



DSS Working Papers

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Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg
DSS Working Paper Nr. 84

ISSN-1615-8229

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect views of the department.



IMPRESSUM

Herausgeber

Der Fachbereich Soziologie

Im Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften der Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg

Für die Herausgeber: Prof. Dr. Heiko Schrader

Redaktion: Marcus Gercke, M.A.

Anschrift

Fachbereich Soziologie der Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg

„DSS Working Papers“

Postfach 4120

39016 Magdeburg

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A Thriving or Spiritual Organization: Leaders' perspectives from stakeholder in- terviews in a pilot study

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04. April 2024

Abstract

In its seminars U-School for Transformation, offered by Presencing-Institute at MIT, invites participants to set up their own team hubs based on topics they design. These contribute to a new global, eco-centered leadership consciousness and ethics that reaches out to profit and nonprofit organizations around the world. Such a collective network approach is urgent since our planet is facing severe economic, ecological, and political threats. This paper is an outcome of the work of ulab 2.x Team #1134 on "Spirituality, personal growth and leadership." We aim to investigate how to bring these three cornerstones together in a leader's work and the organization's life. One of our initiatives was inviting leaders for stakeholder interviews to investigate this topic from the practitioners' perspective. The findings of the interviews are shared in that paper.

Keywords: new leadership • change makers • eco centered consciousness • new economics

Zitiervorschlag

Schrader, H., Diamanti, C., Pontet, G., Ryshke, R., Triep, V. F. (2024). A Thriving or Spiritual Organization: Leaders' perspectives from stakeholder interviews in a pilot study. DSS Working Paper Nr. 84, Magdeburg: Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften.
https://www.soz.ovgu.de/isoz_media/downloads/arbeitsberichte/84_Schrader.pdf.

1 Introduction

Within the framework of Theory U (Scharmer 2016, 2018) that is taught online and offline by staff of the Presencing Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)¹ to engender an integrative economic, ecological, psychological, social, and ethical perspectives. Our Team #1134 chose to investigate the relationship between spirituality, personal growth and leadership”.² One approach taken was to listen to stakeholders who have already taken initiative in this field, or at least aim at doing so, and how they describe a “thriving” or “spiritual” environment in their workplace and obstacles to achieve that. Thus, we took 25 qualitative pilot interviews to learn from their experience. Here, we present our findings.

2 Methodology

Qualitative interviews aim at deeper insight into the perspective of the interviewees, trying to see the world through their eyes. Within this methodology, which is used in various scientific fields to gather primary data, there are various forms of interviews, ranging from structured expert interviews to unstructured narrative interviews. The former aim at collecting specific expert knowledge on a particular issue, the latter gathering subjective perspectives being found in discursive narrations that are initiated by stimuli (c.f. Flick 2009, Silverman 2010). In between we find the problem-centered (expert) interview (Witzel und Reiter 2012, 2022), which tries to combine both the more objective expert knowledge with the more subjective personal knowledge. In our study, we set up an interview guide containing a bank of questions which was flexibly handled by the interviewers, depending on the flow of the interview.

Questions in the interview guide were sorted by topic: (1) the facts about the organization or company; (2) the leader’s role in it; (3) his or her attitude towards spirituality; (4) the relatedness between thriving and spirituality in an organization (5) seeds and building blocks already available, as well as constraints; (6) a vision for a thriving or spiritual workplace; and (7) needs for the organization to achieve that vision. In our project, we did not enter with a preconceived definition of spirituality or a thriving organization; so, we could remain open to discovering what our interviewees shared with us.

Our sample interviews were taken by the team members in Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Greece, Portugal, England, Ireland, Turkey) and the US. We took a purposive sampling of types of organizations by referring to our own personal networks and involving leaders and change-makers of whom we know that they were sensitive to our field of investigation. We selected them from different fields, for example, handicraft, business, education, science, media, professionals, and coaches. The interviews were chosen from our team’s personal networks. The

¹ <https://www.u-school.org/>

² <https://www.u-school.org/g/teams/0974abo3-oof7-4071-81c2-eedd69949973>

interviews were transcribed or paraphrased³ and analyzed by the method of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2022, 2010), by using MaxQda2020 for the coding process.⁴ Coding occurred in two directions, by predefining codes from our interview guide (deduction) and by coding from the material (induction). During the coding process codings were refined.

The limitation of this pilot study lies in the small number of interviews and a very simple and biased sampling technique. Thus, this small number does not allow us to get into an analysis of cultural differences in the perceptions of leaders and in their working environment. Deeper results for such research could be obtained by using trained interviewers to get more interviews, more refined sampling techniques according to type and size of organization, longevity of the organization, the age and gender of the leader, and a cultural analysis of findings.⁵

In the appendix of this paper, we will attach our interview guide. Although the publication of this paper sets an end to this pilot study, we would like to invite people who are motivated to answer our questions in a written form to send their answers to Heiko Schrader (heikoschr@gmail.com). We can use this material for our ongoing work. Thank you for your support.

3 Vision for the working environment

Within the framework of our investigation vision refers to two perspectives, on the systemic level, and the personal level of interaction with others and the environment. Of course, both have overlaps. Let us start with the system view:

3.1 The system view

Systemic visions of respondents vary considerably. The vision of one interview partner (I3) is rather narrow, referring to the technical side of his enterprise, the machines, IT, new tools, after sales - new ways of technical thinking. Then he broadens the perspective. For the staff psychological security is the most important issue – a term that he adapted from Amy Edmondson (Edmondson n.d.). Both the technical and the individual sides, he argues, have to be harmonized. Visioning should take place in the team, both on the level of what is practically

³ The interviewers were in alphabetical order: Hilal Baykara, Denise Bossert, Liviu C. Caliman, Chrisanna Diamanti, Seven Haase, Simone Mastroianni, Giorgina Pontet, Cecilia Rossi Romanelli, Robert Ryshke, Heiko Schrader, Joachim Schraud, Stefanie Tocco, Victoria F. Triep.

⁴ The authors of this paper, Victoria F. Triep, Chrisanna Diamanti, Giorgina Pontet, Robert Ryshke and Heiko Schrader analyzed the interviews and wrote this research report. The interviews were coded by Heiko Schrader.

⁵ Culture shapes both leaders and organizations in their cultural setting, and there is much literature available to link management styles, cooperation, and trust with culture. In our specific topic, we can assume that the religious context of societies strongly impinges on spiritual perceptions. Within the analysis of our pilot study, we could not get deeper into that perspective.

possible as well as what is utopian. This can perhaps be interpreted as pushing the boundaries of the enterprise outward into a new dimension.

Several visions refer to a working culture that allows employees to unfold and thrive (e.g. I22): where staff are comfortable and in a controlled emotional state that allows them to be challenged and provided open, clean, constructive feedback, that allows latitude system interactions (I7). This 44-years old head coach of a football club envisions “a culture with buy-in, flow state, high-performing environment”, where “everyone is fluid, functional, performing in their role efficiently at their highest level. With complete autonomy, trust, and competence.”

A project manager of a large producing company with more than 40,000 employees imagines a working environment where old rules of good and bad are dropped – a challenge for all, as there is a “feeling of anxiety” when something vanishes and changes. Thus,” it is necessary to stay in contact and get attuned with each other. Here new solutions arise.” (I15)

Another male interviewee with a handicraft background refers to job opportunities and an appropriate working environment, particularly for young employees and women. Concerning the leader’s role, he wishes a leader to be a mastermind and designer, an ideal for staff (I2).

A lawyer, who coaches law companies, envisions a balanced working place of love instead of fear. For the individual employee the balance has to be found between performance and relaxation, between doing and being (I4). On the company level, there could be a shift in getting away from pure profit-making to happiness; everybody should have sufficient money to make a living, but the higher goal should be happiness (also I13). Of course, this also involves renewed attitude towards the planet, a holistic benefit. She considers that as a win-win situation for the individual, company, and environment. What the lawyer discusses here is in line with quantitative happiness research. According to the Easterlin Paradox (Easterlin und O’Connor 2021) money only makes people happy until a certain break-even point, but then more money does not increase happiness any more, perhaps even increases dissatisfaction.

In her company, this lawyer pursues a new type of hierarchy and explains, this hierarchy resembles most cells in our body, many of which act autonomously and independently. She aims at a new type of flexible hierarchies, in which positions are in flux, sometimes acting like a boss, sometimes reacting like the cells of the body. This is a new understanding of power, of process, of new ways of acting and concerns interaction of people and organizations. This also concerns the new understanding of ownership, voting rights, shareholders, and has already been realized in her firm. This interplay of autonomy and interconnectedness is embodied in the concept of holacracy⁶ (i.e. self-management)

⁶ “Holacracy is a form of organizing work that is based on the principles of biology. An organization which adopts the Holacracy framework is constantly evolving in response to the needs of the business”. There are no bosses anymore, but employees are empowered to adapt specific roles in which they decide entirely independently, with the permission of other roles <https://www.ensembleenabler.com/blog-en/holocracy-an-organic-approach-to-organizing-work/>; accessed Aug 16, 2023.

A female senior TV producer of reality shows (I8) who safeguards the wellbeing of the contestants, strongly criticizes how such shows cope with them. Thus, she would love to bring in a team of spiritual teachers as advisors. But since the environment is severely restricted by time pressure, such an initiative would be rejected even if it could improve the quality of the product.

A female lawyer and team leader, around 50 years old, considers “the big picture”, the system, and not the individual employee. To change the system, people, from childhood on, should be educated to focus on the “big picture”. Global ethics, mindfulness, and meditation practices should already be taught in schools. “If the ground is not trained for these topics, it will be difficult in the future to have the leaders who should integrate this topic into the workplace (...), I see that platforms are emerging that give space to this topic and give like-minded people a place for exchange. These are important. People want that” (I14). The CEO of a small private company in the UK, 60 to 70 years old, takes a similar perspective that system change generates an environment where employees can unfold their potential. “If you create a complex adaptive system (...) and you draw out the experience of people who are operating in that complex adaptive system, what you see is a great sense of autonomy, that people are engaged, that they feel that they are empowered, there is a huge amount of trust in the group, it’s non-hierarchical, and behaviors are emerging from the bottom up” (I20). However, employees are diverse. New labor is thus a dynamic, adaptive process where there are some initiators, followed by early adopters, later on an early majority, late majority and laggards. The early adopters can initiate a movement the outcome of which is a better working environment. Scholars who have written about this idea confirm that dynamic, innovative human systems are constituted by diverse players, each of these groups playing an essential role in allowing the system to change.

3.2 The personal view of interaction with others and the environment

A chief sales officer of a retail company with around 4,000 employees envisages a working environment with less stress and more cooperation, mutual understanding and support, a higher flexibility, and an attitude that leaders will support employees instead of overburdening them. Managers will allow employees to have ownership of their own tasks: this assumes that people are highly motivated. There will be more informal gatherings, and people want to spend time with each other. There will be a more inclusive culture (I16; similarly, I17).

A head of a private school used his retirement to work in an appropriate environment in which he could “create - with greater freedom - together with my partners, the school I envisioned (...) a school open to life, open to society, that takes into consideration all the perspectives of those involved in the school community in order to ‘shape the next day’.” The interviewee

believes that school education pursues cultivating skills of spirituality and inner growth in people. This involves a widened perspective on happiness beyond material aspects - “contact with nature, movement, playing with others, giving, communicating, sharing, cooperation.” This requires a readjustment of the overall educational system, away from compulsory education to lifelong learning, meaning systematically educating ourselves throughout life. But this has to resonate with society. It requires distinguishing needs and wants: needs reflect the wellbeing of society in interchange with the environment, while wants result from an egocentric consumerism. A changing education perspective might “slowly build another logic, maybe even new needs that we will discover through a multitude of questions” (I10).

Several respondents express a visionary shift in personality. A female university professor from the medical department imagines “better personal relationships compared to what exists now” - based upon more mutual respect, more awareness and honesty. She argues that inconsiderate competition is a special problem at universities that is valued as a mechanism to select the best (I5).

The female law company coach takes a perspective starting from a “better me” to a “better we” to a “better world”. This is in line with her personal spirituality perspective which starts from the “I”, personal and spiritual growth to the “We”, the group, and finally to “Us”, a more spiritual world (I4).

The co-founder of a high-tech company envisages a much higher motivational level with systemic change so that there is less of a necessity to explain the “why” of things. Leaders become more proactive. Then the work environment is serene, peaceful, energizing and people are self-aligned and have clarity on their own goals (I17).

A director of students’ wellbeing in a law school takes a similar view believing that we can learn to support ourselves and our nervous system, and that a change in the individual would then change the entire profession (I 6). And the CEO of a handicraft company argues that thriving and personal unfoldment belongs to the basic needs of humankind and is pursued from the cradle until old age (I2).

The female Director in Primary Education school, between 45 to 50 years old, would like to see everybody from the staff (35 people) and students (180) “smiling, be calm, be in a good mood, having harmonious relationships and being innovative and creative (...) without shouting and tension” (I12). A micro entrepreneur in a network consultancy also wants to see joy in his environment, that energetically would be open, convivial, dynamic. professionally rigorous, but creatively adventurous (I22).

3.3 Summary

To summarize the vision of the respondents, the systemic vision relates very much to a harmonious and cooperative working environment where people feel safe and happy, where they desire to be recognized, heard by their leaders, and trusted by the company. A working culture in which people can unfold, thrive, and articulate their concerns, in which the company gives voice to achieving higher goals versus designing merely for profit. New leaders have to implement new ways of thinking and operating. A new holistic system thinking may emerge, but its basics have to be incorporated already by the educational system in the primary and secondary education system. Several respondents think that change has to start with the individual and move into the collective. Similarly, leaders have to initiate the new way of thinking in their companies, until a self-sustaining process begins. Interesting is the question of whether such a system thinking is a goal that can be achieved or a continuous process. Some of the respondents seem to think in the latter way.

4 Spirituality

What our respondents mentioned in the interviews is also discussed in business administration under the heading of new leadership. It addresses a holistic perspective, which is distinct from the old leadership approach being based upon profit-making and organizational efficiency. The new perspective is said to be related, among other things, to responsibility to the earth and future generations, and a close connectedness to and interest in the wellbeing of the employees (c.f. Scharmer 2016, 2018; George und Clayton 2022). Other authors even go beyond that and identify a new spiritual age being connected to an evolution of new leadership style (c.f. Wilber 2007; Laloux 2014) and holacracy as a new organization of work.

In our study, we wanted to find out the attitude of our respondents to this new approach to leadership. In this part we analyze their attitudes towards spirituality as well as towards thriving in the workplace. As already addressed, we did not define these terms at all but left them open for interpretation. The interviews cover reflections about the respondents' own spiritual self and stance, spirituality in the workplace, and attitudes towards creating a thriving culture.

4.1 Own spiritual Self

Concerning their own spiritual Self, reflections vary across interviews. A COO of a HR company (I17) denies this, while a project manager of a large company in the US is unsure – perhaps (I16, similar I2). A number of leaders consider themselves to be spiritual people but do not commit to how it should be handled in their companies (I18, I16, I13 and I12). The coach of a football club considers himself to be a spiritual person who commits to work and reflects upon nature and Self within the context of the whole (I7). The female Director for Students

Wellbeing and Success at a law school and a female TV producer engage in spiritual practices in their private lives (I6 and I8). Another example, came from the head of a network consultancy organization who has been involved with Buddhism, Daoism and Pan African spiritualities for 35-40 years, which forms his basis for being in the world (I22). However, he did not commit to how these ideas are addressed within the organization. Finally, the head of the large public health organization aspires to be spiritual through regular practices. He sees the value behind his spiritual practices, which supports his well-being and resilience as a leader. In addition, it helps him adopt a compassionate attitude towards his team members.

4.2 Spirituality and Business

The term “spirituality” is considered to be ambivalent, “a potent term, but can be misinterpreted” (I20). The same respondent, head of a small company in the UK that offers leadership development programs and training suggests talking about spiritual intelligence instead of spirituality. He takes up the perspective being addressed in the literature that new leaders apply their own spirituality to the business world and tame “their ego in their leadership practice, which allows them to do something for the greater good, rather than simply for power, prestige, recognition or reward” (ibid). He adds that we are dealing with complex systems that can be understood differently using spiritual intelligence rather than cognitive intelligence. Spiritual intelligence usually asks the questions: “‘Who am I?’ or ‘What do I want to do with who I am?’” (ibid.). These questions are probing, emanating from one’s curiosity, a state of wonder, and an openness, rather than from a knowing or solving perspective. This might allow the leader to see the system differently and thrive for the better.

The head of the producing company (I3) considers spirituality and business to be incompatible since his business is related to making profit and efficiency. The head of the social enterprise (I18) sees it as problematic to talk about spirituality in the organization; it is easier to use the term ‘a caring organization’ at the human level. The overall range of answers reveals the tension in addressing the relationship between spirituality and organizational wellbeing. There remains an unreconciled polarity between spirituality or spiritual practices in the workplace and the role of organizations in business life and the life of their employees. Should companies seek spiritually-minded leaders who serve as role models, training them to develop these capacities, or should they separate the spiritual world from the business world? We find both attitudes in our interviews and take a closer look at it.

The head of the networking company (I22) considers spirituality and business as being compatible with each other: “to have some grounding in spiritual models, frameworks, and an appreciation of human-nature connection, (...) and I think that's a very rich and fertile ground from which to do business.” In terms of working environment, the COO of the HR company (I17) considers spirituality practically as an alignment of employees on the set of company

values and a working environment where people know that some aspects of their personal life are welcome – a balance between personal and professional sphere.

Various respondents agree that integrating a spiritual perspective into an organization or department depends very much on the head of the organization or department, his or her personality and attitude towards bringing spirituality into the workspace, and the cultural context. A female respondent in a German large public organization argues that spirituality cannot be ordered top-down as a structural component, but concerns an individual way of life and way of work that can function as a model for how to behave: a leader is inspiring who thinks in broader categories and can be a role model how he/she copes with colleagues and customers, how he/she speaks, listens, and recognizes and respects others regardless of their position in the organization (I1; also I5). Only in rare cases do leadership training programs offered by companies address spirituality or focus on helping all employees thrive to their fullest potential. Most of these trainings deal with efficiency as a primary company value (ibid). In the same way, the CSO of a retail company (I16) described spirituality as self-management: being open to each kind of possibility with an open heart. This means to accept everything as it comes (good and bad) – not to judge circumstances and other people; to live in the present but connect it to the past and future (similar I18 and I19).

The head of the large public health organization (I21) can bring spirituality into his working environment by offering clients meditation and yoga courses. During the interview he reflects about bringing guided journaling into his course program. Finally, a female professor from Switzerland (I13) describes spirituality as inner contentment and balance. The relation to her work life is that people who are content with their life are successful and attract similar people, so that team competition is reduced. Team members should take the perspective of the "big picture," the common good, and let their ego take a back seat. The common moves closer to the foreground.

The Country Director of an International NGO (I18), Social Entrepreneurship, considers spirituality as an important aspect to a fulfilled work: "If you do not have spirituality, you lose interest, motivation to change things. Employees are left alone."

4.3 Summary

In summary, although not all respondents agree on a definition of spirituality in the workplace, they all have an understanding about the relevance and value of spirituality in creating a dynamic and successful organizational culture. Most consider themselves to be spiritual in their private life, but there was no general agreement about how spirituality can be implemented in the workplace. On one hand some people have strong feelings that spirituality does not have a place in secular workplaces while others reject it as being a religious concept. On the other

hand, the possibility of integrating spirituality into the workplace is context dependent. In business organizations, some respondents referenced that leaders can act as role models to their team members and customers. In educational organizations, leaders can act through educating pupils and students in an open-minded and open-hearted way. In health organizations, leaders can introduce spiritual practices into their organizations' programs. In all cases, spiritual coaches can be brought in to integrate spiritual thinking from the outside into the organization. In higher education spiritually-minded professors have a great deal of leverage to integrate a spiritual climate in their courses or on their teams. However, across departments the academic leaders might be hindered in bringing spirituality into the forefront due to a culture of equals holding divergent interests, competing with each other for money and recognition. In "stressful" contexts, such as film production, stress destroys any desire to integrate spirituality into the experience. Also, large service organizations in the public sector lack a spiritual environment. For example, flexible working hours destroy the capacity for joint meetings in presence. Our own experience is, however, that a spiritual atmosphere can also be created in online meetings.

5 Thriving

Thriving to reach one's full human potential and spirituality are closely related to each other. Many interviewees used the two terms interchangeably or preferred thriving to spirituality. We also have to emphasize that in language contexts other than English, e.g., German, there is no adequate single word translation for that term, and in the German-language interviews we replaced "thriving" by "blossoming".

Here are some voices from our interviews referring to the relation between spirituality and thriving:

The female head of a German coaching company for lawyers finds that spirituality and thriving refer to a perspective and feeling as being part of the whole, being loved and loving oneself, being fulfilled in one's work, being an autonomous and valuable human being, and receiving love and recognition from others (I4). Thus, both terms refer to interaction with others, society, the environment and the cosmos.

The head coach of a football club argues that "spiritual work, including meditation, self-awareness, finding your purpose -- feeds the "WHY?" question (I7) – why we are here - and is instrumental in creating a thriving culture. Also, the female respondent from a law school (I6) considers personal spirituality as a precondition before being connected to the work. But she admits that in the law industry only one's intellect is highly-valued, overlooking the interconnectedness between spirituality and intellect. A female senior TV producer (I8) considers it important to be more mindful and more understanding of oneself and others and helpful at the working place – "to have a system that reminds us to return to presencing, re-learn to feel, and

sense our responses to stimulus so that we don't fall too hard when we fail...". Not only listening to words but "reading the room," and grasping nonverbal communication. She points out that it would be helpful to engage staff with spiritual teachers to practice 'connection' and 'well-being'. This might change the industry! Paraphrasing Bill George in "True North," (George und Clayton 2022) the president of a very large US company for medical equipment in I23 argues that we need a compass, with some references like spirituality, emotional intelligence, and values, to guide us in self-knowledge in order to accomplish a work-life balance. The Director of a private school (I10) draws a relationship between spirituality, consciousness, and one's work in such a way that self-fulfillment is not a burden. The mission is to cultivate values such as listening, raising questions instead of providing clear-cut answers, and discussing to jointly find solutions for improvement. Practicing these values at the workplace integrates the employees and scholars, and creates a spiritual substance and function within the school, a spiritual workplace, a voluntary structure built in the spirit of the founder that sometimes drives the people.

The director of an institution of primary education (I12) uses the terms thriving and spirituality interchangeably. She applies a metaphor for their essence: for an organization or a school to thrive, the director can be compared to the conductor of an orchestra coordinating many musicians and their instruments. It is his or her responsibility to find what each instrument is suitable for and shape the composition to have a resounding or thriving outcome. When he/she can go further and connect this outcome with a vision, a higher goal, this combination leads to a thriving/spiritual result. Harmony is achieved when all the musical instruments find their way to tune together and express a vision bigger than each one separately and all together. The goal of her educational institution is preparing children to become strong, free, fulfilled, and spiritual people contributing to society as a whole.

What does "thriving" mean? The head of a small UK company for leadership development (I20) describes it as follows: people who are highly engaged; they know what the purpose of the organization is, and they are able to align their personal purpose with their organization's purpose. This coincidence drives them and builds intrinsic motivation to come to work and do a good job. Employees also talk about the working culture. They feel safe not only to communicate what worked well but also what does not work, so that the organization gets feedback and can refine the way it operates. He relates this to research findings that an engaged person increases his/her effort by 25% and thus improves productivity. The company is thriving because they give autonomy and empowerment to people working in their service shops and empower them to give compensations to clients instead of holding these backs.

A university professor (I3) considers "blossoming" as a situation where nobody suffers from his or her work.

A female HR consultant in the mid-50s (I 24) argues that in a thriving workplace employees are able to bring their whole selves to work. The workplace is a place to thrive when there is psychological safety and inclusion. Everyone thriving in a workplace means everyone feels motivated, enthusiastic, and creative. People are in tune with each other. In another interview the person mentioned (I15) that a thriving workplace is where everyone is encouraged to align themselves to the organization's purpose and be fully involved in the work. In addition to the importance of psychological safety, the head of a large public health organization (I21) mentions two more important components for a thriving workplace: (1) sufficient employees to provide a structure and time for everyone to thrive; and (2) an organizational culture that is supportive of these efforts.

The female head of the lawyer coaching firm (I4, similarly I13) uses the word "thriving" frequently; thriving is being autonomous and feeling embedded in a bigger whole being balanced and not searching for love from others.

The director of a private educational institution relates thriving to the founder's spirit and values and the voluntary intellectual and material work of many people. He concludes that behind thriving is a spiritual foundation (I10). This is close to the metaphor that the director of primary education uses when comparing a thriving organization with an orchestra being in harmony and resonance (I12). She relates thriving in education to a climate of patience, stability, and altruism which students and teachers learn and practice in experimental workshops about awareness, emotion management, empathy, and attention management.

The Head of the electro-installation firm (I2), takes a similar view of alignment of their employees' personal goals with that of the firm's in order that it thrive. The leader has to be aware of the employees' personal goals to support them.

In contrast to spirituality, thriving is easier to investigate and quantify. A large US company delivering medical equipment (I23) measures whether its employees are thriving by using an outside agency to do research using an anonymous questionnaire called Q12. The tool contains questions that touch on different aspects of an employee's experience. For example, work satisfaction, recognition, and well-being at the workplace are topics covered. The results are used in developing an action plan for improving the culture.

5.1 Summary

As already addressed, spirituality and thriving are similar terms that relate personal and organizational development. Both have to be in line with each other to create a climate of thriving on an individual level, a climate where the employee feels recognized and valued. On the individual level this increases productivity. On the collective level a collective climate of thriving means working as a team for the goals rather than competing with each other and feeling at home. This relates to a feeling of safety within the organization. Employees want to be

recognized, be heard and be empowered to contribute to the “bigger whole.” Thus, the vision, mission, and values of the organization should be known and shared by the employees, as well as to customers and clients.

6 Leadership

Under the leadership code, we formed two subcodes: leadership models and leadership qualities. Leadership models provide real examples, expectations and programs to train leaders in a holistic way. Leadership qualities identify the attitudes inherent to these leaders towards their goals and intention, which means authenticity.

How can the company culture be implemented? Here are some examples and expectations:

An American multinational medical technology corporation (I23) committed to the highest standards of ethical and lawful conduct, decided through their leaders, to implement a training named “Unconscious bias” as part of their new employees' onboarding process to cultivate a strong workplace culture. As a consequence of this ethical leadership, other training took place such as “Psychological safety,” to train the top and middle-levels first, ensuring an open and transparent workplace culture where all positions and all countries go in the same direction.

Psychological safety is also considered important by one of three managing directors (male) of a larger producing company (I3). He mentions how the perceived (collective and individual) security is crucial: “Understandably, as a managing director, as a persona, as a manager it is understandable that radiating security in stormy times is expected from you.”

A large medical company (I23) argues that there are no disabilities that cannot be considered abilities. Such a perspective has to be integrated in the societal and organizational cultural awareness so that every disability is seen as contributing to the whole with one's personal abilities. For the company he promoted an inclusiveness program where the president personally sponsors a group called 3A's - Allies for All Abilities (Mental or physical disabilities). Such a culture must be nurtured day-by-day, the top-level talks with everyone in the company and usually has one-on-one meetings.

The Chief Sales Officer of a retail company with 4,000 employees (I16) agrees that such a new leadership model has to be implemented top down to create and maintain a vibrant business culture. He argues that it is a difficult task to be committed to building a strong leadership culture with an open heart, but this is necessary to motivate the whole workplace to thrive. This commitment should be done by the founders if possible, since they have an interest in the company's well-being and exchange an attitude of “why should I care?” into one that “I contribute to the whole”.

However, since employees are not a homogeneous group, it is easier to create such a culture within the core group, as the attitude of the Vice President of a nonprofit organization in Atlanta (I19) emphasizes: “The core group understands (...) but the newcomers don't. We have

hired someone to work with us on our culture and values, as well as, to align the personal values with the organization's values”

A 51-year old female university professor (I13), who is a member of various boards of directors, also looks for a core group that can support her philosophy to some extent and who can think. It comes to forging a group of people that can start a movement and set a counterpoint with the university atmosphere. Also, she argues that if something is to change, it has to come from the top. "If a leader changes the business culture, he can achieve a lot. The leverage at the top is greater. If a vision is torpedoed from the top, it is very difficult to initiate change. It needs a role model." She is motivated to have a team to create this atmosphere together.

Concerning Leadership programs and talent development to enhance the culture and to support employee empowerment, a leader from an electrical installations company near Lucerne, Switzerland (I2), which belongs to a Switzerland-wide holding, focuses on qualified training, to build a force of skilled workers to be prepared for future demands. The talent development approach is so visible in the company that almost half of the employees are under training. In parallel he tries to shape the employees into future leaders. He aims at cultivating the leadership style of raising questions, instead of giving them answers, encourages them to think for themselves and to come up with solutions, increasing their self-confidence. "Well, I'm very open, I give my employees a lot of freedom, I give them a lot of trust, and I also support their decisions, accepting responsibility and their competencies. In that way, they can decide on their own wherever possible, they can implement their ideas, and can bring forward solutions...Just go ahead, demonstrate, point out the positive results, what comes out of it. Dissolve the obstructive belief sets. There is not much more you can do. The best example is to really lead the way, show results through what you have done."

The CEO of a small consultancy company (I20), which has collaborations and partnerships in 12 countries on different continents and works with businesses and academia, has an accurate view of how to facilitate change in complex systems. Moving through the mental model to a holistic model which integrates emotional and spiritual Intelligence with rational intelligence, engenders transpersonal leadership, where ethical aspects, caring and performance are merged. According to him, the role of a transpersonal leader should be similar to the role of a gardener, stepping out of the mental model where the leader tends to be seen as an intellectual person who tells people what to do, and is perceived as somebody knowing everything. "As a gardener, the leader of the organization knows the shape, what the organization needs to do and what it needs to look like. They plant the seeds, nurture them, feed and water them, and if a plant grows too large, they prune it a bit, and if it's not doing well enough then they feed and water it some more." As this metaphor illustrates, transpersonal leadership is a journey rather than a destination. He strives to do this, promoting LeaderShape Global meetups and sharing experiences, among other examples.

The CEO explains that individuals such as the founder of an organization can be spiritual and can thrive with such a leadership quality, but organizations tend to be rational rather than mystical. Boards taking financial decisions about a company's future always need evidence and risk mitigation, which is based upon logic and rationality. To mitigate these divergent perspectives, his company uses a coaching tool called LEIPA "[Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Performance Accelerator](#)" (n.A.). It helps leaders produce performance enhancing culture from quantitative observations that then, are correlated with the six leadership model styles (visionary, coaching, democratic, etc.) in a qualitative way. Another model called "The Eight Integrated Competencies of Leadership (8ICOL)", which John Knights has been developing over time, has transpersonal elements built into it. It's presented in the first book, *Leading Beyond the Ego* (Knights 2018), a book about how to become a transpersonal leader, which is the codified journey.

On the other hand, there are leaders who are driven more by their intuition, which allows the spiritual person inside the leader to emerge. A micro entrepreneur (I22) male, late 60`s, who is at the core of his network consultancy brings these two perspectives together. In his leadership role he also manages the client selection process and is responsible for doing the marketing and promotion of the business. He considers this to be an area that could be deepened, expanded and projected further. Letting his intuition drive his leadership of the business is a core quality in his leadership: "I would say that fundamentally, it's by intuition and feel. Predominantly, there are certain types of clients that we wouldn't work with".

In the ruthless world of Reality TV, the head of welfare at a British Reality TV show (I8) mentioned that her gut feeling (intuition) can serve as a navigator system, helping her to lead more effectively. Does this intuition-based way of leading emerge from a person's spiritual way of being? In order to improve the atmosphere at work, it would be required that "the people at the top believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and seen as an equal, that is living with equanimity which is in a way spiritual." She also indicated that ideally, these ideas should be implemented as a starting point by bringing the two opposing forces together to find a common denominator for the benefit of the teams. The top people "have to be confident in their ideas to sell them. There is a clear distinction between the creative team that has no clue of the finances and those who are running the finances on the project". There are other models and qualities focusing more on people, social responsibility and sustainability.

An important leadership quality is to identify and attend to new opportunities, as well as to delegate tasks since many leaders have little time to execute all of their unmet needs. It was the reason for the Director of Student Wellness and Success (I6), female, age 50, to be recruited by a university, School of law. The Director of People and culture of a Health Board in UK (I21), who leads 280 people although not having a Human resources education but a background in organizational leadership development, service management and general management, states:

“I can find my way around an Human Resources football pitch, but actually I rely on expertise within my team to do the bits that need to be done there. In those challenging times coping with COVID, he reflected that the best approach to take in his job was a focus on people and culture. The leadership he offers is rooted in daily experiences, emphasizing self-awareness, community importance, network and understanding the influence of neurobiology on the brain, body and hormones.

A Director of a Private Educational Institution (I10) considers that his mission is cultivating the core values of the club of schools they are part of. This purpose suggests a holistic approach to leadership, focusing on personal wellbeing and self-improvement to be in service of the whole school community, as well as in consistent collaboration with other private schools in Greece. Among the healthy habits he cultivates are regular meditations and contact with nature to keep his mind clear to better perform his professional responsibilities, reflecting on his performance during the day. “This helps me become a better person, expands my perspectives and improves my actions”. He shared an experience they had as a nonprofit enterprise, with a private company outside the educational context, that validate the importance of the corporate social responsibility, the company’s culture and values driven leadership, at the core of all organization: “There is not only a world of profit out there, there are also people, because people in high positions are also people and they need to contribute to life, to society.”

A senior change manager consultant (I24) and invited 55-year-old professor, woman, emphasize that aims like talent development, mental health, social responsibility and social initiatives involving the whole community, have to be strategically designed as part of the company's overall mission. Sharing stories from the BCSD Portugal conference adds credibility and real-world examples of companies successfully implementing these principles. She emphasizes this mindset with students and companies to foster more holistic, socially conscious and sustainable business practices.

6.1 Summary

Even though the sector, country, role, and gender vary, the message is unambiguous: the role of the leadership is at the core of what defines a thriving workplace. May it be prosperous for all stakeholders. And several respondents admit that a spiritual mind of the leader helps change the environment at the workplace.

Respondents agree that it is crucial to implement a strong culture, based on ethical values that promote trust, inclusion, development, and well-being of employees. And also, the alignment of purpose, through the results generated by everyone with a positive impact on the company, customers and society. Culture is highly influenced by those who lead organizations and impacts those who serve it on all levels. But an organizational culture has to be understood on all organizational levels.

Therefore, training programs, which address understanding an organization's culture, are mandatory at all levels to ensure the transition from an individual-centered to a collective-centered model.

- Professional training to support employee empowerment, as for talent development and for shaping transpersonal leaders (holistic model who combines emotional intelligence and spiritual Intelligence with rational intelligence, where ethical, caring and performance are merged).
- Personal training to strengthen and align.
- values and purpose, to develop qualities that support positive, inclusive and collaborative conduct.
- Wellbeing training to promote mental health and healthy habits in daily life.

7 Benefits from new leadership models

In our study, we wanted to discover what benefits leaders consider come from new leadership models. The interviewees share their thoughts of how spirituality and conscious awareness benefit and stimulate thriving work environments. In this part we present/analyze the benefits in the different aspects of the system: the clients, the organization, the employees and the on-going process of the bridging.

7.1 Benefit for the clients and the employees that work in an organization

The respondents implicitly or explicitly argue that in our times, people are feeling that something is missing, they feel a lack of meaning, a lack of purpose, of connection and coherence, they need "something more." With spirituality and awareness, the quality of a business, the service to the clients, and the quality of employees' lives change in a beneficial way according to many people interviewed.

Spirituality connects people and organizations with a higher purpose and a coherence.

"I think it's helping people see that they are not just there to do the job that they do, but that they have purpose behind it" says the CEO of LeaderShape Global company. (I20)

A micro-preneur in a Network consultancy (I22) shares that there are a great set of attributes and qualities in the business itself: in terms of its culture, in terms of its brand and in terms of the services offered: "We believe that for clients, the strap line of such a business is 'your flourishing is our purpose.' So that's the benefit to the client, that absolutely our purpose in working with them is to support, facilitate, enable their flourishing in their own context". (I22)

Connecting and providing service in a holistic approach is beneficial for the clients, believes a former lawyer and author of "The for-purpose enterprise: A powershifted Operating System to run your business" (Aschenbrenner et al. 2020). "Clients get the most benefit when we connect

with them in a holistic way” she says, “the point is ‘I, We, World’, that’s the direction we need to take. It is always from inwards to outwards” (I4).

The Director of Student Wellness and Success in Charleston University in School of Law (I6) shares similar thoughts. Her goal is to help students build a toolkit that includes health and wellness strategies. She believes that wellness-staff should lead by example (being spiritual). This is the most powerful way to lead and serve a community. She said: “To know yourself so completely, meaning that you know how to take care of yourself, to be so effective. In Latin, the motto of the school is -‘for the good for the people’ - if you give more to yourself, you have more to give to others. If you take care of yourself (emotionally, spiritually, physically....) you can give back to your purpose “to law, to court, to people, to the community.” (I6) For wellness to become integrated into the culture so the community can prosper, leaders have to set an example.

In education there is a similar belief. “This approach prepares children to become strong, free, fulfilled, spiritual people useful to themselves and society as a whole” (I12). In educational systems, the clients are students who achieve higher levels of knowledge, freedom, happiness, and self-growth for themselves and the common good (c.f. citizen;⁷ active citizens). To offer this to students is considered a high pedagogical goal, that is becoming reality through cultivating awareness, mindfulness, and spirituality. This quality of education leads to self-growth, self-empowerment, personal and collective fulfillment.

The employees in this system are the teachers and staff. “No-one can teach something one doesn’t know.” The teachers and staff need to be in a state of awareness, need to be fulfilled and find meaning in their lives in order to share their awareness and sense making with students. In education, most of the interviewees (I10, I12, I9) agreed that spirituality is a necessity -not a luxury- and that it benefits all, teachers, the students, and their families.

Teachers, “to be able to give of themselves, to contribute to the happiness of children and families, (...) too must be happy (...) For people to be happy they must do things they like, to constantly improve, to give them opportunities - not in the narrow sense of training, but of introspection and self-enhancement. (...) The school looks forward to the improvement of society, to the acceptance of certain values; therefore, all those who work there must improve and develop themselves in order to become better.” (I10)

When people live with less stress they are healthier and more effective in every sense, providing more to themselves and others. Large companies are beginning to embrace the importance of the mental and emotional health of their employees. “For this purpose, human resource departments are studying ways to help people manage their stress, offering courses on mental

⁷ “Citoyen” (French) refers to the political side of a citizen (Latin: *civitas*) who - from the perspective of Rousseau - is taming his self-interest of the bourgeois’ side and actively and collectively shaping the common good.

health awareness” (I21) describes a Director of People and Culture who is a member of the Health Board that provides regional health and care services.

7.2 Benefits for the Organizations, the Companies, the Enterprises, the Systems

Becoming better improves the life and the health of the children, students, patients, and employees and to save their lives are important (I10 and I20). The Director of a Private Educational Institution shared: “I connected to the vision I have for the people in the organization. I constantly want them to become better not only for the children and for society but also for themselves, I want them to be happy. Happiness is of course in quotes because everyone has different expectations and different desires... But I want them to be satisfied” (I10).

A Project Manager and Team Leader for over 40,000 people shared his goals: “Getting away from a cold capital competition with a loss of cost and empathy. Getting to something new that arises, new Ideas, new benefits in resonance with everyone involved in and with the system. In this way we will feel the new and feel that it works. This ‘new’ serves the common intention not the intention of a part or person. The disadvantages can be seen and balanced“ (I15). This interviewee shared a final thought: “Contest, war, and lies disappear when the common intention is put ahead of the individual advantage. And the individual advantage could be enhanced when focusing on the common intention.”

The CEO of LeaderShape Global (I20) bringing in the need of our times and at the same time the benefit of organizations, says: “Another key thing at the moment is one of diversity in organizations. We need that diversity of thinking. We are faced with challenges because of a fixed way of thinking, and we can’t continue to use the same thinking to get us out of this.” He believes that an organization which adapts to its context and is absolutely clear on its purpose is able to contain, to empower, and to retain talented people, and to facilitate diversity, being comfortable working in a hybrid environment. In this way, not losing control of what people are doing but connecting and fulfilling the advanced demands of our era. “Even if it’s a very large organization, it doesn’t matter how remote the worker is – the decisions that people take would be in service of the organization’s purpose,” he concludes (I20).

An independent professional who works in the Corporate Sector believes that the benefits for the collective lie within its purpose. (I24) The benefits are the health and well-being of employees and the life-affirming culture of the organization. Also, from the ethical point of view the benefits serve the collective. The goal would be to support everyone thriving to their full potential in the organization.

The quality of work and the results are different and more qualitative. “People come together thanks to their high motivation. There will be high levels of cooperation, and this would help

people to tackle challenges. People are friends and thus able to easily address their conflicts. There would be a culture of respect. The other person is seen as a human being,” elaborates a CSO of a Retail Company (I16).

The ability to handle organizational or systemic trauma was mentioned as a benefit of a culture where everyone is thriving. Achieving this end comes with greater awareness and commitment to building such a culture. “Not be overburdened with past and with money. The company will be able to evolve regardless of the traumas of the past. Moving from the past to the present and being able to let the future emerge,” says a CSO of a Retail Company (I16).

Being an employee in an organization or workplace that intentionally focuses on all of its members thriving, giving voice to a culture in which spirituality is embraced, will nurture and cultivate the qualities of being human.

A COO of a HR Company shared the following: “Benefits are that I will be 100% mentally at ease and calm as regards the team dynamics, personal relationships and relationships with clients. The business growth will be fostered, since in this work environment team members are realized. There will also be a positive image outward. Communication is more effective, has higher quality and it's clearer. There is a level of alignment. Less words are needed. There is a total transparency” (I17). This reflection illustrates the value of transparent communication, strong interpersonal relationships within an organization, and a culture that is built on a people-centered approach.

“Spirituality would allow us to have better relationships, more respectful of others: with spirituality we learn to see and respect others, even if they are lower in the hierarchy. With spirituality you see them and consider them as people. In competitive environments they are often seen more as subjects that can be used to your liking. It would be a workplace where those who want to emerge by manipulating others, could not do it,” says a University Professor. (I5)

Spirituality and emotional intelligence guide us to achieve self-knowledge in order to accomplish a work-life balance. The President of Europa, Latin America, Canada & EEMEA, a large company over 52,000 people, shared: “In our company we value and promote the connection of the person with our purpose. Because of this we connect better and share stories.” (I23) “All employees without exception, including myself, contribute to realize our purpose” (I23).

Training programs in organizations are beginning to provide personal and collective life skills. This is becoming essential for the growth and thriving of organizations and the empowerment of their employees.

The President of Europa also said: “We have a paid, two-year trainee program that crosses all areas with feedback where employees can speak without censorship, giving the company an opportunity to have another view of itself and mainly to avoid losing contact with our young generation” (I23).

“We give training on this high-value system to the newly appointed teachers, ... not only to support their teaching but also in how they get along with the children, with the parents, how they respond to difficulties, and how they function in everyday life. And we have another step, that of the ‘conscious teacher’ who comes to talk with other people in order to consciously listen to them,” describes a Director of a Private Educational Institution (I10). Most importantly, teachers bring to their work the need to support their students social and emotional well-being and develop a holistic understanding of a student’s growth.

A culture where high-quality work is expected and valued provides high motivation and attracts quality-orientated people. A thriving culture provides a place where personal achievement and fulfillment are seen as critical steps to reaching one’s full human potential. This is very attractive and powerful for the development and the accomplishment of objectives for both people and organizations. A Director of Primary school said: “The effect is seen immediately, people come to work and feel good, have a good time, no matter how tired they are. They feel good at the end of the day. They feel that what they are doing has value and they have the strength and energy for new actions, for new things” (I12). Finally, the COO at an HR company shared: “People will come together thanks to their high motivation. There will be a high-level of cooperation, and this would help people to work through challenges. People respect one another and thus are able to address conflicts easily. They show more respect to each other. [to each other]. The other person is seen as a human being” (I16). “They could contribute and show up as their whole selves without having to repress some aspect of themselves,” (I22) says a micro-preneur in a network consultancy.

The majority of the interviewers focus on the relationship between the benefits for the collective versus the individual. However, the interviews we conducted suggest both are important and interconnected. For example, the V.P. of a nonprofit organization in Atlanta that focuses on community redevelopment said: “My goals would be aligned to the organization’s goals. People would see a path for their growth within the organization” (I19). While the Director of People and Culture shared: “Organizational benefit I would hope would be felt by colleagues as well” (I21). The Director continued “the benefits for individuals are about work, work is a significant part of peoples’ lives and it provides a significant purpose for people. It’s a significant source of social support and interaction. It’s about meaning-making for people in many cases. And ultimately, it’s about their economic well-being as well.” (I21).

7.3 Summary

The necessity of our time is raising human consciousness. A key to that is individual spirituality and awareness, which is sometimes difficult for leaders to maintain. ‘Crises’ – health issues, financial issues, social issues, and human and planetary survivability - are considered the ultimate test in people’s, organizations’, companies’, and systems’ lifetime and it is crucial how

people and systems respond to them. For responding effectively in crisis situations, a special capacity is necessary. An organization needs to be able to respond constructively to the variety of human difficulties and has to radiate into the world of business to be a role model for effective global leadership.

The interviews show an awareness among the respondents that business ethics and corporate social responsibility are nowadays factors that determine organizational success. Thus, we treat that under the topic of benefits. For service-oriented organizations such as in the health or education sectors or for consultancies the interface to their customers is much closer because they directly respond to their clients' needs and get their feedback. For producing companies, the interface to customers is the product itself, and the feedback to the company happens by "voice" or "exit" (Hirschman), i.e. by complaint, written or, nowadays in social media, by likes and dislikes, or they turn away from the product, what shows up in the sales. In business administration money (profit/sales) is the key information system about success. But sales nowadays no longer reflect the quantity-quality-price relation only. The additional utility of a customer gains increasing importance for the decision to buy or not to buy. The additional utility of the customer or client relates to the ethics of the company, the transparency of delivery chains, fair treatment of employees, environmental consciousness, fair trade, etc., in other words: fairness in interaction. Thus, business ethics in interaction perhaps involve higher costs in a narrow sense, but engender more benefits in a broader sense.

8 Needs of the Organization

The organizations' needs, with regard to their employees' wellbeing at work, was another field of interest in our study. We paid special attention to how spirituality in the workplace showed up in the interview. Recognizing that spirituality was not universally embraced as an important cultural element in all organizations, we paid close attention to the idea of how employees reach their full human potential in an appropriate environment. Reaching one's full human potential considers a person's cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. In our study, we recognized a regular pattern of needs that showed up, both from inside and outside organizations.

The primary needs of an organization need to be aligned to their employees' needs so that both the organization and the employees can thrive. For the employees an appropriate environment which could include some of the following:

- 1) A balanced time frame for work, recreation, and rest.
- 2) The opportunity to pause and be nourished.
- 3) Adequate time for sensory needs to be met: time in sunlight, fresh air, contact with nature, and a desirable space to work.

Individuals need to feel they are valued in the workplace. Thriving individuals will be truly present at work when their needs are met, including expressing their autonomy. Also, there is the need for people to embody their experiences, while feeling inspired to create and be in alignment with their teams. Responsibility, commitment, meaningful work, and individual and collective accountability are qualities that employees support as essential. Finally building relationships, which includes a culture that supports honesty and equanimity, is a critical need that must be met.

As we discovered, both individuals and organizations have needs that must be met. These include: (1) the need for belonging and becoming in a safe space;(2) engaging with one's Inner truth; (3) awakening authenticity; (4) supporting a person's need to be creative; (5) being open to change; (6) nurturing a cooperative workplace; and (7) tuning in to co-create a future that is wishing to emerge. Humanity in all its forms has a need to thrive and succeed.

We will address the following fields that emerged in the interviews: (1) mental health and well-being; (2) spiritual self and practice; (3) ethics and inclusion; (4) a culture of togetherness; (5) relationship building; and (6) embracing a timeframe of "slow to go fast."

8.1 Mental health and well being

The president of a global company that deals with medical devices expressed a need for psychological safety in the workplace (I15). The goal is to create an environment without fear, so employees can be vulnerable and scrutinize the status quo without being repressed. A university professor stated that being informed means that there are alternatives. The reality that is experienced by most employees is that they are not listened to or valued by their organization. There is a need to "normalize" vulnerability, being more open to their employees' social-emotional needs. Leaders need to be more open and aware of the importance of mental health issues in the workplace (I6). A professor of a high school calls for "people at the top who are willing to tackle these issues in order to create an environment where difficult conversations can take place in a safe environment" (I15). Finally, the project manager of a large company referenced the need for a "safe-space project" that would create safe spaces for pioneers leading to the whole system feeling open to new ideas (I21). As you can see from interviewees' reflections, employee well-being is linked to the creation of safe spaces that support the expression of one's vulnerability, allow for taking risks and failing to learn, and value the employee as an integral member of the organization.

8.2 Vision and purpose

Articles have been written about the importance of organizations articulating their vision or purpose. The authors of a 2023 Harvard Business Review article (Lysova et al. 2023) write:

“research shows that meaningfulness is more important to us than any other aspect of our jobs — including pay and rewards, opportunities for promotion, and working conditions.” Employees care about the vision and purpose of the organization and want to know that they are seen as valuable members of the community. Aligning to an organization’s purpose is key to thriving.

An entrepreneur of a consultancy firm questions the normal proceeding in management to define vision and mission of a company: and instead suggests posing the deeper WHY question of existence or the purpose. “You have to answer the WHY question! Why do we exist? What are we here to do? If the answer to that relates to the old economic model (i.e., as a Chief Executive my role is to increase shareholder value), then I think that you’ve missed the purpose. So, the purpose has to be questioned in reference to the whole world. What is our role (the role of the organization) in reference to the planet on which we live?” (I20).

The President of a large medical device company takes a similar perspective: “The company promotes a connection with the purpose. Why do you wake up in the morning to go to work? Doesn’t matter if at home or at the office? [Our purpose is] to help improve life and health of the patients and to save their lives. Our values that support our purpose are integrity, accountability, people first, and performance. How can all employees without exception, including myself, contribute to reach this purpose?” (I23).

8.3 Ethics and inclusivity

Another field that emerged in our interviews was the need for an inclusive culture within an organization that clearly articulated an ethical framework.

This was made visible in the interview with the co-founder of a technology organization who considers his own weaknesses. “I feel not to be very empathetic and expansive. I would need support to better communicate, deepen my listening skills and create dialogue (I17).” His comment reflects the need for leaders to accept their own vulnerability in order to build the capacity to create an ethical, empathetic, and inclusive culture.

8.4 Creating a Culture of Togetherness

The director of a private education institution expresses the need to enjoy things together in the school environment, promote a sense of community among co-workers, and create a space for sharing and self-development. advance a program for receiving feedback from an elder or a colleague, and support employees co-creating together (I10). The director of a primary school expressed the need “for more time in order to cultivate and bear fruit” (I12). Placing value on employees’ interpersonal relationships will optimize the effectiveness and well-being of the school. Another set of interviewees spoke about the importance of effective communication

throughout the organization as a means to facilitate employees' well-being and creativity. There is a sense that the workplace becomes a more vibrant space if people believe transparent communication is valued.

A former lawyer now coaching lawyers said: "maintaining talented people and recruiting new ones is key. In a law firm, where losing a person means losing 100,000 €, when you lose 10, it's a lot of money. Change is needed by letting go of people who are not motivated and thus open possibilities for others" (I14). Being ethically supportive, the president of an NGO said: "Building trust within the organization means that we can do the racial equity work together." (I19) We believe this illustrates that leaders in the C-suite need to discover new ways to onboard, develop, and retain a vibrant workforce that trusts their leaders and believes that a culture of community or "togetherness" is valued. When all the stakeholders are involved with intention the organization will thrive.

8.5 Goals/ hierarchy/collective relationship

Expressed in our interviews is the need to create an organizational culture that is supportive, inclusive, and empowering, so that people are able to bring their best selves to the workplace. The Director of People and Culture in a public health organization acknowledged that: "There's a place for a hierarchy in organizations and I think it would be naive to think that we could do away with it altogether" (I21). In addition, this leader reflected on the need to build the capacity of team leaders to effectively support their team members. His comments reveal the need for organizations to create a network of positions and relationships that support people so they can engage in today's work and innovate for tomorrow. He also shared how his company's Human Resource Department prompted employees' personal awareness leading to their individual fulfillment which would lead to the collective improvement of the company. (I17). The president of a NGO referenced the importance of working towards collective growth within the organization but struggled moving the work from individuals to the collective group (I19). These examples from our interviews illustrate that organizations recognize the need to support individual development of their employees; however, their primary responsibility appears to be moving the work from the individual to the collective. It may be that this goal is best achieved through focused development of a "teaming culture" within the organization. This requires building the leadership capacity of mid-level leaders that facilitate teamwork.

Two interviewees referenced the need for their organizations to embrace becoming a learning organization. The sales executive of a retail company says that he needs commitment from the top and fresh supply of resources to address critical issues. "We need to be looking outwards to see what other people are doing, learning from them" (I16). We heard from him the need to design a shared leadership structure across the organization that sees change and learning as integrated ideas. The director of a public health organization spoke about the need for social

movement led change, rather than from the top. He also expressed a need to bring people in from outside their system to help them to learn and grow, to have a broader approach. “I think we should always be looking at what other people are doing, to try and improve what we are doing and that's something we absolutely need to do both within the organization and further afield” (I21).

Some respondents are paying special attention to how other organizations use resources to ensure that their employees are able to reach their full human potential, so that we can assume an inter-organizational learning process.

9 Appropriate and Inappropriate Environment

As already seen from the benefits and needs sections, what can or cannot be achieved by leaders as agents of their organization depends very much on the environment. Thus, we asked them what constitutes an appropriate environment, and which are the hindering factors.

We will start with the factors mentioned that characterize the absence of an appropriate environment. In the analysis of 20 interviews, there were a number of themes that emerged, suggesting which elements must be present in an organization's culture in order for individuals to thrive, reaching their full human potential.

In one interview, a male micro-preneur suggested that the absence of openness and transparency in a culture does not support a person reaching their full potential (I22). Said in another way, the Chief Sales Officer at a retail company said, “the real obstacle is the huge commitment to keep an open heart” (I16). It is the open heart or receptivity to another person that supports individuals in an organization to thrive and enables real interaction among each other. Again, it is this idea of openness and transparency that help build a culture of trust. In an article on building trust (<https://www.mindtools.com/apb02xp/building-trust>) the authors of the Mind Tool Content Team write about the importance of honesty, transparency, and being a team player in creating a trusting community in the workplace. Presence and absence of an appropriate environment are two sides of the same coin. Thus, it is important that the organization creates a safe space for the employees to take risks (2nd element). This is also said in the just mentioned articles that employees take risks for the organization, once they trust it. For example, they stay in the company, even when they are offered a better salary elsewhere, or they feel safe to offer suggestions even if they are in a hierarchically lower position. In our interviews the independent professional said, “The workplace is just another place to thrive when there is psychological safety” (I24). The implication being that if psychological safety is not valued or supported then the culture will not be a place where people will thrive not only for themselves but for the sake of the company, the ideals. In a large industrial company, the Project Manager referenced their “safe space” project as a way to assure attention was paid to this critical element (I15).

The importance of this third element came up in many interviews. Designing for collaboration instead of competition creates spaces for people to learn from and support one another. A kindergarten assistant at an international school said, “it (bureaucracy) is the sickness in an organization because it can cause an island, lack of collaboration, and lack of transparency” (I23). So, an overly bureaucratic and directive organization, one in which collaboration is absent, is not a healthy place to work. It certainly is not a place to thrive. Another interviewee referenced that the easiest way to set people against each other is to support a very competitive environment, a “me first” culture, where selfishness and opportunism reign. In such an environment, it is hard for people to reach their fullest potential.

The fourth theme that arose suggested that unless values and strategies are aligned across an organization its environment will not be conducive to people thriving. The implication is that lack of alignment creates confusion and greater uncertainty. The independent professional said, “Values being aligned are needed to flourish and to collaborate. Once it ignites positive emotions, it can be contagious. Without this there is only subsistence and no passion” (I24). In a high-tech company, the COO and co-founder is quoted as saying, “There is a lack of clarity on strategic vision. We need an alignment on what we want to do in the long term, and how to get there” (I17). Both of these quotes illustrate that alignment, especially with respect to values, across the organization brings clarity to the work.

When diverse perspectives don’t surface as part of conversations in an organization then it won’t be positioned to grow and develop. A number of interviewees referenced the importance of inclusivity, building a diverse community. The CEO of a leadership organization said: “We need that diversity of thinking. We are in the challenges we are now facing because of a set of thinking, and we can’t use the same seat of thinking to get us out of this” (I20). The quote “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results” is usually attributed to Albert Einstein. People in organizations thrive when their ideas are encouraged, and dialogue is promoted as a means to better understanding.

A fifth theme that emerged centered around culture. The absence of an appropriate environment occurred in organizations that did not address the importance of culture as a benefit or an obstacle to a person’s “true self” showing up at work. The male micro-preneur said this in response to a roadblock to thriving in the organization, “not having to suppress or repress some aspect of myself” (I22). Another interviewee said this in response to why people don’t thrive, “The absence of a harmonious working environment in which everyone doesn’t feel comfortable reaching their greatest potential” (I14). Many respondents share a necessity to focus on culture.

Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey make this point in their study of four organizations that are deliberately developmental and have created environments where people can reach their full potential. They write: “In an ordinary organization, most people are doing a second job no one is

paying them for. In businesses large and small; in government agencies, schools, and hospitals; in for-profits and nonprofits, and in any country in the world, most people are spending time and energy covering up their weaknesses, managing other people's impressions of them, showing themselves to their best advantage, playing politics, hiding their inadequacies, hiding their uncertainties, hiding their limitations" (Kegan 2016:1). So, we need to focus on creating working cultures where people can be their true selves.

The final theme that emerged in the 20 interviews was the polarity between competition and collaboration. When working environments are designed on the premise that workers compete with one another for attention or getting ahead, in contrast to cooperate with each other for the benefit of the team, then the environment is not conducive to supporting a person reaching their full human potential. A professor in the medicine department of an international university said, "A very competitive environment, which affirms the ego-self, is an easy way to set people against each other. Situations like this occur very often and nothing can be done" (I5). This person suggests that a competitive culture embraces an energy that takes over and swallows people up. The full human potential can't emerge because personal relationships don't evolve in a healthy way. The absence of an appropriate environment is likely to be present in organizations that fail to honor and support an individual's development to reach their full human potential.

10 Conclusion

In the context of our study's purpose, to uncover to what extent organizations integrate spirituality and personal development into their leadership culture, we found affirmation, apprehension, uncertainty, and confusion as to whether these concepts are, or should be embraced within organizations. We did garner some consensus that in order for employees to thrive in the workplace they have to be able to prosper within a safe environment. From the study, we were able to synthesize the main lines to be established from the evidence found through the reference codes used (see the appendix)

The systemic vision relates very much to a harmonious and cooperative working environment where people feel safe and happy, where they are valued, recognized, and heard by the leaders, as well as trusted by the company. People long for a working culture in which they can fulfill their full human potential. It was clear from our interviews that creating a culture in which people can thrive is dependent upon a leader who understands how to leverage the system to create this welcoming and nurturing space.

The results of the interviews informed us that a prosperous workplace largely depends on the (business) culture established in the company. Therefore, establishing a strong culture with a clear purpose is mandatory. A strong and supportive culture is values-centered, open, transparent, safe, collaborative, and innovative. It seeks alignment of values throughout the

organization. From our analysis of interviews, healthy organizational cultures look for a balanced expression of the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of being human. It is the integration of these five domains that allows a person to develop their full human potential. The absence of an appropriate environment will likely lead to organizations failing to honor and support an individual's development to reach their full human potential. One expression we derived from moving from "ego" to the system "we" is: "better me - better we - better world."

With respect to leadership, we discovered that leaders throughout an organization must build the capacity to see their employees. This requires a high-level of emotional intelligence on the part of leaders. With heightened self and other awareness, leaders can promote a psychologically safe environment that is built on trust, creates a strong sense of community, values employees' health and wellness, and invests in the development of their employees. Leaders have to pay special attention to inclusivity, aligning everyone to the organization's vision, mission, and values, particularly in organizations with top-down structures. Finally, building a diverse and vibrant workforce is essential to creating a culture in which people respect one another, our commonalities and our differences.

There are other factors that emerged in our interviews that if addressed would promote a culture more responsive to employees' needs. Organizations and their leaders paying more attention to business ethics and how their identity is perceived by employees and the public. Encouraging their HR department to design a more comprehensive system for hiring, onboarding, training, and retaining their employees. Being intentional about paying attention to how they communicate with employees, especially frontline workers who are typically more disconnected from the organization's vision, mission, and strategy. Creating a workplace where connectedness is a design feature, and not just about space and furniture but about interrelationships. Another factor of importance to employees is how the organization develops them through learning opportunities. Finally, paying close attention to health and wellness of employees with consideration to work-life balance.

Openness to diversity and a collaborative community were mentioned as critical people thriving in the workplace. Diversity of thinking and perspective is needed for growth and development. A number of interviewees referenced the importance of inclusivity, building a diverse community. New leaders have to implement new ways of thinking and operating, starting from the individual level from basic and secondary education, in an open-minded and open-hearted way. So then a new holistic system of thinking may emerge and accumulate on the collective level. In this context, the role of ethical leadership is fundamental, to enable the transition from the individual-centered model to the collective-centered model. It must be understood as a catalyst for inclusivity, bringing power and wealth for everyone, as it has a quantitative and

qualitative impact and can be an inexhaustible source, benefiting the individual, the organization, society and the Earth.

As mentioned, health and wellness and psychological safety for employees are important so that employees can express themselves with authenticity, and encourage socialization and synergy which will reduce polarization. Fostering collaboration instead of competition. The full human potential emerges when personal relationships evolve in healthy ways. Competitive culture embraces an energy that takes over and swallows people up.

People we interviewed agreed that the whole interview process in the Ulab2x project was beneficial for them to build greater awareness. This seemed to be true despite the fact that introducing the idea of spirituality in the workplace was difficult for many of them to delve into. We believe that our interviews stimulated self-reflection and resonance. Here is an example from one interviewee: “I think you've identified a chord or a theme that will be very resonant for many people. And I would encourage you and your colleagues, at the least, to consider how you might be able to nurture, cultivate to whatever extent is feasible from your respective commitments' perspective, this micro community.” (I22)

Spiritual work or paying close attention to whether employees are able to reach their full human potential, enhances a more holistic perspective that has an enormous potential. This heightened awareness illustrates that all aspects of the system must be considered important if the system is to function to its fullest potential. An interviewee reflects: “We are well aware of the problems, but don't recognize them as already providing the answer. We don't understand so far that what you put in will come out. Recognition, discernment, and implementation are the benefits of such an advanced state of being.” (I6)

What resonance did our team members feel during the interviews and after reading the final draft of that paper?

For the most part we are members of capitalist societies and economies that have shaped our way of thinking, consuming, and feeling, and our relationship between I and We and to nature. In the process of modernization humankind has reshaped nature, of which we are only a small part, into a human-centered environment that we dominate and that serves our ego-driven worldview. The outcome of this worldview is the domestication and exploitation of the natural world to deliver the ingredients for a convenient life for as many people as possible. There was a time when our basic needs were fulfilled for the purpose of survival. Today, we have turned our needs into wants that are fed by abundance in many rich societies. The market system can only survive when these insatiable wants are awakened by advertisements and promises to all of us to achieve better and happier lives by consuming more (Barber). The influence of the economy has come to dominate almost all spheres of life. But happiness research shows that it is not only material possessions that make us happy, but more importantly, less tangible

factors such as good health, strong social contacts, a spiritual life, raising children, walking through nature, climbing a mountain, or swimming in the sea that contribute to a life of happiness.

The planet can no longer endure continuous quantitative growth without collapsing. We now reflect upon dimensions of qualitative, green growth and sustainability which encompass health, (world) happiness, social embeddedness, and the like. But the growth paradigm has not been abandoned. We aim at doing as before, only a little bit greener. Critique of capitalism and ecological critique merge now since we are already in the eleventh hour.

What does it mean from a personal perspective to reembed into a more interconnected way of being? Slowing down, connecting with open heart and mind, feeling, listening, and reflecting before (re)acting, deconstructing former belief systems and habits, self-limitation, moving from self-interest to our true Self, which provides a stable and constant anchor in the stormy environment, if not even connecting to higher Self, to the Greater Whole and higher purpose.

However, reembedding is not only a personal process. Many personal processes culminate in a collective trend. While once capitalism engendered consumerism, the contrary may also occur. As learned from socialization theory and demography, societal attitudes change slowly and with cohorts (c.f. Inglehart 2004). Socialization mainly occurs until the beginning of adolescence, and then behaviors and attitudes remain rather stable. For primary socialization the family is most important. For secondary socialization it is the education system, the media and nowadays, the social media. These nowadays strongly influence consumer behavior of younger cohorts (e.g. influencer and product placement in movies), but at the same time they promote the formation of social movements (e.g. Friday-for-Future), linking people with similar ideals who do not even know each other. A reflexive, critical attitude towards ceaseless consumption and capitalism can be promoted by the education system and the media.

We can also observe that the economy quickly adapts to new social trends (unfortunately, mostly discovering new profitable niches). An example is the trend towards vegetarian and vegan food that is nowadays often produced by meat-processing enterprises, another one the sharing economy, taken up by automobile industries.

We can consider new leadership under the reembedding paradigm, too. From our perspective, it is not necessarily something new but a (re)discovery of former values, constancy, durability and reliability, people-centered and eco-friendly. Mission statements of enterprises and business ethics are not only something to be presented in brochures or at webpages, but they have to be convincingly lived in and by the organization, have to be internalized by the employees, and identified with. As heard by many respondents, the organization should provide a safe place for the employee to unfold his or her capabilities (Sen 1999; Nussbaum et al. 1993), provide their own inputs and feel that these are recognized and valued, so they can reach their full human potential. The new leader is charismatic, self-aware, an approachable and touchable

galleon figure, and a beacon in the organization who is aware of his or her responsibility for societal ethics and nature. A global compact of such new leaders is required now. Our stakeholder interview instrument revealed that many leaders talked about and reflected upon the need for new leadership models.

What we could not address in this pilot study is how far culture/civilization shapes the perceptions of our respondent leaders and the business culture. Embeddedness also refers to cultural codes of conduct such as mutual trust and cooperation or criticism to the usual way done, etc. Thus, a larger and more sophisticated study would more emphasize the cultural/civilizational perspective.

Nowadays researchers aim at reciprocity in their proceedings. They obtain information and knowledge from their respondents, collect these and reorganize these in their analysis and then offer the results to the public and replay them to respondents. In our group reflection, we thought about enhancing that reciprocity so far to invite the respondents to tell us how their ideas and positions are reflected in this paper and whether it offers them new impetus. If you like, you can give us a short-written statement by email (heikoschr@gmail.com). Thank you for your support!

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