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# BeWeDō:<sup>®</sup> Co-creating Possibilities with Movement

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Massey Business School, Department of Management  
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Mark Bradford, 2015

# Dedication

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This thesis is dedicated to Jay and our daughter Ella.

Thank you for always being there, and keeping me #moving forward.

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# Abstract

One of the main challenges in contemporary creative practice is shifting beyond collaborative thinking to more relational ways of engaging co-operatively with each other. The interdisciplinary research focused on investigating how can the movement practices of the Japanese martial art of Aikidō facilitate leadership development for co-creation. This research synthesised diverse literatures focussed on aikidoka, leadership development, and creative modes of practice as processes *in action* and *in relation* to collective creativity and the context of co-creation within the experience economy.

The Aikidō principle of *aiki* was used as a theoretical framework where experiential knowing – anchored in relational processes – focused on engaging my body and its experiences as a site of learning and a participatory way of knowing. This design-led ethnography combined autoethnography and visual ethnography through two Phases of fieldwork. The findings from Phase One highlighted four concepts *zanshin*, *hipparu*, *extension*, and *common center*, which were blended into the BeWeDō® conceptual framework. The BeWeDō® framework was investigated experientially in a series of workshops as part of Phase Two. The workshops involved me being immersed in a relational leadership process which encouraged participants to be in the moment and generate co-creative movement. Six key themes emerged: Aikidō is not BeWeDō®; BeWeDō® is more than collaboration; Aiki involves

“the two of us”; an aiki approach invites co-operation; BeWeDō® positions the body to lead co-creative movement; and BeWeDō® moves the conversation to a different place.

This research is the first to investigate how Aikidō movement practices can facilitate leadership development for co-creation. Beyond the influential act of an individual or individuals, the BeWeDō® framework is a relational leadership approach founded on the idea that individuals are constituted by social processes: a new way of *co-creating possibilities* to facilitate leadership development specifically for co-creation. BeWeDō® is a unique co-creation experience innovation. Furthermore, BeWeDō® extends beyond notions of embodied leadership and embraces the role of *emplacement* for transforming co-creative possibilities.

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# Glossary

**Aiki:** For the founder of Aikidō Morihei Ueshiba (2010): “Aiki is the way we live and how we progress” (p. 65).

**Aikidō:** A Japanese martial art developed in the 1920s by Morihei Ueshiba.

**Aikidoka:** A practitioner of Aikidō.

**Aikidō Shinryukan:** A style of Aikikai.

**Aikikai:** The traditional style of Aikidō most closely associated with Morihei Ueshiba.

**Awase:** Harmonious blended movement with one’s training partner.

**Ayumi Ashi:** Basic (walking) step.

**Bokken:** Wooden practice sword.

**Dan:** An advanced Aikidō rank. A rank above kyu. Shodan is the first level; nidan the second; sandan the third; yodan the fourth.

**Dō:** Path or way of life.

**Dōjō:** A place for enlightenment, understanding, and training.

**Doshu:** Title denoting the head of the Aikikai.

**Gaku:** Calligraphy.

**Gasshuku:** Japanese word describing an extended Aikidō training session where aikidoka come together for a limited time to learn collectively from each other.

**Gi:** The regular white training uniform worn in Aikidō.

**Hakama:** Divided skirt worn over the gi by senior students.

**Hanmi:** The triangular stance used in Aikidō.

**Irimi:** An act or movement to enter (step) inward towards your partner.

**Jiyu-waza:** A form of free-style practice using a specific set of techniques at various speeds with multiple attackers.

**Jo:** A wooden practice staff.

**Kamae:** Posture or stance.

**Keiko:** Japanese word meaning to train in Aikidō with a focused mindset.

**Ki:** Spirit, mind, heart; energy. Word popularised in the Aikidō context by Sensei Koichi Tohei.

**Kokyu-Ho:** Aikidō techniques combining 'breath power' and timing.

**Kyu:** Class, level, grade or rank. A series of Aikidō rankings below Dan.

**Ma-ai:** Harmonious distance.

**Musubi:** The study of good communication.

**Nage:** Aikidoka who performs Aikidō techniques. The opposite is uke.

**One-Point:** Another word for what aikidoka refer to as their 'center.'

**O'Sensei:** Great teacher.

**Randori:** A free-style practice where an aikidoka defends against multiple attackers who may attack using any techniques they desire.

**Sabaki:** Body movement.

**Seiza:** A formal Japanese kneeling position.

**Sensei:** Aikidō Instructor or teacher.

**Shihan:** The title given by the World Aikidō Headquarters to a master instructor or professor of Aikidō.

**Shomen:** Front, or focal point of the dōjō, where important symbols are placed or hung.

**Shomenuchi:** Empty hand strike to the front of the head.

**Tai no henko:** Basic body movement exercise that teaches aikidoka the basics for redirecting an attack.

**Takamusu Aiki:** For Morihei Ueshiba (2010), takemusu aiki meant the "boldest and most creative life possible" (p. 141).

**Tantō:** A Japanese knife.

**Tenkan:** A pivot turn or movement of 180 degrees often executed as part of a technique.

**Tenshin:** A sweeping body turn used in a technique.

**Titami:** A type of mat used as a flooring material in a traditional dōjō. These ranged from more traditional canvas-covered or uncovered rice-straw padding, through to wrestling mats and foam-rubber mats.

**Uke:** The aikidoka who initiates the attack and receives Aikidō techniques. The opposite is nage.

**Ukemi:** Methods of rolling, and somersaulting safely.

**Unsoku:** Foot movement.

**Waza:** Technique.