



DProf thesis

**Leadership with a heart: an inquiry into leading with intimacy**

**Utku, A.**

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# Leadership with a Heart

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An Inquiry into Leading with Intimacy

By Alper Utku (M00138906)

June 2014

Institute for Work Based Learning  
In Partial Fulfilment of Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctorate of Professional Studies  
in Association with Ashridge Consulting

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# Abstract

This dissertation is about an inquiry on leadership and transformation in a consulting organisation in Turkey. The purpose of the inquiry is to explore a fresh perspective on leadership through the lenses of power and love, within the researcher's context of a local consulting firm in Turkey and also beyond that into a more global setting. It offers personal inquiry and action research as significant change tools for leaders. It challenges some of the conventional assumptions where the leader is seen as a heroic, autonomous figure and instead explores transformation within the relational context within which a leader exists.

The inquiry aims to make a unique contribution to leadership practice by working with the themes of intimacy, presence, being "real", power and relational leadership. It offers a different perspective to leadership practice by integrating Sufism, which is an Eastern mystical tradition, with Western theoretical traditions such as social construction and relational leadership. It also invites readers and future inquirers to consider Sufism as an integrative and non-dualistic ground when inquiring into leadership and change – from both a personal and relational perspective.

The dissertation uses action research as its informing approach to inquiry and involves the use of a range of techniques and tools such as journaling, conversations and collaborative inquiry processes as a part of its methodology. Sufism informs the praxis of the inquiry and is integrated with other theoretical frames, most significantly from social construction and relational leadership. It offers collaborative inquiry as an organisational change methodology where a leader with a discipline of personal inquiry will invite others to engage in their own inquiry. It positions a leader in a relational context and proposes that a leader can sustain change by changing the relational context by using creative experiments as transformative opportunities.

The inquiry involves two cycles. The first cycle involves first person research practice and is a cycle of discovery, into intimacy within leadership practice. In addition to intimacy, the cycle involves learning about the researcher's relationship to power and how this relates to intimacy in my practice.

Building on the learning from the first cycle, the second cycle includes new ways of relating as a leader of a consulting organisation working with first and second person research practices. The centrepiece of this inquiry cycle is a group process and sample accounts of specific group encounters. The cycle concludes with reflections and learning from the cycle and is followed by a section reflecting on the overall inquiry process before the concluding chapter, where a summary of learning from the inquiry is presented with emerging propositions developed through the dissertation process.

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This story is a shared story even though I appear as the central character due to individualistic tradition of doctoral studies. My colleagues in my firm made it possible for me to devote time to such a demanding study by providing flexibility and support. In this regard, I would like to express my thanks to you, Labeed Hamid, for your



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I have experienced the doctorate as a demanding process requiring a

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# Chapter 1: Prelude (NEW)

## What is covered in this dissertation? (NEW)

This dissertation represents my learning journey as a leader of a consulting firm in Turkey. It is an inquiry into what it takes to integrate the qualities of power with those of relating, and so enable a way of leading that is inspired by Sufi thought and practices.

After an introductory chapter, the dissertation starts with an extensive overview of the Sufi tradition in Chapter 2, outlining its philosophy, history and a summary of key Sufi practices. It serves as a foundational section aiming to give a robust sense of Sufi tradition and relevant body of ideas, which I then draw on for the purposes of comparative and creative insight. I also explore my personal Sufi practice and how this manifests itself in my daily life.

The following section, Chapter 3, continues with a theoretical overview on leadership and power. It includes an exploration of the different theories and perspectives, as well as a critical appraisal of the various theoretical strands covered. It includes an exploration of the nature of leadership and power in my local context, Turkey and concludes with a reflective piece of personal sense making.

Having laid out the different philosophical perspectives I am working with and seeking to connect, the dissertation continues with a section on methodology, ontology and epistemology on Chapter 4. This covers an overview of my encounter with the Sufi path and talks to my Sufi worldview and how it compares with different research paradigms

from the West. It explores the different qualities of the Sufi worldview and their implications for my inquiry. The second half of the section focuses on research methodology and explores how being in a position of formal authority informs how I experience others and others experience me as I go about my inquiry. It introduces the inquiry process and presents the research practices and methods I employed. The section concludes with a critical reflection on my research practices.

I then move onto my initial cycle of research, Chapter 5, with its focus on intimacy in a leadership practice. This cycle involves first person research practice and is a cycle of discovery, through which I become aware of intimacy emerging as a theme and explore its significance within my leadership practice. In addition to intimacy, the cycle involves my learning about my relationship to power in my practice and how this relates to intimacy in my practice.

Building on my learning from the first cycle, I present my learning on new ways of relating as a leader of a consulting organisation working with first and second person research practices in Chapter 6. The centrepiece of this inquiry cycle is a group process and sample accounts of specific group encounters. The cycle concludes with my reflections and learning from the cycle and is followed by a section on Chapter 7, reflecting on my overall inquiry process before I move onto my concluding chapter, where I present a summary of my learning from the inquiry and the emerging propositions I have developed

through the dissertation process.

### **My intention behind this inquiry (NEW)**

My original intention in this inquiry was simply to improve my practice as a leader. However as I progressed throughout the inquiry, I have noticed that this inquiry served a wider purpose beyond my practice.

It helped me:

- Understand that being in leadership position involves power dynamics
- Become aware of my relationship with power which involved blind spots
- Notice how I discounted the association of my role with power
- Understand the socially constructed position of power and authority in my local context and how it influenced my leadership practice
- Appreciate that being in a power and authority related role involved a greater degree of sensitivity and responsibility

As a result of my learning above, I have developed a much more balanced and intimate perspective about power, helping me become a better leader and better person. In this regard, I have learnt so much about my 'self' and becoming more self-aware; I have learnt about the way of the heart in leading and finally I have appreciated

the beauty of leading with a heart.

### **The challenge presented by my inquiry (NEW)**

This presents my learning journey about the qualities of my locally situated leadership practice, while I go about trying to bridge my learning from Western theories through my doctorate studies and the local knowledge of both the Sufi and Turkish national traditions. While the connection of Western leadership thinking with the Sufi tradition may promise fresh learning opportunities, it is challenging to work with such philosophically diverse perspectives. The first challenge comes from the nature of Sufism itself and shows itself in the difficulty of developing practical, professional insights from a 'mystical' tradition. The second challenge is to work with two perspectives coming from such different socio-cultural roots. It is crucial to understand their roots and their fundamental assumptions they work from.

Inquiring into a professional practice which is enmeshed with issues of power and organisational politics has its own challenges. Locally established patterns of power, where authority holders are seen as distant characters by followers, amplify these challenges and make the inquiry even harder. However working with these challenges has offered me unique learning opportunities.





## The Cycle of Re-submission (NEW)

This document incorporates significant revisions in response to the quoted feedback from the latest VIVA in February 2013:

*'The thesis as a whole needs to be revised so it coheres as an academic document. This will mean attention to criticality – which needs to be of doctorate level -, framing and scope of the work and careful exploration of a limited range of theories that are drawn upon in depth and are consistent throughout the work. The Sufi tradition must be more clearly introduced, and the comparative ontology and epistemology of the Western and Sufi perspective more carefully and clearly explored. All citations need to appear in the references and grammatical and spelling errors need to be rectified.*

*The claims you are making must be substantiated with evidence drawn from your experience and from others in your inquiry. This might involve both reflection on the inquiry work already reported in the thesis and/or your ongoing practice. This will involve discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence, insider researcher issues of research ethics and a careful articulation of the perspectives of the wide range of actors involved in your enquiry. This can be added as an extended final chapter.'* Examiners Feedback Report, February 2013

### What was easy to hear in the feedback? (NEW)

The first message from the feedback that stayed with me was about revising the thesis as a coherent academic document. Therefore I have made an intentional effort to improve the coherence and readability of the document. I have added headings to serve as signposting to help the reader know where they are and see the overall thread and connections. The resubmission process enabled me to have a clearer inquiry focus by which I have revised various sections, edited less relevant data and added new writing. I also understood that coherence meant paying greater attention to my critical engagement with the theories explored as well as the

evidence presented. I received this feedback as a further development opportunity. I come from an educational system that does not encourage or appreciate such a critical stance. It meant unlearning my educational past, from both school and University, which did not need so much critical thinking and developing a new attitude to learning.

Another comment that stood out was the request for a more in depth introduction to the Sufi tradition, including how it manifests in my practice and how Western and Sufi perspectives inform, support and contradict each other as research paradigms. I took this feedback as a further invitation to include my learning from my Sufi path of development.

### **What was difficult to hear in the feedback? (NEW)**

I was disappointed that I had not succeeded with my thesis and some parts of the feedback were harder for me to comprehend.

Initially I had difficulty understanding the request to demonstrate the link between the evidence and the conclusions I reached; this seemed unproblematic to me until I connected this with further feedback about my need to explore my relationship to my power as a leader, both in theory and also in practice. After careful reflection, I realised that all of the feedback that I had difficulty in understanding addressed a significant personal blind spot, my relationship with power.

I have since become aware of two things. Firstly, I noticed that I really enjoyed power and had a life story based around achievement, which I now frame as a manifestation of a particular form of power. Secondly, despite my need for and drive towards achievement and power, I did not acknowledge how it showed itself through my organisational position and the influence I exercised.

As I reflected on my drive for achievement, I started to notice its influence on my inquiry.

*In the section on different voices, I get a sense of where he has got to, but it feels like an achievement rather than a process. Throughout I don't get a sense of an ongoing inquiry, a sense of struggle to work with these great themes in the face of the impossibility of perfection. Strange, but this section is not very engaging, and I feel it ought to be. It is difficult to sense the context of these statements about him to feel into them. The statements feel like testimonials rather than inquiry. Examiner Feedback Report, February 2013*

I reflected on examiner comments such as above with this awareness and I appreciated that the way I presented the inquiry evidence might be a reflection of my intrinsic motivation for achievement, rather than an evidence of learning in an inquiry journey. This awareness helped me realise why I had provided 'testimonials', supportive commentaries from others and notice my deeply held assumption that I had to be successful with my inquiry with enough evidence to demonstrate my success in transforming my leadership practice. I could also make better sense of my difficulty in understanding the examiner feedback about power as I now see it as a reflection of my denial of my drive for achievement and power.

This insight led me to pay much greater attention to power and learn more about how I and others defined, engaged and exercised it, both in terms of practice and theory. It also made me notice that I was discounting power and I became aware of how my denial of power influences my sense making from the inquiry process, as well as my inquiry focus. It has become the missing piece that would make the inquiry cohere. With this insight, I have worked hard to focus on my learning from the inquiry process as much as I strive for achievement.

### **My intention in resubmitting (NEW)**

I am now resubmitting with the intention to share my inquiry learning. I ask myself: 'Have I made great progress?' which is an ironic question, revealing that I am still – in part – in the grip of my drive for achievement. Making progress in the sense of externally validated goals is still figural in my life, despite my espoused ambition to embrace a leadership and learning practice which is not so driven by ambition.

I also notice today the dialectical relationship between the need for achievement and the desire for learning succinctly encompasses the Western and Sufi aspects of my inquiry. The ongoing, paradoxical relationship between the Western minded achiever within me and the learner with a Sufi heart, has been a subtle dynamic that I did not realise until the very last moment.

I now believe that this paradoxical quality is a part of me and it is fine

for me to be like this, to embrace all qualities rather than try and reduce my life and practice down to one or the other. Do I know my habitual patterns and hidden drives better now? The answer would be yes. I know that it is not a choice of either/or, it is a choice of living awarely and choicefully in a universe of indivisible qualities. Maybe a better inquiry question could be: 'How can I learn about leadership as a practice of embracing paradoxical qualities?'

# Chapter 2: Making Sense of Sufi Tradition and Practice (NEW)



## Intention behind this Section (NEW)

My intention in this section is to:

- Provide a clear and extensive introduction to Sufi tradition, history, practices and development
- Explain its evolving centrality in my life and leadership practice
- Provide the basis for my critical and comparative work in exploring the points of connection and difference with Western leadership thinking

In this summary, I will be using some of the terms in original language and therefore I included a glossary of Sufi terminology at the end of the document. It is recommended to use this glossary for better reference.



## The Tensions within my Intention (NEW)

As I share my intention, I am aware of a certain degree of anxiety about working with a mystical tradition in a professional context. I even feel somehow ashamed as I think about the possibility of using a well-established social tradition in order to gain a professional degree, a qualification that could be seen as a means of gaining power and authority because of the status it carries with it.

My reaction also comes from a fear that my work can be seen as a 'New Age' piece, which risks trivialising and commoditising Sufi tradition and practices, turning something of great refinement into a new leadership fad. Such an approach would carry the risk of personal aggrandisement, which is at odds with core tenets of Sufi practice, and also a potential danger of my claiming expertise in a tradition I have only embraced in the last decade - which is not a long time period for the Sufi learning tradition. Given this I would like to make plain that I am not an authority in the Sufi tradition, practices, and approach. I consider myself merely a student who is willing to learn. As a student, I am also aware of the risk of inappropriate disclosure; Sufi tradition encourages the intimate disclosure of personal encounters associated with the Sufi practice of 'seeking', where 'seeking' is the active engagement with a discipline of spiritual development which incorporates the discipline of being within the material world.

However, I appreciate that this is possibly another manifestation of the living tension between my Western minded professional practice who wants to achieve and my Sufi 'seeking' with its focus on the endless potential for learning.

### **My issue with power and how Sufi tradition helps me balance my relationship with power**

During one of my recent conversations with John Higgins I have become aware that my learning in the field of Sufi thought has given me a better ground for relating to power and to balance my relationship with my experience of power.

This sudden and recent realisation helped me to understand a series of issues to do with my inquiry into my relationship with my father, who was so significant as the first power and authority figure in my life. I could understand and appreciate how my professional inquiry related to my owning of my own power position - and how in my academic work I had avoided giving enough focus to power and its dynamics.

I will inquire further into this in following sections, bringing together my Sufi journey, my professional practice and my personal inquiry with the intention of learning from it for the good of my Sufi practice, my leadership practice and my contribution to a unique area of practice.

## The History and Development of Sufism (NEW)

A challenge in classifying Sufism: Is it a theology, philosophy or practice?

'Sufism' as a label was originally coined by Orientalists during the eighteenth century (Arberry, 2001; Ernst, 1997). The term Sufism is in itself controversial as an "-ism" generally refers to an ideology or field of study with distinct qualities. Sufi practices and traditions are not so easily framed and are in part defined by their boundaryless nature – it is a discipline of wholeness and indivisibility and so fits uncomfortably with a world predicated on an assumption that parts can be known independent of the whole.

Sufi tradition is however grounded within Islam (Ernst, 1997) and can be seen as a mystical, esoteric or spiritual version of Islam - or sometimes as a religion in its own right (Chittick, 2000). Sufism is also sometimes used synonymously with the Arabic and Turkish term *tasawwuf*, which simply frames Sufism as the process of becoming a Sufi (Ernst, 1997).

Looking in the relevant literature, there seems to be little agreement about the etymological roots of the word Sufi. One common proposal is that Sufi comes from *suf* (wool), which signifies the rough woollen garment worn by Sufi seekers (Trimingham, 1971). I interpret this as a way of signifying the unworldly, non-materialistic nature of Sufi tradition.

Alternatively there are etymological associations that it may refer to *saf* which means pure. This relates to Sufi practices and techniques that are focused on achieving a state of purity in the body, thoughts, emotions and psyche. Another linguistic root is or could be *ashab-i-suffa* that means 'companions of the bench' and relates to a small group of people from Medina, who reportedly studied esoteric knowledge with the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Chittick, 2000). This association highlights the role of the teacher, or guide, in Sufi tradition – a teacher/guide who works within a community of learners.

There are other scholars who would disagree with all these linguistic theories and even reject the validity of giving the tradition a name (Hazen, 2011). Some go further stating that the Sufism of today is a name without a reality, while it used to be a reality without a name (Chittick, 2000). Other labels are also widely used, with Sufism being given the title of Islamic Mysticism, Islamic Spirituality, and Esoteric Islam, but such labels are often both too broad while at the same time being too limited (Chittick 2000).

I would agree that Sufism is difficult to describe, in part, because of its socially constructed tradition. Because it has no fixed canon or tradition, its practices may show different characteristics in different social settings and groups and so is very difficult to reduce and categorise within a single, fixed frame. It has also been in relationship with other traditions. For example Sufi tradition is said to be influenced from Neo-Platonist thought (Godelek, 1998; Morewedge,

1992; Netton, 1998). Similarly it has said to have influenced other esoteric traditions like Kabbalah (Fetton, 1996).

It also has an experiential nature that makes it difficult to describe as an objective phenomenon, apart from the personal subjective experience of its practitioners. In this respect it is seen similar to Buddhism (Daoud, 2009).

### My connection with Sufi thought

I was initially attracted to the Sufi notion of oneness, *tawhid*. At the spiritual level, *tawhid* is the phenomenological appreciation of the unity of a Divine Presence. Sufi tradition offers a range of well-established approaches to appreciate *tawhid* which I will explore later in this section. At the relational level, Sufi tradition does not exclude any belief system and sees all as a part of one reality. Therefore it can be seen as an inclusive tradition which is expressed for me by the Sufi scholar Ibn Arabi's often quoted poem (Nicholson, 2010):

*My heart can take on  
any form:  
a meadow for gazelles,  
a cloister for monks,  
For the idols, sacred ground,  
Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim,  
the tables of the Torah,  
the scrolls of the Qur'án.  
I profess the religion of love;*

*wherever its caravan turns along the way,  
that is the belief,  
the faith I keep.*

For me, this poem represents how Sufi tradition appreciates different belief systems, and invites an acknowledgement of different views and perspectives – which brings with it many challenges when engaging with a world that is more comfortable boxing things up and drawing distinctions. The poem speaks to a different way, a seeking out of inclusiveness and connection. Similarly the Sufi scholar Rumi writes:

*“Come, come, whoever you are.  
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of learning.  
It doesn't matter.  
Ours is not a caravan of despair.  
Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times.  
Come, yet again, come, come.” (Barks, 1995)*

This was a compelling invitation to me; an invitation into inclusiveness not exclusiveness - which has been a part of my ongoing Doctoral challenge – namely how does this attraction towards an inclusive learning process sit with the exclusive achievement focus of a Doctorate? The Sufi poet Rumi has been a powerful guide in my encounter with Sufism - with his poems he would keep inviting me to go:

*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.” (Barks, 1995)*

When I look back to my childhood challenges to do with intimacy and connection, which I cover later, my attraction to Sufi notions of inclusiveness make sense. It was a living model that promised a place of no judgment and no separation, where I could let go of learned habits of exclusion and inclusion.

### *What drew me (NEW)*

As I look back now, I notice that I had been looking for a spiritual practice until I found out about my own local tradition; the Sufi path had been part of my home geography for more than thousand years, going back to the ninth century (Wilcox, 1995).

Turkey, my home, has been a major centre for the Sufi tradition. Many scholars such as Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, Sadr Al Din Qunawi, Shihab Al Din Suhrawardi, Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, Junayd Bagdadi, Abu Yazid Bastami, Mansur Al Hallaj, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, Niyazi Misri, Yunus Emre and Hacı Bektaş Veli have come from this part of the world. Similarly various Sufi orders such as the Mevlevi Order, Naqshbandi Order, Rukaiya Order, Khalwatiya Order, Qadiriya Order and Bektashiya Order have strong Sufi roots and traditions.

As I have engaged with this deeply rooted local tradition, I have met truly remarkable people who have been on this path. I was particularly attracted to their humility, generosity, warmth, acceptance and loving attitudes. One of the most significant figures amongst all has been Mustafa Merter, who has been a true teacher and exceptional guide

for me. Mustafa, who is a trained Jungian psychoanalyst, has helped me to understand Sufi psychology both in theory and practice. His teaching has been mainly in the form of coaching sessions focusing on dreams and he has helped me understand the Sufi path of development, as well as the Sufi notion of tawhid (Oneness). I am still working with Mustafa.

Another significant other I have encountered is Ibrahim Baba, an American Sufi guide from the Chistiya Order. Ibrahim Baba lives in Turkey for half the year and his house is a popular meeting point for various Istanbul based Sufis. Through my contacts with Ibrahim Baba, I have not only learnt how I can be loving and accepting to different beliefs and traditions, but I have also been able to experience Sufi rituals such as *dhikr* (recitation) and *sama* (audition).

Recently I have adopted another Sufi practice, that of a Learning Circle. I formed this with a group of friends who have an interest in the Sufi tradition. The circle consists of 6 people and works like an Action Learning Set with a group based learning focus. We gather every 3-4 weeks, talk about our learning experiences and sometimes invite guests so we hear new voices. Periodically we attend a Sufi ritual so we experience the tradition through practice. Even though this circle is a recent initiative, it has had a great influence on my Sufi learning path. With all these learning opportunities, I know I will meet many other Sufi practitioners and teachers as long as I keep walking in my inquiry path. I am part of



an embodied and enacted community of practice.

*How it spoke to my practice as a man and a leader (NEW)*

Above all, my Sufi learning path which has gone hand in hand with this inquiry, has helped me become a better person, someone who is more aware, appreciates intimacy and values relationships as much as his achievements. An obvious benefit has been in my ability to relate better to others as a leader. The evidence to support this will be highlighted during the inquiry cycles of this text. However the significant benefit for me as someone in the leadership position has been in my relationship with power. Thanks to this Doctoral process, as well as my ongoing Sufi inquiry, I have become more aware of and skilful in relating to power as a phenomenon, which has further improved my relational skills as someone in a position of power – at the most obvious level this can be seen in my naming of its influence on how I saw and didn't see the role of power in how people did and didn't engage with me, through the various group and conversational processes that are at the heart of my inquiry process.

## Key principles and practices

Even though there are different interpretations of how Sufism fits in the world, it is common these days to see a Sufi seeker following basic practices of Islam such as *salah*, the form of active meditation and fasting conducted during the holy month of Ramadan. However Sufis have different practices which are not necessarily recognised as religious; these may differ within different Sufi orders. Here the most common practices (Netton, 2000):

*Dhikr* (Remembrance), a practice of reciting the Names of God. This can be done individually or within a group setting.

*Sama* (Audition), a group ritual with songs and poetry and may include *dhikr* or ecstatic dance, which takes the form of whirling in certain orders.

*Muraqaba* (Reflection), a form of silent meditation usually done in the morning before sunrise.

*Itikaf* (Retreat), a period of withdrawal from the world, usually done in a designated mosque and especially during the last days of Ramadan.

*Sohbet* (Conversations), a way of learning and sharing. It takes place as a dialogue with a *Murshid* – a spiritual guide - and also with others within a community of seekers in a Sufi order.

Most of the practices are performed in a group setting which may be mixed or single sex - gender participation may differ according to the

Sufi order and social cultural context. Some practices like *Dhikr*, *Sama* and *Sohbet* may be performed in a mixed group in certain orders however it is common to see men and women participating separately in more conservative orders. I will explain the above practices in greater detail and will also include short phenomenological accounts of my experience for significant practices.



Its relationship to other traditions – how it connects to Islam

There has been a long debate about the connection of Islam and Sufi practices. At one extreme, there are traditional Islamic

scholars who see Sufi practices as another form of religious practice. They refuse to recognise them as part of Islam and condemn them as they would anything that lies beyond the strict boundaries of Orthodox Islam. To them Sufi practices are *biat*, invented practices that are not part of Islam. This orthodox Islamic perspective also

refuses to recognise the Sufi development process and the role of the Sufi guide – to Orthodox Islam there can be no saintly mediation between God and humanity (Ernst, 1997).

From this perspective Sufism is being seen as a solely religious practice – and I prefer to challenge this view and instead propose positioning Sufi practice as a development process, more than a purely religious one, a view that fits with the arguments put forward by Schimmel (1975) and Chittick (2000). Similar to most development processes, it has a teacher, a community of learners and a methodology – whose purpose is not strictly religious and which does not necessarily seek to create a clerical position or establish a religious practice.

At another extreme there are Sufi orders such as the Universal Sufis or the International Association of Sufism, who refuse any connection with Islam. They position Sufi thought as a non-sectarian faith and I believe such a distinction could be worked with to promote interfaith dialogue. It also helps Sufism avoid being associated with the oppressive social practices of certain countries with a Muslim population. I find these orders have a useful contribution to the Sufi tradition – and are part of what draws me into it as an inclusive way of being.

**Tensions and paradoxes within the definition, history and practice**

As with the tension between those who hold fundamentalist views of Islam and those non-sectarian Sufis, the Sufi tradition is not well regarded by either conservative/religious parts of Turkish society or by modernist secularists.

Conservative orthodox theologians see the Sufi tradition as heretical and advise that Sufi practices should be avoided by followers of Islam. On the other hand, Sufi orders were legally banned in Turkey after the secular revolution of 1923 and this legislation has not been changed since.

There is paranoia in modern Turkish society about the country becoming a theocratic state, like Iran, so people who follow religious practices are regarded with a degree of suspicion. A Sufi follower who follows some of the practices of Islam could be easily categorised as an Islamist and anti-modernist.

Tensions such as these have existed throughout Sufi history and many notable Sufi seekers, such as Ibn Arabi, have been condemned as heretics – while others like Mansour Al-Hallaj have been executed because of their faith.

In terms of the Sufi scholars I draw on, my prime sources have been the works of Ibn Arabi and Rumi. I am drawn to them as they are both very inclusive and also show little connection with material power and authority – their Sufism speaks to me of a way of 'leading without leading', which I find inspirational if hard to articulate. Another reason

for choosing them is that there are sufficient references in my local language for them. I am aware that I have excluded some voices who claim to be followers of the Sufi path, because of what I experience as their adoption of a potentially oppressive stance, promoting Sufi as 'the only right way' with strict rules and regulations.

I have also made only a limited reference to Sufi orders such as the Universal Sufis - I see Sufi practices as stemming out of basic religious practices such as *salah* (a form of meditation) or *sawm* (*fasting*) and am working from a perspective that denying these religious roots denies an important aspect of Sufism.

## The Practice and Focus of Sufism (NEW)

### A focus on personal development

From a Western point of view, I can easily see that my interest in Sufi thought has a personal development stance. I highlight this perspective by a traditional scripture '*Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa Rabbahu*' which is translated as claiming that 'One who knows herself knows her Lord' (Demirli, 2008). I would translate it as 'one who becomes aware of himself or herself, becomes aware of his inner Guide'. In practice, the Sufi tradition distinguishes itself from Western development traditions on one very significant dimension. For Sufis the point of development involves engaging with the notion that the 'self' is annihilated as part of the development process. This is in stark contrast to the goal of self-realisation as proposed by Maslow (1962) and Rogers (1961) and most 'self' focused analysts such as Freud (1923).

Sufi seekers do not subscribe to the notion of the self as a fixed or a separate entity, rather they see it as a mirror or manifestation of the qualities of a Presence that is with us and beyond us.

For Sufis this leads onto the notion of *abd* which is generally translated as servant, although etymologically it means 'inseparable part that contains the qualities of the whole'. The notion of *abd* reflects the Sufi understanding that human existence is a manifestation of the Essence or the Absolute Being. Being a Sufi

means subscribing to the Islamic faith of *La ilahe illallah*, which is theologically translated as: 'There is No God' (*ilah*) but 'God' (*Allah*). This is often read as the negation of polytheism, but for Sufi practitioners it speaks to *tawhid*, the: 'Oneness of Divine Presence'. Sufi followers emphasise the ontological, rather than the theological, meaning of this phrase and interpret it as: "There is nothing but the Divine Presence". I have recently discovered through my friendly academic that seemingly compatible views today are expressed by Swimme and Berry (1992) and Bortoft (1996) in recent literature which all seem very appealing. I wanted to mention their names to express my excitement about this finding, and awareness of it, but I will not go into further detail of their thinking in order to stay focused at this stage.

Sufi followers describe existence in terms of three levels: The Essence, Divine Names and Cosmos. The Essence or *Dhat* is believed to transcend all manifestation and form and appears as beyond all description, name or qualification. Divine Presence is often referred as the *Dhat* meaning the Absolute or the Essence. It is the world of pure Essence and cannot be fully grasped by human beings. Ibn Arabi suggests that we can relate to this unknowable Essence through the names of God which are divine attributes, through which The Essence manifests Himself as the means of creation in the Cosmos. (Chittick, 1989) These names are temporarily bestowed on us as qualities to exist in this world, serving as relational attributes linking the creation



with the Creator.

I want to say that the notion of *tawhid* is still a bit abstract for me and I intend to make better sense of it as I progress with my inquiry.

## Letting go of the idea of self

I learnt that a good way of the appreciation of *tawhid*, Oneness of Divine Presence through the practices of *fana* and *baqa*. As a Sufi seeker, I have always been interested in knowing more about *fana* and *baqa*, where *fana* speaks to the annihilation of the self, and *baqa*, to the experience of permanence outside of the self.

*Fana* is one of the centrepieces of the Sufi thought and by seeking *fana* with different practices and rituals a Sufi practitioner aims to move beyond individual self. It is a state of achieving union with the Divine Presence which leads to experiencing *baqa*, where the notion of individual self as a fixed entity becomes irrelevant and so is left behind. Therefore *fana* and *baqa* are often mentioned together in Sufi literature and scriptures. In my view, this connects to the prophetic proposition that awareness of the transient nature of self leads to awareness of an immanent and transcendent Divine Presence (Nasr, 1970).

Some of my friends in Sufi circles mention that they have experienced *fana* and *baqa* in *dhikr* and *sama* auditions because of trance like states. I had trance like experiences in *dhikr* rituals but I am not sure they led me to a permanent state like *baqa*. However, I have learnt

much about *fana* and *baqa* by other practices such as dreams. Dreams helped me to go beyond my sense of individual self and appreciate that I have multiple, if not infinite potentials of self, available and present to me at any moment. I am curious to find out further how my Sufi experience speaks to my Western notion of self which is relational and socially constructed and will explore it further in the next section, relating to stages of development in Sufi thought.

### The notion of the *Al Insan-i al Kamil* The Perfect Man

I see the notion of *al insan-i al kamil* perfect man as one of the integral pillars of Sufi ontology and epistemology which is often associated with the work of Ibn Arabi (Schimmel, 1975; Murata, 1992; Chittick, 1989; Nicholson, 1984; Chittick and Murata, 1994). I understand from various works on *al insan-i al kamil* that we, as human beings, embody all of the divine qualities as a potential (Helminski, 1999). I also know that Sufi tradition offers a development path which leads to an ontological state of perfection, of manifesting all of the divine attributes (Nicholson, 1984).

One of my early teachers, Robert Frager (1999), emphasises a psycho-spiritual model of development in Sufism and outlines seven stations of development or *maqam* for a spiritual seeker. I also learnt from another teacher, Dr. Mustafa Merter about how *hal* (states) and *maqam* (stations) in Sufi tradition. *Hal* (state) is a temporary phenomenological experience which is believed to happen beyond

the control of the Sufi seeker. For example, I can feel peaceful during the prayer and this is a state of peacefulness. However it may be temporary as I may forget about it once I go back to my daily routine. A *maqam* (station), on the other hand, is a permanent stage in the path of development. So peacefulness could be a *hal*, meaning a temporary state, while serenity could be a *maqam* signifying a permanent stage.

The stages I outline below describe the Sufi model of development of self, or *nafs* as it is commonly called in Sufi literature (Frager, 1999). The first mention of the Sufi stages of development comes from the 12th century work of the Sufi scholar Abdu'l-Qadir-i-Gilani (Trimingham, 1998) and positions the concept of *nafs* as the focal point of development.

Some literature translates *nafs* as 'ego', which I will avoid using as it blurs with the Western psychoanalytic tradition and will get in the way of some of the distinctive qualities I find important within Sufi development. I believe psyche carries the closest meaning, but I will use 'self' in place of *nafs* as it is more commonly used in translation.

### *The First Stage - the Inciting or Commanding Self (Nafs-i Ammara)*

This marks a domineering and commanding state. This stage of self represents an unconscious accumulation of "riches, power, and ego satisfaction no matter what the cost" (Frager, 1999 p. 52). Frager (1999) adds that: "at this level we are addicts in denial, dominated by

uncontrollable addiction, yet we refuse to recognize that we even have a problem" (p. 53). According to Frager (1999), a person at this stage has narcissistic tendencies without being aware of them, which "is not well described in the literature of psychology because most of us, including psychological theorists, suffer from it. We are in the middle of it and so we cannot see this addiction in others or in ourselves" (Ibid p. 53). I know that Welwood (2000), who is a Buddhist informed psychologist, mentions a similar state in his work on awareness as prereflective state - which I understand as acting without being fully aware of intrinsic drivers and scripts, or acting from impulse due to distress.

I would mark the period prior to my inquiry as depicting this stage. I am assuming that my drive for achievement and my lack of awareness for some of my habits represents the quality of such a state. When I take self as a social process as proposed by Gergen (1999), I am curious if social context can be seen as the commanding self. I will cover this in further sections.

### *The Second stage – the Regretful or Blaming Self (Nafs-i Lawwama)*

In this stage the person on the Sufi development path moves beyond the ignorance/blindness of the base stage *Nafs-i Ammara*, where people do not even "realize the harm we do to ourselves and others" (Frager, 1999, p.66). Frager (1999) suggests that people develop an understanding of their habitual patterns and self-focus at this stage, however the biggest risk is that of hypocrisy. This comes about when

a person may have achieved a better awareness of their patterns or behaviours, but does not necessarily act upon this awareness.

I see this as a stage of self-inquiry leading to awareness, where a person goes beyond an unconscious habit of simply being regretful about one's actions. I have experienced this stage during this inquiry especially during the first 4 years of my inquiry. This period marks a number of inquiring activities on personal awareness, some of which I will cover in the first cycle.

### *The Third Stage - The Inspired Self (Nafs-i Mulhama)*

This is characterised by the presence of 'generosity, humility' (Frager, 1999, p.70) and a genuine feeling of love that begins to develop for oneself and for others (Boni, 2005). A seeker may experience a deeper contact with their inner guide or 'the inner voice of guidance... the heart or conscience' (Frager, 1999 p. 70). This inner voice serves as a constant source of inspiration and point of reference in their lived Sufi practice.

The seeker may feel good, experiencing a sense of spiritual pride and self-accomplishment because of the spiritual illumination he experiences. The risk here is of 'spiritual arrogance', where the seeker starts to think that he is somebody special and so becomes diverted from his developmental path.

I experienced the qualities of this stage after the third year of my inquiry, but would not name it for some time. Later on, I realised that I

was experiencing love but it had no object. This would manifest in different settings like client workshops or one to one coaching. It would help me to connect and serve the group better. My second cycle in this inquiry represents qualities of this stage which I will cover in the coming sections.

#### *The Fourth Stage – the Serene or Secure Self (Nafs-i Mutmainna)*

This is characterised by a sense of serenity. Even though some sources claim this stage before that of the Inspired self, others include it here – as I am. Some other significant characteristics of this station are an embracing of the letting go of attachment to things/ideas, engaging with the world from a position of trust, not fighting or resisting life however it develops, accepting whatever arises and ceases, and feelings of non-attachment, gratitude, contentment and tranquillity (Boni, 2005). Some references call this the ‘Secure Self’ stage as, up until this point, there is a risk of falling back to earlier stages of development. From this stage, however, the seeker is seen as secure from descending to a lower stage of consciousness.

The risk that the seeker faces here is that of being seduced into a false sense of perfection. When this happens the spiritual seeker may become stuck and unable to continue their development (Merter, 2006).

The last stages of this inquiry seem to mark the early stages of this state - a stage of acceptance. I am not covering this stage to any

great extent but I will share some of my experience towards the end of the second cycle.

*The Fifth stage – the Pleased or Content Self (Nafs-i Radiyya).*

*A person at this stage has a sincere appreciation of the Divine presence. A key characteristic of this stage is being in constant contemplation and remembrance of Divine reality and qualities (Boni, 2005). Because of this appreciation, he or she finds that everything happening to him or her is worthwhile and stops labelling matters that arise in life as good or bad. This is the stage that Rumi mentions as 'Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing, there is a field. I will meet you there' (Coleman, 1984).*

This is a stage of moving towards wholeness, where dualities start to disappear and where people are “no longer split between our material desires and our desires for God” (Frager, 1999 p. 80).

My friendly academic Chris Seeley would compare this stage to Buddhism and its focus on non-duality. I will not share my experience of this stage in this inquiry, though it is possible to find subtle influences of this stage in some of my reflective pieces.

### *The Sixth stage – the Pleasing or Gratified Self (Nafs-i Mardiyya)*

This is a stage of wholeness where the seeker experiences “the world as whole and unified” (Frager, 1999 p.82). S/He appreciates the Quranic statement where "All things come from God and all things return to Him" (Esed, Quran 21: 93). Following Rumi, this is stage where ‘the world appears to be a multiplicity, just as a shattered mirror reflects many different reflections of the same image. When we heal the cracks in the mirror; it becomes unbroken once again [it] reflects only a single image’ (Frager, 1999 p. 84). The seeker experiences an affirmation of Unity, and Oneness. Inspired from Chris Seeley this stage resonates with the ideas of the ecological self as proposed by Næss (1984) and later developed by Fox (1995) which recognizes the place of the ‘self’ within the larger social and ecological systems in which it participates.

### *The Seventh stage - the Pure Self (Nafs-i Safiyya)*

This is the stage of Perfected Man (*Insan-i Kamil*) as proposed by Ibn Arabi (Chittick, 2000). This level of attainment is one of complete transcendence and marks the death of a false identification of self (*fana*) and a total absorption in the Divine reality (*baqa*). The seeker is completely free of false attachments and limited identifications. All dualities collapse, the connectedness of the inner and outer world is appreciated and experienced as “One” reality. As Rumi suggests, “If you could get rid of yourself just once, the secret of secrets would open to you” (Frager, 1999, p. 87).



For Sufis this non-dual station cannot be explained or defined, it can only be approximated or conveyed through metaphor, symbolism and creative expression. Again Rumi writes, "Oneness is on the other side of descriptions and states. Nothing but duality enters speech's playing-field. So, either live in this duality, like the double-seeing man, or sew up your mouth and be happily silent!" (Chittick, 1983, p. 275)

This notion of perfection is a quality where one leaves transient qualities of *fana* behind and experiences and reflects *baqa*, the permanence of divine presence. It is an ontological state where the seeker becomes open to all forms, to infinite disclosures of a primordial presence which change every moment (Chittick and Murata, 1994). Therefore he lives moment to moment as he is *abd ul waqt*, being the active participant of the here and now.

I see this notion, of living in a permanent participative present, as connecting to some of the recent thinking in the Western literature, particularly the relational understanding of the self that emerges in the actual context of being with the other rather than existing as a given quality that exists apart from relational context (Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 2003). Building on this, a boundaryless sense of 'non-self' connects to the idea of the self as an experience within a social process and, more broadly within the participatory paradigm, of being as an active process of emergent co-creation. I will explore this in more depth in the coming sections.

## My relationship to the practice and focus of Sufism

In this section, I will review the practical aspects of my life as a seeker in the Sufi tradition, grounding Sufism in my day-to-day life (which will in turn lead onto my exploration of grounding Sufism within my day-to-day leadership practice).

My practice has various facets including bodily practices, dreams and revelations, aesthetic practices, community practices and other applied practices.

### *Bodily practices – Sufism as an embodied experience*

The most significant and visible practice I have as a Sufi follower is a daily meditative practice of *salah*, meaning connection to the self, to others, to the world and to the divine. While Sufi tradition has many distinct meditative practices such as *dhikr* (the recitation and remembrance of the names of God) and *tafakkur* (reflection), *salah* is generally seen as a religious practice linked to Islam. Highlighting that I come from a Sufi tradition where Sufi followership is over and beyond practices of Islamic faith, I would like to emphasise that I see *salah* as a practical and persistent habit of connecting with the Divine Presence beyond a religious routine.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) advises in a number of prophetic sayings that *salah* is the pillar of a person's development path and the means of ontological ascent for a seeker. Frager (1999) frames *salah* as a one step at a time spiritual ascension. I always like using the

example of the Led Zeppelin song Stairway to Heaven when talking to the nature of spiritual ascension, framing heaven as a non-dual place where there is no good or bad and all dualities are not existent.

My daily practice of *salah* takes place during different intervals of the day: before sunrise, midday, later in the afternoon, after sunset and before sleep. Such a routine helps me to reconnect with my inner world and come back to my centre, free of the distractions of the turmoil of both the inner and outer worlds. In addition to this daily routine, I can practice *salah* during long, difficult meetings, before travelling, critical decisions or anytime that I find myself losing focus or feeling imbalanced physically, emotionally, or spiritually. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that *salah* is the practice that gives reflective rigour to my daily routines - both mental and emotional - and is the informing strength of my life and leadership practice. It helps me concentrate my mind, enables me to regulate my emotional fluctuations and even creates an opportunity for my body to rest.

I would like to share a short piece on my experience of salah in a phenomenological sense to give you a better sense of the practice.

*I just finished my evening prayer. It is fresh in my mind and body so let me try to share my experience of salah covering its three major movements: Standing/Bowing/Prostrating*

*I start salah with a silent expression of intention to perform the prayer. 'I am intending to perform the evening prayer.' (I am reminded how intention is important in any action.) Then I raise my hands to the level of my ears and utter 'Allah is the Greatest'. (This is my daily opportunity to salute the Glorious Power that gives us life). My thumbs gently touch my ear lobes (I imagine that*

*my hands stand out like an antenna from my head. I find this a funny gesture and it reminds me that the salah is about connection with the world beyond this world). Then I fold my hands above my navel and recite the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an, followed by a selection of other verses based on my mood. (The opening chapter starts with reminding us that all praise belongs to the Glorious Power that is omnipresent in this world and beyond. As I recite, I contemplate on the meaning of verses and I notice a gradual calming in my senses. This is what I need at this moment. Silence and slowing down. I am standing with great respect, serenity and submission).*

*The second movement is that of bowing with hands rested on knees and the back held straight for a few seconds, long enough to utter the supplication glorifying Allah. In these few seconds, my back and head are held flat, perpendicular to the legs. (I am stretching my spine forward and feeling fresh!)*

*Then I rise back to an erect posture and immediately go down on my knees and rest my hands and forehead on the ground in prostration, which is the third movement. (This is my most cherished position of all in salah. When my forehead touches the ground, I am feeling as if I am diving into a sea of serenity. I do not want to lift my head and want to rest there forever.) By prostrating myself, I am reminding myself to appreciate and respect humanity and all creation that I witness. I finish my prostration which signifies the completion of a unit of salah. I will then do another round and will finish with a prayer. (Journal Entry, April 2014)*

Each round of *salah* only takes a few minutes of my time which I practice five times a day, morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night. While it is challenging to find time during a busy day, it is a wonderful discipline with great spiritual, psychological and physical benefits!

In addition to the daily practice of *salah*, *sawm* (or fasting) is another significant bodily practice. Once a year Muslim believers fast for 30 days in the month of Ramadan. In a typical fasting practice, one stops eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset. Fasting not only

serves as a practice supporting physical health, giving my body a chance to rest, but it also supports the development of patience, generosity and modesty which are very important personal attributes in Sufi developmental journey. Fasting supports these values by its nature as it requires quiet patience as one refrains from eating and drinking during daytime for the whole month. It is a process of action and reflection, where the practice of such restraint makes me reflect on and appreciate the abundance that is provided to me, while at the same time helps me develop much more empathy towards those who are not so privileged.

Fasting is done as a community activity for 30 days during the month of *Ramadan*. In addition to fasting in *Ramadan*, I also fast occasionally throughout the year as part of my personal practice. These bodily practices are useful for me both personally and professionally as they provide me with a regular practice of mindfulness.

### *Aesthetic practices – Sufism as an exercise in aesthetic expression*

*Dhikr* (or *Zikr* meaning Remembrance of God): *Dhikr* is a practice of repeating the Names of God and is done either individually in a silent manner or as a group recitation. Sufi followers often engage in ritualised *dhikr* ceremonies, with each order having different forms for the group *dhikr*, including recitation, singing, music, dance and meditative practices. Another form of aesthetic practice is called *sama* meaning 'audition' and may include *dhikr* as well as singing and dance. In this context, the word 'audition' signifies paying attention to

and noticing different emotions and states aroused through aesthetic practices of music and dance.

*We are in a small courtyard in the old Istanbul. The courtyard is surrounded by historical small houses and the sky is looking like a big blue patch above us. This is the house of Ibrahim Baba who is a Chishti Guide living between Istanbul and California. The crowd is gathering for the audition. Ibrahim Baba's place always attracts people from different social backgrounds and it is always so colourful. Baba is sitting on the ground and I see the love and compassion in his eyes as he looks around. I love how he embraces people. He starts the audition with a soft prayer. He continues with chanting and we join him. The chanting has a rhythmic character and I am noticing the verses. They are about the manners of being a Sufi. It is like being an elementary school student. So simple and so effective. I am thinking that the chanting is a powerful way of learning. My thoughts are disappearing and I am feeling lighter as I repeat verses. I find myself floating in it as we repeat the rhyme. The rhythm gets stronger and I can see one of the participants getting up and dancing almost in a trance state. Baba is joining him. I can see great love in their eyes and it is beautiful to observe them. The pitch gets higher and higher. Finally we reach a crescendo and we slow down. It is as if we were coming back to shore after surfing the waves. I took a deep breath, hold it for a while and give it away. (Journal Entry, January 2014)*

A very common aesthetic form of Sufi expression is poetry and this is seen in the world of Sufi scholars such as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Omar Khayyam, Ibn Arabi and many others. Sufi seekers use poetry and its symbols and metaphors as a way of connecting the physical world with the Essence, which is considered unknowable in itself. Similarly, Sufi poetry is an important part of Sufi epistemology where different notions of Sufi thought are conveyed through poetry. Poetry is the bridge towards the unknowable; it is an inclusive epistemology – integrating the expressive, the beautiful and the intellectual. The aesthetic practice is seen as being an important part of a Sufi's practice because it offers a powerful way of engaging with the

unknown, making it accessible without collapsing it into a too concrete known.

### *Applied practices – Sufism as a way of being in the material world*

Sufism is not only a mystical practice dealing with spiritual matters but also an applied practice, infused into all parts of daily life. There is a famous Sufi story that speaks to this and concerns a Sufi seeker living in isolation in the mountain and another living in the city. When the city Sufi visits his mountain brother, he is criticized by the reclusive, mountain Sufi because of his weakness in following certain practices. Time passes and the city Sufi returns to the noise and bustle of the town and its market place – soon to be visited by the mountain Sufi. Surrounded by the temptations and distractions of the market place, the visiting mountain Sufi realises how challenging it is to stay centred in such a busy place. While Sufi tradition values retreats and promotes modest living, it is not part of Sufi tradition to suggest living in isolation. I also subscribe to the idea that I live the Sufi way of life in the midst of daily challenges. For example, it is generally a challenge to find space or time for the daily practice of *salah* (meditation), while I am busy working in the office with my colleagues most of whom would not follow similar practices. On the other hand, a practice like *salah* is my way of keeping my focus during a long day or challenging meeting. So when I am in a situation where I need better concentration I will take a break, find a quiet corner to practice *salah* for 5-10 minutes and come back feeling refreshed and focused. My

*salah* practice has been extremely helpful for me in the face of challenging situations, enabling me to contribute with a clear mind and step away from the distracting drama of the day-to-day.

Most of my colleagues do not practice *salah* and I can almost say that it has been my 'secret' practice, as I would do it behind closed doors. I do it discreetly as it fits with my cultural beliefs that such practices should not be promoted publicly, as they are considered to be personal. I also show sensitivity because my public practice might create social anxiety for others who do not practice (because they feel should imitate me or that I should not be carrying out something personal in a public setting).

Similarly, my more than 30 years of *sawm* (fasting) experience has taught me a number of virtues such as patience, appreciation and generosity. I especially value patience as it is always a challenge to fast and work and fast on a long day. Patience has helped me avoid getting caught up in the often unhelpful rhythms of popular business culture, addicted as it is to speed and quick answers (rather than slower, more insightful responses).

I also benefit from the Sufi aesthetic stance in my practice. I use poetry and stories to connect with clients or colleagues and to make sense of issues. I find them immensely useful as people remember them better than anything else, repeating them to others, using them in their written documents, presentations and company materials.



Through this approach I am able share my learning and exercise influence in a way that fits with the Sufi tradition. My boldest attempt has been to base the foundation of a long-term development programme on one of the Rumi's poems; I use some of the propositions made in the poem as part of an action inquiry, supporting the action inquiry process with other aesthetic forms such as dance.

My challenge as a leader in a hierarchical and patriarchal culture, such as Turkey's, is how to avoid people around me feeling compelled to copy my behaviours. Forcing others to step into a Sufi practice is not the Sufi way. It has to be chosen by the seeker, not demanded by the teacher.

### *A community practice – Sufism as a way of being in the company of others*

Sufi tradition encourages learning in a community setting. This can be done in smaller Sufi circles or larger Sufi orders. Sufi circles with practices like *dhikr* (recitation), *sama* (audition) and *sohbet* (conversations) serve as a learning community. Gender is an important issue in Sufi communities and each order has different gender related practices. I have seen more patriarchal practices in certain Sufi orders where woman are positioned differently than men. This could be seen in terms of separated seating or imposing conservative clothing. Some orders can be more liberal, with women and men participating in mixed groups and not being required to wear any particular

clothing.

In addition to occasionally attending certain circles in Istanbul, I have initiated a regular Sufi circle with a group of friends.

### Forming an Actual Sufi Circle

Our Sufi circle has been formed from a group of people that I had earlier conversations with to explore Sufi learning and practice.

The group has 7 members who have shown interest in learning more about Sufi practices. I took the lead and proposed to each of them individually that we should form such a group. The group would convene once a month at one of the members' house and would work as an Action Learning set. A typical meeting would take about 3 hours and focus on exploring Sufi practices from a personal development perspective e.g. working with a topic such as the stages of development in Sufi thinking.

Group members had different levels of exposure to the Sufi tradition which has been both a challenge and an advantage. We used it as an advantage by learning from each other (which is congruent with the core of Sufi practice), while the focus on personal development has helped us to overcome the challenge of our differences as it provided a shared focus for us all.

We build on the perspective that a Sufi practice is a learning practice, one dedicated to a process of continuous learning in the company of

others. It is not about reaching an end point of expertise, but about continually pushing on and testing the boundaries of what is known and can be known – about this world and beyond.

In this sense, all members would bring their experience to the meetings and share it with the group. Those with greater exposure to the practice would bring more of their practical experience and those with less exposure would bring their recent reading. We would also welcome reflections or dreams as a learning opportunity.

*A mystical practice – Sufism as a way of engaging with those things that lie beyond the reach of everyday consciousness*

My path to becoming a student of Sufism started with a dreamlike revelation, more than 10 years ago. Since then dreams and voices of inner guidance have served as sources of data and punctuation points on my learning journey. During the last 5 years, I have taken my dreams much more seriously and they have become an integral part of my Sufi inquiry.



*Figure 2: How Mustafa and I greet each other*

I have kept a dream journal and regularly meet with my mentor, Mustafa Merter. As explained above, our focus on dreams had a Sufi

stance but also a psychological perspective. We have short meetings or longer retreats where we use my dreams as data and I learn about working with dreams as a source of knowledge. During the conversation, I would speak about my recent dreams and then we would have a conversation to make sense of dreams from both the 'me' and 'I' perspectives. I have included a photo with Mustafa. I see lots of love and care in this photo and it is what I experience in our relationship. Here is a short account from one of our meetings.

*I am arriving in the room where we are going to meet. It has been a while. I am noticing a slight tension. Then I remember what Mustafa had said that this is a learning process. My tension decreases. Mustafa sees me at the door. I can see his eyes bright, shining, his face smiling, welcoming. He opens his arms wide and gives me a warm and big hug. We enter into the room making a lot of noise, full of laughter and joy. I am happy to see him and he seems happy to see me. We sit and catch-up with friendly chat for few minutes. I am noticing how much I have missed Mustafa. Then he asks me if there is any significant dream that I would like to share. I pick up my iPhone to look at my e-journal where I keep my dream entries. I find my dream and start telling him about it, using the journal as a reference to all its details. I can see Mustafa listening to me; he's fully focused. Sometimes he's taking notes and sometimes he is listening with his eyes closed. I am finished. Mustafa is asking a few questions to clarify his understanding. Then he asks why I could have seen such a dream. The invitation is for me to interpret the dream from a relational point of view. I find few possibilities. Then he asks me about my interpretation. I tell my version. It seems to make sense for Mustafa as well; I can see him nodding. Then he asks me what would be my interpretation from a transpersonal perspective. My understanding of the Sufi transpersonal perspective is that we all embody an inner guide which is a part of an all knowing, omnipresent whole. I find this specific dream difficult to make sense of from this perspective. I make an attempt and then ask Mustafa what sense he could make. He makes a suggestion. It doesn't fully make sense either. Then I have an insight about a possible meaning. We talk about it for a while. It is already time and Mustafa suggests that I reflect on this specific dream regularly and continue making sense as it seems to be a significant one. We finish our dream work. I look at my watch and realise I have few more minutes. We continue with an informal chat until I leave. As I chat, I still have thoughts about the*

| *dream alive in my mind. (Journal Entry, May 2014)*

I notice that my relationship with Mustafa is a very intimate one and I value his presence. I see him as one of my best teachers and I feel so privileged to have the opportunity to learn from him.

I learnt from my experience with Mustafa that dreams influence our state or *hal* in Sufi thought and sometimes they have a deeper impact and influence our attitudes and behaviours. I have learnt to notice not only the content but also the timing and the frequency of a dream; this matters when it comes to the quality of the insights I have. I work with dreams being aware that the process of working with dreams is socially constructed, primarily between my Sufi mentor and me, which may sometimes extend to others with whom I share my experience.

On the other hand, I work with a transpersonal perspective inspired from Sufi thinking. With this perspective dreams can be seen to have a transcendent quality, where 'Self' unites with the 'Other', or 'Self' is the 'Other'. So seeing the Self as the 'Other' or the 'Other' as the 'Self' implies that the self involves conscious and unconscious parts, which may serve as potentials for insight and learning. I have seen dream work as a powerful way of making sense of these potentials and bringing them to life. In this sense, Sufis call dreams as *mana* which means 'meaning'. This connotation reminds me of Mead (1962) who suggested that we are all meaning makers. I see working with both the process of dreaming and dream interpretation as an integrated process of dream making. Mead (1934) takes the Self as a

composition of 'I' and 'me'. I can make better sense of Mead (1934) by combining my learning from Jung and my Sufi teaching with Merter, in this way I see 'I' as the dreamer which I see as the transcendent Self where 'me' is the socially constructed self whose social representations are reflected through dreams. From my Sufi experience, 'I' is whole and represents the imaginal world whereas 'me' is relational and can be best expressed in the verbal world. Dreams taught me to make better meaning of my experience in the real world by means of projections of the imaginal world and become aware of my greater potential. I will share an actual example of my learning in the second cycle of my inquiry.

# Chapter 3: Putting my inquiry into leadership perspective



## The intention behind this section

This inquiry is into my leadership practice as the leader of a local consulting firm in Turkey. Leadership practice, as well as power, is an important thread for my inquiry and so I intend to provide an overview of various models on leadership and power. I will also provide a comparative analysis with a critical appraisal of the various major, established schools. This section serves me well in order to:

- understand different theoretical strands on power and leadership
- frame my inquiry better
- locate it within established schools of theory
- integrate my knowledge from Western theoretical models and Sufi practice

## Exploring Power (NEW)

Power has been as an important topic in my inquiry. I see it as a major thread in my learning and an embedded quality influencing my leadership practice. As Shackleton (1995) states, it is impossible to talk of leadership without discussing the question of power and influence. Therefore I will start by exploring the issue of power before studying leadership theories.

I see this new section being particularly useful for my inquiry in order to:

- understand different schools of thinking on power
- make sense of my learning from the perspective of power
- become aware how power influences my leadership practice

I will start by reviewing two major perspectives on power in the contemporary Western thought, then bring in the Sufi perspective to explore what I can learn from different angles.

### Power as agency

A main perspective on power sees it is an 'essentially contested concept' (Lukes, 2005: 137). In this manner, power is something that people can hold, lose and gain and is referred to as agency. Lukes (2005) maintains that while the concept of power is "contested" by agents holding different values, power may nevertheless be reduced

to capacity. In the words of Giddens (1984, p. 14), "Power is the capability of the individual 'to make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs." This understanding of power has also been dominant in organisational and leadership theory (French and Raven, 1959; Yukl, 2006; Bass, 1960; Etzioni, 1991). Such an understanding has been my predominant perspective on power for a long time until I started my inquiry.

French and Raven's (1959) 'Bases of Social Power Model' is one of the most widely used and quoted within management texts as an example of the agency perspective (Northouse, 2007). Their framework describes five power bases which the leader can use to have influence over followers (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006). These power bases are legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expert power and referent power.

Legitimate power, often referred to as Position Power, consists of influencing subordinates or others using positional or hierarchical authority. Reward power is influencing others by offering them incentives or things they would like to receive. Coercive Power is influencing others' behaviour by means of threat or punishment. These three power bases are sometimes taken together and also referred as Position Power.

The other two bases of power, Expert and Referent power are also commonly grouped together as Personal Power. Looking at them

separately, Expert power is using skills, knowledge or abilities, or other knowledge/skill based means, to influence others. Referent power is influencing others by means of being a role model, where people may do things out of respect or admiration.

Looked at in the whole, French and Raven's (1959) model can be summarised as focusing on getting things done and proposes different ways for somebody to exert influence for achieving results. At the same time, the model presents power as a property of the leader and does not pay attention to the relational aspects of power - unlike more recent thinkers on power like Foucault and Elias.

I see French and Raven's (1959) model as a subset of the Visible/One-dimensional view of power proposed by Lukes (1976) and further developed by Gaventa (1980). Lukes (1976) and Gaventa (1980) propose that there are three faces of power, Visible, Hidden and Invisible.

The first face is visible power and addresses the observable aspects of power, such as people or institutions in charge of decision-making. Visible power manifests itself when there is an action to be taken, issue to be resolved or decision to be made. Lukes (1976) and Gaventa (1980) calls it a one-dimensional view of power, the claim can be made that it is the person who publicly/visibly decides who has the power. In my professional practice, my management role involves examples of visible power. I have formal decision making authority

which comes from my role and also informal – but explicit - influence which comes from my long history, client contacts, and staff connections. Within this configuration of visible power, I can be seen to be in a position to make various decisions and take numerous actions. The assumptions related to visible power privilege an agency perspective and do not necessarily, or explicitly, take into consideration relational dynamics.

The second face of power is described as having a two-dimensional perspective (Lukes, 1976) or being hidden power (Gaventa, 1980). Hidden power looks at how agendas get set, who decides who will be included and who would be left out of the visible face of power. This form of power may still be linked to authority and position, however the rules and procedures about who is included in the decision making process may have a relational and interdependent nature. If I take it to my practice, hidden power is manifested through board structure, management team constitution or the performance review process, all of which are dependent on various stakeholders who have their say. For me, the formation of hidden power is made up of a negotiation process involving different parties.

The third face of power is called Invisible power (Gaventa, 1980) or framed as three-dimensional power by Lukes (1976). From this perspective power is about shaping the meaning, norms, ideologies and basis for decision-making so that individuals and groups can influence the process of decision-making.

As an example for the invisible form of power, the discourse associated with a company's vision, mission, strategy or values may represent an example of invisible power. As an example, if teamwork is a shared value in the organisation, individuals may not easily act on their own without involving others even though the role may be associated with other forms of power, such as visible or hidden. As an individual, I would be expected to comply with this shared value in order to avoid losing credibility and effectiveness in my visible and hidden exercise of power. In my context, the influence of the collectivist nature of Turkish culture is a powerful invisible presence – a presence I will explore in greater detail in the last part of this section.

### **Power as structure**

In the 'Third face' of Invisible power, power can be seen as an expression of deeply embedded social norms, values and world-views which then shape power relations in society (Gaventa, 2010). From this perspective, power is not something anyone possesses, but is a characteristic of all human relationships operating as an inseparable element of social process (Elias, 2000). While the agency perspective argues that individual people have a great capacity for acting freely, this structure view argues that social systems shape and determine individual action.

This seems like a good place to bring some input from my Sufi understanding on power. I understand from Sufi practice that we

cannot claim ownership of power as individuals, however we can act with choice with the power that is available to us as a temporary bestowal. In this regard, I would frame visible power as a manifestation of invisible power that is everywhere and it is a quality beyond social context. However, I have come across various Sufi orders which use the social side of power to exert influence on individuals. While some groups may have rather liberating social practices, one can find rather oppressive social practices in other Sufi groups including gender inequality, excessive power associated with the group leader etc. I appreciate that Sufi path has a development focus and believe that some level of care or self-discipline may be helpful in the development process. However, I would argue against any oppressive measures as I see Sufi seeking as a liberating journey overall. Indeed, I believe that Sufi path is emancipatory and it has the potential to free us up from the limitations of self as we see it and even resolve the entrenched social patterns.

Foucault's work (1980, 2002) deals with power as deeply embedded social norms, values which are expressed in the form of discourses which shape power relations in the society. Considering the constraints and focus of this dissertation, I will do as Foucault (1980) himself suggests, that anyone who wants to make use of the knowledge he proposes may and should quote aggressively, making use of what he requires without committing himself to the complete works (Sadan 1997). In this spirit, I will quote only what really makes

sense and resonates with me, from Foucault's view of power.

*Firstly, Power is everywhere:* Foucault (2002) suggests that power is not a thing and it is everywhere. Power is not a commodity, a position or a prize. It may happen anytime, anywhere with anybody. This view is framed by Hayward (2000) who describes power as a network of social boundaries that enable or constrain the behaviours and freedom of all actors. This runs counter to modernist views about power, where it is seen as the property of a leader that also can empower others. This view fits with my Sufi perspective of power, which sees it as omnipresent and available to us at any moment in different ways. For example, I can force somebody to do something which may be one way of accessing power. I can study hard and increase my knowledge which may give me greater influence. I can help people around me which would gain their consent and I would get their support in return which would make things easier for me.

*Secondly, Power is multidirectional:* Power is not limited to political institutions or ruling authorities. It works in all directions, top down and bottom up. It is not only about domination as exercised by rulers upon the ruled, but also by the domination the ruled can exercise over the so-called rulers. Foucault's proposition about the two way nature of power offers a distinctive perspective on how leaders are experienced and go about their work. Leaders, who see power as a top-down unidirectional possession, tend to become oppressive in order to protect their assumption of what the power is and where it



comes from. Once it is seen as multidirectional, working in both ways, then it becomes easier to appreciate the dialogue in leadership. One of the pillars of Sufi thought that I subscribe to is that being human is about representing qualities of the Divine or the whole. Some people may have physical abilities as a form of power, some may have intellectual qualities and some others may have social status. In this regard, power is available to anybody in different forms one way or another without being limited with social status.

*Thirdly, Power is contextual:* Power relations are dependent on culture, place and time and relate to a given society in a given time. I find this a liberating perspective, when compared to a view of power as being unidirectional and in the hands of a few people. Once people become aware of the contextual nature of power, it opens up the possibility of a wider and more fluid perspective which may help people to liberate themselves from the oppressive influence of top down power dynamics – something dear to my heart given the political upheavals in Turkey this year.

*Fourthly, Power is not only negative:* As opposed to a Marxist view of power, power can be both destructive and productive. It has a direct and creative role in social life. This proposition helps me relax my negative relationship with power and allows me to engage with it as an experience that is not wholly oppressive. I will explore my learning about the generative qualities of power later in this section.

Another influential thinker for me on power is Norbert Elias, who is regularly referred to by Ralph Stacey in his various works on organisations. I learnt from the work of Elias (2000) and Stacey (2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007) that 'power relating' is an inseparable aspect of all human relations and similarly a fundamental quality of organisational dynamics. Stacey (2003, 2005) addresses the two-way nature of power as an enabling and constraining relational dynamic. When in a relationship with another we are constrained by, and at the same time, constrain, that other (Stacey, 2007). Similarly, we also enable each other in the same relationship at the same time. Power, therefore, is the paradoxical enabling-constraining property of human action which is an irremovable aspect of all human relating (Stacey 2007). Elias points to how patterns of power relations, which he called figurations, emerge in human interaction such that power balances can shift in favour of some and against others.

So according to Elias, power is a phenomenon that emerges in the relationship. In another way, the relationship embodies power. Building on Elias (2000), Stacey (2003, 2007) suggests that we can observe power relations by means of communicative interaction where its shifting nature establishes patterns of inclusion and exclusion. According to Elias (1991), this is how we can define the notion of personal identity. Power figurations create patterns of inclusion and exclusion which takes a form of grouping. We may choose to belong to such patterns of grouping and such a notion of

belonging provides a sense of personal identity. In this manner, Elias (2000) refers to the inextricably interwoven aspects of 'I' and 'We' identities, where the notion of self or identity, therefore, emerges in social processes of power relating. For example, I belong to many different identities; Turkish, masculine, consultant, student, teacher and many others. One of the reasons that I am drawn to the Sufi perspective is that Sufis favour going beyond group based identities, including the identity of a 'Sufi', and promote the 'human'ity as the most superior identity. My mentor Mustafa would always tell me that the best *dervish* (Sufi seeker) is the one who doesn't call himself a *dervish*. In this sense I am not sure if I fully connect with Elias' thinking; however Elias has taught me to be aware of potential power figurations in relationships and my Sufi stance encourages me to go beyond these figurations.

I see Elias and Foucault having complimentary views about the omnipresence of power, with both thinkers not seeing power as a 'thing' or a property residing in individuals. Foucault mentions that power is there all the time. Both Foucault and Elias, identify the two-way nature of power. Foucault addresses it by talking about power being productive and destructive, while Elias talks about its enabling and constraining nature. Again, Foucault mentions that power relations are culturally and socially dependent which is compatible with Elias' view of figurations, which addresses the generations of interwoven interdependencies in a social network.

However, whereas Elias defines power as a structural property of every social relationship and acknowledges its two-sidedness, Foucault emphasises the role of discourses in developing power relations. Discourse according to Foucault (1979, 1980, 2003) describes a statement of sequences and signs, which he frames as enouncements. It is related to power as it defines inclusion and exclusion, since a discourse may cover what may be spoken, where and how it may be spoken and who may speak. A discourse becomes a way of constructing truth(s) and Foucault (1979, 1980 and 2002) argued that power and knowledge are inter-related and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and negotiation of power. While Foucault (1980) highlighted discourse, and framed knowledge as both the creator of power and creation of power, Elias focused on how power relations are formed in a social context by introducing the concept of figurations, generations of interwoven interdependency networks, which is complimentary to Foucault's perspective about the contextual nature of power.

VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) and Rowlands (1997) propose an alternative framework for using power in a generative way. According to these authors, whose ideas come from a feminist perspective, the commonly recognised form of power as 'power over' others and things, has many negative associations such as oppression, coercion, discrimination and abuse. It has a zero sum view of power, where having power involves taking it from someone else, and then using it

to dominate and prevent others from gaining it (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002: 39). 'Power over' operates in Visible forms through formal decision making, in Hidden forms through the under the table habits that control all forms of decision making and in the Invisible forms of underlying social frames and norms. VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) and Rowlands (1997) offer three alternative ways of using power – 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within' – to challenge the potentially oppressive nature of 'power over' perspective and to introduce more collaborative ways to express 'power over'.

'Power to' is about individual abilities, talent and skills to act. This form of power builds on the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and world. 'Power with' is about collective action, shared voice and working together - it seeks to find common ground among different interests and establish collective strength, multiplying individual talent, experience and knowledge. 'Power within' is about empowerment and believing in one's sense of self-worth and abilities, it offers a capacity to shift power to a wider range of stakeholders and especially to disadvantaged people. As I write about alternative forms, I am noticing the relational and inclusive thread offered in these forms which I associate with the feminist perspective of all three authors.

As I reflect on my review above, they take my understanding of power to a higher level. Elias' focus on interdependency makes me more humble and considerate about power relations; while Foucault's view

on the ubiquity and productive nature of power helps me have a balanced view about power as it helps me appreciate that power can be generative and the feminist perspective of VeneKlasen, Miller and Rowlands gives me wider appreciation of power as a phenomenon.

## A Holistic Perspective on Power

So far, I have reviewed different perspectives on power. In this section, I am intending to develop a holistic perspective on power - building on my learning from the previous section. I am hoping that this section will enable me to offer an angle on power which informs my inquiry.

In the previous section, I have covered Agency and Structure perspectives on power. While the Agency perspective emphasises the individual's role and action, the Structure perspective gives greater weight to underlying dynamics such as social norms, systems or processes. As I reflect on these seemingly competing views, I want to develop a unitary perspective which is a quality that I relate to my Sufi practice.

The sense I am making about power is that it is a capacity which is present at every moment, and in every space, available to us all and we access this capacity by means of individual action and participation. At the same time this capacity becomes available to us as we actively relate and participate with others. Therefore I find it easier to resonate with VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) and Rowlands

(1997) who propose to access power as a collective ground and Giddens (1984) who sees power as an integral part of a complex social dynamic, where human agency has structural qualities, and the social structure is an outcome of the human activity (Sadan, 1997).

In this sense, I can say that social structure and human agency are interdependent elements, which build and activate social relations, and power acts a central component for both. As a practical example, development programmes that we offer to our consultants represent an example of social structure. However, in order to make it work, individual commitment, engagement and participation is critical if there is to be a useful outcome.

My reflection on the interdependent nature of human agency and social structure takes me to Kahane (2010) who offers a balanced view on power using Paul Tillich's framing of power and love. According to Tillich (1954), power is the drive of everything living to realise itself, which Kahane extends to a drive to achieve task and to move beyond its present – in other words, to grow. Inspired by Tillich (1954), who defines love as the drive to unite the separated, Kahane (2010) frames love as the drive to reconnect and make whole that which has become or appears fragmented. This resonates for me with Foucault's (1979) view on the productive, rather than oppressive potential of power. Similarly Kahane (2010) goes beyond the common idea of oppressive power. He positions power and love as seemingly paradoxical but complimentary drives, suggesting that love is what

makes power generative instead of degenerative and similarly power is what makes love generative instead of degenerative.

Kahane (2010) builds on the views of Martin Luther King Jr. (1967) who proposes that power without love is reckless and abusive and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. In my experience as a leader, I have seen that when I focus solely on results (which I see as a symbol of power), I lose the engagement people in the firm. On the other hand, when we focus too much on dialogue, conversation and participation (a proxy for love), our business performance suffers and we face issues of sustainability. I see that the art of leading involves finding the delicate balance between these two sides. Similarly, Rollo May (1969) addresses the interdependence of power (he refers to power as “will”) and love, proposing that will without love is manipulation where love without will is sentimental. I understand from these claims that power and love are two interdependent drives completing each other. For me, they are not a choice to be made against each other, but they represent a paradox in which both drives must coexist in a dynamic way.

Kahane’s thinking connects for me with the Sufi notion of Divine Names. According to Chittick (1989), based on Ibn Arabi’s teachings, as humans we cannot experience the Divine in its Essence but we can experience it through its names and attributes, which are called Divine names or attributes. Divine names or attributes are the relationships which can be discerned between the Essence and the



Cosmos. Divine names can be grouped by two characteristics of transcendence and immanence. Transcendent names are those such as Mighty, Inaccessible, Great, Majestic, Compeller, Creator, Proud, All-High, King, Wrathful, Avenger, Slayer, Depriver and Harmer (Murata, 1992; Chittick, 1989). These names are called the 'Names of Majesty' or 'Names of Severity'. Murata (1992) compares this grouping as yin and yang and calls the first group 'yang names', since they place stress upon greatness, power, control and masculinity. Names of Majesty fit well for me with Kahane's notion of power.

The other group of names are about immanence, which include Beautiful, Near, Merciful, Compassionate, Loving, Gentle, Forgiving, Pardoner, Life-giver, Enricher and Bestower (Murata, 1992; Chittick, 1989). These are known as the 'Names of Beauty' or 'Names of Gentleness'. Murata (1992) frames them as 'yin names', as they place stress on submission to the service of others, softness, acceptance and receptivity. The concept of Names of Beauty resonates for me with Kahane's framing of love as a uniting energy. As I reflect, I notice that one of the primary goals of Sufi path is *tawhid*, oneness, which is becoming *insan-i kamil* the perfected being uniting the paradoxical nature of life. Appreciating both the Names of Majesty and Names of Beauty compliments the view that Tillich and King propose, that the coexistence of power and love brings a generative quality. The coexistence of power and love gives me a compelling angle to inquire into myself as a leader. The opportunity for me to inquire into my

relationship to 'power' while engaging in relational practices of 'love'  
- and by which I may also shift my relationship to power, as well as  
how I relate to others in a leadership practice involving both formal  
and informal power.

## A Chronological Perspective on Leadership Theories– a definitional maze

As I am inquiring into my leadership practice, I find it important to make sense of different leadership theories in the literature. In this regard, I have made an extensive reading and found it difficult and confusing to find my way through the maze of different leadership definitions, rooted in different decades and disciplines. I find it interesting that there is no agreement on the criteria or scope of definitions – it is an unbounded field!

Northouse (2007) offers a chronological summary of definitions extracted from Rost's (1991) analysis of various leadership studies; he analysed academic works written between 1900 and 1990, identifying two hundred and twenty-one different definitions of leadership.

In order to make better sense of different models, I have chosen to group those under three headings:

- Leadership as a property of leaders
- Leadership as an outcome of the relationship between leaders and followers
- Leadership as a social process

## Leadership as a property of leaders

I will start by introducing perspectives that take the view that leadership is something done or possessed by leaders, and which endeavour to identify the core attributes, functions and/or behaviours that make them effective. This group of theories involve traits theory, behaviour theory, situational approach and contingency theory and skills and functions approach. These theories essentialise leadership locating it in the person as mentioned in trait theories (Yukl, 1989), the situation as stated in situational theories (Hersey and Blanchard, 1984), or person and situation combinations as suggested in contingency theories (Fiedler, 1967).

Up until 1929, definitions were about control and power; leadership was seen to be about "the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation" (Moore, 1927, p. 124).

During the 1930s, the traits of leaders became the focus of leadership studies, with an emerging view of leadership as a matter of influence rather than control and many definitions appeared highlighting various traits.

In the 1940s there was an emphasis on the group, with leadership being located in the behaviour of an individual taking charge of a group's activities (Hemphill, 1949).

In the 1950s, more themes added to the group emphasis and what

leaders do in groups; firstly leadership was framed as a relationship that develops shared goals and what counted as leadership was based on the behaviour of the leader. Secondly leadership was seen in terms of group effectiveness and the ability of the leader to influence overall group effectiveness.

The definition of leadership as behaviours that influence people in groups towards shared goals was underscored by Seeman (1960) in the 1960s, who described leadership as "acts by persons which influence other persons in a shared direction" (p. 53).

### **Leadership as an outcome of the relationship between leaders and followers**

After 1970's, there have been new perspectives which explore the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and followers such as transformational /charismatic leadership/authentic leadership and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theories. These theories act as a bridge towards the relational perspective which will be explored in the final group. Northouse (2007) highlights Burns' (1978) as one of the most important definitions from that period: "Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilising by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realise goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (p. 425). Following Burns (1978), transformational leadership remained popular, defining leadership as a process where "one or more persons engage with

others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 83).

The 1980s saw many works on leadership, as it became a popular topic in both academic and public domains. This was a period where one can easily get lost due to the competing numbers of definitions, although it still predominantly delivered the message that leadership was getting followers to do what the leader wanted done.

### Leadership as a Social Process

After 2000's, we see various literature on the relational aspects of leadership under different theoretical frames such as Processual (Hosking, 2000), Complexity (Stacey, 2001), Distributed (Gronn, 2002), Distributive (Brown and Gioia, 2002), Shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003), Post-Heroic (Fletcher, 2004) and Relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006). These theories differ from earlier ones through their focus on leadership as a shared social process rather than having an individual or the group focus.

One of the most recent and updated theoretical contributions to the topic is Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership approach in which she outlines two ways of studying leadership in the literature. The first she calls the Entity Perspective, where leadership is viewed as an individual entity linked to traits and characteristics (Uhl Bien, 2006, Yukl, 2006) and is seen from a functional and constructivist perspective (Yukl, 2006). In this perspective leadership is seen an

individual property (Uhl Bien, 2006) and leadership is seen as the ability to influence followers toward a certain goal, rather than an emergent social process. The second perspective is called Relational Leadership, which views leadership as a socially created process that can be embodied by an individual at any time (Uhl Bien, 2006).

The Relational Perspective focuses on organisations and individuals as continually being constructed through process, but does not see individuals as the makers of process. The Relational Perspective assumes that meanings are bound by socio-cultural contexts (Dachler and Hosking, 1995), acknowledging the significance of context in the world of relational leadership (Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002, Uhl-Bien, 2006), positioning leadership as a contextual phenomenon (Abell and Simmons, 2000).

On the other hand, the Entity Perspective focuses on an individual's perceptions, actions and thoughts in relational exchanges (Hosking, 2000). The Entity perspective does not necessarily care about the context as much as it cares about the individual, seeing individual action as the driver of organisational life (Hosking, et Al, 1995).

The discussion about these two perspectives connects for me to the agency versus structure discourse about power. My Sufi side feels closer to the Relational Perspective as I do not agree that leadership attributes can be seen as a personal property; however I also acknowledge the influence of individual action on the relational

process as proposed by the Entity perspective. I also tend to agree with Uhl Bien's (2006) comment, that it is not about which perspective is right but rather about understanding the possibilities offered by each perspective. So my Sufi view is rather a blended one rather than a singular view.



## Making Sense of Different Perspectives on Leadership (REVISED)

In this earlier section, I outlined the chronology of different schools of leadership thinking. In this section I will present a critical appraisal of different leadership theoretical models. My intention with this analysis is to make sense of the leadership literature, compare it with the Sufi perspective and lay out a theoretical foundation for my inquiry.

### How I notice I hold, resolve and/or avoid theoretical tension, inconsistency and paradox

I am very intrigued to find similarities and common themes between different theoretical traditions which may enable me to make a synthesis and create new meaning. I am also mindful of the potential tensions and inconsistencies between different theoretical traditions which I can hold, resolve or avoid. I am aware that such tensions may provide a fertile ground for novel ideas and therefore I am keen to work with these differences.

### What I am intending to cover (and not to cover)

I am aware that leadership domain is extensive and I am covering just a portion of what is out there and have left some interesting theories out due to the limits of this paper. My choices are affected by the prevalence of the theories as well as their relevance to my practice, and intend to draw from a cross-section of sources that can be related to my leadership practice - which I frame as leading a consultancy firm

in Turkey. I will share more details about my practice in the coming sections. In this section, I have presented my understanding of different theories relevant to leadership. As I come towards the end, I would like to make sense of the thinking presented so far. My intention is to notice some of common themes and highlight possible assumptions underlying these theories, then develop propositions on leading relevant to my inquiry experience.

### **Leadership is a leader-centric phenomenon**

The majority of theories that I have reviewed present leadership from the perspective of attributes which are directly associated with the leader (Yukl, 1989). Some of these theories go beyond attributes and explore leader's behaviours; however they are all focused on the leader (Mc Gregor, 1960; Blake and Mouton, 1964; House, 1971; Fiedler, 1967; Hersey and Blanchard, 1984; Vroom and Yetton, 1973). There are recent theories like transformational leadership and leader-member exchange theories which shift the focus more onto the relationship between the leader and followers; however these theories also tend to present leadership as a phenomenon linked to the leader and not the leader-other relationship (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990; Graen et al., 1982; Gerstner and Day, 1997). The individual focus of these theories, where the individual claims ownership of leadership qualities, is in disagreement with my Sufi view where all attributes belong to the whole.

In this sense, detaching leadership from the leader and seeing it as a relational phenomenon fits well with my Sufi perspective (Hosking, 2006; Uhl Bien, 2006). Such a perspective encourages leadership to be seen through the lens of 'relationship', rather than focusing on the leaders' attributes comprising the relationship.

### Leadership is predominantly about getting things done

I have seen that most of the traditional leadership theories are looking at the concept from a narrow perspective, where leadership is framed as a role focused on getting things done (Stogdill, 1948; Yukl 1989). I argue that such an achievement driven focus makes it hard to truly differentiate leadership from a classical management role.

Achievement drive represents a one sided focus on power building on Kahane's (2010) model of power and love. My appreciation of Sufi notion of oneness (*tawhid*) requires me to practice the Names of Majesty (power) and Names of Beauty (love) simultaneously. So in practical terms, I can be great result-oriented achiever however a better leadership practice would require relational qualities of love and connection. This inquiry attempts to address this proposition.

### Leadership is seen as an objective phenomenon

Highlighting Northouse (2007), I see an indefinite number of definitions of leadership in the academic literature. I think one of the underlying assumptions in the academic and professional world is that leadership can be framed as an objective phenomenon and can be

applicable to various situations. However, not only is it clear to me that leadership is contextual, but I also know that there cannot be a clear cut definition as it tends to get blurry when I or anyone else seeks to clarify it (Ladkin, 2010). As a Sufi seeker, I subscribe that leadership has a transcendent, primordial quality which is subjectively experienced in a relationship taking place in a specific context.

### **Leadership has a dualistic nature**

As I reflect on the theories above, I can see that they all represent a dualistic tension. In this sense, I can see leadership as a set of attributes that belongs to the leader or as a social process. I can have a task and achievement focus or I can have a people focus. I could emphasise the role of the leader as an individual or I could pay more attention to the relationship. Most of the leadership theories tend to choose one or other of the sides but inspired from my Sufi learning, I would like to bring an integrated perspective, uniting such dualities.

### **How I notice the different theoretical perspectives may inform my current practice and my espoused theory**

In this inquiry, I am interested to know whether leadership is really leader-centric and achievement focused or can leadership be experienced as a phenomenon beyond the effectiveness of the leader. In this sense, I am curious about the dualistic nature of leadership theory. It reminds me of a similar divide in the theory of power, where there is an agency perspective emphasising the role of

the individual or a structural perspective where social dynamics have a larger influence. I am intrigued by Grint's (2004) invitation to think about leadership as something beyond human endeavour rather than considering it as a purely human endeavour. If this is the case, I am wondering if I or anybody can grasp it with a single definition and we can subjectively experience leadership by participating in the relational space.

Pushing this idea to its limit, I can appreciate Pastor's (1998) view of leadership as 'a collective social consciousness that emerges in the organisation' as individuals interact with one another (p. 5). But Pastor goes further by saying that as this process of social construction goes on; leadership takes on an independent life that continues to be enacted over time. I would like to link these perspectives to the Sufi perspective of Divine names and seek whether it is through them that it may become possible to integrate Western leadership thinking with the Sufi approach - and contribute to the body of leadership academics and practice.

In this way, I am interested to explore what happens if I pursue an inquiry to be self-aware as a leader, seeing self as a relational phenomenon. In this regard, I am keen about learning to lead responsibly with power and presence. And finally, I am intrigued to go beyond achievement and getting things done, which seems to be the primary concern for leaders, and curious to know how it would be to lead with a heart.

## Leadership and Power in the Turkish Context (REVISED)

I know that leadership is contextual and in order to my understand leadership practice it is important to pay attention to cultural context. This cultural context is a frame that will colour how I see the world and what I pay attention to.

In this section I explore, as much as is possible for an individual to see the taken-for-granted qualities of their context. At this point, I would like to highlight that my context involves historical and cultural setting of Turkey, my family history, my Western influenced education in this local setting, my inquiry studies within a UK based Business School with a postmodernist view, my Sufi learning path, my leadership role in a local consulting firm in Turkey and my firm's work with corporate executives in organisational change and development.

### How I hold tensions between my espoused theories and theories in use

As I steer my learning through different theories, I may find out that I am living with different theories in use. I find it particularly important to notice the theories in use informed by social norms or cultural assumptions. For example, I may be practicing an example of patriarchal leadership rooted in my cultural context while I am assuming I hold to a participative perspective. I have an example of this in the inquiry cycles where I introduce various participative

practices, but I notice myself engaging with some of these practices with a patriarchal style. Such examples may offer evidence of a gap between my espoused theories, the theory in use and my leadership practice. I hope to notice such gaps with the help of my inquiry, through feedback and reflection as well as my Sufi practices –especially my conversations in my Sufi informed ‘Action Learning’ group and in my dream work. By doing so I hope to become aware of possible blind spots and development opportunities in my practice.

## A cultural perspective on leadership

Turkish culture has long been described as being high on collectivism, power distance and conservatism (Hofstede, 1980; Ronen 1986; Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998).

It is useful to look closer to each of these cultural attributes with a relational perspective in order to understand leadership better.

### *Collectivism*

The collectivist nature of Turkish culture manifests itself as a strong sense of in-group orientation. I believe this attribute has its roots in the strong family focus of the society, which is connected to its historic tribal qualities. It is a common habit in Turkish society to see people identifying themselves through their relationships with family and/or relatives rather than their individual identity. This means that the "We" is given more importance than "I" when people look to their in-group membership of families, tribes or teams. This dynamic

plays out in a high degree of interdependence between group members, bringing a particular relational quality to Turkish society. It can also be seen in common habits of nepotism in Turkish organisations.

The collectivist nature of Turkish culture makes it hard to have direct and clear communication, as people tend to avoid open conflicts in order to maintain group harmony. Therefore feedback is generally indirect. The avoidance of direct communication and conversation in difficult situations shadows the relational quality of Turkish culture, as conversing is a critical way of relating. Feedback has been a theme in my inquiry as it has unsurprisingly been an issue in my organisation; one I've paid special attention to in order to shift this tendency from talking behind closed doors to open and direct communication.

### *Power Distance*

The Collectivist nature of Turkish culture may be seen as a preference for love and connection as proposed by Kahane (2010), however my experience is that the Turkish society significantly favours power which manifests itself as power distance and creates a regular tension.

Similarly a number of studies highlight the power distance characteristic of Turkey (Kabasakal and Bodur, 1998; Pasa, 2000; Pasa, Kabasakal and Bodur, 2001). Combined with hierarchical structures and a culture of paternalism, leaders are seen as father figures who are responsible for protecting and taking care of their followers



(Kanungo and Aycan, 1997).

In their seven country study of paternalism (as one of the four sociocultural dimensions of societies) Kanungo and Aycan (1997) found Turkey to have strongly paternalistic values - a pattern that grouped it alongside China, India, and Pakistan. This was in contrast to the relatively less paternalistic cluster of Romania, Canada and the US – which creates an interesting potential cultural bias given how much of the leadership literature comes out of the US. In high power distance cultures like Turkey, employees rely on their leaders and on rules. Employees expect to be told what to do while at the same time they expect to be taken care of. They see power as an entity of leaders. 'Control' is regarded as a normal managerial practice and the attitude towards leaders is quite formal. Communication is indirect and selective (Hofstede, 1980). High power distance has been an issue in my inquiry, manifesting itself with my tension about the different expectations for formal and informal communication. I have shared this as an emerging theme in the first cycle.

### *Conservatism*

Conservatism is a strong attribute of Turkish Culture (Schwartz, 1994). Hofstede (1997) frames the dynamics of conservatism as being in the service of 'uncertainty avoidance'. It is a habit of that seeks to control the ambiguity of the future by saying it will be like the past and sooth anxiety about the unknown by emphasising continuity. This is achieved by a number of means such as belief systems, rituals or

institutions. For foreigners some of these practices may seem religious but often they are traditional social patterns used in specific situations to ease tension.

I see a connection between power distance and conservatism in Turkey and this combination manifests itself in different ways, such as how bureaucracy is seen, practised and engaged with. Bureaucratic structures are linked to deep-seated values such as precaution and control, which can be seen as rooted in seven hundred years of imperial history. The emerging challenge for me is how relational is it possible to be as a leader in a Turkish setting.

### **The challenge to relational leadership in a Turkish context**

My understanding of relational practice assumes that leadership has an emergent nature, seeing leaders as being in charge but not in control. Power is seen as something dynamic that is created in the ongoing habits of social process rather being an object that belongs to the leader. Everyone who has grown up in Turkey is soaked in the stories of heroic leadership from Turkish history, full of charismatic primarily masculine leaders (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2004). The single most influential charismatic leader in modern Turkey is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, seen as the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, whose leadership and reforms transformed the country from being a theocratic, autocratic Empire into a modern, democratic Republic. Atatürk was a military commander and a political leader representing

a strong archetype of leadership in Turkey, embodying characteristics such as charisma, benevolence, paternalism, statesmanship, intellectualism, strategic thinking and determined service to democratic, secular and modernist ideals (Ozbilgin, 2010). The social construction of such leaders in society creates a fantasy that leaders are saviours and can move mountains by themselves.

Therefore many people in Turkey continue to wait for the perfect, miraculous, charismatic political leader who will change the world. Such an assumption moves the focus in Turkey to leaders' attributes and skills rather than leadership as a process.

On top of this social dynamic, the strong presence of the leadership characteristics mentioned above, such as conservatism and power distance, makes the leadership process quite unidirectional and transactional and provides various challenges to leaders who want to put relational qualities into the mix such as connection, reciprocity and mutuality. I know that such leaders exist in NGO sector especially from the younger generation. I believe this inquiry is an attempt to respond to such challenges within my context. In the following section, I will share a recent example of emerging leadership issues in Turkey to give a better perspective on the wider context.

### **'Gezi' protests: Connecting with the actual leadership context in Turkey (NEW)**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013, the history of Turkish democracy was marked

with protests against the demolition of Gezi Park which is located in centre of Istanbul. Although the protests had seemingly started with an environmental concern, they grew into mass protests in a number of cities around the country within a few days, both in response to police violence and also provocative comments by the Prime Minister addressing protesters. In this regard, the protests can be connected to a wider context, the growing dissent against the leadership practice of the current government and the related rhetoric of the Prime Minister. This leadership practice indeed carries all of the three cultural qualities; collectivism, power distance and conservatism. The common practice of leaders in Turkey is deeply rooted in an historical understanding of power, where it is seen as the property of the leader or governing bodies. Leaders tend to think that once they 'have' power they can act as they want and do as they please such as the recent Twitter, YouTube and social media bans in Turkey demonstrate. I have included above a snapshot of the Turkish Prime Minister on the TV advocating the twitter ban.



Figure 4: Prime Minister R.T. Erdogan on Twitter. (Photo by Tjebbe van Tijen, Creative Commons License)

This attitude alienates them from their team, organisation or society and creates a high power distance. Part of such behaviour can be linked to the collectivist perspective which assumes that all parts of society should share similar views, values and lifestyle.

The predominant nature of the collectivist assumption has led the country into a number of complex social issues such as Turkish-Kurdish ethnic conflict and secular-religious tension.

The Gezi protests marked the peak of such an attitude; before this point the government had implemented a number of significant policies without involving other parties. These policies touched on alcohol consumption, abortion rights, urban planning and

constitutional changes. All of these policies had an assumption that there is objective reality, a predominant life view and that society should have a homogenous quality where everybody should have a similar lifestyle – and those who lived differently needed to adapt to the prevailing social norms. In the case of Gezi, such an attitude was combined with a ‘power over’ attitude where the current leaders saw dialogue and participation as a waste of time and acted without paying attention to different stakeholders’ voices which can be seen from the government’s harsh response to activists.

However, the new generation in Turkey seeks a much lower power distance, appreciates the diversity of social norms and lifestyle and is much more open to new perspectives. The increasing impact of technology made knowledge available to all layers of the society, opening up the promise of a shorter power distance. It also made people deeply aware of the fantasy of collective unity; people could now see how our unity was made up of differences. The connectivity offered by the technology manifested itself by means of internet access and social media, creating a new generation who practised different social norms. It is obvious why a government which is power and status driven, and is rooted in collective and conservative assumptions, is facing a major resistance from a new generation which doesn’t care about status, is open to diverse views and appreciates dialogue.

*What is the significance of 'Gezi' events for my inquiry on leadership and power?*

Gezi events have exemplified that there were a predominant group of activists who persistently promoted dialogue and connection, despite the police violence and government officials' provocative comments creating more separation and distance. While past generations would relate to power by adapting and/or rebelling, the new generation offers a third way of relating by means of dialogue. These events have shown that the new generation has a strong expectation for a new kind of leadership, which deals with power with greater sensitivity and manifests qualities of dialogue. I could see this expectation from the energy of our young consultants who actively supported the protests.

In this regard, I see a striking congruence with the emerging context and my inquiry focus in the balancing of power with relational qualities, or qualities of love as proposed by Kahane (2010). I face a similar tension in my office where some people in the leadership team may promote a rather patriarchal attitude, and some others may favour a more participative approach. I see leading with participation almost as an art which requires great care and patience. I have seen many people feeling frustrated as they consider the dialogue process to be a waste of time. Such congruence makes me consider how my leadership practice, as well as my Sufi seeking, may be linked to the wider context and represent deeply embedded socio-cultural challenges. Noticing such a link helps me appreciate that my

leadership practice cannot be an isolated individual practice and it involves socially constructed patterns.

In this regard, this dissertation is an outcome of the yearning for a fresher perspective of leadership which handles power with care and responsibility and appreciates dialogue and participation.



## My Work Context

### Leading a Consulting Firm

So far, I have explored the social and cultural context in Turkey that influences my leadership practice. Now I would like to offer you some background information on my practice to help you to understand my work context better, as my practice is an integral part of my inquiry.

I have been in the training and consulting business for twenty years. My organisation is an international training and consulting firm operating in Turkey and the surrounding region. Our offerings are mainly related to leadership development and organisational change with large complex organisations. We have approximately forty people concentrated in Istanbul.

The company has been a private firm founded in 1992 by two partners. Recently we added new partners from the within the organisation, to increase loyalty and participation. We listed the company shares on the Istanbul Stock Exchange in 2012 being the first and only publicly traded professional services firm in Turkey. My Western minded achiever side is very proud of this listing while my Sufi heart is pleased that we have more people sharing the value of the firm.

I have included a photo taken during one of our recent client events. I have chosen this photo as it shows most of our consultant team in Istanbul to give you an image of the team that I work with.



*Figure 5: Photo taken during a Client Best Practice Conference held on 24 October 2012*

My practice has a number of aspects. First, I have the leadership role in the firm. This is indeed my primary role and takes up the majority of my time. In my inquiry, my leadership role will be the focus of practice. Secondly, I do client work as a consultant, where I do client management, client delivery as a part of consulting and training projects and community development. I try to do client work in cases where the client is a major account and has asked me to stay involved, or the work is at a senior level - or in cases where my presence would make a difference in serving the client better. Thirdly, I have board level responsibility as one of the shareholders of the firm, where my relationships with other board members form a

significant dynamic for my inquiry. One of them is Hamdi who is the most senior member of the firm. The other one is Can who is the Managing Partner of our Istanbul office.

# Chapter 4: My Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

## Introduction (NEW)

What is covered in this section?

In this section, I will start by exploring the links between my Doctoral focus, leadership practice and Sufi learning which informs my ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to the nature of being or existence and whether reality is objective and external to human beings, or whether it is created by one's own consciousness.

Epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and how we know that we know.

I will start by sharing a personal history of my engagement with the Sufi path and then move to present different paradigms, including my personal worldview in terms of ontology and epistemology. I will then move to discuss my methodology which is about the methods, tools and techniques to collect, interpret and present data.

## My Emerging Sufi Path and its Co-existence with My Doctoral Focus (NEW)

My journey into the Sufi path started with a dreamlike experience slightly more than ten years ago. It happened in an unexpected manner one morning while I was still half asleep. It was an experience that I kept to myself for many years and took the form of an invitation from a voice, or 'receiving of a call' as my critical friend John Higgins frames it. It felt as if I had been spoken to.

After this invitation or call, I started to follow some of the Sufi practices, like *salah* (a form of meditation), on an irregular basis and began to try and let it touch my leadership life, lightly. I will tell a bit more in the coming section about my practice of *salah* in greater detail. This period also coincided with a time of confusion, a sense of arrogance which more appeared more as a thought where I almost believed that I was somehow chosen or privileged.

My confusion later transformed into an inquiry and after a few years, my inquiry pulled me further into a way I have lately started to name as the Sufi path. On this path, I have met great teachers – not all of whom were from the Sufi tradition including my supervisors in the doctorate programme teaching me about Psychology and Leadership.

As I continued my personal search for a way of being, I came across Sufi thought in books and personal contacts. My interest and learning

in this tradition grew quickly, rooted as it was in my home geography. I could relate my learning more easily to my context, meet people who were living in this way in the world I knew, and learn from them.

Today I know that learning is a social process and happens in a relationship (Vygotsky, 1978; Gergen, 1999) which helps explain why I found it so much easier to embrace the Sufi way, grounded as it was in my social situation. I was also greatly moved by a book that was recommended to me and found wonderful. 'Love is Divine', by Robert Frager (1987) tells the story of his choice to embrace the Sufi tradition. It spoke to me because Frager was a world away from my preconceived understanding of what a Sufi follower should be; my assumption was that typically a Sufi follower was an Islamic religious scholar. Frager was anything but this; he was Jewish by origin, a Harvard trained psychologist, an Aikido practitioner for more than 40 years who had trained with Kato Sensei, a world renowned Aikido master.

### *How my interest in Sufism grew (NEW)*

While under the influence of Frager's book, I met with Can's (a colleague at work) father who happened to be a Sufi master and teacher. After conversations with him, he sent me a letter encouraging me to learn more about Sufi thought and so my encounters with other Sufi teachers and followers began. With every exchange my learning deepened and my engagement in Sufi thought grew; I felt a magnetic pull as I learnt more about it. After a while it has become a learning

path for me that I could share with others while continuing with my own education.

The beginning of my Doctoral studies marked a period in which I was progressing as a Sufi learner, or seeker, although at the time I was keeping my Sufi practices personal and private, so it was not explicitly visible in my professional or academic practice. As I progressed, my Doctoral and Sufi inquiries started to leak into each other and I had an increasing pull towards bringing them together. But I struggled. Integrating my Sufi inquiry into the support of a doctorate in professional practice did not sit easily with my learning from a mystical practice – the differences in philosophy felt all but unbridgeable on occasions, as I was urged to integrate and compare what felt incommensurable.

The invitation to explicitly bring these inquiries together was both extrinsic, in the form of a request from my colleagues and supervisors, and intrinsic - as I could see the potential of learning through this integration. Responding to this invitation, I started to make my Sufi learning part of an action inquiry process more visibly.



## My Sufi Worldview (UPDATED)

### The components of a paradigm

A paradigm is a worldview which people use to understand the world. Guba and Lincoln (1994) hold that a paradigm comprises of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Guba identifies three questions that help define a paradigm:

1. The ontological question is what is the nature of reality (meaning existence)?
2. The epistemological question is what is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known?
3. The methodological question is how can the knower go about obtaining the desired knowledge and understanding?

### Exploring the Sufi Paradigm

According to the Sufi ontology, there is an Absolute Being; an Essence which is formless, not bound in time or space and incomparable with anything created, including the universe, and which manifests itself through creation at every moment. There is a prophetic saying attributed to the Creator that points towards an answer of the existential question 'Why do we exist?' within this ontology:

*'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the creation, both worlds, the visible and the invisible, so that I would be known.'*

So the Essence loves to be known and this stands for me as one of the epistemological foundations of Sufi thought.

Sufi ontology describes existence in three levels: Essence, Divine Names and Cosmos. Divine Essence is believed to transcend all manifestation and form and appears as beyond all description, name or qualification. It is the world of pure Essence which cannot be fully grasped by us human beings. The idea of a God's essence which is not fully knowable is a bit challenging. Yet it is not practical for an inquiry on leadership, I translate these three levels as spiritual, social and physical. The concept of Essence may also seem in contradiction with the relational perspective which refutes the existence of a truth waiting to be discovered. In fact, this contradiction would be valid if we had taken a positivist view. However when we attempt to appreciate Essence as a dynamic ever changing ontological whole, it gives us a different perspective. Sufi scholars dealt with these issues by paying attention to the relational side of the universe that is manifested by means of divine 'names' (*asma*) or 'attributes' (*sifa*), Divine names or attributes are the relationships that can be discerned between the Essence and the cosmos (Chittick, 1989). We cannot experience the Divine in its Essence but we can experience it through its names and attributes, the so-called Divine names or attributes. According to Chittick (1989), names are evidence of manifestation. Giving a name means it, Essence, has manifested out of the Divine into human consciousness. These are qualities such as generosity,

justice, kindness, benevolence, piety, patience and gratitude that define the human condition in its ontological sense (Chittick, 1989).

Sufi scholars see the universe as a manifestation of God taking place through these attributes. They are found in the absolute sense in God's Essence and in a relative sense at some level in mankind. One can participate in the fullness of being human only by actualising these qualities (Chittick, 1989). However we can strive to become complete and achieve intimacy with the Divine through certain practices that comprise Sufi methodology. These practices are led by the process of self-inquiry, which is again proposed in the prophetic saying '*Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa Rabbahu*', which translates as 'one who knows one's self has known one's Lord'.

As a person goes through this epistemological process of self-inquiry using Sufi methodology, he gradually assumes certain divine attributes such as mercy, gentleness, generosity and compassion. Sufi scholars describe this process as one of ontological ascension as they believe that we ontologically rise above the dualistic, two-dimensional view of the world. (Chittick, 1989) The assumption being that through these qualities a person participates in the divine reality as a human being and, as they ascend ontologically, so they become intimate with the Divine (Shaikh, 2012). As can be seen from the summary above, ontology, epistemology and methodology are interrelated in the Sufi path. I am now going to present different worldviews with a comparative analysis to my Sufi worldview.

# Sufism in the Context of Received Western Research Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (2005) propose five basic research paradigms: positivism, post positivism, critical theory, constructivism and the participatory. I will first critically review positivist, constructivist and participatory paradigms as prominent paradigms in the research domain today and then I will present and explore my Sufi perspective as an informing paradigm.

## The Positivist Paradigm

Positivism has been the dominant paradigm within social research for many decades. Positivism is based on a rationalistic philosophy that originated, amongst others, with Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Auguste Comte. As a philosophy it adopts the view that the social world can be researched in a similar way to the natural world, independent of the researcher's values, beliefs and interactions. Positivism builds on five assumptions summarized by Guba and Lincoln (1985) in Al Zeera (2001: 27):

1. An ontological assumption of a single, tangible, reality 'out there' that can be broken apart into pieces capable of being studied independently; the whole simply being the sum of the parts;
2. An epistemological assumption about the possibility of separation of the observer from the observed, the knower from the known;

3. An assumption of the temporal and contextual independence of observations, so that what is true at one time and place may, under appropriate circumstances (such as sampling), also be true at another time and place;
4. An assumption of linear causality, that there are no effects without causes and no causes without effects;
5. An axiological assumption of value freedom, that the methodology guarantees the results of an inquiry can be essentially free from the influence of any value system

Therefore, from an ontological point of view, the positivist view claims that the reality is out there for the researcher to discover. The researcher and the research phenomena are assumed to be independent, and detached - that is, they do not influence each other. From this perspective the research is considered to be 'objective' and the results are expected to be valid and reliable. Positivist research uses similar methods to those of the natural sciences, assuming that human beings are like natural objects. The results of positivist research are time and context free and can be generalized (Al Zeera, 2001). The positivist worldview has proven to be limited in investigating social reality and these limitations led to development of the interpretive/constructivist paradigm.

## The Constructivist Paradigm

Significant amounts of prominent qualitative research today leans

towards a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm is based on a basic assumption, that reality is socially constructed through language and shared meanings. This paradigm has its roots in the philosopher Edmund Husserl's (1970) phenomenology and works such as Berger and Luckmann's (1966) 'The Social Construction of Reality' and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) 'Naturalistic Inquiry'.

The basic assumptions underlying the interpretive paradigm, identified by Guba and Lincoln (2005) and summarised in Al Zeera (2001: 35) are as follows:

1. An ontological assumption of a subjective reality; realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions;
2. An epistemological assumption about the knower and the known as interactive and inseparable;
3. An assumption of temporal and context dependence; only time and context bound working propositions and statements are possible;
4. An assumption of causality and that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects;
5. An axiological assumption that methodology is necessarily value bound, interactive, subjective and based on participants' views.

The ontological basis of constructivism is that multiple realities exist,

which are interpreted by individuals, in time and place, some of which may be in conflict with each other. Constructivism does not accept that there is an objective reality that can be known and proposes that the researcher should understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge. Epistemologically, the constructivist view takes a subjective position. The knower and the known are co-created during the inquiry. The researcher aims for a more interactive mode of data collection. Constructivist epistemology brings unique qualities like wholeness, empathy, and subjectivity that set it apart from positivist thinking.

Constructivism attempts to understand phenomena, or a situation, as a whole as it assumes that the whole is to be understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. It also proposes that the understanding of a person's social environment or an organization's political context is essential for the overall understanding of what is observed (Al Zeera, 2001).

## The Participatory Paradigm

Heron and Reason' (1997) participatory worldview is the most recent contribution to Guba and Lincoln's (2005) compilation of research paradigms. Participatory paradigm has emerged from a dissatisfaction with the positivist Western worldview due to concerns of human alienation and ecological risks. As opposed to the Positivist paradigm, Participatory Worldview see the as a universe active, animated, and co-creative whole with an interactive, cooperative approach with methodologies of participation and action research. While constructivist world offers an alternative perspective, it is yet incomplete and unsatisfactory to reimagine our place in the planet in a sustainable way.

The basic assumptions underlying the participatory paradigm, identified by Heron and Reason (1997) and summarised by Guba and Lincoln (2005) are as follows:

1. An ontological assumption of subjective-objective reality co-created by mind and given cosmos;
2. An epistemological assumption about the knower and the known as participative which involves an extended epistemology where a knower participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical;
3. An assumption of that our knowing is from a perspective with



self-reflexive attention to this subjective ground which is critical subjectivity;

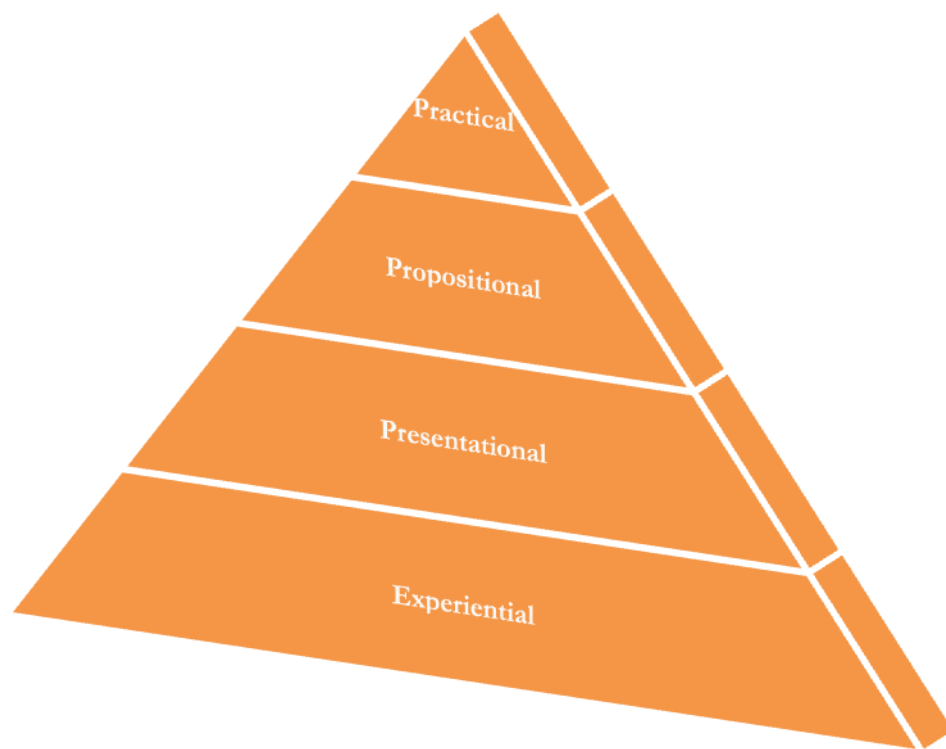
4. A collaborative methodology where researchers and subjects are all participants engaged in the multiple forms of knowing leading to critical subjectivity aiming the articulation of an objective-subjective reality;

5. An axiological assumption that inquiry is practical and in the service of human flourishing is for human flourishing;

While the positivist paradigm is dualistic and sees a world of things independent of the human experience, and the constructivist worldview proposes everything is the construction of the human mind; a participative worldview builds on a stance where cosmos involves a primordial reality, and that human presence actively participates with it and builds on four different kinds of ways of knowing: Experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing.

Experiential knowing takes place through lived experience, direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place, or a thing (Heron, 1996). It is empathic and direct, deeply felt. Heron sees experiential knowing as the grounding for the other three. Presentational knowing grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement and dance. Heron (1996) identifies this as imaginal knowing and makes a distinction

between the imaginative aspects of the psyche and the imaginal that is, the extrasensory mode. Propositional knowing which draws on concepts and ideas, and practical knowing, which consummates the other forms of knowing in action in the world (Heron and Reason, 2001). I tried to visualize ways of knowing according to their foundational relationship to each other as indicated by Heron (1996) in the chart below.



**Figure 6:** *Many ways of knowing (Heron, 1996)*

## A critical review of Sufi, Positivist, Constructivist and Participatory paradigms

The positivist paradigm may initially sound compatible with my Sufi worldview with its belief that there is a reality out there to be known, given that the Sufi tradition works with the faith that there is an Essence that is the Absolute Reality. However as a Sufi seeker, I believe that all creation is the manifestation of Divine. Furthermore, we cannot know its essence, as only Divine could know himself; however we can have a deeper understanding of the manifestation of the divine with our personal subjective experience. The positivist worldview is dualist where Sufi tradition believes in unity. We, human beings, potentially represent all attributes of the Divine and act like inseparable parts (*abud*) of the Divine (*mabud*). In my experience, I have learnt to appreciate this manifestation of the indivisible unity by practicing self-reflexivity and dream work examples of which has been included in this inquiry.

For Sufis the universe and all creation are seen as a *macrocosm* and mankind is seen as a *microcosm*. Therefore staying detached or uninvolved, as proposed by the positivist view, cannot be the basis of Sufi thinking. For Sufis, mankind participates into the Divine with certain practices and achieves intimacy and closeness with the Divine. Through our participation, Sufis also believe that people have some personal power of will to influence their acts, but do not have full control of the universe. This also conflicts with the intention of

positivist thinking, which is to control or manipulate the external environment for objective results which is very common in the performance driven corporate world. All of these points implies that the positivist worldview does not match with my Sufi worldview.

The constructivist paradigm brings the knower and known together which is compatible with the Sufi perspective. However it ontologically excludes the presence of an absolute being. This is where it becomes difficult for me to subscribe to the paradigm. Constructivism focuses on the mind as the location for knowing, whereas as a Sufi scholar I see potential limitations and difficulties in the form of solipsism (the mind looks at itself and only knows the mind). The Sufi tradition alternatively proposes knowing with the heart which may be seen as similar to the experiential knowing put forward in Heron and Reason's (1997) extended epistemology. Sufi tradition privileges this form of knowing as superior to reasoning. In this regard, the constructivist paradigm and Sufi worldview carry different ontological and epistemological perspectives. Amongst all the inquiry paradigms reviewed here, the participative worldview as proposed by Heron and Reason (1997) as well as Guba and Lincoln (2005), remain the most compatible with the Sufi worldview.

The participatory paradigm is based on a subjective-objective ontology; an extended epistemology of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing; a methodology based on co-operative relations between co-researchers; and an axiology which

affirms the primary value of practical knowing in the service of human flourishing.

In this participative worldview a subjective/objective ontology is proposed where there is a given cosmos (a primordial reality) in which the mind actively participates. Mind and the given cosmos are engaged in a co-creative dance, so what emerges as reality is the fruit of an interaction of the given cosmos and the way mind engages with it. Mind actively participates in the cosmos, and it is through this active participation that we meet what is the 'Other' (Heron and Reason, 1997: 6).

If we consider the mind as a cognitive quality then it is different to the Sufi view, which promotes the unity of mind and heart. However, I know that the 'participative mind' is different from the positivistic and constructivist mind as it is beyond language and conceptual thinking (Heron, 1992). It is still slightly confusing for me, as 'mind' somehow connotes reason and logic and the Sufi path of knowledge involves knowing with faculties beyond reason and the five senses (Chittick, 1989).

## Different ways of knowing and Sufism

Sufi scholars rely on multiple forms of knowing, beyond the limitations of reason and intellect, which I call inspirational or intuitive knowing. Leading Sufi thinkers such as Ibn Arabi and Rumi believe that reason based solely on intellect is one-winged and is unable to travel beyond its own truths for a number of reasons:

Firstly, seeing reason as purely an act of cognitive rationalisation, it is insufficient for Sufi knowledge as well as for Heron's (1996) extended epistemology. Secondly, it is unreliable because reason acts as a veil, which constricts and binds reality within its own schemas and often preoccupies the thinker. Thirdly, reason is unreliable, because it acts as an ideology for some and rational faculties become the ultimate bearer of truth and the epistemological gold standard. Fourthly, cognitive thinking generally implies the separate ontological identity of the thinker and thereby implicitly denies Unity of Being. Fifthly, human reason can only accept what is consistent with its own canons, and its canons deny the existence of what is self-contradictory or logically impossible (Coates, 2002: 44-45).

Inspirational knowing in the Sufi tradition can be associated with the experiential and imaginal knowing of Heron and Reason's (1997) multiple ways of knowing. Like participatory worldview, Sufi tradition favours experiential knowing and proposes that each seeker has his/her own path of development which may be through actual

encounter and imaginal experiences. I know that Western literature offers intuition as an alternative way of knowing (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000). On the other hand, Sufi practice offers a well-established methodology of intuition which may take place in various forms such as *ilham* (insight), *ru'ya* (dreams), *kashf* (unveiling), *mushahada* (witnessing) and *mukhataba* (divine conversation).

According to my experience, *ilham* (insight) happens as a sudden, unmediated thought or image, which appears in an unexpected moment. *Salah*, daily bodily practice is a regular place of insight for me. I practice *salah* especially at times when I need fresh ideas or solutions. *Ru'ya* (dreams) is an important element of Sufi knowing. In my experience, dreams act as a regular guide to my Sufi learning journey. *Kashf* (unveiling) happens as a form of insight where suddenly something unseen becomes visible, where the incomprehensible becomes conceivable. I have experienced *kashf* (unveiling) during my several visits and retreats to Kaaba which is place of deep focus for me. *Mushahada* (witnessing) is about knowing from a higher ontological level, without being restricted to the constructs of the phenomenal world. This is a way of knowing that I have only a limited experience of and would like to learn more. *Mukhataba* (divine conversation) means knowing through a conversation with an inner voice beyond oneself. I have been using *mukhataba* (inner conversation) during the last 10 years more consciously. I cannot connect with it very often, but when I do it

provides a powerful reference point for my decisions and choices.

Similarly Sufi tradition involves a strong aesthetic element of dance, poetry, storytelling and music which serves as examples of presentational knowing, propositional knowing happens through reading scriptures, Quran and other seekers' treatises and finally practical knowing is critical involving being in the world with real action and practical applications of the learning.

All of these forms of knowing have a subjective nature and they are strongly embedded in the local cultures and languages which may make it challenging to fully convey their essence when moving across geographies and languages. In order to make better sense of the Sufi epistemology, I will conclude the section with a Sufi story.

### A Sufi story

I chose this story for three reasons: firstly storytelling is a strong element of the Sufi epistemological tradition and this story is an example of presentational knowing as a story. Secondly, it is a story that touches on different ways of knowing such as experiential, practical and propositional. Finally it highlights the need to integrate thinking with practical action like action research:

*A scholar asked a boatman to row him across the river. The journey was long and slow. The scholar was bored. "Boatman," he called out, "Let's have a conversation." Suggesting a topic of special interest to himself, he asked, "Have you ever studied phonetics or grammar?"*

*"No," said the boatman, "I've no use for those tools."*



*"Too bad," said the scholar, "You've wasted half your life. It's useful to know the rules."*

*Later, as the rickety boat crashed into a rock in the middle of the river, the boatman turned to the scholar and said, "Pardon my humble mind that to you must seem dim, but, wise man, tell me, have you ever learned to swim?"*

*"No," said the scholar, "I've never learned. I've immersed myself in thinking."*

*"In that case," said the boatman, "you've wasted all your life. Alas, the boat is sinking."*

## The distinctive qualities and character of Sufi worldview

In summary, the Participatory paradigm has complimentary qualities to my Sufi worldview, while Positivist and Constructionist worldviews remain limited to the physical and social world - and offer two-dimensional thinking when it comes to dealing with the cosmos or creation, our interactions within the physical world and our social environment. As a Sufi I believe in the presence of an Absolute which is formless, not bound within time or space and incomparable with anything created, including the universe. I therefore privilege a three-dimensional worldview where I see humans as physical, social and spiritual beings that can increasingly experience this Absolute by means of ascending ontologically. Rumi says this beautifully:

*You were born with wings. Why prefer to crawl through life?*

In this verse, I see the symbolism of wings as the means of our ontological ascent.

The Sufi worldview unites the paradoxical concepts of one and many, existent and non-existent, inner and outer, form and meaning, seen and unseen, mind and heart, material and spiritual, a discipline of

uniting which can also be found in well-established traditions of spirituality in different cultures. My focus will be on Sufism as it is part of my learning journey and I will be referring to the paradoxical nature of Sufi worldview more in further sections.

I want to share one of Rumi's verses at this point as a reflection of the Sufi path towards unity. Rumi invites people to meet in a different ontological place where duality ends by saying:

*Out beyond ideas of right and wrong doing, there is a field. I will meet you there.*

In summary, I want to put forward the need for a paradigm that matches the Sufi worldview. This worldview has:

- An ontological assumption of an absolute reality that transcends the physical world which is subjectively experienced by each seeker;
- An assumption of a formless and timeless Absolute Being which represents unity, and is temporally and contextually dependent in the physical world which represents multiplicity
- An epistemological assumption that the knower (*abud*) is an inseparable part of the known (*mabud*) and that the act of knowing is the fundamental ontological datum.
- An assumption that the physical world is the manifestation of the divine through certain attributes and that mankind can fully participate in the divine by assuming these qualities

- An axiological assumption that methodology is practical, subjective and based on a participants' path – within the social realm of reality.

In this section, I have attempted to make a contribution by exploring different worldview and bringing in my Sufi worldview as my living paradigm. I summarised the perspectives of different paradigms with their assumptions in a chart below in order to have a better understanding of similarities and differences. In the next section, I will critically examine how this worldview may inform my inquiry.

Figure 7: Different Research Paradigms. (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Zeera, 2001; Heron & Reason, 1997)

Positivist Paradigm	Constructivist Paradigm	Participatory Paradigm	Sufi Paradigm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•An ontological assumption of a single, tangible, reality 'out there' that can be broken apart into pieces capable of being studied independently; the whole simply being the sum of the parts;</li> <li>•An epistemological assumption about the possibility of separation of the observer from the observed, the knower from the known.</li> <li>•An assumption of the temporal and contextual independence of observations, so that what is true at one time and place may, under appropriate circumstances (such as sampling), also be true at another time and place with linear causality.</li> <li>•An axiological assumption of value freedom, that the methodology guarantees the results of an inquiry can be essentially free from the influence of any value system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•An ontological assumption of a subjective reality; realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions.</li> <li>•An epistemological assumption about the knower and the known as interactive and inseparable. An assumption of temporal and context dependence; only time and context bound working propositions and statements are possible.</li> <li>•An assumption of causality and that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.</li> <li>•An axiological assumption that methodology is necessarily value bound, interactive, subjective and based on participants' views.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•An ontological assumption of subjective-objective reality co-created by mind and given cosmos.</li> <li>•An epistemological assumption about the knower and the known as participative which involves an extended epistemology where a knower participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways and knowing is from a perspective requiring critical subjectivity.</li> <li>•A collaborative methodology where researchers and subjects are all participants engaged in the multiple forms of knowing leading to critical subjectivity aiming the articulation of an objective-subjective reality.</li> <li>•An axiological assumption that inquiry is practical and in the service of human flourishing is for human flourishing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•An assumption of a formless and timeless Absolute Being which represents unity, which is subjectively experienced by each seeker.</li> <li>•An epistemological assumption that the knower (abud) is an inseparable part of the known (mabud) and that the act of knowing is the fundamental ontological datum.</li> <li>•An assumption that the physical world is the manifestation of the divine through certain attributes and that mankind can fully participate in the divine by assuming these qualities</li> <li>•An axiological assumption that methodology is practical, subjective and based on a participants' path.</li> </ul>



## Exploring each of the Sufi qualities and their implications for my inquiry (NEW)

In this section I will explore how each of the assumptions given above may inform my inquiry.

### Implications for an inquiry into leading with an ontological assumption of a formless/timeless 'Absolute Being' (NEW)

Inquiring into leading with the ontological perspective of a timeless/Absolute Being that is primordial and transcendent seems like an impossible task. How can we take into account a reality that is not fully accessible in this world? Reason (1993) suggests that we need to engage in a sacred inquiry into a Divine presence that is both immanent and transcendent, nurturing the growth of love, beauty, wisdom and compassionate action. As we engage in such an inquiry, we can discover emotional, practical, aesthetic and spiritual rigour in addition to the Western tradition of intellectual rigour (Reason, 1993).

What I like most from Reason's (1993) proposition of sacred inquiry is its purpose, which is not to seek the ultimate truth but rather heal our alienation from the sacred whole. As this presence is both immanent and transcendent at the same time, there is always an element of mystery. In this regard, an inquiry that is reconnecting our intimacy with the Divine presence requires being open to the unknown with a sense of personal humility (the unknown is not here to be personally mastered).

Sufi tradition assumes that Divine presence loves to be known and its mercy exceeds its wrath (Chittick, 1989) in other words love exceeds power referring Kahane (2010). Therefore such an inquiry promises us a way towards appreciating our intimacy with beauty and wisdom which has indeed been my experience in the process.

### Implications for an inquiry into leading with an assumption that the knower is an inseparable part of the known (NEW)

I know that all knowing is subjective and having a critical stance helps me notice my particular frames of reference and potential biases (Heron and Reason, 2001; Ladkin, 2005). From a Sufi perspective, this is an act of *mushahada* (witnessing), which is engaging into our experience in a non-judgmental way.

Sufi tradition proposes that one can witness Divine Presence once the veil of self is lifted (Emre, 1989). My understanding of 'self' consists of unconscious biases and perspective and therefore critical subjectivity helps me experience the qualities of Divine Presence. Sufi followers regularly quote that the heart is the house of the Divine Presence (Chittick, 1983). Therefore, lifting the veil of 'false self' helps me witness the qualities of Divine Presence and discover the meaning of another sacred saying, *that one who knows himself, knows his Lord*.

I am constantly reminded of Ibn Arabi's treatise on the false notion of self:

*'None can see Him, whether with the eyes of the head or with the inner eye;*

*nor can any conceive Him with senses, knowledge, mind, intelligence or imagination. Only He can see Himself; only He can conceive Himself. None can know Him; only He can know Himself. He sees Himself by Himself; He conceives Himself by Himself; He knows Himself by Himself. None other than He can see Him. None other than He can know Him. That which hides Him is His oneness. None but Himself can hide Him. The veil that hides Him is His own being. He is not within you; nor are you in Him. He does not exclude you, nor are you excluded from Him. When you are addressed as you, do not think that you exist, with an essence and qualities and attributes; for you never existed, nor do exist, nor ever will exist. ...If you know yourself as nothing, then you truly know your Lord. Otherwise, you truly know Him not. (Bayrak, 1997: 2)*

According to Ibn Arabi's treatise above, the Knower and the Known are 'One' and only He (Allah) can know himself. As human beings, we can know our Lord if we know ourselves as nothing. What I understand from knowing the self as nothing is we denounce ownership of any of the qualities that we attribute to self, and appreciate them as qualities of Divine presence. However Ibn Arabi highlights a nuance where:

*'You cannot know your Lord by making yourself nothing. Many a wise man claims that in order to know one's Lord one must denude oneself of the signs of one's existence, efface one's identity and finally rid oneself of one's self. This is a mistake. How could a thing that does not exist try to get rid of its existence? Then you will also know that you are the one whom He wished and that you are forever and will not disappear with time, for there is no passing of time. Your attributes are His. Without doubt, your appearance is His appearance. Therefore, do not think anymore that you need to become nothing that you need to annihilate yourself in Him'. (Bayrak, 1997:2)*

The sense I make of this is that it is futile to try to annihilate oneself; instead a better route is to appreciate our sacredness and realise we are nothing but the Divine. So there is no me, you, him, her or it. Everything is a part of the Divine and so everything happens between



Him and Him. The creation of humankind is a sacred wish, a plane of knowing for the Divine that loves to be known.

*'If you thought so, then you would be His veil, while a veil over Allah is other than "He". How could you be a veil that hides Him? What hides Him is His being the One Alone. ...And when you come to know yourself, you will be sure that you neither exist nor do not exist, whether now, or before, or in the future' (Bayrak, 1997: 3).*

Ibn Arabi criticises the metaphor of the veil stating that He is The One Alone that is hiding Himself behind a veil. So inquiring with the Sufi perspective that Knower and the Known is 'One', is a sacred practice as it is about unveiling the Divine. It is equally mysterious as I start from a place where I neither exist nor do not exist. I can say that inquiring between the poles of existence and non-existence requires strong discipline, rigour and humility so that we can appreciate that He is The One Alone. In practical terms then, I should inquire into the fact of Leadership as a Spiritual Practice and see if it is also a reflection of the qualities of the Divine.

## Implications for an inquiry into leading with an assumption that the physical world is a manifestation of the divine (NEW)

In the same treatise, Ibn Arabi writes:

*'Without being and without not-being, your existence and your non-existence is Allah's being. The void is a mirror; creation is the image in it. Man is as the eye of the image reflected in the mirror; the One who is reflected in the image is hidden in the pupil of that eye.'* (Bayrak, 1997: 2)

What I understand from the above is that all being is Divine and what we see as the physical world is an image of the Divine. Inquiring into, as well as working with, such an assumption requires a great sense of respect and care as all I see and interact is Divine. The beauty that surrounds me in the nature, the love that I experience from a relationship, the high energy that I experience in a workshop; I would consider all being Divine. Ibn Arabi promises deeper learning and awareness about such a mystery if we see what is around us as not-other-than-us, and all and everything as the existence of the One; when we do not see anything else with Him or in Him; but see Him in everything as the Self and at the same time as the non-existence of the self (Bayrak, 1997). So every inquiry, every relationship is sacred and as I continue with my work so each encounter and activity helps me appreciate the sacred whole that I am participating into.

## Implications for an inquiry into leading with a methodological assumption that methodology is subjective and based on a participants' path (NEW)

Sufi scholars work from the perspective that we cannot offer one single path for all seekers. They restate the Quranic message that there are as many paths as the whole of mankind (Chittick, 1989). The uniqueness of my path comes from my social setting, history, personal habits and various other factors - consequently my learning methodology is also subjective. As I inquire with this assumption, I need to pay attention to my methodological choices, what I choose and what I leave out. My critical subjectivity towards my methodological choices will help me become aware of my path and allow me to progress with clarity and intention.

## Action Research Overview

I have chosen to work with Action Research as a Participatory approach as it compliments my Sufi worldview for reasons explained in the previous section. I felt privileged that Action Research was available to me as an inquiry approach as a part of my Doctorate process, as it has made all of my learning in this inquiry possible.

### History of Action Research

Action Research has a long history, going back to social scientists' attempts to help solve practical problems in wartime situations in both Europe and America. Many researchers identify Kurt Lewin as the father of action research, and it is Lewin who is credited with the phrase: "Nothing is as practical as a good theory" (1951, p.169). I know from Reason (2004) that action Research practice draws on a wide field of influence, including critical thinking (Kemmis, 2001), liberationist thought (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1970), feminism (Maguire, 2001), social construction (Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993), and systemic thinking (Pasmore, 2001).

More recent developments and applications of Action Research can be seen in Participative Action Research (Freire, 1970; Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991) action science (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith, 1985) living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) organisational and social change research (Toulmin and Gustavsen 1996; Greenwood and Levin 1998), co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001),

action inquiry (Marshall, 2001; Torbert, 2001), appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987) participative inquiry (Reason and Bradbury 2001), and insider Action Research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2004).

My inquiry was originally informed by Reason and Bradbury's (2001) presentation of Action Research informed from the participatory worldview. I am particularly inspired by how authors position Action Research within a broader purpose of contributing to people and communities in terms of economic, political, psychological and spiritual wellbeing, aiming for a sustainable relationship with this planet which nicely fits with my Sufi path of development, as well as giving greater meaning to my professional practice.

I am attracted by the emancipatory nature of participatory Action Research, which leads not only to new practical knowledge but also to new abilities to create knowledge. However, I am also aware of a contradiction at this point - I belong to the power elite of my organisation, this position comes from my being one of its founders and being a formal leader of the firm. This creates a potentially contradictory position for me when seen in terms of one of the aims of Participatory Action Research, which is to challenge existing power structures within an organisation and release the potential of the oppressed.

At this point, I will focus the attraction of participative inquiry to me

on its privileging of the flourishing of the individual person and their community in the pursuit of practical solutions, in participation with others.

## Positioning my inquiry within Insider Action Research

My inquiry aims to have qualities of Personal Inquiry Research as proposed by Coghlan and Brannick (2004) where a member of an organisation inquires into his own practice within his organisation.

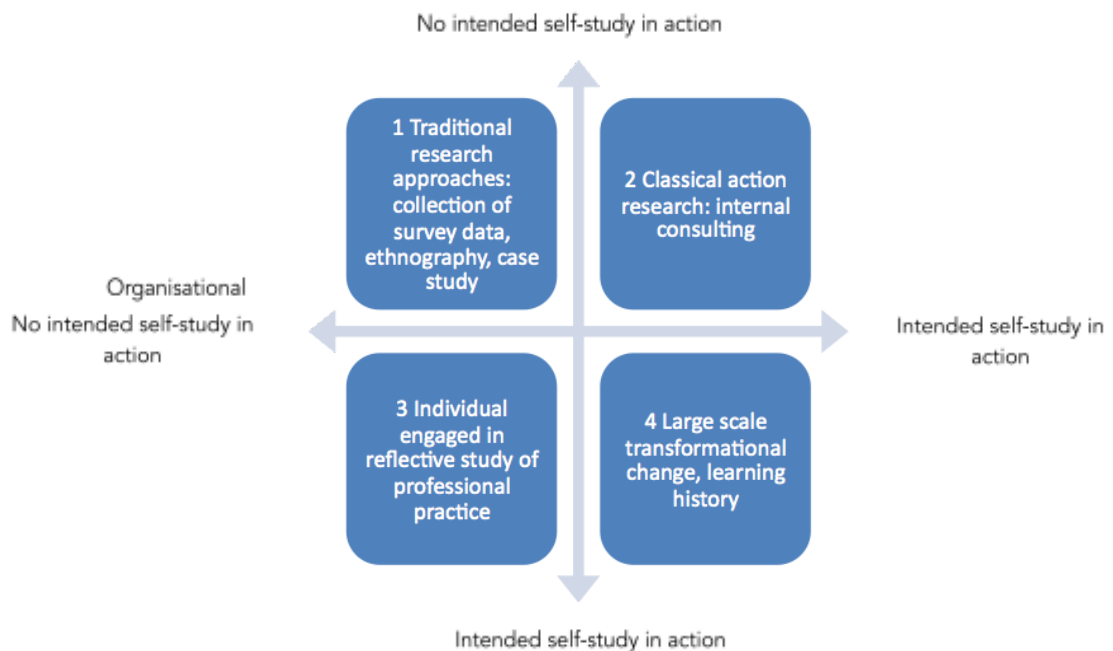


Figure 8: Insider action research (Coghlan, 2004)

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) categorises insider research into four categories presented in the figure above. In my case, my inquiry falls into category 3 being a reflective study of my leadership practice. Due to my role and influence, my inquiry had an organisational impact

thanks to some of the inquiry practices. However, due to limits of this paper, I will stay focused on inquiring into my leadership practice.

## Exploring the Challenges of Insider Action Research (NEW)

Coghlan (2007) highlights three major challenges for insider Action Researchers which are: preunderstanding, role duality and organisational politics.

Pre-understanding is an important issue for me as an insider researcher which means that I already know about the organisation. While this may make it easier for the researcher in terms of engaging with a known world, the researcher is an active part of the organisation and so shares many of the underlying assumptions tacitly and explicitly practised within the organisation. This makes it more difficult for him to reflect on the choices he makes and impact of his action, as an insider he may take certain matters for granted or may not notice certain things that would be very striking to an outsider. Inquiring into one's own organisation therefore requires extra attention and reflection. I believe that supporting inquiry processes such as Action Learning sets and engaging and sustaining with critical friends is very helpful in providing an external view, or at least providing an anchor into the world outside of the organisations taken for granted assumptions.

A prominent challenge for an insider researcher is Role Duality as he is both a member of the organisation and also a researcher at the same

time. Being an executive and a researcher can sometimes be in conflict, existing relational dynamics can greatly shape the research process and the data that is created in the public domain. In a social setting like Turkey, where authority is seen as distant and highly respected, and the researcher is a senior executive it is always difficult to assess the validity of the data.

Finally, Organisational Politics is a significant issue in insider Action Research (Coghlan, 2007). According to Coghlan (2007), researching into one's own organisation involves dealing with internal power structures and political skills are critical in the process. Buchanan and Badham (1999) suggest the activities of performing and back-staging to manage organisational politics. Performing involves leading the change (or research) process, building participation for change (research), while backstage activity involves building support (for research), dealing with visible and invisible resistance (to research) and intervening within the organisation when necessary. In this sense, insider Action Research may be considered to be subversive because it stresses listening, emphasizes questioning, incites action, encourages reflection and endorses democratic participation (Coghlan, 2007). I have used such practices in my inquiry in forms of group work, one to one conversations and where I have experienced they could challenge organisational patterns (or even my established management style). In my experience, insider Action Research is a fine art of balancing internal power dynamics and research needs. As



an example, I have seen how noticing this balance led me to reappraise the quality of the feedback given to me, considering power issues associated with my role. I noticed myself trying to be participative in a patriarchal fashion.

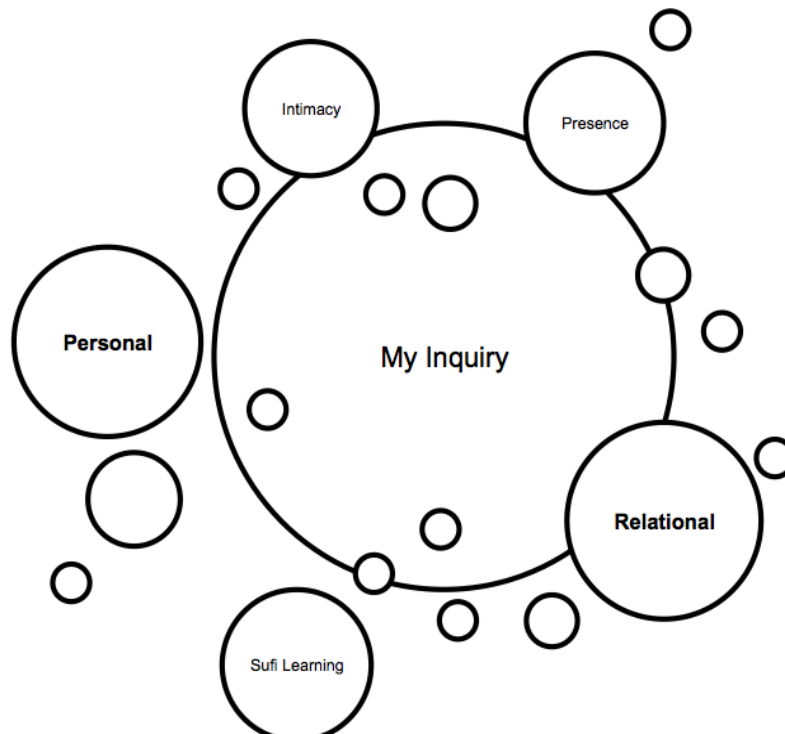
In the next section, I will share my inquiry process where I will also discuss how I experienced these challenges in my context.

## My Inquiry Focus (NEW)

### What did I inquire into?

In the beginning, during the first year (2006) of my Doctorate, my inquiry theme was into connectedness and my initial inquiry question was as follows: How do I experience connectedness at personal, interpersonal and organisational levels and how can I translate this experience into my consulting practice?

After the first two years (2007 onwards), my inquiry then led me to an emerging theme of intimacy and I started to inquire into intimacy in my work relationships. My inquiry into intimacy developed new themes focused around *presence* and *being real* which informed my second cycle of inquiry where I explored new ways of relating. I will explore the details of these labels in the inquiry cycle sections of this thesis.



*Figure 9: Inquiry Areas of Focus*

### A critical reflection on my inquiry focus (NEW)

In the first three years of my inquiry, my focus was divergent and not very clear. At the same time, I couldn't be sure if my practice as the leader of a consulting firm would really fit as a practice within a consulting doctorate as I had assumed that I needed to inquire into client relationships. Once I learnt that leadership would fit as a practice, I have become clearer about my direction. My inquiry theme was initially on connectedness, an abstract theme. As I have become clearer and more specific, my focus has shifted to my experience of the relational qualities I experience as a leader.

Another challenge to my inquiry focus was my interest in the Sufi

learning path. I was aware that integrating my practice with my Sufi learning was potentially interesting and important to me – and possibly to the wider world of leadership practice. However I found I could not make my Sufi practice very visible in the earlier versions of the thesis (2008), as I had concerns about using an Eastern mystical tradition within an inquiry situated in western thinking. I still experience this as a challenge at times but I am excited by it as I now appreciate that I have the opportunity to bring a unique contribution to the academic domain.

Another critical issue for my inquiry focus has been the difficulty of doing insider research as a leader, engaging with power dynamics which have a significant influence on the validity of the inquiry (by which I mean the qualities of the second person voices in my work). The presence of such dynamics required me to provide extra attention and care to the power dynamics in the process. Throughout, I have found it very hard to ensure the validity of an Action Research process as a leader working in Turkey, with a cultural habit of deference to power – which means I can never be sure whether the feedback and interview data can be taken at face value, as people are (very probably) saying what they feel they should say to a person in a position of senior responsibility.

## How I see my inquiry focus now (NEW)

Even though I have known that Action Research is different from conventional research due to its participative and emergent nature, I have struggled for a long time as I tried to hold on to my research question of 'How can I learn about leadership as a practice of embracing paradoxical qualities?'

Conventional research works well when one has a very precise research question, which is looking for an objective answer. In such a case all that needs to be done is to design a research process to answer that question, providing precision and objectivity. Action Research is not so tidy and predictable. It's messy, iterative and alive, like my Sufi practice – something that happens in the moment and where learning isn't known or planned ahead of time.

Initially I had intended to inquire into connectedness on three levels: personal, interpersonal and organisational. I was interested in connectedness at the personal level, which I used to call self-connectedness. I was particularly interested in the idea of 'being connected' with myself.

As I progressed, my inquiry focus has become more practical and linked to my practice, starting with the themes of intimacy, presence and being real before moving on to experimenting with new ways of relating as a leader.

## My Inquiry Methodology (UPDATED)

### Cycles of inquiry and inquiry process (NEW)

Action Research is different from conventional research through its cyclic quality, where knowledge arises through cycles of reflective action carried out by people and communities within the specifics of the context they operate in (Reason, 1994). Therefore cycles of action and reflection form the basis of an Action Research process.

An Action Research cycle may involve several stages. Kemmis (1982) suggests a four stage approach for each cycle where an Action Researcher develops a plan of action to improve what is already happening, then he takes action to implement the plan, following the action he observes the outcome of action within his specific context and finally he reflects on his observation and outcomes as a basis for planning of a subsequent action. My actual experience involved a series of structured phases as suggested by Kemmis (1982), however the flow between the phases happened in an emergent and unpredictable manner. For example, as I was inquiring into intimacy, I found myself in a process where I was experimenting with new ways of relating which happened to be the next phase of the inquiry.

My cycles of inquiry had two major areas of focus, the personal and

the relational. I have chosen the above diagram to illustrate the three dimensional nature of the inquiry, where cycles start and develop and then connect to a new cycle which also develops. In my experience the development of a cycle may finish but the inquiry remains unfinished.

My initial focus had been more about my awareness as an individual. In this initial cycle, I have predominantly used first person inquiry as a practice and have received second person voices to deepen my learning. I have predominantly used narrative inquiry as a research methodology with autobiographical entries, professional narratives, journal entries, records of conversations, workshops and meetings as particular research activities. I have adapted autobiographical entries from my personal history to help me make sense of some of my behaviours, habits, biases and assumptions. Such entries have been very useful to create personal awareness in my first cycle. I have also included narrative accounts in each cycle related to my practice to make better sense of my experience. They helped me to make connections between events, identify emerging themes and finally present my inquiry from my specific context. My journal entries were particularly useful to track my progress, make sense of my experience and make meaning from it. I have included samples of my journals in the below figure.

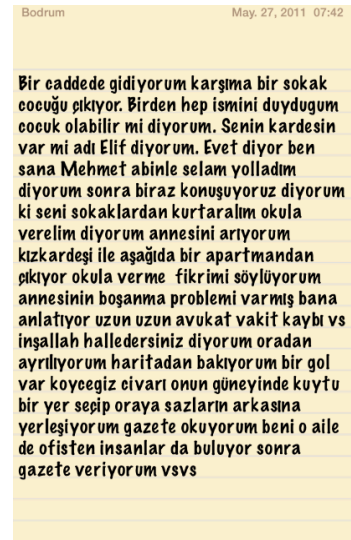
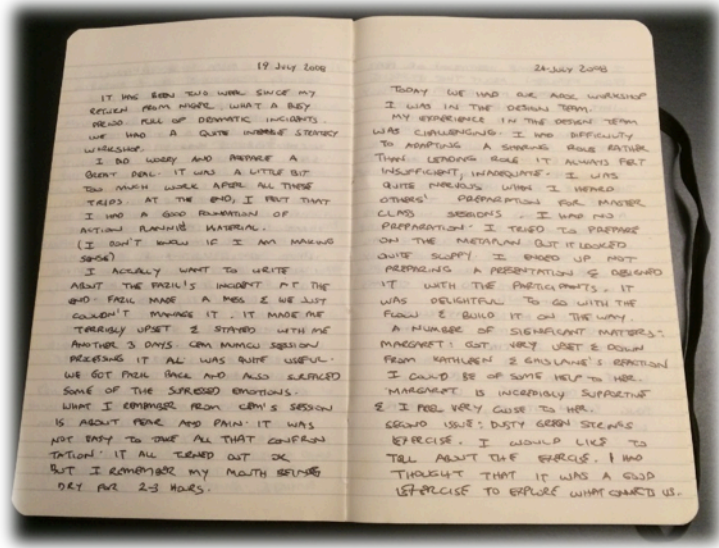


Figure 10: Journal notebook and e-journal (iPhone) for dreams

The cycle was initiated by some feedback from my doctoral Action Learning group. I received this feedback, reflected on it in a first person inquiry form then took it to my colleagues to hear their feedback. I reflected on what I heard during each conversation and the sense I made of the conversation had an influence on the next one. Some of the comments made me aware about my absence as a leader and I initiated another cycle on being present, inquiring through conversations with specific individuals as well as a first person account of a team meeting in 2007. This cycle helped me to become more aware of my presence and learn about intimacy, which I see now as a relational quality in a leadership position and also a useful learning for my Sufi inquiry.

Reflecting on the feedback and my learning in these cycles on intimacy and being present, I have developed my second focus



around discovering new ways of relating.

My subsequent cycles have been about exploring new ways of relating which involved group dynamics and emotional literacy, particularly about my skills of relating to others as formal leader of my organisation. In these cycles, I have used first person inquiry tested against the feedback of my colleagues. The predominant and distinguishing quality of the second phase has been involving my colleagues as a group.

This started with a cycle focused on introducing Gestalt thinking to the team I was working with. Based on their feedback and my reflection on this cycle, I took a bigger step and initiated a long-term group process. This group process has been a cornerstone in this cycle and served as a collaborative inquiry process.

Reason and Heron (2001, p. 1) propose collaborative inquiry as a way of working with others who have similar concerns and interests in order to:

- Understand their world, make sense of life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things.
- Learn how to act to change things they may want to change and find out how to do things better

The collaborative inquiry group had an objective of developing new capabilities as a group and changing the way we related to each

other. It has been a significant learning experience for me due to the relational quality of the process. My experience in the group has offered an abundance of inquiry data, along with conversations I had with the others outside of the group. These conversations helped me validate knowledge claims with second person voices. I intend to give more details about the collaborative inquiry process such as power dynamics and issues of participation as a part of the second cycle.

At the end of each cycle, I have pursued second loop learning by means of critical reflection (Schon, 1983). As I did the critical reflection, I also had a parallel learning process related to my Sufi practice that I used for further sense making of my inquiry. In this sense making process, I not only developed new perspectives for my inquiry but I also deepened my understanding of Sufi practice.

My learning from each cycle led me to take action either by means of a new conversation or leadership act. I then made sense of my actions by means of writing and reflection. I have benefited significantly from my conversations with John Higgins, my editor and critical friend with whom I have had regular conversations over Skype and face-to-face meetings, depending on our schedules. Our conversations have been valuable for me in making sense of my inquiry as he would ask questions as someone outside of my firm, who would make me become aware of my biases and notice different qualities of the inquiry.

With the help of my critical friends' questioning, I have been able to explore different perspectives and possibilities. After each conversation, he would send me a written response that would help me to see what resonated with him. The written responses would also enable me to reflect and learn better from my inquiry process. Our conversations worked as a form of dialogic inquiry and helped me learn in dialogue with him, where I could make new meaning by reading his record of our conversations and his reflections. I have included samples from our conversations in Appendix 2 at the end of this paper.

The inquiry cycles did not have boundaries, beginnings, or endings. In other words, I could always go back, review or challenge the information and interpretation from earlier cycles as I was working in the later cycles. That brought an iterative quality to my inquiry. The iterative nature of my inquiry created an on-going dance between my inquiry process, data, emerging themes and even the literature that I read. My cycles, learning, interpretations and knowing are all intertwined informing each other along the way. Within this process, I have gradually refined my inquiry topic and questions, sometimes feeling inadequate and helpless as I have dealt with the on-going ambiguity and uncertainty. I have also done revisions in this document that allowed me to revisit and recycle each cycle. My conversations with John created a good space for me to voice my experience and make sense of my learning from the experience.

As I progressed, I refined my inquiry question and methods, working with emergent themes and topics. My intentionality has made a difference, providing a focus to the work. My inquiry has become on-going process of action and reflection. This process has enabled both responsiveness and rigour at the same time. I learnt gradually from experience that I could only respond to the situation if I held my question lightly. As I progressed, the inquiry process eloquently created its own story and the question has arisen from the story.

In summary, it has been an inquiry with first person inquiry, second person inquiry and third person practices with first person and second person voices as proposed by Torbert (2000).

In the chart below, I have summarised my research practices and data gathering methods, grouped under my different cycles:

Cycle 1: Personal	Cycle 2 Relational	Cycle 3: Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Inquiry Focus</li> <li>•Intimacy</li> <li>•Inquiry Theme               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•How can I practice intimacy in a leadership position?</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Practice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First Person</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Voices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First/Own</li> <li>•Second/Other</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Methods               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative Accounts</li> <li>•Conversations</li> <li>•Journal Entries</li> <li>•Theoretical Research</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Timing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2006-2008</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Research Recycling               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2009-2010-2012-2013-2014</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Inquiry Focus               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•New Ways of Relating</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Theme               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•How can I practice new ways of relating as a leader?</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Practice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First Person</li> <li>•Second Person</li> <li>•Third Person</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Voices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First/Own</li> <li>•Second/Own</li> <li>•Second/Other</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Methods               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative Accounts</li> <li>•Conversations</li> <li>•Journal Entries</li> <li>•Internal Workshops</li> <li>•Group Process</li> <li>•Therapy</li> <li>•Theoretical Research</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Timing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2008-2011</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Research Recycling               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2011-2012-2013-2014</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Inquiry Focus               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sense Making</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Theme               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What have I learnt from this inquiry?</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Practice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First Person</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Voices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First/Own</li> <li>•Second/Other</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Methods               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative Accounts</li> <li>•Critical Friends' Input</li> <li>•Supervisor Feedback</li> <li>•Examiner Feedback</li> <li>•Friendly Academic Input</li> <li>•Free Fall Writing</li> <li>•Journal Entries</li> <li>•Conversations</li> <li>•Theoretical Research</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Inquiry Timing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2011</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Research Recycling               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•2012-2013-2014</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Figure 11: Summary of inquiry cycles for different research practices/voices adapted from Chandler and Torbert (2003, p 132-149)

In the next section, I will outline my choices of different practices.

## Choice of Research Practices

Reason (2001) identifies three broad strategies of action research practice:

'First person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarery and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting.

Second person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern--for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately. Second person inquiry is also concerned with how to create communities of inquiry or learning organizations.

Third-person research/practice aims to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who, because they cannot be known to each other face-to-face (say, in a large, geographically dispersed corporation), have an impersonal quality' (Reason, 2001: .2).

### *First person research practice*

I began my research by working predominantly with my own voice. I included second person inquiry and brought in other people's voices in the further stages of my inquiry, in keeping with the approach developed more fully by Reason and Marshall (2001); Torbert (2000);

Reason and Torbert (2001); and Marshall (1999, 2001, 2004).

Following Argyris and Schon (1974), I have also inquired into the underlying assumptions, values and views of reality that shape both my espoused theories and my theories in use - this was an important distinction for me as I am aware that sometimes my espoused theories may be different to my theories-in-use. In this respect, first person and second person inquiry have been my chosen research practices.

From a Sufi perspective, first person practice seems like a good indicator of *Nafs al Lawwama*; Inquiring Self and serves as a powerful tool to identify habits and patterns of *Nafs al Ammara* or the Unconscious Self with habits and patterns. In my experience, it offered an important path for self-awareness as indicated in the Sufi scripture '*Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa Rabbahu*', which I translate as 'one who becomes aware of himself or herself, becomes aware of his inner Guide'. As my first person practice helped me become aware of myself, reflexivity has been my guide in the process.

In this sense, my choice of first person research as an inquiry approach was particularly useful for me in order to:

- become more aware of my habits
- develop reflexivity as a skill of noticing in the moment
- learn about the impact of my behaviours as a leader on others

- have a deeper insight about some of the recurring themes in my life
- become more conscious about my choices and how I want to be in the world

### Challenges of first person research practice

I faced a number of challenges when I was practicing first person inquiry, such as that presented by critical subjectivity i.e. critically inquiring into my own perspectives and biases. (Heron and Reason, 2001) This challenge/difficulty is in part rooted in my cultural and educational roots.

Culturally I belong to a power driven culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) where individuals seek the endorsement of an authority figure for what they do. Critical subjectivity required me to be my own authority rather than looking outside of myself and seeking an authoritative input. My educational roots made it even more problematic; the educational system in Turkey doesn't allow the student to think freely or bring his own views out into the open.

Another challenge came from my leadership role. As I was looking to hear other voices to validate my findings, it was always difficult for me to distinguish the extent to which my colleagues' comments were biased due to their potential respect for my role. Consequently, I have had to pay special attention to power dynamics when I critically reflected about the evidence.



As I have embarked deeper into first person inquiry, it has helped me to identify themes of importance to me in my personal and professional life, such as intimacy, that I will be referring to in detail in the first cycle. I have benefited from the first person practice as it has given me much greater awareness of the choices I can and have made about matters that I had otherwise taken for granted.

### Methods in the first person research practice

As I did my first person inquiry, my primary method has been reflexive writing. Here is an example of one of my moments of awareness in my writing.

*"During the period that I was inquiring into intimacy, I heard a striking comment from Cuneyt, who has been one of my good friends for almost 20 years, about his perception of my relationship with the team. He had an opportunity to work on a project with our client solutions team. He had perceived the team seeing me as an authority figure with a combination of respectful, distant and even fearful stance. I found his comment striking as I had always advocated creating a warm working relationship. I had been the advocate of a paperless, open, transparent, non-hierarchical, non-status based organisation in a geography where autocracy still ruled the business world. Our working area reminds me of the living room of a large family home where people would come and go. It is a place to join, converse, celebrate, share, argue, connect, laugh and leave. I had a small corner table instead of a designated office in this setting to help me stay connected with the team. At the same time, I was considering myself to be an open and friendly person at work. However, what I was hearing from Cuneyt was clear. I was a 'living contradiction'. (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) On the one side, I was trying to be intimate and close and on the other side; I was perceived as formal, distant and even fearful for some.*

*(I really did not like it when I heard Cuneyt's comment. The first feeling I noticed was a sense of disappointment. A tiny voice inside me was questioning the validity of the comment. Then I started to hear a slightly stronger voice. Maybe I am living in an illusion. Perhaps I do not represent the person that I am intending to be. Maybe people see me as a distant, cold*

*person. I had heard a similar observation from my wife some time before but had ignored it, assuming that she would not truly know my work setting. When I think of that as a possibility, I feel a bit scared. I feel scared about being a cold person.)".*

This account relates to a starting point in my inquiry and it led me to inquire further and explore these themes in the consequent cycles.

I have used conversations to validate my thinking and findings. Here is one of the conversations as a sample:

*"You used to be away. Now you are with us. We talk. We share a number of things. Even though I do not see you for several days or weeks due to client work, it does not feel that we are apart... Our conversations are so real and alive. Your presence is making an impact on my practice. You are a leader keen about personal growth and development. Your presence is helping me grow." (Conversations with Pelin)*

*"I am seeing something that I am not used to seeing. Your presence! You do not fade out in the group as you used to before. You are creating and participating in the space. You make contact. You are a delight in terms of personal development. I see you as a leader with depth. I treasure that you can make connections between different theoretical grounds. You relate Sufism, coaching and consulting and this is unique and valuable. It is the most enjoyable part of our relationship. I feel like we are growing something with our conversations. I remember our walk on the way to dinner from the office where we both had lost the sense of time and space and lost our way. I cherish that experience." (Conversations with Tarik)*

### *Second person research practice*

I have also used second person inquiry in the second cycle in the form of collaborative inquiry. I would define second person research as making inquiry a relational and collaborative process, which is about inquiring with others into themes and issues of mutual interest.

Second person practice is similar to Sufi conversations *sohbet* which is a community learning practice. I have benefited from second person research as it has enabled me to:

- identify a number of key themes together with my team
- embark on a collaborative professional development path
- support organisational change
- create awareness about some of the existing patterns within the organisations
- shift these organisational patterns in a personally and professionally useful way

## Methods in Second Person Inquiry

The most significant example of the second person inquiry has been the group process that was started during my inquiry a few years ago.

I later found out that the group process had many similarities to Sufi practice of group dialogue (*sohbet*) which is also group based development activity. The main difference is the absence of certain Sufi rituals like remembrance (*dhikr*) or audition (*sama*).

Another method that I used in the second person inquiry has been conversations. Below is a sample of my second person practice from my conversations with people, in this case it is particularly related to their feedback on the collaborative inquiry process.

*"The group process with Cem Mumcu helped me to know myself. I have become aware of my patterns in the background and their influence on my reactions and my anger. Before Cem, I was living with masks and was not so intimate. Now I can assert myself as I am and I am very happy about it. (Conversations with Erdem)*

*The group process transformed my relationship with 'myself' and with others. It even transformed my internal conversations. My perspective in life has been shifted. (Conversations with Ender)*

*Your biggest contribution was to initiate these sessions. (Conversation with Pelin)*

*I find what you have done very courageous and I am not sure if many executives would dare to try it. (Senior Consultant)*

*You exist in these sessions status free and that makes a big difference. (Senior Consultant)*

*You were genuine about your intention. It was most amazing to me, even*

*though you had the obvious role of boss of the organisation, you did not appear as an authority figure in these sessions. That made a very positive impact on the group process. (Conversation with Cem Mumcu)*

I have also introduced an Action Research based Master's programme, focusing on leadership, which is a major initiative and still continuing. This programme's design has been built on my learning in this inquiry and it serves as a continuation of my inquiry. I see it as a product and outcome of this inquiry. Due to limitations of this paper, I will only share top level reference materials about the programme in Appendix 4.

### Challenges of second person inquiry

I faced much stronger challenges in my second person inquiry compared to my first person work, although it was similar to the challenge connected to my leadership role in the first person work. It was extremely difficult to exist in the collaborative inquiry setting, ignoring/setting aside my status and the power dynamic that came with my role. For a long time, I have found it extremely difficult to be there stripped of my role, my status and the power associated with it. In the earlier sessions, I found myself pulling back in order to allow others to speak. In some sessions, I found myself feeling responsible for the success of the session. Knowing that our shared Turkish culture has a strong reliance on authority figures (Hofstede et al., 2010) I was sometimes finding myself acting with extra care in order not to harm the process with my authority like the case below where a key staff member would announce resignation in the process.

*We start the session and I am anticipating a slow start like the other times. Sometimes it takes an hour for the group to warm up and identify a topic to work on. We settle in our seats and I am looking around the circle. As I unintentionally count the number of participants, Celal makes an announcement – he wants to share an issue with the group. I am surprised and turn my chair slightly towards the left to hear him. Celal says that he has been thinking about a decision for some time and he has decided to leave the company. Celal is one of the of the firm's key people. I am in a state of shock and did not like the idea of losing him. In my head, I am questioning why he would make such an announcement in a group like this. (Cem Mumcu Sessions, 2009)*

The cases like above have offered a great challenge for my presence in the process. I struggled with these challenges for a long while until I found a fair balance between my researcher role and leadership status. I am assuming that my Sufi experience might have helped as I had been in a number of practices which required me to participate status free.

An additional challenge for the second person inquiry was to do with participation and who came along to these sessions. I know that quality of participation is a critical issue in the second person practice (Heron and Reason, 2001). On the one hand, I was concerned about the quality of participation and participant commitment; and on the other I was working with the tension of a possible divide being created within the organisation between participants and non-participants in this collaborative process (that I'd convened). This has also been a potential challenge when it came to day-to-day people management responsibilities such as hiring, firing, and promoting people – and how this might be influenced by whether

they had opted in or out of the group process. I was keen to ensure that membership of the group and participation in the collaborative inquiry did not privilege people.

Third person research is about going beyond second person action and taking the inquiry to a broader group of practitioners and academics. It may involve publishing written work, doing a survey, making a report, reaching wider audiences using social media and the internet, participating in a large conference and/or creating communities. I have authored a chapter in a book on Organisational Consulting sharing some of the practices from my inquiry. A copy of this chapter is shared in Appendix 1 as further evidence. I will be giving more examples of evidence for different practices in the further sections related to the cycles of inquiry.





## Critical Reflection on my Inquiry Practices (NEW)

I come from an education system whose emphasis has been, and still is, to transfer knowledge by a well-trained teacher working with a well-designed agenda and textbook. This in turn is part of a well-designed syllabus where teacher, textbooks and curriculum are seen as the source of educational authority and critical thinking was/is not encouraged.

Given this, the primary challenge I have faced has been learning to practice critical thinking while I go about challenging some of my deeply embedded learning patterns and assumptions. One of these assumptions is that learning is about acquiring propositional knowledge and theory in a form of authority that the learner cannot challenge, or even have a conversation about. While such a practice would be common in certain Sufi orders, Mustafa would encourage critical thinking and our work learning process would involve a great deal of self-reflection especially for making sense of the dreams. Mustafa believes that self-reflection strengthens the impact of the dream and helps translate the learning to daily life.

### What do I see now in my first person inquiry? (NEW)

My first person inquiry offered me diverse learning opportunities, helping me question my assumptions and perceptions about myself as a person and as a leader. With the help of the first person inquiry, I have been able to look at my practice with different eyes, which has

helped me expand my choices as a leader and improve my practice.

*What are its flaws and strengths? (NEW)*

A major strength of my first person research practice has been my relentless self-questioning; I have generated a great deal of insight into myself through the first person inquiry process.

In an inquiry dealing with themes such as intimacy, I have worked hard to ask questions I find personally difficult and have not hesitated to disclose myself in a sincere manner, which I see as a prerequisite to intimacy. I have also learnt on the way that critical thinking is another form of intimacy, and critical reflection has been a challenging task for me and still offers a development path for the future.

One of the major challenges that I faced in the first person inquiry process has been to appreciate that Action Research is about learning, and learning can also take place by means of first person inquiry rather than via an authorised external expert.

One challenge was about receiving feedback from others on my inquiry. I would question the contribution from my colleagues and would always wonder if my leadership role was making an impact on their response. My assumption was confirmed by Derya who is part of the firm management team. Derya thought that my interactions with various members of the team, as the senior person in the firm, has a tremendous influence on staff. She believed that any interaction with the team should be received with a filter since even the most innocent

comment or advice would be taken very seriously. This insight has been particularly helpful for me in appreciating the responsibility that comes with a leadership position.

Another flaw that I now notice is the way I contracted with people I had feedback conversations with for my inquiry. I discounted potential power issues, assuming others (who worked for me) would experience the invitation to give me (their boss) feedback as a friendly conversation; I did not think about explicitly offering them the realistic option of not joining in a conversation with me.

*What is my relationship to this inquiry now? (NEW)*

I am a bit sad that once the doctorate is over, I will have limited opportunity to continue my first person inquiry process. In this regard, I am aware of a deep desire to continue this work rather to finish it.

However, I also know that I will continue the learning process by other means such as dreaming and dream analysis, learning journals and continuous reflection on my experience and practice.

## What do I see now in my second person inquiry? (NEW)

My main second person inquiry has taken the form of a group process focused around the theme I called 'being real', its intention being to work on the development of both self and practice. It is an example of a collaborative inquiry process that has helped me to learn new ways of relating, both in my practice and my personal life.

My learning through this has been to consider establishing a much less ambitious (and personally demanding) group learning processes. These could take the form of professional learning groups such as action learning sets within the firm, focusing on specific practice or development areas.

I also consider the continuing Masters programme in leadership I have established to be a significant opportunity to sustain my learning with others, who have similar research interests.

## *What are its flaws and strengths? (NEW)*

I see that being able to organise such a process within my own team has been immensely helpful, enhanced learning opportunities and also transferred learning to the workplace.

As it was a new experiment, all of us who took part have learnt on the way and I can now see that I need to pay greater attention to power issues, show more sensitivity to group dynamics and feelings of inclusion and exclusion within the wider organisational context (which

I will cover at the end of the second cycle). I also believe I could have pursued better contracting within the group in terms of the focus and purpose of the process.

*What is my relationship to this inquiry now? (NEW)*

While the group process has not been sustained within the firm, I am happy to continue with other inquiry opportunities like the Leadership Masters programme that I have initiated, whose details have been shared in the Appendix that has become a significant learning opportunity for me with people who would share my development ambitions.

**What do I see now in my third person inquiry? (NEW)**

Even though I have used third person inquiry in a limited fashion, it helped me appreciate the value of my inquiry practice. Today, I see that there are greater opportunities to offer my learning to the external world and I am motivated to do so once this inquiry is completed.

*What are its flaws and strengths? (NEW)*

The major strength of the third person inquiry process has been to highlight the potential value of this inquiry for others and to encourage me to continue bringing more of my Sufi learning into my work by writing about my practices or bringing in the Sufi perspective. I could link the third person inquiry better and tighter within the overall inquiry which is under-developed at this point.

### *What is my relationship to this inquiry now? (NEW)*

I feel engaged towards third person inquiry and would like to share my learning with external audiences by means of writing new articles and books. I am considering further work building on my learning with the doctorate. I am particularly interested in deepening my studies writing a book, a project which excites me.

### **What I notice about my choice of practices (NEW)**

I am aware that I have not received any formal training in research methods and I have learnt along the way by means of trial and error. I believe that my learning still continues, especially through teaching on the Masters programme which serves as a powerful learning method. I have learnt that first person inquiry fits well into my learning objectives, while I see that the second person inquiry serves as a powerful way to extend my learning and sustain my inquiry process. I have also appreciated the value of being and learning in dialogue as a means of making sense of my learning and developing my authority.

### **What I have learnt about why I am drawn to a particular form of research (NEW)**

I can see that I am drawn to Action Research mainly due to its emancipatory qualities. Given this, Action Research may be seen as being particularly valuable for researchers with limited access to formal/legitimate power. However it has served its purpose for me as someone in a position of formal power. In the process, I have realised

that even though I had positional power, I was bound-up within my social context and this gave me limitations in my role. The Action Research process has enabled me to discover new possibilities for myself as well as my practice. This reminds me of Freire (1970) and the significance of the informed action – which works to achieve a balance between theory and practice through inquiry, and seeks to open up greater possibilities and/or freedoms of action.

### **How will I know that I know: Critical subjectivity, reflexivity and claims to knowledge**

How will I know that I know? Habermas (1984) offers a set of criteria about the legitimacy of knowledge claims, his criteria being that:

- what is being said is meaningful;
- the propositional content of what is being said is true;
- the speaker is justified in saying what he or she is saying;
- the speaker is speaking sincerely.

McNiff (2002: 34) supports the usefulness of Habermas' (1984) criteria but she also warns they are limited to a cognitive, propositional form and do not show how the knowledge can be realised in practice. I know from Marshall (1999) that Action Research is an inseparable part of life space. According to Whitehead (1989) to make research a lived practice, one must know by showing evidence of how learning took place, showing the researcher as a whole person in different ways,

paying attention to his/her social setting as well as his/her values. According to Sufi thought, the best evidence of knowing can be found in the whole self which manifests itself with the psychological state (*hal*) of the person.

As the focus of the first-person inquiry (Torbert, 2001) is my whole self, I am also aware that critical subjectivity, the inquiry into my own perspective and biases, is particularly important (Heron and Reason, 2001). Reason (1994) goes on to say that 'Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing' (p. 327). This means that 'we do not suppress our primary subjective experience that we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective and of its bias and we articulate it in our communications' (Reason, 1994, p. 327). I also recall from a workshop with Donna Ladkin that 'Critical subjectivity encourages inquirers to notice the particular frames of reference they bring to any inquiry arena, including, among others, their political, racial, cultural, or gendered orientation' (Ladkin, 2005).

I remember Judi Marshall (2001) suggesting the process of tracking our own 'inner' and 'outer' arcs of attention. She described tracking 'inner arcs' as:

*'notic(ing) myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out and so on. I pay attention for assumptions I use, repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas, key phrases which are charged with energy or that seem to hold multiple meanings to be puzzled about, and more.'* (2001, p. 433)



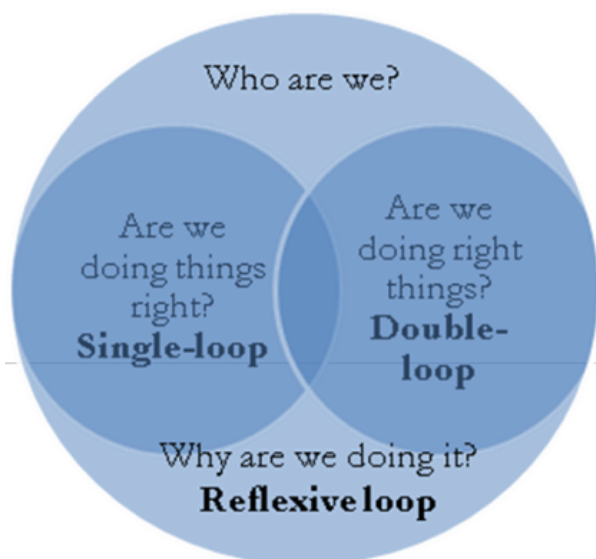
On the other hand, accessing to 'outer arcs' entails:

*'reaching outside of myself in some way . . . This might mean actively questioning, raising issues with others, or seeking ways to test out my developing ideas' (2001, p. 434).*

While I would define critical subjectivity as a research quality, reflexivity is a discipline enabling critical subjectivity. Pollner (1991) defines reflexivity as a way of 'unsettling the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality' (p. 370). It is about 'examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions and the impact of those actions' in our daily practice (Cunliffe, 2004). I am clear that reflexivity is different to reflection - even though sometimes they are used synonymously. Reflection can be associated with Schon's (1983) notion of the 'reflective practitioner' where it could be related it to the analysis of a situation, it ignores the problem of what counts as analysis or the situation.

Reflexivity differs from reflection where it questions the assumptions of the situation itself and their potential impact, rather than taking the situation for granted and trying to improve it. If we think from a single

loop and double loop learning perspective (Schon, 1983), when we question if we are doing things right or doing right things, both loops represent reflection. For reflexivity, I would add a third, reflexivity



loop as a grounding loop, where I examine critically my assumptions and their impact with questions like 'who' and 'why'? I have illustrated my framing in the diagram. Reflexivity has been a significant part of

*Figure 12: Reflexivity vs reflection in terms of double loop learning*

my continuous learning and leadership practice which gives

me the discipline of making better sense of our work by regularly questioning our actions, purpose and assumptions. I today believe that it is a critical competency for a leadership practice.

### **Congruence between multiple ways of knowing (REVISED)**

In addition to practices of self-reflection, Marshall and Reason (2001) suggest engaging in multiple ways of knowing for quality in inquiry. I know from Heron (2008) that we all naturally employ these four ways of knowing and consciously and unconsciously integrate them in all sorts of ways in everyday life. Reason (1998; 2001) stresses that we should seek for each of these ways of knowing to be congruent with each other to achieve a quality of inquiry. In other words, our knowing should be grounded in our experience, expressed through our images, metaphors, and stories, understood through theories and concepts which make sense to us, and expressed as practical action in our lives (Heron, 2008).

In my case, a typical full circle of knowing happened as follows: I would have an experience, then I would explore this experience by means of dialogue, meditation, dreams, imagery, metaphors,

journaling, poetry or dance. I would then read theory and make sense of my inquiry to date with the help of conceptual thinking. Finally, I would explore my new learning as a lived practice. I must admit that all of my knowing did not happen in this “perfect” order, but I can also say that the impact of learning would be significant when it happened in multiple ways.

## Exploring power issues (NEW)

Marshall (2011) highlights that paying attention to issues of power and participation is an important factor for the quality of Action Research. Similarly, Reason and Marshall (2007) suggest that a good discipline of inquiry practice involves exploring different kinds of power issues involved in the research context, what it takes to empower others to create mutuality while paying attention to our own 'power over' practices.

Therefore I understand that an Action Researcher should reflect on how power dynamics influence the inquiry process, show great sensitivity to their potential impact and make extra efforts to create a process which is empowering for all. This may indeed pose a great challenge in Turkey where prevailing notion of leadership has a hierarchical and autocratic characteristic (Pasa, Kabasakal and Bodur, 2001). Such a perception not only influences leaders' behaviours but it also shapes how followers interact with leaders. In my case, I have noticed some examples of my 'power over' behaviour in both cycles that I can see as being at odds with the empowering ethos of Action Research.

In my conversations with some of my colleagues, I have become aware that some of my team members might well have been projecting their image of distant, autocratic Turkish leaders onto me, inevitably impacting our interactions. Given the above, I have

experienced a considerable challenge to my inquiry process because of my leader-informed relationships, which come from my own unconscious patterns of autocratic relating but also from the established perceptions my colleagues may well hold about what to expect from a typical leader. This was a pre-eminent issue for my work, especially in the first cycle and would manifest itself in how people's engagement with me was cloaked in 'respect' in many cases. Consequently, I could never be sure if some of my second person conversations would give me a 'true' picture (in the sense of a forthright personal response) or was I being told what others thought I would want to hear. I have made attempts to have further meta-conversation on this issue while I was revising my thesis, but I concluded that I needed a well-structured and possibly externally facilitated process for better reliability. I have deliberately chosen not to start such a process due to time constraints. I noted this as a significant challenge for an insider researcher who is also in a senior leadership role in a high power distance culture.

The second cycle involved the collaborative group process which was a communicative space as proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) with its power issues.

Avison et al (2007) categorise power dynamics in Action Research projects around the four themes of authority, influence, politics and participation. I find this framing comprehensive and useful for my analysis of the power issues I faced. By authority Avison et al (2007)

draw attention to issues of institutional power which comes from ownership or being in a formal position of power and the role this plays in an Action Research process. One of my learnings in my inquiry has been about coming to terms with my authority. As you will see in some of my accounts in the first cycle, I have denied 'power' issues and ignored the impact of my authority on the process.

In addition to authority, I have made things happen using my influence and political skills. My track record and credibility in the area of staff development within my firm helped me to get things moving – alongside my political skills to make sure that people were engaged and participated in the process. I always thought that their participation was an inevitable result of people's perception and respect for my role as I organised the group events.

Avison et al's final theme is that of participation. I know from Reason and Bradbury (2001), Reason and Marshall (2007) and Marshall (2011) that paying attention to the quality of participation is critical. It requires extra care in my situation where I had the dual role of senior leader and researcher. Participation is about what makes it safe for people to participate openly or opt out when they need to; it involves protecting people from the potential risks of exposing themselves in an inquiry process. It took me a while to become aware of the effort needed to manage such risks. My approach provided people with a number of opportunities for development while I grew my own competence in the area of good participation practices. I will explore

these issues more comprehensively and provide evidence in my report on my second cycle of inquiry.

### Research Ethics (REVISED)

Due to the nature of Action Research, my inquiry involves a number of participants other than myself. I would like to reiterate here that have I outlined the purpose and aims of the inquiry to participants as they participated in my inquiry. We shared reflective exchanges through face-to-face conversations, interviews and group sessions. The voices of participants form an essential part of my research and I have regularly referred to them and their feedback to validate my claims. I have asked their permission to quote our conversations or narrate stories including them. I have kept some of the accounts such as the group therapy sessions completely out of my writing in order to maintain collective trust in the process.

I have been aware of my role duality both as a researcher and a leader. In this perspective, I have shown sensitivity to protect my colleagues from possible risks that may come about as a result of the inquiry process. I have worked hard to avoid 'power over' behaviours and practice a 'power with' approach. I have tried to make sure that the participation was on a voluntary basis and it was also acceptable for people not to participate, or leave the process, if desired.

Almost all of the participants have allowed me to use their names; I have chosen, however, to include them with pseudo names to protect

them from any unpredictable harm. I have also been careful not to name any locations/organisations other than my own firm. I am encouraged by their trust and openness as they responded positively to my requests. I have used certain images in my thesis and contacted copyright owners for permission. Finally, I have worked hard to be congruent, maintained good faith and done it with love at all times.

## Notes about the format

In this document, I will be using different typographic styles in this paper in order to distinguish different entries from journals or academic quotes or conversations with people. I would like give some examples in order to help you locate entries.

### Journal Entries and Own Papers

| *This would be an example of how I would use a journal entry.*

### Conversations

*This would be an example of how I would use a conversation. (Sample Conversation)*

### Quote

*This would be an example of how I would use a quote.*



Headings would be classified in the following format:

# Chapter Heading

Sub Heading Level 1

Sub Heading Level 2

*Sub Heading Level 3*

Sub Heading Level 4

# Chapter 5: Inquiring into Intimacy

(UPDATED)



# Introduction

## What is covered in this section?

This section covers my initial inquiry cycles spanning from 2006 to 2008 and consists of:

- First person inquiry into intimacy and my childhood
- First person inquiry into intimacy at work
- First person inquiry into intimacy and being present
- First person inquiry into intimacy and leadership based on a meeting with consultants in my firm.

At the end of each inquiry there is a short critical reflection on the experience. I have also included a reflective summary at the end of the cycle which aims to summarise my learning.

This inquiry introduces intimacy as a key theme in my thesis. During the cycle, I have inquired into my interactions as a leader from the perspective of intimacy, whose definition emerges through the process. It involves conversations with my colleagues as well as an account of a meeting with consultants. It deals specifically with how the language of a leader affects intimacy, how a leader's aspirations for intimacy interact with the dynamics of the local culture and the relational aspect of intimacy. I also know that intimacy is an important theme in the Sufi path of development and a desired spiritual state

for a Sufi seeker. Sufi thinking sees intimacy as a fundamental quality of becoming a better person.

*What I notice about what I cover (NEW)*

I know I have chosen intimacy as an inquiry theme because it is a significant influence on me personally, due to my family history, as well as how I go about my leadership practice. I would claim that paying attention to intimacy is an unusual topic to see in a leadership inquiry, and so may promise novelty as a focus of inquiry. I am also aware of the cultural challenge of inquiring into such an unusual topic in a country where leaders are seen as distant and authoritative figures, and where intimacy is not part of the established leadership discourse. Given this, the key questions that arise for me are:

- What does inquiry mean to me both as a word and also as life theme?
- How can I practice intimacy within my context?
- Will I be able to get honest feedback about intimacy and my practice from colleagues?
- What can I learn from a Sufi perspective which sees intimacy as a fundamental quality of becoming a better person?

With these questions in my mind, I realise the importance of understanding the social context as well noticing power dynamics in the inquiry process. Critical thinking on the validity of the evidence

becomes a harder task in such a setting where a leader's actions are not always critically evaluated due to the high level of expressed respect for authority.

In light of the above, I anticipate learning along two paths. Firstly I will be exploring intimacy within a leadership practice. Secondly I will be making sense of my experience with my Sufi perspective. At the end, I hope to develop new knowledge by bridging these two paths.

### **How I have improved this section (NEW)**

In this section, I have worked to develop a coherent inquiry around intimacy. In the earlier versions of the document, which was made between 2010 and 2013, the emergence of intimacy as an inquiry theme was not clear and it was hard to understand where the inquiry came from. Similarly inquiry cycles were not clear in how they connected.

I have reworked the whole structure of this section to provide a clearer framing of the inquiry topic. I have also revised the whole section, put in place section headings and additional writing when necessary to make it easier to understand and follow the flow of the inquiry. In the earlier versions, the connection of intimacy to other key themes such as power, leadership and Sufism was not made clear. I have now explored the connections of intimacy with these other key themes. I have also added a section outlining my inquiry process for this cycle.



## Embarking into Intimacy as Inquiry (REVISED)

Action research offered a practical and applied way of looking at my leadership practice, giving me the opportunity to think about and reflect about what I do as a leader while going about my work as a leader (Niff, 2002). The self-reflective nature of action research has been instrumental in my learning journey. Throughout my inquiry I have been hunting for the issues that I need to engage with in my leadership practice; these issues have made their way to me in an emergent fashion. As I have conducted my inquiry, I have both dwelled on the past and been able to live fully in the present, which has provided me new perspective about my sense of self and my practice in a way I had not imagined ahead of time.

In action research, significant, or 'Aha moments' as framed by Gaya Wicks, Reason and Bradbury (2008), provide a key thread for learning. My inquiry took a significant step when such a moment happened during one of the ADOC workshops in early 2007. This workshop provided the first step into my first cycle of inquiry into connection and intimacy. The 'Aha' moment was triggered during an exercise where we sat in pairs across from one another, observing and sharing our observations with each other. I was paired with Robin and it was his turn to share his observations. He stared at me without a break while I felt uncomfortable, both with the exercise and from a sense of shyness. I remember Robin's remarks vividly... he was curious about what was behind the smile he saw and that made me think about



wearing a mask and what 'being real' might mean for me. Despite the internal feeling of 'Aha', I kept a smile on my face – letting go of the mask was not the work of a single step. My unconscious habit of smiling had been developed over many years, an apparently useful mask for me to hide my emotions.

My 'Aha' didn't stop there. I had a similar but even stronger reaction during the supervision session on the last day of the May 2007 workshop. At its end we were sharing our inquiry progress in our action learning set and it was my turn to speak. I was feeling confused about my inquiry and as I told the group about my inquiry process I was not clear about what I really wanted to inquire into. The group were asking questions to make sense of my work, but every question was making it even more confusing for me. My confusion was spreading to everybody else. I remember one of my colleagues persistently trying to understand and clarify the situation with ever more questions, each one making it more painful for me, increasing my frustration. I vividly remember the look on Susan's face, which mirrored my frustration and pain. Finally she gave up, saying she could not help as she too was confused. There was a deep silence in the room. Maybe it was for few seconds but I felt that it was much longer. At that point, Bill asked me what I was feeling at that moment. I told the group about my frustration. Then Bill made me aware of the smile on my face and I immediately realised how my external appearance was contradicting my interior experience. Bill looked me

in the eye: “Maybe that’s it. I know that you are very good with social connections but maybe you do not know how to make intimate connections”. I felt like I had been shaken, very hard.

After the workshop, as I travelled home, I could sense how emotional I was feeling. This is what I wrote in my journal on the plane back to Istanbul and home:

*“I am confused. What is important for me? I am trying hard to find clues. I feel like a fox chasing his own tail. Is something missing in my inquiry? Yesterday and the day before, my peer group were giving me the feedback that they cannot see ‘me’ in my inquiry. I am missing in my inquiry. My peer group seemed quite puzzled. I remember Susan’s face. She was looking at me as if she was in pain. I also remember her comment about her confusion and not being able to help. I am thinking about Bill’s comment about my ability to connect socially but not being so capable when it came to making a personal connection. What am I not doing right? Am I excluding myself? What does this all mean?” (Alper Utku, Personal Journal, 13 May 2007)*

As thoughts flew around my head, I could hear my own analysis of the situation; ‘Making intimate connections was difficult for me because, behind my authoritative leader mask, I was a timid person.’ As I saw and called myself timid, a story about my timidity came to me.

## The challenge of working with personal history (REVISED)

In this section, I will be sharing a first person inquiry where I started to

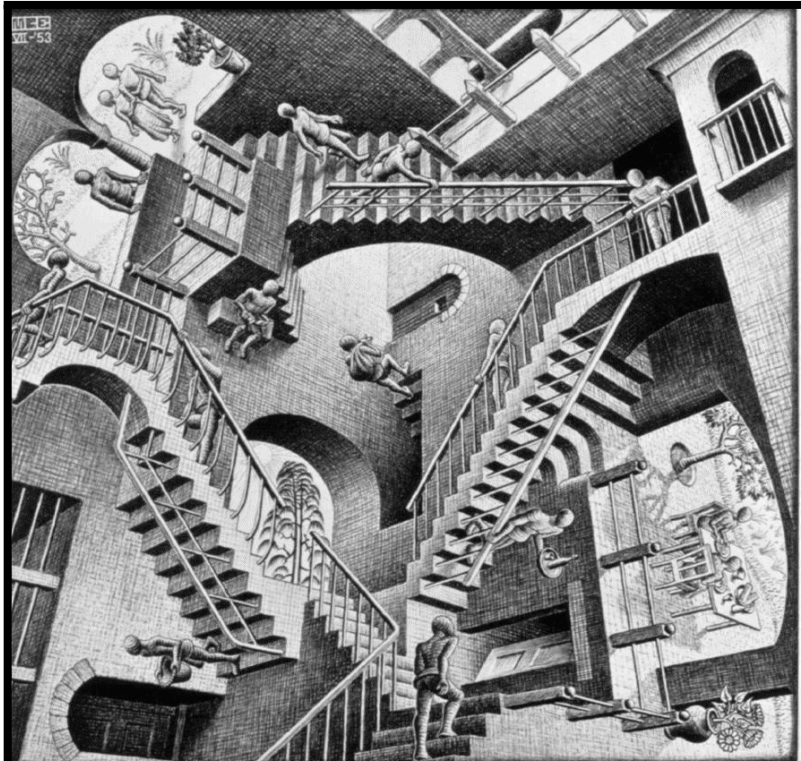


Figure 13: House of Stairs by M.C. Escher  
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[www.mcescher.com](http://www.mcescher.com)

discover that intimacy matters for me as a topic. I will then link it with a childhood story. The inquiry process involves going back to my early years and reflecting on a story of this time. I have

chosen to include the Escher illustration in this page; it represents for me the process I have gone through, endlessly going up and down through the corridors of my personal history.

I described my experience in the journal entry above as 'like a fox chasing its own tail'.

Gergen (1999: 70) suggests that we need to 'recount our past, to identify where we have been and where we are going. In effect, we

identify ourselves through narration'. I understand that my definition of my 'self' is shaped by my interpretation and narration of past events. So my definition of my 'self' is a story that I tell based on my experience of past events.

## Going beyond a fixed identity

As I write and explore this 'self' story, I am also keen to see how this seeing of 'self as a story' is similar to what Sufi scholars call 'self-identification'. Self-identification is the process or habit of identifying or labelling ourselves with a fixed identity; this is done by generalising certain experiences from our personal history. I see certain parallels and potential differences between 'defining self' with narration in social construction and the Sufi concept of 'self-identification'. The main similarity is that both propose people develop a sense of 'self' based on relating to their past experiences. Some Sufi scholars go further by calling this process one of 'false identification'. The challenge, for me, of using the term 'false identification', is whether it is too deterministic from a social constructionist perspective, since the notion of 'false' self can be seen to imply that there is an essential truth to someone's identity, independent of their experience. Therefore I am wondering whether a less deterministic label, such as 'transcendental' self or 'commanding' self may be an easier one to carry across from Sufism and its ways of knowing the 'self'.

What I know today is that I can have a deeper understanding of what I call 'self', and how that self is felt and known as an interior experience, with a reflective inquiry process. In the earlier periods of my inquiry, I would refer to this reflective inquiry process as 'personal archaeology', digging deeper into my past in order to learn more about it and so help me make better sense of my 'self' today which Gergen (2000) frames as 'selfing'. From a theoretical perspective this is akin to the Jungian psychoanalytic process, where the assumption is that the present is informed by early experiences. In the following pages, I will be sharing some of this reflection with you.

Reflecting on the story: Facing and exploring the 'timid self'

This story is related to my childhood and goes back to my middle school years. It provides a good example of my internal narrative which made me see myself as a timid person:

*When I was a child, I was a bit shy. It was difficult for me to connect easily with other children. I was not happy about my timidity and wanted to crack my shy crust open one way or another. With the child's mind, I thought of a possible solution to open myself up; I needed an opportunity to travel on my own. I assumed that I would be obliged to socialise and connect with people during such a trip, forcing myself to open up. I really do not remember where I got this idea. It was not from my parents as they were not so courageous. I had to wait until I was 13, finally convincing my conservative father and protective mother to send me on an overseas vacation on my own – this was a big request for them. We lived in a small town in the north of Turkey, near The Black Sea and at that time, Turkey was only just opening up after years of political unrest. I don't think my parents had become aware of the new era of opening up and so my request would have been a shock to them. After a year of arguing, my father gave in and agreed to send me to Cyprus for a ten day trip. We went to the only real travel agent in town, who also had to assure my father that they would ensure special care for his beloved son by the tour guide.*

*I really do not remember my trip to the island but I vividly remember my first couple of days in the hotel. It was dreadful. I didn't know anybody. Then I started to make friends and at the end of ten days, I was thinking I had made so many new friends, it would be difficult to leave them and go back home. My formula for curing timidity had worked, or so I thought (13 May 2007)*

I find it significant I have chosen to tell this story about my childhood. On the surface it relates to my self-identification as a timid person, when people describe me as sociable person I say that actually I am a shy person. I am also struck by the metaphor I use of 'cracking my crust'. A crust is an outer shell and it somehow separates and sometimes protects the softer core. I also note how I view my parents as conservative and protective and use this to build my story.

### Noticing the theme of intimacy and 'opening up'

While I was thinking about this story, I wrote the following journal entry:

*This whole adventure was for the sake of opening up. Is that what I have difficulty with? I think about my relationships. Socially I am a well-connected person. Maybe I am living in an illusion about my relationships? I have a spark in my head. Could it be that I am very skilled at social connections but cannot make intimate connections? Am I unable to make intimate connections? Is that it? Am I missing intimacy? I remember those days in my childhood when I would go and play with stray dogs. I would hug them; kiss them. I can still connect to that child in very lively sense. I'm in tears now when I think about it. I would come home smelling like a dog and wouldn't mind at all. I think of my daughter, Ece. I realise that she also has some difficulty opening up with people. She is sometimes criticised for not being warm. Then I see her with the stray cats in our street. She is a different person with them. So warm, pure, open, unprotected. Why does she have this special connection with stray cats? I was about the same age then. Is this a mere coincidence? (13 May 2007)*

I notice I used "opening up" and "intimate connections" as key themes in my reflection above. Theory indicates that intimacy is the

process of opening ourselves to another (Reis and Shaver, 1988). It makes me question whether it has always been a challenge for me to



Figure 14: Rind by M.C. Escher  
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"open up". I have had a similar challenge in this inquiry, where I have received comments that people cannot see 'me' in my inquiry. The illustration below (Figure 6) shows a face opening up which symbolises my inquiry. The image reminds me of a mask, which is peeled off the face, which connects to the conversation in the ADOC group about my smile serving

as a mask. Based on my reflection so far, intimacy is about opening up and being without a mask - significant emerging theme for me. As I write and reflect on this, I feel emotional. I know it is important to pay attention to emotions and bodily sensations as a part of extended epistemology in action research (Heron, 1996; Marshall, 2007). It seems I am touching on a significant theme by exploring intimacy.

## Deciding to inquire into intimacy

The ADOC workshop in May 2007 was a turning point for the

direction of my thesis; it was then that my learning really started to take place. The supervision group feedback and subsequent conversations provoked me to ask what really mattered for me. A couple of months after the workshop I wrote the following:

*"I had a period of confusion after the May workshop and did not know where to start for a while. The inquiry process has been a combination of confusion, awakening, frustration and wonder. I am encouraged by Paul Goodman's (1960) words: 'Confusion is the state of promise, the fertile void where surprise is possible again.'" (Journal, July 2007)*

After a time of questioning and confusion I decided to inquire into intimacy during early 2008. In the following sections I will explore intimacy further, which so far I have associated with the experience of opening up and connecting with others.

## A Definition of Intimacy

As I embark on my next inquiry cycle, I will start by defining what I understand by 'intimacy' - as I will be using it as a label on several occasions.

Sufi seekers highlight *uns* intimacy being the etymologic root for the word *insan* human. In this sense, *insan* means the one who is intimate and this link signifies intimacy as a core human quality. According to Ibn Arabi, *uns* intimacy is "presence with God", where a Sufi seeker becomes aware of God's self-disclosure, and God's self-disclosure to a Sufi seeker is nothing but himself (Chittick, 1998). Ibn Arabi sees intimacy as a state of deeper awareness and connection and he contrasts intimacy with alienation which is a state of contraction.



Western literature also talks about self-disclosure where Jourard (1971) offers a model of personal growth development based around self-disclosure. Jourard's (1971) work claims that the disclosure is important in any relationship as it fosters openness, healthy relationships, and personal growth. By being transparent and opening ourselves to others, we can remove veils to our true being. The humanistic perspective of having a 'true self', waiting to be discovered, is of course questionable when seen from a social constructionist perspective. However it resonates with Ibn Arabi's notion of self-disclosure of God. However my understanding of Sufi thought attempts to integrate both perspectives where the experience of the Divine is not dualistic with its inner and outer dimension. So I am curious if the self-disclosure of God means appreciating the presence which is available through different phenomenological experiences such as interpersonal relationships. This will be part of my continued inquiry.

Nevis (2003: 134-146) defines intimate behaviour as 'any communication, verbal or nonverbal, that aims to enhance closeness'. When I first read it, I liked the definition but after a second reading started to think of contradictions. I could aim to enhance closeness by a manipulative behaviour where I would not necessarily be intimate, an example of 'political' rather than intimate behaviour.

Thomas Moore (1992) says that intimacy comes from the Latin root "interus" meaning within, and could be defined as profoundly interior.

Why Moore links it to interior is clear to me, but I am not sure what he means by 'profoundly interior'. On further investigation I found out that etymologically intimacy comes from the Latin word 'intimus' which means 'innermost'. So what Moore (1992) means by 'profoundly' makes more sense to me – it is both a statement of direction and intensity. I also relate the idea of profoundness to honesty, about going deeper into oneself, beyond the surface. I am also struck that the Latin word 'intimare' means 'to announce' or 'make public', which makes me think about the self-disclosing qualities of intimacy.

According to Nevis (2003) intimacy involves the courageous intention of sharing thoughts and feelings openly. Nevis (2003: 134-146) also stresses 'an interaction between two people' rather than 'an isolated behaviour' which 'requires a giver and a receiver, a sense of mutuality, and the experience of little or no hierarchical difference'. I question Nevis, by asking whether intimacy can be achieved despite the perceived differences in hierarchy that are part of my lived reality - and how issues such as status and power interplay with intimacy, rather than simply negating it. I have experienced a number of moments of being intimate as a leader, despite my status and any hierarchical differences such as a meeting with consultants which is included in this cycle.

Building on this learning, I expanded my definition of intimacy as the capacity to be in close relationship with self and others, to invite

others to connect with me and to reach out to connect with others.



## Inquiring into Intimacy at Work

In this section I present my first person inquiry cycle into intimacy with a focus on my work relationships.

### The distinctive challenge of inquiring into work relationships (NEW)

I am conscious that work relationships are distinctive other types of relationship as they explicitly involve power relations and studying a concept such as intimacy at work is not very common, especially an inquiry by someone who is embedded within a high-power position within an organisation. I am also aware of the challenge of inquiring into work relationships as a leader in a firm in Turkey, where work culture is highly formal and power distance is high. In such a culture where leaders are regarded with high respect, I am concerned about the reliability of the feedback I will receive and remain unsure if I will be hearing what I need to hear or what my colleagues believe I want to hear. Given this, this is a tough job and there will always be an element of mystery as to the reliability of inquiry data.

Another challenge arising from power dynamics has been about my dual role both as a researcher and as a leader. I made participation in this inquiry voluntary, making a great effort to establish mutual trust during meetings, and supporting people in feeling safe to participate – especially in terms of confidentiality.

Despite positive remarks from different people about the inquiry

meetings, I always questioned whether people joined in on a voluntarily basis or whether they participated due to their respect to me or through a sense of obligation. I gather from the feedback I received that the participation had a mixed quality. Many people enjoyed being with the boss and giving feedback. However, providing feedback to the boss could be seen as risky by some people. I tried to minimise these risks by ensuring confidentiality and proposing that I would keep their names anonymous. It was fine with me if they did not want to participate or desired to opt out however I am not sure if there were good enough practices to make it easier.

I am hoping that I will be able to minimise these challenges through critical reflection, especially by paying attention to power dynamics and their potential influence in the inquiry process, as well as possible biases or blind spots I may have in the process.

### The inquiry process (NEW)

The inquiry process leading to this section happened through conversations with three people and relates to the second half of 2007. It relates to the period that I was inquiring into intimacy which was the inquiry theme I identified earlier. My inquiry was particularly about how I was perceived in my work relationships in terms of intimacy and the effect of my leadership role on their perception.

### Conversations with Cuneyt

During this period, I had a conversation with Cuneyt, who works with

my firm on a project basis. I was talking to him about my inquiry and he mentioned that he had some input based on his interaction with the team. He thought that the team sees me as an authority figure and they respect me. However he believed that the team members have found me quite distant and they are even scared of me. I was quite surprised when I heard Cuneyt's comment. My surprise turned into disappointment after a while.

Apparently my assumption about how I was perceived at work was quite different from Cuneyt's observation and it did not make sense to me in the beginning. I had written the following comment in an earlier first person inquiry during that period.

*I found his comment striking as I had always advocated creating a warm working relationship. I had been the advocate of a paperless, open, transparent, non-hierarchical, non-status based organisation in a geography where autocracy still ruled the business world. Our working area reminds me of the living room of a large family home where people would come and go. It is a place to join, converse, celebrate, share, argue, connect, laugh and leave. I had a small corner table instead of a designated office in this setting to help me stay connected with the team. At the same time, I was considering myself as an open and friendly person at work. However, what I was hearing from Cuneyt was clear. I was a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).*

As I read the quote above, I am noticing that despite all of my efforts to be an open and friendly boss and to create an intimate work climate, my colleagues would see me distant and fearful. It didn't make sense to me and I struggled with it for a while. Later on I wrote the following note in my journal.

*I really did not like it when I heard Cuneyt's comment. The first feeling I noticed was a sense of disappointment. A tiny voice inside me was*

*questioning the validity of the comment. Then I started to hear a slightly stronger voice. Maybe I am living in an illusion. Perhaps I do not represent the person that I am intending to be. Maybe people see me as a distant, cold person. I had heard a similar observation from my wife some time ago but had neglected it, assuming that she would not truly know my work setting. When I think of that as a possibility, I feel a bit scared. I feel scared about being a cold person. (Journal Entry, November 2007)*

On one side, I was trying to be intimate and close and on the other side I was being perceived as formal, distant and even fearful by some. Moreover I was not aware of the difference. If I look at it now, it looks like a potentially fruitful inquiry topic because of the difference. In fact, it stayed in my writing for some time.

## Broadening out from Cuneyt

Later on in 2008, I decided to inquire further into how people experienced my power and intimacy as I did not want to take Cuneyt's comment as the sole truth. I chose to speak to Can and Kayhan, who have been with the company longer and had less power distance in relation to me. My assumption was that those team members who were less comfortable with me were newer. I was hoping that they would be seeing me as they their previous bosses because they hadn't had the opportunity to get to know me well. I assumed that it would be difficult to get a reliable response from them due to the power relationships as they perceived them. Given this, I wanted to ask people who have worked with me long enough to know me well. Therefore, I chose to inquire with Kayhan. Another reason for my choice of Kayhan came from my experience of him; I



didn't think he perceived there to be a significant formal power distance between us. Therefore, I was hoping that he would give a more balanced response.

I can see now I was hoping that Kayhan would think differently to Cuneyt. What he gave me was a comment that supported Cuneyt. This is what Kayhan said about how he perceived me during the same period as Cuneyt:

*You used to hide behind an imaginary castle that you had built for yourself. When you were behind the castle, you would see others outside the castle as a rival or enemy. It is normal to be afraid of enemies. As you were hiding behind the castle, I would assume that you would see others outside the castle as enemies. Now you will see us as friends and comrades. You started to think; maybe I could come out. When you decided to do so, you have seen the possibility of sharing. (Conversations with Kayhan)*

Kayhan had used the metaphor of the castle and seeing others as rivals and enemies. He was referring to more or less the same period that Cuneyt was talking to. What I understand from Kayhan's comment is I was not creating trust based relationships with people around me, but rather staying reserved, detached and distant. I found Kayhan's comments powerful and yet it did not fully make sense to me – sense came over a period of time with the help of dreams, therapy and self- reflection. I have come to understand my anxiety of that period and how it made an impact on my relationships with others in the firm. I will share further details in the coming sections.

**A hypothesis – how language constructs distance**

After some personal reflection on Cuneyt's feedback, I developed a hypothesis that people position me as someone who is a distant person, and this distance is due to language. In Turkish, the second person singular and second person plural are represented with two different words: 'Sen/Siz', similar in construction to the German 'Du/Sie' and French 'Tu/Vous'. In formal situations, you would use 'Siz'. It occurred to me that many people, mainly latecomers in the team would call me 'Siz' or 'Alper Bey', and despite the fact I called them informally with their names. Bey is a salutation like Mr. in English. The only difference is it comes after the first name.

*(Every time I hear 'Bey', it evokes a sense of distance. It signifies a forced relationship because of my status not because of who I am. My personality has no place. I can identify a deep urge that I want people to have an interest in who I really am, not what I represent. Every 'Alper Bey' wakes a deep suspicion that I am valuable only because of my status. I am noticing that I am making an issue about it but it is probably touching something profound.) (Journal Entry, January 2008)*

## Working with personal and cultural habits of distance

I know from research that subtle variations in language influence perceptions of interpersonal closeness and relationship quality (Fitzsimons and Kay, 2004). I assumed that this could actually be the case for my situation. I was convinced that being called 'Alper Bey' or 'Siz' was creating a socially mandated distance. It did not only create a distance but also would make me feel that I am a 'thing' as Buber's would frame it, rather than a relational being. If I classify what was

going in using Buber's terminology, it represented an 'I-It' rather than an 'I-Thou' relationship. In an 'I-It' relationship, people experience each other as 'things'. However, an 'I-Thou' is a relationship of openness, directness, mutuality, and presence (Buber, 2000). 'I-It', in contrast, is the typical subject-object relationship in which one knows and uses other people and things without allowing them to exist for oneself in their uniqueness and is utterly at odds with Sufi perspective of oneness. It is clear to me that I do not like to be seen as a 'thing', in my case the thing being an 'executive', 'boss' or 'manager'. I had written earlier that 'I have a strong desire to be seen or accepted as 'me' and this sat uneasily with what I understood as the normal way of thinking about leaders and leadership:

*I am aware that I am challenging a traditional leadership norm where people would see me as a 'role' rather than a person. I am questioning if I am discounting my power position here and I am wondering why. I definitely have a need and desire to be loved. This is a given. Another fact and possibility is that I might have developed an assumption that people with power would not be liked but rather forcefully respected. I am thinking of my father, whom I had perceived as a power figure and I am remembering that I had not really felt love for my father during my childhood. I am feeling a 'cold rush' in my body. This is not because of air-conditioning. Such a sensation happens to me when I am uncomfortable, ashamed and a bit scared. Probably I touched something. Yeah! Maybe I am operating with a script that 'power figures' are not sincerely loved but rather respected due to their status. (Alper Utku, Personal Journal, January 2008)*

I may have framed power figures that are called 'Siz' or 'Bey' as distant people.

At this point, I connect with a story from when I was five or six years old. We had visited one of my parents' good friends and their son was

a close friend of mine. My friend would call his parents as 'Siz', while I would call them using the more informal framing. We came back home from them late one night and I remember my father telling me how respectful and good he and my mother had thought my friend was, giving the example of the use of 'Siz'. I dimly remember them suggesting I should call them as 'Siz' as well. After that incident, I started to call my father as 'Siz' but insisted on calling my mother informally as 'Sen'. I have a bitter taste when I remember this story. It makes me think that I have had a much closer and intimate relationship with my mother rather than my father during my adolescent years.

As I write, I notice I was probably assuming that people would see me as I had seen my father and was unconsciously trying to avoid it rather than accept it as it is. Nevertheless, I decided to do a little experiment on the usage of 'Siz' and 'Bey'. I was leading the design and delivery of a "world café" workshop, with a large group of clients, with three other junior consultants. During the workshop design meeting, I said I would like to have a less formal relationship with them during our work together and asked them to eliminate 'Siz' or 'Bey'. I remember them looking at each other, a bit puzzled, and then saying OK. I also remember noticing their struggle throughout the workshop design and delivery work to make the shift. I know today that I was challenging a widespread habit of seeing leaders as distant objects, even on occasions as myths. My challenge in shifting how people

relate to me as a leader and how I relate to them is bigger than in many Western countries, as I am doing it within a culture which has a well-established habit of respecting power difference, and where employees accept that superiors have more power than they have. Today, I also acknowledge another possibility that people may want a 'Siz' or 'Bey' with someone in leadership role which may offer a protection or a safe space for them.

## Conversations with Sinem and Can

To deepen my inquiry, I decided to have a conversation with Sinem who insisted on calling me as 'Bey' despite my earlier request. It was striking to hear what she said.

*We have been working together for more than 11 years. For a long time, probably until a very recent period, I would think you would not see me in the office. You would come back to the office from your travel and, sit behind your laptop. I would sometimes ask certain things and you would answer from behind your screen without any eye contact. That would drive me crazy. I would find you quite distant, and arrogant. It was ok for me as I would expect senior people to be distant, busy and impersonal. (Conversations with Sinem)*

When I read Sinem's comments, my response had a paradoxical quality. On one hand, she has chosen to be formal and stay with 'Bey', on the other side she has given me some of the most candid feedback I had received so far. Her response was sincere and full of emotions. As we kept talking, I felt I was discovering Sinem for the first time and the quality of our relationship had shifted. The paradoxical response continued - on one hand, I was feeling disappointed about my blindness and ignorance for so many years

while on the other I was touched and moved by the conversation. I continued with conversations to validate some of my understanding with others. I spoke with Can who made a comment which irritated me, because it challenged a dearly held fantasy I had – that of the visible, available leader:

*At that time, you were not visible. Most of the aspects of your life, what you do was mysterious to many people. Even people close to you did not know much about your life. You would come back from a trip and you would disappear. You did not have real contact and your primary way of interacting with people was email. I was thinking that you were hiding behind Lotus Notes.  
(Conversations with Can)*

Can thought that I was not an open person. What I understand is that I did not disclose much to others and kept many things to myself. According to Can, I was either travelling or away from people. My primary means of communicating according to him was via email, instead of face-to-face contact or other forms of direct and personal engagement. I could understand that I did not create enough one to one interaction opportunities with people around me.

As I brought my inquiry findings from Kayhan and Can together, it made sense that people would see me as distant. Indeed they were supporting Cuneyt's observation as well as each other by bringing consistent insights from their different perspectives. However at that time, I had not liked these comments and observations, because they challenged my delusional sense of self and my understanding of how close relationships are created. Here is an excerpt from a first person inquiry about these comments:

*I am noticing my disappointment at people seeing me hiding, being distant, formal or hidden behind a castle. It is similar to my reaction after the feedback in the ADOC group, which led me to inquire into intimacy. My disappointment sounds normal at first reading, but I also know that many executives would not mind it at all while some would even intentionally choose to be so. So why am I so nervous about being distant? It could be deeper than just worrying about my image at work. (August 2008)*

### *Exploring the roots: The thread of my father*

I can find a number of threads from my childhood about being distant and reserved. The first thread is rooted in my relationship with my father who was the first authority figure for me. I always experienced him as distant, not interacting much with me very much. I did not like our relationship. It was based on respect for authority. As I reflect, it makes sense to me that my personal experience with my father might be one of the drives behind my relentless efforts to be a likeable authority figure, where I am trying to prove that authority figures can be liked. When I heard feedback which was at odds with this ambition, I am led to assume that I have failed in my efforts to be a different kind of authority figure.

### *The thread of my mother*

The second thread I can speak to relates to my early childhood experience and my mother's approach to parenting. I had a protective mother who was worried about my well-being. In my country, during childhood, children learnt social skills by playing with their friends in their neighbourhood. I was one of those children who for a long time was not allowed to go out of home and play with his friends. I think

my mother was worried that something bad would happen to me. She was so protective that she would not agree to send me to kindergarten, thinking that I was too little to deal with it. We were living in an apartment block in the city centre at this time and our nice flat had a terrace, which gave my parents, particularly my mother, a good excuse to keep her children busy and playing at home. It was definitely seen as safer by my parents than playing in the neighbourhood. So I would spend most of my time keeping myself busy at home while other children of my age were out playing in the wider neighbourhood.

During these years, I would invent games to play on my own as I only had a baby girl sister who would be too young to join me. The positive side of my childhood experience was I learnt to take care of myself. The negative side was I had very limited opportunities for social interaction with children of my age and overall I was left with the experience that I did not like to be lonely and on my own at home. Seeing this as part of my current story, it makes sense that a child with such limited social interaction until the age of seven did and does not really feel comfortable about relationships as an adult. To go with this social isolation, I changed school a number of times during the first three years of my primary school years which further got in the way of developing robust social skills. My childhood strategy was to be visible amongst my friends through what I achieved academically at school, rather than through the strength of



my social network. And I learnt to work hard and get better results as a means of social acceptance.

### *Connecting my past to the present as Kayhan sees me*

My reflection about my childhood experience reminds me of another input from Kayhan about how he sees me at work:

*If I look back, I would see you being lonely despite the fact that we were quite a large team. You would disappear in certain cases. Sometimes you would seem to try to sort out lots of things on your own. You would not ask for much help if you had a problem. (Conversations with Kayhan)*

I have been working with Kayhan long enough to trust his perspective. I am also not sure if power dynamics significantly affect our relationship and so what he does and doesn't say to me – on balance I think his feedback is relatively clean of the influences of hierarchical distance. I am the head of the firm he works for but I see Kayhan as someone with an open mind, who I don't see as being intimidated by power differences. Therefore it was useful to hear from Kayhan how I am seen from the outside. And I wonder if the comments he attributes to me, might actually be him speaking about himself projecting those parts of himself he finds hard to own i.e. Kayhan talks about my being lonely which may be the case for him as he is generally away. But that is for Kayhan to address and outside of the scope of this thesis.

### *My habit of 'busyness' and its consequence*

When I pay attention to my quality of disappearance, as identified by

Kayhan and Can, it is easy to find reasons. When I am away, and not visible to others, I am indeed busy getting things done – there is a business to be run. However I can easily see that my preoccupation with getting things done was impeding my relationships at work and putting me in a solitary position. On the one hand I do not like being lonely, on the other my habit of working hard to create social acceptance through external success was making me distant and lonely. I can see here another living contradiction (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). Shaver, Collins, and Clark (1996) propose that expectations associated with working models tend to become self-fulfilling over time, so for example, being rejected can cause one to develop expectations of rejection and subsequently behave in ways that increase the likelihood of rejection. I am wondering whether the same was happening to me: a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## Reflections on my Inquiry into Intimacy with Four Conversational Partners

The inquiry process leading to this section has happened through conversations with four people. It started with my spontaneous encounter with Cuneyt where I was both disappointed and intrigued with his input, that people in the office might be finding me to be distant and fearful. My further inquiry conversations were informed by these themes.

### What I ignored (NEW)

I am surprised that I received the feedback while discounting my power position and without critically thinking about how people would perceive leaders and authorities in Turkey with its high power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010). One of the things that I may have missed in this inquiry could be evaluating these conversations against different factors such as my relationship dynamics or power differences.

### Paying attention to the relational context I spoke to (UPDATED)

My relational context with Cuneyt is distinctive, as I see him as a personal friend of mine. I know he wants to help me by making me aware of issues he believes it's useful for me to know about. His contacts within the company are either new recruits or younger people and I know that the younger people new joiners may be

projecting their perception of authority figures, based on unprocessed historical experience, onto people in leadership positions within the company.

When it comes to Kayhan, I once again seem to take his feedback as it is. I could have considered that he is away from the office and the team most of the time because of his heavy delivery schedule and it is a challenge for others to be with him. He also lives in a place that is far away from the office and near to woods, his sanctuary. It is striking that he would see me in a castle with the metaphor of rivals and enemies. As a critical reflection, I could review with him how he may have projected his experience of distance on to me. Also given that I am seeing intimacy as a reciprocal quality and not taking the sole responsibility for it, I could have questioned how others contributed to intimacy or lack of intimacy.

## The influence of language

The story about how I tried to engage with reframing intimacy in relationships through inviting people to work with a different language is of note – in my experiments in this area I hoped that intimacy could be achieved by avoiding the formal distance created by more formal language. I definitely needed to 'be accepted' as I am, not in the formal role denoted by the formal linguistic turn, and tried to satisfy it with a collection of people by inviting them (commanding them!) to communicate with me in an informal way. I

am trying to refuse/escape from 'formalities' as I find them forced and fabricated disallowing the space for intimacy. My assumption creates a split between the formal and informal, setting up a duality that my Sufi practice would immediately highlight as unhelpful.

### The relationships between the formal and informal

My critical friend, John, suggests that we should be able to find ways of bridging the formal and the informal by means of intimacy. In fact, formality in organisations helps create a sense of order and hierarchy, while informality may foster intimacy. I am trying to work to find a way to bring the two together, while still living with an assumption that the perception of power acts as an inhibitor to intimacy. And yet my practice and lived leadership reality means power is part of my experience.

### The relationship between power and being liked

At this point, I have an assumption that says people with power cannot be liked. I can relate this to my perception of power figures such as, especially as, my father whom I have experienced as distant, formal and not-so-loving. From this assumption, I also read of my desire to be liked or at least behave in a way that is informed by my subtle fear of rejection.

### My need to be liked and the fear of rejection

I know from transactional analysis that the desire to be liked and the fear of rejection may relate to Kahler's drivers as addressed by Hay

(1992) and also as an insecure 'anxious' attachment style as suggested by Bartholomew (1990). An 'Anxious' style indicates a sense of personal unworthiness combined with a positive evaluation of others. This combination of these characteristics leads a person to strive for self-acceptance by gaining the acceptance of valued others. Of note in my account of the conversations is my mentioning that I see myself challenging 'the traditional leadership norm', where leaders adopt a patrimonial role (as referred to in the overview of leadership theory). Yet when I am trying to avoid being like my father, I am also using a similar patriarchal frame of leadership, a noteworthy contradiction. While I am trying to avoid becoming like the authority figures in my past, I am actually acting like them, intrusively demanding that people change the way they call me. Wow! I am breathless. This is a real living contradiction (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

### What I was discounting

After my conversations with the people mentioned above, I became aware I was trying to change others' perception of me instead of changing my attitude towards them. This allowed me to discount what would have been difficult for me to accept, choosing not to see evidence that would contradict my lived script (Berne, 1968). Firstly, I was ignoring the fact that I was away from the office for large amounts of time. Instead of acting on this, I identified and took a substitute reaction, which was to address the challenge of intimacy by changing the way people named me. I am also struggling with the un-named

anxious need of not being liked or being experienced as a distant authority figure – with all the personal baggage that this connects into with my distant and intimidating experience of my father. I might well have been worried to be seen by people in the company as I saw my father. Because of this concern, I seem to have discounted my power position and possibly the responsibility that it requires.

### **Taking too much responsibility for intimacy in relationships**

One of the patterns in my inquiry and my reflections is that of taking full responsibility for the experience of intimacy rather than seeing intimacy as an interdependent, relational quality. I judge myself severely for not being intimate and ignore the socio-cultural context in Turkey, where the workplace is dominated by power distance and socially mandated deference to male authority figures. My tendency to take the whole responsibility for my relationships plays out in a habit of controlling leadership, in practice little different to the established norms of Turkish patriarchal leadership. As I try to avoid this traditional formal Turkish authority image, so I find myself acting with the assumption and scripts of a patriarchal leader.

### **Connecting the dots: Reflecting further on what this inquiry may mean to me (NEW)**

In the theory section, I wrote about two fundamental drives of human relating, the drive of love and and that of power, which can be seen as being similar to yin and yang. I would like to start by noticing how my

emerging definition for intimacy is associated with the framing of 'love' in this perspective.

I have defined intimacy as the process of building close relationships with others, inviting others to connect with me and reaching out to connect with others - while I have framed love as the drive to connect and make whole that which appears to be fragmented; this builds on the views of Tillich (1954), May (1969) and Kahane (2010). Intimacy then is a form of connection and love in this sense. As my practice is in the leadership domain, my inquiry on intimacy is then about exploring a quality of connection and love in a role which inevitably involves power.

As I explore how I can position my inquiry within these concepts, I notice that this inquiry acquires greater personal and professional meaning for me. Looking back at my academic and professional past, I see I have been an 'achiever' and this can be seen to connect to the drive of power. Kahane (2010) defines power as the drive to achieve, to get things done and to grow, and my life has been about this pursuit of power. Beyond being an 'achiever', I also intrinsically believed that the more successful I was/am the more I can/would be loved. A childhood story speaks to this assumption:

*I was about 11 when I had a major clash with my father, which ended with him beating me. That was the first and last time in our relationship he showed such physical aggression. I do not want to go into details of when, how, and why it happened but it had developed a rupture in my relationship with him. I was so angry with I did not want to talk to or see him for some weeks. I remember my*



*mother attempting to mend the relationship but it was useless. I would not give in. My father also would not say anything or would not try to talk to me. His reaction would shut me down even more. He was upset with what I had done and his attitude was, so I believe, that of simply wanting to make me feel guilty. I did not agree with his view and I did not want to feel guilty. In the end, I avoided him. I was just finishing primary school at the time and preparing for the next level. My grades and exam results were quite good and I got admission for a special category school. My achievement served as an excuse for my parents to try to 'reconnect' with me. I remember my mother coming to my room, trying to convince me to come and talk to my father. I was still sour because of what had happened but I was also happy for being accepted into the school. I just wanted to enjoy the good news and decided to forget about what had happened. I remember going to the living room to see my father. In Turkey, kissing a parent's hand is a sign of respect and acceptance of power. I could see my father's hand waiting for me. I did what a 'good Turkish boy' would do and then he hugged me. It was technically over. My 'success' had offered a good occasion to my father to excuse me at his end. (Alper Utku, Personal Journal, January 2009)*

This story marks a number of deeply rooted assumptions that I developed as a child. Today I know that I learnt as a child that it was easier to be loved when I was successful, as achievement had enabled me to reconnect with my parents. I am aware that such a decision would not take place with one incident, but the story speaks to a pattern. The only appreciation I remember in my childhood was about my scholastic achievements. Reflecting on this incident I can also see how achievement informed how I went about connecting with figures of authority.

My current role as a 'boss' or 'entrepreneur' fits well into my lifelong pursuit of success. My role gives me access to power and authority. It offers me endless opportunities for achievement which keeps me busy all the time. I know that my 'busyness' also serves as a good

excuse to avoid intimacy which is not a quality that I am used to. What I notice now, intimacy, is what an unknown territory it is for me – and how by engaging with it, so it may also shift my relationship to power, as well as how I relate to others when I am in organisational role associated with both formal and informal power. This is an area that I work with in the coming cycle.



## We Need to See You More – further First Person inquiry into Intimacy

This section includes my first person inquiry on intimacy in 2010. After Kayhan and Can, I wanted to have further inquiry conversations with more people.

### Conversations with Tarik

I decided to talk to Tarik who is one of our senior consultants who I see as a 'critical friend'. He has been working for the firm for more than five years. I asked Tarik how he perceived me as a leader in terms of my qualities of intimacy.

In contrast to others, Tarik did not think I had any issues around intimacy with him or others. He gave actual examples where he thought my skills in intimate contact had helped people's morale or made things better in the workplace. He thought, in his own words, I was 'real' and 'maskless', especially in one to one situations. Tarik's comments were pleasantly surprising for me, especially his unprompted description of me being 'real' and 'maskless'. However he brought up a new theme; he thought there were certain periods or incidents where I kept myself detached or disengaged, which made people like him frustrated. Here is a summary of our conversation:

*You have been away from the office for long time. We need your presence to bring balance and harmony to the team. Your presence makes a difference. I want to see you more. I know that other people want to see you more. I also want you to be present in the meetings you attend. When you are in a*

*meeting, I sometimes see that you are withdrawing yourself. You are almost disappearing. These are meetings where we actually need your input, we want your decision-making. That makes a big difference. Think about the meeting in 2007, which we had with consultants. That was the first time; I have seen you so active, courageous, intimate and present in that meeting. It was still my early years and I said 'Wow, this is an interesting place to work.' (Conversation with Tarik)*

I take away a few key messages from the conversation, especially around, 'we want to see you with us'. I have received similar comments from Can, Kayhan and a few others as well as Tarik. They valued that and it made a difference for them to see me around. Presence matters.

## Being present in a virtual world

One of my assumptions had been that I could perform leadership virtually using email, Skype and other technologies. Caultat (2012) suggests that we should radically reconsider notions of being present, learning to lead in the virtual space. However, my conversations started to make me think that indeed physical contact is still valued – or at least it is in my context, which is a medium sized consulting firm based in Turkey.

The second message that I took from the conversation from Tarik is 'and when you are with us, we want to see you in full presence.' For me presence is emotionally and physically engaging with the other party, with full awareness and being present in my role as an authority figure. This comment reminds me of a dilemma that I face in my culture.

## The challenge of being present in Turkish culture

Autocratic leadership is the dominant style of leadership in Turkey (Pasa, Kabasakal and Bodur, 2001) with great power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010), a high degree of conservatism and hierarchy (Schwartz, 1994), as well as a paternalistic norm when it comes to leadership behaviour (Kanungo and Aycan, 1997). This expresses itself through a great deal of respect being shown towards leaders, frequently getting exaggerated into an unconditional acceptance of a leader's acts, with respect and compliance becoming conflated attributes. In team settings this plays out in the leader enjoying exceptional influence and even dominance.

## Providing non-autocratic input

However if a leader with a collaborative approach wants to engage or interact with his team, it may become a challenge within Turkey. Subordinates will mostly allow their leaders to have greater voice, space and influence. In my case, I have always struggled to maintain a balance between domination and holding back. This struggle leads to hesitation to engage at certain times and people see me as holding back and not showing presence. I know from theory that speaks most compellingly to me that leadership is a participative act and takes place in social processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The quality of the relationship is as critical as the attributes of the leader. In this regard, I see intimacy, emotional awareness and being in the moment as critical factors for the quality of the relationship. I believe that they

support each other. Emotional awareness helps create a stronger sense of intimacy while being in the moment is needed for emotional awareness. I will explore this more in the next cycle.

The final message I took from the Tarik conversation was: 'we want your input and decision making'. When I first heard this comment, I thought it was a call for me to be an autocratic leader, meeting expectations for me to use my power and authority to take decisions in the firm. This challenges one of my starting assumptions; I had thought that as our consulting teams are formed of highly skilled and knowledgeable people, who manage themselves most of the time, they didn't need a leader to make decisions for them. When I checked this with Tarik, I heard him wanting me to participate and contribute more actively in the decision making process. He accepts that I should take a collaborative role, but where things get stuck, he believes I should use my influence and power to get things moving.

In the next section, I will be sharing my first person inquiry in a meeting with the consultants that Tarik had talked about. It was a significant meeting for me, being one of my first attempts to 'get out of my castle', using the metaphor Kayhan used.

## Reflecting on the Tarik conversation

I remember being surprised by Tarik's response and how the conversation led me towards the new themes of presence and power, which sat alongside my continuing inquiry into intimacy. I can see

today that presence is related to 'power within' as identified by VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) and it also links to the Sufi notion of presence which is a part of Sufi path of development.

## Noticing my filters

I notice I had applied some filters when I read and used the Tarik conversation data. I hardly noticed the message about power relations despite several readings and cycles of inquiry. I also did not critically review what Tarik means with his message about 'my presence bringing balance and harmony to the team'. I could have inquired into what makes the team imbalanced and disharmonious. I could have asked more about what difference I make as a leader, so that I am perceived as aiding harmony and balance. I am also aware that I had not noticed this comment when I read this interview before.

## *Noticing my assumptions about the nature of power and authority*

I also think about my relationship with power and authority. I am noticing my assumption that power and authority is something good for the leader but not so good for subordinates. I notice that I can create boundaries for my team members, using my power, and this can be comforting for them like the meeting with consultants.

As I inquire, I am able to notice some of my assumptions about leading. One is that a group of people, such as consultants, can be self-leading without much interaction with the formal leader outside of the group. This is indeed an 'I-It' perspective of leading (Buber,



2000), where I am an 'It' to be invoked by the group, not an active relational presence. What I am missing is that as a leader who has the power to make significant decisions about where and what the company does, my interactions with them may create focus on critical issues and mobilise people or resources to take action. For example, Tarik talks of a meeting with consultants where I participated in the conversation, sharing my perspective in an intimate and courageous way, positively influencing Tarik's quality of engagement with the firm. I believe Tarik likes to see me as an intimate leader; my conversation with him which makes me think that power and intimacy can co-exist when a leader demonstrates I-Thou qualities (Buber, 2000).

### *My binary approach to leadership – domination or withdrawal*

Another assumption I noticed is that I could either dominate or withdraw in a group setting. My learning here is that I can participate without domination. I know now that my participation is useful and valued by team members. Indeed participation is about taking responsibility when that is appropriate. It means listening and taking in others' views and input and make decisions. That's not the same as being dominant.

I have learnt to appreciate that leadership is relational and it is the quality of the relationship that makes the difference, a leader's intimate participation in the relationship may make a positive impact (Ladkin, 2010). I also learnt that it is not enough to pay attention to leaders' attributes, as it is equally important to focus on what happens

in the relationship.

### *Noticing my single loop learning style*

As a critical reflection, I can say that I seem to accept Tarik's comments with limited criticality and jump into a new theme rather quickly. I am indeed remaining at the single loop learning without moving to reflective double loop learning (Schon, 1983). With the help of critical reflection, I may have explored further. I could also explore triple loop learning which may bring up the question of what this inquiry is for. In this sense, I could link it to my Sufi learning and could see it as an example of triple loop learning for me.

### *Deepening my attention to the sense I make of Tarik*

I could reflect more on my relationship with Tarik, with whom I share a lot when it comes to personal development and the resonance his comments have on me. He is a close in-group member for me, in the terminology of Leader-Member Exchange theory. Leader-Member Exchange Theory as developed by writers such as Gerstner and Day (1997), Graen et al. (1982) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) sees leadership occurring through one-to-one relations between a 'leader' and a 'follower'. According to the theory, leaders form different kinds of relationships with various groups of subordinates. One group, referred to as the in-group, has closer relationships with the leader. Members of the in-group receive considerably more attention from the leader and have more access to the organizational resources. By

contrast other subordinates fall into the out-group. These individuals are not as close to the leader as the in-group. As such, they receive less attention from their leaders.

I could have explored how Tarik relates to power and authority in comparison to some people in out-group positions. My assumption is that he is not intimidated by power and authority, unlike the common culture. Tarik has more of a low power distance preference and he is not greatly in favour of hierarchical structures, and is a strong believer in participation. It may be that he doesn't see me as having an issue with intimacy, as he is comfortable with power and authority. I am aware that these are my assumptions of Tarik and we could both inquire into these assumptions as well.

My first person inquiry in this section has led to another inquiry theme that I have labelled as 'presence'. I was intrigued that various people were giving me similar feedback about presence, as I was inquiring into intimacy. What I understand from presence is intimate participation in a relationship. I will write more about what I mean by presence and share my first person inquiry about 'presence' in the following sections.

## First Person Inquiry in the Company of Consultants

This section relates to a first person inquiry based on an account of a meeting with consultants held early 2007. Before I move into the details of the meeting with consultants, let me start by describing the context for the meeting, as I see context as an important dynamic for understanding leadership.

### Organisational context

Our business has two companies, one in Turkey and the other in the Middle East. I started the Turkish operation in 1992 and was directly involved in its management until 1999. The Turkish operation has grown very fast and become even bigger than the Middle East operation within those years. Hamdi, my partner and founder of the Middle East operation, asked me if I would be in charge of the Middle East, which was going through some turbulence at that time. After some consideration, I accepted Hamdi's offer and became Managing Director for the Middle East in 1999 - in addition to my management role in Turkey. The Middle East operation covered a large territory with offices and clients in Belgium, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The business in Turkey had a strong client base already and I assumed that it would run smoothly with only my part time attention. I was able to manage the two companies together for the first couple of years. In fact, 2000 was one of the best years in history for both regions. Then a local financial crisis hit Turkey in 2001 and the Istanbul office needed more attention to get through

tough times. Kayhan introduced me to Can who was heading the local office of an international HR consultancy. I was impressed with him and he seemed to be interested. Can did join as Managing Director of Istanbul office in 2002. After six months of working together for orientation, I started to step back and leave Can to lead the business on his own. My assumption was I could be like Hamdi - a silent partner - and let Can manage the business by supporting him with routine strategic reviews. This assumption proved correct for some time as the business kept growing. I was extensively travelling in the Gulf developing business and Can was working hard to grow the Turkish operation. These were the years where people said I was away and Can was in charge.

### **My return to Istanbul in 2005**

By 2005, both companies had reached our historical best years in terms of revenue and profit. Financials were good but I could sense some organisational issues building up and I was worrying if they could compromise the sustainability of the business. I was hearing that a number of key members of the consultant team in Istanbul were considering leaving, because they were not happy with the way the business was being managed or they were being treated. The account below was one of my first reappearances at the Istanbul office other than board meetings. Both Can and I were worried that some key consultants were on the brink of leaving, unable to see how they were a valued part of the team. Our intention was to propose a

different working model, which Can and I hoped would make things better. Here is what I wrote about this meeting in my earlier paper:

*I was expecting a difficult meeting as there were sensitive issues, many powerful characters in the group and loaded agendas. To be honest, I was horrified to be there. It was one of those meetings where I was praying that something miraculous would happen and it would not take place. However, it did not work that way, or maybe it did. Let me explore what went on a bit more.*

*A couple of hours before the workshop, I had suggested to Can, who was going to lead the workshop introduction, to leave "pride and prejudice" out and just be there and work with an open mind. I was indeed proposing to Can to be in the meeting 'here and now' in an unconditional fashion with full awareness. According to Gestalt, the mastery is about becoming an "awareness expert" by remaining focused on the present, on being present-centred. Latner (1986) explains that to be 'aware of the present, to be totally in it, ensures that the self is functioning as it is meant to'. I can make sense of the theory conceptually but bringing it to life was not an easy task for me at the time. I was anxious to make sure that we would not have a major conflict. My biggest fear was losing some of our consultants. Therefore I was feeling quite tense at the beginning of the workshop. Can did the introduction and started to talk about concepts and structures. I could see from the body language that people were already a bit impatient. I was speculating in my mind if they needed to hear something more tangible, like compensation. I was getting nervous as the conversation felt like it was circling around. I could sense that the energy was shifting and there was a need for much straighter talk but I could not be sure what it would be about. (Module 2 VIVA Paper, 16 March 2008)*

## Noticing my pattern of anxiety

As I read this section of the account today, the first thing I notice is my anxiety. As the account records, I was worried we faced a major conflict. The duality that played out for me was a perfectly reasonable concern for the company's sustainability, while on the other hand I was anxious about making a mistake and losing the relationship – an increasingly recognisable pattern for me. It is a pattern of anxiety that

happens before important events and sometimes works against me. However in this case, I am aware of my anxiety and my awareness keeps me in the moment.

## The impact of personal storytelling on my leadership

*Then somebody asked a question about 'why we do what we do'. I was not expecting such a question but I felt an urge to respond as the founder of the firm. I asked Can's permission to respond. As I started to talk, I found myself reflecting about my personal purpose and the meaning I find in what I do. I talked about why I do what I do, what makes me get up in the morning and come to work. I have told a personal story that relates to my passion for my work. I was getting a emotional and one could sense it from the tone of my voice. I could see that my sharing was interesting for the group. I could see them listening to me; they were engaged. After my response, one of the consultants reacted by doing the same thing, telling us where he found meaning and why he is here. That encouraged others to share their perspectives. I was amazed at the level of openness and the willingness to share their innermost feelings. After a while, I could see the mould breaking. Walls were coming down.*

*I could sense that the tension was leaving the group and in its place a sense of wonder was growing. I was wondering what was going on in the room. It was interesting to see how a 'spontaneous act' could change the course of the meeting without having planned it. It turned out to be a special experience. When I reflect on this experience, I can identify this as intimacy as an interpersonal process involving disclosure of personal information, thoughts, and feelings to another and receiving a response (Reis and Shaver, 1988). I can relate this spontaneous act of disclosure to a fresh sense of connectedness between us. It stays with me as a 'living moment' being 'spontaneous, immediate and not pre-mediated' (Shotter, 1993: 5). It is a living but equally extraordinary exchange in a 'free-flowing conversation in which themes arise, evolve and shift spontaneously' where we understand ourselves as engaged in the co-created, open-ended, never complete activity of jointly constructing our future, not as the realisation of a shared vision, but as emerging courses of action that make sense of going on together' (Shaw, 2002: 12). This was a quite different experience than a meeting with a pre-set agenda, guidelines or process. It makes me rethink some of our managerial ways of acting as the spirit of that meeting managed has survived, even after several months. I can highlight this meeting as a debut for a new generation of gatherings, which promise rich data for my inquiry. (Module 2 VIVA Paper, 16 March 2008)*

This meeting has a significant place in my inquiry where I experimented with a new way of being as a leader. What really happened there to change the course of the meeting? Reflecting on my account, I can see that the course of the meeting changed when I did the 'spontaneous' intervention. My intervention made a strong imprint on the meeting, changing its pace, direction and agenda. What was it about my intervention that made a difference? I had shared something very personal, without worrying about pushing a certain agenda. I had done it with sincerity. As I was sharing it, I was there with all of my emotions, body and mind - I was fully alive.

While I shared and was present in a lively way, the invisible distance and disconnection between me and others lessened. Dachler and Hosking (1995) define leadership as a conversational process of meaning making. I am curious what happens in the conversational process that helps a group of people connect better. I am thinking my participation with intimacy has helped me make a connection and also notice how my high status position may have helped the situation as a result of my exchange. I can see that after I shared my story, the group were encouraged to share their inspirations. I did not have this much awareness at the time and intervened in a genuine fashion without any plan. It was spontaneous and almost impulsive; if I'd planned it I would have needed a great deal of courage to share such personal material. My executive persona disappeared and I showed my vulnerability, which enabled others to do likewise. I remember



Kayhan's comment:

*You used to hide behind your imaginary castle that you had built for yourself. When you were behind the castle, you would see others outside the castle as a rival or enemy. It is normal to be afraid of enemies. (Conversations with Kayhan)*

Then I read my statement ‘*I could see the mould breaking. Walls were coming down.*’ I am becoming aware of something fundamental shifting. Whose walls were they? When I was writing the account for the first time, I was assuming that it was other people's walls. I am now aware now these were probably my own, self-constructed, protective walls. I was in my castle, possibly hiding. Then the threat was so big outside that I had to step out from my castle to deal with it. I stepped out with great fear, saw the crowd and made the utterance – told my story. This meeting was one of the first examples of my close contact with the whole team after being away for a long while. It is one of the early demonstrations of intimate conversations being part of my practice as a leader, intimacy with the quality of self-disclosure. I also see it as a significant event in the way the team perceived me as a leader and how I showed up as a leader. Here is evidence from a conversation that supports my assumption.

*That was the first time; I have seen you so active, courageous, intimate and present in that meeting. It was still my early years and I said 'Wow, this is an interesting place to work with.'* (Conversation with Tarik)

Tarik also refers to this as a significant meeting, which shaped his impression of the company. I asked him what made him find the

company interesting. He said he was not used to leaders making contact in such a way as he'd seen me do in the meeting. He thought I was not trying to be like somebody else, I was being real. He also experienced me being different from how I'd been with him and the team in the past. For Tarik it was my presence, full of emotions and engagement, which had made the difference.

Being an intimate leader therefore includes a quality of emotional engagement different to a leader who speaks without feeling, who employs 'management speak' and aims to take emotions out of decisions and their personal presence. I will explore emotional presence in depth in the next cycle.

### **Reflecting on the implications for my leadership practice (NEW)**

As I read and reflect now, this account has an important place in my inquiry; it signifies my embracing of a different quality of relating as a leader to the consulting team. In my specific experience, a leader who is acting as a role model, sharing personal stories and aspirations, may initiate and facilitate the co-construction of an intimate process. This is consistent with a relational perspective, which mixes together functional and influence-based notions of relationships and proposes that relationships are inherently communicative acts, involving written and spoken language as well as nonverbal actions and events (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Hosking, 2000). For the relational leader, leadership is a process of relational dialogue in which organisational members

engage and interact to construct knowledge systems together rather than seeing leadership as a means for personal dominance - as put forward in traditional leader-centric models or the form of interpersonal influence described by Drath (2001).

In this particular case with the consultants, I see that the conversation was helpful in constructing a relational basis for us to engage together, rather than being in the service of building a knowledge system. I conclude that it was particularly inviting for people from the Turkish culture, which tends to be highly collective with a pattern of relating that privileges the group identity over that of the individual. I also understand that it appealed to some who were attracted to a different type of a leader from their previous experience, one who was willing to share personal aspirations without being worried about vulnerability or protecting his power distance.

### What I wasn't paying attention to

The meeting was different from the past where the process would be that of either presentation or discussion. In this specific case, this meeting stands out with its conversational qualities and the breadth of connection it offered to people and the nature of the invitation they were invited to respond to.

### *Noticing the power of the other as well as the leader*

On reflection, I can see I could pay more attention to the power dynamics in the story as there is a power negotiation happening

between the company management and the consultants. Can and I, who represent the top management of the firm, were putting forward a new work contract for consultants. I am aware that due to our top management roles, we have a powerful formal and social position. However I am anxious in the meeting because, despite my formal position, I am aware that the consultants also have power in the relationship as the company is vulnerable if they leave. The company was (and is) dependent on its people; it takes a long time to replace an experienced consultant. They had a powerful position because they were the delivery force of the firm and the success of the business greatly relied on them. My assumption was we would suffer if they left. On the one hand, I was and am aware that the consultants' power is a one off power (the power to quit) and is not like the persistent, positional power I have. In addition the existing contractual agreements with consultants were flexible, allowing the company to operate with less working capital.

*Power relations as a delicate balance of enabling and constraining*

Drawing on the work of Elias (2000), relationships can be seen to provide leaders and followers alike with a delicate balance of enabling and constraining expressions. When I am in a relationship, I enable others and others enable me. Similarly, I may constrain others and others may be constraining me in the same relationship. Power takes place within this enabling and constraining relationship where the power balance may shift in favour of one party depending on the

relative need each party has for each other (Griffin and Stacey, 2005). In my case, I was in the position of business owner and there were other parties who were part of the power dynamics. I am now aware that this was why I found it difficult, scary, delicate and sensitive – power was not solely to do with me. What I am also noticing is the outcome of the meeting is not clearly given in the account. How did it work? Was it positive? I should have shared that after that meeting we were able to introduce a new working model and this model served us successfully for a number of years. I could also have brought into a more figural perspective that the 'disclosing' style, exemplified in this meeting, served as an encouraging example for future meetings - as well as group activities in the company.

### *Maintaining a critical response to the comments of others*

Reflecting on my reading of comments about the inquiry I see that in Tarik's case I am not very questioning about what he said. From a power perspective, my role may affect his comments, which I have presented as being very positive. My assumption about Tarik is that he would not care about my status and would share his thoughts freely, without consideration of my positional status. But I could have asked him if my role had any impact on his comment (although to ask that still comes from a position of me being in role!). I could do the same for Kayhan's comment about the imaginary castle even though he seems very challenging. His comment was helpful because it made me aware of how I relate to world at times – and there is a possibility

that his comment could be a general comment based on his general judgement towards authority figures; more of a comment about him than me.

### *Evidence of my growing reflexivity*

I like the reflexivity in the account where I start to take responsibility for my contribution to relationships, reflecting on my comment about 'walls coming down'. I have started to see that I was reacting to those opposing me as a threat and closing myself down. However, in the light of my experience, I started to change my assumptions and become aware of a paradox where the more I hide behind the walls, the more I feel alienated and worried. This belief justifies a saying in Sufism that 'we become enemies of what we don't know'. If I disclose myself through dialogue to those that I used to protect myself from, they in turn would disclose and participate in the dialogue through which we can now become closer and more supportive to each other, rather than being distant and in opposition to each other. This has been a ground-breaking learning for me in this cycle.

## Reflections and Learning from the First Cycle (UPDATED)

Intimacy has been an emergent theme as a result of first person inquiry.

### My original questions and process

In the beginning of this cycle (2007), I had the following questions in my mind

- How can I define intimacy?
- Am I an intimate leader?
- How can I practice intimacy as a leader?

As it became an emergent theme, I started to talk to people as a way of pursuing outer arcs of attention (Marshall, 2001). I brought my inquiry findings to their attention to test out my ideas.

## The need to 'Show up' and the need to connect

As I had conversations, I realised they were offering me an extended theme, identifying some of those other practical relational qualities that are present before and within intimacy. I was not being physically present with people most of the time and when I was present, I was not there with sufficient social interaction – present behind my laptop. I did not fully understand what intimacy meant but I kept inquiring, dealing with the social and personal tensions of being in a culture that paid deference to formal authority, to power without intimacy.

I had heard similar comments from my colleagues in the doctorate group. For example, I noted the following feedback from Kathleen, one of our supervisors, regarding a paper submitted at the end of first module of the doctorate:

*'You are very clear about what attracts you to this topic. I am less clear about your actual practice. What kind of work do you do? What kind of consultant are you?'*(Supervisor Feedback, 2006)

Kathleen's comment was not the only example. I remember one from one of my classmates, made during a workshop in May 2007, saying she could not see me in my inquiry. I remember that moment vividly still. I was looking at her feeling puzzled, almost in pain as I tried to understand what she meant. I was finding it difficult to understand, as I was assuming that my stories were including me. However, I heard on various occasions that something was missing in my inquiry; finally I realised that I was missing in my inquiry. I was hiding behind abstract



expressions and concepts, keeping 'myself' to myself. I was missing in my practice and in my inquiry. I heard a similar comment several times from Bill, my doctorate supervisor. Showing up in the Doctorate was as difficult as showing up in at work.

*'We know that you are doing very interesting work but you are not bringing it forward. It is not manifested in your inquiry.'* (Supervisor Feedback, February 2008)

Throughout the inquiry, I have come to learn that leadership develops in relationship with others and intimacy is an energising, enlivening dynamic in helping relationships evolve and take new forms. In the context of my consulting firm, when I disclosed myself and shared certain things that I would normally keep to myself, it has helped grow the quality of intimacy in the relationships between consultants and formal leaders of the firm and possibly to client relationships. I have come to appreciate that leadership is an act of participation where a shared meaning is co-constructed with members of the team by means of conversations, narratives and/or stories – and in my case the courage to demonstrate emotional presence. I call it 'showing up' and have seen examples in a number of cases, particularly in the account of the meeting with consultants. In Turkey, team members pay attention to leaders as role models and this sense of connection has grown further as each individual in the group has taken it as an invitation and done the same. Therefore intimacy has made it easier both for me and the group to relate to each other and has opened up new possibilities for us.

## Examining my lived practice: My imbalanced focus on achievement (NEW)

As I reflect on my lived practice in the light of my learning so far, I notice that I am experiencing a tension between the two fundamental (as I now see them) drives of power and love.

The Power drive is associated with the need to achieve things. In my inquiry, I realised that this drive for achievement has had a major influence on my lived practice. When I look at my whole life, I see that I've been focused on the power/achievement aspects of leading and being. When I was a student, it was about getting good grades. I see my choice of leadership role in my business as a manifestation of this drive. As the leader of a consulting firm, I have defined my purpose in terms of being successful and achieving tangible and externally recognised outcomes. I can also see the impact of my achievement drive on my daily practice as I can see in the feedback I've received about being socially present (or rather absent) to this drive. I am becoming aware that I have always given priority to business success as manifested in new projects or sales. My preference for business development inevitably kept me away from the office and I did not allocate time, or see it as important, to connect with people in the team. I was away for new business development and did not have occasions for close contact and connection. I can now see that in the deepest parts of my desire for power, there was a hope that through power I would be successful and loved – I hoped that by engaging

more and more deeply with my Power drive so I would somehow encounter love and intimacy. I now see that I had a life script with an imbalanced desire for power which was costing me too much – and give me what I most deeply, and secretly, desired. However I did not know any other way to find a way to experience love; it had to be through the burden of power, or not at all.

### Denial for power (NEW)

I was not only unaware of my deep-seated and overwhelming desire for power but I was also discounting the power associated with my role. Rollo May (2007) talks about the contradiction of denying our desire for power while trying to cover it up with what is actually a high degree of power. He claims that this contradiction grows out of an element of guilt for having power. I am curious if I have such guilt and why; I will explore this in the next cycle of my inquiry. May (2007) also warns that this inner contradiction is not helpful as it paralyses our options to act upon power. Moreover it does not lead to the sense of responsibility that acknowledged and owned power might entail, since one/I cannot develop responsibility for what someone doesn't admit they have (May 2007, p. 53). Given this perspective, I can see that some of my actions were missing such a sense of responsibility, given my lack of attention to or conscious awareness of the implications of the power dynamics within the relational context of my inquiry conversations e.g. My encounters with Cuneyt and my attempt to use language to bridge power distance.

## Discovering two wings (NEW)

Then through my first cycles of inquiry, I have discovered that something was missing and it was intimacy, a drive for deeper connection. Building on this desire for a deeper connection with others, intimacy has emerged as a strong theme in my inquiry. I started to realise that I was becoming something less than human with my achievement focus. As a part of my Sufi learning, I have discovered that intimacy is an important part of Sufi tradition. In Sufi tradition, *uns* or intimacy signifies a spiritual state in which the heart becomes permeated by love, which is practiced through contemplating the Names of Beauty such as Gentleness, Mercy and Forgiveness. As Rumi says, "You were born with wings, why prefer to crawl through life" (Barks, 1995). In this verse, I see the metaphor of 'two wings' as the two interdependent dynamics of power and love. Focusing only on achievement was like crawling instead of living with my wings of power and love.

The tension here speaks for me to the dualistic view of leadership that I highlighted in the theory section. The dualistic view of leadership imposes an either-or perspective, where I can either have a power/achievement focus or love/relationship focus. Discovering this duality in my life and my practice has been at the heart of my inquiry. As I started to inquire into intimacy, I learned ways to make these potentially opposing qualities coexist. As I moved from being a traditional commanding Turkish patriarchal 'boss' to a relational,

present and integrated 'leader', I started to seek out how I can connect with all my qualities and all the qualities of those I work with in a more intimate and co-created way.

### Looking at my frames and examining assumptions (REVISED)

As I defined intimacy in the earlier sections of the cycle, I was carrying an assumption that intimacy is a personal quality that one can use as appropriate. On top of that, I seem to have had a subtle belief that I can grow it as a personal skill that can be developed with awareness and practice. This perspective is similar to the entity leadership perspective coined by Uhl Bien (2006). The entity perspective can be found in traditional leadership literature in which leadership is seen as a personal quality that can be regulated, controlled and developed (Yukl, 2006; Carroll and Levy, 2010; Karp and Helgo, 2009; Uhl Bien, 2006). This perspective sees the individual as the locus of leadership: leadership is performed by individuals who have the appropriate traits, attributes or styles and engage in measurable leader behaviours (Antonakis et al, 2003). I can trace a similar perspective in certain parts of this inquiry. For example in the account where Cuneyt mentions that team members find me distant and fearful, I am looking for clues and ways to fix it as a personal quality. I can see my assumption in comments like "On one hand, I was trying to be intimate and close and yet I was perceived as formal, distant and even fearful for some". In the same cycle, I realised that I was taking the full responsibility for intimacy in my work relationships, despite social

norms and cultural issues having a significant impact.

### *Examining boundaries*

As I examine boundaries of my perspective, I can see relational dynamics affecting intimacy in my leadership - such as the existence of in-groups or out-groups. Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory highlights the importance of recognising the impact of in-groups and out-groups. In-group members signify people that are closer to the leader where the leader have entrusted such members of the group whereas out-group members may not be so close to the leader. According to LMX theory, leaders may form better interpersonal relationships with in-group members while they may have distance with out-group members (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Graen, 1991; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). When I review the account with Cuneyt using the LMX perspective, I now see that the comment is mainly coming from out-group members. I have conducted a number of inquiry conversations since Cuneyt's comment and have included responses from colleagues like Kayhan and Tarik who could be considered to be in-group members. Tarik's response contradicted Cuneyt's feedback and the difference might be explained by the differences of relationship quality that exist for in-group and out-group members.

### *Influence of the context*

Context may also have a major influence on intimacy. For example, in

the case of the meeting with consultants, it made a difference to have a safe space allowing us to bring in our vulnerabilities and share our aspirations, rather than dominating proceedings by making a presentation on revised organisational procedures. In this contained space, I felt a stronger intimacy by participating as a person beyond my role. On these occasions, I can actively contribute to the intimacy of a relationship by showing willingness to share what is considered very personal, such as stories, aspirations and emotions. Such sharing and self-disclosure particularly encouraged others in the group to join in and share their stories.

Building on my reflection here, I am curious if intimacy stands as a quality of the relationship rather than a singular, personal attribute.

A relational perspective on leadership sees leaders and team members sharing the responsibility in constructing mutual meaning working with multiple realities and making it possible for different realities to be heard and respected. A relational perspective changes the focus from the individual to the collective, including a multiplicity of inter-personal combinations and contextual interactions (Fletcher, 1999). It also means taking seriously the invisible web of connections that people build, that will inform who is trusted and when, what it is safe to share and not share, what is private and what is public. By looking at the story with a relational perspective, I can appreciate that there is a shared sense of intimacy that emerges in the relationship influenced by the context and all parties' perceptions and

interactions.

This view extends my learning and creates new possibilities for me to relate as a leader. Taking intimacy as a quality of relationship then, my unit of analysis in my leadership practice may rather be the relationships I am part of rather than myself as an individual. It encourages me to shift my focus of interest to what happens in relationships that create or manifest the qualities of intimacy.





## Given my insights from this Section what would I expect to see in my current leadership practice? (NEW)

This cycle has provided me a number of insights about how I relate to others. By inquiring into intimacy, I have become aware of my self-identification with achievement and my life script as an achiever. As I write, I am realising that my strong achievement record had reinforced a deeply rooted narcissistic attitude where I would think that I was someone special. I also believe that my childhood story of timidity reveals two relevant patterns. Firstly, it indicates that I did not know how to establish deeper connections with people. Secondly it may have involved a sense of false modesty and psychological game playing to hide narcissistic tendencies.

Building on my learning from this cycle, I can expect to stop denying the power associated with my leadership role.

I would also expect to see intimacy manifesting more in my day-to-day practice, how I show up and invite others to show up (and allow myself to be invited to be present). It would involve an acceptance and appreciation of all the qualities of what makes me human. I would practice intimacy both with myself as well as with others and make it part of my daily living. My Sufi teaching tells me that intimacy requires acting with gentleness and kindness. I would act in this way not because I have to, but because of my deep

awareness of power and the sense of responsibility associated with my role. It would mean learning new habits of relating such as creating time and space for sharing with my colleagues. By doing so, I may harmonise my relationship to power which could shift my story towards a deeper connection with what makes us all human. I would expand the new story by engaging in and learning about new ways of relating as a leader which will be the focus of my next cycle.

### **How is my current practice falling short – and why? (NEW)**

My practice may fall short for several reasons. Firstly, the need for commercial focus and drive in the business which in many cases unconsciously tilts my balance towards achievement. With the aim of responding to business priorities I sometimes may ignore the need to create time and space for intimacy and connection. I have learnt this from my various conversations with Can, Kayhan, Sinem and Tarik.

Secondly there is the contextual water I live in i.e. the prevailing notion of leadership in Turkey with its intimacy denying power distance. Such a distance is not only imposed by those in power positions but is also invited by followers who encourage leaders to behave this way through their ways of acting, communicating and relating in the presence of powerful others. I am an inseparable part of this context. This was my learning from my reflection on the feedback from Cuneyt. Despite my efforts to step into and champion a different way of leading, I may show the behaviours of a patriarchal

manager and act like a living contradiction.

### What does my learning imply for the next cycle? (NEW)

My reflection and learning so far signifies a need for intimacy, a sense of deeper connection with myself and others, an awareness that connecting with others at a personal level was as important as getting things done and a desire to balance the achievement focus with relational qualities. This cycle has offered me a few early examples, like the meeting with consultants, that such a shift could be possible. Building on the insights from this cycle, I have planned and implemented the second cycle. The next cycle is about exploring and integrating new ways of relating in my practice and offers further examples, such as group process work, which builds on my learning in the current cycle.



## Summary of my Inquiry Process in the First Cycle (NEW)

### How I decided to inquire into intimacy (NEW)

Deciding on my current inquiry focus happened after a doctorate workshop in 2006. In this workshop, I received a significant piece of feedback from my peers that I was not revealing myself in the relationship. When I reflected on this feedback, it had a powerful impact on me, which I paid attention to and captured in my journal which I will share in the cycle. While I wrote in my journal, I realised I was touching on a personally significant topic like intimacy.

### How I framed and selected my inquiry theme (NEW)

Framing my inquiry has not been an easy process. The focus had shifted for some time until I selected the theme of intimacy after some first person inquiry and reflection. After my peer feedback and sense making through the process of journaling, I wrote a first person inquiry exploring what intimacy meant to me. This piece is included in this cycle.

### How I explored the context of the issue and its significance (NEW)

After selecting and framing my inquiry as a first person activity, I reflected on the outcome and shared it with my peer colleagues and supervisor in an action learning set. Following the feedback I received from my peers, I further explored the area using a narrative inquiry to

get to the roots of the significance of the topic. This led me to inquire into my personal history. I wrote about my findings and then made sense of it with the help of theory.

I shared my findings with my supervisor and critical friends. After their feedback, and a further round of personal reflection, I developed my definition of intimacy and clarified this definition by critically engaging with different theoretical frames.

### **How I planned my inquiry (NEW)**

Once I knew that I wanted to inquire into intimacy, I wanted to take it to my professional practice and explore it in my work as an organisational leader. I identified a number of colleagues to have conversations with and contacted them in person, telling them of my intention and asking for their input. After an initial conversation, I planned a number of meetings with each of them. I did not have a clear selection criterion at the time but later on realised some of the unconscious criteria I had used for selecting my conversation partners. I cover this in the reflection section.

### **Which process and methods I followed for my inquiry (NEW)**

In my first person research practice, one to one conversations have served as a valuable research method. They allowed me to bring different voices into my inquiry, hear different perspectives and receive feedback. I organised these conversations as informal meetings which generally took place in a location outside of the

office, typically a café. I chose locations with quiet and comfortable seating facilities, with each meeting taking between 1 and 2 hours. I prepared a set of questions beforehand but also paid attention to emerging issues as they arose and explored new questions in response to them. I took notes as we spoke and also recorded our conversations, keeping the meeting data for future reference. From it I developed written accounts and used them for the first person inquiry. Every once in a while I have shared my writing with my supervisor, revising it in the light of the feedback or the new insights provoked by the conversation.

### **How I worked with outcomes (NEW)**

Throughout the process, I re-read my texts – looking for double and triple loop learning (Schon, 1983). With every reading, I questioned my framing, habits and unconscious patterns, trying to notice my behaviours and understand the impact of my actions on others. Using new insights from the process, I improved my sense making of the accounts and the overall cycle of inquiry. As I worked with the data, I also brought in relevant theories to explore my experience further. Sometimes my engagement with theory led me to learn more and in many cases additional reading gave me a new ideas and insights for my inquiry. I included this and continued, working in an iterative process. My Sufi practice has served as a parallel learning process during the inquiry process. My Sufi learning providing me with new perspectives on what I was learning, while at the same time my



inquiry encouraged me to engage and explore more deeply into the Sufi tradition.

After a period of reasonable progress, I shared my work and learning with my supervisor as well as my critical friend. I have had conversations with both of them where my supervisor primarily helped me improve the academic quality of my work, while John worked as a sounding board, someone I could test my emerging thinking with.

I would get their input and reflect on it, which allowed me to see new themes and propositions.

### **How I used reflection in the process (NEW)**

Reflection is the process of stepping back from experience to make sense of what it may mean and to plan further steps in the inquiry. I have used reflection on my work on an ongoing basis. However, I also had the chance to do major revisions of my work on a number of times. Each revision worked as an iteration and, in addition to improving the quality of my work, I used them as an opportunity for deeper reflection - or meta-learning as Coghlan (2007) frames it.

Meta learning is learning about learning. According to Mezirow (1991), there are three forms of reflection for meta-learning which are focused on content, process and premise. I reflected on the content on an ongoing basis and it helped me see emerging themes and develop my propositions. In this cycle, I reflected on the process when I recycled the research. My reflection helped me evaluate my

inquiry approach and strategy that I share at the end of the cycle in terms of additional notes. Reflecting on premise means to critique underlying assumptions and perspectives. I had thought I had done this as I progressed, however during each of major revisions I discovered new blind spots, such as my discounting of power, and realised I could always do more.

# Chapter 6: Inquiring into New Ways of Relating

## What is covered in this Section?

Following my inquiry on intimacy, this cycle covers various inquiry practices between 2007 and 2010 summarised below:

- First person inquiry on exploring new ways of relating
- First person inquiry on discovering new ways of relating
- First person inquiry account about developing the idea of a group process
- First person inquiry account on a pilot workshop
- First person inquiry accounts on group process in my firm

The cycle will then be continued with a learning and critical reflection section. Throughout the cycle, I will be referring to labels like 'being real'. I will be giving my definition of these labels in the reflection section at the end.



## Exploring New Ways of Relating

### Building on a feedback: 'You are not real'

One of my inquiry conversations in the first cycle had a greater impact on the direction of my inquiry than others. In this significant conversation, Kayhan had told me he did not believe we had an intimate relationship, as I was too busy travelling. I had heard similar comments from others and therefore it was not new for me. His feedback was primarily about me being away and not spending enough time with him, which had made him upset as he was one of my long standing colleagues. But he did not stop there... He went on to tell me that I was not 'real' anymore. I remember trying to understand what he meant. He had used a Turkish word *sahici* which means real or genuine. I was not sure if he meant that I was acting as a 'fake' person or that I was not sincere in my presence with him. I remember thinking that he had said it unintentionally as he was upset with me. But in any case, it was a powerful comment that hit home strongly. Later on I decided to ask him what he meant by what he had said, to deepen my understanding of his words and intention.

*I had an accumulation of irritation, disappointment, anger and fury. I decided to speak to you and tell you, "You are not real". My disappointment was that I would see you as being very close to me and yet we did not have a relationship that was intimate. I could not even stand seeing you then. I could not understand how you felt. Were you sad or happy? The way you would greet me would feel so superficial and I would ask myself why you would do that. (Conversations with Kayhan)*

From this commentary, I became aware of two patterns. One that I

was too busy with all those business activities I was involved with and was neglecting my close relationships. This fitted with a clear learning from the first cycle; I easily got carried away with the tasks and activities of work and forgot about being present and available to nurture and develop relationships. However the second part was much more significant and was to do with how I was when I was making contact. I did not have the presence in those moments that Kayhan was looking for.

After I heard it from Kayhan, I also heard from one of my supervisors that 'being real' was a notion mentioned in humanistic psychology. Following on from my inquiry and learning about intimacy, I saw 'being real' as a way of manifesting intimacy personally. However the feedback stayed with me for some time as it was disturbing and I ended up exploring it further. It has since become the focus of my second cycle as my exploration led to a deeper inquiry which I will share in the coming pages.

### **Publicly asking 'How could I be real?'**

How could I be real? That was my question to the twenty-five people that were looking at me with curious eyes during our consultant's camp held in August 2007 in a lakeside resort. Consultant's camp is an annual gathering where we talk about our consulting practice, introduce new ideas and plan the year ahead. I'd been busy with that question in my mind for a while. Even though I did not have a

comprehensive understanding of what being real could be about, I had an intuition that it would be good to explore it with others. I had even secured a slot in the agenda to talk about it, but I really did not have much to say other than ask the question.

It was obvious that I was carrying the assumption that 'being real' was a personal attribute, which I could put on like a suit. However, despite this assumption, I was inviting others to define it for me – unconsciously I knew that I needed to reach out to others.

Furthermore, I had asked Tarik to co-facilitate the session with me. I knew that Tarik was interested in similar topics relating to personal development. I also saw him as a good facilitator in terms of group interaction. I was feeling a bit nervous as it seemed like unknown territory to me and I needed to be with good company as I stepped into this unknown world.

I started the session and told my story about intimacy, explaining some key events that had led me to inquire into 'being real'. I told the group that I did not know where to start and how to do it, so I shared that my intention was to invite them into a dialogue with me to explore the topic.

### Using my vulnerability as a form of leadership

As I said this, I was feeling vulnerable from not knowing what we should do during the next hour. Interestingly, it felt like the group was welcoming the question and also my vulnerability. A number of



people were keen to understand my motivation to make sense of what 'being real' could mean. I was feeling encouraged from the on-going conversations and the level of engagement in the room. Questions then turned into contributions and people started to bring their stories, some quite personal, into the room alongside my own. My tension was starting to disappear and I was thinking that my invitation was being well received.

During the stories, some people started to mention their experience of therapy. As I was trying to make sense of these stories, Tarik intervened and asked if those who had been to a therapist could raise their hands. I was so surprised to see that 75% of the room, including Tarik, raised their hands. Tarik then asked if any of the people who had raised their hands had received any medical prescription during the therapy process. That was a moment of shock for me when I saw at least 50% of the group who had raised their hands keeping them up. I remember feeling a bit scared, as at the time I saw therapy as a major treatment. As I was listening to each story with full attention and care, I was also questioning if I was attempting to bite off something bigger than I could chew. I was worried about harming people while trying to help them, feeling responsible for their well-being as I was their leader. However there was such a welcoming energy in the room, with almost everybody in the room being part of the conversation. The group seemed positive about the conversation, however time was short and we needed to close.

My experience in the session gave me enough encouragement to do a follow up. We heard more stories - some very intimate and closed the session committing to do further work. With this incident I was unintentionally starting to develop a history of creating occasions which invited others to express themselves safely. As I became aware of that, I became interested in whether power in leadership becomes accessible when I acknowledge my weaknesses, remembering verses from Rumi:

*Acknowledge your vulnerability, so you will witness your majesty*

*Know your weakness, so you will find your power (Barks, 1995)*

Bringing paradoxical concepts together is a part of Sufi teaching. Similarly, Rumi does the same here by relating 'vulnerability' to 'leadership' and 'weakness' to 'power'. Brene Brown (2012) explores a similar paradox as a result of her recent research where she claims that we become strong by embracing vulnerability, that we dare more when we acknowledge our fear.

I heard later from others that when I show up in groups with my vulnerability, I can engage in an open and intimate dialogue instead of the patriarchal, distant discourse one would expect from a Turkish manager. These moments of intimacy would happen in cases where I didn't know what to do and publicly acknowledged this, as in the meetings shared in this inquiry.

I left the camp not really knowing what to do next but I was

encouraged from the energy of the group that we could do something together. On the other hand, I was worried about the possibility of dealing with something bigger than I could handle. As I write these lines, I notice that I was taking responsibility for it solely on myself - acting as a paternalistic, distant leader! Habits and patterns don't shift overnight or just because you want them to.

### **Let Us Be Real – introducing Cem Mumcu**

Sometime after the camp, I saw Alev, an old friend of mine. I was talking to her about my inquiry and the theme of 'being real'. Alev looked at me with surprised eyes and said she knows only one other person who keeps talking about 'being real'. He was one of her close friends, Cem Mumcu. She mentioned that Cem was a reputable psychoanalyst in whom she had a lot of faith. I became curious and wanted to meet him. Alev arranged a dinner for us to meet.

### **Making contact with Cem Mumcu**

The dinner arrangement turned into a social gathering on a Saturday night with spouses. I only remember smoke and noise in the restaurant and not being able to talk much. As I was about to start thinking that it was not a good idea to meet for dinner, Cem suggested having coffee at his place. Meeting in his apartment made a huge difference. Even though I did not have the intention to stay long, our conversations were so compelling we ended up chatting until early morning on personal matters which helped me to get to

know Cem better and trust him more. During our conversations, I developed an idea about doing a group process on 'being real' within the company, with voluntary participation (or as voluntary as was possible given my position as an embedded leader/researcher). When I shared my idea, Cem welcomed it. I suggested we should meet and talk again involving others from the team. The more I thought about it the more attractive the idea was becoming to me.

### **Contracting to introduce Cem into my firm**

I talked to Tarik about my meeting with Cem and mentioned my idea to follow up the group decision in the camp to do further work. Tarik welcomed the idea and I brought Tarik and Cem together within a couple of days. It was important for me that Tarik had a good connection with Cem due to his involvement in the camp as well as his general interest in personal development. We met in a café and had a long conversation helping me to clearly see and evaluate the options. I was quite convinced of the benefit of a group process with voluntary (as I unproblematically saw it at the time) attendance. The theme of the process would be 'being real'. It would be a form of collaborative inquiry in itself, as all the participants would work with the same question of 'how can I be real?' I was also aware of the fact that what I was intending to do was not a typical meeting but rather a group inquiry. Cem kept mentioning that it could be difficult to do the work in a team setting, but I was getting keener to go ahead as we talked (unconsciously wanting to work on building intimate

relations with my colleagues). I now know that I was not aware of potential power dynamics which could be involved inviting others as the leader of the organisation.

Then I mentioned the idea of the group process to Can as I thought that he had to be involved in the decision, as the Managing Partner of the firm. I was slightly nervous about how Can would see this initiative and I could sense that if he wasn't on board that would be a major setback, as I was not proposing a casual gathering. I presented the group process as having similar qualities to the recent Gestalt training workshop, which had been regarded highly by the team. Based on the good experience with the Gestalt workshop, Can seemed open to the idea but he had some questions. I thought that it was a good start. I proposed a lunch meeting with Cem so that we could address Can's concerns in detail. It was a challenge to arrange the meeting as it was a busy week for both Can and Cem. I was questioning in my head if I should read this challenge as a negative sign. With questions in my head, we managed to meet near Cem's clinic.

When I am with somebody with a therapeutic practice, I sometimes feel nervous, as if he is observing me or fitting me into a certain psychological framework. I had not felt it with Cem in any of our meetings. He was able to connect with me as an ordinary person rather a therapist. That was one of the qualities that I found in my relationship with Cem; the ability to be with people without any preconditions. We could talk about business issues without being

constrained by a formal process. In the lunch meeting with Can, I had a different feeling. First, I had a strange sense that Can and Cem were almost testing each other in the beginning. I see Cem as a smart and straightforward person. I did not think that he was trying to sell himself to us. On the contrary, he was amplifying some of the challenges that he had mentioned to me during our last meeting. He was saying that some people would find it hard to deal with the process in an organisational setting. I was thinking that he was predicting Can's potential resistance and amplifying the possibility to make it visible and discussable. Even though, I did not like him highlighting the challenges, I had to go with the flow, I had to let go of my need to control others. I was so much engaged with the idea and wanted to do it so much that I ran the risk of being blinded to the risks and challenges of such a process.

Yet, Cem was doing exactly the opposite to being blinded to risks, working with reverse psychology he was laying out all the negatives. He was talking about the need to have a long-term commitment. He was also thinking that it would be difficult due to the power dynamics of Turkish culture, where people could be easily intimidated by each other and by management hierarchies to do such intimate group work.

As he laid out all of these challenges, I could see that he was doing soft contracting with us as the company management. At the end, Can said that he was willing to go ahead with a pilot session. I was

comfortable to go for anything and relieved that we were making progress. I was unconsciously experiencing Cem as an exemplar of 'being real', as a living quality of realness with his unconditional regard and truthfulness as he had managed to name and land difficult truths without disabling the process.

### Landing Cem with a pilot session

A couple of weeks after our meeting, we scheduled a pilot session with Cem in our office. We setup the blue room in the office in a circular seating style, with chairs only. We had tried a similar setting in the recent Gestalt workshop and it had worked well. I found the circular setting very intimate, without tables or laptops to hide behind. The blue meeting room in the office had seen many workshops and meetings but I do not think there was a precedent to the meeting that we were going to hold. There was a good turnout for the meeting and the large room was full of people. Cem arrived on time and we started the session. I discovered that many people knew about Cem as he is also a popular fiction writer, in addition to his psychiatry practice. He would regularly appear on TV because of his unique mix of talents.

The session started without any fixed content or agenda. I was slightly worried if it would work well but did not know what to do. That was when I realised Cem was a celebrity because people were asking questions to him as if we were on a TV show. He responded to

questions for a while. I thought that Cem enjoyed being a celebrity as well! I could see people making very smart comments. It was show time. I was scratching my head asking myself if this was what I wanted them to do.

## How Cem landed himself

Then Cem made a comment that he would go on to make on several occasions: 'I don't know much about what you do and cannot teach you about it. Alper invited me here to work with you on a topic that I am passionate about. I am passionate about 'being real'. You are a great group with very smart people. The conversations that I have been hearing here are very clever, intellectual statements. However, I could not hear any emotional tone. It was all brain and not much from the heart. You could use both. This is a space for you to use both. I am curious if there was anybody willing to share anything in this setting.'

There was a long silence. Silence... silence... and again silence... I was so paralysed and could not think of anything to stop this nerve stretching silence. (We can hold silence in our meetings now but at that time it was difficult for most of us, including me) Then B. shared something, which I perceived as her saving all of us from the awkward experience of silence. B.'s start was a good one and started a completely different session. Then I remember a point in the session where D. was sharing the impact of something T. did to her and then



D. lost control and was suddenly bursting into tears. I was looking at Cem - what would he do? He was doing small interventions with some questions and sometimes invitations. His intervention style and language was different from any other facilitator I have worked with. The difference made me a little bit anxious, he wasn't taking firm control, but he had a compassionate style and I realised that his approach was soothing my anxiety.

D. was still angry with T. then E. joined the conversation and she responded to D. I was thinking that it was getting complicated and witnessing it all I could feel my mouth and throat drying out. This happens when I am scared. I was scared. It looked like Pandora's Box had been opened and I could not decide if what was pouring out was good or bad. Cem allowed all of them to express their emotions, then he started to ask specific questions to D. His conversation with D. took some time and then D. started to tell a personal story after a question Cem had asked her. As she told her story, I could see that the tone and direction of the session was changing. I could see from the faces and gestures of others that the tension in the room was lessening. Then the group asked D. questions about her story. Prompted by the disclosure of the story, the group started to share how it made them feel, supporting D. D. has become a different person as the story evolved and people responded. The process which had started in such a nerve shredding way ended in a very generative fashion.

We did a debrief session before we left. Cem shared his experience of the session and his ideas on how we could work with such issues in an on-going group process. After he left the office, I was trying to sense the overall reaction. In fact, people seemed engaged and some of those I wanted to see in the further sessions seemed positive about attending. This meeting was figural in shifting my assumptions about emotions in the workplace. I started to think it could be possible to stay safely with difficult emotions, without trying to control the situation and being able to trust to the capacity of the group to support each other through the process. I was beginning to see that a group process was not just about me!

After the initial session, we launched the group process with Cem. Initially we had twelve people who wanted to attend and the process took the form of collaborative inquiry sessions with a therapeutic quality. I am aware of the potential challenges of such a process in terms of boundaries and power issues, which I will share later in this section. In the meantime, I would like to share the practical details of the process around frequency, location, setting etc.

We held our meeting every three to four weeks with a break in summer. We would generally have 10-12 people attending. The seating would be like a Group Process, with circular seating and no tables. Our usual meeting place would be in the office and occasionally an outside venue if we could find a secluded place to hold meeting. The sessions would start after work and would go on

for three hours. During the first year, we would stay for longer, sometimes until midnight.

In the sessions, the group would need a warm up period and then we would decide on a topic suggested by a participant. The topic would be a personal inquiry that he or she would like to work with in the group. With Cem's leadership and participants' contribution, we would work around this topic. Let me share an example of a session here to give a better sense of what was involved.



## A Representative Account from the Group Process

We are meeting in the upper floor of a restaurant by the sea. I arrive at the restaurant before everybody else to make sure that the arrangements are in place. I am noticing that I am acting as a host as a part of my leadership role (McKergow, 2009). This will be the first time that we will meet outside the office. I see people climbing up to the upper floor and decide to go down to make sure the restaurant management have reserved the upper floor for our sole use. I am slightly anxious that we are experimenting with this session outside the office. Part of me is excited to change venue but I am also worried that the change may not work well. The floor that we'll use is decorated with very light colours, comfortable furniture and the walls are decorated with creative artwork. I can see the Bosphorus from the several windows overlooking the sea. Boats are passing and create a lovely scene with their lights and moonlight reflecting on dark water. Participants start to arrive one by one. As I chat with Cüneyt by the window, I am listening to reactions about the place from the people arriving. Cem arrives wearing his dark trench coat. He looks cool and I think he likes to be seen that way. We gather, mingle and have some food for a while. We later decide how we want to use the place, as it is spacious for eleven people. We move a couple of sofas together, currently located in different parts of the room, and combine them with some single chairs to accommodate all of us.

## Celal's shocking statement

We start the session and I am anticipating a slow start like the other times. Sometimes it takes an hour for the group to warm up and identify a topic to work on. We settle in our seats and I am looking around the circle. As I unintentionally count the number of participants, Celal makes an announcement – he wants to share an issue with the group. I am surprised and turn my chair slightly towards the left to hear him. Celal says that he has been thinking about a decision for some time and he has decided to leave the company. Celal is one of the of the firm's key people. I am in a state of shock and did not like the idea of losing him. In my head, I am questioning why he would make such an announcement in a group like this. This thought makes me think of the possibility that maybe he doesn't want to leave.

There is a silence in the group. Celal is looking down at the floor. I see that he does not look happy or relieved by his announcement. He indeed seems quite sad. I dwell on different thoughts and I want to ask him why. However I can't find the energy to pose a question or make a comment. Cem asks him what has made him decide to leave. This was one of those moments where Cem could continue working with the 'client', where the rest of us are too emotionally involved with the person. Celal shares what has led to this moment. His issue seems to be with Can, whom he reports to. I think that it is unfortunate that we do not have Can with us in the group. (Writing today, I think that

maybe he wouldn't have been able to raise it if Can had been there. And telling the future history of the group, Can will join the group in a couple of years become one of its leading members).

### **Cem's intervention and connection to the field of group 'constellation' work**

Cem suggests an exercise, involving a conversation with Can. He asks Celal to pick a group member to represent Can and asks Celal to have a conversation with 'Can'. After some time, I start to think that the issue seem to be about exercising and sharing power and authority. I am thinking that both Celal and Can enjoyed 'power' and their conflict is about sharing 'power'. After the role play finishes, Cem starts to ask some questions about Celal's relationship with his father. As the conversation evolves, I see the group is interested in its direction as they join in with their own questions. Time passes and Cem suggests we repeat the role play but now with Celal's father rather than Can. The exercise is emotional and reveals interesting insights for Celal as well as for us. At the end of the session, Celal realises he has some unfinished issues with authority and sees that there is a possible transference for him, seeing Can as his father's form of authority figure. He says he will reconsider his decision in the light of his insights in the session. I am surprised once again by the outcome of the meeting. Until this session, I never thought that the group process would be so closely related to day-to-day work issues.

### **My learning from this account (NEW)**

One of my key learning from this account has been about transference. In this account, Celal had a certain emotional reaction towards Can. His reaction seemed quite genuine and authentic. However after further exploration, I realised that it was influenced by a number of factors including his personal history and social constructs about authority. According to Moore and Fine (1990), transference is 'the displacement of patterns of feelings, thoughts, and behaviour, originally experienced in relation to significant figures during childhood, onto a person involved in a current interpersonal relationship' (p. 196). I know that engaging with people who occupy positions of power and authority may trigger assumptions and feelings rooted in childhood experience and create transference, as in the case with Celal (Hunt, 1989: 25).

### *What I learnt about being authentic (NEW)*

My learning from transference made me consider that there may not be a truly authentic experience without the influence of social constructs coming from the personal past. So what is authenticity? Even though there are various perspectives on authenticity, such as the philosophical perspective as in Kierkegaard (1996), Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (1948) and the psychological perspective as in Erikson (1995), Harter (2002) and Kernis (2003), the variety of perspectives shows me that there is no common definition. I learnt in the process the authentic self is an ideal state of being like a blank canvas. For Sufis, it is a state of purity like the final stage of



development as *Nafs al Safiya*, Pure Self.

We are constantly in a present relationship with others while our past stories continue to influence our daily experience. So seeking authenticity is not about finding our 'self' out there but it is rather a never ending process of inquiring into experiences by questioning projections, habits and frames. Therefore I would like to frame authenticity as a process of noticing my own experience but also paying attention to how and what I'm noticing. So an inquiry into 'being real' is a never ending process of inquiry into authenticity, with multiple levels of learning. Such learning would have parallels with Bateson's (1972) notion of levels of learning. There's learning. Then there's learning about learning. There's also learning about learning to learn. So an inquiry into 'being real' is about walking the infinite corridor of mirrors of learning – which should allow us to experience authenticity in a similar way to seeing the infinite in a grain of sand (Blake, 1988).

#### *What I learnt about social nature of leadership (NEW)*

I further reflected on my learning about authenticity to see if living with the notion of leadership could be considered as a social process (Hosking, 1988). This perspective helped me to look at the social and historical issues more closely, engaging with how people relate to authority in Turkey (as I described in the leadership theory section).

Ritter & Lord (2006) explore the issue of transference in

leader–follower relationships by examining whether representations of relationships with former leaders influence the perceptions of the existing leader. In their studies, they demonstrate the existence of leader transference being an influential relational dynamic, as in Celal’s case. Leadership is a process of relating in what Ladkin (2010) calls an ‘in between space’. This process may involve different qualities such as intimacy, awareness and power, which I explore during my inquiry

#### *What I learnt about ‘being real’ (NEW)*

‘Being real’ or *sahici olmak* in Turkish has been a term that we developed as a group throughout the process. With various sessions and practical experiences, I have learnt to relate in a different way. This way of relating involved being present, staying aware, noticing the actual emotional experience in the relationship and responding to the situation by reflecting on the experience whenever useful or appropriate. The group has described this capacity for emotional awareness and responsiveness as that of ‘being real’ or *sahici olmak*, which I see as a practice of intimacy in a relational setting.



## Dream Work: The Story of Kamil

### How this section connects to the previous section

This is an account of one of my significant dreams. It serves as an example of my working with multiple ways of knowing, where dream work is part of my inquiry. I see dream work as an aspect of an extended epistemology. This account is connected to the previous section as it takes place during a group process.

### Working with dreams

In the earlier sections, I have mentioned my work with Mustafa which is informed by Sufism as well as by psychology and a focus on self-development. Dreams form a significant part of my developmental relationship with Mustafa. Each dream offers a potential inquiry with its themes, symbolism and meaning. Dreams come from an ineffable place and with the help of language and conversation we can make meaning out of them. Therefore a dream interpretation becomes a social construction. According to Jung (1971), dreams are our link with the unconscious, while Sufism has an assumption that dreams offer us potential discoveries in our development process (Vaughan Lee, 1998). In this section, I will share an example of a dream that I have used in my inquiry.

## The dream

*In my dream, I am in our family house in Samsun where I grew up. We are having a reception. All of a sudden a strange creature appears in the living room. It is formless, looks like a light stream, moving very fast around the house. Then it lands on the floor in the living room. The light stream turns into a man. He looks like a criminal. He is overweight, has a stubbly beard. He is laying on the floor semi naked. I can see the fear in his eyes. He looks scared and tries to run away like an animal. There is a high ranking army officer in the living room. He is quite tall, well dressed and good looking. He looks self-confident from the way he stands and acts. He attempts to catch the stranger who again moves out of the room to the terrace at lightning speed. I am watching their struggle with great fear. As the light stream moves out of the room, I can see a large fireball moving towards the house from the terrace. It moves around the house possibly destroying everything. I can see my grandmother sitting in the back of the living room. In a strange fashion, my anxiety with the creature turns into a peaceful feeling as the fireball is sweeping the whole house. (Journal, 01 March 2010)*

After I shared this specific dream with Mustafa, he asked me to name the creature without too much thinking. My response was *Kamil*. As I uttered the name, I was astonished with the immediate choice. *Kamil* means 'Perfect' with an association with the concept of the Perfect Man *Insan-ı Kamil* in Sufi scholarship (Chittick, 1989). If I accept that there is a grain of wisdom in the choice of the name, how could a character, which I see as ugly, murderous and pitiful represent perfection for me? This question offered a turning point in my inquiry. If dreams play a role of offering us new possibilities for learning and awareness, what could I learn from this dream? In my conversation with Mustafa, we talked about the possibility that the story of *Kamil* may represent my shadow side. According to Jung (1965), the shadow represents our life spirit, filled with creative energy to counter the arid scholar.

## Sharing my dream in the group

As a coincidence, or as Jung (1971) would have it a matter of synchronicity, we had a group process the same week in the office. It was early March and there was a warning of snow on the weather forecast. I was not sure if we would have a good turn-out. However, eight people made it. We shared a couple of pizzas before the meeting and started the session in the blue room. I felt a good energy for sharing my dream with the group. As I was getting ready to share my story, Kayhan had a question for Cem. The conversation went on for ten to fifteen minutes. I then shared with the group that I would like to share my dream. Even though I was waiting for the opportunity, it was not easy to start talking. It felt different to share a dream which looked to me somehow awkward, intimate and vulnerable. As I was relating the dream, I was looking at everybody in the room. They were listening to me with full attention. I could sense different reactions: curiosity, compassion, welcoming, anxiety. In the middle of these feelings, I kept on relating the dream. As I finished, I also shared my conversation with Mustafa, and then turned to them for their response. I was curious to find out what they would see in my dream. There were different sorts of feedback. Some agreed that *Kamil* could represent a side of me that I had not fully met. Some were interested in the army officer and what he could represent for me. Cem asked some questions about the house and my grandmother. There were several comments and thoughts, but I did

not feel that I was getting anywhere. At one point, I was responding to a question and saying 'What if I have ignored this side of me, *Kamil*, for all these many years?' As I said these words, I felt very emotional. There was a lump in my throat. I could not help my tears. I was feeling sad and compassionate at the same time. I felt that Cem was supporting me from my shoulders. I then saw Selin in tears. Then I see Cemal. He is a big man and he was weeping aloud like a boy. I did not hold my tears and was crying loud as well. I saw Ahmet coming close and hugging me. There were a couple of others joining them. We stood like that for some minutes. I did not feel like talking much more and the idea of finishing the session did not feel bad to me. As I was able to talk, I said how good it felt. Then I shared a promise that I made to myself as we were standing. My promise was that I would try to look at *Kamil* differently and care about him.

As we were closing some people shared their feedback. I heard them saying that this was the first time they experienced me being so open. Some said that they felt a stronger connection to me. Some shared that they love me calling me *Kamil*. I felt a sense of rejoicing with my colleagues as well with myself.

## My learning from 'Kamil' and dreams (NEW)

From the conversations, my sense making and reflection on this dream, I have appreciated the possibility that *Kamil* could represent how I perceive power. I was seeing him in an ugly and alienated form which could mean that I was seeing power from a negative perspective. This dream provided a remarkable learning opportunity in my inquiry process on noticing and acknowledging my relationship with power. My meeting with Kamil has been a process of reuniting my engagement with power, a reunification which acknowledges the wisdom of 'perfection' that the name of power may offer in the Sufi tradition.

Dreams provide a significant presentational knowing practice in my inquiry and in general. I keep a dream journal with regular notes of my dreams. My learning process from a dream would involve different learning modes.

The morning after a dream, I would write down what I remember, highlighting significant details. Then I would reflect on my dream entry and try to make sense of what it would mean for me. My sense making would be twofold. A dream may have some meaning about how we perceive our existence in the physical world, our relationships and significant life issues. I see this perspective as an 'I-It' interpretation of the dream with a dualistic perspective. Dreams may also give us images of our inner world making us aware of our inner



constructs. We may project these images to other dream objects which can be people or animals or any other object. We can then make sense of the dream with an 'I-Thou' lens which would tell us that everything in the dream represents us. Using the film metaphor; the screenwriter, the director, actors and spectator; they all represent parts of me. In each dream, there is always a significant, unusual detail and I have learnt by experience that making sense of that 'strange detail' would always provide the most fertile learning from the dream. Some dreams would represent certain emotional states which may influence my emotional experience during the daytime. So I would not only reflect on the content of the dream but also on my overall experience of the dream. Once I have sufficient reflection about my dream, I would share my dream with my wife or Mustafa who are my regular dream companions. We would talk about the dream and our inquiry would give me further insight. After this learning process, I evaluate the overall impact of the dream. If I decide that it is a significant dream, I would add key details of the dream on a mind map including other dreams. The mind map allows me where my dream would fit in the big picture and highlight connections and repeating themes.

Dreams taught me to appreciate that my life experience is a projection of my inner world. While dreams guide me in many ways to make better sense of my experience in the daily life, they also show me the most intimate and significant characteristics of my inner

experience. Therefore dreams provide an important learning process for me.

### Group Process Today.. (NEW)

I have shared a couple of examples of group process, a few from many. We continued the group process for a few years successfully. As the years passed we had periods of discontinuity and the challenge of sustaining the group process. We tried smaller groups, some involving only the management to get over the power-hierarchy issues, but they had their own disadvantages as much as their advantages. The group process has shown us the value of creating conversational spaces. Over years, it has been replaced by various professional practice development activities such as action learning sets. These sets had a professional development focus with some emotional tone, but they did not have the depth of emotional quality of the original group process.

I have taken the lead role to introduce other group learning opportunities and professional development programmes, focusing on areas such as relational practice. It would appear that these programmes have brought me to a different place as a leader. Instead of being someone who was distant, mysterious and invisible, I have made myself much more accessible both physically and emotionally.



## What has been my Inquiry Process in this Cycle?

### How I decided to inquire into new ways relating (NEW)

After inquiring into intimacy, there was a period when I initiated a number of group initiatives within the firm. These initiatives had a number of common characteristics. They all had a group setting instead of an individual focus. They had clear boundaries either as a workshop or a group process within a certain period of time. They all offered safe spaces for me and others to have intimate exchanges. One of these initiatives was a group process on 'being real'. The launch of this initiative was very much influenced by an inquiry conversation with a similar theme.

### How I framed and selected my inquiry FOCUS (NEW)

As I embarked into the second cycle, I was not aware where the inquiry would take me. I had an unconscious desire to see myself incorporating intimacy into my practice. I initiated different processes to learn about being intimate in a relational setting. During that period, 'being real' was a repeated theme. My encounter with Cem Mumcu, who had an interest in 'being real', helped me to select the topic as an inquiry focus.

As the cycle progressed, I realised that my learning was not only about 'being real' but also about relating to others. Even though I worked within a group setting, my learning and sense making from the process has been in the form of first person inquiry. In the same

manner, the framing of the cycle has been clearer after I finished the cycle and made sense of my learning.

### How I worked with the context (NEW)

Most of the processes that I experimented with were new and they all had an element of uncertainty and the unknown. I had to use my political skills to initiate some of the activities. Sometimes I also used my personal influence, sometimes I found people who would easily appreciate the process and support it, and sometimes I would use company meetings to gain support. For the group process, I asked Can's support and consent as he held a leadership position. This was both for courtesy but I also see it as an unconscious political move. I had predicted that the process would have a serious impact in the organisation and Can would want to be involved in such a significant process as the leader.

Overall, I can say that it was not predictable as to how the process would interact with the context of the company. I had to work with what has emerged and to learn as I progressed.

### How I planned my inquiry (NEW)

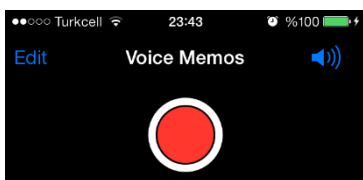
After deciding to inquire into new ways of relating, I planned a pilot session at the office. Once the pilot session was conducted and it had received overall positive feedback, we, as a group, decided to continue and embarked on the group process with people who chose to participate. The planning of the process involved significant input

from a number of people, but was coordinated primarily by me and the external facilitator who facilitated the process.

## Which process and methods I followed in the inquiry (NEW)

Most of my data in this cycle comes from my experience in the group process. The group process had the characteristics of a collaborative inquiry where the group contract was to create a safe setting to practice and learn about 'being real', which I explored in the cycle.

After attending one session or a few sessions, I would capture my



14.07.2010 0:57:38  
Banu ADOC  
14.07.2010 0:50:12  
Erhan ADOC  
14.07.2010 1:44:30  
Ozlem ADOC  
14.07.2010 2:29:50  
Kemal ADOC  
13.07.2010 1:15:46  
8.07.2010 1:29:31  
Serdar ADOC 2010  
8.07.2010 1:49:54  
Pinar ADOC Temmuz 2010  
8.07.2010 1:34:06

experience in my journal to support further reflection and would use the data as a part of my first person practice. I have also had one to one conversations with some of the participants which brought different voices into my inquiry, enabled me to hear different perspectives and helped me receive feedback. Like the first cycle, I organised these conversations in informal setting where each meeting would take between 1 and 2 hours. I worked with a prepared set of questions but I also paid

attention to emerging issues during the conversation. I took notes as we spoke and also recorded our conversations, keeping the meeting data for future reference. I included a screen shot of the listing of voice recordings from my iPhone.

From the voice recordings, I developed written accounts and used them for the first person inquiry. Every once in a while I have shared my writing with my supervisor, revising it in the light of the feedback or the new insights provoked by the conversation.

### **How I worked with outcomes (NEW)**

Throughout the process, I revisited written accounts for further exploration. Every exploration helped me understand my assumptions about myself as well as how I acted in my relationships and how others perceived me. I developed meta-learning at every recycling. Using new insights from the recycling, I made further sense of the accounts and the overall cycle of inquiry. My sense making helped me see my experience from different angles as I worked with relevant theories such as social constructionism. As I engaged with different theoretical traditions, I learnt about psychology and group dynamics. I was also present in this process with my emerging process of Sufi learning and curiosity. I have been given utmost care to participate in these processes with a 'power with' attitude instead of 'power over' behaviour, about which I gladly received positive feedback both from Cem and also a couple of participants.

Similar to the first cycle my exchanges with my supervisor, as well as my critical friend John, allowed me to explore my emerging outcomes in the company of others and develop new propositions.

### **How it connects to the previous cycle of inquiry (NEW)**

In the last cycle I discovered intimacy as a significant theme in my practice and explored how it could become present in my leadership practice. I defined intimacy as the capacity to build close relationships with others, to invite others to connect with me and to reach out to connect with others. In this cycle, I have acted upon my learning from the last cycle. I have initiated experimental inquiries into intimacy in action, where I created spaces to connect with others and to learn about new ways of relating in my practice.





## Reflections and Learning in this Cycle (NEW)

In this cycle, I moved my inquiry from intimacy into 'new ways of relating'. What I notice from the cycle, is that I have engaged with 'relational' experiments that would involve others, rather than working on my own at getting better at intimacy (Hosking, 2000); I engaged with intimacy as a relational experience. As I did this, I have developed an emergent theme of 'being real' informing my second cycle of inquiry. In the following pages, I will share my learning from the process around the broad frame of 'being real'. My learning in this cycle, and around this broad frame, is presented around three headings:

- Learning about Self in Relationship
- Learning the Way of the Heart
- Learning to Lead with a Heart

### Learning about Self in Relationship (NEW)

The group process has provided a reflective, relational space for me, helping me become more aware about myself in the presence of others. Referring back to my story of 'doing versus being' in the methodology chapter, I have been able to receive useful feedback about my 'doing' which made me reflect and become aware of how I define my 'being'.

One piece of feedback from the group process was that people never

saw me expressing any 'negative' emotional responses, such as sadness, frustration or anger.

*I feel frustrated when I always see you in a positive mood. I have hardly ever seen you angry or sad. I do not know if you are real. (Conversations with Ender)*

As I reflected on this feedback, I realised that I did not like negative emotions and also preferred to avoid explicitly emotional responses in my dealings with others - especially in situations that might involve conflict which is limiting my leadership practice. This made it hard for people to know how I was feeling; I was largely a closed book to others when it came to sharing my emotional reality.

I reflected further on this feedback from Ender in the written account below:

*Probably it is something I learnt observing my father. My father is a medical doctor. He practiced his profession for 30 years in the small town where we used to live. When I was a child, I remember walking back home from his clinic together. I would see many people greeting my father in the street. I had always thought that everybody in our small town knew him and had liked him. My father would not show his feelings in social situations. However, my mother was different. She would easily show her emotions in her relationships. My father would criticise my mother for being edgy in certain matters. For example, he would not favour her showing her emotions or pain. So being real in our family was a dangerous thing. I may have assumed that if I expressed my emotions, I would risk others not liking me. As I write, I remember most of my childhood as a power struggle with my father. I recall that my father would constantly remind me not to argue with him, as I was quite rebellious. After some years, I learnt to be more political and play the adapted child. I chose to deal with the power struggle internally without a major external reaction so that I would not be hurt. I am wondering if this could be the reason why I would tend to hold back and would not react in conflict situations. (Journal, October 2010)*

Reading this account, I could say that my preference for not showing emotions during conflict may have its roots in my family history.

Transactional Analysis (TA) theory refers to these learnt habitual patterns as 'drivers' (Kahler, 1975). These drivers show up as certain behaviours which may have helped us survive in the past and then they developed into unconscious models of relating, which may not be so critically necessary in our present lives.

As I integrated my learning from my group experience, journal entries, ongoing reflection and literature review, I was able to associate my emotional response pattern with the self-explanatory 'Be Strong' driver (Kahler, 1975). After some reflection, I could relate the earlier feedback I received in the first cycle, about my 'masking' smile, as coming from this driver. Other drivers from my history also became apparent to me, such as the drive to 'Try Hard', which made me aware of my need for achievement, which I explored in the first cycle, and how this was rooted in my early childhood.

## **Learning about the socially constructed self**

However, my most significant learning from this inquiry has been making sense of how our definitions of 'self' could be socially constructed. During the numerous accounts and exchanges in the group, I witnessed many times how all of us have a story that we keep telling ourselves and to the world. This story somehow defines our 'being' or what we call 'self' as a narrative, as it consists of habitual

patterns and drivers – our ‘doing’ developed in and over time. On the other hand, our drivers may also continue to shape our story beyond our awareness, as we get stuck in old stories or remain unable to imagine new ones. I have become aware of such a construction through the feedback I received during this cycle. The feedback below made me think of how my drive for achievement could impact my perception of the world:

*Alper wants to see things work out and therefore sees the good side and ignores the not-so good. The weak side to the above has been an exaggerated optimism and an underlying pattern of wishful thinking... a somehow distorted or one sided view of the world or of people. (Conversation with Hamid)*

Based on this feedback I now see that my desire for success may lead me to neglect what does not seem to work well and falsify how I see the world and present myself to the world. I am also noticing that I am attempting to break the story’s pattern here, by not ignoring a not-so-good feedback, realising that everything is data and that a Sufi inspired integrative perspective would lead me to this conclusion.

I have seen in my group exchanges that we construct this story of our social interaction starting with our early years, with our family, then with school and so on. Through our experience of growing up, we make some (largely unconscious) decisions about how we define our sense of ‘self’ and then live our lives according to these decisions.

I have also seen that it is easier to break the spell of such stories in a relational process with feedback from others; it is easier to see ones

stories when they are witnessed and experienced by, and in the company of, others. So exploring and developing new stories become a socially constructed process as well. Knowing about this possibility strengthens my understanding about the socially bound nature of self.

### Learning the way of the heart (NEW)

A further learning in the group process has come from working with emotions as a distinctive quality of relating. The process involved identifying and sharing emotions in relationship with others. This was addressed in a conversation with Cem:

*"In the beginning, the conversations and the focus in the group were highly intellectual. You were not interested in what was going on in the group or with yourselves but you were more interested in getting new information. I could remember some of you taking notes in the earlier sessions. Everybody was so knowledgeable but your knowledge was like a dress that you would put on. It was not internalised. Feelings. You did not have a language of feelings."*  
(Conversations with Cem)

As Cem notes above, we were good at making smart comments or engaging with cognitive learning, but it was a challenge for us to notice and name emotions and bodily sensations in the beginning. After a number of sessions, we gradually learnt to bring the 'emotional tone' of our experience into the process.

Before my experience in the group process, I had a subtle assumption that it was not appropriate to share emotions in a professional setting as it would be an inappropriate sign of vulnerability. I have learnt during

my inquiry that expressing emotions is a form of self-disclosure and enables intimacy in a relationship. My learning in the process helped me change my assumption; not only is it possible to become aware of emotions in the workplace but it is also fine to share them when appropriate – and essential if any meaningful mutual understanding is to develop.

Cem acknowledges such learning happened for the whole group:

*In time, you all have become much more involved and competent with emotional awareness. I have witnessed many sessions full of emotional tone.”  
(Conversations with Cem)*

Cem calls this process of noticing and expressing emotions one of emotional awareness. It was a learning process for me as well as the group; I have called this section and my development that of ‘learning the way of the heart’, a title that I have taken from one of my teachers’, Claude Steiner (2003).

### *Emotions are relational*

The social constructionist perspective challenges the traditional view that emotions are innate programs that are invariant and universal. At this point, let me join the discussion about whether emotions are relational responses or innate natural reactions (Hochschild, 1979; Schott, 1979; Boiger and Mesquita, 2012; Weber, 2012).

I agree that there are neurological and physiological explanations for emotions. I also know that they are not fully sufficient to explain why

we feel what we feel (Boiger and Mesquita, 2012). However, based on my experience, emotions happen as an outcome of a relational process. In the group process, I witnessed that emotions not only emerge in the relationship but are socially constructed. For example, in the group process, I have become aware of a dominant anxiety in certain settings. I then reflected on this pattern and realised that my anxious patterns may have roots with my early childhood. This made sense according to Holmes (2001), that such an anxiety may develop based on certain attachment patterns and internal working models, or scripts, regarding my sense of self and others based on my experience with caregivers during infancy (Bowlby, 1982). I also realised in the same process that that my mother's relationship with me as a child could be influenced by her own social context and personal history. And the same would apply to her parents and so on back through the generations.

My awareness about how our unconscious patterns of behaviour may be inherited from past generations helped me appreciate how our representations of self may embody deeply embedded social roots, or patterns of inheritance, such as the case of Celal and many others not shared here. This was a further learning for me, about how the social construction of the self could have multiple layers. In fact, I would say that in the group process the meeting of two people is like the meeting of two armies – legions of historical figures – and our work needed to honour the multiplicities of social history and



connection that play out when people come together.

## Making sense of the Sufi way of the heart

I called my learning in this section as learning the way of the heart. Sufis describe a similar path of learning as the journey of the heart (Chittick, 1983). Heart is mentioned with multiple meanings in Sufi literature. Some of the references are quite abstract and can be confusing at times. A useful framing is given by Helminski (1999) where the heart is seen as the faculty of subconscious knowing of spiritual realities or qualities. As one starts to develop emotional awareness, he or she steps into the path of the heart which is the path of 'being real'. In this manner, Sufi tradition talks about *hal* (states) as momentary phenomenological experience which may involve emotions or bodily sensations (Merter, 2006). I learnt from my conversations with Mustafa, and also from the literature, that the heart represents our capacity to know our different states accompanied by bodily senses and emotions (Chittick, 1989).

Rumi highlights our emotional states as a momentary awareness which should be seen as a guide (Barks, 1995)

*This being human is a guest house  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!*

*Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.  
~Rumi*

Rumi talks about how a seeker should welcome emotional states regardless of their nature or perceived impact. In this sense, Rumi's verses above all remind me of how Carl Rogers frames 'being real' as a way of accepting emotional experiences:

*'I have come to prize each emerging facet of my experience, of myself. I would like to treasure the feelings of anger and tenderness and shame and hurt and love and anxiety and giving and fear –all the positive and negative reactions that crop up. I would like to treasure the ideas that emerge- foolish, creative, bizarre, and sound, trivial-all part of me. ... I want to accept to act on all of them but when I accept them all, I can be more real' (Rogers, 1961: 43).*

Similar to Rumi, Rogers states that 'being real' is acknowledging emerging facets of our experience. Early humanistic psychology literature such as Maslow (1968) may refer to 'being real' as having access to our true self, with the assumption that as human beings we have an essential character. I see the experience of self as always relational and shaped by social influences.

Sufi tradition always works with the notion of *maqam* (stations) together with *hal* (state), where a *maqam* (station) is going beyond the momentary experience and embodying a permanent state after certain practices. I have experienced that such an embodiment may take place in a transformational relationship like the group process. I now see that the group process offered me a safe, trustworthy, nurturing and sustaining relationship. This may be seen as similar to a therapeutic relationship, however the difference here has been that of the group setting which offered a greater range of relational opportunities to practice being different, both in the group process itself, but also within the workplace.



## Learning to Lead with a Heart: Integrating My Learning into Practice (NEW)

Rumi says that 'leadership is a poison and the antidote is in the heart' (Nicholson, 1984). In this verse, he highlights that a leadership position involves power and an imbalanced access to power may be detrimental. I have chosen this quote because in the first cycle, I discovered how I had denied my 'power over' situation and discounted my power position.

### A 'Power with' attitude serving as an antidote

What I understand from Rumi's verses is that being in a leadership position has its own risk, as leaders may hold to a fallacy of seeing 'power' as given to them and abuse this power by means of repression and domination. Avoiding 'power over' behaviour such as domination, repression, force, coercion, discrimination and abuse and favoring a 'power with' attitude by means of collaboration has been a critical development need in this cycle. I can claim such a development through comments such as the one below:

*You did not present an authority figure in the sessions, which had a positive impact on the process even though you were the boss of the shop. This was unusual. It helped the process to become more intimate and mutual.  
(Conversations with Cem)*

While I now know that I demonstrated some contradictory behaviour in certain parts of the inquiry process - which I will to explore at the end of the section - it was encouraging to hear Cem's feedback.

Buber (2000) highlights different characteristics of 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relationships. In an 'I-It' relationship, we experience people as 'things' or objects which we use without allowing the person to exist in his uniqueness. However, an 'I-Thou' relationship is a 'relationship of openness, directness, mutuality, and presence'. What I notice now is that 'I-It' perspective promotes a 'power over' approach while in an 'I-Thou' relationship, a 'power with' attitude becomes possible. One of my takeaways from the Cem facilitated process has been about the importance and value of creating spaces that enable 'power with' or 'I-Thou' relationships to develop. I have seen that such spaces of trust and dialogue increases the awareness of our relational nature and empowers all of us in a remarkable way. Such an empowerment happens by means of creating a shared language and a deeper connection in the group.

In this case, I notice two interdependent processes taking place At the individual level, I started with an inquiry topic and then invited the team to join me in the inquiry, hosted the initial event, then once the event was in place I participated as a member of the team, continually making sense of the learning from the event to develop my leadership practice further. My involvement in the group process was reflected in the feedback below from one colleague:

*"I think that one of your biggest contributions to the organisation has been to introduce us to Cem. Before then, I did not know how to express my experience or emotions. The Group process has taught me to notice and share my emotional experience. In the same process, I have been able to communicate openly with people even with you as a 'boss'. I used to be*

*worried or even frightened to do so in the past. You have been a role model about sharing emotions which encouraged me to embrace all of my emotions. I started to allow myself to be angry or sad. This has opened a new phase in our relationship. It also affected my relationship with the company. Now I can link my personal development with the company development.”*  
(Conversations with Erdem)

However the feedback above is also meaningful as it highlights the impact of the group process from a participant perspective, validating some of my claims about group members joining me in response to my invitation, then experimenting with new skills in the process, developing learning from the process and then transferring into daily practice. Such ‘transitional events’, as identified by Winnicott (1971), helped shift our collective leadership pattern from that of a distant, patriarchal pattern to an intimate and relational one.

## Learning about how I was empowered through my relationships

In this cycle, I have also become aware of how I am empowered through relationships as I have explored my power and authority role with a relational lens. This awareness has enabled me to appreciate and favour my relationships instead of trying to ‘Be Strong’ or ‘Try Hard’ or do it all by myself. I will call this attitude one of ‘relational humility’.

The relational humility has helped me acknowledge that leaders’ attributes are embedded in their relationships. With this appreciation, I have seen how much ‘my’ success is connected to clients which we serve and the team that I work with, as well as the support that I get

from my wife and children rather than my individual strength. As I realised that attributes like success come from the quality of the relationship, I have balanced how I looked at achievements and failures. My learning here has taught me to participate in a relationship with good intentions and effort, but not to assume full credit for success and to give more credit to the relationship rather than individual contribution.

This learning also helped me to respond better when things go wrong, or not in the way I or others thought of as right. In the past, I would get upset when things did not go well, taking full responsibility for the outcome. I now see that getting upset may sometimes involve a narcissistic wound. Instead of feeling deeply upset and frustrated in cases of failure, I learnt to critically reflect on what might have not worked in the relationship and how I had participated in the relationship. This attitude helped me to learn better from challenges and relate better in challenging situations, both as a leader and as a consultant. It has made it easier for me to participate in the group process, minimising the risk of acting with 'power over' behaviour.



## The need to balance the pursuit of power

A further learning from the process concerned the need to balance my quest for power. One feedback I received spoke to my concern with getting things done and the lack of courtesy I showed at certain times. In one case, one of my colleagues was telling me about a major family issue. He was sharing how difficult it was for him and that he needed support from others. As I was listening to him, I realised how much I valued my relationship with him but at the same time I was slightly ashamed that I was not even aware of his need until then. I felt sorry that I had not given him any support, as I had been too busy at the time running after business.

Another colleague shared with me a similar feedback during a group session, about his disappointment in my failure to connect with him more closely during a family transition. Again I felt very sorry that I had been too busy with the task of business and had missed that relational courtesy.

As I reflect on the feedback, I can underline the fact that I was too focused on the task of business and had not been able to show enough care in some of my work relationships. Their feedback deepened my awareness of my lack of balance between power and connection, highlighted in the first cycle. On the other hand, I also noticed the need for a patriarchal leadership pattern, where the leader as seen by all parties as a father figure who needs to notice

and attend to the personal issues of his colleagues. I could assume that such need would not exist in another country, like Germany, with its distinct cultural values and my negligence would be considered totally appropriate in such a setting for a leader. This awareness strengthened my learning on how the notion of leadership could be socially constructed.

My learning has been an outcome of the group process experience, self-reflection and theory. With this learning, I have paid more attention to the quality of my relationships and started to show greater sensitivity in my managerial role which has been my discovery of the 'antidote in the heart'. Such sensitivity would manifest itself in different qualities of relating such as allocating time, giving space, listening well, communicating with care and responding with appreciation.

*"You were like an untouchable object for me. Cold, distant, fixed. Our relationship was based on our roles. But now, (it) is different... I can see you and touch you. Our conversation and time spent together in the Bazaar, or by a seaside café, have strengthened our relationship which feels like a camaraderie." (Conversations with Erdem)*

As mentioned in the quote above, I made special effort to spend quality time with people in the organisation. This was regarded positively by those like Erdem; however in time I have faced some challenges. First it has become a challenge to spend personal time with more people due to time constraints. This has created an inevitable in-group and outer-group issue. A bigger challenge has

been about power. I heard from some managers in the organisation that they were concerned that my direct contact with members of the team would hinder their managerial influence. The feedback has made me to pay more attention and act with greater sensitivity.

There was another input from the same cycle which made me consider a much different perspective:

*“Alper had a unique strength in his empathy based leadership style. A style that centres around understanding people's needs, letting them develop at their own pace and in the direction that motivates them best. This develops a bond between Alper as a leader and the people he leads. People look up to him and admire that trait. He shows a considerable amount of empathy towards people's likes and dislikes which in turn wins him considerable loyalty.” (Conversations with Hamid)*

At first sight, the feedback talks about empathy as a leader, however I also read between the lines that Hamid sees such empathy would serve both as a motivation tool and also as a way of influencing others' loyalty.

The same feedback continues with further input on my leadership style:

*Alper's style of leadership today can be best described as a hybrid between Paternalistic and the Performance Oriented styles. Most of the team in Istanbul accepts this type of management and it has been successful over the years in keeping down the level of staff turnover.” (Conversations with Hamid)*

The feedback from Hamid mentions that my leadership style is a combination of Paternalistic and the Performance Oriented styles. I have shared a number of cases in this inquiry where I have seen

myself suffering from practices representing these styles. After all the work, hearing such a feedback felt a bit disappointing as none of the styles were my aspiration in the spirit of this inquiry. As I write these words, I notice that my disappointment comes from a dualistic view and my unconscious pattern of avoiding what seems negative. If I connect this feedback with my earlier learning about accepting the coexistence of potentially opposing qualities of leading, I start to see new possibilities. So I may be seen acting with a performance oriented style which is a facet of my experience, but I also know that I have other possibilities of relating when needed. I realise that this is the major difference today. This difference comes from my quest for self-inquiry, where I am making conscious choices of action, anticipating its consequences rather than being a victim of a deeply rooted unconscious pattern.

# Chapter 7: Reflecting on my Inquiry

## Practice (NEW)

My inquiry has gone through a number of stages of revision and recycling. With every revision, I have had the opportunity to learn more about myself, and my practice. What I find astonishing is how my research has enabled me to learn about the Sufi tradition as much as I have learnt about my practice as an organisational leader. It has taught me to go beyond my established patterns of living, working and learning and I have learnt to develop my voice and value being a critically reflective practitioner.

## Qualities of Inquiring Practice (NEW)

In the continuing pages, I intend to reflect on my inquiry practice before I conclude my thesis. Marshall and Reason (2007) offer a number of disciplines of inquiring practice as a quality checklist:

- Actively exploring framing
- Enabling participation with sensitivity to issues of power
- Engaging in multiple ways of knowing
- Taking research as an emergent process

Authors highlight these as an invitation and aspiration for quality research rather than an achievement to be targeted.

### Actively exploring framing (NEW)

The process of working with frames was a difficult task and I have never felt that it was good enough. As I worked with the frames, I have found myself in constant tension with my achievement drive which was encouraging me to show only the positives from my research experience. I am even aware of the pressure of such a drive at this point as I am writing these words. However, my learning has been greater when I did not care about doing well or presenting a good image. These were the moments that I have noticed contradictions or paradoxes. Sometimes this has been an awareness about my leadership behaviour, where I seemed to represent

contradictory behaviour or I had to move from an 'either/or' approach towards accepting the coexistence of potentially opposite attributes, moving from a dualistic to a non-dualistic (or whole) view of the world and its qualities.

I have seen the contradictions of my leadership style in the first cycle, where I noticed my patriarchal leadership behaviour in action while I was seeking to establish a more participative approach. Similarly, I had examples of working with a 'power over' attitude while trying to establish a 'power with' approach.

I also had a considerable challenge in writing in a second language. Sometimes the limitations of my language capability limited my expressive quality. In these situations, I have asked for support from my editor, where our dialogue and exchanges have helped me ways for me to express myself in my second tongue. Dialogue was also useful in sharing my frames and getting the perspective of others. My conversations, as well as my reflection on conversations, offered me multiple layers of inquiry possibility. While I have done a couple of iterations with some, mostly I did only one reflective cycle. I am aware that it would have been much rigorous to go deeper with all of them which did not happen to due time constraints and because of the continuous interplay of emerging practice with my patterns of reflection. On the other hand, I have worked closely with John, my critical friend. John's input was particularly useful as he did not have a hierarchical link with me.



## Enabling participation with sensitivity to issues of power (NEW)

Issues of power have been present throughout my inquiry. This was the case because it was an emergent theme and part of my theoretical learning because of my managerial role. On the other hand, it was also a significant thread due to socio-cultural context in Turkey with its embedded patterns of paternalistic, authoritative and distant management styles. Such a set of styles would imply a deep respect from subordinates towards their leaders, which made it very hard for me to assess the reliability of the feedback that I received from most of the people with whom I had a reporting relationship.

### *Power-over behaviour with collaborative intentions*

The group process had the intention of being a collaborative, 'power with' activity. I think the participant feedback has provided evidence of its collaborative quality as shared in the inquiry. However I am now aware of my unintended 'power over' behaviour in the process. For example in the case of finding and bringing Cem into the firm, I have used all of my advantage of being a senior person in the company, engaging with my authority, influence and political skills. I know I could have a very hard time initiating such a challenging activity if I did not have such formal authority and influence.

### *Issues of participation and power for the senior management (NEW)*

Another issue of power and participation has been with Can who was

the Managing Partner of the firm. One example would be about introducing Cem into the firm. When I asked Can about working with Cem, it was very clear that I really wanted to do it. I knew intuitively that Can would not refuse something that I very much wanted to do. A similar moment took place when we started the group process. Can agreed to participate, joined the group process in the beginning and then decided that the emotional processing was too much for him and left the group. I felt that it would be a big challenge to me to keep the group process going without Can, who had great influence on other people on a day-to-day basis. But I kept patient in order not to make it hard for him. After few months, Can started to have individual coaching from Cem. After some sessions, he then told us he found it very useful and later came back to the group, becoming one of the advocates of the group process. However throughout the whole inquiry, I have always felt an anxiety about Can's involvement.

I also noticed that it was hard to be in the process with a managerial role. This would pose a challenge especially when people would bring up their issues in the firm during the session. Sometimes there would be critical issues which would have an impact on the organisation, such as Celal's story and his initially expressed desire to leave the firm. Then my leadership position made it difficult for me to participate in an unattached way. Knowing the cultural patterns of Turkish society, I can also acknowledge the challenge many people faced in participating with their management - at least in the beginning, no

matter how much effort I made to pretend that I was sitting there with an equal status.

Finally, I had the challenge of giving up my power and allowing space to Cem. Knowing that our culture has a strong reliance on authority figures (Hofstede et al., 2010) On many occasions in the earlier sessions, I had to pay special attention to my instinctive desire to intervene as the leader - especially when I became anxious about the process. With the help of feedback and further reflection, I realised that my anxiety involved a combination of a drive for achievement and the need for control. As a leader and the initiator of the process, I could not help feeling responsible for the success or impact of the process. In fact, it represented quite a paternalistic pattern which was a bit surprising to discover. On the one side, I was trying to avoid paternalistic leadership on the other side I was showing some behavioural patterns of a paternalistic leader. This is indeed a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989), part of my dualism or wholeness in action.

I struggled with the role challenge for a long while until I accepted that the process had become a group initiative and the group should have the responsibility for it. Later on, I came across McKergow (2009) who offers the metaphor of 'the leader as a host' in contrast to the 'heroic leader' who is in charge and control (although, given my context, there was something heroic about engaging with the host leader metaphor!). In this framing of host leadership, the leader

creates and participates in these great spaces. He uses the 'soft power' of invitation instead of the 'hard power' of coercion. He has responsibility to design such spaces and respond to what happens there. He encourages co-participation and actively works with boundaries to make it safe for all. He takes a combination of front of stage roles – such as taking an overview, and back stage roles -developing capabilities in him and others. McKergow's (2009) 'leader as a host' framing helped me to find a more balanced role and contribute better to the process. It also brought us a new perspective for client work and helped our client practice to become more inclusive and participative.

#### *Issues of participation for the staff and consultants (NEW)*

The group agreement was to start a new group once a year. Once the group was formed; it was not possible to join after more than a few sessions. The participation to the group process was voluntary, or as voluntary as is possible in a culture that is keen to seek the approval of paternalistic authority figures. In terms of leaving the group, it was easy and safe to opt-out if people needed to, as in Can's case. However a bigger issue about the participation was continuity. The group contract required regular attendance; however we would have a recurring tension caused by the irregular attendance of certain people which made some of the participants uneasy. Another major issue has been about loss. When some group members left due to career changes or redundancy, it made an impact on the functioning

of group as well as having strong emotional repercussions.

I do not need to say that we made an internal contract concerning confidentiality. I have given special care to make sure that it was safe to participate. For this purpose, I supported and protected the group agreement that we would not continue or repeat any process outside the group sessions as they would not have a similar setting of safety. Similarly, we would not use or mention personal or confidential matters outside the session. I have become one of the safeguards of the group contract and possibly my influence helped us keep the contract – at no point have we had a major issue arising from a breach of confidentiality. Maybe my formal status has helped people to honour this contract, as they would not want to go against a contract that has been made with a hierarchically significant other.

Nevertheless, due to voluntary participation some chose to join and some did not. In the beginning, I was worried about a potential divide in the organisation because of these two groups. However it was good to see that the group did not form new boundaries outside the sessions. It was visible that the group members had much stronger relationships between each other, but I did not notice any significant inner and outer group dynamics – again this might have been because people knew that I was looking out for such developments!

### **Engaging Multiple Ways of Knowing(NEW)**

A good research involves an extended epistemology with multiple

ways of knowing including empirical, observational, emotional, behavioural, embodied knowing (Heron and Reason, 2001; Marshall and Reason, 2007). In this inquiry, I have shown great effort to engage with multiple ways of knowing by means of different practices such as journaling, reflection, conversations, group process, meditative practices and dream work. I have used Sufi stories, poetry and metaphors to make sense of my learning. I have made an effort to notice and present where my learning has come from i.e. from inquiry experience, reflection or theory. As an improvement note, I could have used a wider range of presentational forms such as music, dance, painting, photos or videos which would have enriched the range of evidence that I brought to the inquiry.

I introduced some of the Sufi practices in the methodology section as alternative ways of knowing. Due to nature of the inquiry, my learning from Sufi practices has remained in the background most of the time.

### **Taking research as an emergent process (NEW)**

Appreciating the emergent quality of the inquiry process has involved both challenge and learning at the same time. On one side, I see myself as a creative and spontaneous person who enjoys such qualities. However, I have found great difficulty in situations where the inquiry almost had its own path. In these moments, I did not really know where I was going and did not feel comfortable about the sense of lack of control. In such situations, I would feel stuck and would not

be able to continue sometimes for a long time. I am now aware that my challenge would come from my focus on achievement and the need to control the direction of the inquiry. It took me a long while to notice how my life pattern would influence my research process. Once I realised that my habitual pattern of achievement drive was blocking my way, I started to find counter strategies to deal with it. One good strategy was simply finding a way to act rather than thinking about what to do. An action could be giving a break to what I was doing and doing something that I felt more energy for. This could be reading literature or writing an irrelevant section or having a conversation with my critical friend. Such a strategy would always help me move further as new choices would emerge from the activity. However there would also be the downside of potential distraction as some activities may be quite engaging and diverting.

### What would I do differently to improve the quality of the inquiry process? (NEW)

As I look back my review of the inquiry process, what would I do better next time? In the light of my review above, I would:

- create more opportunities to get the perspectives of past participants such as organising sessions for meta-learning together (qualities of participation)
- seek creative ways to explore the validity of the feedback of my colleagues (qualities of participation)

- continue to pay attention to how I use power (qualities of participation)
- use more and different presentational forms like dance and art (multiple ways of knowing)
- remember to follow the inquiry's own flow and take action accordingly in moments of blockage with less fear (research as an emergent process)

### What I have learnt about doing research well(NEW)

I have learnt to appreciate that research can be messy and good research is being able to work and learn through a process which is often unpredictable and beyond control. I think good research is being able to balance the need for a structure with the unpredictable outcomes of emergent learning. A structure may give a sense of control and being in charge, but the real gift of good research lies with working with the most unexpected and unplanned learning moments which unfold when they will.

I have also learnt that in order to do good Action Research, I have to suspend my personal patterns, such as my drive for achievement, and allow learning to find its way. In the same spirit, I notice that the fine balance between action and reflection has great significance for good research. At times where I had action as my main research activity and didn't create space for good reflection, I have seen that my learning opportunities diminished. Similarly, when I was involved with too



much reflection, I felt stuck in the research process and action helped me get back on track and gain momentum.

**What can I see in my current research practice that speaks to me learning as a critically reflexive researcher? (NEW)**

My research experience has allowed me to appreciate critical thinking and reflexivity. These skills have not only been useful for my research practice but also have been part of my professional practice. What I can see is that as I go through life, I (like all of us) develop patterns of living and working which temporarily help to manage daily challenges that I face. However, I may have a tendency to stay with these unconscious patterns even though they have outgrown their usefulness. Disciplines of action and reflection, aligned with skills in critical thinking and reflexivity enables me to have a third eye view of our habits and unconscious patterns; this third eye may then enable a wise voice within each of us to speak to us, to go beyond established custom and practice. In this sense, living life as inquiry offers me a much more fulfilling, wiser way of living as it helps me become aware and free of such self-imposed limitations.

# Chapter 8: Concluding Notes

(NEW)

I conclude with the major findings that have emerged during the two cycles of inquiry that are at the heart of this dissertation. My concluding remarks include the music pieces that I was listening to as I wrote which may have influenced the tone of my writing. These findings are in themselves staging posts on the way to acquiring an approach to leadership that embraces supposedly conflicting qualities, especially intimacy and power. At least I had assumed them to be in conflict when I began my inquiry.

*ØLudovico Einaudi-Time LapseØ*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJcv18lyvKM>

Before the inquiry, I was a leader who was not present when I was with others, either physically or emotionally – in many ways I was also not present with myself. I was unaware of my unconscious drives, running after getting more and more things done. In Sufi terms, I was in the stage of Nafs Ammara, the Commanding or Unconscious Self (Frager, 1999). I had a very limited sense of connection with my own self or with others. I was anxious and alienated. Through the inquiry, I can see that I have potentially gone through the stage of Nafs-i Lawwama, the Inquiring Self, where I became aware of my unconscious habits, drives and patterns and have now reached the stage of Nafs-i Mulhama, or Inspired Self, where I now seek for a new way of being in this world (Frager, 1999). The inquiry has helped me develop a much deeper sense of connection and sensitivity to myself and to others. I feel much more empowered and connected to the

universal qualities of power (which I now seek to co-exist with those of love).

In my inquiry, the first cycle has signified a period of developing 'awareness', while the second cycle has emerged as a 'learning' process. Through my inquiry process the following steps into awareness and learning have occurred:

*ØGiovanni Allevi-Secret LoveØ*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHsfwCl-JII>

## Awareness of My Need for Connection

Intimacy emerged as a focus of study and attention; it evolved into a need to show up and be present in my practice as a leader (and as a human being). At the root of this cycle there was my deepening need for connection, a yearning and looking forward to meeting with others, experiencing in and through them a sense of love, beauty and serenity.

Making sense of the Sufi etymological roots of intimacy, I appreciate that being human embraces and includes intimacy and therefore seeking out intimacy is to seek out one's humanity. In the same sense that to seek out intimacy in the practice of leadership is to seek to make one's way of leading more human, less abstract, less ideal and other – to lead is to be human, to be human is to participate in such a way of leading; this in turn connects to the Sufi notion of oneness, that everything is enfolded into itself and into the other.



## Awareness of My Drive for Achievement

I discovered how much I was driven by an unconscious need and desire for achievement in the world, which I connect to Kahane's (2010) framing of Power. I have looked at my life, my practice and have seen that I've been focused on Power... getting good grades... material success. And it was not just about my ego. The deepest part of my seeking for power came from a script that led me to act from the belief that through power I would be successful and so loved. But Power was costing me too much... there were other less burdensome ways to experience Love.

As I have discovered the imbalanced nature of my drive and how by engaging only with Power, without its balancing quality of Love, so I have realised I was engaging with a practice of Leadership that was at odds with my Sufi thought of 'Oneness' with its invitation to appreciate the unity in all dualities.

And I am aware that I am not at the end of this process, the imbalanced habit is still part of me, my way of leading is tilted to power and is easily evoked in certain occasions – achievement is still my drug.

*ØYiruma-River Flows in YouØ*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-4wUfZD6oc>





## Learning about Self in Relationship

The group process helped me become more aware of myself and also aware that this sense of self, and the 'selves' of others, represented many other experiences and selves. I learnt that self is social and historical and to be human is to live in the presence of many selves, in ourselves and in others. I have experienced in various sessions that many past selves were present with the 'here and now' selves, in fact understanding the 'self' is on-going process of growing awareness. In the words of the Sufi poet Adonis' (2009: 43), 'the 'self' travels towards its deepest being only insofar as it travels towards the other and to its deepest being, given that, in the other, the self finds its most perfect presence'. Or as Rumi says: 'I am You.' Or as Rimbaud repeats in his own manner: 'I is other' (Adonis, 2009; Barks and Moyne, 1994).



## Learning the way of the heart... What it means to be real... as a Person and a Leader

This reaching out is the ineffable experience of liberation from known boundaries of the 'self' to discover profoundly oneself (I avoid saying 'myself' as letting go of the personal identification with self is part of the learning). This is the experience of 'being real' throughout the group process. It is about being open to experience in the moment... being real means engaging with different emotions and states and skilfully expressing these when in relationship with others. And this drive for connection is nothing but love. Heart is the faculty for experiencing emotions and inner voices and I needed to learn its language, its way, which has been a continuous learning process.

While the first cycle helped me to appreciate power, the second cycle was my entry into a new world, where I learnt to see emotional experience as a part of the relational phenomenon. I also realised through the group process that I was labelling some emotions as being 'negative' and so avoided them, or denied their presence or validity.

As I have become aware that emotions are relational experiences, I gradually learnt to see them as emerging facets of my experience without judging them negative or positive. I know that Gestalt theory points to using self as an instrument of change. As my experience of self happens in relationship, then I can see 'using self' as a way of

inquiring into the relational space. With this understanding, I learnt to 'use self as an instrument' as an important quality of my practice. My learning helped me express a wider range of emotional experiences, such as a frustration or anxiety, in a relational setting which brought an intimate quality to my relationships and made them more 'real'.

As I have allowed myself to embrace a multitude of emotional states, I have become less judgmental and different qualities of the heart, such as acceptance, compassion and love, have prevailed. Living these qualities made me appreciate that 'being real' is living from the heart, which is about embodying and growing with the splendours human potential – which fits with the Sufi ideas of growing through stages of spiritual development. My practice as a Sufi inspired leader and a relationally informed leader has been part of my integrative development.



## Learning to Lead with the Heart

As I've learnt to connect more deeply with people, I've learnt to connect with different aspects of myself... and this has led to the experience of 'Being Real', which has led to the path of becoming a better person, insan-i kamil ... a human being. I have witnessed that for my 'self' to reach the other, I must go beyond my (frames of) 'self'. Leading is reaching out to relate, respect and respond to this ever-changing mystery of self.

I learnt through the process that I am empowered by being in relationship with others. My appreciation of such an empowerment connects with my understanding of leading with the heart which entails favouring a 'power with' attitude rather than a 'power over' perspective. It also reinforces my Sufi inquiry, where no one and nothing is outside of the universality of being, and all experience is an act of mutuality. A practice of 'power with' is therefore an acknowledgement of this unity.

Leading with the heart is not only leading with intimacy but also seeing power as a grace of this presence (experienced through relationships); practicing it with great sensitivity, poise and kindness. This is a way of leading that seeks to balance the drive for achievement with the qualities of being in relationship with others. I have learnt to appreciate that the best achievement happens when I am empowered with qualities of love and connection, where

empowerment comes from within me, from others and as a gift from the universe.

So I learnt that leading with heart is being led by heartfelt moments that arise in the midst of relationships. These are moments of conscience, knowing with the heart and the mind (not solely the mind) where the heart becomes the eye and thought illuminates the inner vision (Adonis, 2009).





## What I Learnt about Leadership (in a nutshell)

In this section, I intend to summarise my learning about leadership under three main themes. These themes address integrative, contextual and relational qualities of leadership.

### Integrative

Through this inquiry, I have experienced leadership as having an integrated quality. My inquiry experience made me aware that an integrated notion of leadership is a fertile field that becomes accessible when the seemingly paradoxical qualities of human nature are embraced - such as self and other, task and relationship, mind and heart, or power and love. This has been the result from my learning through both cycles which I summarised above as 'Leading with the Heart'.

### Contextual

It is also part of the unique contribution of this dissertation, which seeks to present and connect Sufi thinking with Western leadership theories. This takes me to my learning about the contextual quality of leadership. From the second cycle, I have come to understand (through a combination of group process experience, reflection, and theory) the social nature of leadership and its socialised discourse. I have seen that our perception of leadership is shaped by the context that both leader and non-leader is situated in. The way we perceive and construct our experience and practice of leadership is influenced

by the social discourse, how leadership gets talked about and what institutions support this way of talking, and cultural patterns – the taken for granted norms and assumptions. Therefore it was helpful to be informed by a local tradition, such as Sufi thinking, to connect my practice with specific social roots, while also employing Western philosophy with its different socio-cultural setting allowed me to seek novelty in my learning. I have found a way of integrating contextual perspectives that are both local and other-than-local.

## Relational

My learning about the contextual also helped me to understand the relational nature of leadership, with qualities that emerge only in relational settings. My Sufi inquiry which took place through dreams, bodily practices, conversations and reflection taught me to avoid claiming personal ownership of these relational qualities; instead I now see myself and those relationships I am part of as temporary expressions of various universal qualities.

Integrating my Sufi inquiry, my learning from the group experience and the relational perspective, I appreciated that leadership cannot be solely associated with me and it represents a collective field of dynamic relationships. Consequently I have started to practice 'leading with the heart', seeing it as the art of participation into this field that shapes and is also shaped by dynamic qualities emerging in the relationship. With this practice, I can now see that the perception

of leadership comprises a dynamic phenomenological experience of relational qualities.

I have looked at leadership from frames of power and intimacy that influences my leadership perspective. I learnt that my frames of power and intimacy are influenced by my personal history, social culture, my company and my current relationships. I can see that every person may experience this in their unique set of relationships and develop different meanings of leadership through and from their experience. This helps to explain, for me, the complex nature of leadership and why there are so many definitions (Ladkin, 2010; Northouse, 2007).



## What I learnt about my Sufi Path

As Sufi thought informed my inquiry, my inquiry has reciprocally informed my Sufi learning. I have reflected on why I may have chosen to include the Sufi perspective in this inquiry; the most obvious or figural reason is that it is an inseparable part of my local context and deeply connected with various social patterns. However I realised that less obvious reasons, perspectives from the ground, may be associated with the core of this inquiry. The Sufi perspective teaches that (mercy from) love exceeds (the wrath from) power (Chittick, 1989). With this appreciation, the Sufi path attracts me and has been helpful to harmonise my relationship to power – it helps me be less consumed by it; I can look at 'power' eye to eye, from my level, rather than from an inferior position where I have to look up at it, be in awe of it and those who I attribute possessing it.

The Sufi ontology of 'Oneness' has also become more significant to me as the inquiry has evolved; 'Oneness' reframes the challenges that some of the Western thinking creates, with its dualistic perspective; the Sufi ontology invites me, and others, to seek out the unity that connects rather than the difference that seems to divide. Embodying this as a living practice of inquiry helps me to find a way to integrate and connect what dualism presents as separate and disconnected.

Finally, the Sufi tradition offers answers for the mystery of self, highlighted by a traditional scripture '*Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa*

*Rabbahu*, which translates into the claim that: 'One who knows herself knows her Lord' (Demirli, 2008). Based on my own experience, I now translate it as 'one who becomes aware of himself or herself, becomes aware of his inner Guide'. From my inquiry notes I would say that 'my inquiry has developed into the process through which I have got in touch with my sense of inner guidance... I have learnt that taking my experience seriously is part of the process of connecting to this inner guidance... this has meant taking emotions seriously, engaging with a process of reflexivity... I have learnt that it is not just inner guidance; it has the qualities of being both inner and outer ... the qualities of the divine presence can emerge in being in relationship with others and show themselves through emotions and through states of being'... It is with me in the company of others and in the world at large. The guide is all around – in me, in others, in the relationships of others and between me and others.'

With this inquiry into and of the self, I have witnessed and appreciated such a guide. I have started to understand an act of leading as the experience of being guided by an omnipresent presence and how I lead is now informed by and connected to this presence, which reveals itself through dreams, inner conversations and relationships. This omnipresent presence is in everything, in the so-called self, the so-called other and in the relationship that exists between and in these dreams of 'self', 'other' and 'relationship'.

This is not a new age veneer of spirituality; this is a practice of leading

in which the sense of a divine presence is absolutely at its core.

This is seeking a spiritual expression of leading that acts in the world as it is and has been brought into being through an embrace of Sufi practice and Western inquiry into self, relationship and psychological encounter with self and other.

And in the end this experience is best expressed through poetry, that most immediate of aesthetic and expressive forms which marries the human tool of words to the spiritual call to see the world anew and reach beyond what is already known and seen:

*Oh lovers, where are you going?  
Who are you looking for?  
Your beloved is right here.  
She lives in your own neighbourhood.  
Her face is veiled.  
She hides behind screens calling for you,  
while you search and lose yourself  
in the wilderness and the desert.  
Cease looking for flowers;  
there blooms a garden in your own home.  
While you go looking for trinkets,  
your treasure house awaits you  
in your own being.  
There is no need for suffering, God is here!*

# Glossary of Sufi Terminology

1. *Abud*: Part
2. *Al insan-i al kamil*: Perfect human being
3. *Baqā*: The experience of permanence outside of the self.
4. *Dhat* the Absolute or the Essence.
5. *Dhikr*: Remembrance; a practice of reciting the Names of God. This can be done individually or within a group setting.
6. *Fana*: The annihilation -of the self
7. *Hadith*: Traditional scripture often translated as 'tradition', meaning a report of the deeds and sayings of Prophet Muhammad
8. *Hal*: State; a temporary phenomenological experience which is believed to happen beyond the control of the Sufi seeker.
9. *Ilham*: Insight
10. *Itikaf*: Retreat; a period of with-drawl from the world, usually done in a designated mosque and especially during the last days of Ramadan.
11. *Kashf*: Unveiling
12. *La ilahe illallah*: Theologically translated as 'There is No God' (ilah) but 'God' (Allah).
13. *Mabud*: Whole
14. '*Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa Rabbahu*': Traditional verse from Prophet Muhammad stating that 'One who knows herself knows her Lord'
15. *Mana*: Translates into the word 'meaning' used to designate a dream
16. *Maqam*: Station;, a desired stage in the path of development that a Sufi seeker reaches after certain practices.
17. *Mukhataba*: Divine Conversation
18. *Muraqaba*: Reflection; a form of silent meditation usually done in the morning before sunrise.
19. *Murshid*: A spiritual guide in Sufi tradition
20. *Mushahada*: Witnessing
21. *Nafs*: Psyche, self, ego



22. *Nafs-i Ammara*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Inciting or Commanding Self
23. *Nafs-i Lawwama*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Regretful or Blaming Self
24. *Nafs-i Mardiyya*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Pleasing or Gratified Self
25. *Nafs-i Mulhama*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Inspired Self
26. *Nafs-i Mutmainna*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Serene or Secure Self
27. *Nafs-i Radiyya*: A stage of self-development in Sufi tradition: The Pleased or Content Self
28. *Nafs-i Safiyya*: Final stage of self-development in Sufi tradition; The Pure Self
29. *Ru'ya*: Dreams
30. *Salah*: A form of meditation or prayer
31. *Sama*: A Sufi aesthetic practice meaning 'audition' may include dhikr as well as singing and dance
32. *Sawm*: Fasting generally practiced during certain months of the year
33. *Sohbet*: Conversations; a way of learning and sharing in group setting in dialogue
34. *Tafakkur*: Reflection

**35.** *Tasawwuf*: Sufism tasawwuf, the process of becoming a Sufi

**36.** Tawhid: Oneness, phenomenological appreciation of the unity of a Divine Presence

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Appendix 1: Organisational  
Consulting-Edges of Possibility  
Article Feature: Third Person Inquiry



**Organisational Consulting  
@ the Edges of Possibility**

**Kathleen King and John Higgins**

**With a foreword from Peter Reason**

## **Transforming work and self through inquiry**

“He transformed himself and... the company at the same time,” is a comment from one of my company’s consultants who made me aware of my story – a story I’ll share in this chapter, intertwining my personal transformation with that of my organization.

### **Philosophical context – a non-dualistic perspective**

My personal and professional rebirth is based on my embrace of Sufism as both a practice and a grounding theory. Sufism is a non-dualistic worldview in which classical ‘dualisms’, or dichotomies, are seen as illusory phenomena and not in any substantive sense as real.

Western thinking and behaviour can be seen as containing many ‘dualisms’, seemingly separate opposites. There is the divide between ‘self’ and ‘other’, which invites people to frame ‘I’ as being able to exist apart from ‘We’. There’s also the ‘mind’ - ‘body’ split, with the mind being constructed as something capable of an organic and sensible existence separate from the body and the body reduced to nothing more than a soulless container. The list goes on: the duality of male and female, good and evil, active and passive, even dualism and non-dualism itself.

In terms of my work as a consultant and writer-researcher the methodology of Action Research (Katz, 2007) fits with the non-duality of Sufism. As a researcher I am not separate from the phenomena I am researching. My practice as a consultant lives within the participative relationship that connects me with my client. Grounding my consulting and research practices in Action Research I research and consult with people, not on people (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

This is in contrast to traditional consulting and inquiry that creates what I see as an illusory separation between the consultant and the world in which she or he consults and even between the consultant as a person and as a practitioner. The participatory paradigm (Reason & Bradbury) does not allow for this separation and is congruent with Sufism, with its belief in the unity of existence and a practice of inquiry that is about experiencing this unity. From this perspective my personal and professional transformation cannot be separated out and the ‘who’ of who I am, is inextricably connected with the ‘what’ of what I do.

However within the actual practice of Western action researchers and consultants I have found aspects of dualism. I have been challenged regularly to pay attention to the ‘dark side’ of my experiences, to reflect on those moments when things have not gone so well and to explore how I have coped. These questions appear to me to be predicated on a dualistic, non-unitary worldview. Clear dichotomous distinctions are made about events which tend to be labelled as good or bad, difficult or easy, light or dark. A Sufist worldview seeks to avoid this categorisation of events, instead seeking to engage with a world where whatever happens is seen as worthwhile. My Sufist practice is therefore not in the service of classifying experiences, paying attention to one side or the other, but in searching for what is worthwhile in the experience.

With this in mind I invite the reader to attempt to read this chapter through Sufist eyes, staying open to possibilities, to experience this chapter as a unity that exists in the unity of the universe, to inquire into the worthwhileness of the experience.

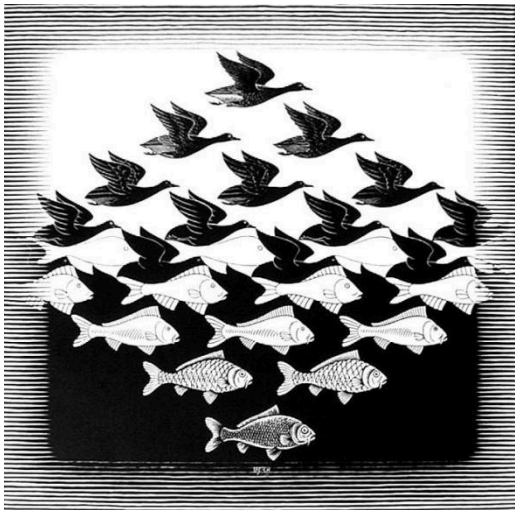
## My Organisational Context and Role

I have been leading a 40 strong training and consulting business for 17 years. It has offices in Turkey and the Middle East and clients throughout Central Asia and the Middle East. I founded the Turkish operation and am one of three partners. Historically we were a training company but we are now transforming into a consulting firm, defined by our desired value proposition of ‘enabling performance inside-out.’ My current focus is on leading this transition.

As well as the classic reasons for changing the business, such as moving out of what was becoming an increasingly commoditised activity, I had a personal agenda in bringing about such a redefinition. The transformation of my organisation will give me the opportunity to do what I really like doing and to make a greater impact on the organisations and communities in which we conduct our business.

At its heart, this transformation means a fundamental shift in the way that my firm works with its clients and in the way we interact with each other within the firm – a move from an I-It to an I-Thou way of being and relating (Buber,2000), a reframing I will explore in more detail later.

## Fish out of Water



liberation.

The transformation story goes hand in hand with my doctoral studies. I was interested in inquiring into ‘oneness’ but didn’t quite know how to go about it. Due to the abstract nature of the topic, I had a number of stumbling points and at the peak of my confusion I received strong feedback that I was “not visible” in my inquiry. The feedback was so strong that I felt like a fish out of water.

Sufism uses a similar metaphor where it asserts that Truth surrounds us, as water surrounds the fish (Helminski, 1992). Just as the fish is not aware of the water unless it is out of it, we cannot have a deeper understanding of ourselves and our reality unless we move beyond our planes of reality. Sufism identifies this process with

Moving beyond the planes of our reality is not an easy process – I drew comfort from Gestalt theory and its invitation to ‘stay with the experience of the fertile void - experiencing my confusion to the utmost’ so that I might “have a sudden ‘aha’ experience; suddenly a solution will come forward, an insight that has not been there before, a blinding flash of realization or understanding” (Perls, 1969).

My experience really has been a series of ‘aha’ moments and new insights since then. I have tried to ‘treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut’ (Marshall, 1999) and to incorporate new insights into my inquiry and my practice. This experimenting and learning influenced my role in the company, my leadership style, the company strategy and my life as a whole.

## Inquiring into intimacy



One of my emerging inquiry themes has been intimacy - the process of opening ourselves to another (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Nevis (2003) defines intimate behaviour as 'any communication, verbal or nonverbal, that aims to enhance closeness' and as 'an interaction between two people' (...) which requires a giver and a receiver, a sense of mutuality, and the experience of little or no hierarchical difference'. I see a connection with Buber's concept of 'I and Thou' (2000). According to Buber we can adopt two kinds of relationships with the world: 'I-Thou' or 'I-It'. In the 'I-Thou' relationship, human beings do not perceive themselves and others as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, instead they consider themselves as belonging to a unity of being. In the 'I-It' relationship, on the other hand, human beings perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities, and view themselves as part of a world which consists of things. 'I-Thou' is a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, while 'I-It' is a relationship of separateness and detachment. My definition of intimacy is a willingness to open ourselves to the world and to explore something deeper, something not known (or even knowable) ahead of time.

The illustration above symbolizes my inquiry into intimacy. It shows a face opening up. It also resembles a mask, which is peeled off a face. It speaks to how others used to experience me as being distant and wearing a mask. It reminds me of the striking feedback I received from a close friend who had worked with a team in my organisation. He thought that the team regarded me as a figure of authority and power and he found them reserved and almost formal with me. His comments bothered me as I had always wanted a warm working relationship and had considered myself the advocate of open and non-hierarchical organisation, in a region where autocracy still rules the business world.

Our offices remind me of the living room of a large family home where people come and go. It is a place to join share, argue, connect, laugh and even leave. To help me stay connected with the team I have a small corner table in this setting, instead of a designated office, and I consider myself to be an open and friendly person at work. However, the feedback was clear. I was a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead & Mc Niff, 2006). I was trying to be intimate and but I was perceived as distant. Once I was aware of this contradiction I started to take steps to improve my presence, change my language and the way I related to my colleagues.

### **Being an Intimate Leader**

My efforts to become an intimate leader helped deepen my relationships with clients and my team. Shaw (2002) considers conversations to be the basis of all organisational work and leadership. I can connect my development towards being an intimate leader with my move towards 'intimate conversations'. One characteristic of such conversations is that they do not have a preset plan or a goal, they are 'living moments', immediate and unpremeditated. They involve being open to whatever emerges and a willingness to tap into 'the intimate' without blaming or defending. They involve moments of silence, nonverbal communicative gestures and physical contact. They are conversations with an 'emotional tone' (Mumcu, 2009).

This contrasts with my experience of being stuck in too many intellectual conversations missing such a tone, finding myself becoming unresponsive and in some way absent, not present. 'Presence' is another characteristic of intimate conversations. When I am bodily, mentally and emotionally 'present' I am more concerned with making the best of 'here and now' rather than being mentally stuck somewhere else.

I am increasingly aware that I have been quite a mind driven person for most of my life. Through my inquiry I have gradually allowed my heart to lead and as I allowed my heart to lead, I started to witness the wonderful. Sometimes it was a conversation with one of my colleagues sharing tears that she had been holding for a long time. Sometimes, I would be the one unexpectedly in tears in a conversation. Sometimes, I would go into a meeting tense and worried about the agenda and I would find things flowing smoothly whenever I let myself be intimately present without any pride or prejudice.

One remarkable example of such a conversation was with F – a key member of our consulting team for over 10 years who decided to leave the company. It was a very difficult decision for me to hear both personally and professionally. What remains with me from this conversation was F's reason for leaving. He did not find me real anymore. I was really hit by his remark. Being real has become an important part of my continuing inquiry since then, a Sufi discipline of responding to what is worthwhile in an experience.

In time, I have seen more and more people in the organisation seeking personal conversations with me. The distance that I mentioned earlier seemed to have become irrelevant.

My search for intimacy and intimate conversations has had a significant impact on the organisation. Firstly the quality of my contact as a leader has changed, with intimate conversations helping my engagement with people in the organisation and their engagement with each other. Secondly, my focus on intimacy made intimate conversations legitimate. In my experience, people in organisations have a formal code, avoiding issues they find inappropriate. This means most intimate conversations take place in disguise and are 'off-the record'. This covert quality then causes problems when it comes to issues such as feedback, integrity and transparency. In our case, by bringing intimate conversations into the open there was more room for feedback and 'off the record' conversations became irrelevant. Most importantly it helped us create strong bonds with each other, offering us all a different quality of relating with each other and our clients.

You could see intimate conversation taking place in groups, where one person would tell another how something he'd done had affected him. We are now talking with our hearts as much as with our heads. We have enough space for emotional gestures as well as for intellectual and smart statements.

When I look at our consultant-client relationships, trust stands out as one of the primary drivers. In my case, this preference for more intimacy helped me to strengthen my client relationships.

This is all the bright side, but there were challenges. One was finding quality time for such conversations. As we started to discover new ways of relating to each other and new ways of conversing, we started to appreciate the time and space needed for intimacy.

And there were tensions. Some team leaders felt uncomfortable about their team members having direct access to the head of the firm. They were concerned that their staff might abuse such a connection. This

did happen with people who were more concerned with power and status. In fact, intimate conversations did challenge the hierarchical power structures within our firm.

### **Becoming real**

As the firm began its transition from a traditional power based hierarchical structure to a capability based networked one, I turned my attention to the challenge F had given me. Being real.

“How can I be real?” That was my question to the 25 people that were looking at me with curious eyes during our consultant’s camp held in August 2007. Consultant’s camps are informal but structured off-site gatherings for our consultant team. They take place once a year and give us an opportunity to talk about new ideas, insights, practices and work collaboratively to make practical sense of them. I had been pondering the question for a while and asked for a time slot during the camp. I thought it would be an ideal place to explore it together.

For me being real was simply about having a consistency between who I am and what I do, but I was curious about how everybody else saw it. I really had no answers, rather a big question. When the session started, I was feeling a bit vulnerable. I had no idea what I should do during the next hour. Yet the group welcomed the question and my vulnerability; they were interested. One of the strong topics for me was the tension between my being and doing. I see it as the tension between my real self and my roles. How would I define my real self? I think it involves everything that makes me who I am: my values, worldview and my wants and needs. I remember talking about the example of a sales person who could value honesty and how he could work in a role where he was challenged about being honest with his customers. There was quite a high level of energy when we talked about this tension between ourselves and roles. I saw an opportunity for us to do something together. My tension was disappearing as more and more people started to bring their stories, some quite intimate, into the room.

Some people talked of their experiences in therapy. The stunning moment for me was when S, one of our senior consultants, asked who had been to a therapist. I was so surprised to see 75% of the people had. He then asked if any of the people who’d raised their hands had received a medical prescription in the therapy process. It was a shock when I saw 50% of the group who’d raised their hands kept them up. I remember feeling scared. I wondered if I was biting off something bigger than I could chew. I was worried I would harm people rather than help them. However, the group had seemed positive about my invitation and I had sufficient energy to do further work. We finished the session agreeing that we’d get together as some form of collaborative inquiry group.

I left the camp not having a clear idea about what I would do next but feeling encouraged by the energy of the group and the sense that we could do something together. On the other hand I was worried about dealing with something bigger than I could handle. Soon after I met Cem Mumcu who is a trained psychiatrist with a life passion for being real. I talked to him about the collaborative inquiry group, suggesting he lead the group. I then introduced Cem to S from the camp session and to T, the Managing Partner of our Istanbul office. With their consent we started our shared inquiry group at work, exploring ‘being real’ with Cem facilitating. Bill Critchley, my ADOC tutor, called them our ‘midnight therapy sessions’ as we ran our meetings after work and on occasions they went on till midnight. They would take place without an agenda and we would work with an emerging issue of the group each evening. We also



held to a strict confidentiality agreement, not to talk about what happened in the group outside the group, even between members. We wanted to keep the energy focused within these midnight inquiry sessions and keep the boundaries strong to encourage a sense of having a safe container.

One of the key challenges of these meetings was the emotional tone. It required a major shift for a group of consultants who were much more comfortable with intellectual conversations. These inquiry sessions helped us to transform the way we experienced and interacted with each other and Cem played a significant role in the process with his facilitation and his therapeutic background.

As I participated in our joint inquiry into “How can I be real in the workplace?” My question evolved into “How can I be real and lead a consulting organisation?”

### **Being Real in the Workplace – work in progress**

Despite question marks at the beginning and the potential difficulties of doing ‘group therapy’ in the organisation, collaborative inquiry sessions have been continuing for more than a year now. People often ask me how we made it work.

The first condition is an openness to experiment, a willingness to try out new things in the workplace.

I think that my ongoing presence as the sponsor of the process has also been important, especially in my capacity as the leader of the organisation. I regularly attend the inquiry sessions and encourage personal development efforts. We also started other development initiatives including exploring the role of Gestalt in Consulting, the nature of Relationship Systems and the practice of Action Learning. These initiatives, supported by the ‘being real’ inquiry sessions helped us to transform our view about consulting, shifting our focus from external tools, models and instruments towards ‘using self as an instrument’ (Nevis, 1995) – a concept made real by encouraging people to share consulting stories of times when they made a difference with only their ‘presence’. We regularly used ‘being real’ in our daily conversations, which eventually led to a new language being used both inside and outside the organisation.

I believe that by creating a new language, we have introduced a new way of interacting and relating with each other, shifting the patterns of power. It has been quite instrumental in the transition of our firm from a transactional training company to a consulting firm. It has informed our structural changes as we shifted from a hierarchical to a networked organisation. I believe the change in power dynamics to be the result of the significantly reduced status differential in our conversations. When I asked some of my colleagues about my contribution as a leader, many told me that my biggest contribution was the courage to initiate our inquiry into ‘being real’ as well as take to an active role in it, participating in the sessions ‘free of status’. This latter comment reminds me of one of the key elements of Sufi thought, the concept of ‘annihilation’. According to Sufism ‘annihilation’ is a prerequisite for experiencing unity. I wonder if I annihilated my executive role during these sessions as I surrendered to the process and put aside my worries about how this process might have an impact on my executive responsibilities. This assumption seems to be supported by an observation from a longstanding colleague, who said she saw me sincerely and openly sharing my discoveries in my personal journey with others, which strengthened her trust and gave her the confidence to join me. It was touching when she described this with a gesture similar to whirling dervishes, spinning with the right arm extended to the sky and the left to earth.

However, I know that at least a couple of members of the management team found it difficult to disengage from their executive responsibilities during these sessions and therefore chose not to attend.

As we shared our stories with each other, I began to experience a deeper level of connection with my team. I could see how similar our experiences were, and how often our actions were deeply rooted in our personal history. We learned to see each other not only from the perspective of our time together but also from a wider perspective. I remember Cem, our facilitator, saying that a meeting of two people can actually be a meeting of two (metaphorical) armies, since we are influenced, in any encounter, by people who have informed our personal history, by past relationships and experiences. Being mindful of this I find I have become much more open, understanding and compassionate towards others. Conversely, I have learnt it is OK to be vulnerable with others. I have witnessed that my most vulnerable moments could evoke the most powerful support from others.

Our inquiry into being real took a hold and we started to make an effort to balance the ‘intellectual’ with the ‘emotional’. I could see an invisible contract forming within the organisation about realness – a contract that spread contagiously. Soon we started to hear different kinds of stories, for instance of an occasion when a rather ‘macho’ member of a consulting team had an emotional moment in front of the client, with huge impact on the client. We started to see qualities of being real spreading and clients too began to see the difference:

*“There is a different quality with your people. You seem to bring an extraordinary quality to our meetings where you complement business capability with an emotional competency. What I find interesting is that everybody that I meet has the same air.” HR Director, Pharma*

*“All other firms limit themselves to a commercial focus. Your people are human at heart. They can create employee-centric solutions with a social mindset. Nobody else has the same deep-seated humanistic perspective.” GM Financial Services*

One of the benefits of the process we have been through is that ‘realness’ has become an emerging cultural attribute for our organisation. I have become a sponsor and an advocate and, as a result, my colleagues experience me differently: *‘You have more presence with us than you have had in the past. You exist in these processes status free. You bring your personal inquiry and learning to the workplace and share it openly with us’.*

One of our consultants highlighted the shift in the company and the impact of the ‘midnight inquiry’ sessions. “In the past”, she said, “we used to try to get the best concepts and products from others and offer it to our teams and clients – an outside-in approach. Now we provide inside-out knowledge, an insight that informs our new value proposition of ‘Enabling Performance Inside-Out’”. It seems to me a beautiful expression of our transition from a transactional training business to a relational consulting firm.

### **Making sense of non-duality**

During the last 12 months, my inquiry and practice have continued to evolve. I have been touched by Bakan (1966) and his concepts of agency and communion. I see in myself a desire to integrate the more masculine qualities of agency with the feminine of communion – an integration that fits with Gilligan’s (1993) suggestion that maturity for both sexes is a matter of finding a balance between the two. This concept of maturity is congruent with the Sufist notion of ‘oneness’ as a unification of opposite states. Paradoxes play a significant role in Sufist philosophy, which looks at the coexistence of opposing views

from a unitary perspective rather than pushing us to choose either one or the other. (Vaughan-Lee, 1995) As different fragments of insights were coming together, an idea struck me after one of the midnight inquiry sessions: I began to realise that my worldview was based on the assumption of the separateness of 'self and other' and I wondered how I would experience life if I changed that assumption to one of connectedness. As I thought more about this I found I lacked the words to express this and therefore developed my own terminology of 'othering' and 'oneing'.

My concept of 'Othering' is related to what Buber (2000) calls the 'I-It relationship', in which we perceive each other as consisting of specific, isolated qualities. 'Oneing', on the other hand, is congruent with the sense of self-other connection in the 'I-Thou relationship', in which we experience each other as being deeply connected, as having a unity of being, as we engage in a dialogue involving each other's whole being. When I took a fresh look at Gestalt Theory (Perls et al., 1951) I found a similar, phenomenological, concept of self defined in relation with 'other': without other there is no self. How I experience other is inseparable from how I experience self.

This is a very similar construction to how Sufism treats Self and Other. Certain Sufi writers write other in two ways. Other with small 'o' denotes another person from a dualist perspective, while Other with a capital 'O' denotes the origin of the self and is seen as the ontological condition for the existence of the self. Self exists because of the Other. Sufism indicates that self and Other are not substantially distinct realities and self originates from Other (Kamal, 2006). The Other is the only Reality and whatever is other than the Other, is nonexistent. Existence of the self is the manifestation of the Other. Ibn al-Arabi, a leading Sufi thinker, calls it the Unity of Being or Unity of Presence, which means that there is only one Being, and all existence is nothing but the manifestation or outward radiance of that One Being or One Presence (Chittick, 1989). At this point, I notice similarities with other schools of thought. Stacey et al (2005) highlights our relational nature by claiming that we are constructed through our relationships instead of being distinct psychological entities. Shotter (2003, p. 440-441) talks about 'dialogic interaction' and suggests that 'when we cease to set ourselves against the others and othernesses around us and we enter into mutually responsive, dialogically structured, living, embodied relations with the others and othernesses around us', then, we 'find ourselves in contact with a world conceived of as an indivisible living unity.' I

Shotter's concept of 'ceasing to set ourselves against otherness' reminds me that Sufism suggests that we can experience communion by focusing on the Other. I find this a challenging invitation for today's world of separateness and detachment where the focus is on self and individuality. Sufism offers a number of disciplines to support an inquirer who is seeking communion. One of the most common disciplines is simply serving the other. Let me tell the story of Yunus Emre, an influential Sufi philosopher who lived 700 years ago. (Halman, 2001) He joined the order, a kind of 'peer learning community', (Tosey & Gregory, 1999) of a well-known Sufi teacher or 'guide'. When Emre joins the group, his teacher asks him to chop wood for the order. He does what he is told but cannot help questioning in his mind why he should chop wood instead of developing his Sufi practice. He keeps chopping wood for a long time feeling a bit angry, wondering whether he deserves such a treatment, whilst others are engaged in their practice and learning. Yunus Emre is only asked to join the group when he stops questioning the process. This moment denotes the point at which he starts to realise that 'chopping wood' is a symbolic service for the Other, which helps him to break the moulds of his self and ego.

This reminds me of a Zen saying: "Before Enlightenment chop wood carry water, after Enlightenment, chop wood carry water." It reminds me of the everydayness of enlightenment. The story teaches me that unconditional service helps me not only feel good but also build bridges between self and the Other. With every selfless act I am breaking the rigid walls of my separate self and my ego. In a conversation with one of my Sufi 'critical friends', talking about 'experiencing oneness', my friend simply suggested to 'give until it hurts' in order to experience 'oneness'. I had not quite understood what he meant at the time. I had thought that he was suggesting I help the needy. I now realise that he was suggesting something simpler, more general, and more profound. He was talking about offering anything I value: my time, knowledge, experience, status, privilege. I can offer these to my colleagues, wife, children and clients. Giving until it hurts actually points out the boundary between the self and the Other. So how does this show up in my practice?

### **Non Duality In My Practice**

Taking a non-dualistic stance in my practice is an ongoing challenge. I try to bring this perspective to both new and ongoing initiatives of my organisation. One example is the Leaders Café, an HR community event attended by over 1000 people. I have been involved in the planning and delivery of the event for the last three years during which we have continued to explore and refine ways in which to make the Café a co-authored event, where a diversity of concerns and interests can be discovered and people are given an opportunity to come together and work on what matters to them. We achieve this through a carefully constructed series of small and large group sessions, fringe events, which happen before and during the main conference. These fringe events combine the opportunity for collaborative inquiry with the presentation of best practice. The process goes through an annual cycle and once the conference is over, we start working on the following year's event.

In terms of a practice informed by non-duality, the Leaders' Café is an attempt to bring us and our clients together in a participative way rather than one in which we treat them as the 'other'. It is a process for connecting organizers and audience and transforming all of us into co- participants. In line with the Sufist notion of communion of self and the Other, we have attempted, and I believe achieved, to shift the patterns of separation and detachment that existed in previous years in the Leaders' Café. The separation between 'audience' and organisers has blurred. The 'audience' has become involved in designing and organising the conference, and we, the 'organizers' have become facilitators, as we have started to share the ownership of the conference. We have stopped seeing the HR community as the 'other' and boundaries have become fluid as we started to share traditionally separate and distinct roles. It strikes me that this process, whilst being informed by Sufi principles, also resonates with complexity thinking, which claims that 'we are all participants' in creating a social process which continuously evolves into an unknown future (Critchley & Stuelten, 2008).

Similar patterns of dialogue and profound collaboration started to develop within the HR community. Managers who used to be rather competitive and independent started to work together in previously unseen ways. I remember a simple gesture during the conference presentations, where the HR Director of a leading conglomerate in Turkey was giving assistance to a junior colleague by advancing her slides on the computer as she did her presentation. People's commitment to each other has gone as far as providing emotional as well as professional support. I believe the Leaders Café has become an example of the Sufist

concept of serving the 'Other' – we provide an unconditional service to a community we once thought of as the 'other'.

Another example I'd like to give concerns my recent work with a bank. We were invited to design and facilitate an innovation conference, having successfully run the first conference the previous year. On this occasion the main challenge was the economic turbulence. Our clients were dealing with uncertainty and managing risk in the marketplace and the bank's innovation team was concerned that the conference would be criticised for being a luxury and insensitive to the economic climate.

I realised that the main issue for the bank's management was managing client risk in an uncertain economic environment. They were facing an apparent dilemma. The more business they did, the bigger loan risks they faced.

In fact, the terminology 'managing risk' comes from a mechanistic worldview and the assumption that we can control the environment. This worldview involves a view of a separate, detached 'self and the other', in which we see the client as the other. A non-dualist worldview suggests uniting with the Other as well as living with the paradoxes. Another paradox in our case was the living with the risk versus innovation. In a recent study on this paradox, researchers claim that risk can coexist with innovation\*- (Borgelt & Falk, 2007).

I thought that the apparent dilemma was resulting from separating the bank from the client: either we do business and we take the risk, or we don't engage with the client. I thought that maybe this was not a dilemma but rather a paradox and that perhaps they could live with the risk as they did business. If the bank was close to its clients and explained the situation, it would be possible to avoid the risk and still do the business. However we cannot avoid risk if we stay distant from the customer. Instead we can engage in dialogue with the customer, understand their business and offer financial advice so that the risk of the loan being defaulted is reduced. In fact, the bank did have SME advisors, but they did not really engage with the clients. We suggested that we design the event in a way that they really engage with the clients, enabling them to support their clients in their business so the loans would be less risky. Reciprocally they'd also let the clients know the bank's business, and the risk being taken by lending to them. Rather than it being the Bank versus the Client they'd realise: 'We're in this together'.

So we suggested that the bank engage with the event from a different philosophy, thinking of their clients as participants/partners rather than constructing them as the other, on the other side of the risk equation. We suggested that the bank should engage their clients in an inquiry process to explore the issues of uncertainty and risk collaboratively. We proposed a theme of 'Managing and Innovating in Turbulent Times Together' with the bank and their customers creating a participative event to explore these turbulent times together, attempting to redefine the bank and customer relationship and seeking innovative ways of working together. The bank management liked the idea of jointly innovating with the customer and accepted our proposal.

We designed a process involving different sessions and collaborative open space workshops. The conference participants, comprised of a combination of bank managers and clients, worked collaboratively to define 'turbulent times', explore 'new way of relating to each other' and propose 'innovative ways of working together' within these new relational settings.

This conference has been a participative act and enabled us to engage, inquire, experiment and learn with the customer. What I see as being special in this case, is that the bank agreed to connect with their customers instead of trying to deal with the client risk in detached way. In my terminology, the bank has accepted the invitation to connect self with the other.

### **Sufism in the Workplace**

Sufism is a discipline of growth and self-development with the aim of experiencing oneness and unity of existence. (Vaughan-Lee, 1995) It is not a religion as some people would think but rather a unitary practice. (Helminski, 1999) I have been practicing Sufism for more than 7 years and my experience so far has made me a much more open, seeking, loving person at peace with the world around me. It has been a process of connecting the inner with the outer. The practice of working with the inner helped me to balance my intellectual qualities with my emotional qualities and is connected with my inquiry into and quest for intimacy and realness. Sufism assumes that every human being has a divine potential and development of this potential is possible through inquiry and practice. Development, one of the primary tenets of Sufism, is always present and alive in my professional practice with people and organisations. Serving ‘the Other’ is another quality of Sufism which informs my leadership style as well as how I relate to my clients.

What does Sufism offer and cost me as a leader of a consulting organisation? Those I work with talk of attributes like presence, patience, persistence, faith, generative thinking, humility, love, an inquiring and enabling attitude, inspiration and courage. Of course, I face certain dilemmas and contradictions as I integrate Sufism in my practice. Today’s corporate world still is dominated by a dualist worldview. I know that my participative style is sometimes criticised by people who subscribe to a more conventional style of ‘command and control’. In Sufism, we believe that whatever happens is worthwhile and do not categorise events as good or bad; and that perspective too informs my daily experience. Instead of classifying matters as good or bad, as many people still do, I seek to find what is worthwhile, which leads people to see me as tolerant and patient – whilst I don’t see anything to be patient or tolerant about.

Another important discipline of Sufism is serving the other. In a traditional business environment many people believe that managers should be served by their subordinates. However, I seek to practice the Sufist discipline of serving others, regardless of their position or role. I believe ‘service’ is a quality of relating to others that everybody can practice and it helps me to get closer to experiencing the ‘indivisible unity’ which is so central in Sufist philosophy. (Ibn Arabi, 1997) Practices like ‘midnight inquiry sessions’ have enabled me to develop an unconditional love for the people that I work with – an experience I know is very difficult for many to understand. Given this difficulty, I am discreet about my Sufi practice and only share it with people who are keen to understand my intentions.

My personal drive for the transformation of the company has its roots in my Sufi quest. Sufism suggests looking for opportunities to serve the greater good. I believe I don’t need to invent something new, instead I focus on serving what I am actually doing already. In that way my life’s philosophy starts to inform my practice. The discipline of serving is for me one of the most powerful in the search to transcend separateness and the illusion of ‘me and other’. Serving is the bridge between ‘me and other’.

My story, the thread for this chapter, is about looking for opportunities in my existing practice to serve and connect with what I used to see as the “other”. It involves connecting with the teams I work with in a much more intimate and serving sense, and involves rethinking my relationship with customers.

In the past, I would see our business as existing to make profit. In order to make a profit we looked for opportunities to sell our services. We would ensure that the quality of these services was adequate so that we deserved to be paid, but were not unduly concerned about the impact of what we delivered for our customers.

In the transformation process, I turned this view upside down. I started to see the consulting relationship as an opportunity to serve the customer. Instead of providing resources to the customer, we would try to create value. When we started work with the ‘value’ perspective, it brought a fundamental shift for the whole company. It challenged the way we related to the customer, changing that relationship from selling a product to providing meaningful value. We started to question the way we delivered our services and realised that we needed to rely on ourselves, and what we bring to the relationship, rather than on extraneous resources. Creating value means going beyond the transactional relationship, instead working to provide what truly makes a difference for the customer. This view does not disregard the realities of life and the need to make a living. In fact, it assumes that if we provide value, the benefit will come eventually. Providing value makes commercial sense.

## **Conclusions**

I have been through a significant personal and professional transformation in which I have looked to be different in myself and in my relations with others. Drawing on my experience of taking a Sufist approach in my practice as a leader and consultant I have come to the following insights:

*1 Maybe it makes more sense to change how I experience the world rather than changing the world itself*

One of the underlying threads of my transformation experience so far concerns change. In today’s consulting world, we regularly speak of change management. I have come to conclude that the only thing I can change is my own experience. I can start this change by having an open view about myself, letting go of the assumption that our present situations are dictated solely by our past experiences. Instead I approach the ‘present’ as a time that renews itself each and every moment, and I look to see how I can liberate my present from the past as I experience each moment anew. In order to develop a capacity to stay ‘open’ to the moment, I have to develop a habit of ‘working’ with myself.

*2: The only person I can liberate is myself, but I can encourage others with my liberation*

Liberation is about developing the capacity to stay open to my experience. I cannot ‘liberate’ anybody but myself. However, my story can be an encouragement for others. I have seen that my transformation has been contagious where others have seen me ‘transform’, and have, in turn, become more courageous to ‘work’ on themselves.

*3: It is not always ‘either- or’, there may be an ‘and’*

I have found that a key to liberation and growth is balancing opposites in a world where polarities dominate. In my case, I have been uniting masculine and feminine, intellect with emotions, inner and outer, individual with collective and self with the other. It is also about living with paradoxes.

*4: Self-growth is easier if I genuinely serve 'the Other'*

I am aware that I am at odds with today's dominant view, where self-interest and competition are constantly promoted. However, I have seen that there is another possibility of self-development. Paradoxically I become a 'bigger person' when I focus on the other.

I would like to conclude with a Sufi story about serving the other. In the old times, it was said that Sufis used special spoons, called Sufi spoons, to emphasize the wisdom of serving the other. These are specially produced and are one meter long and made of wood. Sufi teachers would invite people to dinner where soup is served in bowls and guests were provided with these spoons. People with self-interest would try to drink soup with these long spoons; they would spill it all over the place, intrude on their neighbour with its tip and end up angry and hungry. On the other hand, people with the interest of serving the other would use the same spoons to feed each other across the table without any trouble. They would finish dinner content and full.



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# Appendix 2: Inquiry Conversations with My Critical Friend

## **A New Cycle of Inquiry**

- Making sense in collaboration with my Editor

By Alper Utku

### Contents

1. The intention that emerged
2. The original letter from my editor
3. The conversation that followed – written as a metalogue
4. Reflecting on my practice

## **1. The intention that emerged**

Alper – I have written this as bullet point so that you can use them as the basis for writing up this section

- The overlap that exists between supervisor and editor (and the difficulty of having strict boundaries)
- The different dynamic that exists between myself and John – a different type of power relationship and what it gives me that other relationships don't (or give me in a more problematic way)
- The contract that exists between us – the difference that John brings (perspective, context, line of thinking... coming from a different place)
- The type of conversations and reflections it makes possible for me

## **2. The original letter from my Editor**

13<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Dear Alper

### Reflecting on my experience of structuring your work

These are the themes that struck me as I have spent the last few weeks reading your thesis, finding the red threads and seeing what stands out to me as distinctive about your leadership practice. I offer this as food for reflective thought and maybe even the starting point for your final section.

#### **i) Contextual uniqueness and dual transformation**

Your transformed leadership practice has had to work with the realities of a high power-distance culture, embracing the paradoxes on inviting participation in an environment where high status people's 'invitations' come loaded with expectations of compliance. Not to accept your invitation would be wrong socially and also in terms of accepted behaviours within a professional firm.

In your thesis you have explored in practical and specific detail how to:

a) Enable new patterns of conversational engagement e.g. through the introduction of Gestalt inspired Learning Groups

b) Introduce new voices, other high status perspectives that sit alongside your voice (not under it) e.g. by having Cem and Dorothy become active participants in MCT, but not under your direction

c) Encourage profound self-reflection so that people can become more conscious of self, and agentic in, a very hierarchical society e.g. through the establishment

Your thesis provides evidence of how to invite, provoke and support a sustained redevelopment of an organisation's cultural assumptions – while also working with these assumptions, staying connected to the wider social reality and the paradoxical nature of any invitation that comes from a senior to a junior person in a patriarchal context.

Your thesis locates leadership transformation within the practical reality of established social relations, which you set out to transform as you transform yourself – which is why I have used the term 'dual restructuring' in the title of this section.

Your transformation as a leader is not just inside-out, but outside in. The image I am left with is two snakes in a circle, both of who are eating the others tail – which may explain why the Esher diagrams so appeal to you.

## **ii) Spiritual practice in an earthly, commercial world.**

Embracing a spiritual practice when leading a commercial firm is problematic. Spiritual practice often invites, even demands that, people withdraw from the

muck and bullets of material activity, embodied relationships and the world of Princes (i.e. Earthly power).

Rather than take the easy option of abandoning one world view in order to embrace another (and so stay at some level untransformed, attached to the pattern of singular truths), you have chosen to live in the world with its material and social ontologies while also embracing a spiritual ontology that is utterly different. I am reminded of some work I did with a Christian priest some ten years ago – she introduced me to the notion of “Urban Hermits,” people who practised the discipline of solitude in the midst of life, rather than retreating to the edges of society where they could be other than society.

In terms of your unique contribution to leadership practice what stands out for me in this heading is:

*a) A lived and social rather than espoused and individual spirituality.* Within certain traditions such as Protestant Christians, spiritual faith is seen as a private and individual activity. The individual’s relationship to their God is a matter of personal salvation. Your spiritual practice is something you live in a public domain, while being acutely mindful that it carries within its philosophy a contradiction with the social norms of high power-distance and compliance to hierarchy.

*b) A willingness to live with a plurality of ontologies and epistemological truths.* Identifying a unique contribution to learning would be much easier if you were operating within a single world-view, with established rules and known boundaries. By looking to engage with a synthesis of sometimes contradictory philosophies, of revealed wisdom and created knowledge, your unique contribution is a function of your synthesis rather than reinforcing of a singular



way. And the unique aspects of your synthesis are the integration of social presence and spiritual solitude, owned status and power and the lived practice of giving it away (or transforming what is meant by power), theoretical grounding and day-to-day practice in a world of competing and contradictory discourses

*c) Your invitation to others to find a way of being for themselves that works for them – not imposing a single path.* This is why your Masters programme is so important, it is equipping people to engage deeply with their sense of self and how this self is informed by and also informs the world around them. This is cultural change at a level rarely if ever seen in organisational settings. Usually organisations that embark upon a cultural path that invites compliance to a new way and truth, demand compliance through training courses and the management of performance systems. Your approach is to invite people to know themselves in the world so well that they can be authentically present and self-directed – with this self-direction grounded in hard won and really grounded insight rather than something that has no more lasting impact than a change in clothing fashion.

*d) The humility of your practice.* You have become and remain doubtful, partial and in flux. I remember the story you told me of being in a continuous process of elevation (remembering that however high up the tower you go, there are always higher levels). I think doubt is one of the great and unique qualities you bring to your practice – most leadership writing is still filled with certainty! And the leaders I speak to seem to always talk in the language of 'control', where somehow the world needs to be bent to fit with their view of truth.

In this thesis, with its doubtful and tentative language – with its refusal to make great claims as to your personal role (as you say, power and ability are gifts granted to us, not things that we create for ourselves) – you are engaging with a challenge High Pidgeon made to me many years ago... How do you make the

language of doubt and humility as compelling as that of certainty and boastfulness?

In your leadership practice you have to engage with a world that needs the useful prop that certainty gives (a prop that contains anxiety), while embracing the doubt and modesty demanded of your spiritual practice.

In terms of complexity theory, your leadership practice is the embodied, lived reality that enables people to stay centred under conditions of uncertainty and disagreement. It is your personally lived, socially expressed, spiritual practice that models exactly the type of leadership required to see life as a process of learning from steps into the unknown (or entrepreneurial experiments). It means you can live life as inquiry.

### **iii) Authenticity in a society of roles**

Your authenticity is emerging and contingent, while still being grounded. You have avoided falling into the trap of seeing authenticity as something fixed and eternal.

Your doubtfulness and modesty creates a living version of authenticity that much leadership thinking loses. Authenticity is a process not a state.

And you acknowledge and work with the reality of the roles people have painted onto them, or acquire. Authenticity co-exists in a world of socially mediated roles – which often perform very useful functions... they help people understand

people's hierarchical rank, which is incredibly important in a high power-distance culture (I could go further and so it is essential in any group of Primates!).

You don't wish away roles, but instead seek out how to acknowledge them and transform them. This is what you have been working at with the new conversations you've initiated in MCT, the new voices and perspectives, the new disciplines of knowing

#### **iv) Presence in the now, while having voices from the past**

As part of your patterns of refusing to shrink yourself into single worldview, you have avoided seeing yourself as being totally defined by your past. You have paid attention to your past and how it informs your present, but you have also owned your own agency (mediated by your spiritual beliefs that this agency is God given) in the present.

Your thesis explores the archaeology of your practice, but has offered a view that you are not your archaeology.

This fits with the sense of the dynamic of your practice, its quality of being a work in progress. I am reminded of my frustration in working with Kevin Power in the last 12 months – how I started off wanting to 'pin him down', provide some definitive description of his practice, while what became obvious over the months of our working together was that his practice was defined by its aliveness. It is the difference between practice as a living butterfly and a practice which is a trophy butterfly, killed and pinned into a collector's glass box.

*John Higgins*

*13<sup>th</sup> May 2013*

### **3. The conversation that followed – written as a metalogue**

The following is a metalogue co-written with John following on from our conversation inspired by his reflective letter to me. A metalogue is a style of present tense telling of a story, in the style used by Gregory Bateson in 'Angels Fear: Towards an epistemology of the sacred'.

AU: I want to say how much I appreciate the depth and quality of your response. It was really profound and so intense. You bring a different perspective, a different context, a different line of thinking. You are coming from a different place

JH: What is my difference?

AU: It was what you noticed, your highlighting of my context and its uniqueness and the challenges of the context I'm in. Challenges I take for granted, which means there are gaps in my conversations and how I write about my experience and learning. It's these gaps, these things I take for granted that can make it difficult for a reader of my work.

You highlighted the very obvious, hidden dimension... how I'm trying to live a spiritual practice in an earthly place. The spiritual is always a passion and a choice, although sometimes an unconscious one for me. I'm trying in my thesis to make the choice visible. I was interested in the Christian idea of Urban Hermits that you talked about. It reminds me of Sufi story that explores which is easier, to be a sage in the cave or a sage in the farmers market.

In the story one Sufi lives in retreat, he's always on the mountain, in his cave. He criticises the sage who lives in the town, telling him that he should be going into retreat and that he is failing as a sage by living in the town and in the market. Then one day, and I'm making a long story very short, the sage in the market invites the other to join him. When the sage arrives he is overwhelmed, he sees a beautiful woman and is unable to forget her. He gets into conflict with a man in the street and is unable to let go of his anger. He realises how difficult it is to be spiritual in the midst of earthly life. He realises that to retreat to the cave is to escape into an idealised laboratory.

JH: Your remind me of an experience that I'd all but forgotten, discounted...

AU: What did I remind you of?

JH: Of a debate I experience when coaching a Priest ten or so years ago. She was in conflict with part of her congregation. She saw spirituality as a public, community, discipline and gift... not something that was purely to do with the individual. Some of the old guard in the congregation took the view that faith and spirituality were totally personal and private.

AU: What an illusion! Seeing spirituality as a private, individual thing. That's what creates most of the conflict in this world. The assumption that our spiritual life is private and individual and disconnected from all the rest of life is a major illusion. It is this false separation that creates conflict through the mental imposition it makes.

It is obvious we are all connected! It is very difficult and painful to try to be separated from the world and it is this pain that leads to the suffering of conflict. Living spiritually in a community makes it easy and natural to be connected, it is about experiencing life as flowing and soothing. This is what I understand by the word surrendering – and that is what the word Islam means, it means to surrender... surrender to the web of life around you... it is the experience of surrendering to the social web and network in which we're all in. This surrendering to the social web is the first step and once you've taken it so it becomes easier to flow.

When we think the other way, from the individual and private perspective, then we try to objectify the world. We try to impose individual, frozen, fixed patterns. We become prisoners of individuality. We try to impose some of these mental prisons onto others, which is painful and we soothe ourselves by saying that they need to go through this pain – and this is the basis of fundamentalism. It is the social process of imposing these mental prisons on others – and people then end up spreading this disease, making everyone sick.

In a social world, setting one's mental prison to one side requires effort. It requires a sense of modesty, a willingness to go with the flow and live with all the tensions and paradoxes of the social life. And in the end you begin to see that the 'self' is an illusion. 'Self' is part of the disconnected world of the private mental framework.

The Priest you talked of and her challenge to those in her congregation who wanted work with the notion of the individual spiritual life... she was challenging the notion of individuality in the same way I do, challenging the idea that there is a self that can exist separate from others. Your female Priest was living in a social

world AND living spiritually in the community. She fits with my Sufi notion of unity and the leaving behind of the false idea of a separated self. Her way of being was in unity with that.

The biggest tension that exists in humanity, in my world and in my history is this struggle between individuality and connectedness. There is a large group of people, and a part of me, that claims individuality AND there is another part of me and another group, represented by Prophets and sages, who reinforce and remind us that we are part of an indivisible whole. The section in your letter that speaks to: 'Spiritual practice in an earthly, commercial world' you brought this tension out very clearly... the tension of being an entity and being part of an invisible whole.

BREAK FOR TEA FOR ALPER AND A NEW PEN FOR JOHN

JH: Back to the letter

AU: Where you write about 'a lived and social rather than espoused and individual spirituality'... that was very striking for me. You then go on to write about plurality and being open to this and then to my way of being which is to send people an invitation to find their own path. I notice that I can find myself talking about a single path, that my direction is having an intention and willingness to live with plurality while inviting people to embrace their own path.

Living spiritually in a social world, that is challenging things. One of the subtleties of the lived social world is an open-ness to others. If I start with the notion that

my way of being is right, that leads to the mental torture and prison of fundamentalism. I have to keep reminding myself that there is no one-way of doing social spirituality

JH: While at the same time being convinced of the rightness of seeing spirituality as social rather than individual!

AU: Humility is the key! I can only live with a practice of social spirituality if I question any individuality. I have to be doubtful and partial and in-flux. I have to embrace the wondering of whether I am fixed and real or whether I am just a dream. What is real? What a dream? Who is dreaming if I am a dream?

Tension and doubt creates humility and courtesy towards others. Let me explain this not with a Sufi story but by telling you about the film Oblivion with Tom Cruise. Have you seen it?

JH: No

AU: Tom Cruise's character is presented to us as a living being, who thinks he's one of the last human beings who left the earth after some catastrophe. One day he returns to earth and discovers he is all but a replica... his memories have been implanted into him and it is because of his memories that he thinks of himself as very real. AS the film unfolds he discovers lots of other Tom Cruises who are doing the same as he is. He realises that was he was thinking of as real... what he considers to be his 'self' is a set of memories put into his mental computer. Memories that came from someone who'd died years before.



My sense of self is like that and I'm questioning my sense of self. We exist in this world... where spirit is a form of energy... where individuality is a false concept, an accumulation of patterns of memories. Because we can record and retain these memories, because we can envision them this makes us think that, creates the illusion that, we are individuals.

We define ourselves through our story, which is our accumulated memory.

Let me give you an example. I define myself as a Consultant, Father, Son... all different identities. I work hard and am interested in this and that. But all these things are from the past; they are the accumulation of all my intentions. Maybe I'm deluding myself... these labels and patterns are memories, from the past, they are not real anymore. The social relations that make me a son are still valid, but more and more I am becoming aware that there is something more to what I mean by the label 'self'.

In your letter you write: 'In this thesis with its doubtful and tentative language... you are engaging with a challenge... how do you make the language of doubt and humility as compelling as that of certainty and boastfulness?'

I'm presenting to you the doubtful and the tentative. The self is something I have created mentally and that creates my sense of humility.

If I'm the container of an all-encompassing energy, then I'm a cup. Rumi writes of the cup as the holder for the water... the water is real BUT the cup takes

himself so seriously. If that's true, then I need to take care in whatever I do. If I see the cup as the only real thing, then I create lots of challenges

JH: I am reminded of a story Adrian McClean tells as an example of Batesonian punctuation. He used to run a riding stables and they had a dog that would greet all the new arrivals, bringing a stick to be thrown. Now were the people playing with the dog, or was the dog teaching the people to play with him?

The question I'm now left with is, 'What is leadership if the leader isn't real?'

AU: Leadership is not something we possess. Leadership is a flux, a connecting energy, which we connect through with the names of God. In the business world a leader is an intentional follower of a series of names of God. The leader is always a strong follower of other names e.g. Humility, Trust, Justice. We see the leader as the leader because he is the holder of these values.

Someone we call a leader is someone who connects to a set of values. We like someone as a leader because he is:

- Creative (A name of God)
- Just (A name of God)
- Understanding/Good Listener (A name of God)
- An Achiever who gets things done, wins wars... (A name of God).

The names are infinite. The Leader is someone who connects into these infinity of values.

The only leader is the flux... we are all followers of the flux, the patterns that connects us. Leadership is a temporary combination of these eternal, God named, values that we all participate into.

The Leader has a little more intention than others in connecting with, being possessed by, these values. He's a real person, a possessor of leadership BUT these values are ever-present and through are participation in them they become visible. Water and air are everywhere... you are in the water and the air so when you dip your cup into the water and air you are only filling it with whatever was already there.

But the cup begins to think that it is the water – it is the container for something that doesn't exist elsewhere. It begins to think that it is the water! And the same applies to leadership and the leader. They exist within an ever-present flux, energy, water, an all-encompassing flux that has the potential for all qualities.

How do we define the divine? An Ocean without a shore and a shore without an ocean. Jung spoke of the unconscious as an ocean. My challenging of the notion of leadership and the leader is that we cannot claim ownership of leadership. Leadership is socially created and that creation is false.

There is only one leader which is the flux... in Sufi, Allah, which originates from Hebrew!

#### **4. Reflecting on my practice**

I'd suggest you pick out some phrases from the metalogue and explore them in more depth

Use them as the anchor to explore the implications for the rest of your thesis and your current practice and what is your unique contribution to the academy of leadership

#### **Reflections on a conversation with Alper on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

In this paper I will explore the themes that stood out for me from our short conversation today. These themes are:

- a) The challenge of depth in your Doctorate
- b) The challenge of breadth in your Doctorate
- c) Writing a section in your thesis that is an inquiry into what your Masters programme speaks to in your practice
- d) Re-imagining your thesis

My intention in my writing is to provide you with food for thought for your own writing.

#### **a) The challenge of depth in your Doctorate**

Towards the end of our conversation I talked to what felt to me as something distinctive about the depth of personal transformation that you have gone through in the last decade, specifically I spoke to how you are connecting to and working with a much more profound philosophical practice/tradition than is embodied within much traditional leadership writing. I equated your depth of examination to that experienced by someone attending a monastery.

Let me play with some of my emerging thinking about you and your transformation:

- The Catholic Christian Church has a very well developed body of writing and practice about what constitutes good leadership in the temporal (material) world. If you were writing as Catholic Christian, and anchoring your lived practice in its prescribed way of leading, your thesis would be about the struggles you face, how you fall short and the different moral and ethical universes faced by a Leader informed by Catholic Christianity to that of a leader who takes his insight from the Harvard Business Review
- The difficulty for the Sufi tradition is that it has, to date, avoided developing such a directive set of practical principles (or so you lead me to believe)
- What you share is the sense of bringing into the leadership discourse a language and set of considerations that are usually absent in any lived sense (the highest appeal the CEO of Google could come up with when defending his tax practices was to say it was about fulfilling 'Fiduciary Duty')
- The other challenge that working from an old and established tradition presents is that you are less personally fixated than most Western, self-actualisation, development programmes. You are aware that you are exploring your practice in the context of a greater/higher/more all defining force/being. This means that your visibility and claims for unique knowledge

are more problematic as they can all be seen simply as re-expressions of more eternal truths in the modern context

- Your work is about connecting to and making sense of yourself in the context of a tradition stretching back over 100s of years – most Western leadership writing is unanchored in any explicit philosophy beyond various shades of 'be yourself' (in more or less socially constructed and conscious frames)
- Your anxiety is trivialisation – that a subtle and deeply challenging (to materialistic rationalists) philosophy gets reduced to bullet points – that you become the next Tao of Leadership, something that is cut off from the years of training and learning that inform the true Taoist.

Implications... maybe you should go and look and see how the mainstream religious traditions define good leadership practice. Maybe this is an important point of reference when you do your piece comparing your practice to classical Western leadership models.

## **b) The challenge of breadth in your Doctorate**

What became plain to me as I listened to you was how broad the extent of your leadership practice is:

- It is about you and your evolving sense of self and mission AND
- It's about you in relationship to people you work with and who work for you AND
- It's about you establishing a Masters programme to promote an alternative way of leading to the Patriarchal/Authoritarian tradition AND
- It's about the Masters programme evolving into a community of practice AND

- It's about connecting this community of practice into the political struggle unfolding in Turkey, as you seek to run seminars in the park in the evening AND
- It's about you bringing into the light a mystical practice and philosophy grounded in an ancient tradition that too easily gets lost in the desperate habits of easy learning and self-aggrandising claims of original insight (what I wrote elsewhere about you privileging the modest and doubtful over the boastful and certain)

**c) Writing a section in your thesis that is an inquiry into what your Masters programme speaks to in your practice**

Your Masters programme came into being during your work on your Doctorate – it is a living expression of your unique contribution to how leadership is practised in Turkey. I think the whole weight of your thesis may need readjusting with this as the framing achievement – with the earlier inquiries becoming smaller in their presence and reviewed through the lens of how they contributed to this achievement.

As you told me over the phone, you need to give much more weight to the dissertation topics of your students and the shift they have seen in your practice. You need to write about the need to work with your suffering (and for you your suffering has been in your relationship with authority and power). You need to write about how you were transformed during the process of the Doctorate and your developing Sufi practice so that you began to let go of being angry at your father and instead were able to notice and pay attention to the authority image that you carried within you.

And then, as you spoke to me, spin out from here and say how you have seen the cultural context play out. How your father was constructed and constricted by an authoritarian culture. How you are now seeking to engage with others as you try and transform the context without taking on the trappings of the patriarchal. How you are seeing a participatory experience unfolding around you in the park, how people take responsibility for clearing up the rubbish – how thousands of people are experiencing being powerful without being authoritarian.

And you need to speak to your financial contribution – how you knew that for the Masters to live and breathe it needed some security apart from the day-to-day demands of commercial success. You need to reflect on how this speaks to your leadership practice, in English there is a cliché that says 'he put his money where his mouth is.' Your Doctorate is not just a piece of academic and personal inquiry, it has been a rallying call for you to step into the world as an active agent – taking on a new form of leadership.

Maybe you could compare and contrast:

- Your father as a leader
- Your current Prime Minister as a leader
- You as a leader in 2001
- You as a leader five years ago
- You as a leader right now
- Rumi as a leader



## **d) Re-imagining your thesis**

Much of the work in the current thesis has maybe served its purpose – it helped you get to where you are now in terms of a clarity of purpose in your life. Maybe what now needs to be re-submitted is something quite different. The key Sections could now be something like:

- Section 1 – Connecting to and working within a Sufi tradition (The 'Section – Sufi' you're working on)
- Section 2- Comparing and contrasting Sufi informed leadership and personal transformation with:
  - 2.1 Other philosophically and religiously grounded leadership and transformation practices
  - 2.2 Classical modern Western leadership models
  - 2.3 Individually focused models of personal transformation
  - 2.4 The challenge presented by working within an established leadership tradition
- Section 3 – Transforming leadership in Turkey – my thesis as a living piece of engaged leadership action
  - 3.1 The purpose of the Masters programme at the start
  - 3.2 The need it meets in me
  - 3.3 Transforming leadership at the level of individual
    - The individual dissertation stories
    - Transforming leadership in the organisations participants come from
  - 3.4 Becoming a community
  - 3.5 Becoming a movement
  - 3.6 Making a difference to leadership in the Turkish political context
    - Stories from the park

- Section 4 – The roots of my journey
  - 4.1 My inquiry into intimacy
  - 4.2 My inquiry into Being Real
  - 4.3 How these early cycles of inquiry inform my current leadership practice
    - In the Masters
    - At MCT
    - In the Park
- Section 5 – My research methodology
  - 5.1 My cycles of inquiry and submission
  - 5.2 My current cycle of inquiry and action
  - 5.3 How my research methodology fits with established models of research
    - The participative paradigm vs non-participative
    - The personal vs the impersonal paradigm
    - The mystical vs the material paradigm

Dear Alper

### **A letter from a visible editorial companion**

Over the last year or so I've been providing you with some traditional editorial support, making suggestions about English phrasing and the flow/readability of the document. I've also served as a sounding board, someone you converse with as you explore what sense to make of your inquiry to date, your practice and the feedback you have received from the formal Doctoral process.

Following on from our most recent conversation – yesterday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2103 – I wanted to write to you in such a way that I can make available my expertise in a visible voice, provide you with a source of quotable text.

### **A moment of insight into the intention of your Doctorate**

In a few short sentences yesterday you turned the light bulb on for me, helped me see why you have been so doggedly pursuing your Doctorate. Until now I had been fascinated at an intellectual level, wondering how you were going to marry the seemingly (to me) incommensurable worlds of Sufi practice and classical Western leadership and leadership development theory.

Then you told me about the feedback from your viva, about how they (the voices at the viva) had encouraged you to say more about Sufism and explore its role in

your leadership practice. There had also been a push to get you to pay more attention to power and the theory of power.

This led to you stepping back and asking yourself why you were doing all this work? Why was Sufism becoming such a central part of your work – in the beginning of your work I seem to recall you didn't want to bring Sufism in at all, fearing that you would find yourself trivialising it and playing into the habit of 'fadism' that is so common in classical Leadership thinking (with its touristic visits into Taoism, Buddhism etc).

And here are the notes I made as you spoke to the theme of why Sufism. '... Sufi thought helps [me], makes it easier [for me], to relate to the world... easier to relate to the higher powers... [to] God. Sufism gives me a way of relating to power, [it] normalises my relationship to power. [It provides a] source of power [which] I can relate to, [where] love and compassion exceeds the wrath [of power].'

And you briefly mentioned your inquiry into your relationship with your father, with all the issues of love, power and authority that were wrapped up in it – and as you spoke I began to really feel the parallels between us. Both of us from military families, with officer fathers, both of us deeply attracted to and repulsed by power, leadership and authority – an itch we both are compelled to scratch, you through your Doctorate and leadership practice, me through my research, authoring and tutoring.

## **The enormity of the boundless discourse of power**

At this point you made a request of me, to point you in a useful direction to explore the world of power and we talked of Foucault and I held forth about the immensity of the subject – sharing with you part of an introduction to leadership, power and authority that I give as part of my lecturing on the Ashridge Leadership Process.

My intention when I give this part of my talk is to remind people that this is a massive and multi-disciplinary topic that has been addressed and worked with over the millennia. I start with Plato and the importance he gives to the Philosopher King, how without philosophical discipline Kingship (the exercise of power) can become arbitrary. I suggest that in this context the exploration of what constitutes 'good' power/leadership is intimately bound up with a consideration of what it is to lead a good life.

I then play with other ideas, talking of Machiavelli (author of 'The Prince') and the need for the ruler to be above the fray of different sectional interests, and the necessity of embracing ruthlessness on occasions – that while to be loved is a wonderful thing, to be feared is often more effective when it comes to maintaining order. Leadership and power in this case are in the service of social order.

Then I refer to von Clausewitz, Prussian soldier and author of 'On Strategy', where conflict and warfare are seen simply as extensions of diplomacy. Power is a continuum of the hard and soft – it is a permanent negotiation between different

(national/sectional) interests, where military advantage is deployed if it helps the state achieve its territorial or diplomatic goals.

Out of a sense of mischief I also mention Marx – on one count to tease people in a Business School setting that has embraced, largely without question, neo-liberal economics (and its notion of markets which seem to exist without consideration of differential power relations) – but also in order to emphasise the importance of access to material resources. If as a leader you control a big budget quite frankly you can behave as badly as you want because people will tolerate you – because they need access to scarce resources. Power is about conflict and access to scarce resources.

I then talk about theology, psychology and modern leadership theory – and how the humanists have tried to capture the high ground of the HR world, with a privileging of 'rationality' and/or denial of conflict and/or embracing of positive psychology. The point being that power, leadership and authority are in permanent flux – power, in the language of Foucault, embraces a hugely diverse set of discourses each fighting for primacy and legitimacy.

### **How could you engage with the theory of power in your Doctorate?**

Your initial request to me, or the request I heard, was that given my extensive work in this area maybe I could recommend some reading for you – a request that I found myself leaping into unreflexively.

... I talked of Paulo Freire and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and how power is exercised through the imposition and internalisation of mental forms where one group oppresses itself while the other oppresses (and at the same time oppresses itself by getting stuck in the oppressor/oppressed dynamic)

... And so I think of Gramsci the Italian Marxist and his notions of hegemony and how power is exercised through everybody internalising the ways of seeing the world that serve the interests of the most powerful (so the American dream of 'anyone can make it' is espoused even as the opportunities for social mobility dry up)

... And Foucault and his analysis of how the Absolute Monarchs used their increasing grasp on the monopoly of power (spiritual, legal and physical) to demonstrate their authority through the exercise of the most calculated use of public torture – and how this has deepened further through the observational and controlling capacities of the modern state

... And FW Taylor and the power to control the exact behaviours of the physical man to comply with the requirements of the production process

... And on to discourses of gender and learning and how particular ways of knowing support particular ways and forms of expressing and exercising power

And then I stopped. In my editorial work I have been struck by your capacity to itemise and categorise huge tracts of learning – particularly in the fields of leadership and development. I became concerned that another venture into another theoretical domain would drown you in your Doctorate.

Instead I reflected on other aspects of our conversation yesterday and how you could work more insightfully and constructively with the material you already

have – rather than dive off into another round of reportage on the framings of others. So here is what I think you should do (and why you should do it).

1. Stay anchored in the personal need that your Doctorate is meeting in you – the embrace of Sufism, or Sufi practice, is about releasing you from a frame in which the wrath of power/leadership/authority overwhelmed the capacity for love and compassion as expressions of power/leadership.

The Sufi world provides you with an integrative philosophy that allows all aspects of power to be present, and also provides you with an integrative and generative experience of it. So it allows you to experience your leadership as an integrative and generative experience

2. Rather than introduce another myriad of writers and thinkers I think, as I now recall you suggesting, that you review your extensive sections on established leadership and development theory and review it through three lenses.

Firstly in terms of their implicit or explicit assumptions about power (your interest is in “the-theory-of-power-in-leadership-practice” not the whole field of “the-theory-of-power”), secondly how it fits with Sufi perspectives on power and thirdly how well each one serves you in your engagement with the power/authority of others and of yourself.

3. In summary – I think that your engagement with the theory-of-power should be much more focused on your reflecting on your increasingly clear and figural need to normalise your relationship with the experience of power (as expressed



through how you lead and how you experience your leadership). My sense is that this is the self-reflexive inquiry that will lift your Doctorate to another level of insight.

So I haven't provided you with a recommended reading list – except for the book I came across yesterday about Power and Love.

What I hope I have provided you with is the confidence to engage more self-reflexively with your Doctorate and explore your theory of power and how it serves you (and how it fits with the leadership discourse's views on power-in-action, which you don't need to do any more reading for – simply analyse more rigorously through a power lens)

And I also hope to have provided you with another form of documented inquiry – where this text allows me to be a visible part of your inquiry process, where you and I are renegotiating the boundaries of our relationship (and the assumptions of power within it) to enable me to contribute to your process of scholarship and not just its grammar!

With much affection and good will to your endeavour

John

### **Notes from a conversation with Alper on 23.10.13**

“My conversation with Kahane took me to the next level... [it] took me to a sense of what this inquiry is about and where it’s heading to... a very simple, human thing... finding your ways to deal with/relate to the issue/experience of power.”

“[Now] the whole conception of Sufi thought is about ‘Oneness’... realising that you are part of the universe and appreciating the unity in all dualities... and so Kahane’s book helped me see the unity in the [apparent] duality of Power and Love.”

Now in life “you have to get things done... you have to go to meetings. And sometimes there’s a yearning and looking forward to meeting with others, experiencing that sense of connection, love beauty and serenity. And this speaks to the duality... on the one side there’s the anxiety and excitement (linked to Power) and on the other there’s the Love part with its potential for connection, joy and sorrow.”

“Discovering this duality [has been at the heart of my inquiry]. When I look at business life, I see I’ve been focused on the Power side... getting good grades... material success. My script ignored/avoided/denied love. There were other less burdensome ways to experience love.”

But “Power was costing me too much... and it was not just about my ego. The deepest part of my seeking power was driven from the hope that through power I would be successful and so loved.”

"Adam Kahane helped me make sense of lots of things... the whole basis of Sufi ontology and its names... Names of Majesty AND Names of Beauty. The logic behind the names of Majesty are that they are names of Transcendence, while the names of Beauty are names of Immanence. Issues related to Power such as drive and achievement, that desire to go beyond ourselves speaks to that desire to transcend ourselves... while immanence takes us closer to our core."

"I've been trying to understand what it is/was for me to be a leader of a consulting firm. I wanted the firm and me to be successfully, to be a high achiever. Through my inquiry process I've discovered that this way of seeing life/being in life is missing something... and what is missing is Intimacy, Love, Names of Beauty."

"As I've dived into Intimacy, so I've needed to connect with deeper people... I've needed to connect with different parts of myself... and this has led to the experience of 'Being Real', which has led to the experience/discovery of becoming a better person... a complete person... an integrated person... a full human being."

Before this "I'd been trying to become something less than human."

"My endeavour has been to become fully human... I found it very easy to read Adam Kahane's book and connect it to Sufi thinking. It resonated in a surprising way... power is everywhere and can be generative and productive (as well as its shadow)."

“What I didn’t like was Foucault... I found his take on power depressing and sad. He talks too much about conflict and looks at power through the lens of conflict... I need to understand why this makes me feel the way it does.”

“As a result of this reading I’ve rethought the leadership section and regrouped it into 3 sections:

- a) Leadership as a property of leaders
- b) Leadership as a form of follower/leader relationship
- c) Leadership as a social process”

“In the end I realised leadership as something very simple, sensible and real... something that exists in everyday life. Leadership is a sea that is always there...and from this sea people create definitions gathered together from personal history and needs... and this act of collecting together parts of the sea happens intentionally or accidentally.”

“And what gets collected are certain qualities of participation e.g. Achievement, Trustworthiness, Modesty, Speed. But the sea is the universe of participation and that is why we have so many definitions of leadership, because leadership is a form of participation.”

“Leadership is like God... an overarching word. When I speak of leadership as a spiritual practice, I mean that it is the way we experience the Names of Majesty that are expressed through achievement etc. And when we experience Servant Leadership, or leader as facilitator, that is the beauty part.”

So a definition "in two parts:

- a) Leadership is a combination of qualities of participation that is always there
- b) The quality of leadership comes from how you balance the two major qualities/names of participation (Majesty & Beauty, Power & Love)"

"When leadership is lacks balance then certain things can happen. When achievement is all, then leadership becomes tyrannical/authoritarian in the eyes of the people."

"And if we look at what has been achieved through Achievement leadership, the three greatest in the modern era are Stalin, Mao and Hitler. Personal Power and Achievement are dangerous qualities when lacking in other qualities."

What can be done then to develop as 'a leader'? Three key activities:

- a) Exercise choice in what qualities you draw on (Names of Majesty and Beauty)
- b) Understand your intentionality
- c) Ensure a balance of qualities

"For me, I started as 'Boss'. My quest and inquiry were focused on personal growth. I stepped into the importance of being and connection... I learned to have balance in my qualities. I moved from 'Boss' to 'Leader', where as a Leader I followed others, respected others and related to them in a more intimate way. This was the self-development of intimacy and emotional literacy."

"I came up with the idea of Intimate Leadership, a temporary composition/definition created in my context... connected to my discovery of becoming a better person."

And now "I feel, really, really feel, DEPTH and CLARITY. I'm normalising my relationship to power and understanding how the notion of power/love is/are a unity."

"I have a desire for/capacity for will and achievement. As an achiever I've had to find my own way of becoming complete (a mix and balance of qualities) through my inquiry into intimacy."

"In order to run a consulting practice I needed a heart which has been learnt through Sufi practice. As a man, so Jung writes, we more Power driven and less drawn to/focused on Connection. The transition point comes, when we have children, and we experience the other side of life... the need for connection... and if not children then pets..."

"In my early meetings with Mustafa he was sure that my intention in engaging with Sufi thought was not for growth (in connection) but to increase my power and influence... he and I know people for whom the spiritual quest is an act of ego" i.e. not a balancing of the qualities but a continuing focus on Power/Names of Majesty."

"I find myself in this dance [of the qualities of participation]. I'm aware of the often subtle dangers... there's a lot of 'love' spoken to in the leadership literature,

but the intention behind engaging with love is often about feeding the assumption that leadership/participation is all about achievement and power.”

“And from Foucault I learn about the discipline of systems, how oppressive they can be... the language of leadership competencies is a disciplining structure.”

“Leadership is Nothing. Leadership is Everything.”

“It comes from the intentional and unintentional qualities of participation... power and achievement, connection and love.”

## **Notes from a conversation with Alper Utku on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

... forget about dualities... you can't frame and fix, the world isn't a fixed experience... you can think of leadership as a substitute for God... you cannot own attributes... we cannot claim we have leadership... there is only one leader, one leadership and we are participants in it and we are representatives of it... this me and mine/you and not you dilemma is part of the Sufi secret

... a metaphor comes to me from Physics... matter exists as both wave and particle but never at the same time.. all that is possible is some temporary unity

... leadership is collective, social consciousness... it emerges as people inter-react, as people develop shared understanding. It takes on an independent life and become a property of the social system... it is primordial

... the qualities of leadership are those speed, drive and connection... of achievement... this is how the phenomena of leadership is expressed... so the claim I'm making is that leadership is the unique expression of qualities...my claim is different from classical social constructionism, for me the construction of leadership is making sense of a pre-existing phenomena AND this phenomena is kaleidoscopic... it is over-arching, ever-shifting... one can take a snapshot and that is what framing does

... leadership is infinite, ever-changing and pre-existing... social constructionism cannot claim ownership... I'm curious if we can borrow such an idea... from the



Sufi perspective there is none but God, no leader but God, no leadership but Divinity. If that's the case how does this inform my inquiry?

... My inquiry is firstly about normalising my relationship to power.. I was in a position of power and being friendly and denying my power... being in the power position I can be real and intimate... My inquiry is getting away from the dualistic nature of Power and Love... it is about finding integration, moments of temporary unity

... My inquiry is secondly about normalising my participation in the universal

... Imagine two dimensions, on the Y axis I have the relational and the task, where the relational is Love and the Task is Power... on the X axis I have 'self' and the Universe... when I am in the Power/Universe quadrant then I am in a state of 'non self'

... And even this framing is paradoxical, it is a frozen/snapshot way of understanding 'self' and 'leadership'... the universal knowing of leadership is boundaryless and unframeable. The social constructionist view defines power as finite and within human command, my orientating principle is to see leadership as a Primordial, divine experience... leadership is infinite and omnipresent

... When I think about all the definitions I have included in my theses I am reminded of the story of blind people encountering an elephant, each part can be described but the whole is incomprehensible. The plethora of definitions tells us

about the nature of the phenomena, as does the metaphor of the wave and particle, to know it in one way is not to know it in another

... What is the learning through my inquiry? It is the story of someone who is a boss, who learns to relate... to integrate... and through this is able to step into the next stage, a transcendental state

### **Where is the evidence?**

... for self and non-self? Power and Love and Power/Love? I can find evidence through the process, when I change planes and shift my roles... those moments when I see my ego in the inquiry... could I relate to people or not? Was I still the distant power boss? Now I can see there were times when I could not relate, when I could not tell my experience... my work into being real and intimate, these are qualities of relating

When I started working on relating, I never worked on myself only, I always involved others... wanted others to join me. This was unconscious... I was assuming if we changed the context [then all that needed to change would change]... BUT I am/was still one of those narcissistic, power-driven executives

## **Doctorate 2007 – after Haj**

I will serve only Allah... a reality beyond me and my interests... when I applied to do the Doctorate it was to increase my power and influence BUT the doctorate has pulled me to my commitment, my duty to Allah

I had taken my father to Haj... I was getting closer to the Father... I served him as he couldn't walk... for 12 to 15 days I was in the service of my father (with all his power and authority)... I found ways of connecting to him, I started to relate to him.... The distance was gone and we were able to get closer

I made my vow in 2006... I will serve Allah... but how? Maybe it'll increase my power. I needed to explore how to do this

The Doctorate is a Sufi Learning process... when I had my viva for my MSc in 2009, I was hinting about Sufism. My examiner asked me 'what happen if you bring Sufism to the heart of your work?'

What is it about Sufi learning I want to bring into my inquiry? I can see three clear steps, there was the Haj, the closeness to the/my father, the vow to serve Allah and since then a dual process... there has been the embracing of Sufi practice and then the Doctoral process

At the centre of my work is this... there is my practice/service as a leader and as a human being, which my vow to serve Allah, the embracing of Sufi practice and

the Doctoral process all support. The vow to serve Allah is about spiritual freedom, a practice that seeks to minimise constraints. It is a liberation process that helps me let go of all those attachments to power and self

As my practice/service has evolved... I have moved away from being anxious, from the need for love... it has been liberating... if I look at my framings from a service perspective, my attachment to them give me pain

I don't own my daughter... I have the destiny to raise her... that is what comes from looking at her from a service perspective

When I work with my clients, I have moved away from the need to be a good father, from the need for them to like me, from the need to do it right to impress them

I can bring new things to them, new names other than those of achievement and drive... this is the entry point into love... I am working to bring about an integration of love and power in my work. You can be a better person, a complete human being when you learnt o integrate these qualities. Before I was less than human, my process has been towards becoming a person, a more complete person. Before I was just a boss

My focus has been along two dimensions... along the Y axis the focus has been on Personal Development... along the X axis I have been focusing on Theoretical sense making. I have been moving along from a starting point of Leadership models (with a focus on power) to a transcendent, primordial knowing of

leadership, where leadership is divinity and where there is only one leader. As a Sufi I can't claim to be a leader or to have leadership... I learn from Sufi teaching that I have to denounce the self and leave leadership etc to the only One

Along the Y axis of Personal Development, I have been developing from being less than human to becoming human, by becoming an integrated self. At the junction of Less than human and Leadership thinking as models and references, this is the world of the fragmented leader, the fragmented self, of fragmented service.

Along the X axis the journey has been that of integrating material and spiritual learnings... an integration of philosophy as I shift from an understanding of leadership as a series of models and references, to leadership as something universal and divine. Along the Y axis I am integrating myself, along the X axis I am integrating philosophy

So what am I serving... I'm in the service of management and leadership BUT I don't just get things done... I'm in the service of integration

In the Masters programme I invite people to connect, I invite people of good heart to come on the programme, people who need to tap into/access their power resource... to have a better experience of power... in the service of integration

There is one participant... she was so concerned with being seen... her inquiry was about visibility to begin with, but it grew into an exploration of her repertoire... of her capacity for being seen and not seen, of being both visible and invisible...

when she or I have two wings we can fly... I am in the service of both supporting the self and supporting others

### **My claims**

I am claiming that when you integrate you are free because you have a wider repertoire, more choices

And there are three integrations:

- self integration
- integration of others
- integration of schools of thought

Integration allows you to step into a larger domain... for all of those years my perception of achievement was false. When I step into a larger domain, I leave my attachment to fixed notions of self

What qualities am I embracing... I'm accepting that leadership is a transcendental quality, something beyond me and not me... the evidence for this is humility... everything I claim for myself is not mine... it is not about owning phenomena but participating in them

Humility... respect... compassion... giving up... When I met Mustafa I was interested in 'oneness'... he gave me a recipe. Give until it hurts, status, time... I was driving back with him and about to drop him by the highway to take the bus

home and I realised I could give my time and take him to his front door. Giving my time to others, giving my status to others, is one way of accessing reality

Through my Doctorate I've been involved in an unconscious attempt to access this 'bigger than self' reality

### **My emerging propositions**

If you are a leader who has power but is suffering from the limitation of position, start by accessing integration...

Integration starts with connecting to others and to your self... finding your second wing... seeking out structures to influence wider society

As a leader you become better and more complete through relationships, when you connect with your other side. If you are connected to the names of power, then you need to connect to the names of beauty... it is through the act of connecting that you will find inspiration, through the process of inquiry that you will become a better person... power is given through connections with others... you step beyond borders by embracing the power beyond you... by embracing the reality that without connections to others, to teachers, clients, people in my organisation... I cannot get anything done

If I know power as a means of achieving things, I can only achieve through a big network... Power as grace... I've had 21 years in a network, I've felt agency, AND

we participate AND we weave a structure... BUT as soon as I say "I've done that", I have no access to the resources of others

### **Evidence of the transcendental quality of leadership**

The integration of universal qualities... not the deepening of dualities. There is potential for the integration of us all

If you transform yourself, change the way you exist, then you influence more broadly... the academic process of the Masters programme is a catalyst for this

Through a process of Action Research people become aware of their qualities and find ways to access opposite qualities... these days power is largely exercised through force and pressure...can we find a different way of knowing and presenting power, and so bring forth a new notion of leadership?

Leader as listener, in dialogue... hard and soft... listen with curiosity

The names of power have a hierarchy... to be intimate with God, you need to respect that hierarchy... your compassion is more than your anger... your generosity is more than your sense of justice... Generosity takes you closer to God than justice...which is why giving until it hurts is so important



Finding free access to all the qualities of power... Killing... Revenge... Achieving are all names of power

### **Living life as inquiry**

If we are representatives of these universal qualities AND life and relating is an exchange/inter-action of these qualities... How would you live your life with appreciation of this?

In reflexivity, this means having a notion of noticing how qualities interact with each other

If I'm in a fight with someone... my quality of grandiosity interacts with the quality of achievement... when I have a reflexive eye I can see patterns of life

And what happens when they clash? When Achievement meets Listening?

The learning objective of a Sufi is to witness the major qualities to develop... to witness all the interactions between qualities

If I say "I love you" do I mean "I love my relationship with you"

If I say "I hate you" do I mean "I hate my relationship with you"

By bringing the quality of witnessing, I can see how my warmth gets a response from your quality of intimacy

If somebody is on the path of leadership, they are on the path of knowing themselves, they are on the path of witnessing qualities and being reflexive

Once you as a leader are free from a fixed notion of 'I am these qualities', you become a student of the interaction of these qualities...a student of relational processes and what goes on in them... you discover what life is about... what the pattern of life is I am learning about

I'm paying attention to that which can be seen and not seen... beginning a process of integration that brings together the seen and unseen. The intention of reflexivity is to explore what is unseen, what is beyond us. The Names of Beauty are visible, they are names of immanence (concrete)... the Names of Majesty are names of transcendence (unseen)

Judaism had a very abstract notion of the divine... transcendent. The early Christians wanted something more concrete, more accessible... Islam embraces Moses and Jesus... uniting the abstract and concrete... it accepts prophets... accepts there is a visible and invisible... seen and unseen... abstract and concrete

You don't have to choose... both are right... all are part of 'Oneness'

In practice most Islamic countries emphasise the transcendent... a typical Muslim society values both humility and aesthetics... in practice the Nordic countries are closet to this integration, especially Finland!

Action Research is an integration of the concrete and the unseen. The seen is in the Action, the unseen is in the Reflection

### **Framing my methodology**

This has been hard. I tried a sequential method, it didn't work... the world doesn't unfold one step at a time

Every time I was asked to do a revision, I was learning in relation with the examiners, editors, critical friends and supervisors

What are the qualities of learning in relationship? Conversational... listening... reflecting... synthesising... the quality of questioning... asking helpful questions, questions that lead me to explore more deeply

Living with my inquiry... it lives with me in the back of my mind... I look at life through the angle of the questions I have

### **Different qualities of different conversational partners**

Supervisors... give me a sense of legitimacy, trust... confidence I'm on the right track... open up new avenues... help me critically look at my assumptions... tell me things others won't e.g. 'You're denying your power position'. I'm an employer, shareholder, boss (the unseen critical perspective)

Editor... have someone to talk to without power... quality of openness, of appreciation... enables me to explore and learn what I do, what meaning my work has for me, where it could lead

Co-inquirers... I ask and they respond. They say some things are helpful and some are unhelpful... they are courageous, open to a degree BUT they could be holding back more than they are disclosing. I'm entitled to hire and fire. They can't tell me I'm an 'arsehole'. They may wonder why I make life difficult for myself... there's the issue of reliability, what they say is how they speak in the presence of power... they are careful, respectful and they try their best to be helpful

The intrinsic contract is... I'm coming to talk about my qualities of intimacy and their response is they want to be helpful

Knowing as a boss is very hard... Alper asked me to comment on his Doctorate... if I say yes there's a problem, if I say no there's a problem... knowing as a boss in Turkey is very hard

# Appendix 3: Inquiry Notes with My Friendly Academic

Dear Alper

I have included many comments in the text below. Here I summarise them - they show my impressions of what is there, what readers might need less of, and more of. My word, you have had some insights during this time - about yourself and your practice. I think you have shown great vulnerability in this work. And is there a lot to do? - Yes and no. I think it is crafting work, YES not new material. Cutting quite a lot out to bring the word count down a bit and crafting the rest such that form and content come together more elegantly. Making a narrative which flows more smoothly. Bringing more of yourself in (no surprise there).

Overall summary of my comments:

**Qualities of reflection** - satisfying, vulnerable, open. Unfolding as you learn. I heard many voices speaking of you, giving you direct feedback. 😊 What was missing - and could still be added - is feedback regarding the processes (eg with Cem) that you instigated. Feedback in response to questions like "how is it different round here now?" (double loop) more than "How am I (Alper) as a leader?" (single loop). **ADDITIONAL INQUIRY** One thing I would like additional reflection on is your sense of the purposes and intentions of all this learning, what is it *for*? Surely more than (just) your consultancy "doing well" (whatever that means) within today's corporate headlong rush and madness? **DONE**

**Methodology** - examiners often ask for more on this, so be aware. Show your cycles of action and reflection more clearly. **DONE** Make it obvious and overt. **YES** On several occasions I felt that a diagram would help hugely to show the cycles you experienced and show readers when they happened relative to one another. **ADDED** In addition, perhaps you could intertwine these with your Sufi learning journey in a single image. You draw on Peter, Judi and Jack's work a lot. Methodologically, you also need to draw on some scholar/practitioners for second person inquiry work and blend this in as you are writing, for example, about the difficulties of convening such a group or power issues within a group. I have pointed you towards some relevant literature in my comments. **THANKS**

**Practice accounts** - the longer accounts near the end are satisfyingly detailed. Earlier on, as indicated in the text, there are many points where I would like you to add in mini examples to evidence the claims you are making. **ADDED AS DISCUSSED** These would bring your work alive and bring you into the

picture - something which you and so many others have identified as an important issue. In addition, I am missing accounts which might evoke (in beautiful ways?) the phenomena of your Sufi practices from your lived experience. YES! ADDED! I think this is needed - you do have time - they don't need to be long. Maybe write them in Turkish and then (get someone to?) translate. DONE IN ENGLISH

**Theories & literature** - You have read widely. I wonder which are your key pieces of literature for the whole thesis - the ones that really have informed / inspired / challenged you? I don't know from reading as they all seem quite evenly textured. Perhaps you could emphasise some and let some others fall back. I think that the whole section on the history of leadership could largely be dropped / hugely shortened SHORTENED!! - it reads like you are trying to prove the point that you have read it. Get to **your** point more quickly is my recommendation. Be bolder in making your choices about the literature which is most relevant. DONE Also, in terms of the literature from (contemporary) scholars of Sufism - there are more I would expect to see, for example, Idries Shah and Andrew Harvey. Can you bring in these kinds of voices as well? I noticed them in their absence. One other thing - you do that comparison between Sufi ontology/epistemology/methodology and that of positivism and social constructionism. Do it as well for a participatory paradigm - this will be worth the effort. DONE INDEED!!

**Coming together as a whole** - I think all the ingredients are there and the thesis needs some more combing through and crafting with a fresh eye. I think you'll have a good viva with interested examiners. Remember to frame everything to keep readers with you throughout. DONE THANK YOU!

Some more specific comments before we go into the text itself...

- Abstract: look at this again to draw out the essence - I find it a more muddled piece of writing than the following section. DONE REVISED AS ADVISED
- The next part I find much clearer and encourage you to take some parts of this and use them directly in the abstract. Also, refer readers to specific section titles and page numbers to help them stay located in your text. Remember that you want readers to feel like safe passengers as they read. DONE
- The Sufism section - I am very pleased that this is included. THANK YOU! However, I have a number of points to make as you will also see in the text. First, it reads more as a description than anything and to a non-Sufi this is hard to keep a tag on. I think you can make this a much better crafted piece which brings together the phenomenology of your living practice (*showing* not *telling* readers) DONE WITH FREE FALL ACCOOUNTS with some (ie: less) descriptive work and a more scholarly, critical exploration of what writers such as Andrew Harvey and Idries Shah for example (as well as some you have already referred to) are saying. I think this means you will be presenting yourself as a

scholar/practitioner in ways which will show your practice and underlying ontology (hopefully aligned!). DONE

- In the section on leadership (a noun - leading as a process might be more in keeping): I find myself asking: so, is this a thesis about leadership? If so, whose? Yours? Your colleagues' Your organisation's? Can you be more precise here? YES More framing needed, please - are you leading other people? YES I have no idea as yet, on what you might be taking a lead on? PRACTICE SECTION ADDED What do you stand for in your practice? I am guessing it is something tacitly to do with the central tenets of Sufi practice. You begin to hint at this, I think, with the phrase "grouping spirit". Am I right in thinking at this phrase, the "grouping spirit", is something that links practicing Sufism (Sufing... :0) together with leading? Perhaps something like this (very readily found on the internet, by the way) might be helpful:  
<http://www.gcgi.info/2012-oxford-papers/272-the-forgotten-half-of-sustainability-a-leadership-the-inner-dimensionperspective-the-sufi-approach>  
THANKS! It feels very tentative at this stage, very tacit. Can you make this more explicit? Can you go straight to the heart of this, to the leadership theories which are close to your thesis (instead of feeling the obligation to summarise much of leadership theory)? OK I think that is what I am wanting as a reader - the narrative of your journey from tacitly linking leading and Sufi practice (with those New Age fears) to explicitly standing for them. THANK YOU! I am wondering if meaning is what sits in the gap between the two - what is "leadership" all for?-OK
- I want to encourage you to comprehensively and confidently explore "the comprehensively theorised fields of transformational and relational leadership" in conversation with a leadership of the heart and Sufi practice... You have clearly done enough reading already to be able to do this and can set it with reference to the overall background context of leadership theorising. At the moment, I think you have done this the other way around - tackling first the overall field (which uses A LOT of words and I think is unnecessary). -OK SHORTENED
- I would expect to see more theoretical input - and a critical one at that - plus more exploration as to why power, transformational and relational leading are important relative to your Sufi-informed practice. What is the power that is brought forth by such Sufi practice? Can you start to bring together this rather abstracted set of ideas with links to your own practice, to bring it alive? POWER SECTION ADDED WITH CRITICAL REVIEWS
- At the end of the leadership theory piece... my word, it's been a long - too long? - haul reading this section. If you were to go through it with a highlighter pen and mark the parts that really relate to the heart and soul of your thesis, what would stay in and what would go? What is in here because you think it ought to be? What has informed you about your own inquiry questions? SHORTENED I think you can be - and need to be - more selective, pushing some elements into the background and making the



figural ones of the transformational and relational practices of leaders (note the wording which starts to edge away from reifying leader"ship" as a thing) really stand out.-OK

- POWER: in this section you start to show yourself in the writing as well, in more detail (for example, your use of Lukes' first level of power). HURRAH! Lovely - something that refers to you and your practice! I am relieved that you are placing yourself in the text. This is overdue in this writing. Your context matters here. This brings the text alive so much. Can you do this more? Earlier? DONE THANK YOU
- Thinking about Foucauldian perspectives on power and shaping society / organisational space and so on, I am very curious to know how this fits relative to Sufi practice. Can the path of the seeker dissolve and unravel entrenched patterns? What is your experience, however small? OK
- I think that these ideas and theories on power-with etc come from a feminist stance. Check this out and mention it - put it into context. DONE Joyce Fletchers's work on relational practice does as well. You need to identify that the work that you are doing is being informed and led by work that is coming from feminism, even if you are not making your thesis a specifically feminist piece of work. This feminist strand then disappears in your writing. Did you disappear Veneklasen, Miller and Rowlands? Before your readers' very eyes? Are you doing what you are writing about re power at that point? YES MADE EXPLICIT
- When you start to move into power and love (and please frame this section more - it is so important) DONE I find it clearly explained and - at last - linking all the elements together. Phrases like: "The coexistence of power and love gives me a compelling angle to inquire into myself as a leader" are such a relief to read and I would welcome many more of these - and earlier in your text. Making what has been tacit (or denied through the emphasised fear of "New-Agey" lack of substance), overt. Go for it, Alper. Be bolder.THANKS
- Frame the section on Turkish culture more critically and more strongly. Also, you mention Turkish society as being tribally interdependent. How does this "we" fit with Kahane's power idea of self realisation? And, similarly where does this "we" fit with ideas of love and connection?  
I am guessing it might fit but might not... ADDED A SECTION
- The repetition/summary of the leadership sections is problematic. I suggest that this reprise replaces the longer first section on leadership in some way. For the sake of your wordcount as much as anything. Towards the end of this section you say that you are wondering about the relationship between this and your Sufi practice. I would expect you to be more than wondering and see this as the central tenet of your own thesis - be bolder, Alper, claim this space as your own.

Show us your inquiry questions emerging and evolving. OK

- The section on Eastern Philosophies bothers me a bit. REMOVED Why? As a reader I think... hang on, Alper went to some lengths earlier to tell me that his practice is a Sufi one. And now here we are with Buddhism and bodhi trees. You need to frame this section more carefully so I know that one thing led to another. Do you consider your own Sufi practice as one of the Eastern philosophies? I am concerned if a) we start drifting away from Sufism or b) if the framing of the whole thesis needs to be altered to encompass a number of different Middle/Eastern Philosophies. The latter is possible, but you need to be clear! TAKEN AWAY
- You write about becoming a better person as a result of your practices. You need to evidence your claims. Maybe bring in different voices? OK
- When you are making those comparisons between Sufi ontology/epistemology etc and others, I would like you to also explore that of the participatory paradigm, which I think is much closer to what you are looking for. And to do it here (I know you mention it later). I agree with what you say about the extended epistemology (explain what it is) fully. How does your thesis show that you know in these ways? Where is evidence of your use of these ways to knowing? I would point also towards Bateson ("part of mind cannot know the whole of Mind" - where Mind is not located in the head). As you are writing, I would like to see you do a similar investigation of a participatory worldview and Sufism. I think it will be fruitful. This might help:  
[http://www.peterreason.eu/Participationinhumaninquiry/Contents\\_list.html](http://www.peterreason.eu/Participationinhumaninquiry/Contents_list.html) and this: <http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/LivingAsPartoftheWhole.pdf> OK
- When we get to this section, I am starting to feel like we are on your home territory: "What I like most from Reason's (1993) proposition of sacred inquiry is its purpose, which is not to seek the ultimate truth but rather heal our alienation from the sacred whole. As this presence is both immanent and transcendent at the same time, there is always an element of mystery. In this regard, an inquiry that is reconnecting our intimacy with the Divine presence requires being open to the unknown with a sense of personal humility (the unknown is not here to be personally mastered)." Here, I am reading a more confident voice from you. Yes. THANK YOU
- Your "implications" sections are probably (definitely??) a unique and contribution. Emphasise these. Can you add to each of them a tiny example from your lived experience, just a sentence or two to bring them to life a little more. DONE
- As you move into your action research section, most of my comments are in the text itself. OK
- Your section on action research and your experience of conducting 1,2 person research has some hard won insights in it which ring true for me as a reader. I would also welcome them being substantiated through more

referencing to other scholar/practitioners' work in this field. I think you have to do this. See the work of scholar/ practitioners such as this: [http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/CI\\_SpecialIssue/McArdle.pdf](http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/CI_SpecialIssue/McArdle.pdf) which deals with issues like convening a group. Also, how is second person practice one with "heart" inside organisations? And can you rub this practice and experience up against your Sufi experience? What do they have to say to each other? Do they spring from the same basic ontology? Explore this - dig here - I think it might be at the heart of your inquiry...

- As the thesis proceeds, the Sufi practitioner element of your work shimmers in and out, and is often completely absent from your writing and consideration. Can you weave it into the mix more firmly? OK
- 
- I miss hearing others' voices in your thesis as much as I might - their sense making of the learning processes that you instigated as evidence of the levels of learning that they - and the consultancy experienced (not just their commentary on how they find you as an individual).

I do recognise that this is a lot to take in, Alper - there's a good thesis in here. You have basically done the work and have a few months of additional time to polish it now into something more beautiful. I think you'll enjoy your viva with Peter and Kathleen,

Chris

Appendix 4: Masters in Coaching,  
Consulting and Leadership in  
Organisations (MCCLO): Reference  
Materials