The background features a white canvas with a pattern of yellow dots of varying sizes. Overlaid on this are two large, wavy, organic shapes. The one on the left is a vibrant teal color, and the one on the right is a dark blue. A yellow circle is positioned behind the title text.

Working with Emotional Health and the Enneagram

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& Gayle Hardie

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The centres of intelligence

The second framework important to an understanding of emotional health is what we call ‘the centres of intelligence’ or ‘the three centres’.

If you were asked by someone to describe what you ‘think’ with, you’d probably look at them strangely and respond with ‘My brain, of course’. Interestingly, it is not as simple as that. In fact, when we are thinking effectively, we are doing so not just with our brain but with our whole body.

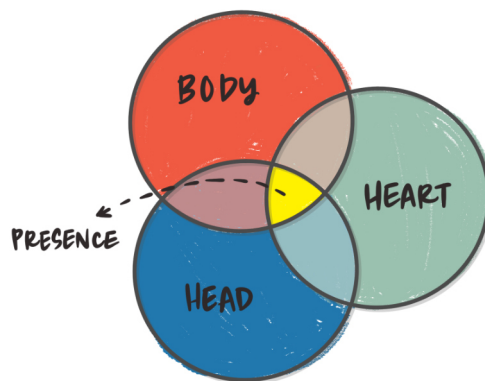


Figure 5: The three centres of intelligence

Three centres

Ancient eastern philosophy teaches us that clear, effective thinking is achieved using a balance of what we call the three 'centres of intelligence': the body or 'gut', heart and head (Figure 5). This notion is supported by modern neuroscience, such as in the work of Grant Soosalu and Marvin Oka and that of Antonio Dimasio.

Put very simply:

- When we engage the 'body centre', our 'body thinking' is based on what we sense and experience in the environment around us, that is our instinct – what we often call 'gut feel'. We also call this the 'doing centre'.
- When we engage the 'heart centre', our 'heart thinking' is based on what we are feeling through our connections with others, that is our intuition. We also call this the 'feeling centre'.
- When we engage the 'head centre', our 'head thinking' is based on objectively connecting our perceptions, knowledge and reasoning, that is our insight. We also call this the 'thinking centre'.

You might argue that instinct, intuition and insight are all pretty much the same, and in fact some dictionaries do list instinct and intuition as synonyms. However, we ask you to stay with us here. Looked at holistically, there is a subtlety to the difference



Figure 6: Body, heart and head

between the three centres that we feel is intrinsic in these words – a subtlety that will become clearer as we explore them.

We have found that providing examples assists in this clarification.

In the body centre we talk about instinct, which is where we get a ‘gut feel’ or a body sense of something we need to do. It is a sensation in our lower abdomen that we cannot ignore. We have many leaders who tell us that this is a primary input into their decision making and that it is never wrong. Recently we worked with a leader who went to great lengths to analyse a situation and the resulting decision he needed to make. However, no sooner had he made his decision than he knew it was the wrong one. His body centre – his gut feel – immediately told him he needed to do something else.

In the heart centre we talk about intuition, which is associated with feelings we get concerning people and relationships. This often occurs when a loved one tells us that everything is okay, though we can absolutely feel through our connection with them that everything is not okay. This feeling may prompt us to gently explore the situation a little more and, sure enough, we eventually learn that what our heart was telling us is right. We've heard many stories from people who tell us that they have had a sudden feeling of concern in their heart for a loved one who is somewhere else, only to find out later that, right at that moment, something unfortunate or concerning had happened to that person.

With respect to the head centre, reflect on a time when you faced a perplexing problem but, no matter how much you thought about it, you could not come up with an answer. Eventually you park the problem while you go about some other simple tasks (such as cleaning, gardening, washing dishes), and then all of a sudden the answer to your problem appears in your mind. This is insight. With practice we can increase the prevalence of this and also enable it to occur in the moment.

Various cultures use different language to express the concept of the 'mind' consisting of more than just the brain. It would be a good idea to explore your own experiences of the different types of thinking, in yourself and in others.

Each of us is capable of engaging all three centres: of thinking with our body, our heart and our head. However, in the process of developing a personality – which we'll discuss a lot more later in the

context of the Enneagram – we tend to lean more strongly towards one of the three, which then becomes our primary filter for perceiving what we think is reality. We develop a tendency to trust the thoughts that come from our preferred centre over others. Conversely, we find ourselves mistrusting or avoiding what the other centres are telling us.

The thoughts and behaviours associated with each centre have different above- and below-the-line characteristics that in turn tend to be associated with high and low emotional health respectively. So, for instance, those who tend towards gut-thinking can be empowering and open with others in taking action when they act above the line, but they can be controlling and stubborn if they act below the line. Broadly speaking, people acting above the line in each centre look to adapt circumstances to meet their needs, whereas those acting below the line take a more defensive approach.

At first you may find it difficult to distinguish which centre of intelligence you most strongly associate with. However, as you learn more about the centres and practise distinguishing them in other people, you will notice the varying degrees to which you draw on instinct, intuition and insight – and one of these more often than the others – at different times. In truth you are probably already more familiar with this concept than you may be aware.

We will explain each centre in more detail in Part 2, in conjunction with the Enneagram types; as we will see, the centres of intelligence and Enneagram types have a close relationship.

Whole body thinking and 'presence'

While all of us tend to lean towards one of the three centres, the most effective thinking is achieved using the 'whole body', that is, by 'balancing' the centres. Whole body thinking is thinking that integrates the body, heart and head, regardless of an individual's bias towards one of these.

The most common times we think in this way are when we are at ease. Those times when we are sitting in the sun, walking through a forest or on a beach, playing with our children or literally 'smelling the roses'. It's thinking that, somewhat counterintuitively, doesn't feel like thinking at all. Sportspeople sometimes call this thinking being 'in the zone'. Others call it 'flow' or 'presence' (the term we tend to use).

In the information era, most people spend very little time being 'present'. Rather, our thoughts operate a bit like Twitter or Facebook: a never-ending stream of notes, recollections, to dos, ideas and inspirations. Time moves quickly as the mind shifts from one thought to the next. When operating in this way, as well as in times of pressure or stress, most of us will be skewed towards thinking and making decisions with our preferred centre.

As an example, imagine you are sitting in a meeting at work. An issue has come up in relation to a member of the team who has not completed his or her part of a task and the project you are all working on has stalled as a result. After a long conversation about

the impact of this, everyone is starting to look to the leader, the most senior person in the room, to make a decision about what to do next. It is precisely in this sort of pressured environment that we tend to revert to our preferred thinking centre, so in this instance the leader is likely to draw on their preferred centre first. They will think and act, broadly, in one of three ways (before considering anything else).

The leader will probably either rely on 'gut' feel – on instinct – to make a call to action, paying less attention to the facts and feelings of those in the room or those who will be directly affected by the situation. Or they will rely on their heart – on intuition – to

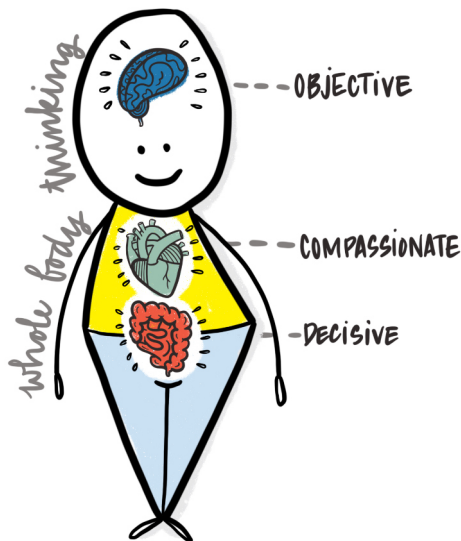


Figure 7: Whole body thinking

decide, doing the best they can to weigh up the emotional impact on everyone involved. Or they will rely on their head – on insight – to make a decision using reason and the objective data available to achieve a logical outcome.

It should be clear that each of these scenarios represents a quite distinct perspective on the situation and the way in which different people may respond.

If, however, the leader has a high level of emotional health, their response might reflect what we have been describing as whole body thinking, that is, the leader's thinking will draw on all three centres as guides to their response to the situation. Their response will be simultaneously decisive and compassionate, with perception and foresight.

In reality few of us will reach a point in which we perfectly balance the centres, especially when under pressure. True whole body thinking is something to aspire to. However, leaders with above-average emotional health will usually be more balanced, not simply relying on one centre to drive their thinking. They will be able to draw on the inner observer we described earlier and so access at least one of their less preferred centres. Again, we'll explore this concept further in the remainder of this book.