

Reflections from the Mountain

Paradigms for Change

by Kathryn L. Goldman, Ph.D.

As a change consultant and avid reader about developments in large-scale change management, I know of many strongly-promoted, extremely expensive attempts at producing organizational breakthroughs that have not been successful. All OD consultants do. A notable example comes from Michael Hammer, who recently "got religion". He was quoted on the front page of the Wall Street Journal apologizing for having "forgotten" about people in his re-engineering work; he now plans to spend more time on them.

I think he's still missing the boat. Many of us are, especially when it comes to "programs" for large-scale change management. It seems like we just don't understand how to make processes like this work effectively. That's because I think the real question we should be asking ourselves is, "What kinds of change can people integrate and make their own so that new ways of thinking and being can be incorporated into their daily functioning?"

There are many ways this question can be answered. Last winter, while trying to create a breakthrough in my skiing, I had an accident. Interestingly, this fall let me discover a missing piece in the consulting puzzle of how to foster change that can last. To put it clearly, I now believe

that the notion of "breakthrough change" in itself is the problem. This is what I want to explore in this article.

Evolutionary vs. Breakthrough Change

Most of us are excited by the notion of breakthrough change. Naturally so. We want fundamental transformation in our personal lives as well as in our corporate lives. "Breakthroughs" are very attractive; they offer the possibility of dramatic new ways of doing things that will revolutionize our relationships, our work, even our lives.

Personally, I find that the physical world provides metaphors which carry over quite well into other areas of life. In particular, skiing offers me many insights into my work with corporate change leaders. Like change leadership, skiing involves taking risks and making critical tactical decisions while moving forward at an extremely rapid pace in what is often a hostile environment.

Since I love skiing and am committed to personal learning, I was delighted to find a new ski instructor last year who specializes in coaching plateaued skiers who want to move beyond their limitations. His philosophy was that in order to leave old movement patterns behind and develop dramatic new ones, I would have to experiment

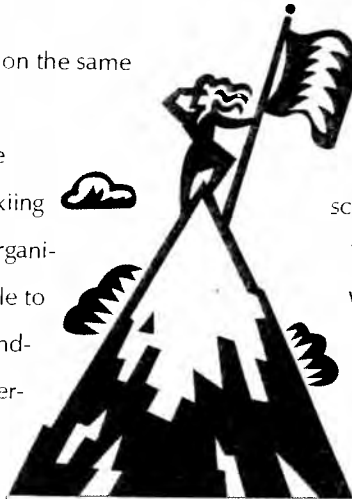
with radically different, atypical movements on the same steep terrain that I knew so well.

I agreed with him wholeheartedly. In the vernacular of organizational life cycles, my skiing was like a successful but dull, habit-ridden organization, one which was succeeding, but unable to do anything special or world class. After spending hours with my new coach, alternatively energized and terrified by what he was asking me to do, I suddenly began to believe in the possibility of becoming a great skier. Not great like Olympic great, but truly expert: fluid, graceful, quick and lithe, able to ski anything I might face with sureness and pizzazz.

Then, one day late last year, despite my sudden improvement, I took a serious fall. Skiing down a steep but familiar hill, I suddenly found myself on the ground sliding towards a cliff dotted with trees and rocks.

While recovering, I contemplated what had caused the fall. With some hesitancy, I realized that I had fallen *because I had been successful* in creating a true breakthrough in the way I skied. On the slopes, a simple curve of the mountain that the year before had been quite familiar, suddenly was a hazard. Because my learning had given me a choice between the former "worse" way and the new "more elegant and effective" way, I couldn't — and didn't — respond "naturally". As a result of my breakthrough, both and neither were natural, and I fell.

Unnoticed at the time, my hesitation — not knowing whether to go right or left, so to speak — caused me to fall, immediately above a cliff. This cliff had always existed; never before had it been an issue, let alone a problem. I had probably skied past it at least fifty times. This time, however, as I saw the drop-off approaching, I dug my skis



In the vernacular of organizational life cycles, my skiing was like a successful but dull, habit-ridden organization, one which was succeeding, but unable to do anything special or world class.

into the snow to break the slide — knowing that this was the type of action that causes ligaments to tear — and went down screaming.

Think of it... most of us are not this fortunate! We struggle for years to create breakthroughs, whether in ourselves or our corporations, and only occasionally find things truly changing. And here I was, exhilarated by my enhanced capability... and then splat! On my face, no more skiing. In fact, no walking without crutches for weeks, and then, on top of it, a slow rehabilitation. The implications for organizational change: (1) breakthroughs are not only difficult to achieve, they are extremely hard to use as a base for new expansion and development; (2) in business life, unanticipated cliffs exist everywhere; places that look non-threatening at first glance can actually present serious risks to the life of the organization; and (3) when business is moving fast, it is almost impossible to react quickly, while at the same time, attempting to integrate the after-effects of breakthrough change.

We, as consultants, think we are unlucky because it's difficult to product major change. But, in fact, this built-in

resistance may be what makes it possible for human beings and organizations to *integrate* change that otherwise would destroy them.

So, Revolutionary or Evolutionary Change?

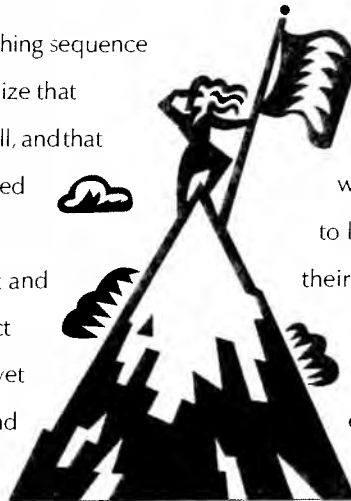
Like you, I want things to happen fast. This has always been true of me. However, my skiing accident helped me see "breakthrough change" and "evolutionary change" through new lenses. Personally, I had pushed my "breakthrough" skiing lessons to the limit and, as a reward, ended up flat on my back. Not only wasn't I skiing, I wasn't even

walking. My learning/breakthrough/skiing/crashing sequence truly caused me to pause. Only then did I realize that perhaps evolutionary change isn't so slow after all, and that breakthrough change may not be all it's "cracked up" to be.

These days we are constantly asked to act and think faster than we were in the past. Product cycles are cut in half, then in half again, and yet again. The time it takes to send a message and receive a response is decreasing so rapidly that we can communicate with friends half way around the globe in less time than it takes to write and mail a letter. Can we really learn and adapt with such rapidity? I don't think so.

I'm convinced that we, as human beings, can't change our response patterns our thinking or our feelings, as quickly as we'd like to believe. These things take time. This is important because, in order for organizational change to really work, people have to make the new ways of doing things their own. The new ways have to become as natural and automatic as the old ways.

Consequently, two things seem apparent. First, it's reasonable to assume that if the change before us simply requires new actions that are based on behavior patterns familiar to the people involved, there will be no problem. The people involved will be able to adapt and integrate, easily. An excellent example of this fact recently occurred at my local Safeway. The service people clearly act different. Instead of managers simply giving their employees slogans like "we put the customer first", they are training employees with a simple set of new actions. Now, when a customer asks where to find an item, the employee stops what he/she is doing and takes the customer to the product and shows it to them. I'm sure that before this "new" training Safeway



Just the stories of corporate re-engineering alone should show us the difficulty of integrating dramatically new ways of doing things into a fast-paced business where there is little time for people to make them their own.

employees already knew how to walk across the store and point out an item; they did not have to learn how to do something with which they were unfamiliar — they simply had to learn that they should now consider it part of their job to take extra actions to help customers.

However, most organizational change is not this simple. Coaching employees, for example, requires skills that many managers have never used and may not even have. Expecting these new skills to be used comfortably and effectively after only two days of training is unrealistic.

The stories of corporate re-engineering alone should show us the difficulty of integrating dramatically new ways of doing things into a fast-paced business where there is little time for people to make them their own. In today's world, people have to work with new processes while still feeling attachment to the former ones and to people who are gone. Frequently, employees do not feel any passion or commitment towards trying something new in which radical change needs to occur. If not actively resisting, they are at best neutral.

In order to get a clear picture of the distinctions between Evolutionary Change and Breakthrough Change, look at the following columns:

<u>Evolutionary Systems Change</u>	<u>Breakthrough Change</u>
• Gradual	• Sudden and dramatic
• Small changes	• Large changes
• Stay in comfort zone	• Frightening, uncomfortable
• Existing skills used in new ways	• New skills or behaviors
• Gentle	• Fierce
• Steady, slow momentum	• Saccadic momentum
• Image: Plants growing	• Image: Birth or death

Both of these models are based on natural principles and

are found in nature. They're both viable models, effective in organizations when used appropriately and with consciousness.

However, today's cyberculture biases us toward breakthrough changes. It predisposes us to demand big changes, fast.

We shouldn't choose breakthrough change just because it fits our personal preference or the wishes of our clients. We know this. We know we need to consider the history of the organization, the complexity of the change required for organizational success, and the styles of both the leaders and members of the organization.

Nonetheless, as a profession, Organizational Development tends to assume that only Breakthrough Change can enable major organizational shifts. This belief is not grounded either in experience or data. Quite the contrary. As of now, both experience and available data tend to show that the majority of breakthrough change projects fail. We see this in the published studies of re-engineering efforts, which sadly documents the failure during the implementation stage of over 60% of major multi-million dollar projects. We see similar problems in work done to "flatten" organizations and in some large scale work done to increase both productivity and management's control over work. Perhaps the best that can be said of these efforts is that they have produced sharply higher levels of burnout among the increasing numbers of managers and employees. Instead of truly 'empowering' people so that they have more control over their work lives, most large scale recent organizational change has been so rapid and constant that people tend to feel they are working harder with less control over anything significant. We need to reconsider our deep, underlying concepts about the nature of change.

No Pain, No Gain?

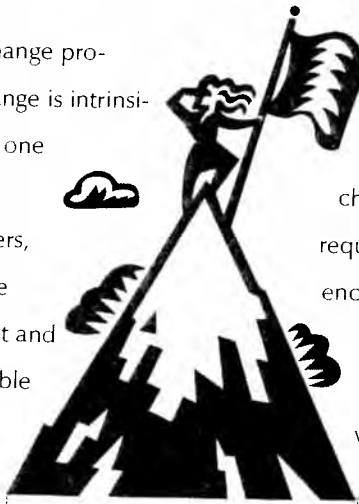
We need to recognize that our most popular organizational change models seem to be based on the assumption that there is a dichotomy between change and pleasure. Simply put, we believe that our clients have to live through

If, instead of using breakthrough change models, we worked with clients (or as managers worked with our employees) from an evolutionary model, we would move from a different mindset and behave in some different ways. We would —

- look for small changes that would shift old patterns and be relatively easy to integrate into daily work
- *rather than* plan out major complex change processes or 'train' people in complex sets of new behaviors
- find out what leaders truly value and have been unable to manifest, and help them do so, no matter how simple or 'ordinary' these things seem
- *rather than* attempting to shift the leaders behaviors into a set mold that we or some popular author espouse (but usually do not live ourselves)
- develop ways to help people experiment with new behaviors 'lightly', effortlessly, in a spirit of play
- *rather than* training, exhorting or incentivizing them to do new things that feel uncomfortable and telling them that it is necessary
- believe that change happens fastest and lasts best when it is light and playful
- *rather than* believing that change is intrinsically difficult or painful
- allow people time to do things more slowly at first and experiment with how to do them well
- *rather than* pushing people to stick with the schedule of an overly ambitious change plan forced on everyone by demands of the market or top management
- seek to create an atmosphere where managers show that they value learning by the way they coach and support people day to day
- *rather than* talking about 'learning organizations' while working so hard that the ease and play associated with deeper levels of learning cannot emerge
- encourage people to take time to pause, breathe, and ask themselves "is this what I really believe is important for me to be doing, given the organization's needs?" — and be supported in discussing their answers with those in authority
- *rather than* exhorting people to 'work smarter' with less resources, without making space for them to get in touch with their own or the customers' real needs.

hard times when pursuing breakthrough change processes. This is because we believe that change is intrinsically difficult and painful, and that the best one can do is "grin and bear it".

In this context we, as change practitioners, have been living with a strange paradox; the more our profession has gained the limelight and become important, the less we have been able to realize its true reason for being. Many of us entered OD in order to empower people and/or help with the sharing of power in the workplace, enabling people to create work organizations that simultaneously serve real goals effectively and provide great places for them to work. This hasn't been so easy to do, causing many people pain and despair. In order to deal with these anomalies, we need to reconsider our feelings about change. Our "no pain, no gain" perspective may be outdated; perhaps for us and our clients, we need to find ways to see our practice as grounded in paradigms and theory which have more organic rhythms and a more evolutionary pace.



Nonetheless, as a profession, Organizational Development tends to assume that only Breakthrough Change can enable major organizational shifts.

normal purpose. Instead, I wanted to extrapolate from its underlying principles and methods a way of enabling organizational change to happen in more fluid, easy ways, ones requiring less effort and leading to a new experience of "more gain, less pain".

I have always felt that we can get underneath the "stuck places" in ourselves by working at the somatic level. When we release our bodily knots, we move more freely; life flows through us more easily. We thereby become better "conduits" for the currents of change. As of now, very little organization change theory starts from this place, attempting to fuse systems thinking with the basics of what is known about somatics¹.

When I combine notions about evolutionary change with basic assumptions of the somatic approach, I find myself thinking about organizational change from a different "jumping off place" than when I look at organizational change within the context of the traditional behavioral sciences. Since there is not yet a generally acknowledged body of somatic principles and theory, I would like to present some generative concepts from the practice of the *Feldenkrais*

Ideas for a New Paradigm: "Embodied" Change

For this reassessment, I find that body-based metaphors are quite useful. I am not alone in this theory, or we would not see so many sports images delivering executive speeches. Consequently, fifteen years ago, I took four years to be trained as a Guild Certified Practitioner of the *Feldenkrais Method*®. This process for increasing body-mind awareness is widely used for increasing mobility among those injured or in pain, as well as for helping performers and athletes discover ways to enhance their performance. I did not study the *Feldenkrais Method* in order to help individuals move better, although this is its

*Method*² which could be married to OD's change principles.

Awareness through Movement® is the term used within the *Feldenkrais Method* for group lessons in movement. The movements used in this approach are based on adapting developmental movements that occur naturally over a person's lifetime to create a variety of short, transformative experiences. These "lessons" are designed to enable people to learn new ways of moving through life without having to think about it. Rather than promoting cognitive learning, the movements work "behind" or "underneath" our left-brain thinking processes to cause

change in how we act and react.

At this point there are five Awareness through Move-ment® principles that we could bring into our change work:

1. Reversibility in Movement

When we can reverse a physical movement at any point, we are in control of it. When we cannot, we have less control and security, which usually indicates that more effort or speed is involved. If, when learning new patterns of movement, we go slowly and effortlessly enough so that we can sustain reversibility, a new quality of movement emerges that in turn allows dramatic changes to take place in an easy, comfortable fashion.

2. Differentiation Before Integration

To alter a movement pattern that uses much of the body, we differentiate that pattern into smaller parts and experiment with exploring its quality, one small part at a time. With each small movement, we stay well within a person's comfort zone, encouraging them to move lightly and slowly, noticing the sensations as they vary the movement. Then once we've mastered each part, we put them all back together again. Such differentiation and integration enables dramatic change in the larger pattern without effort.

3. Generating Action From Different Places

While guiding a person through a movement exploration, we also encourage them to see whether the movement changes if they initiate it from a different part of themselves. For example, I can begin reaching with my arm — or with my hand, with my elbow, with my shoulder, by turning my body, or simply by moving my eyes. All of these affect the quality of the movement, its power, and its shape.

4. Effort (and ease) Impact Perception and Change

When I am working really hard, particularly if I hold my breath, lightness and ease are rarely part of a movement. It is harder for me to change. Corrective change is easier to initiate when one is barely off course. But, it is hard to perceive that one needs to change slightly when one is overwhelmed with input. Most work settings nowadays flood people with input and increasing amounts of work. This makes change more difficult. In fact, there is an inverse ratio between intensity or amount of input and perception, described mathematically by an equation known as the Weber-Fechner Law. This states that one can make finer distinctions when input is lighter. For example: I can feel the weight of a fly if it lands on a piece of paper I am holding, but not on a book and certainly not on a computer. To extrapolate to the organizational setting: If I am not overloaded with input, I will notice a slight difference in my team members' interactions. If I am getting 50 voice-mails and e-mails a day, I am not likely to notice any subtle changes in their style or methods of interacting.

5. Eliciting the Unknown Within the Context of Natural Developmental Patterns

Feldenkrais movement is based in part on the way humans learn movement as infants. When movement becomes difficult or impossible (whether because of injury, damage, or habit) we go back to earlier, easier movements, but do so in ways that feel unfamiliar to the person. We do not create a climate of moving through a developmental cycle in a linear way. Rather, we use what we call "non-habitual movements" — explorations of patterns that a person finds unfamiliar, in order to preclude a mindset of "I know what we're doing: we're working on strengthening the --, or developing a range of motion in the --." Intriguingly, fundamental underlying human developmental patterns are used, yet they are used in ways that elicit a sense of exploring the unknown.



...we, as change practitioners, have been living with a strange paradox; the more our profession has gained the limelight and become important, the less we have been able to realize its true reason for being.

Each of these principles has implications for our work in organizations. For instance, if we “launched” change initiatives with a sense of exploration, but clearly and emphatically remained in the “zone of reversibility”, we might have different departments developing their own best practices for things like performance management or customer service. If we were truly working with something that people valued, they could then “play” and explore improvements without metaphorically having to “hold their breath” and make it perfect. They could try small variations and see what resulted. In the zone of reversibility, they could feel some control and safety within change, which makes possible a sense of play and ease. As change practitioners, if we patterned ourselves after the way a *Feldenkrais* practitioner works, part of our role would become designers of learning processes that enables groups to explore the impact of small changes in their work processes.

Another part of our role would be asking our clients new questions: What if we thought about both our bodies and our organizations in terms of flow and movement? What if we looked for what will enhance this movement? What if we did not focus on the structures at all, but on

enriching movement? What if we looked at the functions desired and played with how to do some easy things to unstick them? (Kathleen Dannemiller’s thoughts on “arthritic organizations³” are a start in this direction.) What if we used processes like the *Feldenkrais Method* (or other delicate movement awareness methodologies) as an “entrance point?” Moreover, by helping clients discover they can get much more movement in their bodies, we could encourage them to experiment in a similar way with their work. What if managers believed that people who are fully present and grounded would make better decisions and cooperate better together than those who are stressed out and burned out and so made time and offered learning for this to happen? After all, reliable methods for such embodied change are known. They have been in use for decades, producing relatively predictable results.

We know that people who learn somatically can experience change as easy and pleasurable, instead of as threatening or overwhelming. What if we taught them this within an organizational context and supported them in bringing this fact into their work? Instead of exhorting people to try harder, what if they learned, somatically speaking, that it is more efficient to “try softer”? Would they then bring such experimentation and a spirit of ease into their work and have levels of improvement comparable to those which we are accustomed to seeing in personal movement programs?

Below are some of the conceptual bases of such an approach.

1. Our experience of life is grounded in our experience of ourselves as physical/emotional beings. What we perceive is colored strongly by how we interact with others and the world. We usually don’t know what we don’t know. In other words, we can’t perceive the way that our being colors others’ responses and the way that we get results. Therefore, we conclude things like “people will always defend their turf as it gets close to the time to make decisions,” when there may be potent ways to prevent this happening, especially when the person in question can’t see and doesn’t know how to do so.

**OD & Somatic Change:
Parallel Approaches to Work**

There are multiple areas of carry-over between the Feldenkrais Method and Organization Development:

Organizational Development:	Awareness through Movement:
• Change: how to shift strategic direction	• Understanding choice - the importance of reversibility in movement
• Organizational Design	• Differentiation and integration/ How parts affect the whole
• Leverage in systems change	• Generating action from different places / Shifts in perspective (attentional shifts)
• Process awareness/ Redesigning work	• Exploring small differences
• Designing change processes	• How effort (and ease) impact learning
• Creating a “learning organization”	• Eliciting the unknown

2. People pick up on our tension and anxiety, even though *they* may not know it.
3. Our own level of tension or comfort in our bodies as we lead or facilitate a group affects what we experience as tension *within* the group that we are working with.
4. Our personal experience with trying to change ourselves strongly colors our beliefs about the ease or difficulty of change.

If we haven't been exposed to, or used the methods that actually exist, we still conclude global things like "change is painful", "change is always difficult".

5. We typically treat our bodies as things that transport us around, need to be groomed and fed (rather like a horse), but are not conscious or really part of our consciousness. This is a domination approach. What if we assumed our physical selves were just that — that part of ourselves that exists in physical form? The physical self may have its own memory and awareness, and simply need to be listened to in order to be part of our team.

Conclusion:

What is Our Purpose, After All?

If change is making people crazy, perhaps our approach to it is part of the problem. By encouraging people to strive for breakthrough rather than evolutionary change, we goad them into changes that are difficult to integrate into the current functioning of the organization. Instead of struggling for breakthroughs, we could work for smaller changes, ones that stay within people's comfort zones, are gentle, and have a slow, steady momentum.

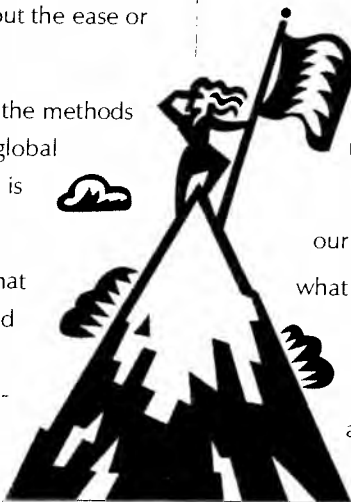
We cause some of the difficulty we think is inherent in change by the ways we think about ourselves, our work, and our

organizations. For instance, our models of reality add rigidity and boxiness (e.g., an org chart). We intensify this by designing physical layouts for work within buildings (cubes) that mirror the "boxy" notions we have about what an organization is. Then, we create both management processes for the workplace with little or no attention to movement, to a sense of organic flow. Instead, we focus on schedules, structures and attempts to measure success by quantifying mechanical changes.

A new paradigm for change should ground our understanding of organizational change in what is known about human change and learning in the field of somatics. This would make our "change initiatives" more grounded, since after all, it is *people* who form organizations. We could create interventions that allow people to experience change as intrinsically easy and pleasant, rather than as painful.


This means that businesses could still use "change management" as a source of increased effectiveness and productivity. However, the nature of the work would shift in emphasis from planning large, scheduled change programs that "drives change through the organization" to interventions that:

- enable people throughout an organization to experience themselves as somatic beings and use this as the ground for improving their decisions;
- help managers support people's learning in an atmosphere of both challenge (as now) *and* play;
- create physical work environments which help people feel great while working — environments that people do not just tolerate, but enjoy and experience as genuine expressions of the values and culture of their organizations;
- help everyone understand the needs of the customer and the key work of the



A new paradigm for change should ground our understanding of organizational change in what is known about human change and learning in the field of somatics. This would make our "change initiatives" more grounded...

organization through differentiated exploration of its processes grounded in metaphors of movement and life.

We can use our experience with somatics to shift some of the approaches that have lead us down a path that we did not intend. Many people throughout the worlds of business, education, and government are now struggling with overwhelming change which leaves them feeling that their lives are out of control. The paradigm of embodied change would provide new perspectives and tools for eliciting fundamental change that does not damage — but rather enhances — the quality of their lives. When people experience themselves and their organizations as evolutionary, embodied networks instead of as static structures requiring force for change, major transformations might become possible. 

FOOTNOTES

¹Somatics is a young science that studies human beings as "soma" — i.e., embodied beings.

²Ultimately, we will want to develop a somatic model that is based on what is known via the multiple disciplines that have a solid basis within the field of somatics, such as *Feldenkrais*[®], *Rolfing*, and *Alexander* work.

³ K. Dannemiller and R.W. Jacobs, *Changing the Way Organizations Change: A Revolution in Common Sense*. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 1992, 28, 480-498.

Kathryn L. Goldman is President of Coherent Change Management in San Francisco, CA. She has over twenty years of experience in individual and organizational development.

Dr. Goldman focuses primarily on helping organizations to develop and implement systemic change. Both as an internal consultant and in her firm, she had worked internationally and supported senior management in building corporate cultures that bring out the best in people.

Earlier in her career, Dr. Goldman created a college-credit experiential program in human development, designed and presented courses in organizational behavior and development for an international MBA program, and led workshops in leadership, career development, group dynamics, and stress management for companies and universities across the United States. She also taught U.S. and Allied Military officers at the Naval Postgraduate School.

Her experience is grounded in extensive training and education in the fields of psychology, sociology, human development, and systems thinking. She earned her doctorate from Columbia University, is certified as a Clinical Sociologist by the Sociological Practice Association, and trained personally with Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, one of the pioneers in the field of somatics. Her writing has appeared in a wide variety of publications. Dr. Goldman makes numerous presentations at professional conferences on human behavior and organizational transformation.