

Leadership Theories and Stories: An Open-Space Exploration

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Abstract

Members of ISSS are being invited to participate in an interactive workshop to be held at the 55th ISSS Meeting being held at the University of Hull, UK in August 2011 to explore four emerging Western leadership theories – authentic leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership and relational leadership with stories and narratives from non-Western cultures to build connections between these traditions. The workshop will be facilitated using an Open Space Technology Meeting format to initiate dialogue between participants to explore these connections and move from passion to action. The theme for the open space meeting is leadership research in not-for-profit charitable or church-based organizations in which the facilitator is deeply involved. The facilitator will briefly introduce the four leadership theories being discussed. He will then describe the Open Space Technology process and its four principles and one law. Participants will then announce discussion topics at the village marketplace that will be created during the workshop where storytelling is encouraged. Reflection and dialogue will take place in the open space (a circle of chairs with a space within) after these discussions. Summaries of discussions held at the marketplace will be collected and posted to all participants after the workshop.

This is the first of a series of similar workshops that are being planned. The workshop at Hull will be followed by a similar workshop at an action research conference in Brisbane, Australia in September 2011 and a workshop being planned in the US in October 2011. The themes captured from these workshops will form the basis of a paper to be published in the Proceeding of the 55th ISSS meeting in 2012.

Keywords: Leadership Research, Spirituality, Nonprofit organizations, Open Space Meeting

Introduction

The Centre for Management and Organizations Studies (CMOS) <http://www.cmos.uts.edu.au/> was established at the University of Technology Sydney to bring together internationally renowned social science and business researchers who investigate management and organizations.

In 2010 the author, a core member of CMOS became one of the Chief Investigators in an Australian Research Council Linkage grant investigating leadership development of non-profit organizations involved in providing health and community care. The research is a

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three year collaborative project between investigators from three Australian Universities and two church-based organizations. While analysing the data collected from focus groups of managers in the partner organizations the research team was able to relate some of the data collected to several emerging leadership theories that might be applicable to non-profit organizations.

The theories that seemed most relevant were authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005, George 2003) and servant leadership (Greenleaf 2002; Sendjaya and Sorros 2002). The research team was also interested to explore aspects of spiritual leadership (Fry 2003) and relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006, Wright 2009) and their relevance to the research. The author (who hails originally from India and has lived for several years in Singapore) became interested in what Eastern leadership approaches might bring to the table. He also noticed that theories like authentic leadership and servant leadership revolved around stories and real life experiences of leaders such as Bill George and Robert Greenleaf. So the idea of using stories from other cultures to explore Western leadership theories was born. Life stories of leaders have been used to study leadership in the past (Gardner 1996) and suggested in research papers written about authentic leadership (Shamir and Eilam 2005; George et.al. 2007; Sparrowe 2005). Autobiographies of Eastern leaders such as Gandhi have been used by Parameshwar (2005) to study spiritual leadership.

Hence it was felt that stories from non-Western cultures could be used as a means of building connections between Western leadership theories and non-Western stories of leadership such as Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi 1927; 1993) and the Dalai Lama (1991) at the workshop.

Emerging Leadership Theories:

While there are several emerging theories of leadership it is proposed that only four of these be explored— authentic leadership, servant leadership, relational leadership and spiritual leadership as these are the emerging leaderships that are of interest to the research project.

Authentic Leadership

Several papers have been published about Authentic Leadership since 2003 after the CEO of Medtronic, Bill George, published his book on Authentic Leadership (George 2003) and Luthans and Avolio (2003) wrote a chapter in a book on *Positive Organizational Scholarship* about it. According to George (2003: 12) “Authentic leaders genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership. They are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money or prestige for themselves. They are as guided by qualities of the heart by passion and compassion, as they are by qualities of the mind”. Luthans and Avolio (2003: 243) define authentic leadership as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self development.

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Avolio et al. (2009:60) state that there are four factors that cover the components of authentic leadership: balanced processing - objectively analysing relevant data to make a decision; internalized moral perspective to regulate one's own behaviour based on internal moral standards; relational transparency – openly sharing information and feelings to present an authentic self and self-awareness based on the understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses.

George (2003 18) expects authentic leaders to demonstrate five qualities: Understanding their purpose, practicing solid values, leading with heart, establishing connected relationships and demonstrating self discipline.

A conceptual framework for authentic leadership and follower development has been proposed by Gardner et al. (2005:346) as shown in Figure 1.

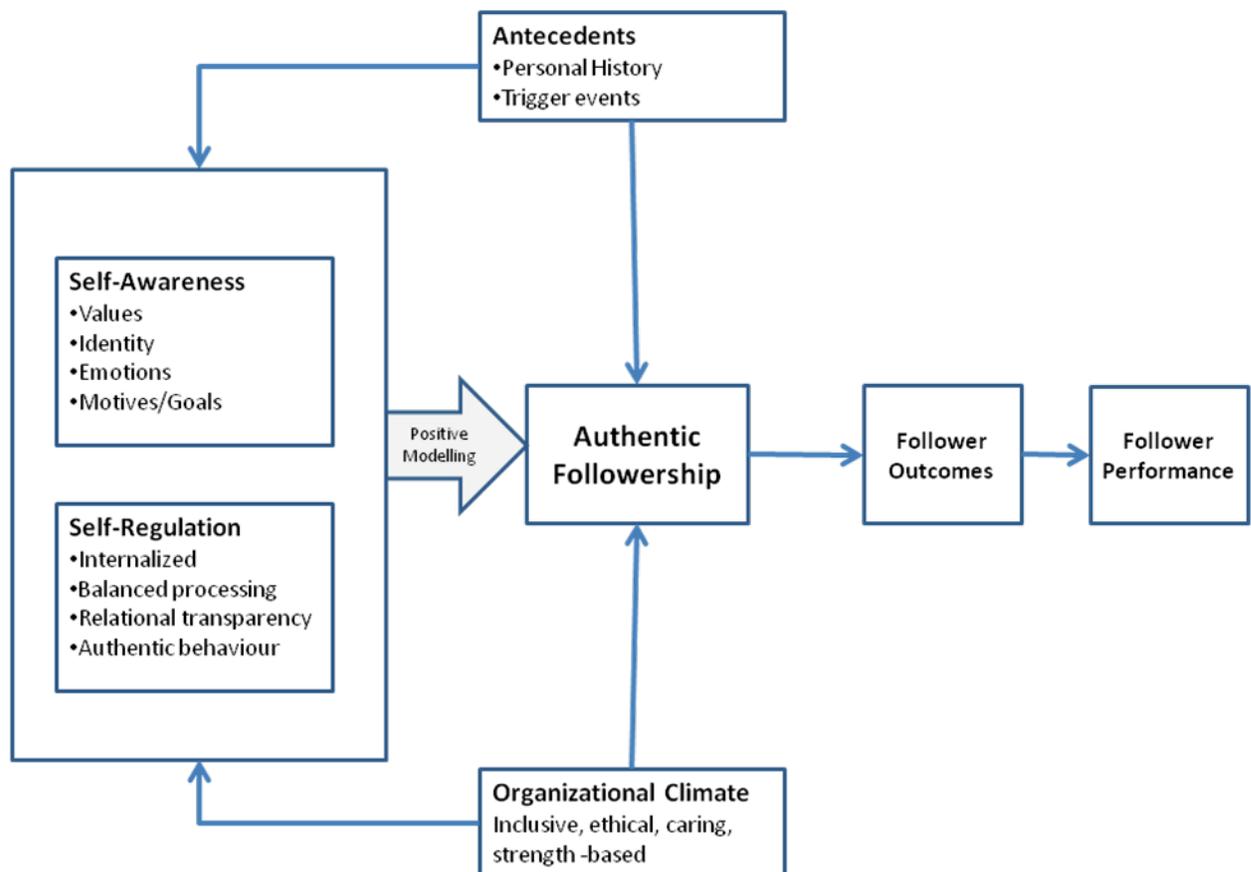


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of authentic leadership (Source: Gardner et al. 2006:346))

Servant Leadership

The term servant leadership has been made popular by the book published by a retired AT&T executive Robert Greenleaf in 1977. Greenleaf was inspired to write this book based on the character of Leo based on Herman Hesse's book titled *Journey to the East*. According to Greenleaf (1977:27) "The servant leader is a servant first... .. Then

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conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead”. He goes on to distinguish between one who is a leader first with one who is a servant first. He says that one who is a leader first tries to make use of a power drive or to acquire material possessions. He adds “the leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature”.

Larry Spears, the CEO of Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership identified ten characteristics of servant leaders (Keith 2010). These are: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Avolio et al. (2009: 60) cite Russell and Stone (2002) who distinguished between functional and accompany attributes of servant leaders and found that while the functional attributes include “having a vision, being honest and trustworthy, service oriented, a role model, demonstrating appreciation of other’s services and empowerment” the accompany attributes included being “good communicators and listeners, credible, competent, encouraging of others, teachers and delegators”.

A framework for servant leadership is shown in Figure 2.

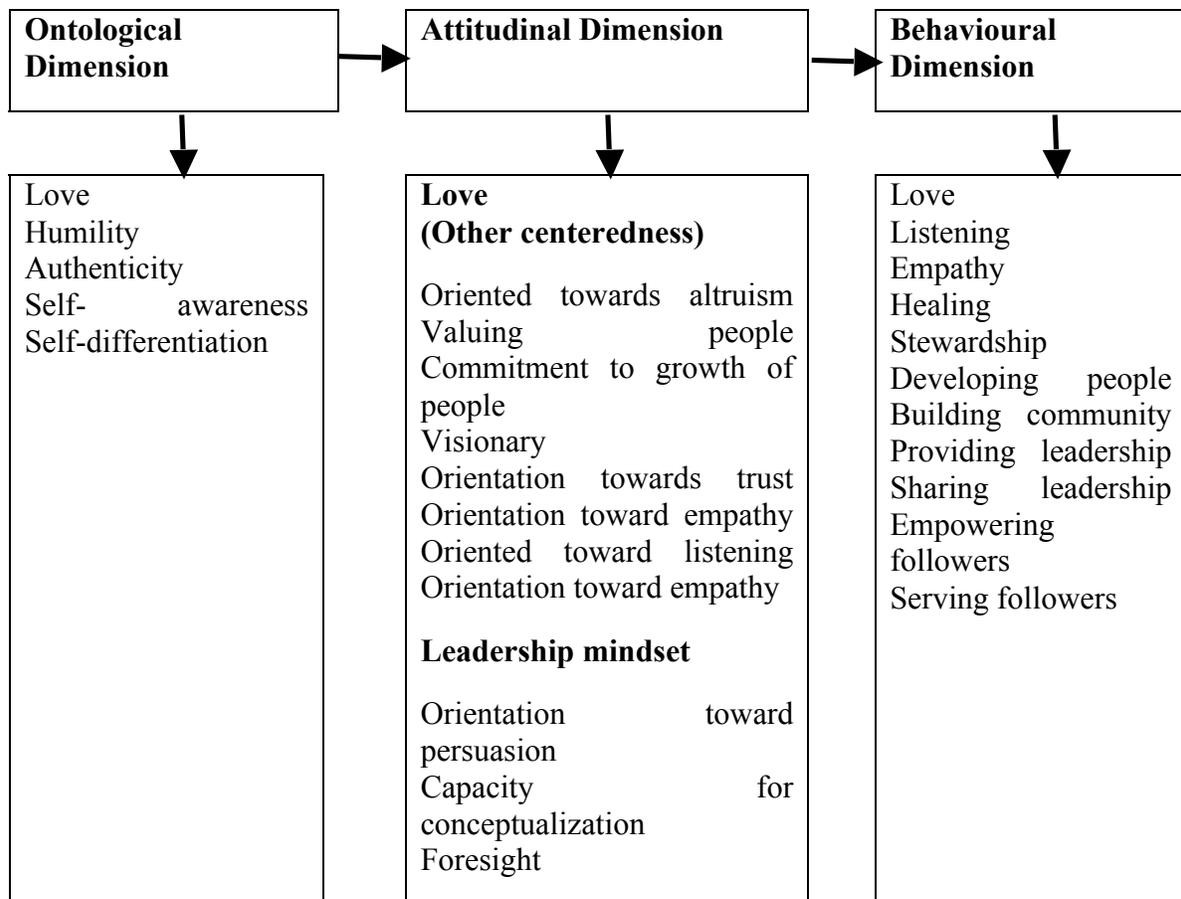


Figure 2 – Three dimensional model of servant leadership (Source: Matteson & Irving 2006:40)

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Spiritual Leadership

Fry (2003: 711) defines spiritual leadership as “comprising of values, attitudes and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership”.

Being a spiritual leader entails (Fry 2003: 711)

1. Creating a vision wherein organizational members experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference.
2. Establishing a socio-organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and being understood and appreciated.

Fry (2003:695) also proposes a causal mode of spiritual leadership which is shown in Figure 3.

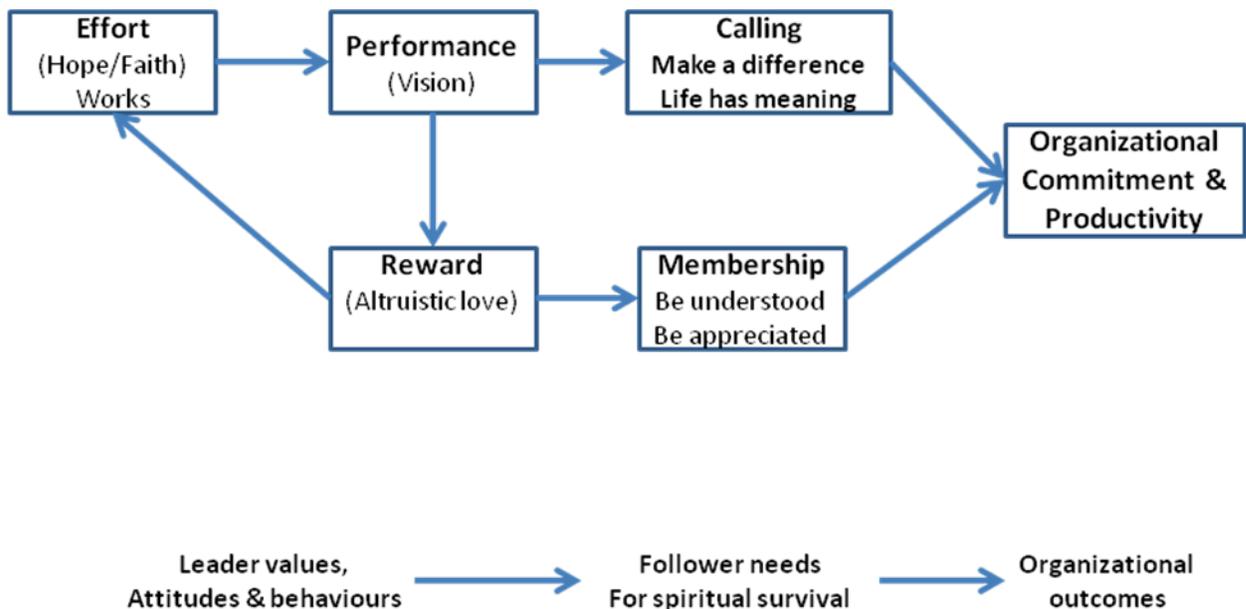


Figure 3 A causal model of spiritual leadership (Source (Fry2003:695))

Jackson and Parry (2008:100) state that ‘the move away from behavioural styles of leadership generally, has also led to an interest in the spirituality of leadership’. They feel that the notion is not new but interest is growing in spirituality of leadership. They state that while spirituality has a theological side to it some authors such as Hicks (2002) argues that the notion of spirituality could be separated from spiritual matters by focusing on the characteristics of spiritual leadership that can be found in the mainstream literature such as “self-actualization and self-awareness, authenticity, the management of meaning, emotion and passion, intrinsic motivation, wisdom, discernment, courage, transcendence and interconnectedness – as well as more traditional leadership subjects of morality, integrity, values, honesty and justice’.

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The workshop will focus on the broader meaning of spirituality and how it influences leadership.

Relational Leadership

The concept of relational leadership has its origins in leader member exchange theory (LMX) which focused on relationship between a leader and his/her follower and servant leadership which posits that the leader is there to serve his/her followers.

Wright (2009:8) states that “leadership is a relationship – a relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or values of another person.”

Although Wright (2009) mentions Greenleaf in his book titled *Relational Leadership* he specifies five principles of servant leaders based on theology The principles listed by Wright are:

1. Influence and service. The influence must have a purpose that is often the shared mission of the group or organization.
2. Character and trust grounded in the faith, beliefs, commitment and values of a leader.
3. Relationship and power with a warning that power should not be misused but be directed towards the mission of the community.
4. Dependency and accountability emphasizing the leaders need follower.
5. 5??

For Wright (2009) leadership starts with God (as theology) shaping character which fuels leadership, through the values and beliefs promoted by the leader in an organization to develop a culture to cope with its environment. The organizational culture clarifies the expectations of people who work for an organization that result in actions taken to deliver organizational outcomes. Leadership is also responsible for creating a vision and leading the organization towards its mission through values and relationships. Figure 4 shows the model of relationship leadership advocated by Wright (2009:35)

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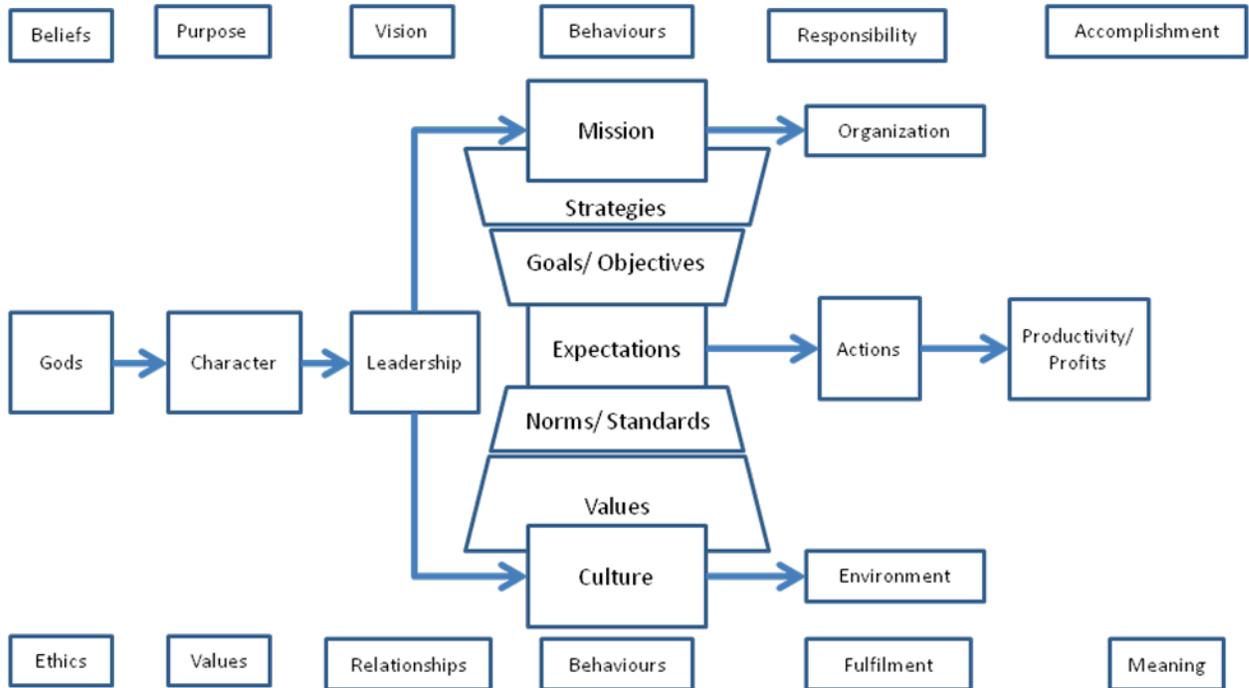


Figure 4 The connections in Relational Leadership (Source (Wright 2009:35))

Uhl-Bien (2006:655) presents another view of leadership by looking at two orientations of relational leadership. The *entity* perspective which ‘focuses on individual entities with an epistemology of objective truth and a ...clear separation between mind and nature’ and a “*relational* perspective that ‘views knowledge a socially constructed and socially distributed and not as “mind stuff” constructed or accumulated and stored by individuals”. Uhl-Bien (2006: 668) offers a general definition of relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (i.e. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced. Uhl-Bien feels that this should be applicable to the entity and relationship views”.

The four leadership theories described are not mutually exclusive and have several common features. The interrelationship has also been acknowledged by the authors who proposed these theories.

The purpose of this paper is not to engage in a debate about these leadership theories but to state them as they have been proposed and wherever possible different versions of it – one from an academic perspective and one from a practitioner perspective.

Workshop Format

An Open Space Technology meeting format has been proposed for the workshop as it has been described as a ‘metaphor of life’ by its founder (Owen 1997: 1) and it is a fast and efficient way of holding rich self-organized meetings. It also generates a lot of passion and energy as participants get involved in dialogues about the issues they care most about.

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The proposed workshop will take the following form:

After a brief welcome and introduction to the workshop's theme and process by the facilitator the participants will be invited to pose a question they would like to explore in connection to the theme. Each volunteering "question owner" will present his/her question and participants then distribute themselves following their questions of interest.

Open space uses four principles –1)whoever comes is the right people, 2)whatever happens is the only thing that could have, 3)whenever it starts is the right time, 4) when it is over it is over. It also has one law which states that when anyone finds that they are not learning or contributing they can use their two feet and walk to a more productive place. The metaphor of a butterfly pollinating is used to describe participants who move from one location to another to transfer knowledge. Dialogue takes place whenever the participants assemble at the open space created for the meeting.

Each group will be requested to nominate a scribe who will take notes of the discussions and summarize it to the group and will then email it to the facilitator who will then distribute it to all the participants after the workshop. At the end of the discussions each group will summarize the key points from their discussions to start a dialogue at the open space.

The proposed Open Space Meeting will have six steps

1. Welcome & Focus the group
2. State the theme
3. Describe the process
4. Present the individual questions
5. Self select the topic of most interest
6. Share conclusions in the Open Space

In preparation for the workshop facilitators will prepare handouts of key concepts of the four Western leadership theories being discussed At the end of Step 2 an overarching question will be posed by the facilitators to help the participants generate related questions.

The proposed agenda for the workshop assuming a 9AM start is as follows:

0900 - 0915	Welcome and Introductions
0915 to 0930	Focus the group This would be "why are we here"? if so it can be shorter and give some minutes to the next
0930 to 0945	State the theme Here we can then share some highlights.
0945 to 1000	Describe the process
1000 to 1015	Reading time
1015 to 1030	Post agenda on community bulletin board
1000 to 1030	Negotiations at the village marketplace
1030 to 1115	Discussions
1115 to 1145	Dialogue at the open space
1145 to 1200	Actions and close

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The open space meeting needs a large room with movable chairs that are set in a circle at the start and end and can be moved around during the discussions. It will need 3 to 4 flip chart holders, flip charts and coloured markers for recording discussions.

Conclusions

The author feels that using an open space meeting and a dialogue format for discussion is in the spirit of the ISSS workshop and ISSS members will find it interesting to make connections between the theories and stories that will bring these theories to life for the participants with the stories. It will also provide pathways for members interested in leadership theories and research to make future connections for collaboration. It may also give rise to discussion about other theories that add richness to the leadership field. Participants will also learn more about how leadership is portrayed across cultures.

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