

OVERVIEW OF THE ESCALATOR

The objective of the escalator is to develop capacities that enable participants to achieve their goals, whatever those goals might be.

Effective achievement of goals requires two key abilities:

- 1) The capacity to develop strategies that identify what must be done to achieve particular goals; and
- 2) The ability to actually do what is identified by the strategies, in the face of competing motivations, emotions, thinking patterns and desires.

In order to develop strategies, individuals need the cognitive capacity to construct mental models of those aspects of the world that are relevant to achieving their goals. They then use these mental models to identify what actions and interventions will lead to achievement of their goals.

Currently humans have limited ability to model mentally those aspects of the world that are complex and transform through time. This seriously limits their capacity to understand and manage the complex challenges that they face in business, government and social environments. At best, they are currently largely restricted to dealing effectively with problems that can be adequately represented by mechanistic mental models (i.e. that can be understood with analytical/rational cognition). *Meta-systemic cognition* is needed to strategize in complex, changing environments.

And even where effective strategies can be developed, individuals have limited abilities to actually implement the strategies. They are continually diverted from doing so by fears, anxieties, self-doubt, worry, and other negative emotions and competing motivations. *Conscious self-mastery* is the capacity to overcome these limitations by aligning emotions, motivations, desires and thinking with one's goals.

These two key capacities (meta-systemic cognition and conscious self-mastery) cannot be acquired simply by extending our existing abilities. Analytical/rational cognition, no matter how developed it becomes, cannot understand complexity. No amount of knowledge alone can produce meta-systemic cognition or conscious self-mastery. The two higher capacities cannot be produced by mere horizontal development: they require vertical development to a higher level.

In essence, vertical development requires the emergence of a new level of self that dis-embeds from and stands outside the previous level. The new level is not bound by the previous level. It is free from its requirements and restrictions, and can move at right angles to them. For the first time the pre-dispositions of the previous level are objects of consciousness. The new level then goes on to develop its own, more effective ways of dealing with adaptive challenges.

The emergence of a new level of self can be promoted by activities that train the ability to dis-embed attention from the functioning of the previous level. Specially designed meditation-like practices can be used to train this capacity. They make use of the psychological fact that resting attention on bare sensations that do not evoke

thoughts or desires will dis-embed attention from involvements in thoughts and feelings. Dis-embedding practices involve repeatedly moving attention back to bare sensations whenever the individual discovers she is embedded in thought or feeling. This practice builds up the individual's capacity to dis-embed and to remain dis-embedded.

Since the object of the Escalator is to build these higher capacities for use in the midst of ordinary life, it focuses on using these practices during normal daily activities, not 'on the meditation cushion'. The dis-embedding practice therefore makes use of bare sensations that are 'portable' in the sense that they can be used during ordinary life. Internal sensations in the body are used for this purpose.

Considerable efforts are needed if an individual is to dis-embed from their current highest level of self and to build a new, higher level. They will not make these efforts until they realize that their current modes of functioning are seriously limiting and dysfunctional. It is very difficult for individuals to see these limitations. They are embedded in their current highest level. Their emotions and thinking tends to have them; these are not something they have. They are part of their subject, not an object to them.

For these reasons a key part of the escalator is to guide participants to the realization that their current analytical/rational thinking and involvement in their emotions and desires seriously limits their capacity to achieve their goals. The contradictions that participants discover in their current cognition and behavior drive and motivate higher development.

The Escalator uses a weekly, facilitated group process together with homework 'experiential' exercises. Participants report the results of exercises to the group and these are examined and discussed by the group. Much of the material that is discussed by the group comes from the experiential exercises and other direct experience of participants.

The facilitator seeds and guides the discussion so that, as far as possible, participants discover key skills and realizations through their own efforts.