

A Psycho-Spiritual Model for Leadership Development

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Globalization and the dramatic rise of information technology (such as social media) have led to significant shifts in society and have radically changed the contexts in which many organizations operate. Recent research indicates that collaboration, co-creation and partnerships inside and outside of organizations are the best means for achieving success in the present environment and the near and distant future. (For various perspectives on these changes, please see Brafman & Beckstrom, Gobillot, Jironet, Li, and Shirky.) Successful leaders must create a heightened sense of their organization's potential for participating in an international landscape, create space for individuals in their organizations to contribute to this vision¹ and communicate the importance of this value throughout their organizations.

To meet this challenge successfully, leaders must not only become conscious of their own personality traits and the impact these have on others, they must also be competent at functioning in complex and diverse environments (Jironet, 2010). Leadership now means skillfully interacting with others on an equal footing and in partnership while remaining solidly based within one's own psyche.

The Need for a New Level of Leadership Consciousness

Through our work with senior executives at large and medium-sized companies in a variety of industries, we have become acutely aware of the need for this new concept of leadership. Many executives find traditional leadership questions irrelevant. The head of a large financial institution, for example, asked: "What am I supposed to lead *toward* when everything is up in the air and people under me are confused and mostly just tending to their own personal business?" A member of the Board of Directors of a large insurance company said bluntly: "I don't see how I can tell others what to do if I don't know what to do myself, and I don't hear anyone convincingly pointing me in any direction." These statements capture the general mood of disorientation and confusion among many leaders today. In addition, many executives speak about erratic and highly disruptive activities in their workplace that make them feel either hyperactive or deprived of initiative. Numerous executives find it difficult to manage their own energies let alone those of others and lack realistic perspectives on how to move forward. The time has come for a different approach in leadership development that enables leaders to face challenges with an internal sense of confidence. We call this a "new level of leadership consciousness," an inner transformation process to enable leaders to function comfortably in the challenging environments of today's complex world.

The Background of the Psycho-Spiritual Approach:

¹ See e.g., C.K. Prahalad, who concluded one of his last works, a column in the April 2010 Harvard Business Review with this thought: "Executives are constrained not by resources but by their imagination." R. Kaplan, together with D. Norton, introduced the Balanced Scorecard, a strategic management tool used worldwide. In *Stop Overdoing Your Strengths*, Kaplan warns that strengths taken too far become weaknesses and shows that to strike a balance between key leadership dualities, actions and motivations must be clearly identified.

Drawing on our professional trainings and decades of experience, we created a Psycho-Spiritual Model for leadership development that is derived primarily but not exclusively from the traditions of Sufism and Analytical Psychology.

We have also been influenced by the dialogues between quantum physicist David Bohm and the spiritual teacher Krishnamurti. In the early 1990's, Bohm and Krishnamurti formulated ideas on how to overcome the isolation, individualization and fragmentation characteristic of modern societies and bring about a greater degree wholeness, both individually and collectively. In *On Dialogue*, Bohm describes several methods that help create opportunities for positive change.² He advocates that when engaging in free dialogue, two or more people with equal status observe the following principles: listen to each other with detachment, suspend opinion and judgment, allow the free flow of thought and feeling, and accept and appreciate differing beliefs or understanding. When followed, these principles allow for surprising agreement and unity to emerge from widely disparate positions.

Drawing on these and other well-known teachings, our model for leadership development is rooted in a specific practice of psycho-spiritual guidance that proceeds in three phases: deep listening, close attunement and transformational shifts. The model teaches leaders how to use themselves as instruments for transformation and thus create and develop equal relationships between themselves and those around them, grasp and formulate surprising new outcomes and ideas, and manage the energies in groups of people as these emerge in free, open and creative settings.

Deep listening

When all your knowledge and resources for coping, planning a future and leading others in a common enterprise prove insufficient, you need to look for alternative ways of thinking, acting and living. This calls for a dramatic change, a fundamental transformation in attitude; a leap to another level of awareness and behavior, a radical shucking off of old habits of thought and behavior to make space for something new. Experiences from the past are deeply internalized, but an attempt must be made to put habitual patterns aside in order for new ones to emerge. Genuinely new and unprecedented insights and ideas can only materialize out of the dark background of consciousness, known as the unconscious. In the unconscious, there is a potential for awareness and insight that exists below the surface of ordinary consciousness. The psychologist Timothy D. Wilson writes about this as “discovering the adaptive unconscious.” These new ideas tend to emerge suddenly, like flashes of insight. Scientists from many disciplines have reported such sudden insights after long and deep contemplation of a problem, then falling asleep and suddenly awaking with the solution in mind. August Kekulé, for instance, claimed that the notion of the structure of the benzene ring struck him during a daydream in which he saw an ouroboros, a snake swallowing its own tail.

² The theories established by Krishnamurti and Bohm have also influenced Appreciative Inquiry, and especially MIT's Center for Organizational Learning's work on dialogue. They have also formed the basis of the work of Otto Scharmer and the Presencing Institute in their method of “presencing” and on working toward social renewal through “Theory U,” a theoretical perspective indicating that the way we attend to a situation impacts that situation.

Deep listening is a technique for allowing insights to emerge into consciousness. This involves a subtle process of listening for a voice that speaks from the unconscious, from recesses below the habits of thinking and behavior that govern daily life. Deep listening seeks to turn up the volume of the inner voice and help the listener to accept intuitively the guidance that may come. The success of this method depends on the listener's capability to enter the realm of the unconscious and to develop an awareness of how to navigate there.

To turn your consciousness to the inner voice: Sit down in a spot where you feel comfortable and relaxed. Close your eyes. Turn your attention to your breathing. Feel your breath moving in and out. Turn your attention to your feet and feel how the floor comes up and meets your feet. Breathe through your right foot into the center of the Earth. Breathe through your left foot into the center of the Earth. Make a connection there and breathe up and down from your lower back straight into the center of the Earth. Breathe in and draw energy from earth into your body. Hold your breath and feel how you are filled with that energy. Then exhale with a sigh. Focus your attention on the energy vibrating in your body. Repeat three times. Turn your attention to your heart. Feel its energy reaching out and filling up the space around you. You are now in your own energy field.

- Gently touch the space around you with your attention. This is how you are in essence. Become aware of how that is. Let go of all images of yourself, leave your perception of the world and your personal theory of life for a while.

- Close your ears with your thumbs, finger pointing upwards. Listen to the sounds inside your ears. Drop your hands in your lap and continue to listen to that sound. Become aware of how the sound fills the space around your head and shoulders. Keep listening. You feel a deep sense of peace. Let yourself become blank and open to receive what comes to you without it affecting you. Simply let it come to you. Just be aware and all you need will be revealed through you.

By following these simple instructions, deep listening develops and the voice of the adaptive unconscious begins to become available in consciousness. By consistent practice, people become more and more proficient in the practice of deep listening. Leaders who work with deep listening allow for the novel and unpredictable insight to emerge in themselves, and are able to stimulate this same process in their peers and co-workers. Some report that merely thinking of sitting in deep listening activates the form of consciousness that it brings.

One senior executive reported that although he had always relied on his "sixth sense," he had never proactively searched for information through intuition, instead taking a reactive approach to whatever came through this doorway. After learning the method of deep listening, he now consults this voice deliberately and relies on the information he receives from it. As a result, he is better able to assess complex environments and situations and more profoundly trusts his intuition as a basis for decision-making.

Close attunement

Close attunement involves sharing the voice of the unconscious, one's own inner knowing, with another person or several persons. Close attunement is essential for strengthening the insights and solutions that arise from deep listening. It is a kind of intimate dialogue that is based on mutuality and deep trust. It is as though all the partners in this sharing are listening to the same inner voice. "Attunement" denotes synchronization of two or more psychic energy fields (see Jung, 1931/1966, para.163). Attunement is also a term used in Sufi teachings to signify a form of concentration (see Hazrat Inayat Khan, 1960, *The Mysticism of Sound*).

Close attunement takes place with the entry of two (or more) people into the same unconscious space simultaneously, as if jumping into a pool of water together. It is a shared moment in which the water entered is the same for all involved and those leaping into it are on the same journey. At the same time, this moment is individually experienced by each participant. Close attunement can be geared to addressing a particular dilemma, or toward the purpose of inspiration or building up of relationship among co-workers. For an in depth instructions on how to work with a group in close attunement, please see , www.jironet.com and www.murraystein.com

Clients speak about how close attunement brings increased body-mind harmonization, more conscious living, greater command of energy, and a renewed spirit. One participant stated that she was finally able to take the steps that she had long been convinced would professionalize her entire organization as well as benefiting her personally. The urge to take this personal transformation forward and seek renewal in the professional setting is a recurrent theme. The process is strengthened because it is shared and witnessed by the group.

In most groups, the participants report that a surprising potential answer comes to them during deep listening and close attunement. It appears first in the form of a visual image, a bodily sensation, or a mind/body combination. In the exchange and reflection stage, it becomes verbally articulated and the beginnings of solutions to the dilemma are formulated as possibilities, prospects or sometimes as promises. This can be a lot of fun with laughter and moments of hilarity or synchronicity. The intuitive answers proposed at this time represent only a potential and not the complete solution. For this potential to reach concrete realization occurs when there is an individual or a collective feeling of "Aha! This is it," which is typically mirrored by all in the group at the same time.

The process of close attunement ensures that all participants act as equal partners in finding and forming the resolution of the issue being dealt with or in solidifying a previous decision. This assures that all are engaged and have a shared understanding, albeit individually experienced and arrived at.

Transformational shifts

Transformational shifts occur when a new awareness is fully experienced, recognized as true and meaningful, and shared among all present. This experience constitutes a fundamental

transformation of consciousness and changes the basic attitude and outlook on life of the individual and the group.

Leaders who have experienced such transformational shifts speak of a growing sense of “relatedness” and a feeling of “renewal” as well as a heightened sense of presence and of increased clarity as to what is going on in complex organizational situations. This tends to create enhanced levels of detached involvement, tranquility, as well as a fuller sense of inner security and trust in the processes unfolding.

For transformational outcomes to reach implementation and to spread beyond the group, two fundamental principles must be addressed. The previous exercises have set out the plan; now, this plan must be realized. A new narrative must be created that frames the intention and ensures that all dispersed energy – everything people do in the workplace – fits into and contributes to the new narrative.

It is important that the new narrative picks up the essential threads of the themes that emerged in the earlier steps and develops them into a story line that is connected to the social and organization realities and is communicated to others. Together, the story is told and retold until all feel sure that, although they have their own stories, this is one that represents the solution that resolves the dilemma. The new narrative converts the ideas and energies released in deep listening and close attunement into a possible plan for action, but on a metaphorical level.

To start the narrative, ask yourself the following questions:

What is cooking? Example: A group of senior leaders – politicians and financial experts – convene to discuss the way forward for Europe. A multitude of areas is addressed. There is no consensus about either methodological approach or desired outcomes. The meeting is considered inspiring and inconclusive. To find out what is cooking, you need to realize what is going on behind the scenes and identify the main theme at play³. Generally there is one major theme, but there may be more. If you identify more than four or five themes, you are probably not distinguishing the core level from its elements, the soup from its ingredients. Bouillabaisse ‘means’ more than just a list of its ingredients.

What is the germ? The germ is what is hanging in the air, but not yet realized. Let us assume that the germ in the example above is fear. If it manifests itself in fearful or defensive acts, it cannot be extinguished. A narrative will be your best way of countering, containing and setting a framework in which fear (or any other germ) does not get out of hand. This creates a new attitude to whatever unspoken energy is in the air.

Who is drawn to it? The narrative needs to be shared by communicating it. It is best to draw together a group of people who are interested in contributing. Together, the story is told and retold until the ambassadors feel sure that, although they have their own story, it is one that represents the shared narrative which resolves whatever dilemma is at hand.

³ Present limitations on space prevent an elaboration of this technique.

To manage the energy in large groups it is critical that you are first aware of your own energy and how you regulate it. It is your responsibility to discover your own behavior and energy patterns, as well as being able to move in and out of these states at will. Second, you need to communicate effectively. Ensure that you have all the technical support and facilities readily available to you and that information can flow freely to you. Be aware, however, that it is not possible to control communication conduits in the myriad of streams of the internet. Drop the idea of 'managing communication.' Think instead of 'what is cooking' and connect to yourself, and then to one or two more people in a shared conversation. Make a statement, whether in the form of an image, written text or vocal statement. Post it, send it, share it with the world. Then wait.

When you receive responses, connect with the narrative before engaging in communication. Make sure you stay with your own story.

Conclusion

Leadership today is no longer just about directing people and energy toward eradicating problems. Leaders must begin with a new type of consciousness that enables them to create partnerships and lead transformation. They can attain this by the methods of deep listening and close attunement which can lead them to gain insights and develop a vision by using the resources of their adaptive unconscious. They can then move toward assisting others to share their vision and work together for solutions by creating a narrative that furthers transformational shifts. Such leaders can address today's challenges with confidence and flexibility while tapping directly into the creativity, knowledge and awareness in themselves and others.

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