A narrative inquiry into contemplative leadership: concepts, characteristics, challenges, opportunities


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Abstract

This research explores the link between the practice of contemplation and its influence on leadership. It investigates how the interiority of the leader can shape the style and quality of leadership practice. This research has as its ultimate goal the provision of a deeper understanding of contemplative leadership, its concepts, characteristics, challenges, and opportunities; and it shows how contemplative leadership can be realistically lived and demonstrated in an organisational setting. The literature includes an overview of the historical development of leadership theories, an exploration of the history and development of the Christian contemplative tradition, and a review of the principal assumptions of contemplative leadership. The qualitative research methodology used was that of narrative inquiry by way of in-depth, semi-structured interviewing. The interview participants were a purposively chosen, information rich, non-probability group. Sixteen leaders who have a contemplative orientation to their life and work participated in the in-depth interviews. The study finds that to be a more authentic and effective leader, a major task is nurturing a disciplined contemplative life through developing an intimate relationship with God. The findings also provide an insight into the multifaceted reality of contemplative leadership including its concepts, characteristics, challenges, and opportunities. Further findings are described under the following themes: contemplation is transformative; contemplation and leadership are complementary; contemplative leadership can promote a good organizational culture. A new model of contemplative leadership is also presented with the hope of providing the language and a theoretical and practical framework necessary to inform and guide prospective leaders and future leadership development.
Leaders have opportunities to make a difference, but they also face challenges. What does it take to be a successful leader today? Reality television and game shows dangle the prospect of instant celebrity, but the experiences of many leaders who make an outstanding contribution to their organisations are often very different. Confident and secure leaders put much effort into developing others. They work with the grain. They find out what people are good at and then they give them roles and provide them with development opportunities that build upon their strengths. As a concept, leadership is neutral. It is neither desirable nor undesirable. Its purposes and how people use leadership roles determines whether it is beneficial or harmful. Preface. Appreciative Inquiry Handbook. “The ageless essence of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.” —Peter Drucker. Better ways of leading change are spreading throughout the world. An AI initiative is more than just a training program. It is an opportunity to create an exciting and dynamic organization. To explain, the following definition is offered.

ANZ Bank, Melbourne. Australia ANZ Bank launched an inquiry into its purpose, involving more than 1,000 people—the largest engagement activity ever at the bank. Within a month, the bank crafted its purpose and had it adopted by the board of directors. Avon Mexico Avon Mexico addressed the issue of gender equity and a pilot project for Avon globally. The inquiry draws on five years of guided conversations and observations that speak to leadership experiences of hope and anticipation as well as despair and disillusionment. I worked with one black male principal and one black female school principal from two rural schools in South Africa. Over time, the tone of their narratives changed from hope to hopelessness and resignation. The findings spoke to how commitment and care were overcome by the educational challenges, which involved hunger and poverty, orphaned learners, teen pregnancy, rape, departmental criticism and lack of support. Theore