



Four Contexts of Business Leadership Shaping the 21st Century

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Four Contexts of Business Leadership

Shaping the 21st Century

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 100 years, four distinct contexts of business leadership have emerged around the globe: *rationalist*, *humanistic*, *wholistic*, and *spiritual-based*. Each context represents a fundamental change in how we view the *nature* of business leadership. As we embrace and fulfill these contexts of business leadership, we believe it will naturally fuel a fundamental change in *the nature of business itself*, such that business and its leadership can take its rightful place in solving what seem to be the unsolvable problems in the world today.



One way of understanding the core process of business is “the conversion of matter, energy, and knowledge into useful products and services for customers through the power of mind and spirit” – where spirit connotes courage, enthusiasm, meaningfulness, and transcendence. Therefore, business has a special affinity to three fields of study: *science* (matter and energy), *psychology* (knowledge and mind), and *spirituality* (spirit). We have chosen to focus on the influence that these three disciplines have had, from among all the disciplines that can help shape a context for business leadership.

The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary¹ defines context as: *the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs: an environment; coherence*. Based on this definition, we purposely chose to use the word “context” to describe the four fundamental views of the nature of business leadership. Within each context we will describe the interrelated conditions that allow it to exist – the “mega-view” of “the way things are” – and that form the basis from which leadership is defined and practiced.

Each of the four contexts of business leadership still exists. The *rationalist* is now in its decline, the *humanistic* is now in its prime, the *wholistic* is now in its development, and the *spiritual-based* is now emerging. Within a company, different leaders might operate from any one of these four contexts, and any single leader might operate from a blend of contexts, especially if he or she is “in transition” in their view of leadership. Thus, they all currently co-exist, sometimes not very peacefully, in today’s business world.

In this paper, we begin with the historical and current perspectives of the rationalist and humanistic contexts. We then articulate what the wholistic context and the newly-emerging spiritual-based contexts look like at this time, including examples from executives who are leading from either point of view. After providing a summary table of key points, we present examples of leaders who are self-aware of their own context for leadership, and are conscious of what it takes to lead others with different points of view about what it means to lead a business. Finally, we introduce a set of discussion questions for an ongoing dialogue about the implications of these contexts for business in the 21st century.

HISTORICAL AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

The Rationalist Context for Business Leadership

Influences from Science and Psychology

After Sir Isaac Newton² uncovered the “laws of gravity and motion,” showing that cause-and-effect forces could describe natural phenomenon, people began to view the universe as a great, mechanical “clock.” Over the next centuries, scientific investigation took on the task of defining the deterministic, “clockwork” nature of everything, including life itself. The hope of finding new ways to control nature, and people’s behavior, helped to fuel the search for new “scientific laws” in fields such as physics, chemistry, biology, economics, and eventually psychology.



When Charles Darwin³ pronounced his views on evolution, people took it as one more sign of a deterministic, cause-and-effect explanation of life. Darwinian “survival of the fittest” became wedded to the theories of Robert Malthus⁴: that people had to compete for a diminishing supply of resources. From “The Wealth of Nations,” by the 18th century professor of Moral Philosophy, Adam Smith,⁵ people extracted a philosophy that “seeking to gratify self-interests, within the ‘market forces’ of capitalism, would *somehow* balance out for the good of everyone.”⁶

Starting in the early 1900’s, the role of science was to create new inventions and learn how to mass-produce them. Thomas Edison,⁷ as the inventor-par-excellence, and Henry Ford,⁸ with his mass-production assembly line, were two of the biggest “heroes” of the day. It was only a matter of time before scientific understanding would also be applied to managing “the parts” (people) of the corporate machine for greatest efficiency and profitability.

By 1910, the new fields of psychology and psychiatry were emerging with their own version of “determinism” as it applied to understanding human nature. Sigmund Freud⁹ developed a relatively mechanistic view of the inner-psyche. The forces of “id” and “super-ego” battled for control, with

the “ego” as the referee. Later, B.F. Skinner¹⁰ developed “behaviorist” psychology saying that all behavior was based on a mechanistic interplay of stimulus-response-reinforcement.

The Purpose of Business and Leadership

So how did all this play out in actual business? From this view, business is “survival of the fittest,” and competition is a win-lose game. The goal of business and its leadership is wealth creation – specifically, profit-maximization – on behalf of business owners.

Nobel Laureate economist Milton Friedman¹¹ emphasized this point of view throughout his career, at one point stating:

“Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible.”

Running the whole show is the owner, or the executives on behalf of the shareholders, often playing the role of “father figure” in the business. Across ages and cultures, the patriarch of a family was the man who was revered as having the experience, as well as the power, to guide the good fortunes of the family and pass along the wisdom and experience of “those who have gone before us.” Just as this patriarchal figure could bring warmth or coolness to the family relationships, patriarchal owner(s) could manage their companies with personal warmth or impersonal coolness.

In this context, business is often compared to “warfare,” where business leaders use a military analogy for operating a highly competitive business that can “crush the competition.” Another analogy is that the business must run like “a well-oiled machine.” It’s no surprise that business leaders adopt command-and-control and “top-down” approaches to running their organizations, ensuring that the ultimate control of a business rests in the hands of the owners or those most dedicated to them.

While greed¹² is not inherent in this context, if greed is combined with wealth creation, self-interest quickly becomes selfish interest, and even employees, consumers, and nature can become the losers. (Thus were born anti-trust, fair-labor, consumer protection, and environmental protection laws.)

Leading and Managing People

In this leadership context, the common employee is usually seen as an interchangeable part in the big machine. Tasks/jobs are well defined, typically by “job designers,” who usually embrace the efficiency ideas of Frederick Taylor:¹³

“The principle object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the owners coupled with the maximum prosperity for the employee. Maximum prosperity for the employee means not only higher wages than are usually received by men in their class, but of more importance still, it also means the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency. Maximum prosperity can exist only as a result of maximum productivity.”

To generate this maximum productivity, Taylor inaugurated “scientific management” in which not only jobs, but also tasks within jobs, are specified in detail. Employees are primarily extrinsically motivated, and good ones are those who just do what they are assigned. And if one person can’t do the job, the “Personnel” department brings in a replacement.

Each person is expected to perform within clearly defined parameters; managers want employees to do only what they are told. Only specialists are given the job of coming up with new ideas for small or large improvements. Directing employees is a matter of “command and convince” leadership; they are rarely consulted for their ideas. Motivation is by “carrot and stick;” i.e., rewards and punishments. By the mid-century, Skinner’s “behavior reinforcement” – with its mechanical stimulus-response practices – was widely accepted and implemented.

Career paths up the corporate ladder are equally well defined. Win/lose competition is often the name of the game for employees vying for the best jobs. Top leaders encourage internal competition, believing it will bring out the best of everyone – or single out the “parts” that need replacing. When performance appraisals are done at all, it is the boss who does the assessment and delivers the results.

The impersonal coolness of the “mechanistic” aspect of this context can be warmed by the “paternal” aspect. For example, IBM’s Thomas Watson Jr.¹⁴ said:

“I believe the real difference between success and failure in a corporation is how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people.”

Still, bringing out the energies and talents of people are mainly in the interest of serving the overall goals for efficiency and productivity. For many insiders, “IBM” once stood for “I’ve Been Moved.” In this context, people are valued mainly by how useful they are in helping the company achieve its goals; and refusing a move could slow down your career growth.

Wisdom and Limitations

This *rationalist* context for business leadership arose at the turn of the century, dominated leadership thinking well into the 1960’s, and still continues to dominate in some circles today. We acknowledge the wisdom of this context as:

- Honoring the experience and wisdom of “those who have paved the way before us.”
- Using resources efficiently.

In contrast, we can acknowledge two limitations:

- Discounting the inherent capability and motivation of people to do good and be good.
- Believing that life (including people and nature) could and should be used and controlled for achieving one's own (self-centered) goals.

The Humanistic Context for Business Leadership

Influences from Science and Psychology

In the early 1900's, Albert Einstein¹⁵ shook the world of physics with his theory of relativity. Our understanding of the world through our day-to-day senses, so well described by Newton's physical laws, didn't describe what happened at speeds close to that of light. Time, space, and mass were all *relative* and *situational* – it all depended on where you were observing the events from. It didn't make logical sense to the mind, but it was verifiable in the science labs.



The great quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg¹⁶ once said that it takes up to 50 years before the physicist's view of the nature of the universe makes its way into the mass consciousness of society. By the 1950's and 60's, "relativity" was a core theme of this *humanistic* context. The writings of the existentialists – Frederick Nietzsche,¹⁷ Albert Camus,¹⁸ Jean Paul Sartre¹⁹ – became popular. They saw man as being "thrown into this world" with the "freedom" to make their own personal meaning out of it all – i.e., there was no inherent meaning, and we had to create a meaning that fit our own situation in life. Truth and values were all "relative."

Abraham Maslow²⁰ developed his view of man's hierarchy of needs: that man was by nature seeking to express his full potential – to self-actualize – after taking care of more basic needs. Thus, the humanistic notion of "finding and filling needs" was born.

The Purpose of Business and Leadership

Belief in "that's just the way it is" began to dissolve, and people began to question assumptions about religion, politics, societal values, and – yes – business. From this humanistic view, the purpose of business and leadership is still wealth creation, but with a win-win mentality in which "enlightened self-interest" supplants "self-interest." That is, everyone who assists in creating the wealth (shareholders, management, and employees) should directly benefit from it. To instill stronger motivation for performance, a larger group of managers and employees are offered the

opportunity to become shareholders through various employee bonus and stock option plans. And the code of business is more like “profits with dignity” rather than “profits – period.”

It took the genius of people like J. Edward Deming²¹ to bring the humanistic view into practical business, first in Japan and later in the USA and Europe. Deming and others showed, through Total Quality Management (TQM), that poor quality costs, and high quality can save. He recognized the value of ideas from everyone in a hierarchy, not just from specialists or management. He saw that fear was the biggest obstacle to productivity – rather than a prime motivator to get the work done.

By the late 1980's, one indication that this humanistic context had matured was when Fortune Magazine began to annually publish the “100 Best Companies to Work For” based on the work of Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz.²² Their assessments are based on five “humanistic” criteria: credibility/trustworthiness, respect, fairness, meaning of work, and sense of family/ community.

Leading and Managing People

Douglas MacGregor²³ called the rationalist understanding of human nature, that people needed to be directed and controlled, “Theory X.” He formulated his “Theory Y” as its opposite: people were basically good; they wanted to do a good job; they could be trusted to do what was right.

In the 1970's, “organization development” emerged as a specialty. “Visionary leadership,” “team building,” and “empowerment” were valued capabilities. How to motivate people in this humanistic context became “relative” to their needs. How to lead people became “situational,” depending on the circumstances. We began to see “situational ethics” and the “situational leadership” model of Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey.²⁴

Within this humanistic context, people are considered a resource to be managed sensitively. Thus the Personnel department evolved to be called “Human Resources.” “Win-win” problem solving is prominent in this context, with a focus on balancing the individual wants and needs of one person or company with another's.

Sports metaphors abound, with emphasis on “working together as a team.” Leadership is more consultative, even participative, with an emphasis on empowerment. Motivation focuses more on filling people's Maslow-type needs than on rewards and punishments. Even marketing lives by the

slogan, “Find a need and fill it.”

The leader's job is to help employees become self-actualized “intra-preneurs” who invest both their emotions and their minds, for their own sake and the organization's. The job of leaders is to provide the right environment for the individual growth and performance of workers. As William Hewlett,²⁵ co-founder of Hewlett Packard, said in “The HP Way”:

“Men and women want to do a good, a creative job, and if they are provided with the proper environment they will do so.”

The employees' concern is how to fulfill their human potential through the workplace. Leaders see people as having unique talents (as well as needs), and build jobs around that talent as much as fit talent into pre-defined jobs. With empowerment, power is shared, but within limits: authority is given to make incremental changes, but not often significant ones. It's the norm to involve the employee in assessing their annual performance appraisals before the manager does the final write-up.

This attention to individual growth fosters a lessening of parent-child bonds between employer and employee. Employee loyalty decreases as they identify more with their profession than their company. And company loyalty also decreases: with re-engineering and downsizing, any idea of “lifetime employment” goes out the window.

Wisdom and Limitations

This *humanistic* context of business leadership first gained momentum in the 1950's and 60's, and became the norm of many major corporations by the 1980's. We acknowledge the wisdom of this context as:

- Recognizing the essential goodness and work ethic of people.
- Providing opportunities for individuals to fulfill their potential, which includes self-actualization as well as work abilities and aspirations.

We can further acknowledge two limitations:

- Focusing on *needs*, where motivation occurs when something is perceived as missing.
- Focusing on *individualism*, where “win-win” solutions are based on individual interests, and do not necessarily include the larger whole and the interest of society and environment.

The Wholistic Context for Business Leadership

Influences from Science and Psychology

An ever-deeper understanding of the physical nature of the universe, along with a reinterpretation of evolution, helped lay the foundation for the *wholistic* context. From the 1930's forward, physics evolved beyond Einstein's relativity to the world of quantum physics, particularly through the work of Niels Bohr²⁶ and Werner Heisenberg.²⁷ *Probability* replaced *certainty* in our understanding of matter and energy. And at the micro-level of the atom, the distinction between "object" and "observer" disappeared; the two were a "system," a single field of inseparable interaction.



Through Ilya Prigogine²⁸ and others, the study of "systems theory" and "complexity science" began to model the seemingly innate wisdom of the self-organizing nature of life. We began to see that uncertainty and complexity are an essential part of the inter-connectedness of all activity, including business.

Simultaneously, people began to re-interpret the popular understanding of "Darwinian evolution" ("survival of the fittest"). They noted that Darwin himself said, "It's not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change." As pointed out by two Chilean biologists, Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana,²⁹ life responds not to the "survival of the fittest" but to the great experimentation of all those "fit enough to survive."

In this wholistic view, business and nature are so inter-dependent that the economy as a whole is seen, in business terms, as a "wholly owned subsidiary of the natural environment," as articulated by Timothy Worth, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs in 1997.³⁰ If the environment goes bankrupt (resources depleted), the economy will go bankrupt with it. This begins to bring a new perspective to "win-win" by integrating individual needs with the good of the whole.

The work of Carl Jung's³¹ and his notion of the "collective unconscious" reflected our inter-connectedness. Later, Stephen Covey³² elevated the discussion of "situational values" to that of

“universal principles.” In these “wholistic” psychologies, people are motivated by something beyond “individual needs” and “individual self-actualization.” They are “moved” to do good work on behalf of a dual-focus: self-focused achievement and the well being of the larger whole (which are inter-dependent). That’s what makes our “human ecosystem” function and stay in balance.

The Purpose of Business and Leadership

Peter Block³³ was the first to seriously critique the limitations of the humanistic context for business leadership – which he felt was still using and controlling people and nature to achieve their own self-centered goals. He employed the term “stewardship” to replace “management.” Management is the act of “handling” things, while stewardship is the art of taking care of what's been entrusted for safekeeping: in this case, the interests of customers, employees, suppliers, society, future generations, and nature itself.

The goal of business and leadership evolved beyond “wealth creation for *shareholders*” to “wealth creation for the optimal benefit of all *stakeholders*” – including shareholders, employees, customers, community, nature, society, and future generations. “Corporate social responsibility,” “conscious capitalism,” “sustainability,” and “socially responsible investing” have become new trends, being driven by consumers voicing their preference for dealing with companies that act as ethical stewards for the good of the larger whole.

This way of thinking occurs at the Tata Group of companies in India. One of their Directors is Dr. J. J. Irani, who heads up both business ethics and quality management for the whole group of Tata companies. As he stated:³⁴

“Business must benefit society; there is no question about it. You cannot be a spike of prosperity in a sea of poverty. Wealth creation is not the major goal; it is the means by which we can serve the community. But unless you create wealth, you cannot share it. If you want something good to be distributed, better housing, better facilities, then you must have something in your pockets, only then can you distribute.”

In 1993, the Prime Minister of India told a group of industrialists, including Mr. J.R.D. Tata and Dr. Irani, that the government could not handle all the infrastructure issues around the country. He asked the business leaders to spend 1% of their net profits on causes that are not connected with their employees. To Mr. Tata’s and Dr. Irani’s way of thinking, the 1% figure didn’t make sense. Dr. Irani explains:

“Afterwards I prepared this table to show how much we were spending beyond our own responsibilities. As you can see here, outside our own area, beyond our employees and our township Jamshedpur, we provide municipal services, community services, medical services, grants and donations. While the Prime Minister was asking us to spend 1%, we were already spending much more than what he was asking. How much we spend does not depend upon our net profit; it depends on the need of the community.”

Another executive voice of this context is that of Helene Ploix, who in the 1980s was the first woman Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and also Executive Director of the World Bank. As she shared in a 2006 interview,³⁵ the core theme of her work has been “to contribute to society:”

“I would like to be remembered as a person who contributed to our employees and investors, to the firms we work with, to society as a whole. The purpose of business is to create wealth for the company and to create wealth for a larger number of people without harming the others. I am trying to do my best for the companies we have invested in and for the long term benefit of all the people involved.”

“For example, when I joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as Executive Director, I did not only do it just to have a career, I wanted to understand better the developing world, and to see what we could do.”

She elaborated on how she has lived that same motivation throughout her career into her current work as Chairman and Managing Director of Pechel Industries in France, a holding company of investments in private equity companies:

“One of my ideas for the future is that one of our new funds also has a possibility of investing in Eastern Europe. There are very few private equity funds in that part of the world. I’m not only looking for a niche in the market, I want to choose small companies and help them to grow, just as I also have to help the young people here to develop, to think of the future, to think of their role in the world.”

A clear sign of the wholistic context maturing at a global level is the growth of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)³⁶ (www.globalreporting.org), an independent organization that is a collaborating center of UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme). Its vision is for reporting on eco-

conomic, environmental, and social performance by all organizations around the world to become as routine and comparable as financial reporting.

Organizations use GRI's sustainability reporting guidelines as the basis for reporting their sustainability performance. They also provide stakeholders a comparable framework for understanding these reports. Thus, GRI helps to promote transparency and accountability by all kinds and sizes of organizations around the world. As of October 2008, more than 450 corporations have filed sustainability reports with GRI, including Infosys (India), Medtronic (USA), Sony (Japan), Bayer AG (Germany), Shell (Netherlands), Barclays (UK), and Cathay Pacific (China).

Leading and Managing People

From this wholistic, systems perspective, the organization is now clearly not a machine; everything is inter-related, as in a complex ecosystem. As Meg Wheatley³⁷ points out, not only is a business enterprise inter-dependent with its community, it is itself a microcosm of community, to be governed more as a society than as a machine.

In this context, the "people" aspect of the organization evolved beyond "Personnel" and even "Human Resources" to that of "Talent Development" and "Human Capital": the recognition that people are, in fact, the principle assets of wealth creation, especially in the knowledge-intensive, learning organizations that Peter Senge³⁸ describes. Since those assets go home every evening, they need to be treated in a new, "stewardship" way. Like managing a complex ecosystem, "control" lies more in having a common purpose and value-system rather than the "command-convince" or even "participative empowerment" leadership styles.

Job descriptions have started to become obsolete as employees primarily engage in self-organizing project teams. While senior executives still have authority, power is also a function of "local" governance in teams. The acceptance of ideas is based on the quality of the idea, not on position or authority. Power becomes more a matter of serving than controlling.

A "new contract" between employer and employee has emerged: each person is treated as an "individual company" (You, Inc.) responsible for his or her own career. Career growth is less in terms of positions and promotions, and more in terms of variety, personal development, and scope of assignments. The entire range of people working with, and impacted by, a person gives input to

“360-degree” performance appraisals.

In this fashion, the employees are principle implementers, day-to-day, of the wholistic principles of the business. Take for example, Novo Nordisk,³⁹ the world’s largest supplier of insulin and industrial enzymes. It’s Chairman, Mads Ovlisen, has led its commitment to measuring its success by the “Triple Bottom Line” of environmental, social, and economic performance. How committed is he? In the company’s 1999 “sustainability” report, he stated:

“I ask you to consider this statement: ‘Social and environmental performance is as important as financial performance.’ Do you agree or not? When we asked the same question to our employees in 1999, 74% agreed with this statement. This is gratifying for me because it shows that social and environmental thinking is now well established throughout our organization.”

Wisdom and Limitations

This *wholistic* context for business leadership was first voiced in the late 1960's and gained momentum in the 1980's and 90's. It has yet to fully mature as the norm of major corporations, but there are signs of its increasing strength, such as the momentum of “corporate social responsibility.” We acknowledge the wisdom of this context as:

- Recognizing the interconnectivity of people, nature, and business enterprises.
- Emphasizing the wholistic nature of values and principles from which to operate harmoniously and creatively.

We also acknowledge two limitations:

- Basing motivation primarily on self-focused achievement, even as it might benefit the larger whole.
- Focusing personal and business goals only on having a better “in-this-world” life, rather than taking into consideration the spiritual life that is both immanent and transcendent.

By 2000, business leadership was primarily a mixture of these three contexts: *rationalist* (its influence in decline); *humanistic* (in its prime); and *wholistic* (on the rise). Yet another view of the nature of business leadership has begun to emerge, one that offers us an opportunity to return to the true roots of our human nature. This context is the emerging *spiritual-based* context for business leadership.

The Spiritual-Based Context for Business Leadership

Perspectives on Spirituality

In order to understand “spiritual-based,” we begin with the word “spirit,” which comes from the Latin “spiritus” meaning “breath.” Spirit⁴⁰ is *the animating principle, the supernatural essence (beyond material nature), which “breathes” life into creation.*

People throughout the world describe spirituality in varied ways, and may or may not base it on participation in an organized religion. Some of those descriptions include:

- Tapping into a deeper meaning in life that transcends our physical existence
- Having a relationship with the Source of creation (i.e. God, Higher Power, Allah, Jehovah, Brahman, etc.)
- Experiencing oneness with Divinity
- Being “fully conscious” of the Source of life and living from that awareness
- Living in harmony with the essential nature and inter-connectedness of all creation
- Living all aspects of life according to a set of religious principles

At this time, we would best describe spiritual-based business leaders as those who have a consciously held spiritual view of life and may be expressing it in their leadership in one of the following ways:

1. They are taking their first steps to bring their spiritual view of life into their leadership
2. They are integrating their spiritual view of life with their leadership more fully
3. They are consciously leading from their spiritual view of life

Depending on their personality, a leader’s spiritual view of life may be a private matter or it may be expressed openly. They may also have varying degrees of being able to articulate their spiritual context. As one example, Janiece Webb,⁴¹ former Senior Vice President, Motorola Corporation, defines her own personal spiritual view of life this way:

“I believe in God strongly. I follow more Buddhist principles than anything else. I connect with



the magic in life... This is all so much bigger than what we can physically see. You must earn the right to lead every day, and spirituality is necessary to do that. (spirituality)...gives you immense courage; yet you also embrace your own humanness and imperfections.”

Another executive, Dr. A. K. Chattopadhyay,⁴² Executive Director for Tata Refractories in India, expresses his spiritual view of life as:

“Spirituality is the manifestation of the perfection that is already there within you. Spirituality is when I look at myself, I look within and not outside, and respond from my inner feelings where we are all perfect beings.”

The Convergence of Science and Spirituality

The previous three contexts for business leadership were influenced by the powerful mind-sets of science and psychology. During the centuries of mechanistic, deterministic science, belief in and reliance on religion declined; the age-old basis for “defining a meaningful life” began to dissolve. It was only natural for the field of psychology to emerge in the 20th century as a substitute for religion in teaching people what it meant to be human in this cosmos.

As science uncovered new understandings of evolution, physics, and systems-theory, a new seed of spirituality slowly began to sprout. It is this seed of spirituality that has converged with science to birth this spiritual-based context, particularly through the work of scientists such as Teilhard de Chardin⁴³ and consciousness-based physicists such as David Bohm.⁴⁴ Add the insights of Fritjof Capra⁴⁵ and others about systems sciences and ancient spiritual texts, and you can begin to see a rich tapestry unfold.

The scientific and spiritual converged in the insights and writings of the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,⁴⁶ an eminent geologist and paleontologist who was part of the expedition team that discovered the skull of the “Peking Man” – an important verification of the evolutionary roots of mankind. As a scientist he saw that consciousness was inherent in all matter and creation, describing his experience as, “The Divine radiating from the depths of blazing Matter.”⁴⁷ He dedicated his life to the synthesis of science and spirituality, saying: “The questions I’m concerned with are indeed those that have animated the deep-rooted life of humanity.”

Once quantum physics demonstrated that the created universe was a continuous field of energy, a

few bold physicists inquired: “What about the self-evident existence of consciousness in certain structures of energy/matter (i.e., human beings)? How does that fit with our view of the nature of the universe?” From the 1950’s to 80’s, physicist David Bohm came to the conclusion that energy and consciousness are “implicate” ... *the nature of the cosmos, of matter in general, of life, and of consciousness... (are) considered to be projections of a common ground.* By analogy, just as wetness and liquidity are qualities of water... energy and consciousness are qualities of the “common ground” of creation.

The works of scientists such as Chardin and Bohm present us with the picture that all of creation is sourced from, and a reflection of, a single, “omnipresent” field of energy/ consciousness. Ken Wilber⁴⁸ offered an integrated set of principles for an integrated, “transpersonal” psychology based on spiritual principles. And D. T. Suzuki⁴⁹ was foremost in popularizing Zen Buddhism in the West, with its emphasis on an inherent oneness with a Transcendent nature of the universe.

Fritjof Capra⁵⁰ further supports this convergence of science (specifically physics and systems theory) and spirituality:

“Although mystical views of consciousness go far beyond the framework of contemporary science, they are by no means inconsistent with the modern systems concepts of mind and matter. ...The systems view of mind seems perfectly consistent with both the scientific and mystical views of consciousness.”

This same idea is mirrored in various spiritual texts, in terms of a Transcendent consciousness dwelling within all:

“All things are of God... One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (The Christian Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Ephesians 4:6)

“God dwells in everything, God shines in every heart. Wherever I look, there is God; no one else is seen.” (The Sikh’s book, Adi Granth)

“One in All, All in One.” (Zen Buddhism book, On Trust in the Heart)

“I pervade the entire universe in my unmanifested form. All creatures find their existence in Me but I am not limited by them.” (The Hindu text, Baghavat Gita 8:22, 9:4)

An early example of the spiritual-based context would be Medtronic, the world's largest producer of medical electronics. Their Chairman in the 1990s was William George,⁵¹ who stated that they “lead by values” rather than “management by objectives.” Those values, in *priority* order, were:

1. Restoring people to full health
2. Serving customers with products and services of unsurpassed quality
3. Recognizing the personal worth of employees
4. Making a fair profit and return for shareholders
5. Maintaining good citizenship as a company

These values may seem similar to successful, customer-driven, wholistic companies. But for Bill George, what's underneath these values is the consciousness that...

"We are all spiritual beings. To unleash the whole capability of the individual – mind, body, and spirit – gives enormous power to the organization. This has nothing to do with religion. People of many faiths, or no faith at all for that matter, can join together in a common cause of service to others through their work."

Furthermore, regarding this prioritization of corporate goals, Bill George said:

"Medtronic is not in the business of 'maximizing shareholder value'; rather, our purpose is to 'maximize patient value.' The 'real bottom line' for Medtronic is the patients who were restored to full life and health last year by Medtronic products... At Medtronic we believe that if we first serve our customers well, provide products and services of unsurpassed quality, and empower our employees to fulfill themselves and the company's mission, we will indeed provide an outstanding return for our shareholders."

The Purpose of Business and Leadership

In the rationalist, humanistic, and wholistic contexts, if "spirituality" is considered at all, it is usually as one of many aspects of life... along with work, family, leisure time, health, etc. If life were a pie, spirituality would be one slice of the pie. In this fourth context, *spirituality is the pie itself*. Work, family, leisure, and health are all "slices" of spirituality and gain their meaning from a spiritual context – including business.

The spiritual-based context transforms the nature of business itself – so that the primary purpose of business and leadership is *spiritual fulfillment* and *service to society*, where both are derived from and motivated by a Transcendent consciousness. Wealth creation is no longer the *goal*; it becomes a *means* for enabling and sustaining this larger purpose. Business leaders promote the spiritual fulfillment of everyone touched by the business: employees, customers, suppliers, share-

holders, and society. Likewise, business leaders develop selflessness in their service to society as they are aware of both the Transcendent and imminent spirituality in those whom they serve.

This new purpose for business and leadership is also a response to two major insights from the 1980's and 90's:

- Having material wealth doesn't really satisfy the inner yearning to access a deeper meaning and obtain fulfillment in work and life.
- What we've been doing with the earth's resources and with international relations (still based on "survival of the fittest") has been destructive, unjust, and unsustainable.

How does a purpose of "spiritual fulfillment and service to society," both derived from and motivated by a Transcendent consciousness, sound in actual practice? Consider the leadership of Floy Aguenza,⁵² President and COO of Planters Development Bank in The Philippines. She has put her spiritual perspective as a Christian to work in serving the economic growth of the people of The Philippines, in a model bank that has the world watching:

"When confronted with a situation, I am basically guided by the question, "What would the Lord do?" I believe we have been given our life for a reason. The truth is we are here to do good – to make the world a better place, to be a better person, and to help others to have a better life. This is what I keep trying to do everyday."

"It is very clear in our minds that our business must be profitable to be sustainable – of course, this bank has been set up by the shareholders and they expect a good return. However, equally clear to us is that it is not profit at all costs. This must be balanced with all of the other concerns of the organization, and its role in society. In our case, profitability and social impact are fundamentally intertwined. Businesses have a role to play in nation building and in building the character of the people. If we all do something, we can all gain. In this we are very blessed. We feel that it is God Who has made us who we are."

Notice that from a spiritual context, wealth creation for Plantersbank is no longer the *end goal* for which everything else is the means. Instead, money is the *means* for the ultimate goal of enabling the organization to sustain itself and grow in its ability to serve; wealth creation is simply a "natural result" of the excellence of good character in living and working from a spiritual context.

Leading and Managing People

From the early 1980's forward, Peter Vaill⁵³ was an early pioneer who addressed the implications of this growing exploration of spirituality and business. Joining him as early contributors to raising this consciousness included: business executives such as G. Narayana⁵⁴ of Excel Industries, Paul Autry⁵⁵ of Meredith Publications and Max DePree⁵⁶ of Hermann-Miller Furniture; academics such as S. K. Chakraborty,⁵⁷ Subhash Sharma,⁵⁸ Debashis Chatterjee,⁵⁹ Andre Delbecq,⁶⁰ Judi Neal,⁶¹ and Dorothy Marcic;⁶² and consultants such as Mrityunjay B. Athreya,⁶³ John Renesch,⁶⁴ Jack Hawley,⁶⁵ and Jay Conger.⁶⁶ For all of these, spirituality is simply a part of what it means to be human, inseparable from the human enterprise in business.

Since 1995, major conferences have been held on the theme of "spirit and spirituality at work" – attended by business leaders, consultants, and academics – in countries as diverse as Canada, USA, Mexico, Guatemala, U.K., Holland, Switzerland, Hungary, Slovenia, India, and Australia. There has been a surge of international non-profit organizations such as "Spirit in Business," the Bahai Business Forum, and the "International Association for Spirit at Work." The Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta (IIMC) inaugurated its "Management Center for Human Values" in 1995 to bring a grounded spiritual reality to business. And in 2001, a special interest group was formed on "Management, Spirituality, and Religion" at the Academy of Management in the USA.

From a spiritual point of view, the difference in motivation, jobs, and careers, can perhaps best be understood through the Sanskrit word "dharma," which means acting in accord with our essential nature and purpose. S.K. Chakraborty – founder of the Management Centre for Human Values at IIMC, India – writes that our most intrinsic motivation is to fulfill our essential nature and purpose – not to fill an ever-present set of "need-based" desires. By corollary, leading employees means evoking each person's sense of spiritual purpose in life. Jobs and career paths are based on having people follow and fulfill their dharma.

An early example of a business leader who led his employees from a spiritual-based context is Isaac Tigrett,⁶⁷ founder of the wildly successful Hard Rock Café chain of restaurants, when he wasn't yet 20 years old. Isaac was raised in the Southern USA during the 1960's when his town was rigidly segregated, greatly offending his sense of fairness. When the Civil Rights laws brought down segregation signs, he felt, "All of a sudden, all of us, not just Blacks, are more human."

Soon after, living in London, he saw that, "The social classes were still completely separated. There was literally no place in London where a baker and a banker could meet to talk. I wanted to

break that system.” He decided to open an “absolutely classless” restaurant, which became a smashing success from the very first day. Standing in line were those bakers and bankers, laborers and Labor politicians.

Tigrett’s humanistic and wholistic values were elevated to the level of *spiritual* when he traveled to India on a spiritual pilgrimage. While there, he heard the teaching, “Love All, Serve All.” He learned that “love” in that spiritual context meant unconditional, selfless, fearless positive regard; the same unconditional love that Jesus spoke about coming from His Father: “...For He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” (The Christian Bible, Matthew 5:45)

To Tigrett, “Love all, serve all” embodied the ultimate spiritual goal of life: becoming divine through love, and serving people from that place. It became the spiritual basis from which he began to lead his business.

“Being one of the Hard Rock Café family was therapy for people. Even if they came from a violent home-life, here they were loved and they loved back in return. Respect was the key. The same went for customers.”

He began putting “Love all, serve all” in the kitchens, on paychecks and menus, on T-shirts and sweatshirts. As the business exploded around the world, he continued his personal and business mission of fostering “classlessness” from this spiritual basis. For example, in Tokyo, he insisted that women, “who are non-entities there,” be treated absolutely equally. As Isaac noted:

“All I did was put spirit and business together in that big mixing bowl and add love. I didn’t care about anything but people. Just cherish them, look after them, be sensitive to them and their lives.”

It takes courage to be “out in front” as a leader who leads from this spiritual-based context. Nilofer Merchant,⁶⁸ President of Rubicon Consulting and former Business Development Manager at Autodesk, Inc., spoke about what it takes to be a spiritual-based leader at this point in time:

“Spirituality to me is “Living fully the glory of God is being fully alive.” To me this means using your gifts to the fullest, working in a position that is using all of you, and being in true, intimate relationships with other people in the community.”

“Being a spiritual-based leader is much like falling off of a cliff. There will be moments of absolute fear and trepidation, (and) it takes a certain act of faith to choose to measure your leadership different than the way the world now measures things – such as money, title, position, and power. The upside to all of this is that this will cultivate a true sense of confidence and clarity knowing that you are living true to yourself. The spiritual path is a sustained joy that nothing in this world can take away.”

SUMMARY TABLES

Four distinct contexts of business leadership have emerged in the last 100 years: *rationalist*, *humanistic*, *wholistic*, and *spiritual-based*. As shown in Figure 1, each context has been influenced by science, psychology, and business leadership principles.

Figure 1: Basis of Each Context / World View

CONTEXTS OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP				
	Rationalist	Humanistic	Wholistic	Spiritual-Based
First emerged	Early 1900's	1950's—60's	1970's—80's	1990's
Science	Newton mechanics Darwin evolution	Einstein relativity	Bohr/Heisenberg quantum physics Prigogine systems theory	Bohm/Capra physics— consciousness Teilhard de Chardin evolutionary consciousness
Psychology	S. Freud B. F. Skinner	J. P. Satre A. Maslow	C. Jung S. Grof	K. Wilber D. T. Suzuki
Business— leadership principles	A. Smith F. Taylor	D. MacGregor J. Deming K. Blanchard	P. Block P. Senge S. Covey	P. Vaillie W. George S. K. Chakraborty

Figure 2 demonstrates how each context also has its own view of the purpose, success measures, metaphor, and leadership style for business.

Figure 2: Fundamental Approaches to Business Leadership

CONTEXTS OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP				
	Rationalist	Humanistic	Wholistic	Spiritual-Based
Purpose of business	Wealth and power for owners, shareholders	Wealth and power with dignity... for owners, shareholders and employees	Wealth with accountability to all stakeholders	Spiritual fulfillment and service to society, that is derived from and motivated by a Transcendent consciousness
Leadership style	Command and convince	Participative empowerment	Stewardship	“Radiating” spiritual nature

(continued next page...)

CONTEXTS OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

	Rationalist	Humanistic	Wholistic	Spiritual-Based
Measures of success	Financial—profit maximization	Financial, Employee surveys (“100 Best Companies to Work For”)	“Triple Bottom Line” Financial Social Environmental	Purity and unity of thought, word and action (reflected in external measures)
Leadership metaphors	Military machine	Sports team	Ecology/community	Watering the spiritual roots

As shown in Figure 3, each context has its own view of the nature of man, how to motivate, and how to manage people’s careers.

Figure 3: Approaches to “Leading and Managing People”

CONTEXTS OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

	Rationalist	Humanistic	Wholistic	Spiritual-Based
Nature of man	Needs to be controlled	Willing to do good, be good	Inter-dependent and self-organizing	Same energy/ consciousness as the Transcendent
Motivation	Extrinsic: Carrot and stick	Needs (“find a need and fill it”)	Moved by wholistic principles for good of self and society	Fulfilling one’s spiritual purpose and operating from one’s spiritual character
Managing people/ organization design	Give structure and roles People are interchangeable parts; jobs based on talent/ skills fitting into organization’s needs	Give structure and roles People are unique; build jobs around talent as much as fit talent to jobs	People are key asset and resource; have them self-define their roles; great flexibility in job definition	People are spiritual in nature; enable them to follow their dharma and express their spiritual purpose
Participation in innovative work	Only specialists are given innovation work to do	People at all levels can contribute to innovation	Every person can “think globally and act locally” to foster innovation	Together we can co-create spiritual and material prosperity

LEADING ACROSS ALL FOUR CONTEXTS

All four contexts for business leadership co-exist today. A leader must first introspect and decide for himself or herself what context they choose to lead from. They must also be conscious of what it takes to lead others who might have a different point of view about the purpose, goals, and methods of leading a business.

In this section, we provide examples from three leaders who exemplify this introspection and conscious leadership. The first is Tom Chappel,⁶⁹ who co-founded *Tom's of Maine* with his wife in 1971 on the *wholistic* principles of customer-focused, environmentally-conscious health products. Tom had to learn to be aware of his own leadership context, evolve it, and lead others to participate with him on this journey.

Between 1981 and 1986, the distribution channels of *Tom's of Maine* expanded from health food stores to include supermarket and drugstore chains and had a 25% growth rate. With this new face and new identity, its wholistic corporate culture began to break down as they began to hire executives and MBA's who had more *rationalist* and *humanist* ways of thinking about the goals of business. Profit and growth became driving values and dominated business planning. Tom began to lose interest in the business and considered selling it.

He decided to attend the Harvard Divinity School and was exposed to the thinking of Martin Buber,⁷⁰ the 20th century Jewish philosopher. Buber says that we can relate to each other in two ways: I-THOU, where we relate for respect, love, and honor for their own sake; and I-IT, where we treat people as objects. The choice is between the dignity of persons versus their utility in our lives.

In 1989, with a new sense of spirituality growing in him, Tom called a special board meeting to create a new strategy and culture based on, "Respecting people for who they are and not for what they can do for us." As Tom later pointed out:

"Christian mystics and saints have written about finding the via media – the middle way. The Hebrew prophets often spoke of finding the 'good way.' I've found the middle way for Tom's of Maine, where we use our head and heart in planning business strategies. We make room for spirit in the world of commerce."

Their new mission – born from his *spiritual-based* perspective – began to give people permission

to actualize the creativity and social responsibility that had been within them all along. He wrote:

“Thanks to the Mission, we have become the definers of our destiny. Believing in God doesn't mean that you must leave everything up to Him. As Martin Buber wrote in I and Thou: ‘Destiny is not where we wait for God to push us. We take part in creation, meet the Creator, reach out to Him, helpers and companions.’ ”

Implementing the changes in strategy and culture were not easy, as his book, *Soul of a Business* relates. As Tom tapped into his own spirituality to help guide this process, he was able to lead employees who ascribed to different contexts through this corporate transition.

A second example is that of Muhammad Yunus,⁷¹ founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of the bank's achievements in pioneering microcredit financing for the poor. He is confident in his own wholistic viewpoint about business commerce, as seen in his comments about the melt-down of the global financial system in late 2008:

“For a long time, the main priorities have been the maximization of profits and rapid growth – but that focus has led to the current situation. Capitalism, with all its market mechanisms, has to survive – there is no question. What I excoriate (criticize) is that today there is only one incentive for doing business, and that is the maximization of profits. But the incentive of doing social good must be included. There need to be many more companies whose primary aim is not that of earning the highest profits possible, but that of providing the greatest benefit possible for human kind.”

“In the US, the financial system has completely split off from the real economy. Castles were built in the sky, and suddenly people realized that these castles don't exist at all. That was the point at which the financial system collapsed. Were there more socially minded companies, the markets would be more balanced than they are today. Finance and the real economy have to be connected.”

But he does not require that every person or every company should think as he does. Instead, he gives room for those executives who might be more *rationalist* or *humanist* in their viewpoint about business goals – while still urging them to consider broadening their thinking to a more wholistic perspective about the role of earning money:

“There will always be businesses whose primary goal is that of earning as much money as pos-

sible. That is okay. But earning as much money as possible can only be a means to an end, not an end in itself. One has to invest money in something meaningful – and I would make a case for it being something that improves the quality of life for all people.”

Finally, an executive who has stretched herself across both the wholistic and spiritual-based contexts is Amber Chand, an entrepreneur of Indian descent born in Uganda and educated in part in the UK.⁷² This cross-cultural background – “a sense of India, a sense of Uganda, and the European influence” – has greatly influenced the course of her entrepreneurial career. In 2006, she founded *The Amber Chand Collection: Global Gifts for Peace and Understanding* as a “mission-based social enterprise that supports talented craftswomen in regions of conflict and post conflict.” She works with women who are from areas involved in wars, civil strife and natural disasters, such as Israel/Palestine, Darfur/Sudan, Cambodia, and Afghanistan.

Each of the items in her collection – with names such as the Jerusalem Candle of Hope, the Mayan Harmony Necklace and the Darfur Basket of Strength – “are made by mothers, who through these creative expressions offer us their gift of hope, strength and courage.” One item, the Cambodian Peace Bell, was once part of a landmine shell, now melted down by villagers to adorn their cows and oxen. It’s a simple yet powerful expression of peace emerging from the ravages of war.

Her mission is to impact the lives – and consciousness – of everyone who comes in contact with her company and its products:

“If we are to create businesses with healthy foundations at this urgent time in our planetary evolution, we need to create systems based on balance, wisdom and humility. As a social entrepreneur, my task is to create an enterprise that is fiscally responsible, grows thoughtfully, and impacts thousands of craftspeople in creating a dignified livelihood.”

She measures the success of her company in terms of both its financial and social impact on the artisan communities it serves. Amber’s personal spirituality provides a deep well of strength for her wholistic view of business:

“At the heart of this work, are the spiritual principles of service and love in action. The company I have created... allows me to use business as a purposeful platform for my spiritual practice, knowing that our work with artisans around the globe helps to support, sustain and strengthen their lives. This is engaged spirituality – one which I find particularly meaningful as a business woman.”

CONCLUSION

It is not our intention to oppose one context against another, as if one were good and another bad. Instead, we have shown how the four contexts have evolved in a “nested” process, building on the wisdom of the previous while rectifying its limitations. There is no inherent conflict among them at the level of their strengths. Each can fulfill the previous while adding its own wisdom.

Thus, the latest context to emerge, the spiritual-based context, can bring forth and fulfill the wisdom found in the other contexts. That is, it can:

1. Fulfill the potential of the *rationalist* context by:
 - Honoring the experience and wisdom of “those who have paved the way before us.”
 - Using resources efficiently.
2. Fulfill the potential of the humanistic context by:
 - Recognizing the essential goodness and work ethic of people.
 - Providing opportunities for individuals to actualize their potential, which includes self-actualization as well as work abilities and aspirations.
3. Fulfill the potential of the wholistic context by:
 - Recognizing the interconnectivity of people, nature, and business enterprises.
 - Emphasizing the universal nature of principles from which to operate harmoniously and creatively.

This model of four contexts of business leadership does not end the discussion about leadership in the 21st century. Indeed, it only adds to the ongoing dialogue about how we can bring prosperity to the entire global community in a sustainable fashion. We have truly become what Marshall McLuhan first termed as the “Global Village” – a globally interconnected human society and economy, inseparable from the health of our planetary environment.

Business and leadership have a key role in transforming society and our quality of life. As noted futurist Willis Harman⁷³ pointed out in his book *Global Mind Change*:

“Leaders in world business are the first true planetary citizens. They have worldwide capability and responsibility. Their decisions affect not just economies, but societies... and the world problems of poverty, environment, and security. World business will be a key actor in the ultimate resolution of the macro-problem. The business corporation is far more flexible and adaptive than the bureaucratic structures of government.”

How we lead, grow and sustain our business enterprises will make or break our future together as passengers on this Spaceship Earth.

SELF-INQUIRY QUESTIONS

We end with a series of questions to you, the reader, to take into your own introspection and your own dialogues with your friends, family, and colleagues.

- When you examine your thoughts, words, and actions, what context would you say you primarily draw from day-to-day?
- Is this the same context that you most aspire to?
- If not, what do you need to shift in your day-to-day viewpoint in order to more fully embrace and put into practice this other context?
- What context do you believe the leaders of your organization primarily draw from day-to-day?
- How well do you “fit in” with this leadership context, given your own viewpoint?
- To the degree there is a difference, how could you bring out the strengths of each context into a harmonious way of working together?
- What are the implications of the four contexts on global economic development?
- What are the implications of the four contexts on the environmental health of the planet?
- What are the implications of the four contexts on sustainable business performance?

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- ⁷³ Harman, Willis (1990) *Global Mind Change: The New Age Revolution in the Way We Think*. New York: Werner

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



William Miller is a Joint-founder of Values Centered Innovation Enablement Services Pvt. Ltd. For over 25 years, William C. Miller has been an internationally-recognized expert on values centered corporate innovation – beginning as head of the Innovation Management program at SRI International (formerly Stanford Research Institute—mid-1980’s) and continuing as president of the Global Creativity Corporation (since 1987). From 2003-2008, he was named by *Leadership Excellence* as among the top 30 thought leaders on leadership worldwide. Two of William’s five books have been rated among the top 30 business books of the year in the USA by Executive Book Summaries.



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