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# Contemplation in Leadership and Leadership Development

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## Abstract

Social and cultural change has impacted upon traditional religious activity, compliance, and fulfilment, opening opportunities for individuals to engage in a more spiritual orientation to both their inner and outer 'self'. In parallel, social change has exposed individuals to a wider array of contemplative, spiritual practises, intensifying the quest for meaning and understanding in both asking and answering existential questions. At the same time, the intensity of activity in the World beyond self increases pressure and inherent complexity in engaging with others in meaningful ways.

Addressing these contemporary challenges and enhancing interconnectedness, between inner and outer self, and between self and others, demands conscious choices concerning contemplative practice whilst recognising the pervasive impact upon whole-life experiences. Contemplative practice and spirituality cannot be 'compartmentalised' enabling impacts and outcomes to be brought into play in certain situations but ignored or over-ridden in others. Throughout life individuals continuously move between roles as managers, leaders, and followers, but the advantages and disadvantages are brought sharply into relief for those who occupy formal or informal roles within organisational settings.

Based upon participant observation and autoethnography, the authors reflect upon their personal experiences within the context of Christian spirituality to illustrate the benefits accruing to individuals, especially in terms of interconnectedness, wellbeing, and leadership activity from engaging in contemplative practice. Unusually, reflecting autoethnography as the principal research methodology has facilitated much of the discussion and empirical, practical sections of the paper to be written in the first person. Core outcomes indicate that benefits derive from engagement in mindfulness and embodiment with either a theistic or non-theistic foundation.

## Introduction

Since 19<sup>th</sup> Century, theory held that social change, labelled 'modernisation', in an increasingly industrialised society led to secularisation with religion losing its importance and power (Norris and Inglehart, 2004, p.3). Secularisation theory held sway throughout almost the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century until Berger (1999, p.2), formerly an advocate of secularisation theory, observed that the contemporary World was "*...as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.*" indicating that accepted theory was incorrect. McClean (2014) observes that Rorty in his early writings viewed religion as a 'conversation stopper' and later he admits that religion is part of life and has public importance. In the early twenty-first century Heelas and Woodhead (2005, p.2-6) noted changing perceptions of institutionalised religion and spirituality, which they attributed to social and cultural change. The changes observed by Heelas and Woodhead did not necessarily indicate decline but rather a shift away from formalised religion towards personal, free-form spirituality. Changing perceptions brought recognition that institution-centred life, based upon externally prescribed roles (Parsons, 1971), no longer satisfies in comparison to a person-centred life.

Individuals therefore seek emancipation from subjugation by 'the system' underpinning society, and additionally, from institutionalised religion centred upon human-mediated/human created doctrine and praxis. Paradoxically, theistic spirituality may still entail subjugation to the deity, albeit based on an intense, personal relationship (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p.5). However, spirituality, self-expression of the belief in the divine, and an intimate, personal, relationship with the deity, offer emancipation through the cultivation of a personal, subjective life. There is more to self than adherence to prescribed norms, and self has more to offer others than prescribed, institutionalised roles permit. Contemplative practice and enacted spirituality facilitates the cultivation of an interconnection between inner and outer life and development of the whole self. Independent and/or collective contemplative practice empowers individuals and/or groups who may then extend connectivity beyond the whole self to others, facilitating understanding, meaning, sharing, and value in reciprocal relationships.

Contemporary organisations play a pivotal role in maintaining the fundamental fabric of society: longevity and attainment of common purpose are crucial. Increasing integration of management and leadership in both organisations and society suggests that a leader's ability to influence, facilitate, and nurture personal development of themselves and their subordinates / colleagues is more powerful than the traditional manager's formal hierarchical authority. The discourses of management and of leadership are fundamentally rational, reifying organisations and dealing with an objective reality in which the primacy of 'organisational objectives' typically expressed in quantifiable economic terms is heavily emphasised. The dominant belief, summarised using objective, rational vocabulary, is that managers and/or leaders need to be equipped with tools and techniques, skills and competences, that can be applied instrumentally to ensure achievement of the 'common' task the most effective and efficient manner. The place of human beings, human nature, and the human condition is largely ignored, and there seems little room for religion and/or spirituality in organisations. However, attempts have been made to acknowledge the impact of spirituality in the workplace. Dent *et al.* (2005) for example identified eight areas of difference and/or distinction in the workplace spirituality literature. Pruzan and Pruzan-Mikkalsen (2007) conducted a five year global project and interviewed 31 top executives from 15 countries in 6 continents. The life stories recounted in their text illustrate how spirituality and rationality go hand-in-hand in business and in life. Bell and Taylor (2004) set out to identify the theoretical foundations and practical features of spiritual management development and found that by defining managerial identity in terms of the inner self puts the responsibility for change on the individual.

The documented origins of spirituality in work-based settings can be traced to 1920's. However, increasing interest in the relationships between spirituality, business, management, and leadership gave rise to a new term 'organisational spirituality' in the 1990's (Poole, 2009). Yet, thirty years of research has not succeeded in developing an accepted consensus on definitive relationships, or definitions of either of the principal elements; organisation(s) or spirituality (Miller and Ewest, 2013). Published research is often undertaken within the rational, positivistic, empirical, deductive tradition (see for example, Petchsawang and Duchon, 2008) with an emphasis on establishing whether organisational spirituality has an impact upon organisational performance, typically expressed in the 'conventional' form of net profit, turnover, productivity, and so on. The underpinning philosophical position is that spirituality 'ought' to be one more management tool or technique that can be simply added to, or injected into, an organisation in an instrumental manner and that its impact will be identifiable in rational, economic, quantifiable terms. Setting aside the methodological difficulties of establishing causality, and directions of causality, in a multi-influence scenario, and the need for proxy measures to represent intangible beliefs and experiences such as spirituality, this perspective discounts the realisation that spirituality is one of humankind's defining characteristics and lies at the heart of the human condition.

At the core of this paper is the overriding question of whether, and if so, how, where, and why contemplative practice and spirituality enhance leadership. The aims are firstly, to review the value of contemplative practice for followers, leaders, and managers; secondly, to illustrate the personal contemplative practice of the authors in the context of Christian spirituality; and thirdly, to reflect on the transferability of personal contemplative practice in both non-Christian and non-theistic spirituality and contexts.

## Methodology

The emergence of spirituality in workplace settings as a serious subject for academic investigation presents a number of challenges. Just as there is little consensus on exactly what constitutes spirituality, there is little consensus on which research paradigms and methodologies are best suited to investigating the phenomenon although the mainstream paradigm appears to be functionalist, grounded in realist ontology and positivistic epistemology (Lips-Wiersma and Mills, 2014). Exploring spirituality in the workplace from a functionalist perspective (see for example Petchsawang and Duchon, 2012) underlines the basic assumption that it is considered to be yet another instrumental tool for management to manipulate behaviour, directly affecting organisational performance. This assumption ignores impacts upon the research undertaken, the findings arising from diversity amongst the workforce, and the inherent pluralism of belief and faith in a multi-ethnic population. There are clear difficulties in operationalising variables measuring spirituality when seeking to conduct hypothetico-deductive research and typically, proxy measures are adopted: for example, Duchon and Plowman (2005) use three components of workplace spirituality; inner life, meaningful work, and community, in their study. Additionally, a functionalist perspective misses significant elements of spirituality, for example, wisdom, which are more appropriately researched through applied phronesis (Flyybjerg *et al.*, 2012) embracing an interpretive paradigm within nominalist ontology and anti-positivist epistemology. In an organisational context, phronesis, or practical wisdom, is the vehicle through which espoused values become enacted reality (Grant and McGhee, 2012) whilst McKenna *et al.* (2009) show that wisdom is fundamental to effective leadership.

Mainstream spirituality literature shows contemporary spirituality to be grounded in constructionist ontology and interpretive epistemology. In completing a survey of extant literature Bartlett (2003) notes a gap between theory and practice which indicates a lack of attention to reasoning and weak research methodologies. Lynn *et al.* (2009) identify the need to explore spirituality, belief, and practice as an integrated whole rather than as separate constructs. They continue, noting that spirituality reflects pluralism and integration in multi-faith contexts and whilst standardised processes facilitate accurate inter-study comparisons, it is important that research methodologies fully reflect context. To further understand spirituality in organisations research paradigms are needed which avoid linking existential meaning to economic and/or material outcomes (Driver, 2007). She continues that there is a need for emancipation to liberate research in spirituality in organisations from the pressure to assess and validate performative measures. In addition, reflexivity is essential in recognising the co-constructed nature of organisational and individual existential meaning making.

McIntosh (1998, p.10) notes that shifting attention towards personal experience has led to a move away from modernist scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century toward multidisciplinary, anthropological and psychological forms in more recent times. The triune God is not something objective which can be subjected to academic scrutiny in the traditional modernist sense. We cannot take a sample of God and subject it to rigorous scientific analysis: none of the latest 'natural science' techniques can offer useful data.

The research paradigm underpinning this paper is grounded within nominalist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. Nominalism regards reality as a projection of our consciousness and cognitive processes, having no existence independent of human interpretation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Subjectivism regards all knowledge as being value and theory-laden: there is no objective, neutral stance that enables phenomena to be observed and experienced independently and dispassionately (Wittgenstein, 1921). Hence, the discussion recognises the socially constructed nature of phenomena, although it is acknowledged that contemplative practice and spirituality have been researched from the diametrically opposed positions within realist ontology and objective epistemology.

Naturally, reviewing extant literature provides a conceptual foundation, but empirical analysis and discussion of practical issues and dimensions are grounded principally upon autoethnography and participant observation. Ethnography is founded upon the researcher immersing themselves in a particular social setting or context for an extended period of time in order to gain an appreciation of the relevant behaviour, culture, and sub-cultures. Based on the belief that being an 'insider' privileges superior access compared to merely standing outside and looking in, participant observation is a principal data collection approach in ethnography. This ensures that outcomes arise from activity in the present rather than being limited to reliance on retrospective accounts. The result is an extremely detailed account based on comprehensive analysis; so much so that the account itself is often known as 'an ethnography'.

We extend to autoethnography because we believe that whilst autoethnography shares all the strengths (and weaknesses) of ethnography; being active rather than passive, involvement NOT detachment, facilitating understandings of social meaning within ordinary 'day-to-day' activity, appreciating other people's realities (Watson, 1994), overcoming externally imposed meaning, being grounded in naturalism versus reliance upon unstructured data, ethical considerations when covert research is undertaken, and making no claim of neutral representationalism; experience overrides field notes because our personal engagement is a legitimate source of data. However, whilst we seek to concur with Ellis and Bochner (2000) that our account must extend beyond merely informing the reader to demonstrating to the reader, and we ensure that we avoid the frequently cited criticism that autoethnography blends research with writing as fiction (the writer's own experience is used as the basis for preparing a novel that sparks an emotional experience for the reader; Holman and Jones [2005]), we must acknowledge the presence of emotional involvement in the activities we report. Naturally, our presence has an impact on others and vice versa. Recognising the inevitable criticisms of first-person methodologies (Varela and Shear, 1999) we seek to transcend isolation and make connections to underpin the potential of experiential outcomes for others.

### **Spirituality and Contemplative Practice**

The inherent difficulty of finding appropriate vocabulary to describe and discuss spirituality is demonstrated in the plethora of different definitions, nuances, and meanings which are attached to the term. "Spirit" and "spirituality" have different meanings for different people in different cultures (McSherry and Cash, 2004) although etymological analysis indicates the original meaning of 'spirit' in many ancient philosophical and religious traditions, both West and East, is the breath of life (Capra, 2003). Often connected with religion, although some authors attempt clear differentiation, spirituality contrasts with traditional academic, rational, analytical, theological stances towards religion because it is much more than merely a listing of core beliefs and/or key statements of practice (McGrath, 2001 p.146-147). It is the lived experience of God, transforming lives in prayer and action, but crucially, for McGrath, it is not separate from theological beliefs.

The breadth and depth of constituent elements in contemplative practice also means that a concise, tightly bounded definition would simply not be sufficiently inclusive to enable consensus to emerge. Duerr (2004) developed a conceptual model to illustrate the relationships between the roots of contemplative practice in awareness, communication, and connection and the multiple branches (active, creative, generative, movement, relational, ritual/cyclical, and stillness) which categorise approaches adopted by participants. The model summarises the multiple routes taken by practitioners in nourishing the soul, overcoming the distractions of everyday living, and centring themselves on whatever is most meaningful to and for themselves. Naturally, a first-person focus develops, which must not be confused with selfishness. Rather, the contemplative practitioner cultivates a more profound understanding of meaning, purpose, and value in life arising from enhanced capabilities for deep concentration and a quieter mind. The outcome is recognised in interpersonal communication, empathetic connectedness with others and compassion.

Unfortunately, there is pervasive confusion between spirituality and religion which sometimes blurs the clarity of focus and challenges the validity and reliability of outcomes from empirical research. Religion is regarded as a system emphasising a formalised relationship to a higher being, existential questions, codification in creedal form, communal/congregational celebration forming emotional bonds, celebration of rites that ensure continuity and inter-generational transfer (e.g. Graafland and van der Duijn Schouten, 2007). The religious individual adheres to the doctrines of one of the mainstream religions, for example, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and follows the practice routines established by one of the religious organisations encompassed within the religion – the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the temple, the mosque, and so on (Longenecker *et al.*, 2004).

On the other hand spirituality is seen as a personal relationship to the higher, transcendent something (not necessarily a being; perhaps a source of energy or a force) in finding the ultimate purpose in life. There is a concentration upon Judaic, Christian, Islamic and New Age spiritualities in extant literature. The first three assume a strong tie between organised religion and personal spiritual experience. New Age spirituality does not have a defined religious foundation and appears more liberated in concept and practice with more flexible approaches to explaining links to morality and ethics.

For Ashley (2005, p.159-160) spirituality represents the articulation in practical action of the influence of God. The European Spirituality in Economics and Society (SPES) Forum defined spirituality as: “...people’s multiform search for the deep meaning of life that interconnects them to all living beings and to ‘God’ or Ultimate Reality...” (Zsolnai, 2015, p.4). Tacey (2004) regards spirituality as seeking “...a sensitive, contemplative relationship with the sacred and [consequently it] is able to sustain levels of uncertainty in its quest because respect for mystery is paramount.” (p.11) and he continues to argue that it reflects something “... non-empirical and hidden...” that challenges “...reason and enshrined logic and science...” (p.18). Schneiders (2005a, p.1) defines [contemporary?] spirituality *per se* as “...conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.” Downey (1997, p.15) draws extensively upon Schneiders’ earlier work when defining spirituality as: “...a way of consciously striving to integrate one’s life through self-transcending knowledge, freedom and love in light of the highest values perceived and pursued.” For McGrath (1999, p.2) spirituality is explicitly associated with “...the quest for a fulfilled and authentic religious life...” and has developed to focus upon the “...interior, individual experiences of believers.”

Several attempts have been made to categorise definitions of spirituality, but the link to contemplative practice remains obfuscated despite Ashar and Lane-Mather (2004, p.253) view “...an innate and universal search for transcendent meaning in one’s life.” which seems closely aligned with a personal perspective. Grant *et al.* (2004); Hart and Brady (2005); King

(2007); and Vos and Barker (2007); all refer to a relationship with God as the crucial core of spirituality. Pava (2003) explicitly points out that whilst this is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition to define spirituality. In other words individuals who may not be considered spiritual may also have a relationship with God and spirituality is based upon more than a personal relationship with God. Three distinct categories of definition can be readily identified. Firstly, associating spirituality with deity; for example, Brown (2003) cites Gibbons' (1999) religious spirituality whilst Hill *et al.*, 2000, cite Spilka's (1993) God-orientated category of spirituality as characterising this view. Deity is perceived to be a universal force which humans are capable of experiencing as a power within their inner being. Secondly, spirituality need not be, and is not, associated with deity, which corresponds to Gibbons' (1999) secular spirituality (cited in Brown, 2003) and closely parallels Spilka's (1993) World-orientated and humanistic perspectives (cited in Hill *et al.*, 2000). Thirdly, the largest group does not specifically mention deity; for example, Cavanagh and Bandsuch (2002, p.109-110) include defining spirituality as a worldview together with a path to achieve or to live that view in their list of terms defining spirituality and moral habits. Not referring explicitly to deity may be an indication of simply accepting, or rejecting, an association as normative and deserving no further comment, or may be a deliberate statement that their specific use of the term 'spirituality' is equally valid whether or not associated with a higher power. In practice, however, the vocabulary used tends to imply an association.

Contemporary perspectives of spirituality strongly emphasise its intrinsic quality and characteristics: spirituality is "... one's striving for and experience of connection with oneself, connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcendent." (Meezenbroek *et al.*, 2012 p.338). It is both an intensely personal and active construct: embracing personal characteristics; beliefs, experiences, feelings, perceptions, and processes which help the individual to develop or maintain their spirituality. Additionally, behaviour or manifestations of the influence of spirituality upon the way in which the individual lives their life, relates to others are also included. Spirituality emphasises connectedness to the transcendent in the quest for answers to existential questions and meaning of life, in influencing the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of individuals (Sheldrake, 2005). It is something which permeates an individual's whole of life but does not necessarily require ritualistic expression, often associated with formal religion. It is inseparable from the self and cannot simply be 'left behind' in the course of changing activities, such as the daily occurrence of moving from home life to work life, and therefore, the workplace should also be an arena for spiritual growth. Whilst spirituality is almost exclusively regarded as an individual, personal phenomenon, it is recognised that a grouping of individuals, such as an organisation, may share common elements. Many of the key principles identified are also reflected in definitions that embrace spirituality as a process: *"The unique and personal inner experience of and search for the fullest personal development through participation into the transcendent mystery. It always involves a sense of belonging to a greater whole, and a sense of longing for a more complete fulfilment through touching the greater mystery (which in tradition I call God). My test of authenticity is the extent to which progress in the spirit of journey manifests itself in loving and compassionate service."* (Delbecq, 1999 p.345). The nature of spirituality as a process is clear in involving a relationship with God in a spiritual journey toward personal development, transcendence, integration, and living a life guided by the Spirit in service of others.

Contemporary spirituality has evolved from traditional spirituality and has four key elements:

- a) It is all-embracing and not exclusively associated with any one (Christian) tradition;
- b) It is not the prescriptive application of absolute or dogmatic principles;
- c) It is concerned with the complex mystery of human growth in the context of a living relationship with God;
- d) It is concerned with interior life and integration of all aspects of human life and experience (Sheldrake, 1995 p.58).

Irrespective of the spiritual tradition or religion one draws upon, spirituality requires an individual willingness to explore oneself (Whitehead, 1926) and reflect on one's own actions and experiences (Collins and Kakabadse, 2006). This neither explicitly includes nor excludes experience taking place within a group or organisational context as a manager or subordinate, or as a leader or a 'follower'. Given the pervasiveness of organisations in our lives, it is highly likely that at least some of the practical action occurring as the articulation of the influence of God will take place in association with organisations.

Steingard and Fitzgibbons (2004) sought to develop a theory of management and spirituality based on an attempt to integrate one of the leading conceptual portrayals of organisation theory, Burrell and Morgan's 1979 matrix linking organisational analysis and sociological paradigms, with Wilber's (1997) integral philosophy. The theory linked empirical 'outside' behaviour and 'interior' phenomenological experience when researching management rather than assuming an instrumental 'applied' relationship between spirituality and management. Management is no longer considered to be isolated in the material world but is 'whole' with body, mind, emotion, and spirit functioning holistically. Movement towards transcendence does not equate with detachment but instead, facilitates a 'both-and', rather than an 'either-or', view of management dilemmas.

In a further development, Steingard (2005) pursued links between theories of spirituality and theories of management. He proposed a model that integrated dimensions drawn from both fields with a view to emphasising the transformative rather than the translative aspects of integration. Spirituality is concerned mainly with driving a more meaningful, moral and enlightened management that fully incorporates individuals need for contributing towards a just society. The concept is founded upon dualities: traditional management is perceived as primarily material, objective and reductionist, and sense-data driven in focusing upon prediction and control. In contrast, spiritually-informed management is, naturally, primarily spiritual, holistic, and transcendent (of self). Other dualities concern the dichotomy between conscious and unconscious awareness, translation (understanding) versus transformation (action), and temporal versus perennial manifestation. Spiritual management is founded upon three basic pillars: experience of reality beyond sense data that transforms understanding of material reality; financial and environmental sustainability; and fruitful ethical balance that is spiritually meaningful and fulfilling for stakeholders. Steingard's research clearly show that the integration of spirituality into organisations must be emergent, a natural reflection of the beliefs of stakeholders. Instrumental perspectives emphasising intervention by managers / leaders is not authentic with the manager / leader's role being that of a facilitator not a director; the director is God.

## **Leadership and Leadership Development**

Effective leadership entails facilitating others to maximise their potential whilst simultaneously ensuring that collective purposes are achieved. There is a range of differing contexts in which effective leadership may be practiced, from entirely formal to completely informal situations. Over time, context is dynamic and whether the principal focus is the leader (or leadership team) or a situation, the individuals, the roles and circumstances in which they act, and interrelationships between players and influences, exist in an ever-changing, complex milieu.

In the context of Christian spirituality, there are two primary functions of business organisations, firstly, to produce goods and services for the benefit of humankind and secondly, to provide work for humankind to express God-given capacities for productivity and creativity. Naughton and Alfredo (2012, pp.41-45) asserts that business leaders have a duty to respect both human dignity and the common good. Businesses are uni-dimensional activities with the purpose to offer needed goods and services to customers; organise good and productive work for employees; create wealth and distribute it justly. These sentiments



were further reinforced by Pope Francis (2015, para.129, p.96) who argues that: “*Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the areas in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good.*” Leadership and leadership development must recognise that humankind is entrusted with a stewardship role with respect to all creation by appreciating honesty and respect and practicing morality in the business community. A top priority of Christian ethics is that we treat our customers, our employees, our personnel with dignity.

Schwartz (2006) seeks to bring together concepts from both spirituality/religion and business by putting forward the proposition that God should be considered a stakeholder in all organisations. The central question remains whether the perceived benefits can be shown to exist in a material, rational, positivistic manner that would be meaningful to secular business managers. In reality, those most likely to accept Schwartz’s argument are probably already spiritual/religious in their orientation and would accept the study as confirming their already-held beliefs and faith. Leaders who engage in contemplative practice and/or spirituality tend to be more aware of the needs of others for meaningful work and the desire for self-actualisation amongst their colleagues. This facilitates connectivity to others and, in a Christian context, enables them to lead in accordance with the two great commandments: to love God and to love others.

Driver (2007) turns attention to the socially constructed nature of meaning in organisations. Humankind is invariably and inevitably spiritual, actively searching for meaning and purpose to life in the face of unanswerable existential questions. The search for meaning embraces work life as well as everyday life and consequentially, the place and role of spirituality in work organisations simply cannot be ignored.

There is a correlation between spiritual orientation, existential questions, and intrinsic motivation with De Klerk (2009) drawing attention to the importance of differentiating between meaning in life, meaning of life, meaning of work and meaningful work. Meaning in life is not synonymous with spirituality. Work does not have to be central to a person’s life to experience meaning in life. Work values only correlate with meaning in life when work is central to a person’s life. Confirmation of a positive relationship between meaningful work, a sense of community, alignment with organisational values and commitment, intention to leave, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement and organisation-based self-esteem is provided by Milliman *et al.* (2003). As economic progress brings prosperity and increasing security there is more time to consider higher order needs such as self-actualisation leading to increasing awareness of, and interest in, spirituality as a vehicle for accomplishing self-actualisation (Tischler, 1999).

Delbecq’s (1999) concentrates upon the impact of the Christian commandments to love God and love thy neighbour, and God’s call to leadership. These two commandments are central to Christian life, being common amongst all denominations and in all situations. Their influence upon spiritual business leaders and employees is that work is perceived as a calling to share in co-creation through business enterprise. This is variously described as enacting God’s will, taking part in caring for creation, being a fundamental obligation to use God-given talents, and so on. In itself this is an act of love of God and love of all creation. Additionally, love permeates all life and cannot be separated from the individual whatever role they happen to be fulfilling. Love of God for the individual imparts courage to see through the challenges and difficulties of leading business in turbulent times. God’s rule will come to pass, even though times may be difficult (van Duzer *et al.*, 2007).

Kennedy (2003, p.90) draws attention to the fact that all stakeholders are created in the image of God, are loved by God, and are destined to share in the joy of eternal life. Hence, managers must take responsibility for facilitating spiritual growth and the development of

spiritual goods and services. Clearly, the spiritual manager / leader is likely to fully embrace their spiritual responsibilities towards others - "*Spirituality is not something we can just tack on to management. If spirituality is on [in?] our nature, we will bring it with us when we manage.*" (Zsolnai, 2004 p.191).

Contemplative practice and spirituality may assist leaders who seek to achieve collective purposes whilst simultaneously maximising the potential of followers, irrespective of whether the leader's beliefs are shared by those with whom the leader is connected. Level 5 leaders keep the balance between the iron will and the humility of their character by regularly tapping into their inner resources through reflection and contemplation (Collins, 2001). Good leadership is continuously co-created by leaders and their followers, and is profoundly influenced by the purpose of the organisation and the context in which it exists; thus good leadership is a collective rather than an individual responsibility (Illes and Mathews, 2015). Nevertheless, despite some evidence of association between spirituality and motivation, commitment and personal performance, but there is considerable ambiguity concerning the role of leadership and management in facilitating spiritual growth and development.

Ciulla (2011) calls for "good" leaders who are not only effective in the traditional sense of maximising value for shareholders, but who are also ethical and carefully consider the interests of all stakeholders and pay attention to the long-term impact of their decisions. In essence, "good" in Ciulla's sense means reliable, trustworthy, sound, safe and effective. The good leader is expected to be fully present in the workplace, to be embodied and in touch with their higher purpose, emotionally intelligent, authentic, listen deeply, be prepared to show their weaknesses and ask for the support of others. Those leaders who meet these high expectations work for the common good and create strong communities, and although there are examples of embodied and morally sound leaders, there can be no doubt in the light of recent events in the contemporary World that they are in the minority.

Trusted leaders are the guardians of the values of an organisation. They go far beyond the surface of race, ethnicity, and gender, appreciate that people's internal characteristics are inferred from their observable qualities and so promote transparency (Eagly and Chin, 2010). By supporting inclusivity they release the energy of people and enlarge the human and intellectual capital of the employees. In a trusting environment, one where members of the organisation are committed to a shared purpose they play active roles both as leaders and as followers. Authentic leaders know themselves and this helps them to be effective and moral (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008) by leading by example.

Leaders can develop new habits (Ford and Harding, 2007) and stronger character by cultivating the inner, not only the outer, self (Kiel, 2015). McBain, *et al.* (2012) suggests that organisations spend between £1400 and £1700 per annum per person on leadership and management development programmes. However sophisticated development programmes, many at high-ranking institutions, cost much more but fail to produce changes in behaviour (Hills, 2013).

### **Value of Contemplative Practice**

The word 'contemplation', derived from Latin origins, means 'the action of looking thoughtfully at something for a long time', 'deep reflective thought', 'the state of being considered or planned' and 'religious meditation' (Tulloch, 1996). All these meanings indicate that contemplation by its nature requires one to slow down, to look inward, take up a 'detached observer' position and consider events of the past or future or simply 'be in the present moment' with an open mind, without any specific agenda. In contemplation one aims and tends to listen inwardly rather than argue rationally.

There are few opportunities in a busy day at work to quiet one's mind. The authors believe that setting up a personal practice, putting time aside in the day, preferably before or after going to work and allowing the focus to be on the internal rather than the external, creates a healthy balance in one's life. Following a rigidly prescribed process might work for some, whilst others prefer to find their own unique way to God.

In a contemplative state one has an opportunity to observe not only thoughts but also feelings and bodily sensations. Although one aims to commune with the divine or the higher self, contemplation is always embodied. In the slower pace one has the opportunity to pay attention to the more subtle signals that might arise in the body and carry valuable information. In this space one can feel connected to all in the universe and feel blessed to be alive.

Faith, for the authors, is grounded in our unshakable belief in God and the revelation of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that epistemologically our belief, and necessarily the beliefs of fellow Christians, does not meet accepted ontological modernist criteria for independently verifiable 'truth' but nevertheless, our acceptance of the validity of Christian creeds and divine revelation are the cornerstone of our faith practices. These practices manifest in our quest to live our lives as 'enacted faith'; following the behaviour and adopting the attitudes advocated and outlined in the fundamental tenets of the Christian church, such as regular attendance at services and Mass, involvement in the Christian mission, and caring and sharing with others, especially those less fortunate than ourselves. We cannot separate our faith from the way in which we live our lives. Implicit in our faith is absolute trust in the promises which God has made to humankind whilst our faith practices strive to bring us closer to God through Jesus Christ in the absolute certainty of salvation. Our spirituality is necessarily deeply rooted in Christianity and concerns our life experiences of God in our drive for unity with the universal power and ultimate value. Our spiritual practices are also, without question, led by Christianity although recognising the existence of other faith/religion-based, or even non-theological, spiritual beliefs as equally valid. We believe our enacted spirituality, which is the outcome of deliberate, explicit thought and decision-making, stands as a counterpoint to the narrowness of elements of Christian faith. Taking a lead from the style and approach to ethnography in recounting examples of spirituality in action demonstrated by Thompson (2011, pp.163-170), we now seek to illustrate our faith and spiritual practices through the following vignettes.

The first author follows a simple Christian contemplative practice with a candle and now, writing in the first person, describes the routine. Every morning I place a small candle (a tea light) on the table in front of me, together with a Bible and a journal. First, I settle myself and say the Lord's Prayer followed by a personal prayer of gratitude. This prayer has standard elements such as: "*Thank you for my life, thank you for this day, thank you for my health, thank you for my children and the beauty in the world*". The prayer also has a more seasonal aspect when I give thanks to God for particular, recent, or unexpected blessings.

After these two prayers, in a period of silence I listen inwardly intently. I try to focus my eyes on the candle and let go of thoughts and feelings that seek to overtake the empty space within.

When the silence is almost tangible and I am inwardly focused, I read a passage from the Bible with true attention seeking for deeper understanding. There are occasions when I read something profoundly important and then I copy the quote into the journal/notebook; sometimes with comments for further meditation.

I allow about half an hour for this practise and have found over the years that this simple contemplation clears my mind, connects it with my heart, and felt senses: it sets me up for the challenges of the day ahead.

Over the years I noticed some significant changes in my attitudes and behaviours towards others. I started to become less judgemental and began to appreciate many different perspectives beyond my own. I became more patient and balanced both in my thoughts and actions. These changes had, and continue to have, significant impact on my work as a leadership developer. I have always been passionate about helping people to bring the best out of themselves. Contemplation made me realise that each life purpose is unique and it can only be discovered personally. The more I focus on bringing the best out of myself in every situation the more able I am to inspire others to search for purpose and meaning in their own hearts. Leaders with contemplative practices are soul nourished and have the awareness and capacity to nurture and appreciate others around them. As a leadership developer with a contemplative practice I am able to invite others to explore their inner world and identify the most suitable personal practice for clearing the mind and listening inwardly with intent.

The second author will now explain, also writing in the first person, two examples of personal contemplation; one regular but largely unstructured and the other in the context of a prayer group meeting for Bible study during Lent. I regularly go for long walks along the coast in the South of England. The beautiful scenery, the fresh air from the sea, and the closeness to nature slows down my thoughts and, no matter how I am feeling prior to beginning my walk, I quickly move into a meditative, contemplative frame of mind. The pressures of life recede and I observe the juxtaposition of human creation, in the village/town buildings, with God's creation in nature, the landscape, and particularly, the seascape that unfolds before me. No matter how often I walk or which specific route I take, I feel blessed and connected to nature and the divine. I know how lucky I am to have such a profound experience within easy grasp and I engage in silent prayer thanking the Lord for favouring me. My thoughts and prayers are completely free to roam. Sometimes I concentrate on World events; other times personal issues dominate, but my friends and family always feature.

In addition, whenever possible, I try to support those active in my local church community by taking part in formal, organised events. Every year, during the season of Lent Christians around the world prepare to mark Easter by remembering how Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness in preparation for beginning to undertake the Lord's work on Earth, including His death on the cross to atone for the sins which humankind had, were, and continue to perpetrate. In 2017, in my local community, Lent Bible study was dedicated to helping us/me enhance our journey towards the cross by developing a closer intimate relationship with the Lord. Six organised sessions, one per week during Lent provided a focus and an opportunity to interconnect with one another to share experiences and learn from others. A group leader, not necessarily a minister and in this particular instance, not from my church, was on hand to guide and facilitate – an example of leadership in action.

While reading well-known passages from the New Testament, discussing, and contemplating in the group I had the opportunity to grow my intellectual understanding of Christ's unconditional love for me/us into a heart-felt appreciation of everything that He does for me/us. In particular, in this scenario I observed at first hand the true meaning of the passage "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.*" (Matthew 18:20). It does not mean, of course, that the presence of Christ cannot be experienced in my own solitude or in a less formal setting; rather the presence of others facilitates connectedness. As Christians we/I believe that Christ is always with us, and that I am/we are all in Christ and He is inside us, all the time even when we are too busy to notice his presence.

On reflection, I observe that this type of group activity does require some personal preparation, and some facilitation, but the benefits are tangible. I considered my own emersion in the group, none of whom I had met before, and I felt that we connected and

integrated well. The leader was particularly effective in encouraging everyone to share experiences, beliefs, and thoughts, even when some participants waived a little from the central theme. The point was that the leader recognised their own desire for interconnection and struck an appropriate balance with collective task accomplishment. It was apparent that their skills in guiding, mentoring, and facilitating not only impacted upon the collective, but also on individuals. I learned a great deal, not just in the context of my understanding of the material selected for study during Lent, and my personal relationship with God, but also of how I might modify my leadership style, especially in the context of the students whose research work I supervise, to try and become more effective in guiding, mentoring and facilitating their learning and task achievement.

I recognise, of course, that in my capacity as a leadership developer my task is to expand the capacity of individuals to perform leadership roles within organizations and my personal reflective practice enables me to connect with others through growing capabilities. My role is NOT to instruct but to open minds and expand options facilitating others in their quest to create vision, and motivate their followers. My actions must be an exemplar, especially in listening and understanding. Generally, the actions of leadership developers help foster future leaders who will create a new future. My belief is that our actions should draw from our personal experience, more than from detached, impersonal research, whilst not understating the importance of accuracy and veracity in our interactions with others.

## Discussion

Our experiences, described above, illustrates in a small way that connectedness plays a crucial role in human life. Connectedness with the transcendent includes connectedness with something or someone beyond the human level, such as God, the universe, transcendent reality, a higher power, or consciousness. The term used is determined by cultural heritage, life experience and environment (Illes 2016). The level of connectedness includes feelings of oneness, awe, hope, joy, sacredness and adoration of the transcendent (Cook 2004, Meezenbroek *et al.*, 2012) and this can inform and influence our relationship with others and the environment. In Christianity for example, spirituality can mean seeking oneness with Christ's spirit; in Hinduism, spirituality is understood as connecting with the Atman, the eternal spirit that attains all human life, whilst appreciating and acknowledging Brahman, the spirit that maintains the universe.

We find that connectedness with ourselves/oneself is expressed through actions based on moral values, authenticity, inner harmony, self-knowledge, and search for meaning; thus confirming other studies (see for example, Elkins *et al.*, 1988; Young-Eisendrath and Miller 2000; Hungelmann *et al.*, 1985; Howden 1992; Mahoney and Graci 1999, Illes, 2012). Self-knowledge and connectedness with one's true self is the foundation for building meaningful relationships with others. The quest to "Know Thyself" has been an integral part of human development throughout history and the search is unique to the individual and one needs to make personal choices and discoveries on this journey. Connectedness to others and to nature can be expressed through compassion, caring, gratitude, selfless love, and wonder.

Effective leadership, motivated and practiced in love, requires humility and service; genuinely caring for others; and striving to demonstrate the achievement of goals, which, in Christian terms, are acceptable to the Lord. Our experience of leadership reveals enacted behaviour, informed by teaching of Jesus. Effective Christian leadership pivots on the two great commandments – *"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12: 28-31). Whilst we recognise and adhere to the Christian examples – either from Mark, as quoted, or from Matthew 22:35-40 or Luke 10:

25-28 – the origin of the commandment lies in Judaism, as quoted in the Old Testament – Deuteronomy 6: 4-5 and Leviticus 19:17-18. Although using different vocabulary and providing contextual settings, we are not aware of any religion or theistic spirituality that does not contain advice or instructions that embody identical meaning. All deities espouse similar values. Contemporary enactment of effective leadership therefore demands honesty, integrity, non-prejudicial judgement, and respect for others as the cornerstones in empowering others to maximise their potential and to grow continuously, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, socially, and in physical health. None of the Buddhist or mindfulness practices that we have experienced would undermine or otherwise require that we should amend our faith or spiritual practices, as described earlier.

Finally, our personal experience clearly illustrates the findings of studies which link contemplative practice and spirituality to health. Individuals who hold spiritual beliefs fare significantly better in mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems than those who are less spiritual. Spirituality has a direct, positive influence on the activity of the immune and endocrine systems that are critical for health maintenance and disease prevention (Koenig, 2012). Lipton (2015, p.68) states that “...*the cell's operations are primarily moulded by its interaction with the environment, not by its genetic code.*” and that our beliefs and the pressures of the environment have a direct impact on our health. Steindl-Rast (1990) characterizes spiritual experience as moments of heightened aliveness. Our spiritual moments are those moments when we feel most intensely alive. The aliveness felt during such 'peak experience', as psychologist Abraham Maslow called it, involves not only the body but also the mind. Buddhists refer to this heightened mental alertness as 'mindfulness', and they emphasize, interestingly, that mindfulness is deeply rooted in the body. Spirituality, then, is always embodied. We experience our spirit, as '*the fullness of mind and body...*' (Capra 2003, pp.58-59). Based on clinical trials and case study evidences, Siegel (2011, p.xiv) claims “*creating well-being – in our mental life, in our close relationships and even in our bodies is a learnable skill*”. Wellbeing emerges when connections are created and separate elements of the brain are linked together into a working whole.

We; the authors, have both commented to each other, and others, how our contemplative practice, either informal or formal, improves our mood and our feeling whilst also enhancing our physical capabilities. We experience contemplative practice and the enactment of our spirituality in constructionist ontology and interpret perceived outcomes through subjectivist epistemology. Physiological effects may be detected and measured objectively using appropriate monitoring equipment, but this would not establish causality and the nature of truth relies upon our faith. Nevertheless, our experience and inner feelings suggest that there is a direct impact on aspects of our physical well-being such as our heart rate, our blood pressure, and our breathing, but, for us, the major benefits and impacts are intangible. We feel nourished, spiritually, and this seems to impact upon our diet and physicality.

## **Conclusions**

Extant literature draws inference that spiritual leadership and organisational leadership may be congruent; at least sharing similar purposes of facilitating and nurturing personal development toward self-fulfilment. Leadership entails managing meaning i.e. facilitating shared understandings; the social construction of the life-world for the individual/group in either, or both, an organisational and a spiritual context. Difficulties may arise from pluralism which makes it unclear exactly what is valued within and by the organisation. Accommodative action can be integrated through skilful leadership but a major issue concerns the pervasiveness of a common spirituality versus the particularity of specific beliefs expressed narrowly by heterogeneous stakeholders. However, with an assumption of instrumentality, it is uncertain how individuals could be protected from abuse through

manipulation given the potential for pursuing economic objectives at the expense of personal aims.

Situating personal experience within extant literature, and comparing and contrasting perceived outcomes, the authors feel able to make the following assertions:

1. The quality of life for an individual, including enacting their leadership potential, is enhanced by taking time to engage in contemplative, personal reflective practice.
2. Emotional, non-rational dimensions within, and felt sense arising from, contemplative practice facilitate leaders enhancing characteristics of non-judgemental, non-confrontational, compassionate behaviour enabling humbleness in connectivity.
3. Connectedness facilitates seeing 'others' as yourself, - "*I am the other and the other is part of myself*" (Ricoeur, 1990) - whilst interconnectedness and connectedness with the Universe helps leaders to recognise a 'we are all in it together' (Palmer and Crawford, 2013) perspective.
4. Embodied leaders read signals from their consciousness and perception expanding personal space and appreciating enhanced inclusiveness, centred and intense listening, and truth. Effective leaders focus upon the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, understand what is not said as readily as understanding what is said, and projecting their truth onto others without confrontation, aggression, or personal attack.
5. Spiritual organisations create space for everyone to freely engage in their personal spiritual practice.
6. In 21<sup>st</sup> century others are frequently perceived and presented as a means to an end. Their well-being is ignored. However, striving to achieve God-inspired aims is for the benefit of all humankind. There is no explicit or intrinsic differentiation between being a good leader or a good manager and enacting the characteristics of a decent human being.

Contemporary leadership and leadership development both benefit from contemplative, spiritual practice, whether grounded in theistic faith or secular beliefs. Diversity and inherent pluralism necessarily raise uncertainty. However, leaders acting with love for others is pivotal and contemplative spiritual practice is the cornerstone of development, enactment, evaluation, improvement, and learning in any organisational context.

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