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A Case for Developing Spiritual Intelligence in Leaders through Equine Facilitated Learning

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Introduction

Organizations and today's leaders are unquestionably in a period of transition. In response to unprecedented levels of competition, ethical challenges, organizational crisis, climate change, and increasing complexity, a growing body of inner approaches to foster skillful and principled leadership has emerged to help managers navigate their organizational cultures in the face of organizational change. As an approach to inner leadership, this article explores Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning (EFEL), a technique where leaders develop key management skills by working with horses. Whetten and Cameron (2008) and others have pointed out that today's manager needs to adapt and develop skills to thrive in the face of recent changes in the business world. Given the extent to which today's business environment is changing and becoming more unpredictable, "We are in one of those great historical periods that occur every 200 or 300 years when people don't understand the world anymore, and the past is not sufficient to explain the future" (Peter Drucker, in Whetten and Cameron, 2007: 3), to thrive, managers need to develop a new order of managerial skills. Knowledge and experience alone are insufficient to survive in the new business market and so personal development has become essential. Leaders must undertake a voyage of personal understanding and development for greater purposes in the organization (Rooke and Torbert, 2005). As such, we are persuaded that leaders and managers will benefit from an approach of leadership development that fosters spiritual intelligence by developing greater insight and depth of understanding of themselves and others and by helping leaders embrace the necessary moral and character fortitude needed to manage and lead today's organizations.

Problematic

Equines are more than a historic symbol of conquest, wisdom, and wealth; they are a powerful instrument and facilitator for our personal and leadership development (Kohanov, Rector, Strozzi, Pike, et al). Supported by Gehrke and Schuyler (2006), this emerging body of research suggests that facilitated interactions with horses can help leaders refine their sense of confidence, develop their natural instinct for leadership, and perform more effectively in their professional domains. Horses tend to serve as an instinctive behavioral mirror and facilitate a raising of the individual's consciousness, with the help of professionals who can correctly interpret the interaction between a horse and a person. Through an inner process of learning, horses can help an individual to overcome personal difficulties and to develop inner strength and creativity (Strozzi, 2004). The remainder of this article focuses on the Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning (EFEL) as a new leadership development process which demonstrates how

horses can play a pivotal role in helping managers become more aware of their leadership weaknesses and, in turn, assists them in building capacities and embodying their strengths in a more empowered way.

Section 1: The Case of Equine Facilitated Experiential Learning (EFEL)

Many practitioners have worked with the EFEL method in various forms,¹ however this article will focus on the deeper, more spiritual EFEL approach in Linda Kohanov's path.

Kohanov's work is paramount with the natural equestrian approach. Author of four internationally-acclaimed books, she is also a specialist in equi-therapy, a riding instructor and counselor with over twenty years of experience working with horses. She founded The Epona Equestrian Services Center to share with others the approach she developed through her own personal interaction with horses. Her work is a union of different domains, including psychology, body language techniques, spiritual practice, natural horse education, and experiential learning. Kohanov is an internationally-recognized innovator in the field of Equine Experiential Learning and Psychotherapy.

EFEL Whisperers' Influences

The interaction between humans and horses started with horse *Whisperers*, also referred to as *Natural Horsemanship*. Popular Whisperers as Parelli (2004) and Roberts (2002), experience in a first-hand manner, the emotional and spiritual richness that horse-human interactions can bring and found that the process can improve a person's abilities to communicate, observe, and lead their lives. The model of communication these Whisperers use with horses was the first source of inspiration for the EFEL approach: communication that uses body language, will power, intuition, and the development of consciousness, supported in Hesler-Key's (2001) studies. When working with horses, Whisperers adapt their behavior to every situation, and instinctively use emotional resonance with horses. They discovered the key to working with horses is to focus and enter into a functional presence during the time they spend with their "four legged partner"² (Kohanov, 2001; Irwin, 2001; Hamilton, 2011; Strozzi, 2004). Monty Roberts (2002), one of the most popular horse whisperers, referred to as "The man who listens to horses," found that being in the "horse frequency"³ gave him a deeper connection to his inner world and helped him communicate actively with the world and adopt appropriate behaviors in critical personal and professional situations. Kohanov (2001) works on the socio-sensual awareness whisperers like Roberts developed, which uses her "sixth sense" to "legitimate phenomenon," following an archetypal pattern of intuitive awakening.

The EFEL Approach

The main purpose of EFEL is to help people discover their personal strengths and capacities, largely based on the responses of the horse they interact with, or what Kohanov (2001) refers to as the horses' messages. In other words, horses are able to amplify or raise a person's consciousness, allowing him or her to be more self-aware and in tune with their surroundings in a more primal way (Gehrke and Schuyler, 2006; Hamilton, 2011; Irwin, 1998; Kohanov, 2001; Strozzi, 2004). Epona's instructors believe

¹ Arianna Strozzi, *EGE Equine Guide Education and Change Leadership*; founder, Barbara Rector, *Adventure in Awareness, EGE Facilitated Mental Health*; Chris Irwin, *Equine Assisted Personal Development*; Kathy Pike, *Coaching with Horses*; Shelley Rosenberg, Amy Foster, Anne Clemson, Barbara Alexander, Hélène Bernier, Nancy Coyne and many others, work with the EFEL in their equestrian center.

² Horses designation by EFEL practitioners, whisperers, and riders.

³ The horse frequency, as described by whisperers and Kohanov, is a spiritual state of deep connection to the animal, a kind of presencing with him, in an emotional resonance with him as physiological, emotional, and spiritual. This term will be explored later.

that this approach has a spiritual dimension whereby participants become aware of issues they may have, and with facilitated work, can bring about a deeper transformation (Kohanov, 2001: xxvi).

At first, this approach focused on the interaction between women and horses: “[...] there was a persistent connection between these animals and aspects of feminine knowledge that were routinely suppressed or demonized in patriarchal societies” (Kohanov, 2001: 15). Because of the nature of Kohanov’s research which focused on her own personal development, and overcoming personal issues with the help of horses, at the beginning, the program mostly attracted women who were eager to share their own experiences and ask her for help in their relationship with their horses. These women also felt strongly that their horses were in fact acting like emotional mirrors, helping to make visible what is invisible, in the sense of making the unconscious influence conscious. In Kohanov’s personal experience, she was able to use her connection with her mare to develop a consciousness of her own strengths and weaknesses. She finally came to understand that all humans have an incredible capacity, with the help of horses, to develop an internal power of which they, perhaps, were not aware (Goleman and Boyatzis, and McKee, 2001). Finally, it’s a process that allows an individual to be in harmony with herself and her environment, which, in turn, may be seen as improving a person’s spiritual consciousness and further improve their overall development of character.

During workshops, practitioners observed that horses in a herd, by nature, are animals of prey and because of this they are always looking for a leader to protect them in similar ways that humans do in societies and groups (Hamilton 2011; Irwin, 1998; Kohanov, 2001; Rector 2005; Strozzi, 2004; Weber, 2001). To better understand this observation, it is important to take a closer look at a horse’s impact on the connection to our inner world.

Horses Facilitating Connection to the Right Hemisphere of the Brain

The EFEL approach helps people to access the power of the right side of their brains. According to Kohanov (2001), Hamilton (2011), Rector (2005), and Strozzi (2004), the spiritual dimension in working with horses from EFEL practitioners promotes access to the knowing of unconscious impacts and influences. Horses help to make visible our weakness and strengths. Instructors use horses to facilitate feedback and focus on the present. As prey, horses have more “resonant surfaces” (Kohanov, 2001: 91); they respond to “sympathetic vibrations” from people and use this information to adopt appropriate behavior. In fact, horses are naturally in this state of deep listening to optimize their level of presence and communication with the world in order to survive. Thus, to collaborate with horses, people must know and use the power of emotional resonance with the outer world and their inner world. Kohanov (2001) and Rector (2005) noted that in the training arena or round pen with horses, men and women find they have access naturally to the state of “letting-go” to a state of consciousness that leaves the material world out of the training arena — like a zone keeping leaders in contact with the present moment, deemed “presencing”⁴ (Kohanov, 2001; Rector, 2004). EFEL practitioners find the resonance to connect to their inner world without cutting themselves off from the left side of the brain. Conversely, to improve oneself in this process of learning, participants need to be guided by professionals who are facilitating the understanding and interpretation of horses’ feedback. Instructors and horses must be a strong team to conduct efficiently EFEL workshops. So, EFEL is then dependent on

⁴ Scharmer, O. (2007). *Rendre visible “l’angle mort de notre époque”*: un résumé exécutif de la Théorie U: (1-23). In Utheory, presencing is an operational field of connection with the world and self. This concept is more comprehensively explained by the Society of Organizational Learning and Presencing Institute, on www.presencing.com.

professionals who can interpret a horse's behavior and give the participants feedback about how the horse's response reflects certain things about their thoughts, personality, and behavior.

EFEL Practitioners

Equine-facilitated learning practitioners assist the participants in EFEL workshops, using horses as facilitators and behavioral mirrors of the participants. They are guides to a deeper inner connection, helping foster self-awareness and personal development. All instructors have an equi-therapeutic certification and some have a background as manager and psychotherapist. Each of the Epona's certified practitioners discovered the power of horses through their own life experiences and love for equines.

The Intelligence of Horses

Horses are employed to “[...] help people explore their own emotional and behavioral issues” (Kohanov, 2001: 103). Each horse really has his own characteristics and must be known intimately by the instructor to be an effective “four legged partner.” In addition, horses and instructors work as a team based on collaboration and communication. To receive horse wisdom, instructors work with a “respectful partnership-oriented approach” (Kohanov, 2001; Hamilton, 2011; Irwin, 2005; Mertens,⁵ 2012). Horses are facilitators to the extent they permit people to “leave their problems at the gate” (Kohanov, 2001: 96).

As animals of prey, horses have a highly efficient system for detecting changes in their environment, specifically for detecting a predator's body language. Even though horses have been domesticated by humans since 4000 BC, their survival instincts and intuition remain inbuilt. Their bodies are finely tuned to the outer world; they can sense a predator's movements from the tips of their noses to the ends of their tails. They are fully connected to the present moment, instinctively adapting their behavior at every moment. In this way, supported by Coates (2008), Hamilton (2011), Irwin (2001), Kohanov (2001), Rector (2005) and Strozzi (2004), they are able to give humans immediate feedback about their behavior, as an authentic and neutral mirror. They perceive a person's emotions as simple data and react immediately because of their exquisite resonance ability.

Additionally, it is also supported by Becker (2004), Mistral (2007) and Gehrke (2009) that horses can feel a person's heart-rate frequency and sense their magnetic field. Horses are not in competition with humans, but they have to choose between either cooperating with them or taking flight as they would with a predator. With their very sensitive body language, horses “help us put our hands around the handle of the ego ejection seat [...]” (Hamilton, 2011, 27). In other words, they help humans abstain from using their ego and instead establish a more substantial connection to their right brain. Of course horses do not make a distinction about language, religion, racial or social and professional positioning. They only feel people as they are — as prey living in a herd. A person's background and history have no relevance for a horse, who responds to the core of a person's spiritual being and reacts according to what is taking place in the moment.

Herd Psychology

Another important characteristic of horses is that in the wild, they naturally organize their lives together as a herd and are dependent on a leader. A group of two members or more can be called a herd. The leader has the responsibility of protecting the herd and

⁵ Equi-therapist from Quebec, met by the author during the paper realization and with whom regular contact and conversation about the EFEL approach and EFEL workshops are maintained.

ensuring its survival (Grandin and Johnson, 2005).⁶ “[...] each horse is looking for someone to lead the herd” (Hamilton, 2011, 104) and asks every member of the herd if he wants to lead. This is essentially the dynamic of what happens in the round pen⁷ during EFEL workshops. Those individuals who display no leadership agility in front of the horse are essentially answering “no” to the following question: are you a potential leader for the herd or do I have to lead us? At this point in the workshop, instructors assist by observing behaviors by both the human and the horse, and pinpoint, for the participant, the skills they possess and lack. They then continue by working on the development of leadership skills in the participant. Horses help to refine human leadership agility because they continually test the participant until confirming that the individual is able to be a leader. “Leadership is something your horse bestows upon you [...] recognizing the leader in you” (Hamilton, 2011, 104). Furthermore, the herd has an implicit hierarchy. Every member has a precise role, responsibilities, and status, much like an organizational model (Gehrke, 2009; Strozzi, 2004).

Facilitation with Horses

Working with horses requires skills that are not easily seen by humans. Hamilton (2011: 43) supports that the “power of energetic will [or] intention, is the process by which we focus our energy by visualizing the end result before we begin.” In other words, it is essential for horseman to be mentally focused on outcomes in order to communicate with the horse effectively. To evade predators, horses will attempt to distract the horseman, knowing that it can throw their enemy off focus, giving themselves a chance to escape. This characteristic demands that participants in an EFEL workshop be deeply connected to the present moment and requires emotional congruence. Supported by Gehrke (2009) and Rashid (2011), this is the only way they will gain trust from the horse and finally achieve collaboration. A horse will respond to a person’s every command once he feels a trustworthy assertiveness from the person in question. As Kohanov suggests, working with horses is “[...] an art form that require[s] a sophisticated understanding of timing, concentration, visualization, anticipation of difficulties, constant reevaluation, the ability to regain focus quickly when thrown off course, and knowing when to press forward and when to back off” (Kohanov, 2001, 118). This specific, present connection requires facilitated “energetic connection” (Gehrke, 2009, 230) to bring humans to a low-stress learning environment, moving away from judgment, incongruent emotions, and negative influences from education, norms, and past experiences (Mills, 2005). They “[...] reflect the authentic feelings behind the socially acceptable masks people wear” (Kohanov, 2001: 183). Consequently, horses help people to overcome negative emotions that diminish empowerment by reflecting this physically as a real mirror of human insight; “horses don’t judge or reject us for what we’re feeling; it [is] the act of trying to suppress our emotions that drives them insane” (Kohanov, 2001, 148).

A Horse’s Way of Learning

A horse’s survival depends on its ability to learn from experiences. Kohanov (2001) termed this the gift of “one trail learning.” In the equestrian world, the learning process has to explain clearly what is bad or good; there is no punishment without explanation or possibility for misinterpreted factors if the leader of the process expects improvement and change. Just like humans, horses need a clear process plan with established goals and emotional congruence from the leader in order to achieve tasks efficiently. “[...] a horse simply isn’t giving his full attention to the lesson when he feels threatened [...]”

⁶ Grandin, T. & Johnson, C. (2005). *Animals in translation: Using the mysteries of autism to decode animal behavior*. New York: Scribner.

⁷ A closed circle where people work with horses with or without an attached lead.

(Hine in Kohanov, 2001: 152). Because of this, according to Desmond and Dorrance (1999), working with horses can generate a series of positive outcomes that in turn can facilitate the development of leadership skills. For example, positive outcomes such as self-satisfaction, confidence, and awareness can help create a new positive circuit in a person’s brain — a new reference for behavioral reactions in situations that require leadership. As such, working with horses can help leaders to recognise the value of connecting with their deep emotions, leading to a new positive behavioral experience and provide opportunities to practice these outcomes in other areas of their lives. In a practical sense, EFEL workshops cultivate a deeper self-awareness.

EFEL Workshops

EFEL Workshops were born out of Kohanov’s desire to train her young mare in a collaborative spirit. This way of training increased expressively education of both — horse and rider — and made this mare a partner and “a coach to teach us some news moves” (Kohanov, 2011: 14). She argues that “these workshops and private sessions employ horses in teaching people of all ages and backgrounds how to achieve a state of greater physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual balance” Kohanov (2001: *Tao of Equus* Introduction). The global philosophy of this approach is to raise a person’s awareness concerning behaviors they have adopted, bad or good, in a situation that requires them to be a leader. Primarily, it is about learning how stop rejecting issues that arise and use these insights to thrive and understand the behavioral reactions faced in specific situations. Conversely, participants work on changing their behavior and reprogramming old patterns of thinking — all facilitated by horses. This method is then adapted according to each person and situation.

EFEL Methodology

Practitioners use experiences, practical exercises, observation periods, and various practices with the horses, pairs, and workshop coordinators to put participants in real situations of practicing leadership. This approach is well adapted to the organizational context. They guide leaders in a deep observation of other participants and horses — being continually alert when judgment or criticism influences thinking — and adapt new situations to a better practical understanding of each kind of behavior. By doing so, participants have tools to thrive, but need to be guided to find their own way. Instructors can help leaders grasp the message behind horses’ behaviors with their experience of bringing people into the particular horse frequency and then interpreting the horse’s language (Kohanov, 2001; Roberts, 2002).

Developing Key Management Skills

Management skills are usually associated with “identifiable sets of actions that individuals perform and that lead to certain outcomes” (Whetten & Cameron, 2008: 9). Management skills developed from EFEL correlate well with models of essential management skills:

Figure 1: A Model of Essential Management Skills (Whetten & Cameron, 2008: 19).



Management skills provided by these authors are similar to most key skills developed through EFEL. This approach looks at an individual's development through self-awareness in leading situations with horses. EFEL instructors and practitioners such as Irwin (2001), Kohanov (2001, 2003), Rector (2005), Strozzi (2004) as well as authors like Church (2007), Coates (2008), Dorrance and Desmond (1999), Gehrke (2007), Hesler-Key (2001), and McCormick (2004) all support that EFEL develops leadership, communication, emotional intelligence, stress-resilience, power, influence, and spiritual intelligence. The next section of this article is dedicated to defining each skill derived from EFEL and explaining why managers will benefit from its development and how horses can facilitate this development.

Section 2: How Managers Develop Leadership from EFEL

EFEL offers an opportunity to develop self-awareness and to realize a higher level of agility or action logics where leaders need to be aware of their present development state. This is where horses come in. With their special presence, participants are able to experience links established between behaviors and feelings, connecting them more directly to the present. This makes them focus more on what horses reflect back. Keeping in mind that horse survival depends on their accuracy to read their environment, they expect from people (if they are to serve as leaders) emotional control, clear will, confidence, listening, relaxation, and deeper communication through an open mind with a deep focus in the present. As Greenleaf (1998)⁸ points out, the leader has to be a servant before becoming a leader. And horses bring one into an authentic experience and demonstration of consequences in a herd to be a servant first in order to obtain collaboration and efficient teamwork. Because leadership includes key management skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, power, influence, stress-resilience, as much as observation, by asking leaders to be servants, horses ask of leaders to develop their capacities of consciousness. The benefits of being a servant leader justify the importance of each individual cultivating this form of leadership in his or her organization. Making intuitive decisions and staying in the present moment with emerging reality demands a certain degree or level of consciousness and a high mastery of communication (Greenleaf, 1998).

Communication Development with Horses

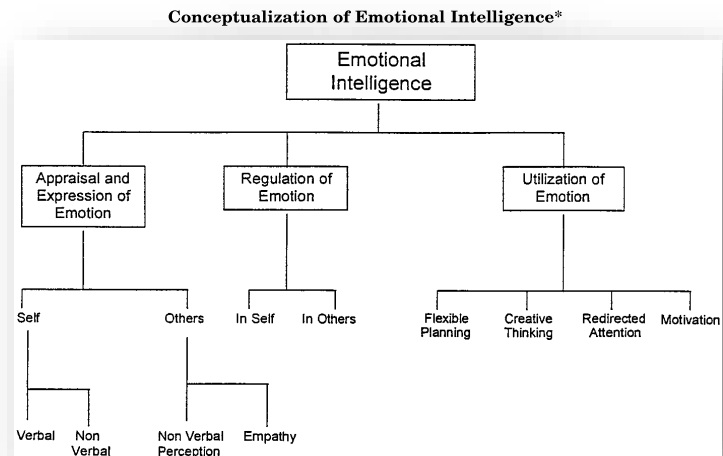
EFEL tends to be more focused on non-verbal communication. Nevertheless, verbal communication is practiced and essential to express emotions and awareness development during the workshop. Because of their honesty in exchange with others, horses show humans a model of direct interactions that improve socio-emotional competencies related to communication agility (Russell-Martin, 2006). Because horses work on congruence and never punish or threaten, defensiveness is a kind of self-protection and has no place in the round pen. They give an authentic reading of the emotional and behavioral situation without judgment or criticism (Gehrke, 2006; Irwin, 2001; Kohanov, 2001; Strozzi, 2004). Horses are offended when the communicator demonstrates self-aggrandizing behaviour, shows off, or loses respect and motivation. As a result, they reflect this disconfirmation back. It looks like agitated horse behavior, showing him that his incongruence makes his way of communication meaningless and in contradiction with the potential leader for the herd. Communicating effectively relates to some skills as a "socio-emotional" orientation (Bales, 1950), as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and also as "human relations skills" (Whyte, 1955). "Sensing others is

⁸ Greenleaf, R. (1998). *Servant Leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 21-61.

also a central skill to the whole notion of interpersonal communicative competency” (Morgan, 2001: 23).

Emotional Intelligence in the Context of EFEL

Emotional intelligence is the “[...] ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; in Morand, 2001: 25). This particular conceptualization of emotional intelligence helps establish and legitimate important connections in the EFEL process.



*From Mayer and Salovey (1993).

Figure 2: Morand, D.A., 2001. The emotional intelligence of managers: assessing the construct validity of a nonverbal measure of “people skills.” *Journal of Business and Psychology*. Pennsylvania: Human Science Press, 16 (1): 23.

Why is Emotional Intelligence Essential in EFEL?

Being resonant with our own emotions is an integral part of emotional intelligence that asks empathy from others and consequently, gives power and influence in leading successful changes and fosters positivity. EFEL provides awareness about emotional expressions and shows incongruence through equine behavior. Being emotionally intelligent involves developing the ability to read the horse’s emotions. It also means being able to recognize other people’s emotions as well as our own feelings. EFEL workshops promote emotional development — as horses serve as a powerful mirror of our behavior — giving instantaneous emotional feedback devoid of judgment or societal influence. Horses become a kind of emotional management facilitator. Kohanov (2001: 237) outlines that equine facilitated therapy employs a form of biofeedback for practicing self-awareness, emotional management, and relationship skills that human role-playing exercises and discussion groups cannot begin to access.

Power and Influence with EFEL

According to Foucault (1980) and Apollini, Jordan & Walsh (2009), we cannot exercise power except through being in proximity to truth. So, consistent with this definition, it EFEL workshops help managers become more aligned with the reality principle. Power is defined as the ability to motivate others to work efficiently and shape their environment in a collaborative manner (Cameron and Whetten, 2008). With horses, using power and influence means having the horse cooperate with you without confrontation or aggressiveness. This is possible only in using the power of will, focus, and body language with assertiveness. As demonstrated in Figure 4, power has to be well balanced to win the trust of others who are using power and influence. Working with a horse demands an optimal personal and informal power. A lack or an excess of power with horses never gives you back what you were expecting whereas using optimal power will give you *more* than you expected. The horse will generate increased and clearer feedback, fostering self-acknowledgement, empowerment, and satisfaction.

Stress Resilience Developed by EFEL

Schwartz and Stone (1993) indicate that stress is one of most common obstacles of effective management. It is useful for managers to discover ways of thriving with stress

and to develop resilience instead of sustaining its negatives influences. In an EFEL training, coming into a horse's frequency means being in an emotional and spiritual resonance with the animal, which reduces stress — physically, emotionally, and mentally (Gehrke and Schuyler, 2006). According to Ulrich (1993), discovering and experiencing positive stress in an appropriate learning environment promotes positive emotional states, which is what EFEL provides. The presence of horses relaxes people in a stressful state. Horses teach people to practice resilience by showing them the positive effects of stress and how they have to manage it. Finally, management skills developed through EFEL are needed in this organizational transitional period. Because of their non-judgmental and authentic way of giving feedback and providing self-awareness, horses serve as facilitators of management skills.

The Learning Environment Provided by EFEL

Interactions between a horse and a human reveal high resonance and responsiveness to the emotional environment. Horses, like humans, have a bio-emotional field and produce biofeedback, making them facilitators for human healing. Like stress, emotions can disturb concentration and human relationships. As we have seen previously, stress resilience is an important quality to have in order to limit emotional disturbance since it affects both social judgment capabilities and cognitive performance. Stress resilience procures positive effects and improves cognition and the predisposition for learning. In the same way, positive emotions will link learning to pleasure and induce the necessary motivation to learn. Positive emotions in learning emerge from a good understanding of the process and the realization of one's own advancement throughout the process. EFEL, by making heart, brain, and body connections is a catalyst in the learning process due to the positive outcomes from equine workshops.

The Positive Outcomes of Equine Workshops

Horses regulate our heart rates, bringing managers into a positive energetic learning environment. Heart-Brain-Body connections are significant indicators of physical and mental health states (McCraty and Tomasino, 2004). Studies from the Institute of HeartMath measured the heart rate variability during horse-human interactions. Results demonstrated that a horse, because of its ability to synchronize its heart rhythm with the human heart, will resonate with the human's emotions, providing biofeedback through a specific behavior detected by EFEL instructors and other equine specialists. Scientists are able to distinguish between negative and positive emotions due to the variability of the heart's rhythm. In addition, they discovered that this same emotional resonance phenomenon appears between two individuals. So when a horse feels a human's negative emotions, it will make the horse uncomfortable. As prey, it is not able to remain in this state for long and it will try to return to a normal heart rate. Horses have trouble regulating their emotions by themselves and as a result, will seek positive emotions in their environment to return to a more comfortable state. During a workshop, the participant is the only emotional resonance tool of which the horse disposes. McCraty (2004) discusses the electromagnetic power that horses have with respect to the human heart rate frequency. They can guide a human, such as a whisperer, toward a positive emotional state by reducing his or her stress level through lowering one's heart rate. McCraty (2004) and Mistral (2007) discovered that in the presence of a horse, a human makes a stronger connection to the right side of his or her brain when bonding with the animal, primarily in a subconscious manner. Like horses, humans have a certain electromagnetic influence in relation to their environment in the sense that a positive feedback cycle exists between the two. This phenomenon happens at a subconscious level through the right side of the brain. The fact is that a positive emotional state

improves leadership and others' management skills due to a good synchronization between the nervous system, the heart, and the rest of the body. Finally, according to Gehrke (2007), working with horses leads to higher physiological coherence.

Positives Outcomes from the Horse's Feedback

Participants in EFEL workshops have claimed that a horse gives one a feeling of satisfaction and increased self-esteem when it simply follows with no lead lines attached. At that moment, the participants understood that it is not enough to say to someone, "I am your leader so you have to listen to me and follow me." This is wholly insufficient to lead people and to gain their trust. Horses show individuals that, as within an organization, managers have to demonstrate that people can trust them — not based on their status or legal power — but because of their ability to lead efficiently by showing respect and by being comfortable under dynamic conditions. The proof must not only come from one's head and competence, but also from his or her heart and body language.

This way of leadership produces positive outcomes for everyone, generating power and energy and influencing others to do what you want through assertiveness and a collective spirit. Horses reward humans by being receptive as soon as the human is in congruence with what he or she wants the horse to do — like men and women are. They help to give managers immediate 360° feedback on the impact they have on others and their environment, continually asking the manager for "authentic leadership." They teach managers to operate like them, with integrity and fairness, when interacting with others. "[...] horses actually assist in demonstrating the consequences of emotion driven behavior[...]" (Gehrke and Schuyler, 2006: 23).

In conclusion, learning is a process that uses various ways of knowledge acquisition and practice. In comparison to other learning models, EFEL shows that horses are effective facilitators in acquiring knowledge and improving self-awareness by involving thinking, feeling, and intuitive processes.

Spirituality and the EFEL Approach

Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram (2008) explain that spirituality is an omnipresent dimension in the self-development process, but rarely in a manager's professional life and as a result, in organizations. Spiritual intelligence broadens the range of intelligence forms, adding depth and increasing connectivity to the world and other beings. Taylor J.B.'s experience is a clear demonstration of this phenomenon, most specifically when she mentioned that her stroke initially led to a surprisingly high level of happiness and peacefulness that she had never experienced before in her life. She described it as receiving a strong force coming from inside, and feeling she had become a part of the environment around her — rendering her unable to identify the limits between the whole and her body in this unity. Her vision of everything was integral. Gehrke and Schurley's research (2006) support that humans can be connected to their environment and become affected by it through heart rate variability. Since horses are deeply connected to their environment because of their survival needs, they appear to have the ability to teach us the art of using our right side brain to use and feeding our inside power of co-creation with the world. This next section will explore definitions of spirituality and spiritual intelligence, relating them to EFEL and the role of horses in spiritual development.

Section 3: Spirituality and Spiritual Intelligence

Spirituality is an innate element of being, related to “sensing and perceiving the outer world” (De Souza, 2009: 1132). “Spirituality refers to a person’s ultimate values and commitments, regardless of their content to the values to which we subscribe which give meaning and orientation to our lives (Griffon 1988:1, in Kourie, 2008: 23). “Spirituality entails the ongoing harmonious integration of the whole human person” (Kourie, 2006: 26). It is also “the capacity of persons to transcend themselves through knowledge and love” (Schneiders 1986: 265; 2003: 265; in Kourie, 2006: 23). The “ultimate belonging or connection to the transcendental ground of being” (Vaughan, 2002: 17) is a kind of subtle inner power that people are often not aware of (Kohanov, 2001).

Many authors like Anthony (2003), De Souza (2009), Vaughan (2002), and Zohar (2000), consider three forms of intelligence in human beings: intellectual (cognitive learning and thinking process), emotional (affective learning and feeling process), and spiritual (inner reflective learning and intuitive process). These considerations support that the emergence of the spiritual quotient was influenced by Buddhist cultures. Defined as an integrated intelligence, it is a “transpersonal intelligence that transcends the boundaries of the individual” (Anthony, 2003: 40). Spiritual intelligence is the ability to connect the heart, the brain, and the soul to the universe (Dossey, 2002; Vaughan, 2002; Zohar, 2000). A non-rational dimension, unifying human and nature, “our relation to the absolute” (Waijman, 2002: 1; in Kourie, 2006: 24), teaches humans to co-create with their environment in a state of “presence” (Scharmer, 2007). SQ or the spiritual quotient is another form of human intelligence, linked to the soul and imagination helping one thrive as a whole entity, leading to a higher level of reflection and use of creativity in solving problems with the feeling of personal power and collective spirit (Zohar and Marshall, 2000; in Anthony, 2003: 5).

Connections with the Learning Process and the Heart-Brain-Body Connection

Spirituality “operates in the learning process and connects between rational thought which is linked to the process of thinking, the emotions which trigger feelings, and spirituality, which draws on the subconscious mind to enable the individual to creatively and intuitively find solutions” (De Souza 2008: 1132). Using spirituality in the learning process “raises the potential for the integration of learning” (De Souza, 2009: 1133). Some authors talk about gaining knowledge implicitly, referring to the subconscious mind in the learning process. According to Vaughan (2003), spiritual development begins with authenticity, self-awareness, and the absence of defensiveness and hostility. Integrating heart and mind, spirituality helps to recognize the power in one’s self, and to learn from one’s mistakes, in the misidentifying from ego. Practicing spirituality helps people to be more connected to the world and the heart because development of spiritual intelligence is associated to the integral vision of “I” and the world, supports Anthony (2003). In Kourie’s (2006) opinion, the authentic answer and awareness of “Who am I?” can come when the individual finds harmony in his or her own beliefs, thinking, and behaviors. EFEL practitioners demonstrate that horses help people make the connection between the heart, the brain, and the body to finally find harmony, as a new approach to learning: the heart-brain-body connection. Training, teaching, and learning usually focus on incorporating something new in the brain. Gehrke and Schurley (2006) support that the incorporation of essentials points to the learning process, the heart, and the body at the same level as the brain facilitates the integration and the emergence of the new. “Experience with body-based learning can help managers appreciate viscerally what is required for maximal learning” (Gehrke and Goldman, 2006: 9). It seems that considering oneself as one larger series of systems in harmony decreases discomfort, increases

confidence, and puts people in a positive learning environment as they start “letting go” and “being present.” By doing so, the EFEL approach uses the “heart-brain-body connection” to work on the harmony in oneself including emotions, self-awareness, judgment, and interpersonal relationships. The EFEL learning environment is not “sticky”; there is an advantage for management improvement in leading changes to learn in an unstuck process with pleasure and immediate reward. The heart-brain-body connection facilitated by horses works on the connection to our inner world and our environment, thereby stimulating our spiritual intelligence.

Spirituality Development through the EFEL

The EFEL approach is similar to a kind of transformational learning inspired by Boyatzis (2001), De Souza (2004), Low (2003), and Scharmer (2007). The EFEL program applies the three aspects of being from De Souza (2008): Thinking, Feeling, and Intuiting. Horses facilitate the reflection from the person’s “center” (Kourie, 2006: 23; Zohar, 2000: 162), also called the soul (Marshall and Zohar, 2000; Vaughan, 2002), the non-conscious mind (De Souza, 2009), and links to the right side brain (Gehrke and Schuyler, 2009; Hamilton, 2011; Taylor, 2002). This starting point of reflection uses an intuiting process in the way of “sensing and perceiving the outer world” (De Souza, 2009: 1131). It comes before the emotional resonance. Starting firstly with intuition, this intuitive learning process provides an objective and non-judgmental approach of what people are learning in the present moment. It facilitates the advancement process for feeling and thinking — as a virgin field waiting for new plant seeds and fresh rain to grow in sustainable conditions. Horses push humans in this subconscious potential of learning called “the intuitive way of knowing” by Del Prete (2002). EFEL teaches participants to tap into their observation senses, to experience silence with horses, to look in their inner world to find solutions in a non-contextual situation, and finally, to co-create new behaviors and knowledge around leadership with their four-legged partner.

The primary goal in an EFEL workshop is to develop sensitivity to inner intuitive reflection and to be open to receiving the product of this new reflection through the eyes of honest, emotionally intelligent facilitators. De Souza (2009: 1136) supports that “students need to develop skills that allow them to see through the eyes of another.” In EFEL, the role of “another” is played by the horse. Dossey (2002) considers dreams “an integral part of healing” (Dossey, 2002; in Anthony, 2003: 45) and introduces the idea that the non-rational dimension must be integrated in science processes as “the primacy consciousness in the universe” (Dossey, 2002; in Anthony, 2003: 46). Kohanov worked with this way with the horses’ power of awareness, connecting to the non-rational dimension: “They showed me that when logic couldn’t make sense of a situation, some completely irrational notion that popped into my head, my heart, or my dreams might lead me to the truth” (Kohanov, 2001: 38). Broomfield goes further when looking at the human’s relation to nature: “Humans and nature are not separated, but are in unity” (Broomfield, 1997: 96). He supports that nature communicates with us through visible messages. He confirms, too, that animals have a “vibrant intelligence” in terms of resonance. Broomfield’s affirmation is in alignment with the heart rate study related by Gehrke and Schurley (2003) mentioned previously. In fact, horses come in heart rate frequency synchronicity and use their non-verbal communication to express themselves, always deeply connected to their environment through visual, auditory, tactile, emotional, and intuitive senses. Horses are not able to support incongruence or human inner stress. Animals do not use the cognitive process in their thinking, making them authentic and honest beings playing the role of developmental facilitators. According to Kohanov (2001), because of their power to bring people to focus only and deeply on the present moment, horses have positive impacts on all physiological and cerebral activities through

our subconscious connection to our right side brain. This connection leaves time to receive and understand all outer and inner information and use it to thrive. Taylor J.B. (2006) supports that with an exclusive connection to our right side brain, referred to as her stroke of insight, everything slows down and little attention is paid to it because of the nature of the perceptions experienced. Woods (1996: 9) explains that the deep connection to inner world, which draws upon the right side brain, is a kind of “self-transcendence.” Otherwise, nature teaches us spirituality, and in the case of EFEL, horses help us use our spiritual intelligence and develop it through the process of personal development and a deeper understanding of the universe.

The EFEL Learning Process in Relation to Learning Sciences

Kegan (1982) supports the notion that managers improve their level of leadership ability when they differentiate themselves from their mental models and look more objectively at reality. It is a question of being aware of the relation between personal sufferings and personal views, thinking, and reactions. Joiner and Joseph (2007) describe this individual world view, action logic, self-strategies, and representations — the conscious expansion of a manager engaging evolution. To improve himself, the manager must consider his own world view and his needs in this world. However, some needs are harder to identify than others because they are too deep and may be contrary to rules and principles inveterate to the manager. Nevertheless, these needs that are hard to define are often responsible for incongruent emotions and behaviors. This reflection and awareness gives power and control to oneself, which is essential to personal development. This directly relates to Mahatma Gandhi’s insight that “the purpose of life is to know oneself. And in order to do , we must learn to identify with all that lives.”

Fortunately, EFEL provides awareness, assessment, learning, and analysis practice through workshops as a result of all the learning styles it uses. Schuyler (2006) supports that a manager’s quest for empowerment needs a new approach — one that could teach and coach by using body and world interactions to integrate a sustainable empowerment and self-development, thereby making use of the right side brain. In the case of EFEL, skill development, supported by Cameron and Whetten (2008), Gehreke (2006), Kohanov (2001), Rector (2005), Schuyler (2006), and Strozzi (2004), is based on the assumption of awareness through behavioral feedback guided by a professional and an animal in a global partnership. However, a manager’s ability to learn demands a certain open mind, eschewing old knowledge to prepare room for the integration of the new.

Section 4: Conclusion and Future Research

The article will now conclude with a brief reflective sketch of the intuitive learning process facilitated by horses. This reflection is inspired by Scharmer (2007), De Souza (2006), Low (2003), and Boyatzis (2001). It is demonstrate in the logic of “I” as the process center keeping the focus on action logic development. To introduce the model and before starting the EFEL workshop, certain factors have to be considered:

- Who am I;
- My state of spirit, thinking, perceptions, and beliefs of the outer world;
- My inner perception and understanding of myself; and
- Existing ideas and beliefs of who I am and how I am in personal and professional life.

Like Scharmer’s U theory, EFEL follows a process of open mind, open heart, and open will — facilitated by horses.

Co-initiating

The first feedback from the horse is during grooming: the horse makes an analysis. I have my first experience with the horse, observing his reaction and connecting within. Horses offer a kind of review of my inner self as a behavioral mirror. Their feedback and the instructor's guidance lead me to an awareness of who I am. This provides me with an awareness of what I do and how, as well as of my personal skills. This is facilitated by the instructor's assistance and his or her explanations of the horses' reactions. This first step sheds new light on the difference between who I think I am and who I am, making visible what is invisible. The horse is a mirror of my interior. The horse initiates me to the practice of connection to the present moment. It is practical learning to receive horse feedback and react to same as a behavioral mirror. At this point, I start a constructive reflection guided by instructors, on how to improve myself to complete the exercise with the horse. Finally, I am in a deep listening state and I am receptive and open.

Co-sensing

I understand that I must consider the horse as a partner and not an obstacle or a challenge. At this level of practicing my development with the horse, I have to observe carefully what happens — first, for my security, and second because the horse does not leave me with a choice. Here begins the process of collaboration in order to complete the goal. I come into emotional resonance with the horse, leaving at the gate all exterior influences on my perception. I start to unlearn, in a deep connection with the world; I open my heart and connect it to my mind. And finally, I join the horse frequency and reach the “letting-go” state. Subconsciously, I come into a deep connection with the right side of my brain, observing and listening to the surroundings and being receptive to the horse's feelings. I focus only on horse. I get far away social pressures, judgment, experiences, stress, fear... suspending the voice of judgment.

Co-presencing

At this point, I am in an intuiting process — an inner reflective and receptive process of new learning. I start using intuition with the horse and trust in it as it has trusted me. It is the beginning of a new learning process — using my inner spiritual power to “transform knowledge and action, sensing and perceiving the outer world” deeply and intuitively (De Souza, 2009: 1131). Like the Utheory process, I slow down to understand my logical actions, improve my listening of inner and outer phenomena by beginning to listen to the horse's biofeedback, as generative listening. The horse facilitates the emergence of my insight power. This state of high level of presence provides me with an awareness of my leadership ability and the existence of the deeper grounds of strength to which I have access.

Co-creating

I co-create from this deeper connection between the horse, my intuition, my feelings, and my thinking. I start to unify my mind, my heart, and my body to plant the seeds for new management skills with the horse as a partner — a mirror of my intuition. I am open to learning new aspects about myself, leading to new behaviors and knowledge. I practice the power of will with the horse and adjust instinctively to new behaviors. I start to co-create a way of being with the horse. I am aware that this collaboration with the horse is for my own improvement on deeper levels, but also for life as a whole. I use my four-legged partner to practice new aspects of who I am. I am in the practical integration process; the horse follows my intuition and checks if I am a potential leader for the herd. It will test my leadership. He provides me with a new awareness of my leadership ability level. The EFEL workshop allows one to remain focused on my actions and how they are

done, allowing the immediate testing of one's authenticity throughout the self-development process. This practice is a kind of development from action and definitively leaves negatives in my life and old knowledge behind, as non-essentials of myself. I experience and feel the power of heart-brain-body connection.

Co-evolving

At this level, I find assertiveness and connection to the world. I harmonize my mind, my heart, and my body through the horse's help in connecting to my inner world in a subconscious process. This practice reveals the acquisition of the physical and cerebral, helping bring new awareness of the change I am called to live. I integrate new behaviors through a recognition and application of my emerging strengths and future possibilities. I acquire a new spirit and perception of who I am. I note a co-evolution of my level of consciousness and my perception of the outer world. A new way of considering things and how they work is born inside me, opening and touching the spiritual part I have and didn't use before. Finally, I have a reflection of what happened during the schedule with the horse, alone, and with the instructor, to continue the process of development and complete the transition.

Closing Thoughts on Future Work

Research is currently underway concerning the human and horse relationship. For future studies, it will be valuable to focus on the professionals assisting in the EFEL workshops. What capacities are important for assisting and leading from a consciousness point of view? What makes an efficient guide in the personal development process? By exploring the spiritual dimension of the EFEL workshop, how might this further clarify how horses serve in the process of management skills facilitation through field studies? Future research may consider how EFEL can develop possibilities of spiritual intelligence of which managers and professionals are currently unaware, particularly in terms of the key management skills addressed in this article.

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