

*The true meaning of meaningful work; a  
cross cultural career perspective*

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# Where are we in Leadership Studies?

- “There is a call to redress the balance accorded to individual and collective accounts of leadership, and the relative importance attributed to leaders and followers” (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling and Taylor, 2011 p13).
- They warn against idealizing “leaders” and conspiring in the deskilling of followers, by writers who argue that “leaders are akin to the moral faculty of the system and their deliberations are intrinsically ethical” (Bolden et al op cit p 121).
- *This notion that agency can be intrinsically ethical reflects Levinas’ conception of “ethics as first philosophy” but the ontological and epistemological bases of leadership and organisations are complex for leadership is by no means a value-free term and “by choosing to call one thing leadership and not another we privilege certain things and downplay others” (Bolden et al, op cit p 127).*

## “Leadership” and “followership” as we commonly use these terms seem to emerge from differing ontologies

- Much leadership discourse (however much it may be concealed by concepts like “servant-leadership”, “shared leadership” and “team-leadership”) contrasts *the leader as individual with the followers as mass*.
- Leadership itself arguably cannot be defined without the corresponding notion of followership (Kupers, 2007) and “conventional approaches dominating the discourse in leadership research and practice take a person-centred and dyadic perspective” (House & Aditya, 1997).

# Where are we with studies of Meaning in Work?

- Marxian Alienation approach: something really important is lost in the Industrial Revolution
- Alienation, Anomie and Conflict
- Much motivation research presumes that many workers need to be somehow re-convinced about the need to work
- Finding “meaning” is often downloaded into other spheres where people can find fulfilment
- Job enlargement, enrichment, rotation, often abused by employers to get more for less

# A “person” is more than a rational economic actor

- A biological, mechanical physical reality
- With a Past and a Future as well as a Present
- Possessing Shape, Form and Virtuality
- Embedded in Culture but able to make choices
- Some of these are Counter-Intuitive and Idiosyncratic
- Embodied in a unique physical and experiential recipe
- Kinaesthetic as well as capable of Emotion and Involvement
- In Ballroom Dancing Leadership/Followership is expressed (51%/49% according to Matzdorf and Sen ([http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fides\\_Matzdorf/publications](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fides_Matzdorf/publications)))

## So what is meant by using the « person » as the basis for our analysis?

- Most sociological theory is based on Roles and Cultural Stereotypes
- Most psychological theory is based on behavioural syndromes
- Most economic theory is based on the rational economic model
- Most development theory incorporates a « progress » meme
- Most political science is based on Interests models
- Much Cross-cultural research is based on the Western paradigm and implicitly asks « when will *they* be like *us*? »
- Cartesian Dualism implicit in most models of action
- Emotions and feelings have to be re-discovered in each generation

## *Business Schools locked into Western liberal rational agency paradigm*

- *Business Schools with their core competences of the financial and marketing knowledge areas and rooted in the Anglo-American liberal capitalist assumptions have not challenged the prevailing received wisdoms and have been happy enough to continue to turn out well qualified graduates well-equipped to solve yesterday's organisational and business problems.*
- *These satisfying behaviour patterns have created and been re-inforced by the structures of academic bureaucratisation that solidify expectations around such epiphenomena of scholarly status as rankings, ratings, employment rates in "prestige" employers and incidentally provide mechanisms for better tailored and more precise subjugation to both governmental and private sector controls.*

# John MacMurray (1891-1976)

- Philosopher
- Non-institutional Christian
- Socialist
- Scot
- Communalist
- Democrat
- Major influencer on public thinking about philosophy and society in the 1930s and 1940s
- Especially influential on Welfare State thinking of the post-war era
- Tony Blair claims to have been influenced by his work

# Personalism and Leadership

- “Personalism focuses on the social character of human life. It is one of Macmurray’s major beliefs that to be a person means we are in relation with one another:
- Personal being is *necessarily* relational. Community becomes an important element of personalist thought, understanding community to be not an aggregate of individuals but a unity of persons.” (McCabe, p 1).
- MacMurray therefore locates the leader in relation to patterns of interaction within the group rather than seeing leadership as implying special powers, abilities or traits in those who occupy the leader role.

# Personalism and Agency

- MacMurray coined the aphorism “all meaningful knowledge for the sake of action, and all action for the sake of friendship.”
- MacMurray’s argument centres around the necessity of moving beyond Cartesian dualism to understand minds and bodies in terms of agency.
- Beyond this, he claims that the prime drivers of social action are concerned with the need for positive reinforcement in interaction
- He argued that “reality in human life is action... The real world is the world defined by action, in action. Ideas are the eyes of action"... (MacMurray 1950 pp. 151, 152)

# Trust

- Perceptions of servant-leadership correlated positively with both leader trust and organizational trust. The study also found that organizations perceived as servant-led exhibited higher levels of both leader trust and organizational trust than organizations perceived as non-servant-led. (Joseph and Winston, 2005 ) [Errol E. Joseph](#), [Bruce E. Winston](#), (2005) "A correlation of servant leadership, leader trust, and organizational trust", Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Vol. 26 Iss: 1, pp.6 - 22
- Trust as central to Leadership in Intercultural settings
- We Trust *Persons*, not Collectives or Abstracted rational constructions

# Identity

- The new issue in (post-) modern times is not the need for recognition, but the circumstances in which recognition cannot be achieved
- During the pre-modern times people did not speak about identity, not because they did not have or needed it, but the question of the recognition of identity was unproblematic
- Equal recognition of identities of the citizens is not only the base of healthy democracy, but the failure of recognition can cause serious damages both in individual and collective level
- Denial of recognition is a form of discrimination
- One's own identity is constructed in a dialogical or multiversal relation to other people
- Identity is not abstract or sectional: it is complex and interactional

# Advantages of a Personalist approach in Inter-cultural comparisons

- Includes Emotion, Affect, Feelings
- Persons are historically particular
- Primacy of the Other (cf Levinas dictum that « the demands of the other are absolute, inescapable and paramount »)
- Service constituted in context of personal relations
- Personal identity is central to post-modern model
- Personalism goes beyond Cartesian Dualism
- The drivers for Community, Service and Leadership may be Universal

## Some examples of leadership frameworks from other cultures

- Diwaniah
- WASTA
- Ummah
- Ubuntu

# Diwan



- Top-level involvement
- Rotating whirl of people
- A knowledge-gathering forum
- Hierarchical and egalitarian
- Recognition of special individual qualities of participants
- A listening forum
- A networking opportunity
- An implementation network

## Alshamlan family in Diwan

### Saif Marzooq al-Shamlan, Pearling in the Arabian Gulf



- The diwan is both a physical location where members of a family and their guests can meet and also a representation of the way in which leaders take decisions, taking time to consult those whose views need to be heard and those who may not otherwise be heard because of their low hierarchical positions.

# WASTA

- Connections
- Influence
- Power
- Middle-man
- Broker
- Intermediary
- High Social Status, Good Connections, Fair Reputation
- Al-Amin .....trusted
- First title of the Prophet
- “Wasta is an Arabic term that refers to an implicit social contract, typically within a tribal
- group, which obliges those within the group to provide assistance (favorable treatment) to others
- within the group. Members of the group have a largely unqualified obligation to provide
- assistance when asked, and those who ask for assistance have no obligation to provide direct
- compensation for assistance provided. ...an invisible hand that facilitates individuals engaged in complex
- exchanges within a social network”
- ([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2219126](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2219126))

# Western and Arab ideas about leadership

- Democracy as an end-value
- “The Free Society”
- Scientific evaluation as final arbiter
- Knowledge is the goal
- Humans can conquer nature
- Leaders can be “Democratic” or “Laissez-Faire” or “Autocratic”
- Democracy as a facilitative value‘
- Moral evaluation as final arbiter
- Wisdom is the goal
- Humans, like all nature, are subject to a power that is ultimately unknowable
- Trust, Autocracy and Service can be combined in “The Just ruler”

# So Diwan and Wasta and Service can combine

- Quite like a (good) University really
- Consensual autocracy
- Consultative centralism
- Requires good Listening skills
- Involves a wide range of participants
- Creates a Learning Culture
- Long Time Span of Decision
- Trust-Based Relations
- Autocratic Structures
- Consensus Decisions
- Networks
- Respect for *Experience / Seniority / Power, Learning / Training*

# Rules of conduct in Diwan and Wasta

- Understand who is who  
who you are dealing with

Informal networks are stronger

Word of Mouth works fast

Respect family and personal connections

Participate in Diwan if you are invited

LISTEN

Official involvement takes time

Transaction costs may be high

Work through local partners

Show RESPECT for all

# UMMAH

- Collective community of Islamic peoples.
- In the Quran the ummah typically refers to a single group that shares common religious beliefs, specifically those that are the objects of a divine plan of salvation.
- Commonwealth of Believers
- God expects and indeed commands a believer to do good
- The responsibility to serve does not entail serving any particular nation or body of people; **it is for the whole of mankind.**

# Ubuntu

- Value system that acknowledges people as social and co-dependent beings.
- Basic respect and compassion for others
- Communalism and interdependence

All human beings are connected not only by ties of kinship but also by the attachment of reciprocity rooted in the interweaving and interdependence of all humanity' (Goduka, 2000: 70).

- Societal wellbeing, : consensus, agreement and reconciliation, compassion, human dignity, forgiveness, transcendence and healing (Tutu, 1995, ; Mokgoro, 1999).

# The Community as the basis of Moral Leadership

- Because “a morally right action is one that intends community” (MacMurray, 1961 p 119)
- It is in membership of a moral community that what MacMurray defines as “freedom” is to be found.
- For human beings, “their freedom is grounded in the ability to act, which in turn, is bound up with their relations as persons”
- Furthermore, it is only in a community governed by rules that guarantee equality that *free* choice is created.
- Service is grounded in real not abstracted community interactions
- Inter-Relationality creates trust based on experienced trusting experiences
- *Meaning comes from others, not only from oneself*