



SOUNDVIEW

Executive Book Summaries®

www.summary.com

Career &
Self-Development

Focus

The Hidden Driver of Excellence

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

For more than two decades, psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman has been scouting the leading edge of human sciences for what's new, surprising and important. In *Focus*, he delves into the science of attention in all its varieties, presenting a long-overdue discussion of this little-noticed and underrated mental asset that matters enormously for how we navigate life.

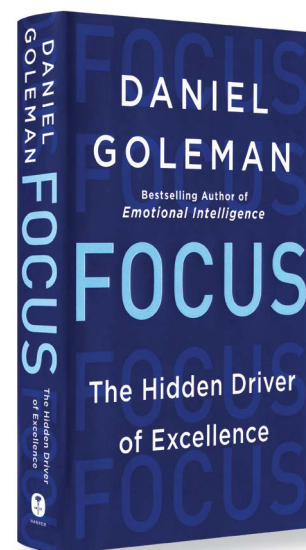
Attention works much like a muscle: use it poorly, and it can wither; work it well, and it grows. In an era of unstoppable distractions, Goleman persuasively argues that now more than ever we must learn to sharpen focus if we are to contend with, let alone thrive in, a complex world.

Those who excel rely on what Goleman calls smart practice — such as mindfulness meditation, focused preparation, recovery from setbacks, continued attention to the learning curve, and positive emotions and connections — that help them improve habits, add new skills and sustain excellence.

Combining cutting-edge research with practical findings, *Focus* reveals what distinguishes experts from amateurs and stars from average performers.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to find balance and restore attention.
- The importance of working your mental muscle to sharpen your attention and focus.
- How to apply a 360-degree evaluation to yourself and others.
- What the act of accentuating the positive can do for your mindset.
- What mindfulness can do for you at the workplace.



by Daniel Goleman

CONTENTS

The Anatomy of Attention
Page 2

Self-Awareness
Page 4

Reading Others
Page 5

The Bigger Context
Page 5

Smart Practice
Page 6

The Well-Focused Leader
Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: FOCUS

by Daniel Goleman

The author: Daniel Goleman, a former science journalist for *The New York Times*, is the author of 13 books, and he lectures frequently to professional groups, business audiences and on college campuses. He cofounded the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning at the Yale University Child Studies Center (now at the University of Illinois at Chicago). He lives in Massachusetts.

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence by Daniel Goleman. Copyright © 2013 by Daniel Goleman. Summarized by permission of the publisher, HarperCollins. 320 pages, \$28.99, ISBN: 978-0062114860.

To purchase this book, go to www.amazon.com or www.bn.com.

Summary copyright © 2014 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY.

For additional information on the author, go to www.summary.com.

Introduction: The Subtle Faculty

Though it matters enormously for how we navigate life, *attention* represents a little-noticed and underrated mental asset. The good news on attention comes from neuroscience labs and school classrooms, where the findings point to ways we can strengthen this vital muscle of the mind.

For leaders to get results, they need all three kinds of focus. *Inner* focus attunes us to our intuitions, guiding values and better decisions. *Other* focus smooths our connections to the people in our lives. And *outer* focus lets us navigate in the larger world. A leader tuned out of his internal world will be rudderless; one blind to the world of others will be clueless; those indifferent to the larger systems within which they operate will be blindsided.

And it's not just leaders who benefit from a balance in this triple focus. All of us live in daunting environments, rife with the tensions and competing goals and lures of modern life. Each of the three varieties of attention can help us find a balance where we can be both happy and productive. Attention connects us with the world, shaping and defining our experience.

Anne Treisman, a dean of this research area, notes that how we deploy our attention determines what we see. Or as Yoda says, "Your focus is your reality." ●

The Anatomy of Attention

The ability to focus in the midst of a din indicates selective attention — the neural capacity to beam in on

just one target while ignoring a sea of incoming stimuli. There are two main varieties of distractions:

- **Sensory:** Notice the feeling of your tongue against your upper palate. It's just one of an endless wave of incoming stimuli your brain weeds out from the continuous wash of background sounds, shapes and colors, tastes, smells, sensations and on and on.

- **Emotional:** These loaded signals are more daunting. While you might find it easy to concentrate on answering your email in the hubbub of a coffee shop, if you overhear someone mention your name, it's almost impossible to tune out the voice that carries it. Your attention reflexively alerts to hear what's being said about you.

The biggest challenge for even the most focused, though, comes from the emotional turmoil of our lives, like a recent blowup in a close relationship that keeps intruding into your thoughts. Such thoughts barge in for a good reason: to get us through what to do about what's upsetting us.

The dividing line between fruitless rumination and productive reflection lies in whether or not we come up with some tentative solution or insight and then can let those distressing thoughts go — or if we just keep obsessing over the same loop of worry.

The more our focus gets disrupted, the worse we do. The ability to stay on one target and ignore everything else operates in the brain's prefrontal regions. Specialized circuitry in this area boosts the strength of incoming signals we want to concentrate on (that email) and dampens down those we choose to ignore (those people chattering away at the next table).



1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 511 School House Road., Suite 300, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2014 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. **Available formats:** Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (240-912-7513 outside the United States), or order online at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Ashleigh Imus, Senior Editor; Amanda Langen, Graphic Designer; Melissa Ward, Contributing Editor

Summary: FOCUS

Since focus demands we tune out our emotional distractions, our neural wiring for selective attention includes that for inhibiting emotion; those who focus best are relatively immune to emotional turbulence.

Failure to drop one focus and move on to others can leave the mind lost in repeating loops of chronic anxiety. The power to disengage our attention from one thing and move it to another is essential for well-being.

Attention Top and Bottom

Our brain has two semi-independent, largely separate mental systems. One has massive computing power and operates constantly, purring away in quiet to solve our problems, surprising us with a sudden solution to complex pondering.

This back-of-the-mind attention typically comes to the center of focus when the unexpected happens. You're talking on your cell phone while driving (the driving part is back-of-the-mind), and suddenly a horn honk makes you realize the light is now green.

"Bottom-up" has become the phrase of choice in cognitive science for such workings of this lower-brain neural machinery, whereas "top-down" refers to mental activity that can monitor and impose goals on the subcortical machinery. It's as though there were two minds at work.

The bottom-up mind is

- faster in brain time
- involuntary and automatic (always on)
- intuitive, operating through networks of association
- executor of our habitual routines and guide for our actions
- manager for our mental models of the world.

The top-down mind is

- slower
- voluntary
- effortful
- the seat of self-control, which can (sometimes) overpower automatic routines and mute emotionally driven impulses
- able to learn new models, make new plans, and take charge of our automatic repertoire, to an extent.

Top-down wiring adds talents like self-awareness and reflection, deliberation and planning to our mind's repertoire. Intentional, top-down focus offers the mind a lever to manage our brain. As we shift our attention from one task, plan, sensation or the like to another, the related brain circuitry lights up.

A surprising factor constantly tips the balance toward bottom-up: the brain economizes on energy. The bottom/

top systems distribute mental tasks between them so we can make minimal effort and get optimal results. As familiarity makes a routine easier, it gets passed off from the top to the bottom. The way we experience this neural transfer is that we need to pay less attention — and finally none — as it becomes automatic.

The Value of a Mind Adrift

The easy assumption that attention need be in the service of solving problems or achieving goals downplays the fruitfulness of the mind's tendency to drift whenever left to its own devices.

The inner tug to drift away from effortful focus is so strong that cognitive scientists see a wandering mind as the brain's "default" mode — where it goes when it's not working on some mental task.

However, while mind wandering may hurt our immediate focus on a task, some portion of the time, it operates in the service of solving problems that matter for our lives.

Also, a mind adrift lets our creative juices flow. While our minds wander, we become better at anything that depends on a flash of insight, from wordplay to inventions and original thinking. In fact, people who are adept at mental tasks that demand cognitive control and a roaring working memory — like solving complex math problems — can struggle with creative insights if they can't fully switch off their concentrated focus.

Among other positive functions of mind wandering are generating scenarios for the future, self-reflection, navigating a complex social world, incubation of creative ideas, flexibility in focus, pondering what we're learning, organizing our memories, just mulling life — and giving our circuitry for more intensive focusing a refreshing break.

The Architecture of Serendipity

"New ideas won't appear if you don't have permission within yourself," Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff says. Case in point: Benioff took a month off to go to Hawaii just to relax, and in that open space he realized the potential for cloud computing, which led him to quit Oracle, start Salesforce in a rented apartment, and evangelize for what was then a radical concept. Salesforce was a pioneer in what is now a multibillion-dollar industry.

Open awareness creates a mental platform for creative breakthroughs and unexpected insights. In open awareness we have no devil's advocate, no cynicism or judgment — just reciprocity to whatever floats into the mind.

But once we've hit upon a creative insight, we need to capture the prize by switching to a keen focus on how to apply it. Serendipity comes with openness to possibility, then homing in on putting it to use.

Summary: FOCUS

Life's creative challenges rarely come in the form of well-formulated puzzles. Instead we often have to recognize the very need to find a creative solution in the first place. A classic model of the stages of creativity roughly translates to the three modes of focus:

- **Orienting:** where we search out and immerse ourselves in all kinds of inputs;
- **Selective Attention:** given to a specific creative challenge; and
- **Open Awareness:** where we associate freely to let the solution emerge — then home in on the solution.

Finding Balance and Restoring Attention

It's not the chatter of people around us that is the most powerful distractor, but rather the chatter of our own minds. Utter concentration demands these inner voices be stilled. When we can turn such full attention to our senses, the brain quiets its default chatter. Brain scans during mindfulness — a form of meditation which focuses on one's awareness of the present moment — reveal it quiets the brain circuits for me-focused brain chatter, which in itself can be an immense relief.

Tightly focused attention gets fatigued — much like an overworked muscle — when we push to the point of cognitive exhaustion. The signs of mental fatigue, such as a drop in effectiveness and a rise in distractedness and irritability, signify that the mental effort needed to sustain focus has depleted the glucose that feeds neural energy. The antidote to attention fatigue is the same as for the physical kind: take a rest. But what rests a mental muscle?

Try switching from the effort of top-down control to more passive bottom-up activities, taking a relaxing break in a restful setting. The most restful surroundings are in nature, argues Stephen Kaplan at the University of Michigan, who proposes what he calls “attention restoration theory.”

Such restoration occurs when we switch from effortful attention, where the mind needs to suppress distractions, to letting go and allowing our attention to be captured by whatever presents itself. But only certain kinds of bottom-up focus act to restore energy for focused attention. Surfing the Web, playing video games or answering email does not.

The key is an immersive experience, one where attention can be total but largely passive. This starts to happen when we gently arouse the sensory systems, which quiet down those for effortful focus. Anything we can get enjoyably lost in will do it. ●

Self-Awareness

What allows people to have a strong inner compass, a North Star that steers them through life according to the dictates of their deepest values and purposes? Self-awareness, particularly accuracy in decoding the internal cues of our body's murmurs, holds the key. Our subtle physiological reactions reflect the sum total of our experience relevant to the decision at hand.

The decision rules derived from our life experiences reside in subcortical neural networks that gather, store and apply algorithms from every event in our lives — creating our inner rudder.

The brain harbors our deepest sense of purpose and meaning in these subcortical regions — areas connected poorly to the verbal areas of the neocortex but richly to the gut. We know our values by first getting a visceral sense of what feels right and what does not, then articulating those feelings for ourselves.

Self-awareness, then, represents an essential focus, one that attunes us to the subtle murmurs within that can help guide our way through life. And, as we shall see, this inner radar holds the key to managing what we do — and just as important, what we *don't* do. This internal control mechanism makes all the difference between a life well lived and one that falters.

The Brain's Map of the Body

When Steve Jobs gave a heartfelt talk to a graduating class at Stanford University, his advice was “Don't let the voice of others' opinions drown out your inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.”

But how do you hear “your inner voice,” what your heart and intuition somehow already know? You need to depend on your body's signals.

Our “gut feelings” are messages from the insula — tucked behind the frontal lobes of the brain — and other bottom-up circuits that simplify life decisions for us by guiding our attention toward smarter options. The better we are at reading these messages, the better our intuition.

There are two major streams of self-awareness: “me,” which builds narratives about our past and future, and “I,” which brings us into the immediate present. The “me,” as we've seen, links together what we experience across time. The “I,” in stark contrast, exists only in the raw experience of our immediate moment.

The “I,” our most intimate sense of our self, reflects the piecemeal sum of our sensory impressions — particular-

Summary: FOCUS

ly our body states. “I” builds from our brain’s system for mapping the body via the insula.

Such internal signals are our inner guides, helping us at many levels, from living a life in keeping with our guiding values to remembering our running shoes.

A Recipe for Self-Control

Attention regulates emotion — as long as one can stay tuned to an interesting object of focus, the distress calms; the moment that thing loses its fascination, the distress, if still held onto, will come roaring back.

Our mind deploys self-awareness to keep everything we do on track: meta-cognition — thinking about thinking — lets us know how our mental operations are going and adjusts them as needed; meta-emotion does the same with regulating the flow of feeling and impulse. In the mind’s design, self-awareness is built into regulating our own emotions as well as sensing what others feel.

At least three sub-varieties of attention are at play when we pit self-restraint against instant gratification:

1. Ability to voluntarily disengage focus from an object of desire that grabs our attention.
2. Ability to resist distraction and keep focus elsewhere.
3. Ability to allow us to keep focus on a goal in the future.

All this adds up to willpower.

The Power to Choose

Of the many nuances and varieties of attention, two matter greatly for self-awareness. Selective attention lets us focus on one target and ignore everything else. Open attention lets us take in information widely in the world around us and the world within us and pick up subtle cues we’d otherwise miss.

Extremes in either of these kinds of attention — being too focused outwardly or too open to what’s going on around us — can, as Richard Davidson puts it, “make it impossible to be self-aware.” Executive function (as cognitive control is sometimes called) includes attention to attention itself, or more generally, awareness of our mental states; this lets us monitor our focus and keep it on track. ●

Reading Others

The executive circuits that allow us to think about our own thoughts and feelings let us apply the same reasoning to other people’s minds. “Theory of mind,” the understanding that other people have their own feelings, desires

and motives, lets us reason what someone else might be thinking and wanting. Such cognitive empathy shares circuitry with executive attention; it first blooms around the years between two and five and continues to develop right through the teen years.

Getting the Context

Those who do business with diverse sets of people in a global economy need particular sensitivity to unspoken norms. The cross-cultural talent for social sensitivity appears related to cognitive empathy.

Ground rules for what’s appropriate can create invisible barriers when people from different cultures work together. Culture aside, ground rules also shift greatly depending on whom you are with. There are jokes you tell to your best buddies that you should never tell your boss.

Attention to context lets us pick up subtle social cues that can guide how we behave. Those who are tuned in this way act with skill no matter what situation they find themselves in. They know not only what to say and do but also what *not* to say or do. They instinctively follow the universal algorithm for etiquette, to behave in ways that put others at ease. Sensitivity to how people are feeling in reaction to what we do or say lets us navigate hidden social minefields.

Where we see ourselves on the social ladder seems to determine how much attention we pay: more vigilant when we feel subordinate, less so when superior. The corollary: The more you care about someone, the more attention you pay — and the more attention you pay, the more you care. ●

The Bigger Context

Pattern detection signals the systems mind at work. This sometimes uncanny ability lets us spot with ease the telling detail in a vast visual array (think “Where’s Waldo?”). If you flash a photo of lots of dots and tell people to guess how many there are, the better estimators should be better systems thinkers.

A “system” boils down to a cohesive set of lawful, regular patterns. We learn how to read and navigate systems through the remarkable general learning talents of the neocortex. Such cortical talents — as in math and engineering — can be duplicated by computers. That sets the systems mind apart from self-awareness and empathy, which operate on dedicated, largely bottom-up circuitry. It takes a bit of effort to learn about systems, but to navigate life successfully we need strengths in this variety of focus as well as the two that come more naturally.

Summary: FOCUS

System Blindness

Through human history, systems awareness — detecting and mapping the patterns and order that lie hidden within the chaos of the natural world — has been propelled by this urgent survival imperative for native peoples to understand their local ecosystem. They must know what plants are toxic, which nourish or heal, where to get drinking water, and where to gather food, etc.

Here's the catch: We're prepared by our biology to eat, sleep, mate, nurture, fight-or-flee, and exhibit all the other built-in survival responses in the human repertoire. But as we've seen, there are no neural systems dedicated to understanding the larger systems within which all this occurs.

Systems are, at first glance, invisible to our brain — we have no direct perception of any of the multitude of systems that dictate the realities of our lives. We understand them indirectly through mental models (the meanings of wave swells, constellations and the flight of seabirds are such models) and take action based on those models. The more grounded in data those models are, the more effective our interventions (for example, a rocket to an asteroid). The less grounded in data, the less effective they will be (much education policy).

The obliviousness to the systems around us is puzzling. We seem curiously unable to perceive in a way that leads us to prevent the adverse consequences of human systems, such as those for industry or commerce. ●

Smart Practice

According to Anders Ericsson, a Florida State University psychologist, “You don't get benefits from mechanical repetition, but by adjusting your execution over and over to get closer to your goal. You have to tweak the system by pushing, allowing for more errors at first as you increase your limits.”

Apart from sports that favor physical traits, almost anyone can achieve the highest levels of performance with smart practice. Smart practice always includes a feedback loop that lets you recognize errors and correct them — this is why dancers use mirrors. Ideally that feedback comes from someone with an expert eye. If you practice without feedback, you don't get top ranks. The feedback and the concentration matter — not just the hours.

Learning how to improve any skill requires top-down focus. Neuroplasticity, the strengthening of old brain circuits and building of new ones for a skill we are practicing, requires our paying attention.

Daydreaming defeats practice; those who browse TV while working out will never reach top ranks. Paying full attention seems to boost the mind's processing speed, strengthen synaptic connections, and expand or create neural networks for what we are practicing. At least at first. But as you master how to execute the new routine, repeated practice transfers control of that skill from the top-down system for intentional focus to bottom-up circuits that eventually make its execution effortless. At that point you don't need to think about it — you can do the routine well enough on automatic.

Focused attention, like a strained muscle, gets fatigued. Ericsson found world-class competitors — whether weight lifters, pianists or a dog-sled team — tend to limit arduous practice to about four hours a day. Rest and restoring physical and mental energy get built into their training regimen. They seek to push themselves and their bodies to the max, but not so much that their focus gets diminished in the practice session. Optimal practice maintains optimal concentration.

In the Mental Gym

Think of attention as a mental muscle that we can strengthen by a workout. Memorization works that muscle, as does concentration. The mental analog of lifting a free weight repeatedly is noticing when our mind wanders and bringing it back to target.

That happens to be the essence of one-pointed focus in meditation, which, seen through the lens of cognitive neuroscience, typically involves attention training. You're told to keep your focus on one thing, such as a mantra or your breath. Try it for a while, and inevitably your mind wanders off.

So, the universal instructions are these: When your mind wanders — and you notice that it's wandered — bring it back to your point of focus, and sustain your attention there. And when your mind wanders off again, do the same. And again and again and again.

As in any workout, the more reps, the stronger the muscle becomes. More-experienced meditators, one study found, were able to deactivate their medial strip more rapidly after noticing mind wandering; as their thoughts become less “sticky” with practice, it becomes easier to drop thoughts and return to the breath. There was more neural connectivity between the region for mind wandering and those that disengage attention. The increased connectivity in the brains of long-term meditators, this study suggests, are analogous to those competitive weight-lifters with perfect pecs.

Summary: FOCUS

Muscle builders know you won't get a six-pack belly by lifting free weights — you need to do a particular set of exercises. Specific muscles respond to particular training regimens. So it is with attention training. Concentration on one point of focus is the basic attention builder, but that strength can be applied in many ways. In the mental gym, the specifics of practice make all the difference.

Accentuate the Positive

Negativity focuses us on a narrow range — what's upsetting us. A guideline in cognitive therapy holds that focusing on the negatives in experience offers a recipe for depression. Positive emotions widen our span of attention; we're free to take it all in. In the grip of positivity, our perceptions shift; when we're feeling good, our awareness expands from our usual self-centered focus on "me" to a more inclusive and warm focus on "we."

Cutting Through the Hodgepodge

The scientific literature on the effects of meditation amounts to a hodgepodge of bad, good and remarkable results in a mix of questionable methodologies, so-so designs and gold-standard studies. After asking the dean of contemplative neuroscience, Wisconsin's Richard Davidson, to sort through it all and summarize the clear benefits for attention of mindfulness practice, he immediately recognized two: mindfulness and selective attention.

"Mindfulness," he said, "boosts the classic attention network in the brain's fronto-parietal system that works together to allocate attention. These circuits are fundamental in the basic movement of attention: disengaging your focus from one thing, moving it to another, and staying with that new object of attention."

Selective attention inhibits the pull of distractors. This lets us focus on what's important rather than be distracted by what's going on around us — you can keep your focus on the meaning of what you're reading instead of having it being pulled away by a distractor like an endnote in the text. This is the essence of cognitive control.

Mindfulness at Work

Mindfulness, in the form of mind wandering, may be the single biggest waster of attention in the workplace. Focus on our experience in the here and now — like the task at hand, the conversation we're having, or the building of consensus in a meeting — demands that we tune down the all-about-myself murmurs of mind stuff irrelevant to what's going on right now.

Mindfulness develops our capacity to observe our moment-to-moment experience in an impartial, nonreactive

manner. We practice letting go of thoughts about any one thing and open our focus to whatever comes to mind in the stream of awareness without getting lost in a torrent of thoughts about any one thing. This training generalizes, so that in those moments at work when we need to pay attention to this and drop our stream of thoughts about that, we can let go of the one and focus on the other.

Mindfulness training decreases activity in me-circuitry centering on the medial prefrontal cortex, and the less self-talk, the more we can experience in the moment. The longer people have been mindfulness practitioners, the more their brain can decouple the two kinds of self-awareness and activate circuits that foster a here-and-now presence for the task at hand, free of the mind's "me" chatter.

Building executive control helps especially for those of us for whom every setback, hurt or disappointment creates endless cascades of rumination. Mindfulness lets us break the stream of thoughts that might otherwise lead to wallowing in misery, by changing our relationship to thought itself. Instead of being swept away by the stream, we can pause and see that these are just thoughts — and choose whether or not to act on them.

In short, mindfulness practice strengthens focus, particularly executive control, working memory capacity, and the ability to sustain attention. Some of these benefits can be seen with as little as 20 minutes of practice for just four days (though the longer the training, the more sustained the effects).

Seeing the Bigger Picture

Business leaders are increasingly pressured by the acceleration of complexity in the systems they need to navigate: There's globalization of markets, suppliers and organizations; the hyperspeed of evolving information technologies; impending ecological dangers; products coming to market and becoming obsolete faster.

Setting aside some regular reflective time in the daily or weekly schedule might help us get beyond the firefight-of-the-day mentality, to take stock and look ahead. Very diverse thinkers, from Congressman Tim Ryan to Columbia University economist Jeffrey D. Sachs, are calling for mindfulness as a way to help leaders see the bigger picture. They propose we need not just mindful leaders but a mindful society, one where we bring a triple focus: to our own well-being, that of others, and the operations of the broader systems that shape our lives. ●

The Well-Focused Leader

Directing attention toward where it needs to go is a primal task of leadership. Talent here lies in the ability to shift attention to the right place at the right time, sensing trends and emerging realities, and seizing opportunities. But it's not just the focus of a single strategic decision-maker that makes or breaks a company: it's the entire array of attention bandwidth and dexterity among everyone.

Attention in organizations, as with individuals, has a limited capacity. Organizations, too, have to choose where to allocate attention, focusing on this while ignoring that. An organization's core functions — finance, marketing, human resources, etc. — describe how a particular group focuses.

Signs of what might be called organizational “attention deficit disorder” include making flawed decisions because of missing data, no time for reflection, trouble getting attention in the marketplace, and inability to focus when and where it matters.

How Leaders Direct Attention

Leadership itself hinges on effectively capturing and directing the collective attention. Leading attention requires these elements:

- Focusing your own attention;
- Attracting and directing attention from others; and
- Getting and keeping the attention of employees, peers, customers and clients.

A well-focused leader can balance an inner focus on the climate and culture with an “other focus” on the competitive landscape and an outer focus on the larger realities that shape the environment the outfit operates in.

A leader's field of attention — the particular issues and goals she focuses on — guides the attention of those who follow her whether or not the leader explicitly articulates it. People make their choices about where to focus based on their perception of what matters to leaders. This ripple effect gives leaders an extra load of responsibility: They are guiding not just their own attention but everyone else's.

Think Different

Companies with a winning strategy tend to refine their current operations and offerings, not explore radical shifts in what they offer. A mental balancing act — exploring the new while exploiting what's working — does not come naturally. But those companies that can both exploit and explore are “ambidextrous”: They separate each strategy into units with very different ways of operating and cultures. At the same time, they have a tight-knot team of

senior leaders who keep an eye on the balance of inner, outer and other focus.

What works at the organizational level parallels the individual mind. The mind's executive, the arbiter of where our focus goes, manages both the concentration exploitation requires and the open focus exploration demands.

The Well-Focused Team

For a team, self-awareness means tuning in to the needs of members, surfacing issues, and being intentional about setting norms that help. Some teams make time for a daily “check-in” at the start of a meeting to ask how each person is doing. A team's empathy applies not just to sensitivity among members but also to understanding the view and feelings of other people and groups the teams deal with — group-level empathy.

Team focus can take the form of both whom in the wider organization to help and where to get the resources and attention teams need to accomplish their own goals. Or it can mean learning what the concerns are of others in the organization who can influence the team's capabilities or asking whether what the team is considering fits the larger strategy and goals of the outfit.

Leading for the Long Future

The largest lens for our focus encompasses global systems; considers the needs of everyone, including the powerless and poor; and peers far ahead of time. No matter what we are doing or what decision we are making, the Dalai Lama suggests these self-queries for checking our motivation:

Is it just for me or for others?

For the benefit of the few or the many?

For now or for the future? ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Focus*, you'll also like:

1. ***Working With Emotional Intelligence*** by Daniel Goleman. As Goleman documents, emotional intelligence is the essential ingredient for reaching and staying at the top in any field, even high-tech careers.
2. ***Ecological Intelligence*** by Daniel Goleman. Goleman reveals the hidden environmental consequences of what we make and buy and how we can drive the essential changes we all must make to save our planet.
3. ***Primal Leadership*** by Annie McKee, Richard Boyatzis, Daniel Goleman. Great leadership works through the emotions. The authors describe what managers and executives must do to be emotionally intelligent leaders.