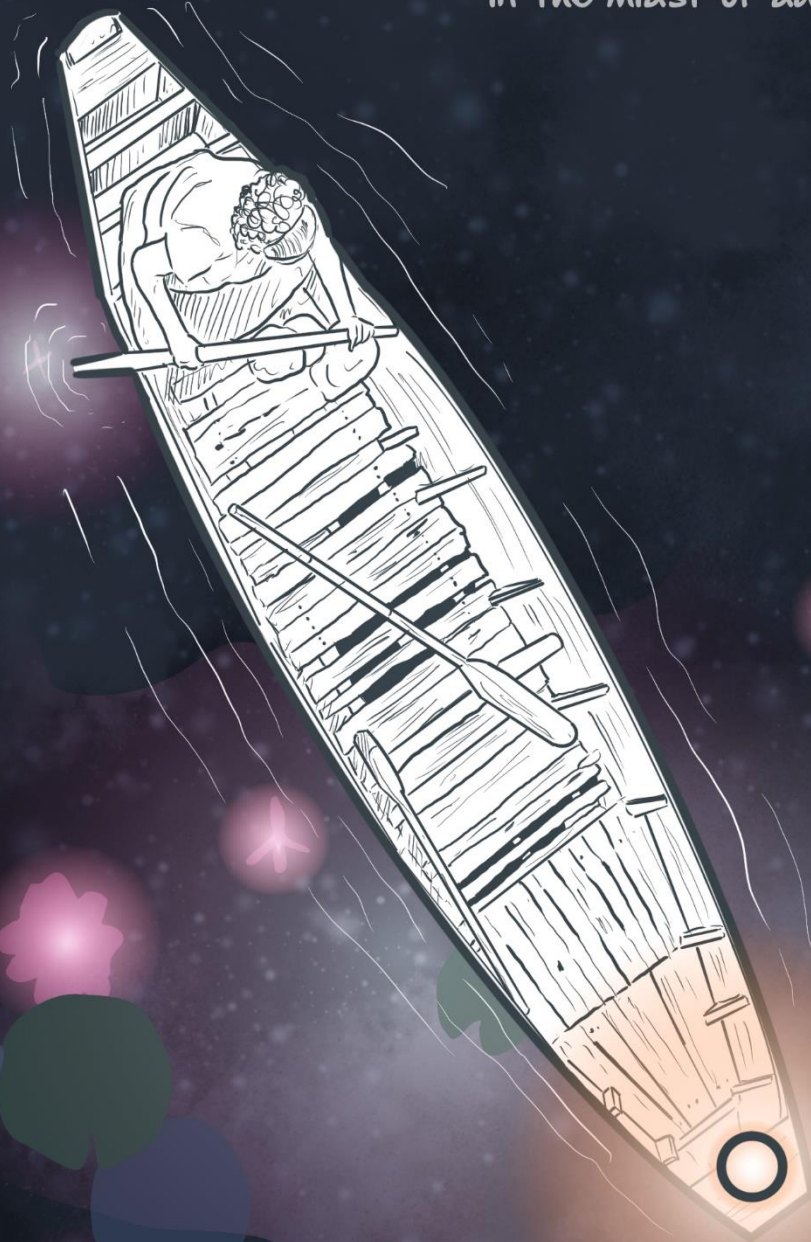


Chapter 8: The Soulful Organisation

Benevolence and humanity within an organisational culture enable people to flourish and succeed. How can we foster soulful nourishment and be true to ourselves in the midst of daily work pressures?



8

THE SOULFUL ORGANISATION

“Call the world if you please The Vale of Soulmaking.” John Keats

In this chapter we explore how leaders can respond to the numerous and complex challenges and demands they face through cultivating their inner life. In particular the fostering of soul in both leaders and organisations to encourage wellbeing and resilience through soulfulness. We offer the Caplor Horizon’s “Leaderful Way” to illustrate that leading with soul is possible, desirable even, in whatever environment you work in, bringing countless benefits for you and everyone involved.

The External Environment

Another meeting, another agenda, another list of buzz-words, initials and initiatives.

PSU is entering Phase Three

while the CDR wants G2 to go to Level Five.

*If we go the full nine yards on this one;
if we get pro-active, get out of the box, get
our teams together and on the same hymn-sheet;
if we hit the ground running, if we downsize HR.
if we get the money on board, and our asses into gear,
then we can change something, make a difference,
change what the other guys changed last week.*

Meanwhile the god has left the garden,
the muse lies minimised in the corner of our screens.
Not dead, not buried, but ignored and unseen,

like a doodle at the edge of an action plan.

Me? I say make a sacrifice to the doodle;
pick some flowers, speak a poem, feed the tiny muse.
Draw, paint, sing or dance, and you'll bring the gods
back into the board-room; the laughing, smiling,
weeping gods of the night-time and the wild.

A Doodle at The Edge by William Ayot

With kind permission

We live in a complex and highly challenging world. Issues such as coronavirus, the Black Lives Matter movement, climate change, the expansion of social media and the ever-increasing pace and demands of daily life are all changing the way we live, feel and behave. Levels of stress, behavioural and mental health problems for many are rising significantly.

Several polls and research findings indicate that many people today are in a crisis looking for meaning, they feel that something is broken in their workplaces. Laloux (2014) describes how most employees are unhappy and bring their bodies but not their whole selves to work; certainly not their spirit or souls. His research evidences that this feels true at every level of organisation, including top leaders. People are tired of the rat race, unproductive meetings, office politics, infighting, bureaucracy and all the things that restrict and disempower them. Benefiel (2005, 2008) describes how many leaders feel compelled to focus on performance and targets. What is measured becomes what is given attention. While it is appropriate and important to deliver results, the price paid is that external results and pressures take priority. As a consequence, the place and value of our inner life is neglected.

Yet for many people complexity and challenges stimulate a desire, a need even, to go inwards to find balance, respite or even a sense of meaning and purpose. To find the resilience they need to lead effectively.

So how can leaders not only thrive themselves but also enable their organisations and the people within them to thrive? To create what Margaret Wheatley (2017) calls "islands of sanity".

The Observatory

“Put your heart, mind and soul into even your smallest acts. This is the secret of success.”

Swami Sivananda

In this section we explore what soul is. We hope to inspire you to step deeper into your inner life, to experience your soul as a leader, and as a person. You may identify as agnostic, atheist, spiritual or religious. You may dislike all labels and regard yourself as a free spirit. Yet inside us all is a place that many refer to as soul.

What is Soul?

We hope you will explore and find your own answer to this question. There have been differing views in different periods on what the soul is and yet key aspects have persisted through the ages. These include:

The soul

- is beyond, or more than, the body, physical self or material world
- is essential, deep, true, spiritual or authentic self
- can be directly experienced in a personal and transforming way
- constitutes the true fabric of reality beyond our egos
- is where our true unique individuality arises
- lives on beyond death as an individual or cosmic entity
- is seeped in the everyday, the minutiae, mundane and depth - (whereas spirit is more inclined towards the higher realms and perfection)
- is experienced through imagination rather than reason
- is expressed through symbols, myths, rituals, dreams, metaphors, mythical characters, poetry, storytelling and art

There is also the concept of the collective or “Cosmic Soul”, of which the human is a unique individual manifestation while simultaneously interconnected. Theories, experiences and expressions of soul exist in various schools of philosophy, and in Indigenous, Western and

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Eastern faith traditions. Modern writers on soul include Thomas Moore, Patrick Harpaur, Rosalie Osmond, Roger Scruton, Susan Greenfield, Roger Penrose, John Polkinghorne, Almaas and Alain De Botton.

Fostering a Leaderful Soulful Organisation

In today's complexity it can be limiting for there to be only one leader recognised at any one time, holding all, or most of, the power. The more a leader can be collaborative and model soulfulness, the more everyone will feel able to express their own soulful leadership capability.

We suggest that moving mentally and practically from a heroic individualistic model of leadership to a collective one can significantly assist in soulfulness. Moving from "I" to "We", beyond ego to soulfulness, from conventional notions of leadership into "Leaderful".

Thus, we offer the Caplor Horizon's "Leaderful Way", developed by Lynne Sedgmore (2019), for leaders and organisations to illustrate that leading with soul is possible, desirable even, in whatever environment you work in, bringing countless benefits for you and everyone involved.

The Leaderful Way offers an integrative approach and is designed to foster highly effective leading in turbulent, fast paced and complex times and comprises three integrated pathways of "Soul", "Service" and "Synchronous" as illustrated in the diagram.



The Leaderful Way

- **Soul** – As a leader, the more skilled you are at knowing yourself, and your soul, the more effective you will be. When a leader is self-aware and soulful, it makes it easier for staff members to focus on their work and to bring their whole selves into their workplace, resulting in improved wellbeing and performance. Nurturing our own souls alongside the soul of our organisations offers greater strength and capacity to deal with ever increasing demands.
- **Service** – Service involves everyone thinking and acting beyond themselves to make a wider contribution, seeing the greater good and the larger picture. This means that individuals, teams and organisations have a purpose that is bigger than themselves. It means that people are aware that they need to succeed for the benefit, happiness and flourishing of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) and spiritual intelligence (SQ) are important capabilities to serve and connect.
- **Synchronious** – Being synchronous means “existing or occurring at the same time”. To be truly synchronous everyone willingly and consciously shares power with each

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other, moving consciously and deliberately from “power over” to “power within, with, for and through” others as the purpose and task requires. In today’s complexity it can be limiting for there to be only one leader recognised at any one time, holding all, or most of, the power until replaced by the next heroic hierarchical authority. Distributed leadership allows for more possibilities and more solutions and ideas to be generated fostering more sophisticated and better answers to complex situations.

These pathways are distinctive in themselves yet, if all three are developed, integrated and practised simultaneously in the behaviours of everyone who chooses to be leaderful within a community or organisation, they can bring huge liberation, performance outcomes and satisfaction.

Simultaneously manifested within the collective culture, the integrated pathways enable every person to attain their full potential as individuals and as leaders to initiate change within their lives and workplaces. More than one leader can step forward and act at the same time, involving and encouraging others to behave overtly and deliberately as multiple and soulful leaders in a synchronous manner, dedicated to service. Being leaderful is an interconnected, plural, collective, collaborative and sharing endeavour – not an individual phenomenon.

Leadership no longer derives from individualist charismatic or heroic influence but manifests as caring, loving people leading together inter-connectedly, soulfully, simultaneously and peer-fully to a common higher purpose.

The Library

“This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.” Mary Oliver

Academics who study leaders who work with soul and spirit in organisations are clear that significant impact occurs. Margaret Benefiel (2005, 2008), Louis Fry and Yochanan Altmann (2013), Louis Fry and Melissa Nisiewicz (2012), and Frederic Laloux (2014) have researched in many organisations and have written case studies of the benefits and impact of soulful and spiritual leadership. Fry’s extensive research explores the correlation between a leader cultivating their inner spiritual/soul life through daily practice and the impact such leaders have on their organisations.

The main themes of impact include increased staff motivation, creativity, connection, higher energy and improved engagement for individual and collective tasks. Soulful leaders frequently co-create high performance and generate significant surpluses on financial targets. Their organisations often overachieve across all aspects of the organisation as well as contributing to the communities they serve, support charities, and are proactive in recycling and contributing to the “saving” of the planet.

Often the atmosphere of a soulful organisation can be felt as soon as you enter it. You know one when you experience it. Those of us who are working consciously to be as soulful as we can know palpably that our organisations and staff feel happier, healthier, creative and more productive.

Spiritual Intelligence, SI or SQ, developed by Cindy Wrigglesworth (2012) is “the intelligence with which we access our deepest meanings, values, purposes and highest emotions”. Daniel Goleman (1998, 1998a) brought emotional intelligence into the mainstream of organisational and leadership development. He claims that 80% of leadership effectiveness is down to EQ (Emotional Quotient) not IQ (Intelligence Quotient). Exploring EQ is invaluable in being soulful as high EQ is considered a prerequisite for spiritual intelligence. We believe that explorations of SQ will encourage soulful organisations to a deeper level.

Below we share some of the most significant benefits and challenges of fostering a leaderful soulful organisation that have occurred in many organisations:

Benefits

- Significant success across all bottom-line results due to enhanced engagement and contribution
- Greater meaning and clear collective purpose and commitment with everyone bringing their whole self, and their maximum potential to each situation and context
- Increased trust within the community with more time to be creative and innovative
- Fostering service encourages humility, appreciation and caring
- Different forms of power can arise – power for, with, through, within and from below

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- Everyone holds the possibility of stepping into being a leader and contributing their best
- Being able to feel at ease and to depend on others because everyone who is involved is considered as decisions are made and as actions are taken
- Nothing is hidden or unspeakable due to openness, a sense of safety and transparency, including constructive dissent and open challenge
- Things get done and outcomes are overachieved; there is high impact
- A healthy playfulness, gratitude and genuine joyfulness in working together abounds
- The fostering of more post-conventional perspectives through leaderful practices, processes and systems

Challenges

- It takes courage to experiment within conventional cultures
- Seeing our own shadow and blind spots takes considerable work, requiring coaching, mentoring and self-awareness
- It takes courage for people to speak truth to power
- Not everyone likes transparency or sharing power
- Some people may choose to leave in reactivity and discomfort
- Letting go of control or hierarchy can be difficult for senior leaders already in role
- It takes courage and persistence and time to co-create a culture in which it is genuinely comfortable to discuss emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence and soul
- Stakeholders may not understand what you are doing or why
- It may take up significant time and energy to bring about the necessary change in culture and behaviours

The Family Room

“Soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance.” Thomas Moore

Co-creating organisational values and a culture that encourages open and free expression of soul is critical. Many yearn to bring their whole self into the workplace but feel it is not safe or possible. For those who feel it is undesirable or impossible the only way they will open is by seeing palpable evidence of others doing it without negative consequence. Before any sharing and expression of our inner life can happen in the workplace there needs to be a safe enough culture and sufficient encouragement and space to allow soul to arise, to be visible and eventually to have an impact.

This starts with individual soul awareness. As a leader, the more skilled you are at knowing yourself, and your soul, the more effective you will be. When a leader is self-aware and soulful, it gives others a feeling of safety even in uncertain times and environments. It makes it easier for individuals to focus on their work and to bring their whole selves which leads to improved wellbeing and performance. A self-aware leader with high EQ and SQ, comfortable in expressing their own soulfulness, will be able to modulate his or her own behaviour to alleviate organisational stress and create an environment in which soul thrives.

Developing and fostering self-awareness in the workplace requires feedback. This can be done through offering opportunities for critical self-reflection and awareness, including the soul dimension. We can experience soulfulness through creativity, imagination, silence and connection as Ayot (2014) describes in his poem at the beginning of the chapter. Soulful organisations encourage their staff to express their soul individually and together through sharing their hobbies, interests, books they have enjoyed, their passions and creativity. Things that are usually kept outside the workplace. They find ways to connect together beyond work tasks as interesting, soulful human beings.

The Foundations

“Wherever you stand, be the Soul of that place.” Rumi

Continuous learning is a key component of becoming a Soulful Organisation. Being soulful means honouring mistakes, recognising limitations, and learning from failures. Caring for soul involves working with “what is” rather than “what you wish were different”. Fostering learning and reflection from mistakes within a no blame culture will encourage risk taking and innovation in the future.

Soulful organisations are also cognisant of pace and its vital role in learning and improving as an organisation. Ironically, while technology is continually invented that saves us time, we use that time to do more and more things, and so our lives are more fast-paced and hectic than ever. Slowing down is a conscious choice, and not always an easy one, but it enables you to be more present, mindful and reflective creating a more conducive learning environment.

Learning is also embedded within soulful leadership. Soulful leadership involves being self-aware of who and how you are, constantly learning and growing to wholeness, while serving the greater good and the interconnected whole or web of community. Moreover, a soulful organisation has multiple leaders meaning multiple perspectives and capabilities. This also allows leaders to learn from one another and to be accepting of different viewpoints. It is only through distributed models of leadership that learning is sustainable.

The Roof

“A mind committed to compassion is like an overflowing reservoir – a constant source of energy, determination and kindness.” Dalai Lama

Leaders who have focused on their inner life express significant benefits – feeling clearer, stronger, self-aware, resilient and nourished from within. Confident in fostering high performance and experiencing a connection with not only the financial bottom line, but also with the “quadruple bottom line” – purpose, people, planet and prosperity (for more background, read Chapter 2). A focus on this has been introduced in many organisations wanting to improve all aspects of the sustainability of the organisation.

One of these bottom lines is “purpose”. This can also be described as “soul” and is represented by our “north star”. Sustainable soulful organisations are guided by their values and a common purpose, so that the team can each find meaning and soul in the work they are doing within the organisation.

Seeing sustainability and soulfulness as a whole rather than a combination of subparts will improve longer term impact, way beyond the usual three-to-five-year horizon timescales, encouraging and understanding the impact of any organisation for future generations. A sustainable organisation needs a healthy sustainable culture in which every member feels connected to the core purpose of its quadruple bottom line approach.

As described earlier, organisations are impacted every day by the volatile environment that surrounds us. None of us can escape the unexpected shifts and critical events that shape our world. We are arguably the first generation that has really understood the nature of our interconnected world, the perils of climate change, and how actions in one location can impact directly on the lives of others across the world.

We are leaders who can be truly networked across the world through the speed and power of social networks, internet communications, and real time news feeds.

Juggling such complexities therefore requires greater resilience than ever before. Nurturing our own souls alongside the soul of our organisations offers greater strength and capacity to deal with ever increasing demands. We hope you will join and support our aspiration to be the generation of sustainable soulful leaders and change agents who play a vital and collective role in nurturing and impacting the soul of many organisations to find a way to bring and ensure the “best future” of the world.

The Kitchen

Practical steps to becoming a soulful organisation

- **Work collectively from meaning, purpose and service** – co-creating organisational values and a culture that encourages open and free expression of soul is critical. Integrate questions about soulfulness into appraisal and other processes, providing opportunities annually to reflect on an individuals' experience and expression of soul.
- **Practise The Leaderful Way** – simultaneously develop, integrate and practise the three pathways of the Leaderful Way (Soul, Service and Synchronous) within your community or organisation. For more practical ways of doing this, read our Thought Leadership Paper titled, "The Leaderful Way".
- **Celebrate, recognise and support diversity** – commitment to diversity and dignity at work is so important. This means that all differences are truly celebrated and respected, while seeing through to the connection, unity and harmony of what, at the deepest soulful core, unifies staff together in meaningful, soulful and common purpose.
- **Express appreciation** – drawing on the "power of appreciation" can be deeply soulful, gratitude often arises when the soul is touched. A simple but sincere thank you or acknowledging achievements can be inspiring. Fostering learning and reflection from mistakes within a no blame culture will encourage risk taking and innovation. Finding ways to express sincere appreciation to others can bring deeper connection.
- **Respect and respond to dissent and challenge** – there is tremendous liberation in acknowledging dissent with sensitivity and providing safe spaces for staff to express their full and authentic views in a constructive manner. Staff encouraged to speak truth to power and working together to keep everyone's ego, excesses and flaws in check can be immensely energising.
- **Embed soulful practices in rituals and routines** – for example, daily practice of quiet time to connect directly with your inner state of being or beginning a meeting with silence to shift the depth and tone of a meeting to a more profound place. The soul and a sense of unity can be heard more clearly in silence.

Key messages

- Today's organisations require their leaders to build and sustain heart and soul. This means liberating the whole person and co-creating organisational values and a culture that encourage an open and free expression of soul. This starts with individual soul awareness. As a leader, the more skilled you are at knowing yourself, and your soul, the more effective you will be. Nurturing our own souls alongside the soul of our organisations offers greater strength and capacity to deal with ever increasing demands.
- Leaders who have focused on their inner life and soul express significant benefits such as feeling clearer, stronger, more self-aware, resilient and nourished from within. A soulful organisation reaps benefits such as increased staff motivation, creativity, connection, higher energy and improved engagement for individual and collective tasks.
- Soulful organisations practise the Leaderful Way. This occurs when leadership no longer derives from individualist charismatic or heroic influence but manifests as caring, loving people leading together inter-connectedly, soulfully, simultaneously and peer-fully to a common higher purpose. Practising the Leaderful Way involves embedding soulful practices in rituals and routines such as having quiet times or reflective practices, being creative, and spending time in nature.

Reflection questions

- Are you in touch with your soul? If not, how might you be?
- In what ways does your soul influence or shape your personal approach to your leadership?
- What is the place of soul in your organisation?

Action and impact questions

- How can you co-create organisational values which include soul?
- How might soulfulness be made visible in your organisation? How might soul be reflected in any of the formal structures?
- How can individuals feel able to express their own soul?

Further reading

- **Sedgmore, L. (2020)** *The Leaderful Way*. Caplor Horizons: Thought Leadership paper. Online
- **Wheatley, M. (2017)** *Who Do We Choose to Be?* Berret-Koehler.
- **Laloux, F. and Appert, E. (2016)** *Reinventing Organizations: An Illustrated Invitation to Join the Conversation on Next-Stage Organizations*. Nelson Parker.

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