

IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP CAPACITY VERSUS COMPETENCE: A CASE STUDY

Jeannet Weyers

ABSTRACT

This article examines leadership capacities within a Buddhist educational institution. The capacities reflect qualities of the individual and are subsumed under two broad competence domains: character and elasticity. Character is defined as the quality of ethical and mental discipline. Elasticity is defined as the ability to change on a moment-by-moment basis in response to the demands of individuals and the situation. With reference to ancient wisdom, it is argued that the capacity of the individual leader is more important to the organisation than generic competences.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Change, Organisational Behaviour

The 1990s were characterised by accelerating change and increased globalisation. Current indications suggest rapid change and globalisation will be the norm of this century. For organisations to remain sustainable in this environment it is imperative that they have the capacity to be flexible and rapidly respond to change. The average life span of large industrial enterprises is less than forty years. A survey conducted in 1983 found that one third of the Fortune 500 firms from the 1970s had disappeared (Senge 1990). The key characteristics of survivors have been flatter structures, decentralised decision-making and a new leadership paradigm (Conger 1993).

Over the last few decades there have been numerous and diverse theories of organisational leadership, each hoping to capture the essential formula. The inevitable result is an ‘... endless proliferation of terms to deal with it [leadership] and still the concept is not defined’ (Bennis 1959, p. 259, in Yukl 1998, p. 2). It seems the controversy lies in the level of analysis performed. Over the decades four perspectives on leadership have developed: those focusing on the intraindividual processes within a single individual; the dyadic approach, assessing the relationship between the leader and an individual; the group processes approach; and the organisational processes approach, in which leadership are viewed as an open system (DEC 2001, p. 2.5). Whilst each of these perspectives has merit, leadership effectiveness must begin with the individual. As succinctly stated by McCall (1993 in Conger 1993, p. 217), “Not everyone is cut out to be a leader”

The many and varied definitions of leadership entail, to some extent, the capacity to influence others, to transform motivation, and subsequently the organisation (DEC 2001, p. 2.4; Yukl 1998, p. 2). The qualities of leadership stem from the qualities of the individual, the leader. If the individual is deficient in certain characteristics, their leadership competence will correspondingly be lacking.

Jeannet Weyers is Director of AmRo Training Pty Ltd, PO Box 2107, West Ashgrove, Queensland, 4060, Australia. Email: jweyers@powerup.com.au

The quality of the individual is especially important in the organisation under consideration. The Institute (TI — fictitious name) is a not-for-profit Buddhist teaching institute with nearly a three-quarter of a million-dollar turnover. TI is unique in that its appointment structure is not based on competence; leaders are appointed by a Tibetan Lama.

The TI Executive Committee agrees competencies are desirable, but not mandatory — indeed not important. Present and past appointments have not been made on the basis of competency, but on motivation: a level of dedication to the centre and a high standard of ethics and morality. Buddhist doctrine states that all action, thought, and words stem from motivation. If the motivation is pure so will the corresponding result. An appointment to a position is considered an opportunity to practice ‘Dharma’ (Buddhist teachings). In the words of Akong Tulku Rinpoche (in Witten 1998, p. 3), “What makes you think work and meditation are two different things?” To cope with this type of an appointment strategy, the executive agreed that leadership capacity was more important than competence.

Capacity has been defined as ‘the potential each of us has to do more and be more than we are now’ (Daft 1999, p. 333). It is something more than skill and involves using our whole selves including our intellectual, emotional and spiritual capacities. Further discussion with the executive resulted in defining two broad competence domains that encompassed the required capacities. They were: character and elasticity.

Character is defined as having the quality of ethical and mental discipline. These qualities are the foundation of Buddhist practice and were considered necessary to lead primarily volunteer staff with little or no competencies of their own in a religious setting. Elasticity was defined as the ability to change on a moment-to-moment basis. With the many and varied personalities, including ordained nuns, monks, Geshes and Lamas, a leader in the TI environment must be able to respond appropriately to each individual and situation.

THE DOMAIN OF CHARACTER

When all other factors are equal, it is the character of the leader that determines the outcome Deng Ming-Dao (in Daft 1999, p. 67)

Daft (1999 p. 19) suggests the domain of character encompasses passion, vision, self-confidence, tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, intuition and empathy. Goleman (1996, p. 34), in his exposition of emotional intelligence, suggests self-motivation, persistence, impulse control, delayed gratification, mood control, empathy and hope are the necessary factors for success. Senge (1990) has yet another list, as does Chin-Ning Chu (1992). This diversity of lists may reflect Canning’s (1990) view there is little evidence for a generic competency because a job is highly context bound. Canning’s (1990) comments underscore the limitations of generic competence domains, in that they maybe highly influenced by the prevailing work paradigm. This is especially applicable to the organisation under consideration.

TI can be classified as one of Zohar’s (1997) ‘Quantum Organisations’. TI literally operates ‘like a jam session’ wherein there is no set score, and no conductor. This may be attributable to the fact that the majority of staff are volunteers, or are paid a nominal sum. Each individual has their own motivation for working at the Centre. Many individuals view the Centre as a family and are highly reluctant to recognise the business aspects of the Institute. This has resulted in a fragmented structure with the business and the family factions often at

odds. In this type of organisation a leader cannot operate from a control-centred approach. Traditional business structures are ignored. The only recourse a leader has, in this environment, is to use a people-centred approach. As Daft (1998, p. 19) recognises ‘leadership is not something we possess; it is something we give from within ourselves’ .

This shift from control to people-centred leadership is prominent in the literature (for example, Carlopio et al. 1997, p. 9; Goldrick 1997, p. 17). The future leader will be more a coach, a helper, a nurturer, partner and facilitator (Goldrick 1997, p. 17). The new leader will need to inspire a sense of trust and have excellent interpersonal skills (Carlopio et al. 1997). In using words such as nurture, shared, and trust, the new leadership paradigm increasingly resembles ancient thought. Indeed, the movement to back to ancient thought is apparent in the popular literature. (for example, Chin-Ning Chu 1992; Witten 1998; Roach 2000; Jones 1995), as well as business discourses (for example, Fox 1994; Brandt 1996; Galen 1995). A number of secular organisations in Japan and the USA have shown an interest in spirituality and spiritual values (for example, Brandt 1996; Galen 1995). They suggest that a spiritual paradigm results in openness to change, a sense of purpose and meaning, connectedness and an abundance mentality.

Buddhism, having often been referred to as the religion of lists, not surprisingly specifies in detail the requirements of a leader. A leader (usually the teacher) must be tamed, pacified and thoroughly pacified (Atisha 1021). Tamed and pacified, for the purposes of this article, relates to the domain of character at an intraindividual and dyadic level of analysis, whilst thoroughly pacified refers to the domain of elasticity at the group processes level.

Competency of Tamed

Tamed is a quality of ethical discipline; an internal discipline applied to overcome negative qualities. Negative qualities are those actions, thoughts and words that result in harm to yourself and others. The tamed leader knows and can identify these negative qualities and applies the opposite. As Daft (1999, p. 43) reflects “... leaders have to know who they are and what they stand for.” Buddhist thought makes this process easy by providing a list of ten behaviours that must be avoided: three of body, four of speech, and three of mind, and their corresponding positive quality (see table 1).

Being tamed is not a trait. Similar to Carlopio et al’s (1997) conclusions, the qualities of a good leader are behavioural. It could be argued that these ten qualities extend and encompass the only three essential traits found in this literature: self-confidence, honesty/integrity and drive. Self-confidence is a consequence of knowing and trusting your own judgement. Honesty and integrity, which refer to truthfulness and non-deception, are encompassed by several of these qualities, namely, the category of speech. And the final quality, drive, comes from a strong feeling of wishing to benefit others — the foundation stone of Tibetan Buddhism.

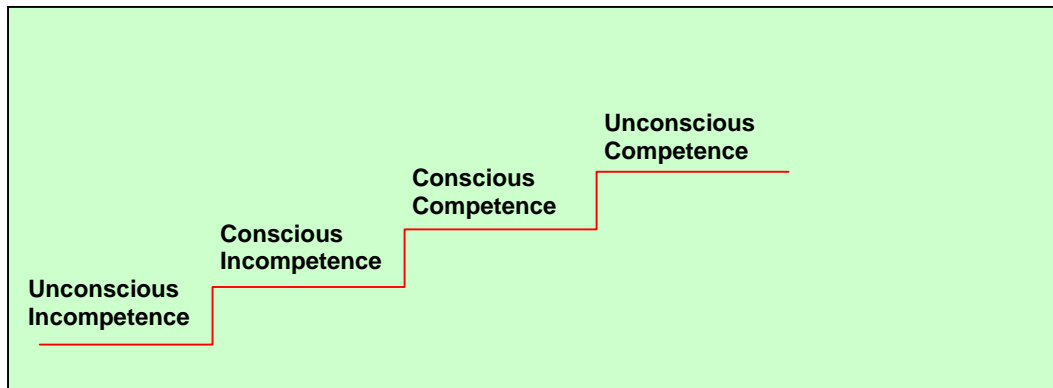
Table 1. Positive and Negative Qualities (*Source: Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991*)

Quality	To be Avoided	To be Fostered
3 of Body		
Killing	To cause harming to any being	To value and cherish life
Stealing	To take what is not freely offered	Generosity
Sexual Misconduct	To engage in sex with another's partner	Cultivating trust and honesty in one's relationships by respecting another's feelings
4 of Speech		
Lying	To speak with the intention to mislead	Speaking the truth
Divisive Speech	To speak with the intention to cause division	Uniting people
Insulting Words	Hurting another person with your speech	Talking in a pleasant manner
Idle Gossip	Speaking about frivolous things	Speaking about meaningful things
3 of Mind		
Covetousness	Desiring another's property or possessions	Rejoicing in another's happiness
Harmful Intent	Wishing harm on another	Having a compassionate attitude to all living beings
Wrong Views	To be ignorant of reality	Cultivating wisdom and a realistic attitude to life

An additional benefit from relying on a preset list of qualities is speed. To acquire leadership competence, an individual must traverse four stages (see Diagram 1). It could be argued that the first of these stages, unconscious incompetence, is omitted. Unconscious incompetence is a state wherein an individual is unaware of the competencies they lack. In short, they don't know what they don't know. By dint of being provided a preset list, a potential leader, with

some self-assessment, could move directly to the 'Conscious Incompetence' stage. At this stage the individual is aware of their deficiencies and ideally works to overcome them.

Diagram 1. Learning stages of leadership (*Source:* Daft, 1999, Leadership Theory and Practice, Dryden Press, London)



Competency of Pacified

The quality of pacified refers to mental discipline, the ability to control one's mind and subsequent behaviour. This could also be called emotional maturity. This is the ability to act in a beneficial manner in accordance with the requirements of the situation. As Aristotle commented:

Anyone can become angry — that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way — this is not easy (in Goleman 1996, p. ix).

Whilst the Buddhist view eschews anger, the point is that a good leader should be exerting some control over their mind and behaviour for the benefit of the organisation. To attain this there are a number of practices to pacify one's mind (see table 2). The first four of these practices fall under the domain of character. The latter two will be discussed in relation to the domain of elasticity.

Table 2. The 6 Perfections

(*Source:* Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991, Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand)

1. Patience
2. Generosity
3. Ethics
4. Enthusiastic Effort
5. Concentration
6. Wisdom

Patience is the ability to reflect upon your own and another's behaviour with a measure of empathy before responding. Generosity is the giving of not only things, but of your time, attention and yourself. Patience and Generosity embraces all aspects of supporting behaviour

(see table 3). A supportive leader considers others’ well-being and personal needs. The leader treats others as equals and is similar to people-oriented leadership (Daft 1999, p. 103). This style of leadership builds effective interpersonal relationships that result in greater cooperation and support (Yukl 1998, p. 95).

Table 3. Guidelines for Supporting

(Source: Yukl, 1998, Leadership in organisations, 4th edn, Prentice Hall, New Jersey)

• Show acceptance and positive regard	Patience
• Be polite and patient, not arrogant and rude	Patience
• Bolster the person’s self esteem	Generosity
• Provide assistance with work when needed	Generosity
• Be willing to help with personal problems	Generosity and Patience

Ethics refers to ethical discipline, discussed above (see table 1). Enthusiastic effort entails a measure of perseverance with the understanding of the benefits to be obtained from these practices. Enthusiastic effort, in particular, relates to one of the essential traits of leaders’ drive (Daft 1999, p.68). A leader requires a high degree of effort, motivation and tenacity to attain the ideal future, their vision. Given the unusual work structure of TI, drive — backed by strong motivation — is a necessary requirement for a leader to function.

In summary, items one to four, and the ten qualities, are important components of person-oriented leadership model. One could also classify these as a values-based leadership model. In this model a set of internalised values are shared by the leader and their followers (Daft 1999, p. 197). As a religious institute, TI must have a strong set of ethical values and these must be reflected in the leader’s behaviour. This entails a high level of moral development on behalf of the leader that the above guidelines can provide.

THE DOMAIN OF ELASTICITY

*Life is impermanent like the setting sun. Wealth is like dew of the morning grass.
Praise is like the wind in a mountain pass. A youthful body is an autumn flower.*
Seventh Dalai Lama

Organisations are fluid, dynamic, living systems (Daft 1999, p. 11). Despite human nature’s desire for stability, organisations are coming to understand that ‘the only certainty is uncertainty’ (Nonaka 1996, p. 18). The changing nature of work is reflected in past and current theories of leadership. Historically, a leader’s role was to maintain the status quo. ‘Maintaining stability was considered a cost saving and energy-efficient way of doing business, and change was perceived to disrupt operations and exhaust resources’ (Daft 1999, p. 9). The new focus of organisations is change. Accommodating change requires more than flexibility or adaptability. According to Goldrick (1997, p. 17) the new leader is a ‘visionary or change agent, who always seeks new and better ways of attaining goals by challenging current paradigms ...’. A leader must be able to cope with a dynamic environment, but more importantly must themselves change to fit. This is the domain of elasticity.

Despite its fragmented nature, TI has managed to survive for almost 26 years. Attempts by previous managers to 'create an emergent theme' (Zohar 1997) were met by stonewalling and dissension. In each instance the manager was forced to both back down and slow-down. This may have been the result of being 'over managed and under led' (Daft 1999, p. 17). It is clear from this historical account that TI requires a move away from traditional power over model of leadership to a to a high-involvement style. The high-involvement organisation 'views employees at all levels as true partners in achieving its objectives' (Goldrick 1997, p. 17). The TI culture leaves a leader with no other choice.

Competence of Thoroughly Pacified

Thoroughly pacified encompasses the practices of concentration and wisdom. These practices are practices relating to the group processes level. In particular, situational theory will be investigated.

An integral component of both people-oriented and high-involvement leadership is empathy. Empathy is the ability to read another's feelings. Empathy, as Goleman (1996 p. 105) points out, depends on self-awareness. Without the capacity to understand and relate to our own emotions, we will not be able to read others. This refers to the perfection of concentration.

Concentration is the practice of examining our own mind, to understand its nature and workings. Whilst concentration can be understood as meditation, ideally this self-awareness is present throughout all our activities. A self-aware leader is able to examine their own and others' motivations and communicate effectively and appropriately with their followers (Goleman 1996, p. 97). The key to this is an ability to communicate via non-verbal channels. Over half the message in a communication is non-verbal (Daft 1999, p. 169). The non-verbal component (such as gestures, facial expressions) has the greatest impact on participants. A self-aware leader is in tune with their behaviour, as well as their mind. This awareness enables them to ensure that their words are congruent with their actions. A congruent verbal and non-verbal message builds trust and respect and enhances a leader's ability to motivate, influence and achieve their goals (Carlopio, et al. 1997, p. 17).

Concentration also extends the learning stages of leadership. With a level of self-awareness, a fifth (top) stage can be added, that of 'Conscious Unconscious Competence' or what is often referred to as Meta-Cognition (Rose & Nicholl 1997, p. 161). This is the ability to perform unconsciously, but with a higher level of awareness. This characteristic raises the leader's competence above that of their subordinates by enabling them to think before they act and to continuously improve.

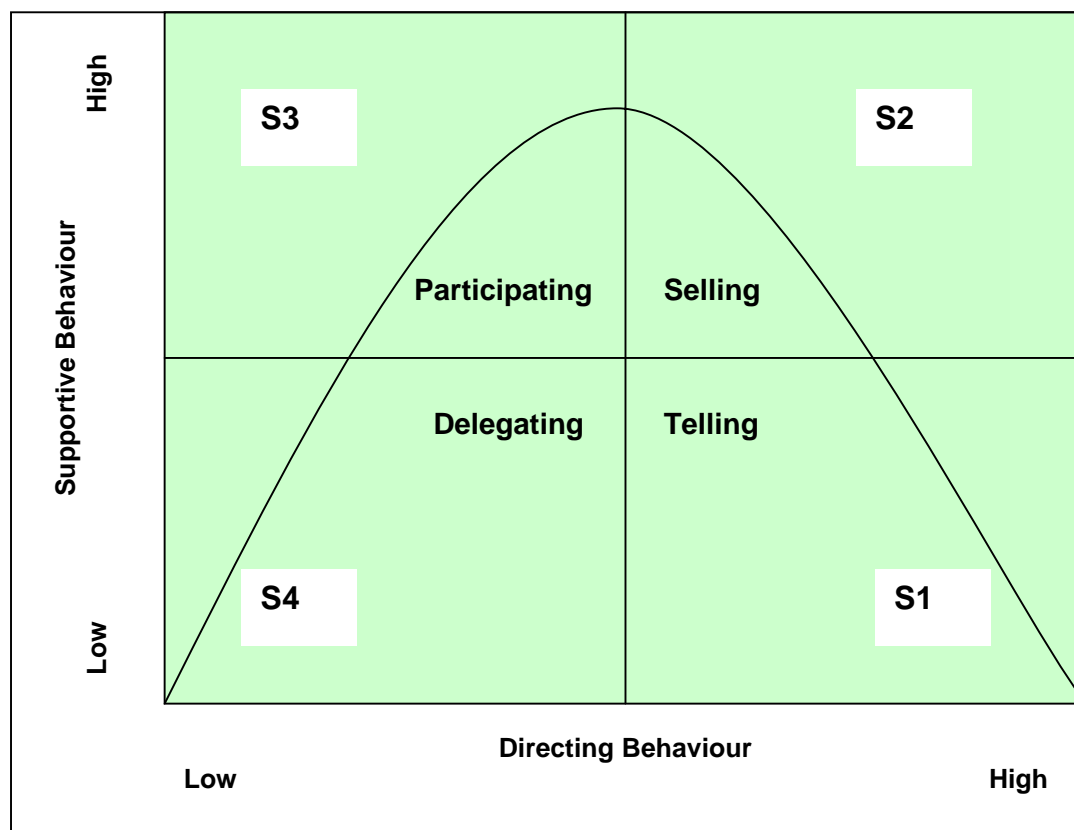
Related to concentration is wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to see things as they are, not as we wish or project them to be. An effective leader must be able to integrate the self and subsequent other-awareness to determine their follower's readiness levels and needs (Daft 1999, p. 99). According to Hershey Blanchard's Situational Theory (in Daft 1999, p. 100) a competent leader needs to be able to evaluate their followers and adopt a leadership style to suit. A Telling (S1) leadership styles is required for followers with low task readiness, due to limited ability, training or insecurity. Those followers who have a good ability, skill and confidence can operate within a delegating (S4) leadership style (Daft 1999, p. 99).

Table 4 depicts four situational leadership styles. Telling (S1) is a directive style. This style has high directive and low supportive behaviour and is appropriate for consistency. Selling (S2) provides high directive and high supportive behaviour. This style uses some direction, but also seeks input. Participating (S3) has low directive and high supportive behaviour. This style supports the growth and development of others. Delegating (S4) provides little direction and little support. At this level employees take responsibility for their work.

Research conducted in the North West Health Service in New South Wales indicated that 83 percent of managers perceived they had only one of these leadership styles. The remainder had two (Hartley 1996, p. 108). None of the managers found they accommodated all four styles. In this case study, this deficiency led to low morale and frustration on behalf of the managers. This underscores the necessity of a truly competent leader to be elastic, to fit the people and the situation as required.

Elasticity requires concentration and wisdom. Concentration increases the leader’s self-awareness to enable them to be more in tune with their followers. A degree of wisdom then enables the leader to choose the most appropriate style for their followers needs.

Table 4: Situational Leadership Theory (adapted from Daft, 1999, p.100)



CONCLUSION

TI’s appointment structure is not competency based and, therefore, highly unique. For this reason the competence domains listed are ‘simple, accurate, but specific’, that is, applicable to this organisation only (Thompson, Stewart & Lindsay 1997). TI recruits leaders on the basis

of 'what you need to learn'. To survive this challenge the Executive agreed on the necessity of character and elasticity. As one TI leader commented "When you work for TI throw away everything you ever believed about your competencies and begin again".

REFERENCES

- Attica, 1021, *A Lamp on the Path* [Lam Rim], Tibetan Buddhist Text.
- Brandt, E, 1996, 'Corporate pioneers explore spirituality: peace', *HRMagazine*, vol. 41, no. 4, April, pp.82-7.
- Canning, 1990, 'The quest for competence', *Industrial and Commercial Training*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp.12-16.
- Carlopio, J., Andrewartha, G. & Armstrong, H. 1997, 'Management skills in Australia', chapter 1 in *Developing Management Skills*, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne, pp.1-50.
- Conger, J. 1993, 'Training leaders for the twenty-first century', *Human Resource Management Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp.203-18.
- Daft, R.L., 1999, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, The Dryden Press, New York.
- Fox, M, 1994, *The reinvention of work: A new vision for livelihood for our time*, Harper San Fransisco, San Fransisco, CA.
- Galen, M., 1995, 'Companies hit the road less travelled', *Business Week*, no. 3427, 5 June, pp.82-4.
- Goldrick, P., 1997, 'High-involvement leader', in *HRMonthly*, Oct.
- Hartley, R., 1997, 'Integrating leadership and followership development — a rural health case-study', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 34, no. 3., pp.105-10.
- Jones, L.B., 1995, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, Crown Publishers, New York.
- Nonaka, I. 1996, 'The knowledge creation company', in *How Organisations Learn*, ed. S Starkey, International Thomson Business Press, London, pp.18-31.
- Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Wisdom Publications, Massachusetts.
- Roach, M., 2000, *The Diamond Cutter*, DoubleDay, New York.
- Rose, C., & Nicholl, M.J., 1997, *Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century*, Dell Publishing, New York.
- Senge, P., 1990, *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation*, Doubleday/Currency, New York, NY.
- DEC, 2001, *Unit 55207: Self Leadership Study Book*, Distance Education Centre, University of Southern Queensland, Australia.
- Thompson, J.E., Stuart, R. & Lindsay, P.R. 1997, 'The competence of top team members: A framework for successful performance', *Team Performance Management*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp.57-75.
- Witten, D., 1998, *Enlightened Management*, Random House Australia (Pty) Limited, Sydney.
- Yukl, G., 1998, *Leadership in Organisations*, 4th Ed., Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

Zohar, D., 1997, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain: Using the New Science to Rethink how we Structure and Lead Organisations*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, New Jersey.

Appendix A.

Domain of Character

Tamed	Importance					What needs to be done to acquire this competency
	1	2	3	4	5	
Ethical Discipline						
<i>3 of Body</i>						
To value and cherish life					X	Development of mindfulness to avoid killing and use creativity to solving problems
Generosity					X	Reflection on the benefits of this quality. As the Dalai Lama says 'If you are going to be selfish, be wisely selfish'. i.e. generosity benefits yourself also.
Cultivating trust and honesty in one's relationships by respecting another's' feelings					X	As above
<i>4 of Speech</i>						
Speaking the truth					X	Conscious unconscious competence by being awareness of your speech
Uniting people					X	Understand and be aware of the implications of your actions
Talking in a pleasant manner			X			Talk in a manner appropriate to the situation, and as above
Speaking about meaningful things		X				
<i>3 of Mind</i>						
Rejoicing in another's' happiness					X	Develop a 'what did they do right' approach
Having a compassionate attitude to all living beings					X	Remember that all living beings want survival and happiness
Cultivating wisdom and a realistic attitude to life					X	Reflect and meditate on the meaning and your purpose in life. Remember the big picture.
Pacified						
Mental Discipline						
Patience					X	Consider the consequences of your actions
Generosity					X	As above
Ethics					X	Have standards that you adhere to
Enthusiastic Effort					X	Remember the goal and vision

Domain of Elasticity

Thoroughly Pacified	1	2	3	4	5	
Advanced Mental Discipline						
Concentration				X		Take time out to reflect and become self-aware
Wisdom					X	Remember the big picture