other people and getting advice. And in this way you are changing the very structure of your body itself to deal with the harmful effects of stress that we are living with today in our incredibly stressful world⁵.”

He conducted an experiment in 2008 where he measured whether meditation can affect us on cellular and molecular levels and discovered that people who used to meditate daily for many years showed changes in 2,209 genes, people who meditated daily for only eight weeks showed changes in 1,561 genes and people who did not meditate did not show changes in their genes. “This study provides the first compelling evidence that the Relaxation Response elicits specific gene expression changes in short-term and long-term practitioners⁶.”

He and his team have, in other words, found evidence that we can change in stress-freeing ways at very profound levels by focusing on doing nothing or almost nothing.

Training the Brain Versus Training the Mind?

When Dr Benson says that “the mind can affect the body” is he referring to the brain or to another part of ourselves separate from the brain? We tend to use the terms “brain” and “mind” interchangeably, but are “brain” and “mind” in fact the same thing?

Since the 1970s Kabat-Zinn has also been studying how meditation changes our body and brain and he has found out

that meditation can be curative⁷.

For more than 40 years, Dr Kabat-Zinn has been offering thousands of hospital patients a non-religious meditation course as a supplement to their medical treatment with a huge amount of success. He was one of the first persons to successfully bring meditation into mainstream medicine. He emphasises that when we forget who is doing the “doing” and who is doing the “non-doing” it can be quite tragic.

During one of his talks entitled “*Mindfulness Meditation*” at the Google campus in California, in 2007⁸ he used the analogy between an orchestra and an organisation to explain the relevance of meditation to business, saying that: “Musicians must first tune their own instruments before they can be in tune with each other. Before we can find better ways to connect with others we need to find better ways to connect with ourselves. Meditation is like tuning our instrument before taking it out to the world.”

I am of the view that the brain is the hardware, like the computer where the stream of information or thoughts happens. The mind is the user who decides when to turn the computer on or off, that is when to think or when to stop thinking. The brain doesn’t decide when to think and when to stop thinking. The mind does. It is also an observer that sees the different thoughts being processed by the brain and has the choice to become attached to these thoughts or to let them go. It should also be responsible for deciding

which tasks are to be accomplished, that is which software will be used.

Meditation is a software as it is a collection of instructions used by the user to accomplish specific tasks. In the same way that the user needs to be trained on which software to use, for what purpose and how to go about it, so does the mind need to be trained on the best possible ways to achieve the tasks that it needs to accomplish.

Most of us want to achieve more work-life balance, but how can we possibly do that if the brain is operating unchecked, processing thoughts incessantly like a runaway train?

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, the worldwide coordinator of Satyananda Yoga, once told me that "To find balance one needs to train the mind. Sometimes the mind becomes too chatty. Balance can only be attained if the mind is calm. You can be in a cave and you will not find peace if your mind is chatty. You can be in a busy market and you can be in total silence."

Is it Feasible to Successfully Sell and Put the Concept of "Mind Training" into Practice within Mainstream Business?

I think so. In fact, this is already happening in companies like Google, the World Bank Group, and many others. People are starting to wake up to the fact that the amazing results that can be achieved if they are better able to control their minds are not part of an airy-fairy dream. The enormous potential that can be unleashed when the mind is trained, even if just a little bit, is literally mind boggling as so many scientists have started to discover.

Benson's research has shown that it is possible to quieten the brain by simply repeating a word, a sound, a phrase, a movement or a combination of them and, when other thoughts come to mind, ignoring them and coming back to the repetition.

Therefore, I suppose that practising yoga or a sport like running or swimming, listening to music, dancing, gardening, cooking, or praying, can be ways to train the mind, provided that the activity in

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question involves some form of repetition and that the person performing the activity is able to ignore unrelated thoughts when they come up.

I believe that the benefits of training the mind will directly impact an organisation's bottom line because having a calmer, sharper, more focused mind will directly impact an individual's sense of well-being.

On an organisational level, mind-training activities can be incorporated into most training and coaching sessions, similar to what happens with training methods such as energisers. We can make mind-training time in the course of carrying out our business routines simply by remembering to take a few conscious breaths throughout the day. Awareness is readily available at every moment, it is free and it is an inexhaustible resource.

Finally, mind training can also take a more formal shape and be carried out through more comprehensive programmes, over a few weeks, during which participants learn specific techniques. One of the formal techniques that can be used is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, MBSR, which Kabat-Zinn began teaching at the Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979.

The bottom line is those of us who are serious about our contribution to the process of human capital development at a corporate level must take concrete steps to consciously train our minds so as to be able to bring mind-training practices to our internal and external clients either as a concept or as practice itself. ✍

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