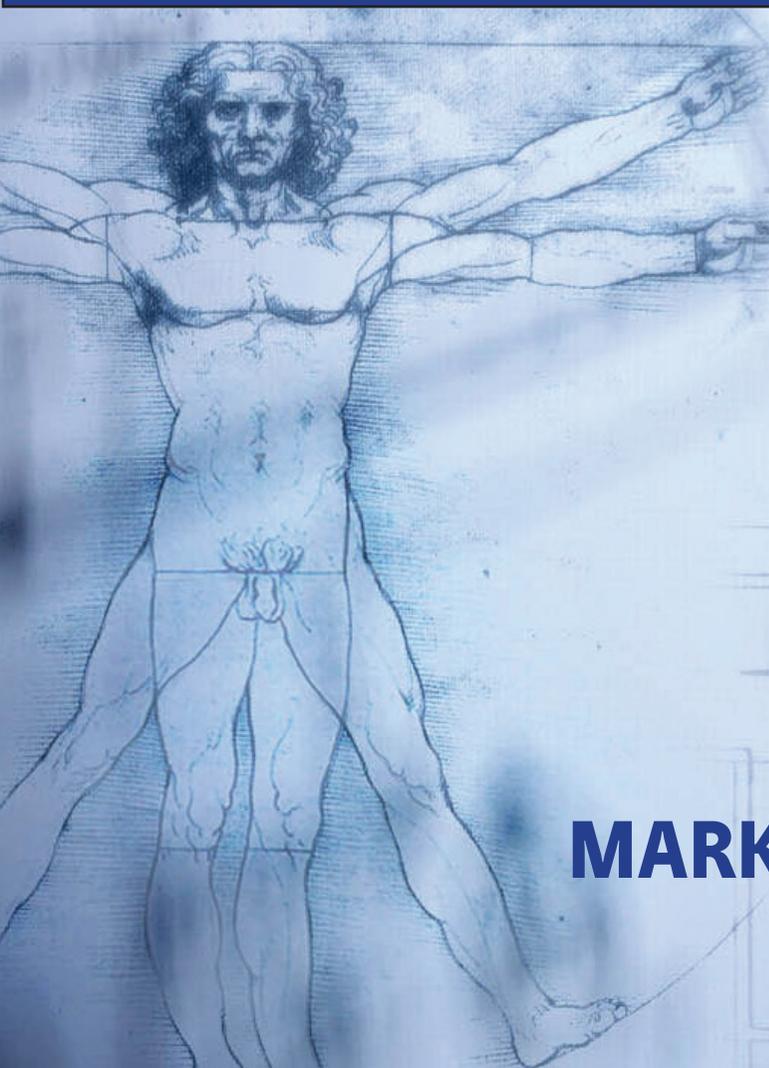




THE BODY IN COACHING AND TRAINING

AN INTRODUCTION TO
EMBODIED FACILITATION



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1

Introduction: what your body really is

Few of us have lost our minds, but most of us have long ago lost our bodies.

– Ken Wilber

Exercise

Exercises and practice are integral to this book – you can only learn embodiment that way, which is all about experience by definition. Exercise:

Feel. Take a moment to pause before this book changes your life. Breathe. Feel. Or as Lynne Forest said, ‘Have an in-body experience.’ Your body is a part of yourself and, just like your mind, can be educated. As the founder of Clinical Somatic Education, Thomas Hanna, wrote; “*The human body is not an instrument to be used, but a realm of one’s being to be experienced, explored, enriched and, thereby, educated.*”

Setting the scene

Preliminary reflection/discussion questions

The chapters begin with some reflection. This can be done internally briefly, or by using paper and pen taking more time, or in the form of a long discussion over coffee with a friend. You could even dance or draw your answers if you are more creatively inclined (some schools of embodiment use art therapy in combination). The key thing is to be active and engaged from the start, as this means you will get A LOT more from this book than just reading it through passively as information-gathering.

- What is a body to you? Complete the sentence, ‘My body is . . .’ 20 times in quick succession and see what your associations are. You could also ask, ‘My relationship with my body is . . .’ and do the same.
- What challenges that the world faces do you think involve the body, or a lack of embodiment?

- How do you already use the body in facilitation work?
- Do you give any embodied training already (e.g. yoga or dance) and how might this bias your perspective on the body?
- Ask yourself what it means to be truly 'body smart'. Include more than the athletic/kinaesthetic.

Promise

By the end of this chapter you will have a radically expanded view of what the body actually is, and a far more useful view for facilitators than the common understanding.

What is embodiment?

Embodiment teacher Emilie Conrad said, 'Movement is what we are, not something we do', and this sums up the meaning of embodiment, but let's go a little deeper into defining what embodiment is, especially as it's becoming something of a buzzword and '#embodiment' is starting to be used for any old nonsense on Instagram these days! I've found answering this question is best done from a series of perspectives rather than using one rigid definition.

One short definition of embodiment is that it's simply about '*how we are*'. The complexity within this simple sentence opens up, however if we give an extended version of it: 'how we are' is the manner by which (how) we (it is inter-relational) create (it is generative) our (identity is key) being (are), moment by moment in relationship to all our social, cultural and environmental contexts. 'How are you?', while a simple worldwide social nicety of a question, is also a deep ontological enquiry and the essence of this book!

Next, another deceptively concise definition: '*Embodiment is the subjective aspect of the body.*' The important distinction between 'bodily' and embodied is that the word 'embodiment' pertains to subjectivity – *who* we are, as well as *how* we are. The body as 'I' not 'it', you could say. Embodiment is about the bodily aspect of ourselves, rather than just seeing the body as an inert 'brain taxi', as embodiment teacher Francis Briers says! Or to link it to the first definition – it's 'the how of our who'! It is subjective in the sense of felt but further in the sense of our being. Some confusion comes from the 'subjective aspect of the body', as some conflate mere body awareness with embodiment. While mindfulness is the foundation of embodiment practice, the word may still suggest separateness – 'I am aware OF MY body' – as if you were separate and looking at it from afar. Embodiment could therefore be described as true inhabitation rather than awareness *of*. Embodiment refers to being aware AS a body, not just of it. This leads to this simple set of distinctions, with various ways of doing yoga used to illustrate:

Bodily: physical, but no emphasis on awareness

Yoga here would just be a form of exercise to develop muscles and flexibility, like much modern Western fitness ‘yoga’

Mindful: aware of the body

Most traditional yoga involves attention, so would include mindful movement practices, breath posture and other aspects but only as things to correct

Embodied: awareness of the body as an aspect of the self

Some modern schools (e.g. my own EYP) and some classical tantric yoga schools develop the whole person using the body as the entrance point

Somewhat more philosophically – or, more accurately, linguistically – we could say embodiment is not just about the body as an aspect of the first person not third person, but about the body as a verb not as a noun (object). One to contemplate perhaps!

The opposite of embodiment – objectification

Note that the objectified body is the alternative to having a subjective view of the body. Most people are aware of the problems this causes in a sexual context – if you’ve ever been leered at as just a piece of meat, you’ll get this. Likewise, are people who work for a business really a human ‘resource’ like a piece of coal to be burnt? Or consider how the fitness and dieting ‘industries’ (note the factory feel again) asks us to shape our bodies, or how the medical industry asks us to see health mechanically and not holistically. The implications of the endemic disembodiment we see in the world are disturbing and profound, and we’ll explore this further in the ethics section of this chapter and in detail when we look at the forces of disembodiment in Chapter 2.

Reflection

In what ways are you seen as an object and not fully human? In what ways do you treat yourself this way?

The HOW of being human

Our physiology (specifically our posture, movement, tension and bodily awareness patterns) is far from being a neutral ‘brain taxi’.¹ It is the mechanism of our perceptions, cognitions, emotions, behaviour, relationships, and so on

(see functions of the body later in this chapter), and a partial solidification of a set of habits we call ourselves. (That's a dense sentence and the heart of this book, so read it again.) The way we hold the body, move around, attend and intend with the body, is a way of managing and expressing who we are, and we literally 'lean' towards one life or another. The unconscious self, and potentially the consciously created self, are visceral. Our shaping isn't just an expression of ourselves (body language) but *creates*. It is a response to the present moment, but is equally a solidification of past conditions and a way of creating a future based on these. Coaches take note of the last part especially.

Further, to clarify confusion around definitions, it's worth highlighting a distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious* embodiment. ALL people are unconsciously embodied, meaning that they have a set of bodily habits that are the unexamined substrate for their being (thinking, feeling, relationships, etc.), but only a few have brought these to light and gotten any choice in the matter. So are we all embodied? Yes, but some more consciously embodied than others.

A way to be smart (a set of skills)

A very pragmatic definition of embodiment that I will be working with throughout this book is that of a type of intelligence. What I like about this angle on it, is that it points to specific skill-sets that can be developed through practice. By this definition, embodiment is about skills in awareness and choice, both individually and in relationship. This creates the categories of self-awareness, self-leadership, social awareness and social leadership. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter and throughout the book, as it provides a simple framework for us.

A further way to think about how the word embodiment is used is as a catch-all term for all the practices relating to bodymind holism. It's as good a word as any to lump the various awareness-based movement/bodywork arts such as tai chi, aikido, Feldenkrais, yoga and conscious dance together. The nearest other word that could do this is 'somatic', which is sometimes used as a synonym for 'embodied', and sometimes means awareness-based movement but not with an emphasis on shifting the self. It is also associated with a specific school – Hanna Somatics – in some locations, but feels 'clunky' to us because despite its high – sounding Greek origins, it is not part of most people's daily vocabulary. A common usage of 'embodiment', of course, is as an exemplar of or a tangible form of an idea, which we think points helpfully towards the more technical and specific usage here, although I appreciate others may find this dual meaning unhelpful. Other terms that have been coined include 'bodyfulness' – which Christine Caldwell and I came up with independently, and the aforementioned 'bodymind'. In any event, it appears that 'embodiment' is the word that is catching on.

Very simply after all this word play, it is worth noting that embodiment is really about just being human. Because it is both a more accurate and kinder

view of what a body is, it directs us back to the essence of our humanity – to our values, our consciousness, our relationships, and, dare I say it . . . to love.

More poetically, as the body is the primary site of creativity, aesthetics and artistry, we could say that embodiment simply means *coming home* to the body. When awareness and the body embrace, flesh turns from a prison to freedom, from a command to a question: a question of spirit, of love and of meaning. Embodiment is our original romance and the possibility of a life-long love affair.

Lastly, many people also experience transcendence through sex, sports, connection with nature or, less enjoyably, bodily pain or illness – so I end this section by saying the body is also a gateway to that which is most meaningful to us. There are many ways this can be phrased, including ‘Your body is a temple of the holy spirit’ (Corinthians 6:19–20) in the Christian tradition.²

Guidelines for embodied practice

This book contains many exercises, as experience is the heart of embodiment by definition. Here are some basic guidelines for them:

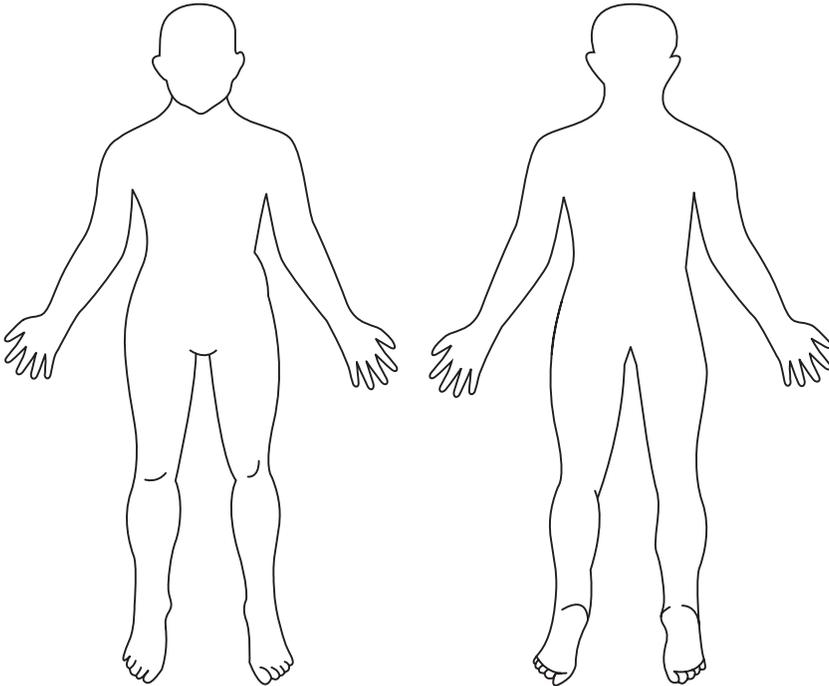
- **Safety first:** do no harm physically or emotionally, to yourself or others through embodied techniques. If something starts to feel very unpleasant or overwhelming (as opposed to simply odd or slightly uncomfortable), stop. Definitely stop if you start to become ‘flooded’ with emotion, freeze up or dissociate (space out). See also the ethics, trauma and safety section.
- **Experimental and experiential:** don’t believe a word I say – test everything for yourself and remember, it’s ‘not knowledge until it’s in the muscle’,³ so you need to try things out. Theory and practice are two wheels on a cart as Buddhists say, and just reading this book without practising is a waste of time.
- **Personalised:** we’re all different and techniques must be adapted to suit each of us and those we work with. Be creative and feel free to make the work bespoke.

Exercise: Your body now – drawing

Intuitively people often have a good sense of their embodiment but may not have the words for it. One way to bring this out is to draw your current embodiment (Figure 1.1).

Focus on the subjective aspects of how you experience the body and your body being rather than just physical things. As per our definition of embodiment. You can use colours, symbols, whatever works for you. Be creative and capture your relationship to the body. It’s not a work of art. You could also talk it through with a friend (though be aware this is very personal), a coach or therapist.

Figure 1.1 Body drawing



Exercise: Objectifying arm exercise

Another exercise to bring to life experientially a definition of embodiment is to relate to your own arm first as an object and then as a part of yourself.

First, look at IT as a THING, as an object. Prod it, poke it, treat it as no different from a chair. Notice how that is. Next look at your arm as part of you, feel YOURSELF through the arm, move the arm as part of you, RELATE to yourself with and through your arm. How is this different from the previous experience? You could also try this with a partner and with (consensual) touch, be warned though, they may not appreciate the objectification!

Why does the body matter in training and coaching?

Aka: Why embodiment makes or breaks facilitators.

I'm aware that readers who have not yet 'bought into' embodiment may ask, having read all the seemingly abstract definitions, 'So what?!' Fair question. Why does all this matter to facilitators?

Given that we all are embodied, it's EXTREMELY useful to know how we are shaped as people generally, and as facilitators more specifically. Why?

Because our embodiment impacts others hugely, while being invisible to us, and because it dictates what we can see and do! As facilitators we need to know our strengths, weaknesses and blind spots; and also to develop flexibility. The basic embodied training model that I work with is to help people develop awareness, range and choice (rather than tell facilitators that they are wrong, and offer to fix them). People may already know their habitual coaching style, for example, but embodied training can help them easily shift that to better work with different clients, giving them state-changing skills and longer-term behavioural flexibility. When all that you have is a hammer (and maybe don't know that), then hitting nails is all you can do, and everyone looks like a nail!

Also, embodiment can help you develop yourself more deeply over time. It is not just self-awareness that makes a good facilitator but who a person is – that is, what they embody! Techniques are easy and theories plentiful, but it is the *being* of a facilitator that makes the biggest difference, not what they know about. Being underpins ALL techniques – and this is embodiment, and we cannot develop ourselves to death without using the body, and this holds all patterns in place. We could all list the many traits of a good facilitator, but HOW do we develop these without embodied practices? Clever words and good intentions don't cut it.

Hopefully this section takes the 'who' and 'how' definitions of embodiment and links them to your practical concerns as a facilitator. Yes, you'll find 'quick-wins' in this book, but more critically you'll find a map, and a practical method to developing the most important tool in your box – you.

A more client-centred answer is that if we are to get the best results, we need to work with the whole person and the body is part of a person. Embodiment is a core part of a person's being (and therefore communication, stress management, leadership, parenting – or whatever) and so needs to be considered. Furthermore, because embodied intelligence is likely to be excluded from people's education, from secondary school to MBAs, it is the area where leverage can most quickly be found. As it is the aspect most usually excluded from the helping professions too, it is often the aspect that helps when others have failed, and makes an excellent market differentiator, especially with so many coaches and trainers around these days!

The body is also the most direct and quick way to work with many issues. It may be quite laborious or take much work to talk your way around a person's world – view, for example, and all kind of 'defences' may be in place linguistically, but to just shift their posture, that's much more accessible! Because the body is the most manifest part of our being (to borrow from a tantric yoga model), it is the easiest to get a hold of!

When I'm selling embodied training to companies, we don't call it that, we just say it's interactive and therefore engaging (everyone hates PowerPoint, let's face it), goes deep quickly (people are busy) and sticks (you won't waste your money). Most of all, I demonstrate that it works, which is what my business clients really care about. I think we've all been on courses promising quick-wins and realised that air-punching emotional highs don't lead to lasting

change. Embodiment is about practice and sustainably shifting over time, and while not rock and roll, this is what works. Mere information remains as useless ‘shelf help’, as embodiment teacher Wendy Palmer says, in reference to books that sit on shelves and don’t really impact us. I like to think that if information alone was enough, then Wikipedia and Google would have solved all the world’s problems, or whether you’d trust someone claiming to be a great lover because they’d read a lot of books on kissing? Likely not. Knowing *about* stuff is common these days, but embodied wisdom, that’s rare . . . and what makes the real difference.

A further perspective on ‘why embodiment?’ is that of being VUCA-proof. In an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, the view of many as to how things are heading today, it is important that we develop flexibility for ourselves and our clients, especially under the new norms of intensity and challenge. I have seen over the years of working in business that NO business client of mine has become less busy, more stable or found easier markets. The business environments that I now work in, feel more and more like war zones. Embodiment makes you anti-fragile⁴ when adaptability is required for resilience and simply not being out-of-date very quickly. I see many facilitators burn out in this fast-paced . . . no . . . insanely-paced environment, and coming back to the sanity and refuge of the body is vital to avoid this.

Honestly though, these days I find that there’s genuine widespread curiosity on the part of facilitators about how to work with the body, so maybe I shouldn’t preach to the choir. And what I do hear is not so much, ‘would it help me to work with the body?’, but ‘how do I work practically and safely with the body given that I’m not an athlete or yoga teacher?’ People want simple tools that do the job, coming from depth but without being esoteric or too ‘Californian’/‘woo-woo’, and this is what this book is all about. When I started this work, perhaps the world wasn’t quite ready except on the leading edges, but now after the revolutions of emotional intelligence and mindfulness, the time for embodied intelligence and ‘bodyfulness’⁵ has come.

You already know this

While embodied facilitation may seem like an unusual subject, it is really something you already know (but may need reminding of and developing) and somewhat common sense. Often I frame it this way when introducing it to new students rather than try to sell it as exotic secret knowledge. People all feel to some degree, and we all know feeling matters – work someone hard enough and they will feel that they are tired, and nobody picks their life partner from an Excel spreadsheet after surveying data on potential mates. We can all manage our mood to some extent unless we are toddlers, we are all aware of natural rhythms to a greater or lesser degree, we all know there is a better posture for sleeping than waking (i.e. more horizontal!). A dog or a child can get a sense of someone’s character by how they move, we have all felt the stress of someone next to us on a plane or a train, we all have at least a little skill in humour,

‘cheering people up’ or flirting (forms of embodied emotional influence), we all have ‘gut instincts’,⁶ and there’s plenty of sayings based on ‘butterflies in the stomach’, ‘gut wrenching’, etc. that show that embodied wisdom is implicit in our cultural understanding to name just one body area . . . I could go on. **The basic embodiment skill-sets are our core humanity.** Embodied training merely clarifies and refines our birth right.

A further note on language

Note that the English language – and many others besides – are FULL of embodied wisdom! Phrases like, ‘stand up for what you believe’, ‘broken hearted’ and ‘gut feeling’ point to the somatic. Lakoff and Johnson have suggested that the body is our most fundamental metaphor, as for example we associate a parent’s literal warmth with affection, so ‘warm’ becomes a byword for affection.⁷ I believe, however, that this is more than just linguistic or metaphorical, as the body is our basic way of making sense of the world. Those studying robotics and AI have also found this to be true.

Embodiment teacher Philip Shepherd, on the other hand, points out how disembodiment is also firmly established in language, especially in regard to leadership. We have ‘heads’ of companies, ‘chief’ executive officers and ‘captains’ of industry, for example.⁸ What does this say about our culture’s privileges?

As an exercise you could try and list how many body-based phrases you regularly use or are prevalent in your country. Spend a day, or watch a movie, making a tally of those you hear. You’ll hear a lot!

Structure of the book

Overview

Now let me walk you through the structure of the book. After defining terms, laying out what I mean by embodied intelligence, passing on the necessary trauma and cultural considerations to practise safely, and presenting the scientific foundation, I’ll present the four main aspects of embodied intelligence, each in their own chapter. These chapters are the ‘meat’ of the book. Each is shorter than the last as they build on each other. After this core content, I will present chapters on other practical applications and client concerns, discuss excellence in embodied facilitation and conclude.

Format

A heap of words about embodiment is . . . somewhat ironic. To make this book closer to the essence of the content, I therefore present not just theory and

descriptions of tools, but reflections and experiments. Engaging with these will deeply enhance your understanding of the book, as this work is experiential by definition. I will also guide you to your own practices as a central aspect of learning to be an embodied facilitator.

In order to keep the book to a manageable size, and because embodiment is sometimes better shown than told, video resources are mentioned throughout if you'd like to delve deeper into a subject, or to see what we're talking about. While it is not necessary to view any of these to grasp the book's central content, they will support it. These are all on the book website along with an extra chapter, a free film of a workshop that we normally sell, various supportive articles, course links and more. See: www.embodiedfacilitationbook.com [link not up and running yet?]

Foundation – building your own embodiment

An embodied facilitator's foundation is their own embodied intelligence. It starts at home. Critically, embodiment is a form of learning that requires experience. You certainly wouldn't board a plane with a pilot who had no practical flying experience, and nobody would believe someone who said they were a great lover because they'd looked at a lot of porn. The same need for practice applies to the field of embodied facilitation. Techniques can be learnt easily, but what makes them work well is the practitioner's own embodiment. Most of your coaching efficiency will stem from who and how you are, and what you have laid down in the flesh, not from what you know *about*.

It can be tempting and well-intentioned for a facilitator to jump straight in and start using the tools with others, but the techniques will only be safe and effective if the facilitator practises them him or herself, and embodies them with congruence. This is a matter of both integrity and efficacy, and it is sad to see coaches set themselves up as embodiment trainers after a few weekend workshops, without undertaking any long-term practice. I sure don't want this book to add to this trend! So my request of you, and prayer to the heathen gods of embodiment, is that you experience first-hand what's in this book, and develop your own embodiment through dedicated practice, and stay on this ever-deepening path. Please be humble enough not to think that other kinds of work you have done qualify you in this regard. Realistically, you can of course help others as a work in progress, and I don't expect many readers to simply develop themselves for months before working with others – the format I work with when training trainers – so we have structured the book so that each chapter has two halves, one for you and one for working with others. At least explore the first half of each chapter thoroughly and experientially before trying to take it to others.

Please also read all the essential precaution and safety information in the preliminary matter a few times before trying ANY of this work as a facilitator.

What is embodied intelligence?

The contexts of the body

Before we can understand the real function of the body, it is first necessary to understand the contexts within which we are *always* embodied. In fact, one way of understanding embodiment is *as* our primary context. The body is our constant, largely invisible and underlying context, shaping what we think, feel and do – as well as our relationships – by providing the substrate of our being. This is what ‘embodiment’ means.

Equally we could say that embodiment is a relational network. We are always embodied in relationship as well as in ourselves. You exist not as a permanent independent self, but are different in different interpersonal contexts, and because of those social contexts.

Lastly, we are always embodied in place, and have come to embody the places we have inhabited most frequently. Culture sits between place and people and has aspects of both to it, as will be mentioned extensively throughout this book.⁹

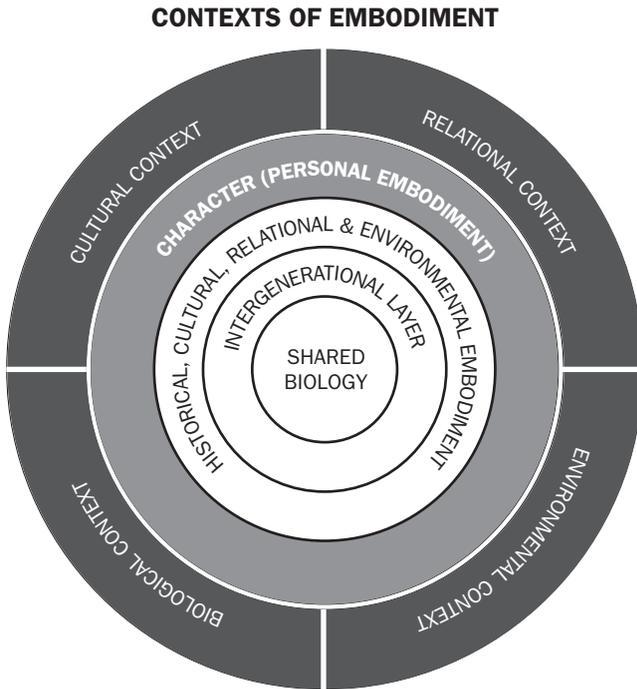
We can view the aspects of bodily influence happening in place and in relationship, as layers. This means that at any time a person’s embodiment is influenced by the various dimensions below (Figure 1.2).

Embodiment is affected by situation (what’s happening now), culture (present and past), relationships (present and past) and place (present and past) – as underpinned by universal biological aspects (e.g. the distress response), many of which we share not just with all people, but with many animals.

- **Environmental context:** we are different depending on where we are. Different cities, climates and training rooms all make a difference, for example. See the box below.
- **Situational context:** we are not embodied in the same way in all circumstances, as at work or at home, for example. Fluctuating biology (e.g. hormone cycles) could also be thought of as ‘situational’.
- **Relationship context:** we are different with different people. We are also embodied in relationship to historical relationships.
- **Personal historical context:** a body is a life story, or perhaps more accurately an adaptation to a life, a way of finding love, safety and belonging. This is ‘our’ embodiment and if we are not aware of what it predisposes, this solidified past creates a future. Bringing this to light and creating new options is what embodied facilitation is all about.
- **Cultural context:** where we come from, and where we are now, matter.
- **Human context:** we have a universal shared physiology (e.g. the distress response).

As embodied facilitators, our job is to bring to awareness these different layers, and appreciate all of them at play. Failure to act or least acknowledge introducing the idea of embodiment to a client will lead to a ‘but it depends’ pushback, which is half true as it does indeed depend (on these contexts).

Figure 1.2 Contexts of embodiment



The body and place

Places have a subtle but significant impact on how we behave, so setting up your working space is important. The sensory dimension is key; research shows that people are more likely to tip the waiter or help a stranger if the sun's shining! But sensory information that's too subtle to be noticed can still have a significant impact on behaviour: A smell of burnt dust too faint to notice is enough to make people lose their appetite. What kind of sensory space are you facilitating in? The layout of spaces is also important. Think about how differently you behave in a canteen or a restaurant, a corner shop as opposed to a supermarket, or a library compared to a bar. Each space helps structure how we behave through the architecture, furnishings, layout, lighting, etc. Your coaching or training space will do the same. What's the 'mood' of the space? Is it serious and formal, calm and relaxing or quirky, upbeat and fun? How might the 4-elements model (explained later in book) apply to the mood of the space? For example, arranging the chairs in opposed lines, a circle, rows or randomly will impact on power dynamics, embodiments and how people interact. When we are in close physical proximity to someone or something, we feel closer psychologically. The opposite is also true and your layout could create 'tribes'. Different stages of coaching or training may require a different space. If you're

using the 'four seasons' model, think about how to match the mood of your space to the task at hand.

Is 'thinking outside the box' more than just a metaphor? Researchers at Cornell University built a box big enough to sit in to find out. Those sitting outside the box were better at solving word puzzles, and those walking freely around it did best of all. There's two reasons why this happens: First, we think with metaphors all the time; second, these metaphors are embodied. The way we use the metaphor 'more is up' provides a simple example. Because in health we stand up and sickness brings us down, we tend to think metaphorically of 'more' as being 'up' ('price rises') and less as down ('stocks plummeting'). So being in a restricted space – inside the box – makes it harder to open up your thinking to bigger ideas. Some coaches and trainers work outdoors and with good reason: Walking in nature can lighten your mood, boost cognitive capacity and enhance creativity. Nature is also great for our well – being: People whose work spaces look out onto trees and flowers experience less stress, are more satisfied with their jobs and experience fewer everyday ailments like headaches.

The bottom line is that the environment we're in contributes in a significant way to our thinking, creativity and reasoning skills – we are embodied in place – so take this into account!

Further reading: www.bodymindplace.org

– Adrian Harris, MSc, PhD

Exercise: Place and embodiment

Notice the impact of places on your embodiment:

- How is it affected by the landscape and environment, climate, outdoors or indoors architecture and settings? How does your experience of self and others change with these?
- What are your key needs in terms of place (e.g. beauty)? How concretely are you taking care of them? What about where you generally do your facilitation? Are there any positive changes you could make?

What does the body actually do?

Founder of the modern conscious dance movement Gabrielle Roth said, '*Your body is the ground metaphor of your life, the expression of your existence. It is your bible, your encyclopaedia, your life story.*' The central notion of embodiment is that the purpose of the body includes much more than the standard story might suggest. Understanding this defines embodiment as a field and opens up a host of possibilities for clients. One way of thinking about

the huge scope of what the body encompasses is to think of embodiment in terms of *functions* that the body has.

To start with, the body relates to two aspects that are usually well known, from a 'bodily' (though not necessarily 'embodied') perspective:

- **Basics:** physical health, survival, locomotion and reproduction. This foundational aspect of the body is the standard view in mainstream culture as the body as a physical 'self-taxi'.
- **Aesthetics:** the body seeks, receives and expresses beauty. There are different levels of depth to this but the body has always been involved with beauty and I support the 'body positivity' movement.¹⁰

The body also relates to ten further aspects, which bring us more directly into the field of embodiment:

- **Perception:** the body is *how* we view the world. To steal a quote, 'we don't see the world as it is; we see the world as we are'¹¹ – we perceive the world through the lens of our embodiment (see exercise below).
- **Cognition:** the body is *how* we think. The field of embodied cognition, for instance, has established this clearly. For example, it is now established that our posture and movement patterns directly impact how creative or more structured or thinking can be. 'The body is our brain', as embodiment neuroscientist Amanda Blake¹² would say.
- **Emotion and motivation:** emotions are physiological actions we do with specific patterns of our body, and feelings are the felt sense of these actions. Emotions signal to us very clearly our underlying needs and values, which are either satisfied or unsatisfied (for more on this, see Center for Nonviolent Communication¹³). In that sense, our body guides us through our emotions to our deep motivation.
- **Identity:** the body is how we solidify and maintain *who* we are – the set of habits and dispositions that form our personality are embodied. Our sense of who we are is deeply embodied.
- **Relating:** the body is how we communicate and coordinate with others, and how we are in community. We are inter-body-beings, creatures of relationships, in and through our bodies.
- **Learning:** the body systematically records our past and predisposes our future learning around how to be and interact in the world. 'Learning' here refers in the widest sense of implicit learning to do and be, e.g. how to be safe or how to relate. Our embodied learning lies in between this solidification and the plasticity that we can create in our learning through awareness and rewiring of our habits and patterns. Our body is informed by our past, creates our future, and is our access point to the present.
- **Insight:** the body is how intuitive wisdom from experience operates. Our distributed nervous systems keep the memory of our past learnings in mostly unconscious ways. So when we access the body we can tap into

knowledge, as well as personal and perhaps transpersonal insights. While I am clear that this happens to us personally, it is worth noting that it is the only function here not scientifically well established – yet.

- **Inspiration:** the body receives creative and spiritual inspiration. I have asked many groups when they have their best ideas and participants' answers are usually: in the shower, on the toilet or walking in nature – all times when the body is both felt and relaxed. While there is little science on this one, there is a lot of wisdom and you may have relevant experience that may point to the truth of it.
- **Ethics and values:** the body tells us what we care about and what is morally right and wrong. Positive feelings and sensations give us a direct indication of ethical congruence, before and during action. Kindness and truth make us literally stronger.¹⁴
- **Linguistic creation:** through the body we create new possibilities in the future through language. While language is our primary and very human means of organising future actions (you never heard a dog say, 'I'll meet you next Tuesday at 4pm for a walk'), and how we plan and create different tomorrows, language is always embodied. For example, some people struggle to embody a 'no', or to make a bold declaration.¹⁵

Notice the word 'how' in many of these descriptions. The body is *the way in which* we perceive, think, relate, etc.!

This extended 12 functions view of the wide scope of the body's role is pretty radical, and can lead to a very different view of life. Awareness of all that the body is involved with also opens up a huge toolkit for facilitators to work directly with these areas. The fact that these areas are not widely considered 'bodily' is why this book was written. There is a wide evidence base for nearly all of these 12 functions – that is, they are proven and not just my opinion – with a couple strongly suggested by science. See Chapter 2 for more on this.

Credit: This list was influenced by the work of Richard Strozzi-Heckler,¹⁶ The Newfield Network¹⁷ and Paul Linden¹⁸ among others. They are all significant influences on this book.

Exercise: Angry vs. kind bunnies – perception and cognition

Sit or stand somewhere where you can watch people unobtrusively as they walk by – outside a café, for example. First scrunch up your nose like an angry bunny rabbit, narrow your eyes and tighten your jaw and abdomen. Notice how people look at you and what you think about them.

Next try making your posture as relaxed yet expansive as possible and soften your eyes, jaw and belly. How do people look at you now and what kinds of thoughts do you have about them? The people have not changed but you have, and so might have your thoughts and perceptions.

Credit: Exercise inspired by Paul Linden's Being in Movement somatic education.

Exercise: Bodily identity

Can you imagine being YOU 'in' a different body. Maybe you've seen one of those goofy movies where a genie or wizard or whatever swaps two people over. Now imagine you woke up in a different gender, a different age, a different size and shape. Would you still be you? Imagine reacting to different stimuli with more or less triggering, having different hormones, and of course people would treat you very differently. Would you still love who and what you love? Would the world look the same? Would you have the new person's confidence or yours? Their sexuality or yours? Their politics even, or yours?

What exactly is the 'you' that's floating around? Your brain? That's not really possible as neurones are all over the body, with significant clusters in the gut and the heart. Some abstract mind that doesn't depend on anything else? Makes you think, doesn't it!

Dimensions of embodied intelligence

One way to think about embodiment is as a type of intelligence, or 'a multi-dimensional way to be smart', consisting of learnable skills. In a way it is a meta-intelligence as other forms of intelligence fit within it – emotional and intuitive intelligence almost completely, for example, and even cognitive intelligence is influenced by it (see embodied cognition research in the next Chapter 2).

I created a model based on one of Daniel Goleman's models of emotional intelligence, to demystify the field and make learning embodiment practical. You can think of embodiment skills as involving awareness and choice (or leadership), for ourselves and others, across two time-frames, thus forming a simple four-quadrant matrix of embodiment capabilities, or cube if you prefer (Figure 1.3). Or to put it another way, it's about 'know' and 'grow', 'now' and 'then', with 'me' and 'them'.

Embodied intelligence (Figure 1.4) is a pragmatic perspective as it provides a map of practical skills that can be developed, so is the central model of this book; Chapters 3–6 are each devoted to one of the four quadrants. It gives a practical framework for developing oneself and supporting clients.

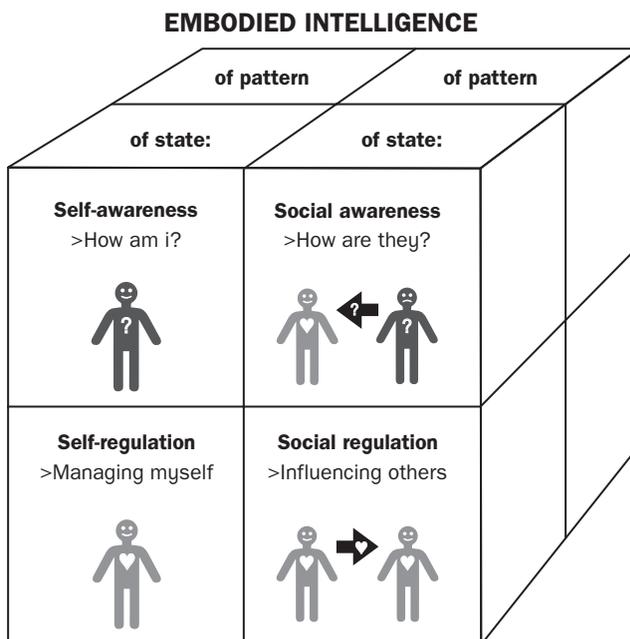
The basic model is self and other, awareness and choice (know and grow), over two time-frames. Note that I created this model in 2010 and started sharing it widely online soon after. Others have since come up with similar models, perhaps independently, perhaps in imitation . . . which after all is a form of flattery!

Figure 1.3 Model of embodied intelligence

EMBODIED INTELLIGENCE

<p>EMBODIED SELF-AWARENESS</p> <p>- of short-term state</p> <p>- of long-term pattern</p>	<p>EMBODIED SOCIAL AWARENESS</p> <p>- of short-term state</p> <p>- of long-term pattern</p>
<p>EMBODIED SELF-LEADERSHIP</p> <p>- of short-term state</p> <p>- of long-term pattern</p>	<p>EMBODIED SOCIAL LEADERSHIP</p> <p>- of short-term state</p> <p>- of long-term pattern</p>

Figure 1.4 Embodied intelligence



From the book *Embodiment: Moving Beyond Mindfulness* (2020), see www.embodiedfacilitator.com/book

Each aspect of embodied intelligence will be explored in detail in its relevant chapter but here's an overview:

Embodied self-awareness

The ability to feel one's passing state (know how you are) and know one's long-term patterns (know who you are)

Embodied self-leadership

The ability to both self-regulate and express oneself short term (shift how you are), and build a new embodiment long term (grow who you are)

Embodied social awareness

The ability to feel others' passing state (know how they are) and guess their long-term patterns (know who they are)

Embodied social leadership

The ability to influence how people are short term (shift how they are) and who they are long term (help grow who they are)

Note that embodied intelligence is radically different from bodily or kinaesthetic intelligence, which relates to athleticism, sports ability and physical movement alone.

The skills are partially independent (you can be great or terrible at any one) but also somewhat linked in a sequence. Self-awareness helps us to self-regulate, self-regulation helps us to listen, and listening helps us to lead. This is why both on face-to-face courses and in this book, I teach them in this order.

Note too that these skills will be more or less developed already according to character, life experience and past practices. A trained counsellor, for example, will likely have very developed empathy (social awareness) while a martial artist will likely have great self-regulation under pressure (self-leadership regulation aspect) and a conscious dancer great self-expression (the other side of self-leadership).

Learning and practising what's offered in this book will provide you with an opportunity to develop them all, first in the frame of self-development and then as a facilitator – the latter being built on the former.

Reflection

Which of these skill-sets would you say is most vital for facilitation? Which have you had explicit training in already? Which do you have a natural affinity for? If you have body practices, are they building any skills and missing any (e.g. yoga may be building self-awareness and self-regulation, but not social awareness or interpersonal leadership). Which would you pick as strongest and weakest in yourself? Please back up your answers with evidence, and ask others who know you well.

Nine tools for working with the body

One might ask what exactly one is aware of, or what one is shifting in this model; it is therefore helpful to further subdivide what we're working with into the 'nuts and bolts' of embodied facilitation. These are the basic tools of the trade and a person's ability to work with them in themselves and others defines their skill in embodied facilitation. These nine components of embodied intelligence also determine what makes a happy, healthy, flourishing human being generally! I sometimes call them 'primaries' or 'gateways', as they are primary methods – and verbal instructions should be given referring to them rather than more complex combinations for maximum clarity (techniques are built with these tools – in my lexicon) – and because any one of them opens the door to into the depths of embodiment. Each of them could be a life's study, in fact!

Let's take breath as an example. One can be aware of one's own breath – a great subtle state indicator and 'early warning' system, and you can use breath to self-regulate or express yourself. As a facilitator you will also be aware of others' breathing (very useful in, say, phone coaching for guessing the client's state), and influence it either indirectly by regulating one's own and that being mirrored – a good example of how your own embodiment comes first – or by giving the coachee a breathing exercise to up- or down-regulate themselves, for example. There are people who have studied the breath their whole lives at a level of detail that would shock you – can you identify 15 variables that could be changed in one breath, for example – and who say they are still just scratching the surface.

Note that people may be very skilled in one or two of these tools and have never used others. Systems of posture, for example, may not work much with movement and vice versa, and an expert on one may have only passing knowledge of the other. Note, too, that some tools will work better for some than others – visualisation, for example, is great for some coaches while others simply can't to grips with it at all, or it may just feel 'kooky' to them. Hence a varied tool kit is helpful, although of course we may have specialisms and favourites. For the very dedicated I would say make sure you have real expertise in one or two and passing familiarity with the rest, whereas for beginners just mastering the basics of a handful is enough.

The nine primary gateways to embodied intelligence

Of the nine tools, awareness is the most fundamental, since without awareness we can't work with any of the others. For ease of memory, you could use the acronym PRRIMAARI, but I tend to present them with awareness first – as it's necessary for all the others and defines embodied work – but aside from this there's no real order.¹⁹

- Posture
- Relaxation
- Respiration (breathing)

- Intention
- Movement
- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Responsiveness
- Imagery

Throughout this book, you'll be offered numerous examples of how you can easily start to use these nine primary embodied components of experience in working with your clients. Let's start now, though with just a little on each. This is just a first-take overview.

Posture (structural alignment and balance)

Stand how you choose to live. Stand for what you stand for.

– Me

From an embodied perspective, we see posture as the architecture of our being of course, and not just mechanical. We can align ourselves with the forces acting upon us, and this is not a neutral thing psycho-emotionally.²⁰ Gravity is perhaps the most important of these forces, acting upon us throughout our days and lives. We can structure our alignment to allow the force to be carried through our bones and into the ground, stimulating a reactive force back up again. To align with gravity, our muscles must be as relaxed as possible (they are not designed for prolonged weight-bearing) and we must provide a clear 'line' for gravity to go down.²¹ Think of buildings: the walls and other support structures are vertical, and although we are not towers, the same principle applies: to align the bones to take the force and relax all muscles not involved in the essential effort.²²

When people talk about 'good' and 'bad' posture what do they mean? Imposing some kind of platonic ideal shape? This is likely not wise, and everyone has a different theory!²³ What is the best posture? Standing up 'straight'? Verticality aids alertness, but is this the best posture for sleeping? Of course not. So I ask, 'best for what?' This is a central question that I ask our students over and over again for any tool. There are better postures to get sad and angry in for example, as well as for clarity, kindness and authority.

Balance is both the result of, and a particularly important aspect of, structural alignment. The bodymind works best when it is balanced, and (as much is possible) symmetrical as a general rule, but again we could ask, 'for what'? The link between emotional and physical balancing is also fairly apparent – nobody suddenly slipped over calmly, and the emotional balancing of activities like yoga and tai chi is established (but as ever don't believe a word I say, test both of these out if you disagree).

Quick-win application: Ask yourself or a client, 'Intuitively, what's the posture that's better for the thing I'm/you're doing next?' Many people will easily improve their performance this way without specialist knowledge. Another

deeper one to ask is, 'What's the posture of my/your life right now? Show me.' You can add, 'And how would you like it to be? Show me.' This is the key awareness and choice principle that I'll keep circling around in this book. This little exercise can be a profound starting place for coaching! Likewise, when working with yogis I may ask, 'Please do yoga like your life is. Note and feel that . . . [3 minute pause] . . . Now do it how you'd like your life to be.' Again, this can be huge for people to highlight their way of being and chosen life-style/embodiment.

Reflection: A stance for what?

Look in a full-length mirror. And then at some photos of your full body. What pose seems habitual? What is your habitual stance a posture for? In the book we will present models to explore this question but just intuitively many people can access significant answers.

Relaxation

Relaxation is perhaps a surprisingly deep aspect of embodied work. The body-mind works better when relaxed as tension inhibits both movement and feeling. Note that these are two sides of the same thing, and for some the *not* feeling is the point, despite the costs of aliveness, emotional relaxation and empathy in this. Numbing has huge consequences across the board as a coping mechanism (hence this book). Tension serves other functions in the body besides numbing emotions, such as solidifying our history and sense of who we are (unconscious embodiment)

Furthermore, living tense is like driving with the brakes on, so it takes energy. Holding on to a contraction in a pair of opposing muscles is a waste of effort that will inhibit other kinds of movement (and therefore emotion). The mind also works better when the body is relaxed yet upright (structure). I distinguish between 'dead relaxation' (a 'flop' response) and relaxation (which has movement potential and responsiveness). Relaxation is about efficient effort (mobilising the exact amount of energy and patterns of movement needed, not more), not the absence of effort. Think of an agile boxer or tiger, not a drunk guy on a sofa – the former is what I mean by 'relaxed'.²⁴ More philosophically, it has long been noticed that which is relaxed and pliable is alive, and that which is brittle is dead.

Many, but not all, centring techniques involve an element of relaxation, as most people could do with a bit more of it to function more effectively! Again though, 'for what?'

Quick-win application: Try out this simple trick for yourself or with a client: let your tongue hang loose in your mouth, and let your belly be soft – relax your core and let that spread to the rest of your body.²⁵ Say, 'aaahhh'. How do you feel? Where might this be useful in your life?

Reflection

How would your day be impacted if you were 20 per cent more relaxed today?

Respiration (breathing)

Breath is central to life itself, and at the core of nearly all of the embodiment systems that exist in both East and West. Breath is both unconscious and conscious, tremendously sensitive (hence an ‘early warning device’), and hugely powerful as a tool. While there is no one right way to breathe – and different systems will tell you contradictory things – we could ask ourselves, ‘what is this type of breathing for?’ and learn a range of techniques, say, to up- and down-regulate²⁶ our state. ‘Breathwork’ hasn’t just become popular with the likes of Wim Hof²⁷ and Dan Brule²⁸ bringing it to the masses; there is a hugely rich tradition of breathwork in yoga and other arts, as well as in Western acting and public speaking traditions. As an embodiment coach, it’s certainly worth exploring!

Quick-win application: Simply remind yourself or a client to breathe when you are stressed! No special breath, just a reminder! Coaches new to embodiment may be surprised how this simple ‘pointing’ out of aspects of embodiment can go a LONG way!

Reflection

What does your breath tell you right now about how you are?

Intention

The balance to the yin of acceptance (coming up) is the yang²⁹ of agency and choice: intention. Where we have conscious choice, we have freedom. Intention happens in the body and enables choice and personal leadership. It is more than just saying mentally, ‘I will do this in the future’; it’s a present moment bodily action – a direction. Think of reaching out to shake hands or hug someone, and notice if there is already a slight tilt forward in your body. What moves with you, or just ahead of you, is intention. Made multi-directional, the notion of ‘expansiveness’, ‘reaching out’ or ‘intentional reaching’ is key to some centring practices. As framed here for embodied facilitation, you can think of intention as the bridge between the purely mental aspects of activity and the more gross physical aspects. It is part of what is sometimes called (far too loosely for my liking) ‘energy’.

Quick-win application: Pick your intention for what you’re doing now or have a client do the same. Give it a word and shape it. Cultivate a physiological sense of direction, as opposed to just floating aimlessly around.

Reflection

Pay attention to different parts of the room you're in one at a time. Notice if there's a slight tilt towards the area. What 'reaches out' to that area? Is this a reflection or an exercise?

Movement

Life breath, a central defining characteristic of life, is movement. Senior embodiment teacher Stuart Heller said, '*We move through space like we move through life.*' From when the foetus starts to wriggle we move, and when we are dead we are still. Movement one could say IS life, though perhaps more properly I should say, 'movement potential' – to include the possibility of stillness – is life.

Movement requires freedom from tension and a balanced posture, so is built on these.³⁰ Where our movement is chronically constricted by numbness or muscular tension (aka 'armouring'), we are less embodied and less alive. Health – both mental and physical – can be defined by the amount, quality and rhythm of movement. The latter also includes the rhythm of rest and stillness. When we feel happiest, when we are most engaged in our work and in relationships that nourish, we move! When our bodymind is working at its best, we jump with joy, run wild, dance with our partners (vertically or horizontally) and 'get a move on' at work. The entire field of embodiment is sometimes called 'movement psychology', as aside from awareness there is nothing more central to the work.

How we move is intimately related to who we are and what we're capable of. If you want to change how you are, change how you move.³¹ In our teaching, I work with this in two ways that I call 'form' (top-down processing) and 'freedom' (bottom-up processing).

Quick-win application: Next time you are or your client is stuck with a problem and needs new insight, move or ask them to move. Stretch, go for a walk, wriggle even; nothing fancy is necessary. See what new ideas are forthcoming. Being static usually won't help you get unstuck!

Exercise

Change how you feel yourself right now, with 30 seconds of movement.

Reflection: Movement pattern

What three words best sum up how you often move (of course, there's a situational and emotional context; but what would people who know you well

say)? Is your way of moving also a way of living? How has your dominant movement pattern served you in your life? When have you been rewarded for it? What would your life be like if you adopted the opposite pattern? What about having more range? What has been the personal or professional cost of using your dominant pattern to excess? What has been the cost of under-developing other patterns?

Awareness

The body is anchored in the here and now while the mind travels to the past and future.
– The Buddha

Awareness is the basis of all embodied work by definition, and the basis of skill in this field. It is the only tool you *must* use in embodied work. I systematically stress awareness-raising practices, especially meditation, throughout my trainings as it is so important, and I literally cannot think of one senior meditation teacher who isn't a regular and long-term meditator. Awareness is the tool that enables the other tools, and the only one included in the embodied intelligence model itself (i.e. you can be aware of your awareness!). Awareness is a profoundly human capacity, and a mystery still unresolved by science.

Quick-win application: Ask clients to notice their bodies at ANY time in a coaching process. This alone is enough to add a whole layer of insight and create much learning!

Reflection

What 'shape' is your awareness right now? Does it reach out equally in all directions? This is unlikely. How 'big' is it?

A particularly rich resource – awareness of sensations

Body awareness of sensations is your foundation as an embodied practitioner, and often what you are guiding clients towards. These are not to be confused with thoughts (e.g. metaphor, imagery, evaluation), which I also work with. A wide vocabulary of sensations³² is helpful for embodied work, both as distinctions that actually help people feel, and to express ourselves more richly.

All sensations are characterised by their:

- Quality: **what?** (e.g. 'itchy', 'flowing', 'tense', 'spacious', 'bright', etc.³³)
- Intensity: **how much?** (e.g. intensely or mildly itchy)

- Feeling tone: do you **like it or dislike it**, or neither – ‘yum, yuck, whatever’?
- Location: **where** is it in the body?, what is its shape? (some sensations are global, others are not)
- Movement: **how** is it moving? (all the above factors change: we can rely upon the body to be unstable; sensation is a process not a thing; movement is necessary for all sensation)
- Immediacy: **when?** (sensation is always now, but may have a subtle sense of the past or future)

Acceptance

Acceptance: saying yes, not fighting what is, surrendering, letting go. Reality is how it is, and if we fight it, we lose every time. The universe is not broken and it has not made a mistake for you to point out. Arguing with God (or whatever you believe in) is futile.

Acceptance concerns receptivity and freely giving consent. If the ‘yang’ of embodiment practice is will or intention, then the ‘yin’ is acceptance. ‘I do’ is a leadership move as much as ‘no!’ or ‘I will . . .’, and without acceptance we become resentful control freaks. Acceptance of what is, is also paradoxically the second stage in changing anything after awareness, so should not be confused with apathy and is vital for coaching. Acceptance doesn’t mean being passive; it means being clear. For example, Nelson Mandela accepted the reality of apartheid in order to change it.

Body hatred/body negativity is sadly part of the world still and shows a prevalent lack of acceptance for the body. In some contexts, like business, it may show up as taboos, embarrassment or immature humour.

Acceptance needs to be broken down a little more to use it, so it’s cheating somewhat to call it a primary tool, but it’s so vital as to be worth mentioning as if it were one. Operationalising acceptance may involve saying phrases to oneself like ‘yes’ and ‘this is how it is right now’, or just relaxing. Many people, however, will not need it to be broken down and will already have a felt sense of it, or relations like surrender (deep acceptance) or gratitude (one step further than acceptance).

Quick-win application: When either you are or a client is complaining, ask what can be changed and what needs to be accepted.³⁴ If a client, ask them if they *can choose* to accept what they can’t change. Ask them if they’re *willing* to. Ask them if they will. For each part, ask them what way of sitting would help and allow them to shift posture. Ask them to say ‘yes’ out loud in their first language if they are willing to. If you’re qualified you could add a yoga pose such as a hanging forward bend or ‘child’s pose’ to support this process. Any kind of letting go action will be helpful though.

Exercise: Warning, potentially triggering

Stand in front of a full-length mirror for a full five minutes looking at yourself. What parts of your body do you not fully accept or dislike? How can you give these parts of you some more love? This exercise can also be done naked, or with a considerate partner. Take care with this one and please be kind to yourself. If you could not imagine doing this, or it is a very emotional experience, you are not ready to work with another's embodiments yet.

Reflection

Are there any emotions you tend not to consider as OK? If you were more accepting of your emotions, how would your life be different? How about your energy levels? Is it OK when you are tired or wired? What about your sexual feelings?

Responsiveness

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change.

– Charles Darwin

Bodies are not processes that happen in isolation – we always have a relational layer to our being and this is another way that we can work with ourselves. Another of the fundamental characteristics of health, efficiency and life, is to be able to respond to the environment and to be proficient at relationships. If we are functioning well, we don't just 'carry on regardless', instead we listen and reply to where we are, what is happening, and to others. Sensitivity of response is aided by relaxation and postural balance. Along with movement, this produces 'live' relaxation. This tool brings us from healthy individuals to healthy inter-dependent members of partnerships and communities, capable of effective cooperation and competition. Responsiveness could be further subdivided into a range of other somatic skills such as listening, blending and entering – all vital for facilitation.³⁵

Quick-win application: In order to better connect and synchronise with a person or group of people, take three breaths in time with them, or take a walk with them and allow yourselves to fall into step.

Reflection

Do you tend to be more or less the same in all circumstances, or highly flexible and adaptable?

Imagery

Imagination is an embodied phenomenon, not just a mental one. The body responds powerfully to personally and culturally appropriate imagery. This can activate subtle and complex movement patterns that would be very hard to figure out through conscious control of muscles. Imagery acts as a short-cut. Using imagery can be a powerful tool for many, though it's important to note that (a) imagery does not work for some people as well as it does for others, and (b) it's wise not to confuse imagery which can be given with clear methodological instructions – what Paul Linden calls ‘operational language’ – with confused metaphors given as if they were instructions.

Some common imagination themes that I have found useful teaching embodiment include:

- Animals and plants (e.g. ‘picture yourself with a tail’, ‘imagine tree roots extending from your legs into the ground’)
- Landscapes and nature (e.g. ‘sit like a mountain – picture it’)
- Colours (e.g. ‘imagine your whole body is a bright daffodil yellow’)
- Foods (e.g. move like honey)
- Life stages and family roles (e.g. ‘like a five-year-old’, ‘in a motherly way’)
- Vehicles (e.g. ‘like a kite, train, canoe’)
- Familiar social situations or roles (e.g. ‘like you were on a first date’, ‘like a queen’)
- Archetypes (e.g. monarch, fool, warrior, etc.; or any famous person)
- Weather (e.g. ‘imagine you’re a storm’)
- Water and electricity (e.g. ‘a flowing river’, ‘a lightning strike’) [OK to add?]

Quick-win application: Bring to mind an activity you’re struggling with in life. Ask yourself, what animal or force of nature would be best at this thing, and picture yourself as that animal. Try the thing again.

Reflection – tooled up?

Which of these nine tools have you had explicit embodied training in already? Which might you be a ‘natural’ in? How might working with them add to your facilitation?

Quick-win application techniques recap

- 1 The posture for . . .
- 2 Relaxed tongue and belly
- 3 Breath pointing
- 4 Pick an intention

- 5 Getting unstuck by movement
- 6 Reminder to notice the body!
- 7 What can't you change coaching?
- 8 Synched breath/walks
- 9 What animal/force of nature?

You'll see from these examples that even without any skill in working with the body you can open up its wisdom as a facilitator both safely and easily. Try these, you may be surprised by the whole new world that opens up, and the power of results that can be achieved just by ASKING about the body. Gaining the skills of the rest of the book will of course add to this, but I wanted to get you started to demystify 'embodiment' and build confidence in using the method.

Practices and skills learning

Learning to be, to do and about

A critical distinction for understanding embodied learning is the difference between learning *about* something, learning to *do* something, and letting *be* something. For example, learning about France versus learning French versus being French (or French-like). Learning about something relates to cognitive knowledge, learning to do something requires skills that need practice, and being is the level that comes with time, immersion and greater practice still. Embodied learning and facilitation, and I would argue any depth facilitation approach, are about skills and being, and have more in common with language acquisition, learning to drive a car, playing a sport or learning to play an instrument, than learning *about* things by way of remembering facts. Truth be told, embodied facilitation mastery is not hard in theory, only in practice.

The notion of practice

Because of the type of learning that it is, essentially what neuroscientists would call 'procedural' rather than conceptual learning, embodied learning requires practice. Much of it is about retraining our nervous system which has default habits which we easily fall into until we build new ones. Building real awareness, range and choice as a facilitator is not an overnight job, as a result. Honestly, I think most of us have done the weekend workshops and know real transformation takes more than this. Temporary high *states* at a motivational hot-coal-walking, air-thumping, psychedelic-taking, board-breaking . . . whatever . . . do not lead to more permanent traits. Highs wear off, whether drug-induced, motivational speaker – induced, or yoga – induced, and what's left is unsexy but effective daily practice.

Community – in person and online

What I've also found helps a lot to support practice is community. Many people can be very relaxed and open on a meditation or yoga retreat, only to find that when they come home, they lose this Zen. It's partly the power place but also about the people that you are around (contexts again). Embodiments are infectious and your embodiment is in many ways the sum of the people that you spend the most time with. Communities also help in less direct ways, for example, with support, encouragement and challenge. In our hyper-individualistic times, it is worth noting the importance of other people for practice. In addition to reading this book we encourage you to reach out to other embodiment practitioners. There are several groups that I host online, for example, on social media and Zoom.³⁶ While not a complete substitute for face-to-face community, we have found people can develop a surprising amount of connection online using the latest technologies. At the Embodiment Conference – which is online – this has become very apparent, and there's an art to facilitating embodiment online that I will refer to in relevant sections throughout the book. Most of the exercises I'll describe can be done online as well as in person.

A personal practice anecdote

I was highly invested in cognitive learning as a child but when I was in my first year of university I had a moment of clarity. A year before was the first time a theory test had been added to the UK driving licence test and I passed that easily but failed the practical three times, unlike all my supposedly less intelligent friends at school – this was embarrassing and confusing! I had already learnt the hard way that learning about people didn't make you good at human relationships and was nursing my first broken heart, and that knowing about health didn't make you healthy (I was a drug addict and an alcoholic by 17 despite knowing the literature inside out), and had read all the psychological, sociological and philosophical works on suicide in an attempt to be less depressed, but to no avail. Having read the entire library at my school I decided perhaps the answer didn't lie in a bigger library. Doing the same old thing and all that.

Ironically it was in an academic exam that I realised the idiotic mistake of my culture, education and life to that point. I was sitting an exam on health psychology and doing the stress section. Ironically I was quite stressed due to a mix of not having done any work and the amphetamines that I spooned in my morning coffee to wake up. I realised at that point that even if I did know about the subject, that wouldn't help me with my stress which was physiological not theoretical. What did help me was a breathing exercise from an aikido class I had just joined – a basic centring technique I'd now call it, and I scraped a pass. After this I spent even less time in the library and more in the aikido dojo.

Notes

- 1 Credit: Francis Briers.
- 2 Incidentally, 'embodiment' is a word that is also used in Christian theology. Confusingly, the word has several specialist meanings in academic fields too, as well as in robotics!
- 3 A saying of the Asaro tribe of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, made famous by embodiment teacher, Richard Strozzi Heckler.
- 4 A concept of Naseem Taleb.
- 5 A term coined by me and by embodiment teacher Christine Caldwell independently about the same time.
- 6 There's plenty of research on gut biomes and neurology being conducted.
- 7 For example, in *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 8 See Philip Shepherd, *Radical Wholeness* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2017) and *New Self: New World* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010).
- 9 This area is weak in many US schools, and I would be highly sceptical of any teacher who isn't able to answer the question, 'How is your approach to embodiment culturally biased?'
- 10 That being said, postmodern attempts to deny bodily aesthetics entirely (the other end of the spectrum from commercial body objectification) are also unhelpful
- 11 Anaïs Nin, Talmudic origin.
- 12 <https://embright.org/mandy/>
- 13 <https://www.cnvc.org>
- 14 See Paul Linden's fun demonstrations of this on YouTube. Search 'kind power', which will get you both him and awesome Public Enemy tune.
- 15 Newfield Network and The Strozzi Institute work with this aspect, combining embodiment with linguistics, and I recommend both.
- 16 <https://strozziinstitute.com>
- 17 <https://newfieldnetwork.com>
- 18 <https://www.being-in-movement.com>
- 19 Classical tantra and hatha yoga added these tools to mindfulness to 'supercharge' the process, so there are precedents to this list. They might also include mantra as an aspect of breath.
- 20 Every time I use words like 'psychological', 'emotional' and even 'spiritual' AS IF they weren't embodied, I cringe now! Paul Linden often answers questions like, 'Is that physical or emotional or psychological?' just by saying 'Yes'.
- 21 It isn't quite as simple as this due to tensegrity (tension and integrity), fluid dynamics, gaseous pressures and fascial networks, but it's fine as a basic model unless you're a posture geek! In reality, we're more like a tent with guy-ropes or a suspension-bridge than a skyscraper or stack of blocks (compression-based strength). Look up Gary Carter, David Lesondak and Stephen Braybrook for a deeper take on anatomy.
- 22 Note here that I've already had to bring in the tools of awareness and relaxation – tools are only artificially separated for clarity.
- 23 You'll find this with breath too – there are many theories on *the* right way to breathe!
- 24 Note my martial arts bias here. Always note your teacher's training bias.
- 25 Paul Linden's relaxation centring classics – he's spent nearly 50 years simplifying and testing such tools!

- 26 Up- and down-regulation are terms from medical science/physiology that refer to the process of altering the response to a stimulus. In an embodiment context they refer to altering people's general arousal level and fight-or-flight response in particular.
- 27 <https://www.wimhofmethod.com>
- 28 <https://www.breathmastery.com>
- 29 Yin and yang (you've seen the symbol) is an ancient Chinese model that creates many useful distinctions in embodied work, so you'll hear me mention it throughout the book as a fundamental distinction. Once you take anything and make it two poles, you have yin and yang.
- 30 This is a good example of how these tools are deeply linked, and only separated out for ease of understanding.
- 31 For more detail, see the work of Rudolf Laban on 'movement patterns'.
- 32 See, for instance, <http://larisanoonan.com/sensations-list/>
- 33 Building a vocabulary of feeling words is a skill-set for embodied facilitators and will actually help with discernment, as we can identify more easily what we have named.
- 34 This is a secular version of Alcoholic Anonymous' 'Serenity Prayer'.
- 35 Credit: these ideas come from various aikido Sensei working with 'off-mat' aikido, especially students of Robert Nadeau Shihan.
- 36 At the time of writing, this includes the Embodiment Circles on Zoom and in person, and The Embodied Facilitator Course Facebook group. These will likely change but some searching will no doubt find the latest incarnation.