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An Integral Model for Missional Leadership



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Leadership is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. While the missional paradigm is not leader-centric—rather, “every disciple is to be an agent of the Kingdom of God” (Hirsch, “Defining Missional”)—leadership is nevertheless indispensable to living out the calling of the church. Those giving direction to the church and its mission need to attend to many aspects of life simultaneously, a reality that needs to be taken into consideration as we support and develop leaders. A superficially understood and unbalanced approach to Christian mission could result in unsatisfying, unsustainable and ineffective activism. Effective, sustainable mission is possible only where we honor the needs and demands of both the inner life and the outer world of the leader as well as the context in which he or she operates.

The missional and spiritual formation movements, two major manifestations of the work of the Spirit in North American Protestantism in the past decade, have developed against the backdrop of a renewed appreciation for the role of community and the need for spiritual sustenance. Integrating the practices of spiritual formation with a missional focus holds the promise of facilitating the development of spiritually mature and properly focused leaders.

While action and contemplation are each demanding in their own right, combining and integrating them are even more challenging. Robert Fryling points out that while there is an abundance of books that focus on either the external organizational principles for success or internal spiritual disciplines, there is a dearth of leadership material in which they intersect and inform each other (Fryling, *The*

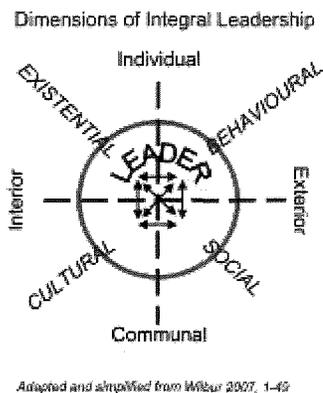
Leadership Ellipse, 91-97). It is encouraging to note that several recent initiatives are drawing together action, contemplation, and community, including the Missional Order, established for the purpose of “helping to foster contemplative missional communities” (“What Is a Missional Order,” <http://missionalorder.com/about/>) and Richard Rohr’s Center for Action and Contemplation. Caroline Osgood’s recent DMin thesis, “Intentional Missional Engagement as a Necessary Discipline for Spiritual Formation”, grants formal recognition to the importance of integrating these aspects.

The Integral Model, an inter-disciplinary, multi-level interpretational framework, may help us make sense of the complex and comprehensive challenge of missional leadership development. The model arises from the realization that there are numerous interrelated dimensions to the leader and his or her context and presents a way of viewing leadership that can help us recognize and honor the critical dimensions of all human interaction and activity. For the purpose of this article, we will look at only one aspect—the quadrants—of the model termed AQAL (All Quadrants, All Levels).

AQAL postulates two fundamental orientations; the interior (or subjective) and exterior (or objective), as well as two modalities; the individual (or singular) and collective (or plural), wherein human interaction takes place. By plotting the orientations as the X axis and the modalities as the Y axis, four fields are formed (see diagram):

1. Individual interior: the existential or intentional dimension
2. Individual exterior: the behavioral dimension
3. Collective interior: the cultural dimension
4. Collective exterior: the social dimension

Every person and social entity has their being in these four ‘worlds.’ The exterior quadrants tend toward functionality (what do I or what does someone or something else do?) and lend themselves to empirical observation. The interior quadrants focus on interpretation (what do I or what does someone or something else mean?). The individual or singular perspective looks at the person or phenomenon in and of itself, while the collective or plural perspective looks at the person or phenomenon as it participates in its contexts and networks.



AQAL model

The existential dimension, the “being” of the leader, must be nurtured. Effective leaders model the behaviour they desire of others. In the letter to the Corinthians Paul exhorts his audience to “follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1) and in a letter to Timothy he writes, “Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.... Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim. 4: 12, 16 TNIV). Robert Quinn suggests that, “one key to successful leadership is continuous personal change. Personal change is a reflection of our inner growth and empowerment. Empowered leaders are the only ones who can induce real change [in organizations, cultures, and other people]. By having the courage to change themselves, they model the behavior they are asking of others” (*Deep Change*, 34).

It is therefore important that Christian leaders develop and nurture the interior dimension of their life by maintaining a strong personal relationship with God so that the character, motives, and attitude of Christ can be formed in them. Contemplative practices such as solitude, retreats, meditative prayer, journaling, examen, and lectio divina facilitate Christian spiritual formation in combination with ongoing theological study and discussion. In addition to spiritual formation, leaders can benefit from the self-insight provided by diagnostic systems that measure emotional intelligence, psychological type and spiritual gifts. Therapeutic counseling, spiritual direction, and spiritual friendship help leaders to identify and deal with problem areas and imbalances, thereby assisting with personal as well as spiritual growth and change. While the pressures of leadership are often felt most in the functional areas, leaders must nurture their spiritual lives if they are to be effective and remain faithful with respect to God’s mission.

It is obvious that the “external” lives of leaders, their behaviors and skills, matter. Paul’s list of criteria for elders and deacons includes a number of behavioural criteria, namely “Overseers [are] to be above

reproach, faithful to their spouse, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.... [They] must also have a good reputation with outsiders..." (I Tim. 3: 2-3, 7 TNIV).

Leadership requires all encompassing skills, from visionary planning to communicating the vision, from policy development to developing people, from personal management to managing meetings, from conflict resolution to resolving budgets, from enlistment skills to skillful resource deployment, and much more. No matter with what degree of proficiency people enter leadership roles, these abilities can always be improved through training. Failure and feedback alert us to areas where development may be needed. Job performance reviews, solicited evaluation, 360-Degree and other feedback instruments as well as incident post-mortems ("What went wrong? How can we do better?) help determine training needs. Practicing, and debriefing a new skill with a coach or mentor enhance the efficacy of training programs.

Leaders also need to discern and engage the "inner life" of societies and groups. They need to be able to identify cultural patterns and values that should be moderated or developed in the host culture or target group, take advantage of opportunities to do so and respond strategically to trouble areas. Without this ability, we may be doing little more than trying to arrange chairs for an event we don't understand. Jesus asked the leaders of Israel, "Can you not discern the signs of the times?" (Matt. 16:3 KJV). Christian leaders must, at the same time, be aware of their cultural proclivities and the way in which leadership needs to be exercised in order to shape culture in accordance with the gospel. Theological and philosophical frameworks can help us discern the worldview and spirit of the times. Sound theological training will equip us to present and live a vision congruent with God's Kingdom.

Finally, leadership seeks to influence social activities, arrangements, constructs and relationships. "A leader without a social context simply cannot be a leader. This social context is multi-leveled, ranging from relationships with individuals to teams, committees, organizations, and so forth," writes Day and Harrison ("Multilevel, Identity-based Approach to Leadership"). Leaders participate in the "outer life" of the community, comprised of the social dimension with its roles, relationships, organizations, systems, politics, and power dynamics. Much of the books of Acts concern the Apostle Paul's work in this realm and his letters (by themselves a social act) abound with examples of how he exercised his leadership in the community. "We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God," he wrote to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 2: 11-12 TNIV). Since a person's influence in the social (external collective) is what people most associate with leadership, it is not surprising that the majority of books focus on this dimension.

Of course, these fields are not self-contained or independent. They constitute different aspects of a greater whole so that their membranes are porous and the different fields are interconnected. However, it is easy for us to become “one-sided” as leaders. As I work with pastors and Christian leaders and reflect on my own development, I see how easy it is to become immersed in one aspect of reality or facet of life to the neglect of others. This is the way of growth for many of us—not a straight line but a zigzag movement; though at this point in my life, it seems that I need to zig and zag at the same time, paying attention to multiple aspects of life simultaneously.

The *Missio Dei* journal seeks to be missional, contextual, and integrative. This should also be the goal of Christian leaders and those who are involved in their development. The Integral Model holds promise for a contextual and integrative approach to our missional call, our leadership vocation and the development of missional leaders. We must attend to the whole person of the leader, his or her inner well-being and development, behavior and competencies, discernment of culture, and fulfillment of social roles, thereby promoting the balance needed for sustaining both the person and work of the Christian leader.

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