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**Leading without Greed:
A Vedāntic Lens on Wholeness toward Cultivating
Spiritual Intelligence in Leadership**

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

As the current civilisation grapples with existential grand challenges, it is suggested that old leadership paradigms furthering social injustice and environmental crises through greed, be examined. Greed was theorised in the literature as arising from a material ‘incomplete self’ predicament of constant want. Vedānta posits such never-ending desiring to be consequential of a lack of spiritual intelligence. Systematic reviews into workplace spirituality studies identified a need for qualitative leadership research, specifically recommending Eastern spiritual lenses, due to rising interest. Wholeness is central to spirituality, considered fundamental to human flourishing, yet remains nascent. This study explored whether wholeness, as conceptualised from a Vedāntic lens, could be meaningful for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership outside a Vedāntic context. Applying a Vedāntic lens, three essential constructs of wholeness were identified, namely, Being, consciousness, and joy. Hermeneutical phenomenology was applied through semi-structured interviews with twenty-five purposively sampled leaders across diverse sectors and spiritual orientations. The findings were triangulated across two different focus groups comprising fifteen participants, thus totalling forty study participants. Data analysis was conducted through transcript coding and thematic categorisation. Wholeness, as conceptualised, was found both meaningful and relatable outside a Vedāntic context by both spiritually active and not so spiritually active leaders, who expressed cognitive and emotional resonance with the constructs in relation to wholeness. Moreover, the findings showed such wholeness to be holistically meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership, encompassing leadership of both self and others, with positive organisational and social macro-implications. Leaders felt that wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment would evoke less greed in leadership, greater virtues-orientation, holistic consciousness in decision-making, and a more human-centric approach to leadership, since a sense of inner completeness evokes fewer desires and greater contentment. Potential societal and organisational macro-implications included holistic business models and kinder, equitable societies. The findings offered a practical way to cultivate spiritual intelligence toward addressing greed and the incomplete self, contributing toward the nascent concept of wholeness whilst encouraging the inclusion of multi-cultural perspectives. The study contributed three novel, meaningful wholeness constructs with phenomenological insights on leadership import, a Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness incorporating a Whole Self theory, and epistemological findings on the processual interplay between the Whole Self and incomplete self.

APPRECIATION

To *Brahman*, Bhagavan, Beloved Divine God, may this work be a sacred flower offering at Thy Feet. What can be accomplished without Thee, who art the Light of all Wisdom, Pure Consciousness itself? May this work fulfil pure and noble aims, in honouring *theoria*, the etymological root of theory, meaning experiential spiritual knowledge through contemplation on the Divine¹. That this study was successfully completed within three years amidst a pandemic, an insurrection, and the worst flooding disaster in the history of my city, is a testament to Divine Grace.

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¹ Case et. al (2012)

INSPIRATION

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Ōm pūrṇam adaḥ, pūrṇam idam, pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate ।
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate ॥
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ॥

That is Whole; this is Whole. From Wholeness does Wholeness emerge.
Having taken the Whole from the Whole, the Whole alone remains.
Om peace, peace, peace.

Ishavasya Upanishad

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SANSKRIT-ENGLISH GLOSSARY

Advaita - not-two, non-dual

ahamkara - ego

ananda - joy, bliss

Atman - the Self, same as Brahman on realisation

avidya -ignorance

bhakti - devotion

Brahman – Supreme Being

buddhi - intellect

chit – consciousness, awareness, knowledge

dvandva – pairs of opposites

gunas – the three strands or tendencies which influence all manifestation

jnana – [spiritual] knowledge

jnana-kand – knowledge portion

kaivalya - liberation

karma - action

koshas - sheaths

mahāvākyas – the four great truths taken from the Upanishads

manana – thinking about spiritual truth as heard

manas – mind

math - monastery

māyā – manifesting power of illusion

moksha – liberation

nidhidhyasana – uninterrupted contemplation on spiritual truth

nirvana – liberation

nishkama karma – selfless action

raja yoga- system of yoga as taught by Patanjali

rajas – guna principle of activity

sakshi – witness consciousness

sat – Being, existence, truth

satchitananda – Being-consciousness-joy/bliss

sattva – guna principle of purity

shakti - power

shravana – hearing of the spiritual truth

tamas – guna principle of darkness, ignorance, inertia

tattvamasi -That Thou Art

trigunatita – one who has transcended the gunas

Vedas - knowledge

Vedānta - end of the Vedas/knowledge

viveka - discrimination

yoga - to yoke, union with the Divine Supreme Being

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research problem: Leadership greed in the world

Despite scientific and technological advances, human suffering and social injustice in the world prevail, amidst a seemingly unquenchable leadership culture of greed, exploitation, and ethical deficiencies (Copeland, 2014; Grinde, 2016; Kets de Vries, 2016b). The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, exposed rich nations stockpiling more vaccines than needed to the detriment of poor nations (Kelland, 2021), and some leaders conducting mass retrenchments while paying themselves a bonus (Melin & Bloomberg, 2020). Yet, both ethical (M. E. Brown & Treviño, 2006) and spiritual leadership remain insufficiently researched (Copeland, 2014; Dent et al., 2005; Mitroff, 1998; Neubert, 2019; Pruzan, 2008; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022). Without a shift in leadership ethos, one cannot expect a world without poverty, unreasonable wealth disparities, and exploitation. As Insead Professor Kets de Vries (2016) discerned,

The bigger question we should ask ourselves is how can we change the societies we live in that are based too much on acquisitions and excess? As Schopenhauer said, *“Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become”*. If we learn how to overcome greed, we may have a simpler, more meaningful, happier, and richer life (para.10).

Has civilisation really evolved with so little care for the well-being of the whole? And what makes some wealthy leaders keep grasping for more than they need? One theory is the materialistic ontological belief of an insatiably incomplete or “empty self”, driven by perceived psychological lack, thus needing constant fulfilment of external desires to feel whole (Collins, 1994; Cordaro et al., 2016; Cushman, 1990, p. 599; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Fromm, 1976; Kets de Vries, 2016b; Nikelly, 2006). Notwithstanding authentic human needs, the Bhagavad Gītā discerned the *“state of constant desiring and wanting, as life's fundamental problem. This constant feeling of lack springs from a mistaken sense of inadequacy about one's self. This leads to running constantly towards objects to fulfil the sense of incompleteness”* (Dhiman, 2015, p. 4). This fulfilment strategy is akin to filling a bucket with a hole in it (Cordaro et al., 2016; Fromm, 1976; Kets de Vries, 2016b; Nikelly, 2006; Venkataramiah, 2010). Yet, according to Cushman (1990), it serves consumerist, advertising, and psychotherapy industries to perpetuate the ontological predicament of the incomplete, empty, fragmented self, which they attempt to address *“by employing the lifestyle solution”* (p. 599).

The ancient wisdom tradition of Vedānta described the end of this constant “Hungry Creature” drive for external fulfilment as attainable through the experiential realisation of wholeness from the spiritual intelligence of Self-knowledge (Collins, 1994, p. 36; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018). Such wholeness consequently fosters care for the greater whole from an understanding of oneness, where *“altruism is grounded in the Vedāntic unity of all existence”* (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Sarvapriyananda, 2014, p. 210). This offers implications for both leadership of self and others. Steingard (2005) asserted that *“spiritually informed management theory”* is characterised by *“spiritually responsible behavior — managing that makes an appreciable difference to the holistic well-being of oneself, humanity, and the planet”* (p. 236). A spiritual epistemological and ontological bedrock elevates inclusive, ethical decision-making, providing a teleology toward peace and human evolution (Steingard, 2005).

Notable psychotherapist Erich Fromm (1957) observed that *“In previous epochs of our own culture, or in China and India, the man most highly valued was the person with outstanding spiritual qualities”*, whose primary purpose was to serve as a role model and teacher of noble human values (p. 91). However, as Fromm (1957) further observed, in the current capitalistic context, those *“suggested for admiration and emulation are everything but bearers of significant spiritual qualities”*, seemingly pedestalled solely for wealth and fame (p. 92). Almost three-quarters of a century post Fromm's (1957) observations have borne witness to no reversal of this trend, but to an exacerbation of harmful self-interested ideals instead, the impact clearly visible in a world beset with burgeoning existential grand challenges. To Pruzan's (2008) point,

Greed and the desire for prestige and power still appear to be extremely strong motives amongst many business leaders. What is missing is a paradigm of leadership that looks upon social responsibility, ethical behaviour, and concern for the environment NOT simply as instruments for wealth generation and protecting the corporate licence to operate, but as fundamental principles and values in their own right. What is missing as well is a paradigm for leadership that can motivate and give leaders courage to base their decisions and actions in the outer world on values and principles that are the products of their inner worlds—the domain of consciousness, conscience, and the soul/the spirit (pp. 111-112).

Yet science and leadership theory has typically been confined to a Newtonian, secular, deterministic, functionalist paradigm, subject to a hegemonic bias of assumptions casting physical measurement as a

sole determinant of scientific worthiness, publication inclusion, rationality, and truth (Baets et al., 2016; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Case et al., 2012; Mitroff, 1998; Neubert, 2019; Pruzan, 2008). Echoing Case et al. (2012), Neubert (2019) observed that, “*Although faith and theory share an etymological heritage in the Greek notion of theoria as contemplating the divine or transcendent...for the most part theory has been severed from its spiritual and relational moorings*” (p. 254). Such exclusion of spirituality risks impoverishing leadership theory by ignoring a large part of what it means to be human, perpetuating parochial secular assumptions (Case et al., 2012; Neubert, 2019), and limiting wisdom sources that may be relevant for a leadership world plagued by greed (Mitroff, 1998; Pruzan, 2008; Steingard, 2005). Neubert (2019) cautioned that,

In adhering to this secular viewpoint, we are not availing ourselves of sources of inspiration, motivation, and explanation rooted in faith or spirit that could broaden our “seeing” and may occupy the space of “variance unaccounted for” in our own experiences, research, and organizational practices (p. 253).

Spilka (1970) warned that a positivistic-reductionist human science approach devoid of spiritual integration leads to dehumanisation, diminishing human beings into objects. As Milne (1993) too discerned, “*The result of materialism is to conflate or reduce the human person, including consciousness, into matter*” (p. 35). Nevertheless, there has been progress in scientific thought, encompassing growing interest in spirituality and import for leadership and the workplace, with studies demonstrating positive benefits (Benefiel et al., 2014; Dent et al., 2005; Emmons, 2000; Reave, 2005; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022). Spiritual intelligence, with its holistic ontological paradigm beyond the material incomplete self, has the potential to infuse wisdom, greater ethicality, and altruistic orientation into leadership theory, sorely needed in a world of suffering and social injustice (Benefiel et al., 2014; Emmons, 2000; Fairholm, 1996; Fry et al., 2005; Gotsis & Grimani, 2017; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Mitroff, 1998; Pruzan, 2008; Reave, 2005; Steingard, 2005; Strack & Fottler, 2002).

Core to spirituality is the concept of wholeness, a nascent research phenomenon (Hart et al., 2020; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Niemiec et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016; Thakadipuram, 2010). This is somewhat perplexing given the unified voices of eminent psychologists across time, extolling the significance of wholeness to human flourishing (Fromm, 1957; W. James, 1902; Pargament et al., 2016). Yet, wholeness has been integral to many Eastern and African wisdom traditions for centuries (Cordaro

et al., 2016; Daniels, 2019; Nussbaum et al., 2010). By neglecting to consider multi-cultural perspectives, the positive psychology movement has been criticised for presenting monocultural, ethnocentric views of human well-being and identity (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Russo-Netzer, 2016). There are growing calls to challenge and expand dominating ontological and epistemological assumptions in psychology and management research (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Cushman, 1990; Steingard, 2005), spurred by a postmodernist context of questioning long-held beliefs (Borer & Fontana, 2012), seeking multi-faceted integration over fragmentation (Russo-Netzer, 2016; Vaughan, 2002). Moreover, reviews show that growing global interest in Eastern philosophies are increasingly inspiring scholars to recommend further such studies into workplace and leadership spirituality (Dent et al., 2005; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022).

Vaughan (2002) asserted that spiritual intelligence brings a “*new appreciation of integration as a key to healing and wholeness*” (p. 31) Thus wholeness is arguably the specific aspect of spiritual intelligence holding the greatest potential for addressing the incomplete, empty self (Cushman, 1990). Vedānta seeks to address this experiential problem by healing psychic polarities through a spiritual consciousness of non-duality (Coward, 1978; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020; Milne, 1997). The aim of Vedānta is “*to bring peace and freedom to the anxious human spirit*” (Radhakrishnan, 1924, p. 14). After all, ought not the alleviation of human suffering toward collective flourishing be considered a noble purpose of leadership, be it through beneficial scientific discoveries, or more humane approaches to the spheres of politics, economics, psychology, and business?

Certainly there is evidence to suggest relevance of Vedāntic theory to multi-cultural modern management contexts. Influential Western management theorists who borrowed significantly from Vedānta included Peter Senge (Hee & Gurd, 2010) and Ken Wilber (2005). Moreover, interest in Vedānta continues to grow, notably so in global prestigious management publishing such as the highly-rated Academy of Management (“AOM”), with recent symposium papers and publications including topics on the Bhagavad Gītā and Vedic leadership principles (Amar et al., 2017; Cappelli et al., 2010; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020; Pandey et al., 2020). If, as Radhakrishnan (1940) discerned the crisis in humanity and world affairs to be “*due to a profound crisis in human consciousness, a lapse from the organic wholeness of life*” (p. 38), then Fairholm (1996) may have a point in exhorting that “*The new task for leaders is to become whole-makers, creators of oneness in people and in their groups*” (p. 16).

Thus the purpose of this study was to explore the meaningfulness of wholeness, applying a novel lens from the ancient living wisdom tradition of Vedānta, for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership.

1.2. Reflexivity: Personal motivation and study context

My personal interest lies in exploring spiritual wisdom beyond positivist ontologies. Born into culturally oppressive apartheid South Africa, under a Westernised hybrid secular-Hindu upbringing overtly unconscious of Vedānta, I found myself searching for spiritual truth from a young age. Renouncing a lucrative corporate career as a chartered accountant in my thirties, I embarked on a deep exploration into the Vedāntic wisdom tradition over the past two decades to find my spiritual roots, adopting an immersion approach which included mentoring by senior Vedāntic monks of a well-respected Order, formal studies into Sanskrit and seminal ancient Vedāntic texts, community service, and spiritual initiations into deep meditation practices. As a certified yoga and meditation teacher, I have actively taught meditation and yoga for the past decade, also integrating this into my coaching practice to assist clients suffering from anxiety and stress. My journey has included annual solitary spiritual pilgrimages to ancient holy sacred places in India and practising the scriptural tenets of simple living. These theoretical, intellectual, and experiential-based learning processes (Oman & Singh, 2018) toward attaining Vedāntic spiritual knowledge were motivated by spiritual love.

This immersive approach also enabled me to directly observe the complex leadership of busy spiritual organisations, while consciously not seeking to exclusively belong to any, choosing to maintain spiritual freedom, objectivity, and a universal outlook. Exposed to both the light and shadow aspects of spirituality on my journey, I found wholeness to be a central theme in Vedāntic philosophy, offering potentially useful insights into spiritual leadership development and human well-being. I also have a unified spiritual appreciation for wholeness across different wisdom traditions, including Sufism and mystical Christianity. Cross-tradition findings were thus included to demonstrate concept universality, where appropriate, supported by studies which showed shared spiritual virtues across all the world's major religious and spiritual traditions (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; McGhee & Grant, 2008). While wholeness could also be explored through other wisdom tradition perspectives, it was logical to apply the lens of Vedānta, in which I have greater experiential and theoretical knowledge.

Further to the personal context discussed above, there is also a professional context. In 2012, I conducted Master's research exploring the meaning and impact of self-love on leadership (Maharaj & April,

2013a). Self-love was found to be distinct from narcissism, with profound implications for leadership (Maharaj & April, 2013a, 2013b). Based on phenomenological leader interviews, wholeness was found to be central to the definition of self-love (Maharaj, 2016; Maharaj & April, 2013a), while the meaning of authentic self-love also hinted at a spiritual essence. This suggested wholeness as a potentially deeper root concept needing exploration, which piqued my interest. Moreover, my coaching experience over the past decade continues to reveal a prevalence of low self-love issues amongst humans across contexts, accompanied by feelings of ‘not being enough’ and perceived incompleteness (Cordaro et al., 2016). Clinical psychologists report similar findings, increasingly regarding self-love as a measure of successful psychotherapeutic interventions, acknowledging its importance toward psychological well-being (Samiei, 2015). Yet, self-love remains nascent in research, with wholeness even more so. This study was therefore inspired by my interests in both spirituality and vocation as a leadership and life coach in exploring new paths toward human flourishing and spiritually intelligent leadership.

According to many scholars, a researcher’s experiential knowledge ought to form part of the research design, not eschewed as a bias risk, but treasured as a valuable insight source, applying critical rigour (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Lillrank, 2012; Maxwell, 2009; Robinson & Kerr, 2015). Positivist notions of total researcher objectivity are increasingly regarded as an illusion (Jones & Bartunek, 2021), since researchers come with their own cultural background assumptions and experiences, which inherently form an integral part of the research process through interaction and interpretation (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Robinson & Kerr, 2015). Robinson and Kerr (2015) defined reflexivity as *“the development of an understanding of the effect the researcher has on the research process and the possible outcomes of the research”* (p. 778). Reflexivity aids to researcher awareness and careful critical assessment of philosophical orientations and potential prejudices, toward discerning what is enriching to the study, or what may constitute bias risk (Finlay, 2012; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Maxwell, 2009; Robinson & Kerr, 2015).

In light of this, my personal experiences were shared to provide explicit researcher context as part of reflexivity (Finlay, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Maxwell, 2009; Robinson & Kerr, 2015; Vicary et al., 2017). I felt encouraged by scholarly perspectives that researcher knowledge of explored phenomena is increasingly considered an asset, less marred by stigmatisation of old perspectives (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Lillrank, 2012). Jones and Bartunek (2021) argued that personally relevant research, when managed effectually, bolsters trustworthiness and research quality,

enhancing rapport with participants. I also applied reflexive journaling during the research process, exploring critical self-reflective questions to create conscious awareness of the interplay between preconceptions and participant data (Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Robinson & Kerr, 2015; Vicary et al., 2017). Further detail on my reflexivity process can be found in Chapter 3.

1.3. Cultural inclusion, cultural enclavism, and post-colonialism considerations

This study explored the consideration of different perspectives, by applying the spiritual lens of Vedānta. However, the risks for a post-colonialism flavoured study include cultural enclavism and orientalism. The term ‘orientalism’, coined by Professor Edward Said who founded the field of postcolonial studies, referred to a resolutely prejudicial view by Western literature of the East (Turner, 2004). However, using a Vedāntic lens supports calls to expand prevailing Western-dominated ethnocentric theories into more culturally inclusive ones, pushing the boundaries of taken for granted assumptions (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Daniels, 2019; Frawley, 2001; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016; Russo-Netzer, 2016). This is particularly relevant in light of growing concerns that positive psychology theories remain dominated by Western cultural values, ideologies and context, dogged by assumptions around universal application (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Cordaro et al., 2016; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016).

On happiness studies, for example, Pérez-Álvarez (2016) observed, “*It [positive psychology] does not even represent the different conceptions of happiness of the Western tradition itself, much less the non-Western cultures*” (p. 11). Studies found that happiness and well-being are indeed culture-, values-, and context-dependent, which encouraged a significant new cross-cultural focus (Diener et al., 2018). For example, in Malaysian and Indonesian studies, religion and spirituality were found to be significant constructs of well-being (Khaw & Kern, 2015; Maulana et al., 2019), yet these are not typically explicitly represented in prevailing Western academic well-being models (Diener et al., 2018).

According to Woolfolk (2002, as cited in Pérez-Álvarez, 2016), “*If psychology is to avoid a banal and prosaic delimitation [“negative”/“positive psychology”], it would be well advised to take heed of some ancient and cross-cultural sources that give prominence to the tragic, finite, and negative aspects of human existence*” (p. 14). While it is encouraging to see the emerging push back against ethnocentric biases in positive psychology, it is still confounding to note the use of the term ‘non-Western’ (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016; Russo-Netzer, 2016) instead of ‘Eastern,

African and Latin American' in academic literature. Thus 'Western' is still perceived to be the validating point of reference in academic science, even in terminology, despite Europe and Northern America comprising a mere 14.5% of the world's total population (*Distribution of the Global Population 2021, by Continent*, 2022). As Mehta (1978) lamented,

Must not there be a different way of grasping things than the one which was launched by the Greeks, a way that needs to be fashioned yet by becoming aware of the implicit and unquestioned foundations on which they built? (p. 132).

Whilst refraining from uncritical imitation or belief, to be dismissive of Eastern or African wisdom traditions as mere obscure superstition, is to fall prey to even worse uncritical attitudes of narrow-mindedness. As Frawley (2001) observed, "*All major cultural debates are now framed according to Western values and perceptions, and so they will naturally serve to uphold them*" (p. 1). Jung cautioned against regarding the dogmatic view of Western science as the only valid approach, extolling the profundity of Eastern teachings, his own theories significantly influenced therefrom (Coward, 1978; Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018). However, while Jung appreciated the experiential in lieu of blind faith approach of Eastern wisdom traditions, he could not fully appreciate the true ontic reality of certain concepts (Coward, 1978; Whitney, 2018).

For example, Jung's injunctions that yoga is suited only to Easterners and may be harmful to Westerners has since been criticised as a form of cultural enclavism, "*a view that holds cultures are too different to communicate and benefit from each other*" (Coward, 1978; Selvam, 2007, p. 87). The factual inaccuracy of Jung's perspective is baldly evident in the world today, with demonstrable universal popularity and benefits of yoga to human well-being, resulting in the 2014 United Nations declaration of an annual International Day of Yoga (United Nations, 2021). This is one example of the questionable assumptions that a fragmented view of humanity can present. As Selvam (2007) observed,

In issuing such dire warnings often, Jung is seen as having overlooked the extent to which cultures have been interpenetrating each other over time and gone against his own understanding of the commonality of all of mankind that led him to formulate the theory of the collective unconscious in the first place (p. 83).

1.4. Research questions

The aim of this study was to explore the meaningfulness of wholeness, as conceptualised from a Vedāntic lens, for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership. The primary research question was:

Is wholeness, as conceptualised from a Vedāntic perspective, meaningful for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership?

This was deconstructed into the following sub-questions:

1. Are the Vedāntic constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy meaningful for wholeness outside a Vedāntic tradition?
2. How is wholeness as conceptualised from a Vedāntic lens meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership?
3. What are the enablers and detractors of wholeness toward cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership?

1.5. Intended contributions

The study sought to contribute toward leadership theory in the workplace spirituality stream, heeding scholarly calls toward expanding prevailing materialistic, secular assumptions in scholarship and leadership (Neubert, 2019). More specifically, this study intended to inspire further research into the vital but nascent phenomenon of wholeness, using the novel lens of the Vedāntic spiritual wisdom tradition, toward cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership as a counter to greed. This approach supported growing calls by scholars to expand both prevailing positive psychology and leadership theories into more culturally and spiritually inclusive ones, challenging taken for granted assumptions (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Russo-Netzer, 2016; Selvam, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2018). The contributions were intended to be practical, while offering an extension to existing theory, and/or building a new one, and included:

- A Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness.

- Phenomenological understandings of novel Vedāntic constructs of wholeness, namely, Being, consciousness, and joy.
- A practical and theoretical understanding of the meaningfulness of wholeness, as conceptualised from a Vedāntic lens, for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership.
- Practical insights on the enablers and detractors of wholeness toward cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership.

1.6. Research assumptions

I was aware of my background assumption that wholeness and the Vedāntic-based constructs may have little relevance or meaning for leaders, but consciously maintained an open, exploratory stance. My study assumptions included the following:

- Leaders from diverse contexts would be sufficiently reflective to engage meaningfully on the concept of wholeness and the Vedāntic-based constructs, albeit likely unfamiliar to them.
- Leaders from a non-Vedāntic background and/or with less active spiritual inclinations would be willing to participate in the study.
- Wholeness is the antidote for greed.
- Spiritual intelligence is the necessary next step for the evolution of leadership for the good of the world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explains the meaning of Vedānta as the research lens, followed by spirituality and spiritual intelligence in leadership. The concept of wholeness is then explored from both Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic perspectives. In addition to scholarly peer-reviewed articles, the literature review included conference papers, dissertations, books, and Vedāntic textual commentaries. This was based on Maxwell's (2009) recommendation that a broader source net is more likely to contribute valuable insights toward concept understanding versus exclusive reliance on published research. Moreover, Ramsundarsingh (2019), who applied a Vedāntic lens to social work practice, also drew from authentic indigenous sources of Vedāntic knowledge since it “*provides consistent interpretation of scriptures, was developed and shared using Vedantic ways of knowing, and supports decolonization of Vedanta*” (p. 71). Source breadth was particularly relevant for this study, given the emergent nature of wholeness.

2.1 Vedānta: Ancient meaning and modern relevance

2.1.1 What is Vedānta?

The Vedas, meaning ‘knowledge’ in Sanskrit, are a foundational quartet of ancient Indian philosophical texts, dating between circa 1500 - 500 BCE, comprising the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda (Monier-Williams, 2008b; Witzel, 2003). This study focussed specifically on the concluding portion of the Vedas, known as the *jñāna-kāṇḍ* (knowledge portion), Uttara Mimāṃsā, Upanishads or Vedānta – the last in Sanskrit translates to “*the end of knowledge*” (Guénon, 2001; Monier-Williams, 2008b; Muniapan, 2017, p. 127; Radhakrishnan, 1924; Witzel, 2003). According to scholars and spiritual seekers alike, the etymological significance extends beyond textual location, to indicate that Vedānta contained “*the final and supreme aim of traditional knowledge in its entirety*” (Guénon, 2001, p. 12; Monier-Williams, 2008b; Witzel, 2003), representing a shift from an externalised ritualistic focus to the inner world of spiritual intelligence through Self-knowledge (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1914a, 1924).

Regarded as the cream of soteriological Vedic philosophical wisdom, Vedānta pertains to more mature spiritual seekers, going beyond religiosity and ritual to “deal with the eternal problems of humankind” (Witzel, 2003, p. 83), offering liberation from psychological suffering through the science of Self-

realisation (Bauer, 1987; Dhiman, 2015, 2018; Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1997; Muniapan, 2017; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Sagar & West, 2016). Dhiman and Kriger (2018) noted that,

While each of the wisdom traditions of the world uphold the importance of Self-knowledge as a necessary condition for wholeness, happiness, and lasting peace, in no other tradition is Self-knowledge explored to such a depth and breadth as in the Vedas. The entire philosophy of Vedānta is devoted to discovering the essence of Self-knowledge, fulfilment, and freedom (p. 71).

In Vedānta, one sustainably attains pure wholeness through realisation of the ultimate truth of the universal, infinite, non-dual Self as the ground of all Being (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Lucas, 2011, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 1924; A. Sharma, 1999; Venkataramiah, 2010). As Radhakrishnan (1940) explained, “*What is the self? The Upanisads answer that it is the primal spirit, pure awareness, distinct from bodily states and mental happenings*” (p. 122).

Guénon (2001) considered Vedānta to be “pure metaphysics”, free of the usual conflicts between spirituality and materialism, and unconcerned with the superficial questions which arise from such oppositional thinking (p. 13). However, according to Harvard scholar Bauer (1987), “*Advaita Vedānta shares with Western philosophy a commitment to highly rigorous analysis of the content and meaning of human experience in very similar (or at least compatible) philosophical categories*” (p. 36). Advaita Vedānta, one of the more influentially significant and studied Indian philosophies (Allen & Venkatkrishnan, 2017; Bauer, 1987; Medhananda, 2021), is a precise strand in Vedānta focussed on wholeness through non-duality, “*the assertion that reality is a unified field of pure awareness and being*” (Lucas, 2014, p. 7; Milne, 1997).

In Sanskrit, *advaita* means ‘not-two’ or “non-dual” (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018, p. 71), and is considered by scholars to be “*the philosophical culmination of the Indian spiritual tradition*” (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018, p. 71). However, as Milne (1997) observed, “*the real meaning of [Vedāntic] nonduality has frequently been misunderstood, especially by Western scholars. It’s essential sense has often been only partially grasped, or oversimplified, and sometimes even quite distorted*” (p. 165). Fry and Kriger (2009) posited the non-dual state as constituting the pinnacle of Being-centred leadership. Kriger and Seng (2005) asserted non-duality to be at the heart of the world’s cardinal spiritual wisdom traditions,

notwithstanding recognition of the antiquity of Vedānta as the “perennial philosophy” which emphasised “oneness of being” as its essence (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018, p. 72).

Radhakrishnan (1888 – 1975), who served as Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford University, before becoming the second President of India, was regarded as one of the foremost academic giants of Vedānta (Pandey et al., 2020; Selvam, 2007). According to Radhakrishnan (1914a), “*A system of philosophy is generally tested by its ethical doctrine*” and “*its capacity to improve life*”, observing that “*The ethics of the Vedānta is dependent on its metaphysics*” which “*postulates the absolute oneness of all things*” (p. 168). This cultivates an ethos where “*The individual's life is not a means to the satisfaction of his personal desires, but is a trust for humanity*” (Radhakrishnan, 1914a, p. 169). German philologist and fellow Oxford University professor Max Muller (1823-1900) noted similarly that, “*The Vedānta philosophy has not neglected the important sphere of ethics; but, on the contrary, we find ethics in the beginning, ethics in the middle, and ethics in the end*” (n.d., as cited in Radhakrishnan, 1914a, p. 168). Bauer (1987) discerned that: “*Whereas Western philosophy is marked by a continuous and explicit interest in ethical issues, Advaita Vedānta treats axiological matters implicitly - revealing its value commitments largely in the structure and content of its other philosophical arguments*” (p. 37). Bauer (1987) argued that it is precisely this difference which could open a rich philosophical inquiry and meaningful comparative exploration into value system explications.

This study, albeit not exclusively, drew from the Advaita Vedānta strand, exploring expositions from foremost academic Vedāntic scholars such as Radhakrishnan (1914b, 1914a, 1924, 1929, 1940), as well as authentically recognised Vedāntic sages discussed below. In addition to the Bhagavad Gītā (Nisreysananda, 2005; Radhakrishnan, 1949), widely acknowledged as an essential summary of Vedāntic concepts and enjoying growing popularity in leadership studies (Amar et al., 2017; Dhiman, 2015; Hee & Gurd, 2010), this study included other seminal Vedāntic texts, such as the Vivekachūdāmani (Madhavananda, 2009), Chāndogya Upanishad (Frazier, 2019), and Astāvakra Samhitā (Nityaswarupananda, 1940) for comprehensive perspectives.

While pioneering Vedāntic sages Adi Śankara (788-820 AD), the hallowed exponent of Advaita Vedānta, and, less so, Rāmānuja (1017-1137 AD) who taught qualified non-dualism, are most commonly cited in Vedāntic studies (Amar et al., 2017; Barhydt & Fritzman, 2013; Jeste & Vahia, 2008; Lucas,

2014; Maharana, 2009; Medhananda, 2021; Milne, 1993, 1997; Sarvapriyananda, 2014), this study sought perspectives from more contemporary luminary Vedāntic sages too, mitigating the risk of narrow interpretations from one Vedāntic school of thought. Śankara's commentaries, for example, are increasingly subject to criticisms questioning modern relevance, pragmatic impact, and cultural influences (Forsthoefel, 2002; Medhananda, 2021), although this may well be attributable to a lack of proper understanding by some commentators of Śankara's actual meanings (Milne, 1997). For example, Milne (1993) noted that "*Sankara is often called a Monist by Western scholars, but this is very inaccurate*" (p. 35). Nevertheless, some subsequent Vedāntic monastic traditions affiliated to Śankara's teachings and *maths* (monasteries), have displayed cultural conditioning, male-centric dominance, and an externalist institutionalised epistemology, deviating from the universal intent of pure Vedāntic philosophy (Forsthoefel, 2002).

Therefore, while not eschewing Śankara whose contribution is undeniable, this study harnessed universal relevance and progression of experiential Vedāntic understanding from more recent authentic sages, notably Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) (Forsthoefel, 2001, 2002; Locklin, 2017; Lucas, 2011, 2014; Milne, 1997; A. Sharma, 1999), Sri Ramakrishna (1836 – 1886) (M. Gupta, 1942), and Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981) (Frydman, 1999), whose teachings have increasingly exerted a significant influence on both Eastern and Western Vedānta spiritual seekers. Ramana Maharshi, in particular, was regarded as a pure and genuine exemplar of Advaita Vedānta by both scholars and spiritual aspirants alike, refreshingly free of institutional dogmatism (Forsthoefel, 2002; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Locklin, 2017; Milne, 1997; A. Sharma, 1999). Fry and Kriger (2009) cited Ramana Maharshi in describing the non-dual essence of Being-centred leadership. In taking Advaita Vedānta to its culmination, some believed Ramana Maharshi to be a spiritual descendent of Śankara (Forsthoefel, 2002). However, Ramana Maharshi never referred to himself as belonging to any particular sect or lineage exemplifying a universalism true to the non-sectarian spirit of Vedānta (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Venkataramiah, 2010).

While associated with Hinduism, Vedānta is considered a philosophy and not a religion, unaffiliated with any particular person, founder or organisation, which guards against dogmatism while remaining true to the non-sectarian, universal ethos of the original wisdom (Allen & Venkatkrishnan, 2017; Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Lucas, 2011).

Forsthoefel (2002) noted that, “*By relativizing socially established patterns of transmission and instead emphasising an internalist epistemology, Ramana ushers in a universalism that is in harmony with the premises of Advaita*” (p. 139). Authentic Vedāntic sages, like Ramana Maharshi, respected all religions and philosophies of ultimate truth, did not assert themselves as belonging to any particular religion, never sought to establish organisations, nor posited any religion as superior to another (Forsthoefel, 2002; M. Gupta, 1942; Venkataramiah, 2010). Since the essence of Vedānta ultimately transcends the duality of names and forms into unitary consciousness, even using the term ‘Vedānta’ risks preconceived notions and separation, but pragmatism prevailed for the purpose of this study (Locklin, 2017; Milne, 1997).

2.1.2 Modern relevance and cross-cultural influence

As the spiritual wisdom tradition foundation of an enduring ancient civilisation which continues to flourish, Vedānta is considered a valuable source of insight in the current age (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Tahora et al., 2019). Yet as the world’s oldest religion, Hinduism, “*to date has received the least psychological study than any major world religion*” (Oman et al., 2018, p. 90). Radhakrishnan (1940) dated Hindu civilisation back to fourth millennium B.C., which continues to thrive undeterred by the 336-year average ancient civilisation life span (Kemp, 2019). Examples abound of flourishing, influential endurance despite antiquity, such as the increasing proliferation of yoga and Vedāntic studies including Oxford University (Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, n.d.), and acknowledgement by the United Nations of the universal holistic human well-being benefits of yoga (United Nations, 2021). There are also increasing explorations of the implications for modern psychology of Indian spiritual philosophies through the advent of the Indian Psychology Movement, which could contribute toward a more cross-culturally richer epistemological approach to the field (Oman & Paranjpe, 2018).

Discussing the historical import of Advaita Vedānta for modern times, Allen and Venkatkrishnan (2017) observed that it “*represented a nondualist alternative to inherited modes of Western thought; at turns mystical and thoroughly rational, it could attract comparative philosophers and spiritual seekers alike*” (p. 271). Indeed, this is exemplified by the many illustrious Western philosophers and writers who were inspired by Vedānta, including Ralph Waldo Emerson (Riepe, 1967), Walt Whitman (Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020), Aldous Huxley (Huxley, 1947), Henry David Thoreau (Davis, 2018), René Guénon

(Guénon, 2001) and Arthur Schopenhauer (Radhakrishnan, 1940). No mere speculative philosophy, exemplary sages such as Ramana Maharshi, more recent among the many lived examples of the ultimate realisation of Being, were documented, directly observed, critically questioned, and validated not just by Easterners, but by numerous well-known Westerners too (Forsthoefel, 2002; Frydman, 1999; Locklin, 2017; Lucas, 2011; Milne, 1997; A. Sharma, 1999).

While the popularity of Vedānta in the West is attributed to exposure through increased mobility, globalisation, and easy internet access to teachings, Lucas (2011) explored specific enablers of the successful appeal and adoption of Vedāntic principles and practices in diverse cultural contexts. Two factors were discussed, identified by Csordas (2009, as cited in Lucas, 2011), namely portable practice and transposable message. Portable practice pertains to simplicity, requiring little enigmatic knowledge, and free of institutionalism, complex rituals, or cultural ideology (Lucas, 2011). Transposable message is characterised by universality and transferability without denaturing the original teachings (Lucas, 2011). Lucas (2011) argued both to be applicable in the case of Ramana Maharshi's teachings, an assessment shared by Forsthoefel (2002), further supporting the stance of this study to draw from such teachings. Transposability and portability are arguably applicable to the Vedāntic epistemologies of yoga and meditation as well, evidenced by global popularity (United Nations, 2021).

2.1.3 Shadow aspects of Vedānta

However, it must be acknowledged, as with most things, that the popularity of yoga and meditation has inevitably presented a dark side as well. This has included mass commercialisation of mindfulness, pithily described as “McMindfulness” (Hyland, 2017, p. 334), devoid of the spiritual intelligence and authentic moral depth of the wisdom tradition foundations behind the practice (Oman & Singh, 2018). Moreover, the advent of modern cross-cultural teachers of “Neo-Advaita”, who are not always authentically mature in understanding to teach, lacking spiritual grounding through the eschewal of fundamental Vedāntic foundations of spiritual effort, proper training, virtues cultivation, ethical living, and mental purification, has created distorted understandings of Vedānta, misleading followers and displaying susceptibility to moral lapses (Lucas, 2011, p. 94).

Lucas (2011) noted no less than seventy-seven so-called Vedāntic-influenced teachers and organisations in North America, many of whom he categorised pejoratively as “Non-Traditional Modern Advaita”

(“NTMA”) teachers (Lucas, 2014, p. 6). According to Lucas (2014), NTMA teachers are criticised by the “Traditional Modern Advaita” (“TMA”) movement as entrepreneurially motivated to attract followers through promises of instant enlightenment, making premature claims regarding their own states of realisation (p. 6). However, with the exception of rare saints like Ramana Maharshi, the spiritual journey to wholeness demands patient maturation through persevering spiritual practices, counter to egoic delusions of instant spiritual realisation from cognitive dissonance (Lucas, 2014).

Lucas (2014) observed that “*NTMA gurus strip away essential aspects of the Advaita system, leaving a pseudo-spirituality that is ineffective for the arduous task of achieving moksha, ultimate spiritual liberation*”, remaining mired in undesirable ego-centric mental attachments and aversions (p. 10). However, Lucas (2014) also acknowledged that NTMA sessions may serve as an introduction for genuine seekers, who then subsequently progress to authentic Advaita Vedānta teachers. False gurus seeking wealth and power are perhaps one reason why *viveka*, or discrimination is considered an imperative attribute of a true seeker in Vedānta (Madhavananda, 2009; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Sarvapriyananda, 2014; Vivekananda, 2006). Moreover, seekers with less mature development may be tempted into taking the wrong path from an overly ambitious self-assessment, this being precisely the problem that Lucas (2014) identified with NTMA teachers, notwithstanding the various Vedāntic spiritual epistemologies enabling seekers to discerningly take the path best suited to their inherent nature (Ramsundarsingh, 2019).

2.2 Workplace spirituality and spiritual intelligence in leadership

According to Benefiel et al. (2014), workplace spirituality in the Christian West was inspired by St. Benedict’s (c. 480 - 543) monastic rules which integrated work and prayer. This continued through the Reformation with exhortations by Martin Luther on the holiness of work, the Protestant Work Ethic concept during the Industrial Revolution, and the Faith at Work movement in the late 19th century, finding academic traction in the 1990s (Benefiel et al., 2014). However, Benefiel et al.’s (2014) review of the history of workplace spirituality neglected to include Asian, African, and other cultural contexts. Notwithstanding studies suggesting a positive imperative for spirituality in leadership, the link to workplace spirituality, certainly in Western scholarship, is fairly recent. Dent et al. (2005) attributed Fairholm (1996) as one of the first scholars to do so.

Yet despite ongoing organisational and political leadership transgressions over the past two decades, spirituality in leadership remains under-researched (Benefiel et al., 2014; Dent et al., 2005; Mitroff, 1998; Neubert, 2019; Pruzan, 2008; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022; Steingard, 2005). Nevertheless, there has been increasing scholarly interest in workplace and leadership spirituality, including the formation of related interest groups by the AOM, American Psychological Association, and American Sociological Association (Benefiel et al., 2014; Dent et al., 2005; Mitroff, 1998; Neubert, 2019; Pruzan, 2008; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022; Strack & Fottler, 2002). A coding analysis of eighty-seven scholarly articles by Dent et al. (2005) on leadership and workplace spirituality revealed the reasons as including increased suffering in the American workplace, along with growing interest in spiritual Eastern philosophies. In a later review of empirical research on workplace spirituality, Benefiel et al. (2014) found similarly, along with an increased need for meaning and purpose at work, and a search for spiritual solutions to cope with increasing social and business complexities. More recently, R. K. Singh and Singh (2022) conducted a systematic review of a hundred and fifty-nine journal articles pertaining to workplace spirituality, identifying a need for more empirical research into the leadership aspect of workplace spirituality, and specifically the use of Eastern research lenses due to interest.

2.2.1 The meanings of spirituality and spiritual intelligence

While religion may risk problems of zealotry, arrogance through moral superiority, and divisiveness in the workplace (Fry et al., 2005), spirituality does not necessarily equate to religiosity. Conceptually discrete, distinguishing factors include religion as more form-based (e.g., organisations, rituals, conformance), while spirituality focusses more on underlying universal essence (e.g., connection with sacred, universal truth, freedom) (R. B. Brown, 2003; Dent et al., 2005; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Mitroff, 1998; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Pargament, 2013; Reave, 2005; Steingard, 2005). Spirituality in this sense is closer to what pioneering psychologist William James (1902) referred to as “personal religion”, characterised by direct sacred experiential communion, versus “institutional religion” confined to second-hand accounts and ritualistic externalities (p. 28). As Spilka (1970) wryly observed, “*Institutional religion and psychology frequently share a common view of man, the machine model*” (p.175). This diminishes what it means to be human. Fairholm (1996) explained,

There is a part of us that is not just physical, a part that we are comfortable in calling spirit, which people less spiritually inclined may call human nature. It is the vital, energizing force or principle

in the person. It affects our identity, our values; our memories; our sense of humour. It integrates guiding principles of wholeness, relationships, inner wisdom and inner authority (p. 11).

Therefore, while spirituality transcends institutionalised religion, it is or ought to be, the central purpose and soul of religion (Pargament, 2013). Ultimately the essence of spirituality, according to philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich (1957, as cited in Emmons, 2000), is a “*passion for the infinite*”, which Emmons (2000) asserted as “*unparalleled in human motivation*” (p. 4). Vedāntic texts such as the Bhagavad Gītā (Nihśreyasananda, 2005), Vivekachūdāmani (Madhavananda, 2009) and Katha Upanishad (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018) extolled intense spiritual longing as a fundamental attribute of true spiritual seekers toward the highest human goal of Self-realisation.

As a “*highly complex, multidimensional construct*”, spirituality does not lend itself easily to a consensus definition (Strack & Fottler, 2002, p. 6). However, congruent themes were found amidst the myriad scholarly definitions and expositions including wholeness (Niemić et al., 2020), transcendence (Fry et al., 2005), transformation (Fry et al., 2005), a “*synergy of meaning, purpose, beliefs, and values*” (Gill, 2022, p. 50), and interconnectedness (Dent et al., 2005; Emmons, 2000; Fairholm, 1996; Fry et al., 2005; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Mitroff, 1998; Niemić et al., 2020; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Samul, 2020; Strack & Fottler, 2002). Campbell (2007) articulated spirituality as, “*an intangible animating force involving a state of intimate relationship with a force beyond oneself, an awareness of one’s inner self and recognition of a connection with other people*” (p. 143). Pargament (2013; p. 271) influentially defined spirituality simply as “*a search for the sacred*” - an inherent motivation bringing forth purpose, meaning, coherence with lower order goals, and greater well-being (Pargament et al., 2016).

Niemić et al. (2020) asserted Pargament’s (2013) definition as constituting “*nearly a consensual definition*” (p. 2). However, Mitroff (1998) cautioned against forcing spirituality into a consensus definition, arguing that, “*Like truth, the definition of spirituality is part of an ongoing management process whose fundamental purpose is to ethically rebuild and redesign a person’s life*” (p. 76). This caution was echoed by other social scientists who, while acknowledging the usefulness of a common definition, argued for “*instrumental and pragmatic approaches*” in defining spirituality, taking cognisance of varying scholarly aims (Oman & Paranjpe, 2018, p. 141). Frankly, this instrumentalist argument seemed to miss the central point of spirituality as an intrinsic motivation. Moreover, while

virtuous in its parsimony, Pargament's (2013) definition is arguably rather vague and unsatisfying. For example, what happens to spirituality once the 'search' ends? A more robust articulation based on twenty leader interviews by Strack et al. (2002, as cited in Dent et al., 2005) defined spirituality as "*God or some other transcendent power, the source of one's value and meaning, an awareness of one's inner self, and a way of integrating all aspects of oneself into a whole*" (pp. 632–633). From a Vedāntic perspective, Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004) defined spirituality as:

Spirituality means beginning to become aware of a consciousness higher than that of the body-mind centered ego, and the ability to live more and more in it or under its guidance. It is this consciousness – non-contingent, self-existent, pure of ego – which is spirit or self (p. 197).

According to Steingard (2005), "*Transcendence—moving beyond one's own sense of self into the awareness of a larger and more meaningful universe—is a pivotal experience in just about all spiritual and wisdom traditions*" (p. 230). Significantly for the leadership aims of this study, McGhee and Grant (2008) defined transcendence as "*Seeking to transcend their ego*", constituting a behavioural characteristic of spiritual persons (p. 62). Transcendence is regarded as a universal human capacity (Pargament et al., 2017), and arguably the most fundamental out of the defining prototypical qualities of what constitutes 'sacred' (Oman & Paranjpe, 2018). Similar understandings of 'sacred' were found across cultures, typically understood as being beyond ordinary sensory perception, imbued with divine presence, and/or consecrated to God (Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Pargament et al., 2017). Drawing from personal narratives, empirical studies, and scholarly texts, Pargament et al. (2017) posited three qualities pertaining to sacred, namely, "*transcendence, ultimacy and boundlessness*", finding similarities across Christian, Judaic, Islamic, and Vedāntic texts (p. 722). Oman and Paranjpe (2018) conducted a review of Pargament's Definitional Framework against what they broadly termed as "Indian spirituality", referencing Vedāntic texts, finding coherent resonance (p. 140). Oman and Paranjpe (2018) acknowledged, however, that some terms in the framework had no direct linguistic counterpart in the traditional Vedāntic language of Sanskrit.

One of the first scholars to argue the case for the categorisation of spirituality as an intelligence was Emmons (2000), who defined five core components of spiritual intelligence:

1. The capacities to transcend the physical domain and "be virtuous" (p. 10); and

2. abilities to experience “heightened spiritual states of consciousness”; sanctify everyday experiences; and draw on spiritual resources to address life’s problems (p. 10).

Emmons (2000) enumerated the benefits of such categorisation as including establishment within an acceptable psychological framework; forging invaluable links toward human flourishing; a remedy for cerebral secularism; an integrative framework for understanding the impact of spirituality across human dimensions of functioning; and enabling the active cultivation of spirituality as a skill and competence. This was supported by other scholars who asserted that spiritual intelligence includes the ability and capacity to navigate oneself and others toward greater well-being, involving “*critical thinking about existence*” (Samul, 2020, p. 3; Vaughan, 2002).

Relevantly for this study, Emmons (2000) posited that, “*Tethering spirituality and intelligence enables an acknowledgment of, and deeper appreciation for spiritual and religious ways of knowing that might be highly prized in certain cultures*” (p. 21). For example, in Vedānta, Taoism, and Buddhism, spirituality, wisdom, ethics, and intelligence are regarded as inseparable (Radhakrishnan, 1940). Clinical psychologist Vaughan (2002) noted that “*Spiritual intelligence depends on the capacity to see things from more than one perspective and to recognize the relationships between perception, belief, and behavior*” (p. 20). However, a crucial distinction clarified by Vaughan (2002) is that spiritual intelligence extends beyond cognitive and emotional intelligence to encompasses manifold ways of knowing, and a deeper awareness of transcendent levels of consciousness: “*Spiritual intelligence implies a capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness*” (p. 19).

Yet, many psychologists and scholars attempt to explain away spirituality and religion without any experiential understanding of the phenomenon (Pargament, 2013). As Pargament (2013) pointed out, while 90% of the population in North America believe in God, only 24% of psychologists share those beliefs. This leaves a gap in theoretical and experiential understanding in psychology and healthcare of a concept which most humans find fundamentally beneficial and integral to their lives. Vaughan (2002) defined spiritual practices “*broadly as intentional activities concerned with relating to the sacred...Cultivating spiritual intelligence seems to call for a commitment to some form of spiritual practice*” (p. 26). Spiritual practices including prayer, attending religious services, and scripture studies, along with Eastern practices such as yoga, tai chi, meditation, breathing exercises and chi gong, were

found to have significant positive physiological, psychological, and behavioural well-being benefits (Emmons, 2000; Pargament, 2013; Reave, 2005; Tischler et al., 2002; United Nations, 2021; Vaughan, 2002). These included emotional experiences of joy, awe, and gratitude (Casioppo, 2020; Welwood, 1999), leading certain health insurance companies to offer lower premiums to regular practitioners thereof (Tischler et al., 2002).

2.2.2 Spiritual intelligence in leadership

Whilst there is no consensus definition of workplace spirituality, an oft-cited definition by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) is “*a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy*” (p. 13). The references to feelings of completeness and joy, connected directly to this study on wholeness. Notwithstanding the research need, the ethos of this study in exploring wholeness at a leadership level was based on the premise that for leaders to implement workplace spirituality in a meaningful, authentic way, it stands to reason that they need to personally cultivate spiritual intelligence through wholeness first. Indeed without enabling their own sense of transcendence, completeness, and joy, it would be difficult to envisage how leaders would have the ability to implement a framework of workplace spirituality as defined. Case et al.(2012) too deemed this definition “*highly contestable*” (p. 355).

While leadership education matured from a purely mental or so-called ‘rational’ IQ intelligence focus to encompass emotional intelligence, it remains insufficient to cope with a global context characterised by growing instability and grand challenges (Samul, 2020; Tischler et al., 2002). The next evolution of leadership development is necessary, arguably that of spiritual intelligence, “*considered as the foundation of both rational and emotional intelligence*” (Samul, 2020, p. 1). Zohar (2005) further clarified that while rational intelligence (IQ) relates to material capital and thought and emotional intelligence (EQ) relates to social capital and feelings, spiritual intelligence (SQ) relates to spiritual capital and being. However, leadership studies to date have largely focussed on “having and doing”, neglecting a spiritual Being-centred approach to leadership (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). While “*‘Having’ and ‘doing’ are constructs that are central to the ego-based self*”, the linguistic reference to human *beings*, reflected in ancient cultural understanding for millennia, hinted at the spiritual significance of Being (Fry & Kriger, 2009, p. 1687). As Dhiman and Kriger (2018) observed,

“Only by going beyond doing, which is based on the vicarious desires of the personal self, and resting in awareness of the Self, can true lasting well-being emerge in the workplace or, indeed, in one’s life more generally” (p. 93). However, as Fry and Kriger (2009) explained,

Unfortunately, the direct experience and understanding of ‘being’ has atrophied in the world today, largely owing to an overemphasis on ‘observables’. Essentially, if something is not directly observable or measurable, behavioural scientists tend to question or even deny its ontological status (p. 1687).

The risk of this narrow materialistic paradigm as observed by Neubert (2019) is that *“In the discipline of management and organizations, this results in the adoption and perpetuation of a limited view of how people act and interact, influence and are influenced, and flourish and fail, which is value-laden despite claims of objectivity”* (p. 253). According to Neubert (2019), the inclusion of spiritual perspectives in scholarship and leadership paradigms has profound implications in challenging and expanding prevailing materialistic secular assumptions, namely that human beings:

- are by nature both “immaterial and material”, and therefore have a “unique and inherent value and dignity” beyond material “instrumental value”;
- have the potential for profound change, being behaviourally influenced by, but not limited to their material dimension; and
- are capable of choosing to serve others altruistically beyond self-interest, challenging the “common secular assumption” that “all psychological mechanisms underlying behavior can be explained by self-interest” (p. 258).

Neubert (2019) further observed that *“Faith and theory influence our ways of seeing and interpreting and behaving. Secularism is its own kind of faith system”* noting that secularism *“limits its theories, or what it has faith in, to what is natural or material”* (p. 254). Spirituality in leadership *“facilitates development of the social awareness, self-motivation, and core values and self-identity components of character development”*, which is arguably foundational to leadership development (Sweeney & Fry, 2012, p. 100). This is backed by study findings, which linked spirituality to improved financial performance (Benefiel et al., 2014), leadership effectiveness (Fry et al., 2005; Reave, 2005), productivity (Fry et al., 2005; Benefiel et al., 2014), ethical decision-making (Mitroff, 1998), employee well-being (Fry et al., 2005; Benefiel et al., 2014), employee engagement and meaning (Saks, 2011), and more

inclusive workplaces with employee belongingness (Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). Moreover, honesty and integrity were the top defining virtues of spirituality, in addition to consistent virtues of compassion, humanity, wisdom, forgiveness, gratitude, conscientiousness, humility, and altruism (Benefiel et al., 2014; Chan & Ananthram, 2019; Dent et al., 2005; Emmons, 2000; Fairholm, 1996; Fry et al., 2005; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Mitroff, 1998; Reave, 2005; Samul, 2020; Sweeney & Fry, 2012; Tischler et al., 2002). Empirical studies also linked spiritual practices, notably meditation, to improved leadership effectiveness and performance (Reave, 2005). Gill (2022) discussed several spirituality measurement scales which may be potentially useful for assessing spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being in the workplace. However, as Case et al. (2012) argued, adopting a “performative”, empiricist, reductive approach risks denigrating spiritual leadership theory into yet another means to an end for financial outcomes (p. 356).

Gotsis and Grimani (2017) formulated a framework of spiritual leadership and inclusive workplaces, stipulating inner life, mindfulness, service, and altruism. However both Gotsis and Grimani's (2017) model and Sweeney and Fry's (2012) character development through personal spiritual leadership framework were purely conceptual. There remains a need for empirical research into spirituality and leadership (Benefiel et al., 2014; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022). In general, scholars explained spirituality pertaining to management and leadership as “*transformational, moral, and ethical, and claim that spirituality assumes integrity, honesty, goodness, knowing, wholeness, congruency, interconnectedness, teamwork*” (Dent et al., 2005, p. 629). Fry et al. (2005) popularly defined spiritual leadership as:

the values, attitudes, and behaviors that one must adopt in intrinsically motivating one’s self and others so that both have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership—i.e. they experience meaning in their lives, have a sense of making a difference, and feel understood and appreciated (p. 836).

The core purpose of spiritual leadership according to Fry et al. (2005), is to “*create vision and value congruence*” across teams and individuals to enhance commitment and productivity (p. 836). It is a debatable purpose statement, vague in its reference to unspecified values, which arguably risks encompassing examples of leadership that do not encapsulate the essence of spirituality. For example, one might argue that Adolf Hitler ably accomplished this purpose. Could he then be considered a spiritual leader? The ensuing inclusion of altruistic love in Fry et al.'s (2005) spiritual leadership theory

model thus provided a crucially distinctive addition to the initial definition. To Fairholm's (1996) point, *"A characteristic of current leadership texts is that they confuse dedication, mission or vision, with spirituality"*, however spirituality goes beyond that, into what *underpins* Being and activities (p. 12). It is to this point that this study is focussed on 'spiritual intelligence in leadership', rather than 'spiritual leadership'. Spiritual intelligence, as explicated by Emmons (2000) and Vaughan (2002), arguably offers far more profound implications for leadership development in firmly classifying spirituality as an intelligence. For example, Emmons's (2000) exposition of spiritual intelligence as characterised by transcendence, virtues, and higher consciousness goes a step beyond spiritual leadership definitions, shared also by Vaughan's (2002) experiential observations as a clinical psychologist specialising in spiritual and psychological developmental integration. Spiritual leadership definitions tended to describe outward focussed expressions, while spiritual intelligence encompasses the inherent spiritual essence of Being which gives rise to such expression. As Vaughan (2002) explained, *"An integral view of spiritual intelligence subsumes multiple intelligences and looks at spiritual intelligence in the context of a person's whole life"* (p. 31). However the use of the term of 'spiritual leadership' is far more prevalent in scholarly studies, while spiritual intelligence remains an emergent concept in leadership.

Commensurate with spiritual intelligence, spirituality in leadership was later supported by development of thought extolling the need for Being-centred leadership theory (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005), although this is currently nascent. This was depicted by a five-level ontological model based on the intersecting worldviews of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). These ontological levels of Being were hypothesised as impacting all leadership practices, including values, ethics, motivations, and other psychological states, successively evolving from physical profit-focussed leadership motivations to altruistic spiritualised ones of benefit to broader humanity (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). Significantly for the Vedāntic lens of this study, leadership theorists are increasingly expanding the externalised focus on traits and behaviours, to include inner spiritual Being-centred concepts like presence and non-dual awareness, as foundational to altruistic leadership and organisational wellness (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). This is facilitated by reflective practices like prayer, study of spiritual texts, and meditation (Reave, 2005).

According to Mitroff (1998), spirituality in management entails three ethical imperatives:

1. Ethical (non-harmful) provision of products and services.
2. Ensuring availability of products and services to those in ethical need, without exploitative profit-taking.
3. Fostering a deep sense of care and responsibility toward broader stakeholders connected to the business, such as employees and communities.

Ethical leadership and spirituality are therefore closely aligned (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Mitroff, 1998; Reave, 2005) and imply the very opposite of greed. As Chakraborty et al. (2004) cautioned, “*Unless we begin to combat squarely the globalized scourge of ‘I need your greed for my greed,’ values and ethics have little chance to revive. Without such a base, spirituality will get no foothold*” (p. 101). The converse is arguably true as well, in that without spiritual intelligence, the potential for ethical leadership is diminished. An example of a materialistic outlook unbalanced by spiritual intelligence, is the widely-used but rather uninspired definition of ethical leadership by Brown and Treviño (2006), as “*the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making*” (pp. 595–596). Whilst the importance of honesty as an ethical leadership attribute was acknowledged, Brown and Treviño (2006) omitted to include this explicitly in their definition.

Moreover, Brown and Treviño (2006) asserted that other leadership forms “*include characteristics that are not part of the ethical leadership construct (i.e., visionary orientation, religious orientation, self-awareness)*” (p. 600). It is argued that ethical leadership extends far deeper than transactional processes (Mitroff, 1998), and that self-awareness ought to be an integral component, without which a leader is unlikely to have an ethical orientation in the first place. Brown and Treviño's (2006) exposition on ethical leadership arguably impoverishes the essence of the construct. For example, Hitler could arguably have been considered as constituting “normatively appropriate conduct” by many Germans at the time of his leadership, and displayed strong transactional accountability processes in securing followship and furthering his aims (pp. 595–596). Could that be considered as constituting ethical leadership? In distinguishing ethical leadership from other forms, Brown and Treviño (2006) seemed to view ethical leadership as fundamentally transactional in nature, concerned solely with accountability processes and communication.

Chakraborty and Chakraborty's (2004) definition was more encapsulating of the spiritual essence of ethical leadership, with less risk of unethical leadership falling into its ambit. According to Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004),

[Ethics] may be defined negatively. It is unethical when an entity, individual or collective, intentionally uses its power or authority to gain some advantage at the expense of another entity, of which the latter is unaware or defenseless...Transcendence of the empirical self, tied to the separative ego consciousness, could transform the perpetrating entity towards all-embracing self-consciousness (p. 197).

This definition tackles the scourge of greed and exploitation in clearly defining what is unethical leadership. Yet it is Brown and Treviño's (2006) inadequate definition which is oft-cited (Mayer et al., 2012). Given the import, this raises concerns around academic responsibility in propagating certain key concept definitions pertaining to ethical leadership. Furthermore, leadership theory which omits to take spiritual intelligence into account, risks promoting leaders without humanity. Mitroff (1998) went so far as to assert that, based on the spiritual weakness of academic management literature, "*we have no right to claim that we have any comprehensive theories of management*" (p. 76). While spirituality and faith may also pose negative consequences for leadership, without sufficient breadth and depth of empirical research, there is no way of sufficiently discerning all aspects of impact (Dent et al., 2005; Neubert, 2019; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022). Nevertheless, positive evidence from workplace spirituality studies to date may hold promise for the development of spiritual intelligence in leadership.

2.2.3 Shadow aspects of spirituality and workplace spirituality

However, there are shadow aspects of spirituality to be considered. Reasons for the traditional exclusion of spirituality, faith, and religion from the workplace included negative connotations associated with evangelical imposition, proselytising, and control (Tischler et al., 2002). Exclusionary assertions of superiority of one faith over others can also negatively impact employee well-being and morale (Benefiel et al., 2014). Notwithstanding a basis of inadequate research from which to draw conclusions, R. B. Brown (2003) mused that,

At its best, workplace spirituality is intended to provide a means for individuals to integrate their work and their spirituality, which, it is alleged, will provide them with direction, connectedness, and wholeness at work. At its worst, workplace spirituality is a new management fad, with sinister undertones, which, when unmasked, is likely to prove ineffective and ephemeral (p. 396).

Moreover, concerns of business owners exploiting and manipulating employees for selfish ends under the guise of spirituality (Reave, 2005) and workplace spirituality being promoted as yet another means to attain materialistic outcomes, warrant serious consideration (Benefiel, 2005; Case et al., 2012; Dent et al., 2005; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022). As R. K. Singh and Singh (2022) noted, *“Most of the literature concentrates on how WPS [workplace spirituality] can be used as a means to enhance productivity, with employees being viewed primarily as a means of production and secondarily as spiritual beings”* (p. 1303).

Notwithstanding the potential for transformation, some studies linked religious and spiritual (“r/s”) struggles to physical and mental health issues, impaired well-being, and distress (Hart et al., 2020; Pargament, 2013; Pargament et al., 2016). It can take years to recover from undiscerning spirituality, such as cult influences (Vaughan, 2002). Emmons (2000) listed emotional volatility, basic character deficiencies, and the lack of channelling one’s spiritual intelligence toward noble aims, as factors that lead to problems of maladaptive spiritual imbalance. Psychotherapist Welwood (1999) outlined a need for greater integration between spirituality and modern psychology, cautioning that an emphasis on one without the other risks “spiritual bypassing”, which creates an imbalance of healthy functioning (Welwood, 1984, p. 64). Spiritual bypassing refers to adopting spiritual principles of transcendence at a premature level of spiritual maturity and ego development to avoid confronting human needs and addressing issues pertaining to the wounding of the ego-self (Welwood, 1984, 1999). Although Welwood's (1984) observations of spiritual bypassing stemmed primarily from his experiences with Buddhism, there may potentially be learnings for practitioners of other spiritual traditions too. In addition to spiritual bypassing, Welwood (1984) cited desensitisation and narcissism as psychospiritual developmental impediments. An imbalanced approach to spirituality may thus have shadow aspects, such as the inability to function productively in the world.

However, mature spiritual intelligence can become a mediating force, helping one to harmonize and integrate all aspects of life, including earthly and divine, along with critical discernment between

authentic and false spirituality (Emmons, 2000; Vaughan, 2002). For example, the dark night of the soul, often presented as a negative experience on the spiritual path, was found by psychiatrist May (2004) to not necessarily be so. According to May (2004), this experience enables transformation, bringing joy and liberation from hindering attachments. Benefiel (2005) found similarly. Significantly for this study, wholeness was found by Hart et al. (2020) to be empirically associated with greater growth versus decline following post traumatic r/s struggles as a positive mediator. Greater wholeness was also associated with a more flexible, inclusive interfaith spiritual orientation versus rigid religious exclusivism (Pargament et al., 2016).

2.2.4 Detractors of spiritual intelligence in leadership: Greed, profit, and the Invisible Hand

In exploring the detractors of spiritual intelligence, some influences that contributed toward shaping the prevailing culture of greed in leadership are explored below. Not being the main focus of this study, this does not intend to represent an exhaustive analysis, but provides context. Based on a prototype analysis, Seuntjens et al. (2015) defined greed as *“the experience of desiring to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough. It is associated with goals of materialism and feelings of envy and it may lead to self-interested behaviour and tunnel vision”* (p. 518). Perhaps what is lacking in Seuntjens et al.'s (2015) definition is the critical point of the greed experience as wants pertaining to those who already have more than they *need*. This is clearer in the dictionary definition, *“a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed”* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Moreover, *“Although needs can be defined as what is necessary for sustaining the basic comforts of living and for relieving suffering, wants, the essence of greed, are desires created by the social and economic environment”* (Nikelly, 2006). The distinction between needs and wants is critical, because wants “have no quantitative limits” and can therefore never lead to satiety (Nikelly, 2006, p. 67).

According to Nikelly (2006) it was John Locke who re-termed greed as “self-interest”, in the belief that it would be beneficial to trade and prosperity (p. 67). In a distortion of 18th century ethics philosophy which praised utilitarianism, economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) propagated the belief that self-interested actions automatically result in the greatest social and economic good through his Invisible Hand theory (Chakraborty et al., 2004), and considered the desire for insatiable wealth accumulation to be “rational and morally legitimate” (Nikelly, 2006, p. 66). One needs no further empirical evidence

than current global economic inequality, for example, to see the abysmal flaw in this reasoning (Nikelly, 2006), which failed to consider the harmful impact of greed and selfishness on the poor or the environment, since it does not take anyone or anything beyond self into account.

Then followed Milton Friedman (1912-2006), who declared shareholder profit maximisation to be the sole responsibility of business, denouncing business executives who extolled social responsibility or social conscience as “*unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society*” (Friedman, 1970, para. 1). Friedman (1970) acceded to social cause spend only if it linked to corporate profit. Friedman (1970) argued that “only people can have responsibilities”, and that corporations are artificial and cannot be viewed as having responsibilities (para. 2). That corporations are made up of people rendered Friedman’s argument completely illogical (Chakraborty et al., 2004). Both Smith’s and Friedman’s assumptions and philosophies of self-interest to the exclusion of social impact stand in direct contrast to spiritual intelligence, which is characterised by a transcendence of self-interest to noble, altruistic, and inclusively-beneficial ideals (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Emmons, 2000; Fairholm, 1996; Fry et al., 2005).

In stark contrast to what was assumed as ‘rational’ by Adam Smith, Radhakrishnan (1914a), from a Vedāntic perspective enquired, “*What are the general features of a rational life? First, it will be a life of unselfish devotion to the highest ideals of humanity*” (p. 170). Moreover, as Neubert (2019) noted,

A spiritual assumption is that to be human is to, at times, rise above self-interest and choose the good of others. In contrast, a common secular assumption is that all psychological mechanisms underlying behavior can be explained by self-interest (p. 258).

While the major spiritual and religious traditions of the world stand united in eschewing greed as immoral, a “greed is good” mentality was promoted in the materialistic world of economics (Seuntjens et al., 2015, p. 521; Wang & Murnighan, 2011). Contrary to biological assumptions, Nikelly (2006) argued that “*Accordingly, people are erroneously taught by the prevailing economic system that self-interest is a social norm. Indeed, socio-historical evidence shows greed to be a cultivated behavior fueled by economic and cultural values and neither inherited nor universal*” (p. 68). Moreover, studies found that those educated in such economic models tended to display dishonesty, hoarding, and other such behaviours associated with greed (Seuntjens et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2011).

While it must be appreciated that the core purpose of business is to be profitable in ensuring sustainability, dogmatically insisting that business be absolved from broader social responsibilities runs the risk of threatening that very sustainability in the long term, simply because it ignores systems-thinking and adopts a parochial perspective (Cappelli et al., 2010; Fairholm, 1996; Neubert, 2019; Pruzan, 2008; Steingard, 2005). Former General Electric chief executive officer (“CEO”) Jack Welch, whom many regarded as a proponent of shareholder value strategy, denounced Friedman’s philosophy as misguided, *“On the face of it, shareholder value is the dumbest idea in the world,”* he said. *“Shareholder value is a result, not a strategy...Your main constituencies are your employees, your customers and your products”* (Guerrera, 2009, para. 4). It is also markedly apparent by the grand challenges of current existence that Adam Smith’s self-interested Invisible Hand theory is a dismal falsity, beneficial to a few at the expense of the many, and that there are dangerous repercussions with Friedman’s narrow profit maximisation doctrine to both the planet and its inhabitants (Chakraborty et al., 2004).

Contrasting how United States (“US”) companies in the 1970s used to take pride in the number of their employees versus the current era trigger-happy retrenchment for profit maximisation approach, Kristie (2010) wondered what type of work world children of today would enter into, and whether they would even have jobs in a business paradigm where people are treated as liabilities and expenses instead of assets. Kristie (2010) therefore called for enlightened business models to be a change agent, even amidst the structural complexities of catalysing such change. Chakraborty et al. (2004) classified profit maximisation behaviour as constituting either the “greedy kind” or the “responsible kind”, characterised by the lack or presence respectively of ethics, social responsibility, and broader stakeholder concern (p. 113). In short, *“The greedy kind is disastrous for mankind; the responsible kind is the future of civilization”* (Chakraborty et al., 2004, p. 114). However, as Kets de Vries (2016b) noted, *“Greed isn’t a topic we like to talk about. This may explain why greedy people use a host of strategies to disguise their greediness, often resorting to high-minded statements such as seeking to better humankind, while concealing their real motives”* (p. 12).

Yet, despite the harmful impact in leadership and link to corporate fraud, the “psychological underpinnings” and dynamics of greed are under researched (Kets de Vries, 2016b; Seuntjens et al., 2015, p. 506; Wang & Murnighan, 2011). However, scales measuring dispositional greed are emerging

(Zeelenberg et al., 2022). Many psychoanalysts identified the root cause of greed to be emotional deprivation, either through childhood experiences which substituted materialism for emotional nurturing as a source of self-worth, or harsh, alienating social experiences, thus leading to an insecure, incomplete self (Kets de Vries, 2016b; Nikelly, 2006). For example, Kets de Vries (2016b) wrote, “*What I notice when seeking to decipher the background of greedy people is that they are often driven by a fundamental sense of deprivation, of something lacking within, contributing to low self-esteem*” (p. 14). Nikelly (2006) explained further,

To satisfy these feelings of incompleteness and deficiency, the self strives to ingest and merge with valued objects in order to restore itself and a vicious cycle is created. Greed is an illusion that compensates for the void and the lack of meaning that a market-driven society promises to replenish (p. 68).

Thus the self becomes viewed as a commoditized material object obsessed with having versus Being, as a source of self-worth (Fromm, 1976; Nikelly, 2006). Along with ‘greed is good’ economic models, the secular, materialistic approach to leadership theory and scholarship has arguably not helped to counter greed in leadership. Moreover, the accumulation of excess wealth continues to be celebrated as aspirational, despite the influence of many philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Spinoza, who deemed greed to be pathological and character corrupting (Fromm, 1976; Nikelly, 2006), and injunctions from the world’s religious and spiritual traditions of greed as harmful (Fromm, 1976; Seuntjens et al., 2015).

An example of how spirituality in leadership practically impacted organisational decision-making and values is that of Reell Precision Manufacturing (“RPM”), where during a tough financial period, the co-founders after praying about it, decided to take large personal salary cuts to prevent lay-offs, and obtained agreement from employees to similarly do so at a smaller reduction (Benefiel, 2005). This is an example of what spiritual leadership, in contrast to greed in leadership, looks like. Although the co-founders had strong financial justification for the retrenchment route, they opted for a different approach, staying true to their spiritual values instead - “*to let go of their own egos and find the way forward that was best for the company as a whole*” (Benefiel, 2005, p. 740). It sparked high morale in employees and the company subsequently recovered (Benefiel, 2005). RPM’s direction statement at the time was, “*We recognize that profitability is necessary to continue the business, reach our full potential and fulfil our*

responsibilities to shareholders, but our commitments to co-workers and customers come before short-term profits” (Benefiel, 2005). A more spiritually intelligent approach to leadership has become imperative in challenging harmful self-interested motives toward more noble leadership aims. This will require a shift in the materialistic assumption that human beings are primarily motivated by biological greed (Seuntjens et al., 2015), to encompass the spiritual perspective that human beings have a transcendent dimension and are capable of altruistic, prosocial motivations beyond self-interest (Emmons, 2000; Neubert, 2019). It will also require awareness to see the value of spirituality in leadership beyond yet another means to promote materialistic outcomes (Benefiel, 2005).

2.2.5 Vedānta and spiritual intelligence in leadership

The integration of spirituality, work, and leadership was extolled by Vedānta for centuries, most explicitly in the Bhagavad Gītā. For example, Hee and Gurd (2010) observed that “*work is a sanctifying reality*” in the Bhagavad Gītā, citing teachings as including, “*The wise see that there is action in the midst of inaction and inaction in the midst of action. Their consciousness is unified, and every act is done with complete awareness*”, and “*The goal of all work is spiritual wisdom*” (p. 402). Amar et al. (2017) noted that the “*Bhagavad Gita, which, although by some accounts as old as from the year 3137 BCE, is still admired globally and guides the personal and work lives of more than a billion people in the world*” (p. 1). Mahatma Gandhi, was one such example, treasuring the Bhagavad Gītā as his leadership guide, and source of comfort, spiritual wisdom and strength (Gandhi, 1925, as cited in Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

But how relevant is the ancient spiritual wisdom tradition of Vedānta toward fostering greater spiritual intelligence in prevailing leadership and management contexts? According to S. Sharma (1999), “*During recent years the relevance and importance of the Gita in social and corporate contexts has received the attention of management gurus, management scholars, management teachers, management practitioners and social scientists*” (p. 103). More than two decades since S. Sharma’s (1999) observation, leadership interest in Vedāntic philosophy continues to grow globally, exemplified by recent AOM symposium themes and publications (Amar et al., 2017; Cappelli et al., 2010; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020; Pandey et al., 2020), although studies remain relatively emergent. In view of the increasing number of influential global companies headed by Indian-origin leaders, it might be unsurprising to find such enthusiastic curiosity in the potential underlying Vedāntic philosophical influence on leadership

and performance. By July 2020, 30% of influential Fortune 500 companies were led by Indian CEOs, including Microsoft, Google (parent company Alphabet), IBM, Adobe, Deloitte, Mastercard and Novartis (India Global Business, 2020). Three were named among the world's top 10 best-performing CEOs in 2019 based on entire tenure by Harvard Business Review (HBR Editors, 2019).

Chan and Ananthram (2019) conducted a qualitative study of multi-faith senior executives in India, finding that ethical virtues including humanity, empathy, fairness, integrity, conscientiousness, transcendence, wisdom, and moral fortitude were inspired by various spiritual and religious backgrounds, leading to ethical mindsets and decision making. Nobel laureate and welfare economist Amartya Sen observed that, “*successful capitalist economies both in the West and East depend very much on the system of values and norms embedded in their respective societies and cultures*” (1993, as cited in Alexander & Buckingham, 2011, p. 320). However, growing receptivity to what Eastern spiritual wisdom traditions could offer may also be consequential of a world growing tired of moral depravity propagated by existing capitalistic business models (Cappelli et al., 2010; Dent et al., 2005). Certainly, the examples discussed below are not meant to imply blindness to failings and moral exceptions, notwithstanding the mediocre standing of India in bribery and corruption indices as one example (Chan & Ananthram, 2019).

However, Vedānta enshrines at the heart of its ethics, a spiritual principle of wholeness, through a systemic understanding of the interconnectedness in creation, which promotes an orientation aligned to the Vedic ideal of “*whole world as one family*” and the common good principle (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020, p. 13; Pandey et al., 2020; Radhakrishnan, 1914a). This principle was found to have a pervasive influence in inspiring a different approach to leadership. For example, Cappelli et al. (2010), in exploring alternatives to the socially problematic prevailing US business model, revealed the core reason for top performance by Indian CEOs to be that they valued social mission and employees over sole maximisation of shareholder value, noting that,

Specifically, the Indian approach eschews the explicit pursuit of shareholder value in favour of goals associated with a social mission. These companies make extraordinary investments in their employees and empower them in decision making. These practices combine with a distinctively Indian approach to problem solving to create a competitive advantage that has led to spectacular

business growth, not just within India but in international markets as well (Cappelli et al., 2010, p. 6).

Based on research interviews with 105 leaders of 98 of the largest Indian companies by market capitalisation, Cappelli et al. (2010) found that top-ranked priorities by Indian business leaders revealed an expanded leadership focus beyond the parochial lens of shareholder profit maximisation, evidenced by an appreciation for employees and a desire to ensure the well-being of the broader societal context. Moreover, comparative analyses between US and Indian companies by Cappelli et al. (2010) showed Indian companies significantly outscoring their US counterparts on metrics such as skills development, talent management, succession planning, and corporate social responsibility, inter alia. What about shareholder profit maximisation then, which would typically be the priority for many CEOs? As Cappelli et al. (2010) observed, “*A particularly important lesson for the United States is that the major Indian companies are not succeeding despite the fact that they are pursuing a social mission and investing in their employees. They are succeeding precisely because they do so*” (p. 6). In contrast to a self-serving, transactional management approach, these leaders saw no conflict between shareholder profit maximisation and a central societal value-creation based model, discerning that the former could not be sustained over a long period without the latter (Cappelli et al., 2010). Cappelli et al. (2010) concluded that notwithstanding cognisance around specific aspects of transferability, these practices are recognizable by managers in all contexts, reminiscent of long lost previous generation US practices. Kristie (2010) concurred, noting that Cappelli et al.'s (2010) findings on the social focus by Indian companies are “*what the true nature of CEO and board leadership should be all about*” (p. 28).

Cappelli et al. (2010) found the source of this approach to be spiritual values, which included service to others and a life goal beyond material needs, honouring the four *ashramas* or Vedic stages of life philosophy, notably the third *ashrama*. This *ashrama*, commensurate with the average age of senior leaders, extols the virtue of slowly withdrawing from the active pursuit of wealth and pleasure after midlife, to focus more on spiritual goals and service to others:

The priority and value placed in India on service to others and the widely held belief that one's goal in life should extend beyond oneself, especially beyond one's material needs, is no doubt part of the driver for the sense of mission. The third of the four stages of Hindu life, the *vanaprastha ashrama*, focuses on the search for meaning, helping others, and a gradual

withdrawal from the competitive business world, and it neatly coincides with the typical age (over 50) of senior business leaders (Cappelli et al., 2010, p. 11).

Vedānta instructs that one's actions be guided by consideration for the welfare of society as a whole, not by selfishness (Dhiman, 2015; Pandey et al., 2020; S. Sharma, 1999). This is regarded as *lokasangraha* or enlightened collective interest, working for the well-being of the world in a spirit of appreciation for the “*unity of the world and the interconnectedness of different forms of existence*”, in contrast to egoic self-interest (Pandey et al., 2020, p. 33; Radhakrishnan, 1940; S. Sharma, 1999). Closely linked is another Vedāntic concept, *nishkama karma*, or selfless action, which means working without attachment to the fruit of actions (Hee & Gurd, 2010; S. Sharma, 1999). In Vedānta, action done with this attitude is considered to be pure, encapsulated by the Bhagavad Gītā verse, “*As the unenlightened act from attachment to work...so should the enlightened act without attachment, desiring the welfare of the world*” (Nihsreyasananda, 2005, p. 69).

Maheshwari and Gupta (2020), who articulated Vedic leadership as “*Authentic leaders are self-realized people who do their work dispassionately according to their moral duty*” based their model on two Vedāntic principles of Self-knowledge and righteous action (p. 1). For example, performing one's work with excellence motivated only by expectations of a bonus and promotion is considered ego-driven work in Vedānta, while working with excellence because it is one's *dharma* or inherent ethical duty to do so, without attachment to reward, or motiveless helping of others, are considered pure spiritual actions (Dhiman, 2015).

By contrast, leaders who lack an alternative outlook from spiritual intelligence find themselves grasping for some sense of higher purpose and meaning as they grow older, feeling incomplete. Without anything else to look to, they continue with all that they know: An undisciplined desire to become wealthier to satisfy ever-growing materialistic goals, albeit at the expense of others, degenerating into an endlessly blind pursuit for fulfilment coalescing into greed (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011; Kets de Vries, 2016b). This approach cannot fill the emptiness or provide a fulfilling sense of wholeness, higher purpose and sustainable happiness (Radhakrishnan, 1940). Studies show that “*Selfless service to others seems to support both psychological growth and general well-being*” and that “*this transcendence of self-interests and striving for a greater, common good can provide people with a sense of meaning and calling in their life*” (Sweeney & Fry, 2012, pp. 90, 102). Moreover, greed creates a risk for the ethical

sustainability of organisations with a detrimental impact on wider society, evidenced by the spate of corporate financial scandals over recent decades (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011; Cappelli et al., 2010), Credit Suisse being one of the latest examples (Makortoff & Pegg, 2022).

One of the early sources of the common good principle can be attributed to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, an ancient Vedic text dating between 4th BC and 150 AD, regarded as a leadership manual for kings on sustainable wealth creation and economic stability, rooted in an ethical paradigm of *dharma* or righteousness (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). The teachings included active caring for the common good of society as fundamental to sustainable wealth creation, the importance of moral leadership education, and self-discipline in adhering to *dharma* (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). However, while noble in theory, there are also risks to the ethical common good approach to be mindful of, including dictatorial imposition, paternalism and hierarchical beneficence (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011).

In comparison to the *Arthashastra*, Hee and Gurd (2010) found that “*the Bhagavad Gita is more appropriate for analysis of leadership because the former deals with duties of rulers during war and peace while the latter deals more with attaining insights into self-control and individual harmony*” (p. 400). This is supported by Muniapan (2014), who observed key Bhagavad Gītā teachings to be that self-mastery through spiritual knowledge is fundamental to successful leadership of self and others, including learning how to overcome greed, anger, mental restlessness, despondency, egotism, false knowledge and delusion. If left unbridled in a leader, these traits would likely have an adverse effect on ethics, productivity, and sustainable organisational success. S. Sharma (1999) distilled four areas of management theory and practice from the Bhagavad Gītā, namely, “*stress management; psycho-spiritual improvement in the work environment; business ethics and human values; and enlightened leadership*” (p. 104). Moreover, the Bhagavad Gītā exhorted that whatever a great person does is followed by others (S. Sharma, 1999). This is supported by non-Vedāntic studies which found that leaders who behave unethically are likely to perpetuate this attitude in followers (Mayer et al., 2012).

Kanji (2003) developed a Vedānta business excellence model, mapping the Vedāntic concepts of *karma* (selfless action), *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (higher knowledge) as a foundational framework for leadership, devotion to continuous improvement, facts, employees and customers, and knowledge of business excellence. While Kanji's (2003) model merits in simplicity, it could be argued as presenting a distortion of the true meaning of Vedāntic principles to enable a force-fit of these concepts into a business management framework. Kanji's (2003) use of the term ‘*janana*’, which means ‘birth’ or

‘bringing forth’ throughout the paper as the Vedāntic term for higher knowledge, when the correct term is *‘jnana’* (Monier-Williams, 2008a) was one example which cast doubt over the authentic understanding of Vedānta. The risk of distortion of spiritual concepts in the service of commercialisation is a factor to be wary of (Case et al., 2012; Hyland, 2017).

Maheshwari and Gupta (2020), who explored organisational success through the Vedic leadership case study of a technology multinational, used the Vedāntic concepts of non-dual consciousness (*advaita*), impartial action (*karma*), and righteous duty (*dharma*) to develop their V-theory of Transcendence model for leaders. The model focussed on the development of leader self-awareness through various techniques, including the capacity for “*living alternatively in silence and action mode*” (Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020, p. 13). Relevantly for this study, Maheshwari and Gupta (2020) observed that “*Vedic leadership ideally leads to a sustainably growing organization that engages the wholeness of Being and fullness of knowledge for mistake-free action on everyone’s part*” (p. 1). While discussing concepts like consciousness, Maheshwari and Gupta's (2020) study focussed on an externalist Vedic epistemological approach to leadership evolution through selfless action. However, there appeared to be little internalist epistemological and ontological phenomenological exploration as to the nature of the core Vedāntic attributes which facilitate wholeness of Being. According to Muniapan (2017), workplace spirituality can be analysed into three perspectives, namely intrinsic-origin, religious, and existentialist. The intrinsic-origin view posits that spirituality comes from inherent consciousness, free of all conditioning (Muniapan, 2017). While there are certain Vedāntic concepts that may arguably fall within the religious perspective, such as *bhakti* (devotion to God), the concept of Vedāntic wholeness, is argued, by its very nature, to constitute an intrinsic-origin perspective, which supports the need for an internalist ontological exploration.

2.3 The concept of wholeness

2.3.1 Wholeness in classical psychology and spiritual wisdom traditions

Wholeness is core to spirituality (Niemic et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016). Vaughan (2002) explained that, “*A spiritual path that leads to love, freedom, and wholeness is concerned with the well-being of the whole—the whole person, the whole human family, the whole planet, and the whole web of life*” (p. 24). Yet wholeness is a nascent research phenomenon, typically ignored in theoretical leadership, spirituality, and psychology frameworks (Campbell, 2007; Emmons, 2000; Hart et al., 2020;

Niemiec et al., 2020; Thakadipuram, 2010). This is somewhat perplexing given the unified voices of eminent psychologists across time, with the exception of Sigmund Freud, who extolled the significance of wholeness to human beings, identifying an intrinsic human need for inner unification, relief from the suffering of the fragmented incomplete self, and a yearning for experiential transcendence (Fromm, 1957; W. James, 1902; Pargament et al., 2016; Russo-Netzer, 2016).

James (1902), in his classic exposition *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, considered “divided self” unification to be fundamental to human flourishing, and an outcome of authentic spiritual processes (p. 166). Jung (1964) concurred, noting that, “*the impulse towards wholeness is universal, and its symbols appear to be indistinguishable from the phenomenology of religious experience in the human psyche*” (as cited in Selvam, 2007, p. 4). Jung (1938) declared “*the desire to discover and integrate the multiple levels of the self, including the sacred dimension*” as being a primal human drive (as cited in Pargament, 2013, p. 273). Jung approached wholeness through the concepts of individuation and integration of the unconscious self into a “complex holism” (Collins, 1994, p. 32).

Fromm (1957) too, observed that, “*Man - of all ages and cultures – is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one’s own individual life and find at-onement*” (p. 8). Fromm (1957) identified typical unhealthy strategies of overcoming the pain of separation as including alcoholism, drug addiction, orgies, consumerism, productive work, and “*the union of herd conformity*”, where the focus, rather counter productively tends toward “*‘sameness’, rather than ‘oneness’*” (pp. 11-12). However, according to Fromm (1957), these temporary “pseudo-unity” solutions were incapable of sustainably solving the human predicament of perceived separation (p. 14). Fromm (1957) argued love through interpersonal union to be the answer. In contrast, Vedānta posited sole reliance on interpersonal union for wholeness to be a shaky strategy, subject to change and requiring external psychological dependence, encouraging intrapersonal non-dualistic soteriological integration as a sustainable way instead (Milne, 1997; Venkataramiah, 2010). Aligned to this, Fromm (1957) expanded his concept of love from interpersonal union to encompass untypical examples, such as self-love and love for God, relevantly drawing on principles of non-duality and paradox from the Taoist and Vedāntic traditions.

Albeit fresh to scholarship, a profound understanding of wholeness has been intrinsic to many Eastern and African wisdom traditions for centuries (Cordaro et al., 2016; Daniels, 2019; Nussbaum et al., 2010).

In the Japanese wisdom tradition, integration of brokenness into wholeness is celebrated by the beautiful ancient art of *kintsugi*, where broken ceramic bowls are reconstructed with gold filigree, symbolically enhancing the beauty of the whole by highlighting the cracks (Hart et al., 2020; Russo-Netzer, 2016). Wholeness is also intrinsic to Chinese wisdom traditions, exemplified by the *Zhuangzi* (Daniels, 2019) and *Tian*, which appreciated harmony between nature and humans - viewing nature, God and the individual as being absolute and always whole (Liu, 2021). In Taoism, the concept of wholeness is extolled in the yin-yang union of opposites in the self, through “*a uniting and regulating principle that is hidden, nameless, and at the same time the source of all creation*” (Selvam, 2007, p. 58). This is commensurate with Vedānta, which encompassed wholeness at its core through the unifying principle of *Brahman* or the Self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Guénon, 2001; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). The appreciation for the interconnectedness and unity of all life also existed in African wisdom traditions, for example, through the concept of *ubuntu*, where wholeness is described as a way of being, a deeply embedded holistic way of seeing the world and what it means in relation to the individual (De Beer & De Beer, 2012; Nussbaum et al., 2010; Watson, 2006).

In many spiritual wisdom traditions, including Christianity, Vedānta, and Sufism, wholeness in the ultimate sense implied a union with the Divine or the highest principle in one’s Self (Huxley, 1947; W. James, 1902; Khalil, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 1940). Aldous Huxley (1947) in his classic spiritual comparative *The Perennial Philosophy*, which drew significantly from Vedānta, declared, “*The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground*” (p. 29). Psychologists found similarly, with Jung observing wholeness to be a “*cross-cultural and cross-temporal impulse motivating religious experience in the human psyche*”, thereby acknowledging the role of spirituality in the quest for wholeness (Selvam, 2007, p. 70). These expositions suggested that the problem of separation of the incomplete self could only be resolved through spiritual intelligence, wholeness being the central endeavour of spirituality and religion. Holiness and wholeness were thus found to be interwoven concepts in spiritual teachings, ‘holiness’ being etymologically rooted in wholeness (Hart et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016).

The etymological root of ‘whole’ is derived from the Old English “*hal*”, meaning to be “*healthy, unhurt, entire*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b; Russo-Netzer, 2016; Thakadipuram, 2010). Whole is defined in the dictionary as “*something constituting a complex unity: a coherent system or organization of parts fitting or working together as one; a completeness or perfection that can be sought, gained, or regained*”

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). This is congruent with Vedānta, which taught that wholeness is attainable, being the true, inherent nature of human beings (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1924). However, this view is incongruent with contemporary psychology which largely posits wholeness to be unattainable (Hart et al., 2020). Yet, as Sen (2015) pointed out, “*The aspiration to unify presupposes the pre-existence of wholeness and peace*” (p. 57). This is also supported by Jung (1980), who noted that the shared archetypal human impulse toward wholeness “*is a natural process; it is what makes a tree turn into a tree*” (as cited in Selvam, 2007, p. 44). As Kabat-Zinn (1994) described:

Perhaps ultimately, spiritual simply means experiencing wholeness and interconnectedness directly, a seeing that individuality and the totality are interwoven, that nothing is separate or extraneous. If you see in this way, then everything becomes spiritual in its deepest sense. Doing science is spiritual. So is washing the dishes (as cited in Niemiec et al., 2020, p. 3).

2.3.2 Wholeness in contemporary psychology

Although wholeness is a nascent research area in psychology, there has been recent blossoming interest (Hart et al., 2020; Niemiec et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2021). Wholeness is regarded as central to maturation, greater psychological health, and sturdier social connections, fostering connection beyond oneself through a unified, less fragmented sense of self (W. James, 1902; Pargament et al., 2021; Sinnott & Berlanstein, 2006; Thakadipuram, 2010). Niemiec et al. (2020) defined wholeness as “*a way of being in the world that involves a life-affirming view of oneself and the world, a capacity to see and approach life with breadth and depth and the ability to organize the life journey into a cohesive whole*” (p. 1). This definition was based on the popular, albeit empirically untested deconstruction of wholeness by Pargament et al. (2016) into five dimensions as a comparative to brokenness, in the context of orienting systems: “*(a) deeply purposive vs. aimless; (b) broad and deep vs. narrow and shallow; (c) flexible and enduring vs. rigid and unstable; (d) balanced, cohesive, and discerning vs. imbalanced, incohesive, and non-reflective; (e) benevolent and life-affirming vs. non-benevolent and life-limiting*” (p. 381). These dimensions of wholeness versus brokenness were not an assessment of wholeness itself, but of one’s orienting system, which could be viewed as the intra-dynamic forces that influence wholeness. Pargament et al. (2016) defined orienting systems as the blueprint of values, beliefs, and practices through which humans sense-make the world, serving as an underlying support system for dealing with life’s traumas and struggles.

Pargament et al. (2016) viewed spirituality as an “*integrative dimension in the orienting system, a force for wholeness that provides the individual with higher-order overarching values and an ultimate source of meaning that organizes lower-order goals and gives life a consistent unifying direction*”, appreciating the connection between wholeness and holiness, whilst acknowledging r/s struggles toward wholeness (p. 381). Significantly, Hart et al. (2020), in an empirical study of 1162 college students, found an orientation of wholeness to be a key determinant toward an outcome of positive growth from post-traumatic r/s struggles versus decline. While valuable in its findings, Hart et al.'s (2020) study did not explore the meaning of wholeness, but a hypothesis of wholeness as a mediating variable in r/s struggles, based on Pargament et al.'s (2016) empirically untested conceptualisations of wholeness orienting systems. The findings suggested wholeness also as a vital mediating force toward deeper levels of spiritual growth versus falling prey to the shadow aspects of r/s. Wholeness attributes, according to Hart et al. (2020) included:

- An involvement of “*a constellation of thoughts, emotions, actions, relationships, motivations, and experiences that define a person*”, not in isolation but socially and contextually relational (p. 3);
- continual dynamic evolution over a lifespan, never fully attainable; and
- a capacity that encompasses the integration of brokenness, closely bonded to holiness.

However it is unclear how these wholeness attributes by Hart et al. (2020) were derived, with no evident empirical testing. Despite acknowledging the role of spirituality in wholeness, the assertion by Hart et al. (2020, p. 3) that wholeness could never be fully attainable based on their material assumption that “*people are limited beings*”, contradicted the spiritual ontological perspective of human beings as inherently having a transcendent spiritual dimension unlimited by the material aspect (Emmons, 2000; Neubert, 2019). Moreover, these assertions are incongruent with many spiritual wisdom tradition teachings including Vedānta (Bauer, 1987; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Milne, 1993), Christianity (May, 2004; Milne, 1993) and the *Tian* (Liu, 2021). Pargament et al. (2021) went so far as to assert that “*wholeness itself is an ideal and must always remain a work in progress. From a religious perspective, the achievement of perfect wholeness may be reserved for the Buddha, God, or other divine being*” (p. 434). If this is true, then what would be the point of wholeness and spirituality? Indeed

Pargament et al.'s (2021) assumption contradicts the point of wholeness as an outcome of spirituality and the ultimate goal of religion (W. James, 1902).

Contrary to perceptions of perfection, wholeness does not imply pushing away hurt and brokenness but embracing these by altering the way in which one relates to that brokenness (Hart et al., 2020; Niemiec et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016; Russo-Netzer, 2016; Thakadipuram, 2010). It is that very brokenness which can lead to one's wholeness (Russo-Netzer, 2016; Sen, 2015). As Mehta (1978) observed,

What greater healing can there be than the thinking experience by man of being at one with that from which, in his all too human state, he experiences division and of being freed from the tyranny of that thing out there, and this, here inside his mind, confronting him as an other to himself? (p. 146).

Exploring the interplay between character strengths and spirituality toward wholeness, Niemiec et al. (2020) hypothesised wholeness to be a central master virtue. Using the analogy of a wheel with character strengths representing the spokes, Niemiec et al. (2020) professed wholeness to be the unifying fulcrum, facilitating a two-way energy flow to and from the character strengths. The character strengths included gratitude, love, zest, hope, kindness, bravery, appreciation of beauty, and self-regulation (Niemiec et al., 2020). The character strengths were based on Dahlsgaard et al.'s (2005) six core virtues, presented as psycho-spiritual qualities integral to spiritual development, synthesised from eight major wisdom traditions including Hinduism, drawn primarily from the Bhagavad Gītā. However, Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008) presented valid criticisms on authentic cultural representation of Dahlsgaard et al.'s (2005) study outcomes, noting that none of the authors possessed specialist knowledge of the underlying traditions.

Niemiec et al. (2020) theorised the relationship between character strengths, spirituality, and wholeness into two pathways: grounding and sanctification. In the grounding pathway, character strengths were posited as enhancing spirituality which leads to greater wholeness, whereas in the sanctification path, spirituality enhances character strengths leading to greater wholeness (Niemiec et al., 2020). Essentially the two pathways have different starting points leading to the same summit, that of wholeness. Niemiec et al. (2020) produced a heuristic model, depicting the synergy between character strengths and psycho-spiritual pathways toward wholeness, based on Mayseless and Russo-Netzer's (2017) spiritual

development model. However, Niemiec et al.'s (2020) model was purely conceptual. Furthermore, Niemiec et al. (2020), like Hart et al. (2020), did not explore the meaning of wholeness, relying purely on Pargament et al.'s (2016) empirically untested conceptualisation of wholeness orienting dimensions, Pargament being a co-author on both papers. Liu (2021) explored the relationship between the individual and the whole in holism, specifically the interplay between individual and collective intention, positing emergence, and identity as solutions. However, Liu's (2021) exploration too was purely conceptual, lacking empirical grounding on the meaning of wholeness.

2.3.3 Wholeness in leadership studies

If empirical research on wholeness was found to be lacking in psychology, there has been even less research exploring wholeness in workplace spirituality and leadership. One rare such study was that by Thakadipuram (2009, 2010, 2023), who conducted phenomenological interviews on the lived experiences of ten cross cultural spiritual leaders on their journeys toward wholeness. According to Thakadipuram (2010), *“to be whole means to envision the reality of individuals, organizations, society, and nature as interconnected phenomena designed for the purpose of common well-being, progress, and maximum happiness”* (p. 464). Explored from a human resources development perspective, Thakadipuram's (2010, 2023) Leadership Wholeness Model depicted the thematic stages of the journey toward wholeness, and external interrelationships. Unlike the conceptual psychology wholeness studies discussed (Niemiec et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016), Thakadipuram's (2009, 2010) study explored wholeness empirically through qualitative interviews. However, the epistemological and ontological gaps were that Thakadipuram's (2010) study focussed on exploring experiences relating to the individual *quest* toward wholeness, versus unpacking the meaning and constructs of wholeness itself. Moreover, the study was limited to ten leaders of spiritual organisations. Thakadipuram (2010) recommended extending wholeness research to other leadership spheres.

Relevantly for this study and Being-centred leadership (Fry & Kriger, 2009), Thakadipuram's (2009, 2010) model depicted 'Being' at the core of wholeness. 'Being' also formed one of the four components of Campbell's (2007) intra-individual conceptual model on leader wholeness along with cognition, spirituality, emotion, and the external components of behaviour and relationships. However, the meaning of Being was not explored by either researcher. While Campbell (2007) argued for an integrated approach toward wholeness in leadership development, their model was formulated solely through an appraisal of existing literature, and not empirically-based. It is interesting that while the aforementioned

leadership models explicitly identified Being as core to wholeness, emerging psychology conceptual models, for example, by Pargament et al. (2016) did not.

2.4 Wholeness in Vedānta

Wholeness is central to Vedānta, viewed as the natural outcome of Self-realisation, considered the highest goal of human life as that which brings true fulfilment (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1940). To be whole in the Vedāntic sense is to attain psychological freedom comprising three types: “(a) freedom from the pair of opposites; (b) freedom from fear; and (c) freedom from delusion” (S. Sharma, 1999, p. 114) - in short, freedom from suffering. Vedāntic wholeness is described as “a sense of immediate contact with ultimate reality, of the unification of the different sides of our nature. It is a state of pure apprehension, in which the whole being is welded into one” (Radhakrishnan, 1940, p. 51). Vedāntic terms for this state include *moksha*, *nirvana*, or *kaivalya* which all mean liberation from identification with the limited incomplete body-mind ego self, into an experiential realisation of wholeness and oneness through consciousness of *Brahman/Atman/Self* as ultimate Reality, the highest evolutionary state that humans can realise, from a spiritual perspective (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Monier-Williams, 2008b; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Ramsundarsingh, 2019).

In Vedānta, the infinite, changeless aspect of existence is referred to interchangeably as *Brahman/Atman/Self*, while the finite refers to that which is subject to constant change, referred to as *ahamkara/jiva* or the mind-body ego-self (Bauer, 1987; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Frazier, 2019; Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1997; Monier-Williams, 2008a; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1914b; Ramsundarsingh, 2019). Radhakrishnan (1914b) explained that,

according to the Vedantin, the Absolute is pure affirmative Being, the presupposition from which all determinations of the finite proceed. Knowing it, we know everything...The Absolute includes the finite. It is the whole. It is the self-determining principle which manifests itself in all the determinations of the finite without losing its unity with itself (pp. 449–450).

Therefore, Vedāntic wholeness encapsulates both the infinite and finite aspects of human beingness and existence, holding stability amidst the capricious (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004). The closest Western philosophical concepts dealing with a changeless substratum are that of “ontological substance”

and the “metaphysics of presence” (Guignon, 2006, p. 4). In Vedānta, the *ahamkara* or ego-self refers to the mind-body complex, the “*individual’s manifest empirical ‘self’ which is “an outer instrument of action”*” (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004, p. 196). This would equate to Cushman's (1990) reference to the empty self, which assumes that the self is a social construct and thus inherently incomplete, aided to function effectively through cultural embedding, also known as the empirical self in psychotherapy (Ramsundarsingh, 2019). Such self is referred to as the egoic mind-body ‘incomplete self’ in this study, to capture the meaning of material identity without spiritual wholeness.

In contrast, the *Self/Atman/Brahman*, often used interchangeably in Vedāntic texts, refers to the formless, eternal, non-dual aspect of pure Being (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frazier, 2019; Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1993, 1997; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Whitney, 2018). One translation of *Brahman* is “*evolution*” or “*the one universal soul...the Absolute, the Eternal*” (Monier-Williams, 2008b, p. 1071), although Whitney (2018) used “*pure consciousness*” as the most fitting, noting that there is “*no English equivalent*” (p. 293). It is important to note that *Brahman* is not to be confused with *Brahma*, the Creator aspect in the Hindu trinity, a common error made by some scholars (Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1997; Steingard, 2005).

In Vedānta, wholeness implies oneness, because, “*The goal of Advaita Vedānta is to show the ultimate non-reality of all distinctions; reality is not constituted of parts*” (Gupta, 1998, as cited in Silberstein, 2017, p. 1138). The concept of wholeness in Vedānta therefore both includes, and extends beyond integration of the mind-body egoic incomplete self, to realise wholeness in its entirety through the unifying principle of *Brahman* (Bauer, 1987; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1997; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Silberstein, 2017; Whitney, 2018). This perspective could arguably be viewed as an ontological extension to modern psychological theories, which are largely concerned with integration at the level of the empirical mind-body ego self (Hart et al., 2020; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Whitney, 2018). Vedāntic wholeness is encapsulated in the theory of “*self as the emergent unity which is more than a sum of its subordinate parts. In Indian traditional wisdom, the notion of ‘Brahman’ as the ultimate reality is not different from Ātman ‘the true self’*” (Pandey et al., 2020, p. 6). Ramsundarsingh (2019) noted that the implication from a psychotherapy perspective is that a Vedāntic approach would positively focus the client on awareness of the inner *Self/Brahman/Atman* which is whole, in contrast to traditional psychotherapy which emphasises the negative dysfunctions of the incomplete empirical self.

2.4.1 Inner integration: *Yoga* epistemology, the five *koshas* ontology, and the *gunas*

Yoga epistemology

Wholeness is viewed as an internally dynamic process, attainable in Vedānta by the epistemologically mapped out paths of *yoga*, which in Sanskrit means to “unite” or “yoke”, where ignorance of one’s true spiritual nature is systematically overcome to experience union with the Self (Oman & Paranjpe, 2018; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Whitney, 2018, p. 293). Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004) described Vedānta as a classical “psycho-philosophy”, comprising a foundation of “philosophical aims”, with *yoga* constituting the practical system of “psychological methods” through which these aims could be attained (p. 196). Although dissected into ‘Vedānta and *Yoga*’ for ease of understanding, these are not in fact “parallel” development concepts as asserted by Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004), but are treated in Upanishadic texts as integrated concepts, notably the Bhagavad Gītā (p. 196; Nisreysananda, 2005; Radhakrishnan, 1949). The four primary *yogic* paths are *karma* (selfless action), *bhakti* (devotion), *jnana* (spiritual knowledge) and *raja* (meditation) - designed to take into account the predominant psychological nature of each person, enabling a path best suited to natural individual tendency (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Locklin, 2017; Nisreysananda, 2005; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Vivekananda, 2006). In plain parlance, it also implies an integration of head, heart, and hand, or intellectual, emotional, and active dispositions. Ultimately, all paths merge into wholeness through Self-realisation (Lucas, 2014). This holistic epistemology is potentially relevant for emerging leadership theories, which argue for a more integrative and Being-centred approach to leadership development factoring in mind, body, emotions, and spirit (Campbell, 2007; Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005).

The systems of *yoga* are considered to be a sophisticated evolutionary Vedāntic science, based on human psychological orientations, not to be confused with the diminished modern understanding of *yoga* as merely pertaining to a series of physical postures (Saraswati, 1976; Vivekananda, 2006). According to Collins (2019),

the meditative practices and theory of higher states of consciousness named *Yoga*, is to liberate the Self (*purusa*), which is posited to be pure, objectless consciousness, from the suffering (*duhkha*) that forms the basic or ‘default’ state of existence in the world (p. 6).

Thus, Vedānta works with uniting the splits in the psyche through Self-realisation (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Whitney, 2018). According to Whitney (2018),

Yogic union is, in the simplest terms, the union of any splits whether they be, for example, mind–body, me–you, us–them, personal–impersonal, or transcendent–immanent. Healing these splits is a psychological and epistemological process. Then, once the splits are healed and there is full integration, Yogic union is freedom from suffering, whereupon pure consciousness abides in its true nature (p. 293).

Two Vedāntic frameworks of intra-dynamic wholeness, in particular, the *gunas* and the *koshas*, have been used globally by many management scholars in theories and models (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; S. Sharma, 1999; K. Singh et al., 2013; Wilber, 2005), and in the growing Indian psychology movement (Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Shilpa & Venkatesha Murthy, 2012). These are discussed below.

The five *koshas* ontological framework

The *koshas* framework offers a holistic representation of the different ontological dimensions constituting a human being (Guénon, 2001; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Selvam, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2013). The *koshas*, meaning ‘sheaths’, are typically depicted as concentric circles moving from gross (the body, energy, and mind sheaths) to subtler levels of ontological identification (intellect and bliss sheaths) and correspondingly higher states of consciousness (Guénon, 2001; Selvam, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2013; Wilber, 2005).

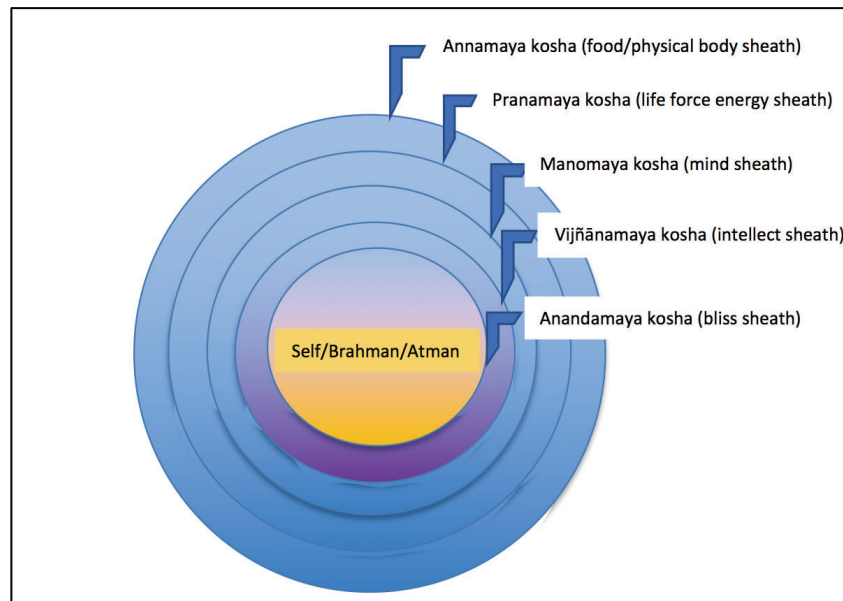


FIGURE 1: VEDĀNTIC ONTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: THE FIVE KOSHAS

At the centre of the *koshas* is the Whole Self/*Brahman/Atman*. Restriction within the physical body is not implied, the very nature of the Vedāntic Self being free from limitations of time and space (Guénon, 2001; Selvam, 2007). The term ‘sheaths’ implies coverings, and refers to ontological identifications with the incomplete layers of coverings over the Whole Self/*Brahman/Atman* of true identity, perpetuated by ignorance (Forsthoefel, 2002; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Selvam, 2007). Even attachment to happiness, represented by the bliss sheath, is considered ignorance of the Whole Self which abides steadily in both joy and sorrow, however the proximity of the bliss sheath to the Self indicates joy as an inherent quality of the Self (Guénon, 2001). Identification with any of the sheaths is what is referred to as the ‘mind-body ego self’ in Vedāntic parlance, equating to the empty, incomplete empirical self in modern psychological terms.

The *koshas* framework is reflected in Welwood's (1999) description that, “*Realization is the movement from personality to being—leading toward liberation from the prison of the conditioned self*” (p. 170). However, what is referred to as the sum identity of a human being in Western psychology is only the mind-body complex, or Cushman's (1990) conditioned empty socially-constructed material self, the ontological attachment to which Welwood (1999) lamented as a limitation of the potential for higher Self-realisation. This is congruent with the stance by some of the world’s cardinal spiritual wisdom traditions (Kriger & Seng, 2005). Hence Vedāntic ontology represents an extension to prevailing assumptions as to what constitutes a human being.

Not only is the field of psychology starting to expand in terms of ontological understanding, but leadership theorists are also starting to understand the ontological implications of a Being-centred approach as fundamental to spiritually evolved leadership (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). Fry and Kriger's (2009) model of multiple ontological levels of leadership posited the highest level of Being-centred leadership as “*non-dual leadership*”, based on “*Oneness and constant reconciliation of apparent opposites*” (Fry & Kriger, 2009, p. 1670). These are also clear Vedāntic concepts, the term ‘non-dual’ directly translated from ‘*advaita*’ although Fry and Kriger (2009) omitted acknowledgement in this regard, also inappropriately depicting Hinduism and Buddhism interchangeably in a tabular depiction of ontological levels across selected spiritual traditions, despite conceptual and linguistic differences. The omission was subsequently rectified by Dhiman and Kriger (2018) who fully acknowledged and discussed the contribution of Vedānta to non-duality of Being/Self.

Wilber's (2005) “Great Chain of Being” model is acknowledged as primarily based on the Vedāntic *koshas* framework, although he depicted the concentric circles in reverse, with the physical matter dimension at the centre, moving outward toward the subtler dimensions (p. 252). This could be perceived as misleading from a Vedāntic perspective, and indeed many wisdom traditions such as mystical Christianity and Sufism, who posited the true spiritual Self as lying deep within the centre - the journey to the Self being an inward rather than outward one (Forsthoefel, 2002; Ganeri, 2007; Kriger & Seng, 2005; May, 2004; Milne, 1993; Venkataramiah, 2010). Wilber (2005) referenced the great wisdom traditions of the world without reflecting this crucial point in his visual interpretation.

The essence of Vedāntic ontology pertaining to wholeness is the recognition that the finite, ever fluctuating aspects of existence rests in the underlying substratum of an infinite unchanging whole (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Guénon, 2001; Whitney, 2018). This is poetically analogised in the Bhagavad Gītā as how “*the mighty wind moving everywhere ever rests in space*” (Nihsreyasananda, 2005, p. 168). Vedānta posits that the highest ontological level of Being/*Brahman/Atman/Self* is the independent animating force and substratum of all other ontological levels, creating the understanding of interconnectedness and oneness. According to Vedānta, it is this experiential knowledge which leads to the ontological realisation of wholeness (Guénon, 2001; Nihsreyasananda, 2005; Venkataramiah, 2010).

The *gunas* psychological framework

Codified from the Samkhya tradition but widely expounded in Vedāntic texts, human psychological dispositions were classified from ancient times into a holistic framework called the *gunas*, meaning “strands” (Hee & Gurd, 2010, p. 401; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2013). These strands of human temperament represented a map of orientations of human consciousness, analysed into three predominant personality types: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Nihisreyasananda, 2005; S. Sharma, 1999; Shilpa & Venkatesha Murthy, 2012; K. Singh et al., 2013). Murthy and Kumar (2007) conducted a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical and empirical studies on the *gunas* and psychometric scales were developed by psychologists (Shilpa & Venkatesha Murthy, 2012), finding consensus with core features.

Sattva, the most virtuous of the strands, pertains to light, purity, wisdom, compassion, altruism, knowledge, self-restraint, tranquillity and equilibrium (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Nihisreyasananda, 2005; K. Singh et al., 2013). *Rajas* is associated with over exertion, greed, restlessness, ostentation, and passion (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Nihisreyasananda, 2005; K. Singh et al., 2013). *Tamas* is the lowest vibration of consciousness, representing inertia, dullness, laziness, ignorance, anger, hatred, and delusion (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Nihisreyasananda, 2005; K. Singh et al., 2013). Hee and Gurd (2010) referred to *sattva*, *tamas* and *rajas* rather quaintly as “*bloom*, *gloom* and *vroom*” respectively (p. 401). Humans have a mixture of all three dispositional strands, in varying proportions, all dynamically competing for dominion within each personality (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Murthy & Kumar, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2013). The predominant *guna* reflects a person’s character.

The internal forces of the *gunas* affect world view and way of being in the world, and therefore have ontological implications (Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004). Discerning the pro-social/anti-social impact of these *gunas* reveals consequent implications for individual and collective human well-being (Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; S. Sharma, 1999). Studies are increasingly demonstrating import for leadership, including an empirical study by Kejriwal and Krishnan (2004), which showed a positive correlation between *sattva* and positive transformational leadership, and an opposite result for *tamas*. *Sattvic* actions bring harmony, happiness and goodness through a holistic way of viewing self and the world, while *tamasic* and *rajasic* actions bring suffering and harm, leading to social dysfunction (Kejriwal &

Krishnan, 2004; Nihseyananda, 2005; S. Sharma, 1999; K. Singh et al., 2013). Vedāntic epistemologies work with harmonising the *gunas*, creating an evolutionary propensity toward *sattva*, eventually overcoming attachment to *sattva* into a state of wholeness, known as *trigunatita*, a psychologically stable state of Being, free from the disturbing influences of the *gunas* (Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Venkataramiah, 2010).

Thakadipuram (2010), for example, described wholeness as “*a journey through the process of praise and criticism, success and failure, solitude and community, leading towards greater integration of life*” (p. 464). This bears a striking resemblance to the Bhagavad Gītā verses, “*the same to foe and friend, and also in honour and dishonour...to whom praise and blame are equal, who is silent, content with anything*” (Nihseyananda, 2005, p. 236). Vedānta posits that consistent psychological stability and equanimity amidst the dualities of life are exemplified in one who has attained to the highest realisation of Self, displaying the capacity to hold polarities, which a state of wholeness brings (Murthy & Kumar, 2007; Nihseyananda, 2005; Venkataramiah, 2010). Congruent with Vedāntic teachings of *sattva* as enablers of wholeness, emerging models are beginning to recognise the role of character strengths as a foundation of spiritual pathways toward wholeness (Niemi et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Outer integration: Relationship with the world

In contrast to disconnection, true Vedāntic wholeness implies a harmonisation between the relative state of being in the world, and the absolute state of Being (Frazier, 2019; Guénon, 2001; Locklin, 2017; Lucas, 2014). Radhakrishnan (1914b) elaborated:

Every part is dependent on the others, which altogether constitute Brahman. Reality is the whole, and it is one system. It is impossible to be satisfied with anything short of the whole...Any part or feature of reality may be regarded as dependent on some other part or parts. In the case of everything but the absolute system as a whole, this dependence is found (p. 439).

Therefore, unlike more individualistic standpoints, in Vedānta, a human being is “*not considered to be a separate and peculiar being. He is part of universal nature, ‘a whole carved out of nature’s continuum’*”, which is the foundation of Vedāntic ethics (Bauer, 1987; Frazier, 2019; Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1993, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1932, as cited in Pandey et al., 2020, p. 6). Thus, in contrast to beliefs in modern psychology of an inherently incomplete self (Cushman, 1990; Pargament et al., 2021),

Vedāntic ontology rests on the foundational theory that one is already “whole and complete” as the Self, needing only to break free of egoic attachments and identity delusions which both perpetuate, and are driven by, the belief of incompleteness born from a lack of spiritual Self-knowledge (Bauer, 1987; Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Dhiman, 2015; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1997; Nityaswarupananda, 1940; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Sagar & West, 2016, p. 626). When this realisation happens, a oneness with all life is experienced, which expresses as freedom from psychological suffering and grasping (Collins, 2019; Dhiman, 2015; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020; Milne, 1997; Sarvapriyananda, 2014; Whitney, 2018).

Moreover, in Vedāntic ontology, when the Self is experienced as whole and complete, the world does not become something to be exploited or feared. It is deified and respected instead as part of the Self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). From the insatiable, egoic, incomplete self ‘*What can I get, what can I get*’ emptiness grasping mentality (Cushman, 1990; Nikelly, 2006), wholeness of Being from Self-realisation births a ‘*What can I give, how can I serve?*’ orientation (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). This is aligned with love, which Fromm (1957) described as “*an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole*” (p. 36). The import is that “*Thus, the metaphysics of the Vedānta naturally leads to the ethics of love and brotherhood. Every other individual is to be regarded as your coequal, and treated as an end and not a means*” (Radhakrishnan, 1914a, p. 169).

2.4.3 The Vedāntic constructs of wholeness: Being-consciousness-joy

Beyond the play of the *gunas*, and forming the ontological heart of the *koshas*, lies the Vedāntic Whole Self/*Brahman/Atman*, encapsulated throughout seminal Vedāntic texts by the term *satchitananda*, which translates to Being/existence/truth (*sat*); consciousness/knowledge/awareness (*chit*); and bliss/joy (*ananda*) (Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1993; Monier-Williams, 2008a; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Selvam, 2007; K. Singh et al., 2013, 2018; Tandavaraya, 2006). The profundity of this term is that it provides an explicit clue as to the constructs of Vedāntic wholeness. In Vedānta,

Brahman is *sat* (Being), the ground of all that is, including my own being, which is of the nature of sheer, pure *chit* (awareness, of which "knowing" is itself a derivative mode) and potentially capable of rising above all otherness and, therefore, pure bliss (Mehta, 1978, p. 139).

According to K. Singh et al. (2013) *satchitananda* is “a multidimensional construct...which combines three dimensions of reality and is an optimal state of being which is reflected in exemplary human beings” (p. 102). In contrast to the negating ‘no-Self’ *anattā* mainstream Buddhist doctrine of emptiness (Albahari, 2002), *satchitananda* of Vedānta constitutes a life-affirming approach of wholeness, fullness, and oneness (Medhananda, 2021). After all, what would be the point of aspiring to such a state only to find nothing? Ramana Maharshi explained, “*The Self makes itself known as being, consciousness, bliss, and is self-effulgent in the heart*” (1987, as cited in Forsthoefel, 2002, p. 151).

Aligned to the essence of wholeness, the constructs of the unified term *satchitananda* are regarded as inseparable, like facets of a diamond (B. Gupta, 2004; Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1993). Or as the Kaivalya Navaneeta (Cream of Liberation) text written 500 years ago poetically explained, “*Is water tripartite because of its coldness, fluidity, and whiteness (i.e., transparency)? Or is fire tripartite because of its light, heat and redness?*” (Tandavaraya, 2006, p. 65). Thus, while regarded as inseparable, these Vedāntic constructs of *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* were examined individually in this study to gain a greater understanding of wholeness, in much the same way as the composite principles of light, heat, and colour might be explored to understand fire.

The *koshas* depict the various ontological sheaths that ‘cover’ the human experience of wholeness, with *satchitananda* reflected as the core state of the Self. This *satchitananda* state corresponds to Fry and Kriger's (2009) description of non-dual Being. While the ultimate non-dual spiritual state was found common to cardinal spiritual wisdom traditions (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005), Vedānta is unique in using the *satchitananda* concept as a descriptor. While concepts like Being and joy are referenced in some other spiritual wisdom traditions as indicators of highly evolved spiritual states, consciousness is not commonly overtly mentioned. Milne (1993), who conducted a comparative study between Advaita Vedānta and the Christian teachings of Meister Eckhart, specifically referenced the non-dual concept of *satchitananda* and sense-made it to Christianity noting, “*The birth of Christ in the soul is therefore the arising of non-dual knowledge, non-dual being, and non-dual joy. Christ is the knower, the knowing and the known*” (p. 42). This indicates the potential universality of the *satchitananda* concept.

An empirically validated Sat-Chit-Ananda scale was developed by K. Singh et al. (2013), and further psychometrically substantiated by K. Singh et al. (2018), although the researchers did not link the

constructs to wholeness or spiritual intelligence, or empirically explore construct meanings. Significantly, validation with Western well-being scales revealed a positive correlation of the *satchitananda* constructs with flourishing and positive experiences (K. Singh et al., 2018). Ventegodt et al. (2003), who explored Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, wrote:

We believe that everyone can experience the sweetness and happiness of gaining wisdom when we find the deep and genuine need inside us that is all about being conscious about life, ourselves, and the world we live in. Actually being, knowledge, and happiness often go hand in hand. In ancient India people talked about reaching the level of existence called “sat-s[c]it-ananda”: beingness, wisdom and happiness as one (p. 1054).

These expositions supported further exploration into the *satchitananda* constructs, and its potential import for human flourishing through wholeness. Yet, despite the empirical development of a Sat-Chit-Ananda scale (K. Singh et al., 2013, 2018), no scholarly studies were found exploring the phenomenological meanings of these Vedāntic constructs to date, arguably a critical foundational step to the development of any scale pertaining to human-related phenomena. This showed up in the explanations of the constructs and scale items. For example, *sat* was defined as “being truthful”, which constitutes a significant impoverishment in meaning from a Vedāntic standpoint, while the scale items appeared to lack any overt connection to the spiritual essence of the constructs (K. Singh et al., 2013, p. 104). K. Singh et al. (2018) acknowledged the need for subjective qualitative research into the meaning of these constructs, which this study contributed.

2.4.4 Obstacles to wholeness in Vedānta: The veil of *māyā* and the intellect

If the *satchitananda* state of wholeness is considered the natural, inherent essence of every human being as posited by Vedānta (Forsthoefel, 2002; K. Singh et al., 2018; Venkataramiah, 2010), then it begs the question as to why wholeness appears so elusive for humans? As Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004) pointed out, “*the typical human person is not experientially holistic, though essentially he/she is*” (p. 196). Vedānta posited that this is because most humans are solely identified with the material, limited changing ego body-mind dimension or incomplete self, unaware or ignorant of the transcendent, unchanging, pure consciousness, Being/Self/*Brahman/Atman* aspect, which is whole (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Milne, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Venkataramiah, 2010). Such ignorance is the key obstacle to experiencing the Whole Self, as posited by Vedānta, fuelled by the concept of *māyā*

and the intellect (Forsthoefel, 2002). Awareness of the transcendent dimension is one of the characteristics of spiritual intelligence as defined by Emmons (2000).

The veil of *māyā*

The veiling principle of *māyā* or delusion causes human beings to see reality as multiplicity instead of oneness, due to the ontological error of mistaking the incomplete mind-body ego-self for entire human identity (Guénon, 2001; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Milne, 1993, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1914b). In Vedānta, the ego self is defined as “*a construct of the mind, the self-image built up through association and identification with objects of sense*” (p. 37). Western psychologists recognised the incomplete self as suffering perceptions of emptiness, separation, and alienation, resulting in anxiety, fear, addiction, and adverse social consequences (Bauer, 1987; Cushman, 1990; Fromm, 1957; Nikelly, 2006). However, in contrast to Vedānta, this human predicament was not attributed to a fundamental ontological error in Western psychology, i.e., the mind-body ego self is taken to be sum total of a human being. Therefore, Hart et al. (2020) assumed wholeness to be unattainable, because their explicit assumption is that the self is limited, congruent with Jung’s insistence on ontic subject-object splitting and assertion that consciousness cannot be known, due to Jung’s conflation of consciousness with the unconscious (Whitney, 2018). According to Vedānta, what fuels the perception of duality, and therefore separation, is ignorance of the true Whole Self/Being/*Brahman* substratum, exacerbated by conditioned dualistic mental tendencies such as attraction and aversion, which are vanquished in the unconditioned state of Being (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1993; Nihśreyasananda, 2005; A. Sharma, 1999). Ramana Maharshi used the Vedāntic analogy of a mirror to explain *māyā*, where one takes the changing reflection to be reality, unaware of the stable substratum of the mirror itself (Venkataramiah, 2010).

According to Milne (1997), “*It is in the subjective experience of separateness, incompleteness, and relativity of being that the problem of duality arises and comes into view. The notion of duality is not a philosophical or metaphysical notion but is an experiential fact*” (p. 167). Milne (1993) enumerated three chief dualities:

1. “Universe/Absolute (It/Thou duality)
2. Absolute/Self (Thou/I duality)
3. Self/Universe (I/It duality)” (p. 34).

According to Advaita Vedānta as expounded by Śankara, true knowledge of all three dimensions of Absolute/God, self, and the world (*Brahman, Atman, Prakriti*) is the realisation that these are one, resolving the apparent contradictions of *māyā* (Milne, 1993, 1997). However, the key tenet of *māyā* that the world is false and illusory, appears to contradict the Vedāntic theory of oneness and wholeness, and has attracted criticism (Medhananda, 2021; Radhakrishnan, 1914b; A. Sharma, 1999). Radhakrishnan (1914b) found that the *māyā* doctrine of the world as illusory was introduced later by Śankara and did not form part of the original Upanishads. Radhakrishnan (1914b) argued the doctrine to be illogical, using the classic Vedāntic analogy of clay in clay pots, where one cannot say that the clay pot (i.e., the world) is an appearance and the clay (*Brahman*) alone is real, when in fact the clay is the very underlying essence of the pot. The Upanishadic clay analogy evokes a shift in awareness to a deeper identity of Being, from the particular to universal essence (Frazier, 2019). Medhananda's (2021) critique of Śankara's theories on *māyā* cautioned the risk of such a doctrine as a life-negating attitude, instead of a life-affirming one, which could lead to indifference. A. Sharma (1999), while agreeing that *Brahman* and the world are one, disputed that the fault lay with Śankara, but rather with scholars who misinterpreted his expositions. This was supported by Milne (1993, 1997) who clarified that Śankara's teachings implied overcoming dualistic thinking into realisation of oneness of the Absolute, individual, and the world.

The true principle of *māyā* therefore, rests not on regarding the world as an illusion, but rather on the limited illusory way of seeing self and the world as material, fragmented, and separate, instead of realising the underlying undifferentiated unifying *Brahman/Self/Being* principle (Forsthofel, 2002; Guénon, 2001; Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Milne, 1993, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1914b; A. Sharma, 1999; Steingard, 2005). “*The world is not as much negated as is reinterpreted. Maya can thus be understood, again, in the infinite expressing itself as the finite world*” (Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004, p. 33). Overcoming this false belief of separation is the end of *māyā*. According to Vedānta, this is the ignorance to be vanquished, the root of human suffering, and obstacle to wholeness from Self-realisation (Guénon, 2001; Milne, 1993; Venkataramiah, 2010).

The intellect

However the intellect perpetuates *maya*. Vedānta teaches that non-dual wholeness through Self-realisation cannot be known through the mind or intellect, but through direct experiencing or spiritual ‘seeing’ (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Collins, 2019; Forsthoefel, 2002; Guénon, 2001; Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1993, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1940). As Radhakrishnan (1914b) explained:

In a final intuition we can realize the immediate fact that all is one. Know it we cannot; but realize it we must. Logic does not help us here, but it is life... We want the soul of the seer or the eye of the artist to take in at one glance the whole of reality, which cannot be comprehended by our intelligence (p. 443).

As Bauer (1987) noted, “*All Advaitic philosophical concepts, while operating squarely within the bounds of rationality, also reflect a basic respect for the standard of human experience*” (p. 38). The mind, in Vedānta, is considered part of ignorance or *māyā* (Fromm, 1957; Milne, 1997). As Chakraborty & Chakraborty (2004) explained, “*The faculty of mental reasoning, though higher than vital instinct, is insufficient for knowing the ‘whole’*”, because “*Reason and intellect proceed by dividing and fragmentation*” (p. 196). Moreover, the nature of the mind is to constantly turn outward, distracted by sensory perception, rooted in objectification and dualistic perspectives (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1997; Venkataramiah, 2010).

Additionally, mental reasoning is distorted by incomplete knowledge, memories, and reliance on physical organs of perception (Frydman, 1999). For example, it is the mind which might argue that the sun sets or that the earth is flat, solely reliant on the sense faculty of sight for its conclusions, oblivious to the intuitive faculty which discerns that what is physically seen may not be ultimate truth. This blocks receptivity to other possibilities. According to Frazier (2019), who explicated the Chāndogya Upanishad, these teachings were “*not merely ‘metaphysics’*” but “*uses its teaching about the underlying universal ground of reality to train us to see differently, and thereby shape a ‘foreconceptual’ structure of experience that alters our apprehension of all things, including ourselves*” (p. 9). Jung cautioned against a growing one-sidedness in Western culture of dominant reliance on the intellect to the exclusion of intuitive perception or other ways of seeing (Coward, 1978), a view echoed by contemporary spirituality management theorists (Steingard, 2005).

One might argue that there is then not much point to exploring Vedānta through intellectual activities like research and multiple scientific theorisation. However, according to Milne (1997),

Advaita Vedānta does not propose to replace this field of knowledge with a better or truer version that will render the world more intelligible. It proposes, instead, that another order of knowledge exists which transcends the paradoxical nature of all such knowledge by transcending its dualistic basis which lies in the very structure of cognizance and reason itself, upon which it is founded (p. 174).

Moreover, not considered entirely useless, discriminative thought is appreciated in Vedānta as a preliminary fundamental step toward the experiential knowledge of the Self, notably through the Vedāntic technique of self-enquiry as extolled by Ramana Maharshi (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Locklin, 2017; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Vaughan, 2002). This is also exemplified by Śankara's teachings of the classic three-fold Vedāntic epistemology of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nidhidhysana*, which means hearing, thinking and meditative contemplation, in progressing order of assimilative depth, for which purity of mind (*sattva*) is key (Albahari, 2002; Forsthoefel, 2002; Locklin, 2017; Milne, 1993; Radhakrishnan, 1940).

The discriminating intellect (*buddhi*), considered a higher faculty than the primitive sensory mind (*manas*) in Vedānta, is helpful in challenging mental false conclusions and assumptions which block higher truth (Forsthoefel, 2002). However, Vedānta posits that reliance on the intellect alone cannot culminate in Self-realisation of wholeness (Forsthoefel, 2002). The analogy used by the great saint Sri Ramakrishna, was that of using a thorn (intellect) to remove another thorn, being the false perceptions of the mind (M. Gupta, 1942). Once accomplished, both thorns are set aside, because “*Reality in its wholeness cannot be grasped by the discursive understanding, which distinguishes, separates, and relates. The final unity at which thought aims is beyond all concepts*” (Radhakrishnan, 1914b, p. 442). Therefore, to experience wholeness, one has to ultimately go beyond the mind and intellect (Forsthoefel, 2002). The intellect is depicted as the *viññānamaya kośa* in the *kośas* framework (see section 2.4.1 Figure 1).

Once beyond the noise of the intellect, it is the practice of “*receptive mental silence, with an aspiration for directly perceiving the whole, the self within*”, which leads to direct experiential knowledge of the

wholeness of the Self (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004, p. 196; Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020; Radhakrishnan, 1914b; Venkataramiah, 2010). This is arguably a shared epistemology among other wisdom traditions, for example, the Biblical teachings of Jesus, “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Holy Bible, 2011b Psalms:46:10; Venkataramiah, 2010). Significantly, modern psychology is recognising that true healing and insight arises from epistemologies of felt experience beyond the mind, “*many [psychological] systems share an understanding that real change happens as an energy shift in the body, not through talk or intellectual insight alone*” (Welwood, 1984, p. 67). Moreover, congruent with Vedāntic expositions, developmental psychologist Cook-Greuter (2000) empirically found the “language habit” to be a barrier at higher levels of ego-development, creating an imposition of a mental construction of reality (p. 228). Those at the advanced spectrum of ego-development recounted experiences of non-judgemental receptiveness, consistent with Vedāntic descriptions of states of higher consciousness, observing the “personal–verbal or discursive frame of mind” to be an inhibitor of the ability to sustain such states (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 228).

In Vedānta, the experience of true wholeness of Being ultimately requires a stilling of the mind through meditation, going beyond conceptualisations, to the *source* of the mind as consciousness (Albahari, 2002; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Forsthoefel, 2002; Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1993; Venkataramiah, 2010). The growth in popularity of stillness practices like mindfulness and meditation, may thus offer pathways to experiential Self-knowledge beyond the limited precincts of the mind. Other blockers to wholeness in Vedānta include a lack of virtues, including impurity of mind, weak discipline, poor sense-restraint and worldly attachments (Forsthoefel, 2002). Perhaps the greatest obstacle of all, as observed by great sages, is the rarity of those who sincerely and actively take up the quest for spiritual truth and wholeness through the Self-realisation (Frydman, 1999; Nisreysananda, 2005).

2.5 *Satchitananda*: Root-theory contextualisations of Being, consciousness, and joy

The meanings of Being, consciousness, and joy (“the Vedāntic wholeness constructs”) are individually explored in more detail in this section. Since each construct was found nascent in research, I conducted root theory contextualisations between key selected Western theorists and Vedānta to explore assumptions and meaning, based on Alvesson and Sandberg's (2011) root metaphor concept. For this purpose, Western theorists were confined primarily to Jung, Heidegger, Husserl, and selected positive

psychology theorists, based on relatedness of their theories to the Vedāntic wholeness constructs. It is acknowledged that there was a risk of feeling forced to justify or obtain credibility for Vedāntic theories by presenting them in a Western context due to fear of historical cultural bias (Frawley, 2001). However, the primary objective of the root theory contextualisations was to provide an orientation and deeper understanding of the *satchitananda* Vedāntic wholeness constructs, by exploring dialectical, ontological, and theoretical differences and similarities of assumptions in relation to prevailing Western theories. While there is cognisance of the risks of cross-cultural analyses including oversimplification, incompleteness, and misinterpretation (Bauer, 1987), an in-depth Vedāntic-Western theory comparison was out of scope for this study.

2.5.1 *Sat*: Being, existence, truth

Sat translates to ‘Being, existence, truth’, often referred to interchangeably in Vedāntic texts by the terms Being/Self/*Brahman*/*Atman*/existence/pure awareness/truth/Reality, which all mean the same from a Vedāntic perspective (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frazier, 2019; Guénon, 2001; Monier-Williams, 2008b; Nisreysananda, 2005; K. Singh et al., 2018). In this sub-chapter, root theory contextualisations were explored for the Self between Jungian and Vedāntic theories and Being between Heideggerian and Vedāntic theories.

Vedānta and Jung: Root theory contextualisation of Self

Carl Jung (1875 – 1961) was significantly influenced by Eastern wisdom traditions such as Vedānta, Buddhism, and Taoism, although it is apparent from his interpretations that he did not always appear to have a full grasp of the true meaning of Vedānta, exemplified in his misapprehension of the ontic realism of pure consciousness and the Self (Coward, 1978; Schlamm, 1999; Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018). Jung viewed the ego as the sole centre of consciousness in the psyche and the self as unconscious, whereas in Vedānta, the central Self is pure consciousness and cannot be objectified (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1993, 1997; Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018). Vedāntic sages argued that since humans are capable of experiential awareness of the ego self, how can the ego self logically then be considered as the entire identity of a human being, i.e., who is it that is aware of the ego self? (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Venkataramiah, 2010). Exploring evolutionary psychology, Grinde (2002) noted study findings showing that the capacity for awareness of a ‘self’ is regarded as an evolutionary construct, found in only a scant number of species, including humans and particular apes. According to Selvam (2007),

“Whereas Jung’s self is unconscious, the Advaita Vedānta self is conscious or self-aware” (p. 15). Therefore, in contrast to Jung, Vedānta extended exploration from the unconscious ego-self to awareness or consciousness itself (Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018).

For Jung, as with Vedānta, *“The experience of the archetype of the self is one of wholeness”* (Selvam, 2007, p. 44). Yet there can never be wholeness in Jung’s concept of self, due to its inherently limited definition, while the Vedāntic Self holds no such inner division (Whitney, 2018). According to Whitney (2018),

Jung’s Self does not map to the Brahmanic or Patañjalian Self, even though Jung believed that it did. The reason the Patañjalian and Jungian notions of Self do not map is because the Brahmanic Self allows for no metaphysical splitting of opposites (p.294).

Therefore in Vedānta, *“there can be absolutely no metaphysical splitting, no ontic duality”*, because the Self-concept is expansive or whole (Milne, 1997; Whitney, 2018, p. 295). Due to this key ontological difference, Jung felt that liberation from suffering was not possible (Whitney, 2018). According to Whitney (2018),

Because Jung’s God was unconscious, he could not rest in it, causing him confusion between ontological questions and epistemic issues. That is why individuation never stops, and why Jung never speaks to the stillness that both Yoga and Buddhism do... Whereas in Yoga, eternal Being is the luminescent ground of all becoming, in Jungian psychology, there is no stable ground (p. 297).

The problem of polarities or dualities, referred to as *dvandva* or the “pairs of opposites” in Vedānta, *“provided Jung with powerful cross-cultural confirmation of his personal experience of the psychic tension within the personality”* (Coward, 1978, p. 354). According to Selvam (2007), Jung quoted from many Indian sources, including the epic Ramayana text,

The Ramayana says: “This world must suffer under the pairs of opposites forever”. Not to allow oneself to be influenced by the pairs of opposites, but to be nirdvananda (free, untouched by the opposites, to raise oneself above them, is essentially an ethical task, because deliverance from the opposites leads to redemption (Jung, 1920/1971, as cited in Selvam, 2007, p. 60).

Examples of these dualities are described in the Bhagavad Gītā as praise/blame, attraction/aversion, success/failure, happiness/sorrow, illumination/delusion, which create mental suffering and instability, for which spiritual mastery from Self-knowledge is key to psychological stability (Dhiman, 2015; Milne, 1997; Nihreysananda, 2005). Whereas Vedāntic epistemology aimed at liberating the individual from these polarities of the ego-self through an inner steadiness in the non-dual wholeness of the Self, Jung could not conceive of this as being possible, due to his attachment to the concept of self as empirical ego and limited understanding of consciousness (Coward, 1978; Milne, 1997; Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018). In Jungian psychology, wholeness through integration is considered to be an endless ongoing spiral process of stages of ego integration with the unconscious self (Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018).

Radhakrishnan argued that conditioned mind-body stimulus response theories alone were an ineptly narrow lens for understanding and liberating such human behaviour (Pandey et al., 2020). In Vedānta, polarities are not overcome through denial or suppression, but through an expansion of the ego self-concept to encompass the non-dual *Brahman*/Self/Being, thereby harmonising and hold polarities in wholeness (Milne, 1997; Oman & Paranjpe, 2018). In Vedānta,

The ‘Self’ is the transcendent and permanent principle of which the manifested being, the human being, for example, is only a transient and contingent modification, a modification which, moreover, can in no way affect the principle...The ‘Self’, as such, is never individualized and cannot become so, for since it must always be considered under the aspect of the eternity and immutability which are the necessary attributes of pure Being, it is obviously not susceptible of any particularization, which would cause it to be ‘other than itself’.... The ‘Self’ is thus the principle by which all the states of the being exist, each in its own domain (Guénon, 2001, p. 23).

A common Vedāntic metaphor for Being is the expansive sky, which spaciously witnesses, endures and embraces alternating bouts of thunderstorms and sunshine without disquiet (Nityaswarupananda, 1940). Jung appreciated the integration of the pairs of opposites in Eastern thought, viewing “one-sidedness” as “barbarism” (Coward, 1978, p. 342). “*When the opposites balance one another, says Jung, that is the sign of a high and stable culture*” (Coward, 1978, p. 342). Jung used Eastern concepts like circumambulation of the self and *mandala* as integration methodologies for opposing archetypes in

personality (Selvam, 2007). Coward (1985, as cited in Selvam, 2007) summarised his analysis of the influence of Eastern thought on Jung as follows:

Our comparative studies show that several of Jung's major theoretical notions contain significant influence from the East. Joseph Henderson sums it up best when he suggests that Jung attempted to balance between the empirical considerations of Western psychology and the mystical tradition of self-centering in Being, as found for example in the Upanishads. Jung, observes Henderson, treated both traditions seriously but in the end remained true to his own 'reality of the psyche' (p. 56).

Jung's struggles with ontological concepts concerning higher states of consciousness and non-dualism, were attributed partly to the prevailing materialistic scientific notions at the time, and his own inability as an empiricist to attain these states himself (Coward, 1978; Selvam, 2007; Whitney, 2018). Yet, despite regarding himself as an empiricist, it is interesting that Jung did not proceed to experientially test the science of yoga epistemology, so clearly laid out in Vedāntic texts (Nihisreyasananda, 2005; Saraswati, 1976; Vivekananda, 2006), or submit to meeting globally acknowledged realised sages during his visit to India in 1938 to enable direct observation, before rejecting these states as impossible (Selvam, 2007). Instead, he relied primarily on his own interpretation of potentially flawed text translations, without testing his assumptions through a practitioner perspective, thereby opening himself up to criticism (Schlamm, 1999; Selvam, 2007). Surely a true scientific attitude would have involved an experiential approach to test these theories through an open-minded, non-biased lens. As Schlamm (1999) wondered,

Why was Jung ambivalent towards the Hindu religious tradition? Why is it that in spite of his profoundly significant, acknowledged debts to Vedanta and Yoga philosophy, he insisted on sharply distinguishing between the European individuation process of Analytical Psychology and any Hindu religious experience? (p. 49)

Still, there can be no doubt that Jung is to be credited, not just for his valuable contributions, but also for being one of the first Western psychologists to engage with Eastern wisdom traditions, thus opening up the field for further cross-cultural dialogue and exploration (Selvam, 2007).

Vedānta and Heidegger: Root theory contextualisation of Being

Heidegger (1889 – 1976) did not appear to have much depth of understanding of Vedāntic philosophy, at times displaying a derogatory and closed attitude toward what he referred to as “East Asian thinking”, perhaps unsurprising in light of his racist leanings through Nazi involvement (Caputo, 2006; Guignon, 2006; Mehta, 1978, p. 131; Zimmerman, 2006). Unlike other philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Hegel, Heidegger did not even consider Vedānta a philosophy, a term he felt, rather dogmatically and prejudicially, should be restricted to Greek thought (Mehta, 1978), which is certainly not the consensus view (Bauer, 1987; Frazier, 2019; Radhakrishnan, 1914b). It seems contradictory when one considers, as many commentators have, the likeness in terminology and ideas between Heideggerian and the Eastern philosophies which pre-dated him, specifically Vedānta, Taoism and Buddhism, especially given his interest in the latter two (Zimmerman, 2006). Given evidence of his involvement, such as working with Tao Te Ching translations, arguments that Heidegger’s theories were not influenced by Eastern philosophies are flimsy (Zimmerman, 2006).

Yet, although Heidegger held the sway of Greek thought responsible for the dismal state of the world, he believed the solution to a Western disease could only come from a Western source (Mehta, 1978; Zimmerman, 2006). This was arguably an unfounded and myopic conclusion in light of the increasing positive global empirical results from Eastern-born practices like meditation and yoga over the past few decades (Casioppo, 2020; United Nations, 2021). Mehta’s (1978) description of Heidegger as the “first world-historical, planetary thinker” seems baseless considering Heidegger’s biased views and separatist way of thinking, notwithstanding spiritual examples which may have preceded Heidegger (p. 129).

Despite Heidegger’s affinity for medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart, Frazier (2019, p. 4) noted that *“there seems to be a limit to the applicability of Heidegger’s method, for he conceives of religion as an orientation to a radically transcendent divinity beyond Being”*, characterised by an anxious sense of faith in waiting for the unattainable beyond human comprehension, aimed at escaping the finitude of human experience (Caputo, 2006). Heidegger’s stance was essentially dualistic, falling into ignorance as defined by Vedānta, commensurate with what Meister Eckhart referred to as identification with the relative, temporal “creature” aspect of becoming (Milne, 1993, p. 40). Interestingly, Milne (1993) found great similarity between Advaita Vedānta and the teachings of Meister Eckhart from a comparative study, using the former to gain insights into the latter.

According to Frazier (2019), Heidegger's attitude stemmed from,

his judgement that it is finitude that essentially defines humanity. From this flows his rejection of metaphysical religion. Yet while this may fit well with Abrahamic religions which hold the divine nature to be ontologically different in substance from the world, it occludes religions committed to a divinity that is continuous with or present within worldly Being (p. 4).

Herein lie the key distinctions between Heidegger's beliefs and Vedānta, for in Vedānta, this transcendent divinity *is* Being/*Brahman*/Self and this divine oneness is considered as permeating everything without separation, from a river to a tree to a human being (Frazier, 2019; Ganeri, 2007; Milne, 1997; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). This is illustrated by the oft-quoted Upanishadic example of the presence of salt in salt water, the existence of which is undeniably apparent in the taste of salt water, despite the invisibility of the salt (Frazier, 2019; Ganeri, 2007). In contrast to Heidegger's fragmented perspective, Vedāntic non-dualistic ontology united the paradox of immanence and transcendence, in that there is no separation between the observer and that which is observed, no "separate, divided reality" (Albahari, 2002, p. 9; Frazier, 2019; Milne, 1993; Selvam, 2007).

While Heidegger and Vedānta both agreed that time is an illusion (Selvam, 2007; Zimmerman, 2006), the epistemology of Vedānta is that the underlying non-dual *Brahman* substratum of Being, is outside the space-time continuum, and therefore realisable in the present moment, not confined to some impossible future state waiting to happen (Frazier, 2019; Venkataramiah, 2010). Thus, in contradiction to Heidegger's consideration of religious life as an anxious pursuit, Vedānta did not aim toward escapism or denial of the finitude of human existence but rather a re-orientation, expansion, and enrichment of the experience of human existence through the unifying realisation of Being (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frazier, 2019; Milne, 1997). What Heidegger referred to as the finitude of human existence, Vedānta argued to be merely the finitude of the mind-body ego self and not the whole human experience of Being (Milne, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Venkataramiah, 2010).

Akin to Vedānta (Sarpapriyananda, 2014), Heidegger posited that Being could be sensed through *Sorge*, "a primordial interwovenness of existence" (Tomkins & Simpson, 2015, p. 1021). However, in contrast to Vedāntic thought, Heidegger did not believe in a substratum, because to him the meaning of Being was an "abyss", arguing agency to be enabled by the unfolding of life stories and not by a substrate (Guignon, 2006, p. 11; Zimmerman, 2006). In Vedānta, this argument would be considered illogical,

akin to saying that it is the activity such as reading, performed under a lampshade light, which enables the light by which such reading can be performed, and that the substrate of electricity is non-existent. Thus whereas Heidegger's Being is dependent on the extent to which it is channelised into relationships, activities, and roles, Vedāntic Being is not dependent on anything—it simply is as it is, whether in stillness or activity (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Guignon, 2006; Nityaswarupananda, 1940; Venkataramiah, 2010). From a Vedāntic standpoint, it could be argued that Heidegger's Being would then cease to exist in deep sleep, which fails to meet experiential reality, whereas Vedāntic Being continues through all states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 1924; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Venkataramiah, 2010), in much the same way that electricity still exists whether the lampshade is on or off.

Certainly, Heidegger's stance appears to be in direct contrast to the very foundation of Vedāntic ethics from unitary underlying Being (Frazier, 2019; Mehta, 1978; Radhakrishnan, 1914a). Mehta (1978), who conducted a comparative between Heidegger and Vedānta, explained:

The Brahman-Atman of the Upanisads is not the same as the Being of Western thought; they are different starting points, each uniquely itself, for thinking in the two traditions, and they are untranslatable one by the other, for we do not yet have a name for what may be identical in them (though perhaps 'Brahman' has the advantage of including in itself, but not being exhausted by the notion of Being!) (p. 147).

However, it is argued that this is not necessarily the case. Like Vedānta, Heidegger eschewed the Cartesian epistemology of human beings as things, considering humans to be "*a peculiar kind of nothingness: the temporal linguistic clearing, the opening, the absencing in which things can present themselves and thus 'be'*" (Zimmerman, 2006, pp. 295–296). The difference is that Heidegger assumed this nothingness to mean the absence of a substratum (Zimmerman, 2006), whereas in Vedānta, the unconditioned state of nothingness *reveals* awareness of the substratum, of *Brahman/Ātman*, often metaphorized as the sky or ether, a holding space for the active aspect or *shakti* of creation (Albahari, 2002; Nityaswarupananda, 1940). In fact, Heidegger's term for his concept of humans as a clearing is *Dasein*, which means "the place in which being occurs" (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 297).

While it is easy to draw comparisons of Heidegger's 'nothingness' to Buddhism as Zimmerman (2006) has, few scholars understand the realisation of unconditioned nothingness to be the ultimate essence of

Advaita Vedānta as well (Albahari, 2002; Milne, 1997; Venkataramiah, 2010). For example, the realised Vedāntic saint Sri Ramakrishna taught that,

If one analyses oneself, one doesn't find any such thing as 'I'. Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel off the red outer skin; then you find thick white skins. Peel these off one after the other, and you won't find anything inside (M. Gupta, 1942, p. 148).

The difference is that in Vedānta, the 'nothingness' refers to the ego I, and unlike Buddhism, does not end there, since such realisation then takes one into the wholeness of the *Brahman/Atman/Self* (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018). The implication extends beyond just a linguistic clearing to a full psychological clearing and beyond. In Vedānta, with its gift for holding polarities through paradoxical logic (Fromm, 1957), nothingness and wholeness are integrated, in much the same way that a zero can be seen as a representation of both fullness and emptiness, which a mind attached to dualistic thinking is incapable of apprehending (Albahari, 2002). Fry and Kriger (2009) agreed,

Logically, this level of being appears to involve a contradiction; however, all of the world's spiritual traditions refer in one way or another to this level of being that is so inclusive that it includes both pure emptiness and pure fullness or plenitude (p. 1683).

In contrast to mainstream Buddhism, Vedānta presents a life-affirming, holistic position on the concept of Self by viewing it non-dualistically as constituting the whole (Albahari, 2002; Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frazier, 2019; Radhakrishnan, 1924). The import of the Vedāntic Self is that it influences one's outlook on life with arguably greater positive affect to self and the world, than a nihilistic interpretation of emptiness might (Frazier, 2019; Radhakrishnan, 1924; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). Whitney (2018) attributed the rejection of such Absolutism to mainstream Buddhism, clarifying that the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition does recognise a true Self, as contained in the *tathagatagarbha* ('Buddha-womb') texts, in line with Buddha's declaration of such Self on his last day.

Heidegger's Being was defined by language, mood, agency, and thought (Frazier, 2019; Guignon, 2006; Mehta, 1978). Vedānta, however, relegated language, mood, and thought to the mind-body ego-self, acknowledging this to be a limited, reflected form of Being and experiencing, positing true Being as the still inner awareness of consciousness which births the ego-self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Venkataramiah, 2010). Thus Heidegger's Being is concerned with experiences, utility, and relatedness,

while Vedāntic Being is concerned with the source of all experiences, including that from which the experience of nothingness arises (Guignon, 2006; Mehta, 1978; Smith & Smith, 1995). In Vedānta, awareness of thoughts, moods, and language are regarded as a preliminary step toward the experience of true Being which extends to the source of these activities through the Vedāntic technique of self-enquiry (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Locklin, 2017; Venkataramiah, 2010).

Furthermore, Vedānta posited that to be stuck in identification with the body, thoughts, language, emotions, and moods is the very root of suffering due to ignorance, and the way out of this psychological suffering is through true knowledge of Being beyond such superficial transitory identifications (Milne, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Venkataramiah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2006). Heidegger and Vedānta were both aligned in the observation that thoughts manifest within the ‘clearing’ of human existence, using different terminologies but possibly conceptually similar (Venkataramiah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2006). According to Silberstein (2017), “*in Western philosophical terms the witness consciousness/pure presence could be seen as the transcendental condition for the existence of any subject or object—for the world as experienced*”, noting that the witness/observer consciousness shifts to the state of pure Being in a succession of meditative states (p. 1142).

It must be pointed out that Zimmerman's (2006) interpretation of Vedānta as overcoming identification with the ego-self to ‘identify’ with the Absolute Self, in contrast to the Buddhist doctrine of no identifications with an Absolute Self, is fundamentally inaccurate from a non-dual/Advaita Vedāntic perspective (Albahari, 2002). In Vedānta, the state of unconditioned Being unequivocally implies overcoming *all* identifications to *become* the Absolute Self (Albahari, 2002; Venkataramiah, 2010), as clearly stated in Vedāntic texts such as the Astāvakra Samhitā (Nityaswarupananda, 1940) and Bhagavad Gītā (Nihisreyasananda, 2005), not *identifying* with an Absolute Self which implies duality. No more clearly is this expressed than in one of the four great *mahāvākyas* or Upanishadic sayings, *tattvamasi*, which means “*That thou art*” (Ramsundarsingh, 2019, p. 74), which Frazier (2019) extolled as “*one of the most globally celebrated lines in the whole 3 000 year span of Hindu thought*” (p. 12).

Both Vedānta and Heidegger discerned the underlying anxiety in the human predicament of sensing such nothingness or emptiness as the cause of indulgence in escapism through endless distraction (Milne, 1997; Venkataramiah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2006). Vedānta, according to Bauer (1987),

accounts for the frustrations and anomalies that characterize current, everyday experience by linking ontological and epistemological notions and thereby equating our imperfect state of being with our imperfect state of knowledge...Advaita prescribes a method for overcoming ignorance (*avidya*) which involves the attainment of perfect philosophical knowledge (p. 38).

Therefore while Heidegger could offer no philosophy capable of sustainably liberating humans from such anxiety, Vedāntic epistemology does, exemplified by many robustly documented accounts of Self-realised humans who experientially overcame said predicament (Forsthoefel, 2002; Frydman, 1999; Lucas, 2011; A. Sharma, 1999). No such success stories from Heideggerian philosophy could be found. Moreover, unlike Vedantic sages like Ramana Maharshi (Forsthoefel, 2002; Locklin, 2017; Milne, 1997; A. Sharma, 1999), Heidegger himself never attained to Being (Zimmerman, 2006). Quite possibly, one reason that Heidegger never personally attained to Being and eschewed the notion of a substratum, is because for Heidegger, Being could only be realised through thinking, while in Vedānta, true Being is beyond conceptualisation, realised only by going beyond thinking into experiencing (Frazier, 2019; Guignon, 2006; Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1997; Zimmerman, 2006).

While Heidegger valued experiencing as transformative, he posited thinking as the pre-eminent way toward such experiencing of thinking itself, although in later years he came to appreciate silent reflective practices which Vedānta and Buddhism extolled as necessary to higher self-knowledge (Mehta, 1978; Venkataramiah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2006). Eventually Heidegger had to concede his inability to conceive of Being through mental activity, and started to view human understanding as part of Being (Zimmerman, 2006). As Mehta (1978) noted,

If the bringing together of 'Heidegger' and 'Vedānta' is to have any sense it can only lie in enabling us to see that there is more to Vedānta - something that is its very own and yet unfulfilled - than providing those who are in revolt against the establishment (the religious, the Western metaphysical), and in flight from thinking, with a 'mystical' alternative; that as a way or path of thinking, not so much as a doctrine, Vedānta may also have some relevance to that other task to which Heidegger points, the task of planetary thinking, in an age of homelessness and of the coming together of East and West in the extremity of fate, in the task of overcoming this universal misery of lost home (p. 149).

While Heidegger's concept of Being denies Vedāntic Being, Vedāntic Being extends Heidegger's to a deeper level through a philosophy of experiential non-duality (Guignon, 2006; Mehta, 1978; Milne, 1997).

2.5.2 *Chit*: Consciousness, awareness, knowledge

In Vedānta, consciousness is denoted by the term *chit*, also understood as knowledge, awareness, or self-effulgence (Maharana, 2009; Milne, 1993; Monier-Williams, 2008a; K. Singh et al., 2018). This is recognised in the concept of phenomenology, "*Phenomenalist ontology holds that human existence is a specific modality of the luminosity characterizing all phenomena. Human awareness brings this cosmic luminosity to self-awareness*" (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 316). The concept of consciousness, while emergent and growing in current science, has been central to Vedānta for centuries (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009; Radhakrishnan, 1940). As B. Gupta (2004) observed:

It would be a mistake to claim, as has often been done, that the theme of consciousness belongs essentially to modern Western philosophy, beginning with Descartes, and finally culminating in Husserl. This essay will amply demonstrate that the theme of consciousness has been central to the Indian tradition, especially the Vedāntic tradition, since the time of the Upanishads (roughly 1000 BCE) (p. 119).

In this sub-chapter, root theory contextualisations were explored for consciousness between Husserlian and Vedāntic theories.

Vedānta and Husserl: Root theory contextualisation of consciousness

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was an influential German philosopher, widely regarded as the founder of phenomenology in the West, pertaining to the interplay of consciousness and personal experiencing (Lala & Kinsella, 2011; Maharana, 2009; Smith & Smith, 1995). The distinction from Vedānta is that "*Husserlian phenomenology seeks the description and structural analysis of consciousness*" and did not concern itself with the physiological origin of consciousness (Smith & Smith, 1995, p. 9). Husserl defined phenomenology as "*the study of the essence of conscious experience, and especially of intentional experience*" (Smith & Smith, 1995, p. 9).

B. Gupta (2004) and Maharana (2009) presented comparatives of consciousness theories between Advaita Vedānta and Husserl. While key differences were observed, the possibility of similarities also arose, certainly more so than between Heidegger and Vedānta (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009). For example, Husserl agreed, like most philosophers except perhaps the more materialistic-oriented, that consciousness is not a spatial phenomenon (B. Gupta, 2004). According to B. Gupta (2004), “*consciousness in Advaita is self-luminous, eternal, beginning-less, undifferentiated, non-spatial, non-temporal, and non-intentional*” (p. 122).

According to Husserl, consciousness is perceived as intentional and directed toward something (B. Gupta, 2004). However, Husserl subsequently encountered a problem with this theory in that intentionality is temporal and in flux, whereas consciousness is not (B. Gupta, 2004). To solve the problem, Husserl resorted to a concept of two levels of consciousness: an “*empirical consciousness which flows, and a non-empirical, absolute consciousness which paradoxically, as he puts it, is standing while flowing*” (B. Gupta, 2004, p. 124). In so doing, Husserl moved closer to the Vedāntic conceptions of Being or *sat* as the still, transcendent, unmanifest substratum aspect of consciousness, and the manifested, intentional aspect or *chit* (Maharana, 2009). Radhakrishnan (1959) referred to a famous Vedāntic metaphor in which one can clearly appreciate the similarity with Husserl’s concept,

The Mundaka Upanishad makes a distinction between the two birds which dwell in the same tree, one eating the sweet fruit and the other looking on without eating. The former is the empirical self and the latter the transcendental self (p. 27).

B. Gupta (2004) struggled to reconcile Vedāntic and Husserlian understandings of consciousness, asserting that there is no intentionality in consciousness according to Vedānta. This is because B. Gupta (2004) only recognised the ‘*sat*’ or absolute consciousness, albeit terming this as ‘*chit*’, the dynamic, object-associated aspect of consciousness. B. Gupta's (2004) interpretation of consciousness was due to sole reliance on interpretations of Śankara’s school of thought which rejected the notion of intentional consciousness, viewing intentionality as “*a mere appearance superimposed upon non-intentional consciousness*” (p. 126, Maharana, 2009), where *sat* and *chit* are viewed as the same. However, this is not representative of all Vedāntic perspectives. According to Maharana (2009), Rāmānuja, who taught qualified non-dualism, combined “*both ‘self-shining’ and ‘object-directedness’ of consciousness...Rāmānuja takes these two features to be mutually dependent. For Rāmānuja,*

consciousness reveals itself to its locus (Owner or Ego) only when it manifests its object” (p. 3). Confused understandings around intentionality and consciousness amongst some Vedāntic scholars are therefore arguably attributable to differing interpretations of earlier influential Vedāntic philosophers, namely Śankara, who posited consciousness to be purely non-intentional and independent of objects (non-dual stance), and Rāmānuja, who counter-argued consciousness to be intentional and non-existent without object-identification (qualified non-dualism) (Barhydt & Fritzman, 2013; Maharana, 2009).

Hence the term *chit* is sometimes used interchangeably with *sat* (Being/existence) by some translators and scholars, which can create confusion, a particularly relevant consideration for the contextualisation of Vedānta with Husserl’s theories (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009). *Sat* is the underlying, unconditioned Being/Self, a ‘pure’ consciousness free from object-association or intentionality (Venkataramiah, 2010), while *chit* is the dynamic intentional aspect of consciousness which reveals itself through object-association (Maharana, 2009). To put it simply, *chit* = *sat* + object association. As Maheshwari and Gupta (2020) explained, “*They all describe the Self as nondual self-aware Consciousness. This absolute Self is pure silence and pure potential. However, this infinite silence contains within itself infinite diversity and dynamism*” (p. 2). The great saint Sri Ramakrishna explained it as fire and its power to burn, inseparable yet discernible when fire’s power to burn is known on contact with an object (M. Gupta, 1942). That both positions are indeed valid is apparent in the wholeness construct of *satchitananda* itself, a compound term consensually applied across Vedāntic texts, which clearly encompasses both *sat* and *chit*. To argue *sat* and *chit* as being identical would be to render such inclusion of both terms superfluous.

What influences consciousness (*chit*) in Vedānta, are the *gunas* or strands of human predispositions (Kejriwal & Krishnan, 2004; Nihreysananda, 2005). Vedāntic Being (*sat*), in contrast, is untainted by the play of the *gunas*. The very nature of the Self/Being/*Brahman/Atman* is pure unconditioned consciousness (Hee & Gurd, 2010; Milne, 1993; Venkataramiah, 2010). The entry of intentionality into the mind is viewed as a superimposition onto pure consciousness (Venkataramiah, 2010). For intentionality to occur, there would need to be thought, which gives rise to the mind, which Vedānta deems as a distorted reflection of Self/Being/*Brahman/Atman*, veiling wholeness (Frydman, 1999; Maharana, 2009; Venkataramiah, 2010). In this case, the ‘object’ with which the consciousness is associated is the mind itself. The lower *gunas* of *rajas* and *tamas* create a greater distortion of consciousness (Nihreysananda, 2005). Therefore, *sattva* or virtue is considered important in

journeying to wholeness, although that too must ultimately be transcended in Vedānta as it forms an attachment to goodness and knowledge (Nihśreyasananda, 2005).

Husserlian philosophy therefore showed greater alignment to Rāmānuja’s Vedāntic thought, because it considered the paradox of intentionality in consciousness (Maharana, 2009). Mehta (1978) acknowledged that Śankara’s ontological stance would be near impossible to reconcile with Western concepts, which supports the stance in this study of going beyond Śankara as the sole authority on Vedānta. The key difference from Vedānta is that Husserl’s theory of consciousness is egological, where the entire self is viewed as an empirical ego object to which consciousness belongs (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009; Mohanty, 2005). Many scientists are beginning to acknowledge the existence of a consciousness that does not arise from, but distinctly “*precedes material reality*” (Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020, p. 2).

In Vedānta, consciousness by its very nature is not an object (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009; Milne, 1993). It is that which illumines the object, and is thus crucial to the cognition of both knowing, and not knowing (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009; Radhakrishnan, 1924; Venkataramiah, 2010). Therefore the Self which is consciousness itself (*sat-chit*), can never be “an object of consciousness” (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Ganeri, 2007, p. 12). Being that which illumines the mind-body ego self, also referred to as the witness consciousness or *sakshi* (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009). According to Vedānta, to mistake the mind-body ego self for consciousness itself is to limit the very nature of consciousness, giving rise to duality and separation (Milne, 1997). The Bhagavad Gītā describes the nature of consciousness thus: “*It shines through the functions of all the senses, yet is without sense-organs; unattached, yet sustaining everything, without attributes, yet their enjoyer; Without and within all beings, It is moving and also unmoving, because of Its subtlety It is incomprehensible*” (Nihśreyasananda, 2005, p. 248). In Vedānta, awakening to the wholeness of the Self involves becoming aware of the subtle enlivening force of this consciousness, which leads to a realisation of oneness with the silent substratum of Being from whence this dynamic consciousness arises (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Venkataramiah, 2010).

Husserl assumed consciousness to be pure, however he perceived consciousness to be an activity pertaining purely to the mind, which is considered flawed logic from a Vedāntic perspective (Smith & Smith, 1995). Using the Vedāntic wave-ocean metaphor to illustrate, the wave or thought is a part

expression of the ocean of consciousness, and not the whole ocean, although it is made up of the same substance (Locklin, 2017; Madhavananda, 2009; Milne, 1997). Vedānta posits that the mind cannot exist without consciousness just as the wave cannot exist without the ocean (Milne, 1997). Husserl viewed acts of consciousness as a whole made up of structural parts, with implications of interdependence (Smith & Smith, 1995). The error with Husserl's assertions, according to Vedānta, is that the mind is mistaken for consciousness (Maharana, 2009), versus being enlivened by it, that is, the limited ego-self is mistaken for the entirety of Being with a perceived separation from the whole of creation, whereas in Vedānta there is no such distinction (Milne, 1997).

Both Husserl and Vedānta shared the notion of the unreality of mental life, ascribing dependence of the mind on body identification for its false sense of reality (Frydman, 1999; Mohanty, 2005). However, the ego according to Vedānta, is what is created from this identification with the mind-body complex, therefore Vedāntic philosophy would disagree with Husserl's assertion that, "*To the spiritual world belongs the ego*" (Mohanty, 2005, p. 66), counter-arguing that it is consciousness which belongs to the spiritual world (Frydman, 1999). Interestingly, American philosopher John Searle (1992) proclaimed that it is "*consciousness, rather than neural or computational function, which defines the mind*" (as cited in Smith & Smith, 1995, p. 10), while Vedānta goes a step further in positing that it is consciousness which *vivifies* the mind (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Nihisreyasananda, 2005).

Like Vedānta, Husserl acknowledged the inadequacy of sensory perception, going beyond limited Cartesian reliance on cogito and empiricism, to value intuition and experiential knowledge as valid epistemological approaches (Milne, 1997; Oman & Singh, 2018; Smith & Smith, 1995). Husserl argued that "*consciousness must be studied from the first-person point of view, for only thus is it possible to do justice to its irreducibly subjective structures*" (Smith & Smith, 1995, pp. 10–11). The Vedāntic epistemology of concentrated inner awareness through self-enquiry to reveal the source of consciousness itself, is a clear example of agreement with Husserl's argument (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Locklin, 2017; Smith & Smith, 1995, pp. 10–11).

Husserl's concept of abstention from the natural world in adopting a transcendental attitude required a 'bracketing' of what is presented in consciousness, to observe the essence of consciousness itself (B. Gupta, 2004; Maharana, 2009; Mohanty, 2005; Smith & Smith, 1995). Husserl's stance must therefore assume a position of duality to consider bracketing possible. Yet, seemingly contradictory, Smith and

Smith's (1995) exposition on Husserl's stance is that "*Epoché in this way leads to a metaphysical 'nullification' of the world, to the dissolution of the world into the realm of consciousness*" (Mohanty, 2005; Smith & Smith, 1995, p. 12). One might appreciate the seeming similarity with Vedānta from the lived experience of Ramana Maharshi, as described by his direct disciple, the poet Muruganar (2016), "*The ego false and transient makes the transient world seem real and lasting; And if it dies, the Self abides as the sole Being and ground of this phenomenal universe*" (p. 187). But there is a fundamental distinction. For Husserl, it is the ego which is consciousness alone (Smith & Smith, 1995), whereas the Vedāntic stance posits consciousness as the animating substratum of ego and not the ego itself (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018). Thus the key difference is how Vedānta, and Husserl defined consciousness.

Yet, despite some weighty differences (B. Gupta, 2004), some possibility for similarities were also observed (Maharana, 2009). As Maharana (2009) noted,

While pointing to significant differences in their respective approaches to understanding the nature of consciousness, the exploration finally unveils the common thesis for both Śamkara and Husserl that 'pure consciousness' is essentially foundational, evidencing, and absolute for any epistemic act (p. 1).

Moreover, B. Gupta (2004) acknowledged that "*both Husserl and Śamkara were inspired by the idea that discovering the truth about our deeper selves and about the true nature of consciousness can serve the highest practical purposes of life*" (p. 132).

2.5.3 *Ananda*: Joy, contentment, bliss

Ananda means joy, and in yogic philosophy, "*is associated with complete satisfaction and wholeness*", prized as supreme contentment (Collins, 2019, p. 4; Monier-Williams, 2008a). The inclusion of joy as an integral construct of wholeness in Vedānta is profoundly meaningful, for without it, the constructs of Being and consciousness alone would leave a big 'so what?' question for human relevance. Humans ultimately want to be happy and free from suffering (Cordaro et al., 2016; Diener & Seligman, 2018; Emmons, 2020; Fisher, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to (B. Gupta, 2004),

The goal of Vedānta is not only to construct a philosophical system, not only to bring to light phenomena that would otherwise escape our notice, but also – in the long run – to illuminate the

path to *moksa* or spiritual freedom. This freedom is liberation from that ignorance which makes the empirical individual (*jiva*) subject to pain and suffering, confusion (*moha*) and attachment (*raga*), and thus prevents him from enjoying that bliss which constitutes the very nature of consciousness in its purity (p. 131).

The human search for happiness has engendered discourse since time immemorial (Fisher, 2010). Yet, like many spiritual wisdom traditions, sensory happiness is not the aspiration in Vedānta. This is because happiness is considered impermanent and subject to its opposite, thereby creating suffering by involving a psychological dependence on unstable externalities such as wealth, fame, relationships, praise, and so on (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Nityaswarupananda, 1940).

Vedāntic wholeness, as represented by *satchitananda*, both implies and aims at that supreme joy which has no opposite, because it is a joy which springs from the very nature of Self, like warmth is inherent to fire (Radhakrishnan, 1940). Because the very nature of the Self in Vedānta is joy, to seek it in externalities is considered both futile and ignorant, a fruitlessly endless pursuit of desire in which one can never be completely fulfilled (Venkataramiah, 2010). Such pursuit leads to greed, anger and frustration, born from the belief of an empirical egoic incomplete-self which needs something outside of itself to be complete (Milne, 1997). Positive psychology, however, has preoccupied itself with the concept of happiness, not joy and contentment (Emmons, 2020), therefore the ensuing discussion explores happiness to understand why it is not a construct of wholeness from a Vedāntic perspective. In this sub-chapter, root theory contextualisations were explored for happiness, joy, and contentment between various Western theorists and Vedānta.

Vedānta and positive psychology: Root theory contextualisation of happiness

Engendered by Martin Seligman's positive psychology launch in 2000, concepts like happiness and well-being have increasingly become viewed as a science, sparking a proliferation of studies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While noble in the pursuit to expand psychology's focus from human dysfunction diagnosis to the cultivation of human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), there are ongoing concerns about the Western-centric bias of theories to date (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Daniels, 2019; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016). Happiness and well-being were largely viewed through the Aristotelian lenses of *eudaimonia* or the virtuous good life, and *hedonism* or

pleasure-seeking (Fisher, 2010). A consensus definition of happiness was not apparent from the literature review, with differing views around meaning (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Daniels, 2019; McKenzie, 2016; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016). Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir (2011) simply defined happiness as “*an experience that involves the presence of pleasure or positive emotion and the absence of displeasure or negative emotion*” (p. 223). However, Georg Simmel considered more deeply the ethical implications of happiness for duty and authenticity, drawing important distinctions between “*sensual and spiritual, epicurean and ascetic, egoistic and emphatic happiness*” (McKenzie, 2016; Zingerle, 2002, p. 466).

From an etymological perspective, the “*hap*” in happiness refers to fortune or chance (Pérez-Álvarez, 2016, p. 9), which implies an unsustainable state subject to change. Vedānta observed that if one forms an attachment to a state characterised by instability and change, this is bound to create psychological suffering due to the expectation of permanence from something inherently temporal (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1997; Venkataramiah, 2010). Consequently, attachment to happiness is considered a bondage in Vedānta, constituting the last covering of the Self, referred to as the *anandamaya kosha* or ‘bliss sheath’, which must be overcome to experience the non-dual wholeness of Being-consciousness-joy (Monier-Williams, 2008a; Radhakrishnan, 1940; Ramsundarsingh, 2019; Venkataramiah, 2010; Wilber, 2005). Such attachment is viewed as detracting from wholeness, eschewed as creating psychological suffering from an incapacity to ‘be’ with what is.

Gruber et al. (2011) found that while studies show psychological, social, and other benefits of positive affect, the possible dangers were relatively unexplored. Conducting research into the dark side of happiness, Gruber et al. (2011) explored how too much happiness could lead to negative outcomes, examining boundaries around degree of happiness, wrong timing, detrimental types of happiness, and improper methods of pursuit. Examples of the dangers of excessive happiness and positive emotion included paying less heed to risk and threat, leading to indulgence in harmful behaviours, increased self-absorption, and at extreme levels, indications of clinical psychopathologies such as mania, or an incapacity to experience negative affect (Gruber et al., 2011). Grinde (2002) cautioned the harmful implications of pleasure pursuit, concluding:

regarding the present application of evolutionary thinking, the idea that stimulation of brain rewards adds to happiness could be taken to suggest that any means to obtain these sensations are warranted. Besides the concern for long-term negative consequences, there is the obvious

fact that the pursuit of happiness for one person is sometimes in conflict with what is good for others (p. 349).

This has import for implications in leadership and the Invisible Hand theory, where greed in leadership for the pursuit of one's own happiness has repercussions for the greater whole (Chakraborty et al., 2004). Perhaps these might be clues as to why happiness is not highly prized in many spiritual wisdom traditions, including Vedānta, where joy and contentment are favoured instead. The reality of life is that it brings both sorrow and joy. Therefore, a theory which promises lasting happiness by ticking a list of factors on a concept model, is arguably both overly simplistic and not fully reflective of the dynamic nature of life. For example, a person may turn to Seligman's (2018) well-being PERMA² model and evaluate his life according to these constructs. Perhaps he scores well on relationships and engagement but low on meaning. This may lead to feelings of discontent based on a resultant belief that he lacks well-being. According to Gruber et al. (2011), treating happiness as an externalised goal pursuit is incongruent with the resultant emotions created by outcome evaluation, concluding that *"the more people value and pursue happiness, the less likely they may be to obtain it, especially when happiness appears to be within reach"* (p. 226). As noted by many philosophers and scholars, this goal-oriented approach creates a trap of unrealistic expectations with inevitable resultant disappointment (Daniels, 2019; Gruber et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2016; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016; Zingerle, 2002).

Therefore, Vedāntic sages cautioned against fuelling desires in the belief that such fulfilment would bring eternal happiness, as an approach which creates an endless cycle of desire (Venkataramiah, 2010). Many Western philosophers agreed. Simmel regarded exterior-based happiness without spiritual consideration as an exercise in futility, as noted by Zingerle (2002),

The whole range of exterior orientation as well as egocentric attitudes, desires, and strivings detracts our state of mind from the essential inner-directed condition. They all are 'mixtures of our soul with exteriorities', are only a 'roundabout way', on which the soul will 'lose itself'; they are the fruitless attempt of it to close a gap in itself by complementary exterior means (p. 467).

Schopenhauer, too, viewed happiness dependent on the fulfilment of desires as an unachievable pursuit, leading to an endless cycle of disappointment and incompleteness through unmet expectations (Daniels,

² PERMA is an acronym for positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2018).

2019; McKenzie, 2016). Freud also argued the attainment of happiness based on external factors including technological or material, as being implausible, due to the inherent restrictions of living in civilization (Daniels, 2019). Moreover, external need gratification does not guarantee the non-occurrence of discordant situations, which can have long-term negative effects on well-being and happiness (Grinde, 2002).

Vedānta and positive psychology: Root theory contextualisation of joy

In light of such inconsistencies and concerns, perhaps it is not happiness that is the key to human flourishing (Cordaro et al., 2016; Emmons, 2020). Emotion psychology has recently started exploring other positive states beyond happiness, including gratitude, interest, and awe (Cordaro et al., 2016). Yet low arousal positive emotion states like peace, contentment, and joy, remain under researched comparative to happiness and well-being, despite being highly esteemed by various spiritual wisdom traditions (Cordaro et al., 2016; Emmons, 2020).

Joy has been central to Christian and Jewish theology for two millennia, and Vedānta and Buddhism for even longer, indicating just how integral joy is to spirituality and human well-being (Casioppo, 2020; Emmons, 2020). Casioppo (2020) described ways to cultivate joy from the yogic traditions, citing from the Bhagavad Gītā and Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Yet, according to Emmons (2020), joy is nascent in positive psychology research,

Joy has been one of the least studied human emotions despite the fact that it is on everyone’s list of basic or primary emotions. In fact, if awards were given for the emotion most neglected by psychologist [s], joy would surely be among the contenders (p. 1).

Emmons (2020) noted that the conception of happiness is at times “*anchored in a frankly means-end transaction that highlights the reductively individual nature of our satisfactions, framed as happiness. Joy, on the other hand, seems to suggest a more ecstatic understanding of agency than ‘happiness’ typically allows*” (p. 1).

In Vedānta, joy is considered as the inherent nature of the Self, hence the inclusion in the concept of *satchitananda* (Frydman, 1999; B. Gupta, 2004). Interestingly (Grinde, 2002, 2016), who explored happiness from the lenses of evolution and neuroscience, profoundly found contentment to be a default setting in the human brain, which implies that external stimuli are inessential toward achieving that state,

congruent with Vedāntic philosophy. Grinde (2002) found that those able to manage discordant situations, “*manage to retain their default positive mood, and who are as a consequence in the best position to delight in the rewarding sensations associated with handling the daily chores of life*” (p. 350). Yoga and meditation were specifically mentioned by Grinde (2002) as interventions designed to return one to the default positive state and nurture this.

Articles by Casioppo (2020) and Emmons (2020) appeared recently in a special edition of The Journal of Positive Psychology dedicated to the call for future research on joy, an encouraging directive. Given the lack of academic research on joy, it was challenging to provide a meaningful root theory comparison, therefore the next closest concept cherished in both Vedānta and other wisdom traditions was explored instead, namely, contentment (Cordaro et al., 2016). Both joy and contentment appear repeatedly and interchangeably in Vedāntic texts like the Bhagavad Gītā (Nihsreyasananda, 2005), and Astāvakra Samhitā (Nityaswarupananda, 1940) as key indicators of wholeness, therefore contentment could be regarded as synonymous with joy in Vedānta (Nihsreyasananda, 2005; Nityaswarupananda, 1940; Radhakrishnan, 1940). Since contentment is also still emergent in research, the root theory contextualisation was conducted by exploring contentment in other key wisdom traditions, along with scholarly studies.

Vedānta and positive psychology: Root theory contextualisation of contentment

Contentment, “*according to over 4,000 years of spiritual, philosophical, and theoretical discourse, is an emotion that sits at the deepest core of human well-being and is foundational to the experience of fulfilment in life*” (Cordaro, Brackett, Glass, & Anderson, 2016, p. 221). The term ‘contentment’ is derived from Old French via Latin, the etymologically alluding to “*something whole, complete, and intact—the contents of something—and not just a simple feeling of satisfaction*” (Cordaro et al., 2016, p. 224). Cordaro et al. (2016) performed an extensive cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary review of contentment, using a prototype approach to identify common themes pertaining to lived experience, albeit omitting African cultural perspectives, which is covered below.

Cordaro et al. (2016) found contentment tremendously valued across multiple ancient wisdom traditions, citing earliest mentions as originating from Vedāntic texts, including the Bhagavad Gītā (5th - 2nd century BCE), the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Upanishads, and the Yoga Vashishta. These texts encouraged truth

seekers to cultivate contentment, steering clear of the psychological swings of happiness and sorrow caused by endless desire and attachment (Cordaro et al., 2016; Nihreyyasananda, 2005). The emphasis on contentment as a gem quality was also found in Bhutanese, Tibetan and Buddhist traditions, which dissuaded excess living as a deterrent to balanced living (Cordaro et al., 2016). Christian, Islamic, and Judaic wisdom traditions too, extolled contentment as a divine virtue (Cordaro et al., 2016).

Chinese Daoist principles from the ancient Zhuangzi text (475–221 BCE) described contentment as a “*process or method for living well*” (Daniels, 2019, p. 578). The Zhuangzi warned against the danger of stirring up desires and attachment to externalities, as obstacles to the inner treasures of tranquillity and equanimity associated with contentment (Yu, 2020). Bearing remarkable similarities to Vedānta, the Zhuangzi advised one to overcome the dualistic tendencies of the mind, which show up in the conditioned form of likes and dislikes, keeping the mind open and clear instead to flow with the right nature of each thing, abiding in contentment and attunement (Yu, 2020). The Zhuangzi taught that, “*The binaries of happiness-unhappiness, praise-no praise, usefulness-uselessness, and right-wrong are constructs and therefore oppositional*” however to move “*with the undulations of the world... results in a nonbinary and non-fragmented life; in other words, a contented life*” (Daniels, 2019, p. 590). This is essence links contentment to a wholeness way of Being which embodies inner stability, regardless of the ebb and flow of the dualities of life.

Contentment, or *rida* in Arabic, is also one of the core concepts of Sufism in Islamic moral psychology, described as the joy of the heart, and soul contentment with God, evoking a reciprocation of God’s contentment (Khalil, 2014). Islamic scriptures too described the true defining quality of contentment as the capacity to be satisfied and steady even when faced with life’s blows, eschewing the *rida* of pleasant circumstances as easily natural and not a concrete test of moral struggle (Cordaro et al., 2016; Khalil, 2014). The great female mystical Sufi saint Rabi’a extolled that “*the aspirant must find equal joy in both tribulations and blessings. The reason for this, she implied, was because both joy and sorrow have their origin in the Beloved*” (Khalil, 2014, p. 380). In wisdom traditions, such an attitude was seen as purifying and therefore enabling to spiritual progression.

Sufi mystic and theologian Muhasibi once remarked, “*the content one is rich though he be hungry, and the covetous one is poor though he possess [much]*” (Khalil, 2014, p. 378). One discovers near identical

quotes across the many different wisdom traditions, showing a universal upholding and consensus of contentment as a virtue to be cultivated and treasured. The implications are that one who is constantly desiring and covetous is never satisfied, and therefore always poor. This leads to never ending behaviours of greed and acquisition, both to the detriment of self and society. From a Biblical perspective,

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction (Holy Bible, 2011a, Timothy 6:6-11).

In many African cultures, contentment is seen as a journey of becoming, involving past history, spirituality, a connection with community and ancestors, and an appreciation for the interconnectedness of humanity known as *ubuntu* (De Beer & De Beer, 2012; Nussbaum et al., 2010). “*Contentment from an African perspective seems to be a continuous process of becoming*” (Beer & Beer, 2012, p. 141). As with other wisdom traditions, contentment was not associated with desire and the pursuit of pleasure. Wholeness is described as a way of life in many African cultures, and like other wisdom traditions, spiritual wisdom is viewed as key to psychological well-being (De Beer & De Beer, 2012).

These ancient wisdom traditions clearly discerned distinctions between contentment and pleasure-seeking happiness, displaying a cross-cultural unity toward contentment as an aspirational spiritual state associated with wholeness. Recent studies have emerged on appraisal themes and physiological impacts associated with contentment, thus validating wisdom tradition teachings (Cordaro et al., 2016, 2020). Studies by Cordaro et al. (2020) showed evidence of positive correlations between contentment and positive psychological aims such as unconditional self-acceptance, self-worth, and improved psychological health. Significantly for wholeness, Cordaro et al. (2016) identified the core root appraisal theme of contentment to be what they termed as “*perceived completeness*” (p. 222). Perceived completeness implies unconditional acceptance of both self and the present moment, non-contingent on anything other than what is (Cordaro et al., 2016). According to Cordaro et al. (2020), “*Contentment is an emotion that arises from the perception of completeness in life*” (p. 1). Significantly for this study on wholeness, it addresses the deep human psychological need for completeness, allowing harmonisation of the complexity of life experiences into a purposeful narrative, thus enabling integrated human well-

being (Cordaro et al., 2016). Others argued contentment to be a mood, distinct from emotions which are episodic, temporal, and object-related (Gibbs, 2017; Grinde, 2016).

Parse (2001) defined contentment as “*a satisfying calmness amid the arduous*”, and a feeling of peace in everyday life (p. 330). McKenzie (2016) described contentment as “*a fulfilling relationship with the self and society*” (p. 252). Gibbs (2017) described contentment as “*a state of being content with oneself. Contentment is becoming what one wills one’s being to be, in the knowledge of one’s capabilities*” (p. 244). Zingerle (2002), who explored Georg Simmel’s view on happiness, was closer to the Vedāntic concept of contentment as a state of unified Beingness, describing its meaning simply as “*becoming what we are*” (p. 468). “*According to Simmel, there is nothing inherently moral or good about the pursuit of happiness, but the development of a fulfilling sense of self is of great importance*” (McKenzie, 2016, p. 257). Parse (2001) similarly viewed contentment as a chosen way of Being, fundamental to human well-being.

These earlier definitions expand on Cordaro et al.’s (2020) definition, taking contentment beyond a perception of completeness of life, into more importantly, a completeness of *self*, born from Being, congruent with spiritual wisdom traditions. One could argue that it is impossible to hold a sense of completeness about life from an incomplete sense of self, and that the two are intertwined. In a comprehensible differentiation from happiness, the above contentment definitions imply an affirming sense of self from wholeness of Being.

Being/Self arises from cognitive awareness rather than cognitive activity (Forsthoefel, 2002). The very nature of contentment is grounded in an “*intrinsic state of awareness*” (Gibbs, 2017, p. 245). It is a state of “*being in the present, rather than a destination*” (Beer & Beer, 2012, p. 136). Cognitive awareness in each moment was found to be an important contributor toward “*experiencing sustained and robust contentment and satisfaction and lasting reductions in psychological distress*” by Carey, Haviland, Tai, Vanags, & Mansell (2016), from a MindSurf app pilot study (p. 9). These findings were congruent with the Vedāntic *satchitananda* wholeness constructs, which intrinsically tie awareness and joy/contentment. Being versus pursuing is therefore a key distinction between the concepts of contentment and happiness respectively, from both Vedāntic and academic perspectives.

Another distinguishing factor was the capacity of contentment to hold polarities of both positive and negative life experiences, whereas happiness and well-being were implied as being found solely in pleasant experiences (Cordaro et al., 2016; Gibbs, 2017; Gruber et al., 2011; McKenzie, 2016; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016). Unlike contentment, happiness studies do not appear to accommodate the complex human capability for oppositional emotions to co-exist (Pérez-Álvarez, 2016). For example, a person who has cultivated contentment can still feel an overarching sense of contentment with the sunshine, life, and self, while concurrently feeling deep sadness for a friend is suffering or anxiety over a deadline. *“It [contentment] arises from the convergence of different emotions such as happiness, frustration and despair”* (Gibbs, 2017, p. 244). This may provide insight into why studies show that chasing happiness can actually result in the opposite of human well-being, promoting imposed ways of thinking and attachment to outcomes, paradoxically leading to psychological suffering and negative emotions (Daniels, 2019; Gruber et al., 2011; Pérez-Álvarez, 2016).

However, it is thus vital to note that contentment is not contrary to happiness, but extends to encompass the capacity to hold unpleasant life experiences (Cordaro et al., 2016; Gibbs, 2017). Contentment, *“although it certainly finds a place for the presence of joy and momentary outbreaks of expression of delight and pleasure, it is not reliant on extrinsically directed and generated pleasures”*, an observation congruent with Vedānta (Gibbs, 2017, p. 245). In contrast to the happiness pursuit of externalities, Cordaro et al., (2016) found that *“contentment by definition regards a state of minimal perceived desires”* (p. 231). Furthermore, and significantly relevant to the broader aims of this study, Cordaro et al. (2020) found higher levels of contentment to be predictive of lower levels of greed and materialism observing that: *“The cognitive appraisal of completeness is unique to the contentment experience, as it is perhaps the only discrete emotion where egoic desires temporarily subside”* (p. 2). This aligns to Vedāntic teachings of wholeness where contentment is described as a desire-free state involving a deep presence arising from Being (Cordaro et al., 2016; Nisreysananda, 2005; Venkataramiah, 2010). With implications for the egoic incomplete self, Cordaro et al. (2020), observed that *“in behavioural psychology, it has been hypothesized that dispositional contentment reduces the desire for material possessions and buffers against greed and excessive consumption”* (p. 2). Therefore Vedānta, along with other spiritual wisdom traditions, unanimously encouraged contentment for centuries.

The import thus extends beyond self to implications for society in a world fragmented by social injustice and uneven wealth disparities through greed. This is supported by Gibbs (2017), who presented a case for contentment as a key pedagogical aim of higher education, versus the temporal happiness driver of desire-satisfaction, citing an age of consumerism already wrought with resultant problems.

It is strongly suspected that people who experience contentment with greater frequency will not as readily succumb to media and advertising messages that suggest that we are less than what we really are (Cordaro et al., 2016, p. 231).

However, as Cushman (1990) observed, it serves the advertising, political, and psychotherapy industries to keep humans in a state of desiring and consuming. Inherent in these observations of what then makes humans succumb, are links between self-worth, contentment, and wholeness.

Studies on the psychological outcomes of contentment are also emerging; unconditional acceptance of self has been observed as a prerequisite to experiencing contentment...On the other hand, when one's self-worth is dependent on external circumstances, individuals may become vulnerable to depression and other negative health outcomes (Cordaro et al., 2020, p. 2).

This is congruent with studies which revealed self-love to be connected with wholeness, and self-acceptance to be a key construct of self-love (Maharaj, 2016; Maharaj & April, 2013a). A person with a healthy sense of self-love, feels wholeness within, and is less likely to be hooked by messaging promoting beliefs of inherent incompleteness that promise fulfilment through externalities (Maharaj, 2016).

A possible reason why contentment seems to be undervalued in scholarly focus relative to happiness, is a misconstrual of the concept to imply complacency. However, while contentment is not concerned with desire gratification, it does not imply inertia (McKenzie, 2016). Rather, contentment is about a mature ability to cultivate a sense of appreciation for what one has, with considered values and expectations, countering the norms of endless, relentless striving where nothing is ever enough (Gibbs, 2017; McKenzie, 2016). Neither does contentment imply a lack of effort toward what one deems to be meaningful. Rather, it *"is being able to strive realistically to know the best one can be, and not the best anyone else might want one to be"* (Gibbs, 2017, p. 245). Contrary to complacency, Gibbs (2017) suggested that unfolding into one's authentic self involves disruption,

To find our potential to be and to will its realisation requires the disruption of our tranquillity, and a heightened awareness and realisation of the core structural capabilities of critical thinking, confidence, and citizenship. Securing these capabilities is emotionally unsettling, distressing and creates temporary negations to contentment but, in doing so—provided we experience them as part of our understanding of ourselves through attunement to the mood of contentment rather than anxiety—these capabilities bring benefits for individual growth (pp. 244 -245).

Both psychology and Vedānta posited that to be whole is self-love (Fromm, 1957; Frydman, 1999; Maharaj, 2016). Vedāntic master Nisargadatta Maharaj said, “*More than happiness, love wants growth, the widening and deepening of consciousness and being*” (Frydman, 1999, p. 401). Thus one becomes free from the trap of conforming to societal expectations, and attuned to the wholeness of one’s authentic self (Zingerle, 2002).

2.5.4 Ontological distinctions and core definitions

The Vedāntic wholeness constructs, namely Being, consciousness, and joy (*satchitananda*), were individually explored through root theory contextualisations between Vedānta and selected Western theorists. As with wholeness, all three constructs were found nascent. Moreover, the root theory contextualisations uncovered that wholeness, as conceptualised through a Vedāntic lens, is encapsulated by a spiritual ‘Whole Self’ ontology through the *Brahmanic* substratum principle. This contrasts with modern psychology which is founded upon a materialistic ‘incomplete self’ theory. Clarity on ontological assumptions is arguably critical to the concept of wholeness. A summary of distinctions in the interpretations of ‘self’ from the literature review and root theory contextualisations is thus presented in Figure 2 below:

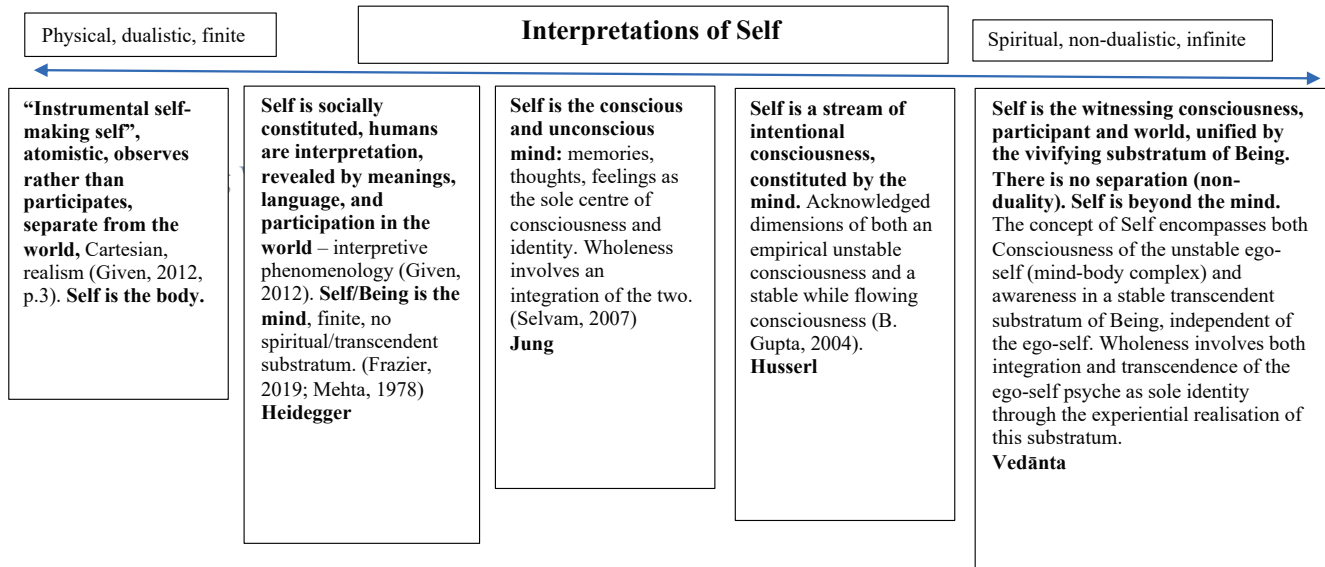


FIGURE 2: VARYING PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF SELF

Cushman (1990) called for a radical critique of psychology and understanding of the self:

I think the study of the self across time and cultures is an essential topic for psychology. If psychologists do not recognize the ethnocentric nature of psychology's discourse about the current Western self, we commit several errors. In particular, we participate in a culturally disrespectful and damaging psychological imperialism abroad and at the same time perpetuate the discourse of self-contained individualism and its attendant miseries at home (p. 599).

While not overtly supporting the Vedāntic stance, Jung acknowledged that, “*in considering the psychology of the self we should do well to have recourse to the treasures of Indian wisdom*” (Jung, 1945, as cited in Selvam, 2007, p. 62).

Based on a synthesis of both Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic research, the following definition of spiritual intelligence is suggested:

Spiritual intelligence is the capacity and ability to uphold virtue and ethical decision-making, navigating life's complexities through a transcendent consciousness of the underlying interconnectedness and unity of all life, based on a spiritual wholeness of Being

Both scholarly expositions and wisdom traditions agreed an intrinsic connection between spirituality and wholeness. Therefore a definition of wholeness ought to include spirituality. Being nascent, no consensual definition of wholeness was found. Based on a theoretical synthesis of the literature, an initial definition of wholeness is suggested, incorporating the Vedāntic wholeness constructs:

Wholeness is a spiritual state of Being from a purity of consciousness capable of apprehending Oneness, and an ability to hold and transcend polarities, revealing inherent non-contingent joy of Self, which fosters a life-affirming orientation toward self and others.

No consensus definitions were found for Being, consciousness, and joy/contentment, unsurprising in light of the scarcity of research. Definitions of these constructs, derived from a theoretical synthesis of Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic literature in the context of wholeness, are suggested below:

- *Being: Being is the spiritual underlying substratum and source of 'being' human, i.e., it refers to both immanent and transcendent existence. It is experienced through spiritual connection from stillness of mind and non-judgemental presence.*
- *Consciousness: An illumination of Being that is intentionally expressed in a life-affirming way, guided by virtue, for the well-being of both self and the greater whole.*
- *Joy: An inner state of contentment accompanied by feelings of completeness, non-contingent on externalities, associated with pure consciousness of Being.*

It must be noted that from a non-dual or Advaita Vedānta perspective, pure absolute consciousness is not necessarily life-affirming or virtuous since it constitutes an impartial illuminating substratum. However, in the context of wholeness, consciousness arguably takes on distinct qualities as per the Vedāntic explanations of the *sattva guna* (virtuous psychological orientation) and consciousness in Chapter 2.5.2 on intentionality referencing Rāmānuja's qualified non-dualism stance (Maharana, 2009). This correlates to some extent with descriptions by Pargament et al. (2016) of orienting systems toward wholeness (life-affirming, cohesive), and Niemiec et al. (2020) (guided by virtue). In Vedānta the distinction is implicit in the interwoven *satchitananda* concept, because without a virtuous orientation of consciousness, joy would arguably not arise.

Both Vedāntic and scholarly expositions were congruent in describing contentment as a state accompanied by a sense of completeness and wholeness (Cordaro et al., 2016), although Vedānta is distinct in implying contentment to be interchangeable with joy. An exploration of cross-cultural wisdom traditions on contentment also found links between wholeness, Being, and contentment. Furthermore, contentment was described as a non-contingent state of Being, rather than an externally dependent psychological state of happiness. It is important to note that the initial theoretically derived definitions suggested in this chapter were not shared in advance with participants, since the study sought to empirically understand the constructs of wholeness from participants’ own lived experiences. The definitions were subsequently updated to reflect the data findings and are contained in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.6. Initial theoretical Vedāntic framework of wholeness

Based on recommendations by Maxwell (2013) and Gehman et al. (2018), I constructed an initial Vedāntic theoretical framework of wholeness from a synthesis of both Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic literature, depicting what is known and unknown, providing grounding and structure for this study. My proposed framework is shown in Figure 3 and explained below.

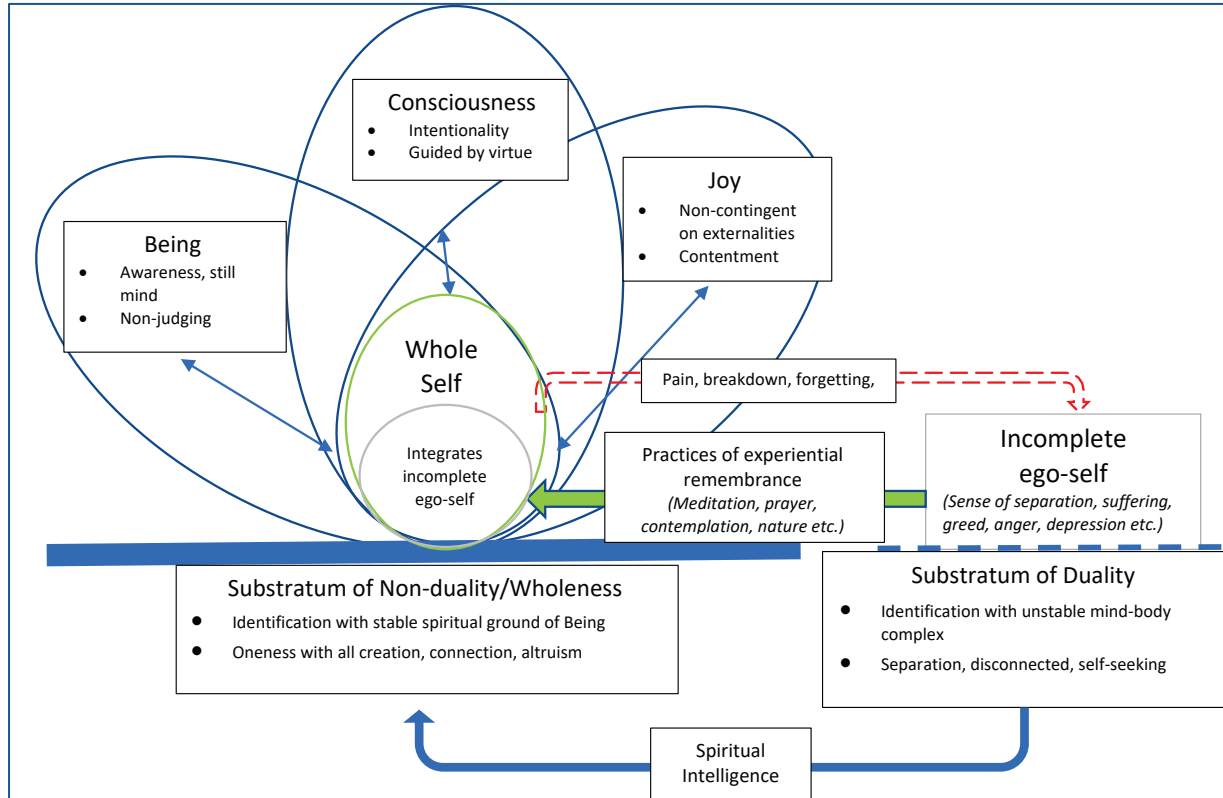


FIGURE 3: THEORETICAL VEDĀNTIC FRAMEWORK OF WHOLENESS

What is known is that spiritual wholeness according to Vedānta, is described as Being, consciousness, and joy. These are depicted as constructs with the underlying spiritual foundation of the Whole Self. As schematically depicted, they do not stand in isolation but are interwoven with one another. The dual-facing arrows between the constructs and the Whole Self, suggest that Being, consciousness, and joy, gives rise to wholeness, and vice versa. In addition, a processual interplay is depicted between the incomplete ego-self with its accompanying vices such as greed, and the Whole Self, which is grounded in a non-dualistic spiritual ontology.

Epistemological integration of the incomplete ego-self with the Whole Self is depicted by processual spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and reflection (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2004; Niemiec et al., 2020; Vaughan, 2002) which aid the process of remembering that one is fundamentally whole as a spiritual Being. This process activates spiritual intelligence, which loosens identification with the incomplete ego-self or fragmented unstable mind-body complex, a solely material ontological identification. The activation of spiritual intelligence invokes the Whole Self, which provides inner stability to cope with the suffering and pain experienced by the egoic incomplete ego-self. The Whole Self thus ‘holds’ the ego-self. When suffering and pain strike again, the ego-self forgets its spiritual basis, moving into separation and the suffering of the empty ego-self. Without these practices, humans remain stuck in the ego-self suffering of separation, resorting to greed, anger, depression, drugs, consumerism, and alcohol inter alia to find relief from the incomplete self. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous discerned the root cause of addiction to be spiritual emptiness, and consequently placed a strong emphasis on spirituality throughout the recovery programme (Mitroff, 1998). Practices of spiritual intelligence are thus designed to facilitate processes and pathways toward experiential wholeness (Niemiec et al., 2020) until stability in the Whole Self is attained (Dhiman, 2015).

What was not known was whether the Vedāntic constructs could be meaningful for wholeness outside a Vedāntic context, and in particular, meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership. The conceptual framework provided a basis for exploring the research questions via hermeneutical phenomenological leader interviews. While Nayak (2008) viewed the processual and atomic approaches of concept “becoming” and concept “essence” as mutually exclusive, it was unconvincing as to why such a dichotomous view need be endorsed (p. 176). This was supported by Fromm (1957), who drew a distinction between Aristotelian logic with its polarised stance on seeming contradictions, versus the paradoxical logic of Vedānta and Taoism, which holds polarities simultaneously. These Eastern

traditions posited ultimate truth to be beyond contradictions, unknowable by linguistics or thought. Therefore, an integrated approach of exploring both concept becoming and concept essence was adopted toward understanding the meaningfulness of wholeness, i.e., exploring both the meaningfulness of the wholeness constructs as well as the processual interplay between wholeness and emptiness. This approach was coherent with the principle of wholeness as an integration of polarities.

The theoretical framework distinguished between two different ontological foundations, namely, non-duality and duality. An objectivist approach rooted in a realist philosophical worldview might challenge a relativism ontology and constructionism epistemology (Moon & Blackman, 2014). However, the guiding principle of this study was pragmatism where, *“The value of knowledge is judged with respect to how well it serves human purpose”* (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1175). A criticism of the theoretical framework could be that *“all systematization is absolutely impossible in pure metaphysics”* because metaphysics is free from relativities including the philosophical, being *“essentially knowledge of the Universal, and such knowledge does not permit of being enclosed within any formula, however comprehensive”* (Guénon, 2001, p. 9). However, the counter argument is that the purpose of the model was not concerned with systematizing the metaphysical aspect, but explicitly on exploring the meaningfulness of wholeness through a formulation depicting the contrast between spiritual and material ontological assumptions, and the epistemological interplay between them. At this stage, no leadership impact was depicted, as there were no studies exploring wholeness as defined through the identified Vedāntic constructs, and leadership. The final model, encapsulating the empirical findings is shown in Chapter 5.

2.7. Chapter summary

The problem being addressed is that of harmful self-interested leadership driven by greed, posited as perpetuating social injustice and environmental problems in the world. Fairholm (1996) asserted that, *“Spiritual leadership asks us to reject past models of human leadership that focused on values of self-interest. These earlier models are energized by implicit values focusing on power, wealth and prestige”* (p. 12). For example, spiritual leadership was found to inspire employees to transcend self-interest for the greater welfare of the whole, based on behaviour motivated by meaning and purpose over personal reward and security (Dent et al., 2005; McGhee & Grant, 2008; Pruzan, 2008). These findings were congruent with emerging Vedāntic leadership studies (Maheshwari & Gupta, 2020). Thus the premise in this study is that spiritual intelligence in leadership could serve as an antidote to greed in leadership.

Such leadership greed was observed as being perpetuated by materialistic economic doctrines of self-interest and sole profit maximisation (Nikelly, 2006; Seuntjens et al., 2015). More specifically, in dealing with the proposed ‘incomplete self’ root cause of greed, this study sought to examine the wholeness aspect of spirituality, since the literature posited greed as arising from a sense of deprivation (Kets de Vries, 2016b; Nikelly, 2006). In uncovering potentially new insights toward understanding wholeness, the novel lens of Vedānta was applied. I thus reviewed both Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic literature on wholeness to identify research gaps.

The literature review revealed only a handful of emergent psychology and leadership studies on wholeness to date. Moreover, none were found specifically exploring wholeness as conceptualised in Vedānta, toward developing spiritual intelligence in leadership. Both ontological and epistemological gaps were identified, perhaps unsurprising given the research nascency of wholeness. From an epistemological perspective, it was encouraging to find emergent, albeit mostly conceptual, studies on processual frameworks pertaining to wholeness, for example, the quest toward wholeness (Thakadipuram, 2010, 2023), the role of character strengths and spirituality toward wholeness (Niemic et al., 2020), the characteristics of an orienting system toward wholeness (Pargament et al., 2016), and wholeness as a mediating factor in r/s struggles (Hart et al., 2020). However, no studies were found empirically exploring the constructs and meaning of wholeness, and its meaningfulness for spiritual intelligence in leadership from a spiritual wisdom tradition lens, certainly none from a Vedāntic one.

Furthermore, with the exception of Thakadipuram (2010) and Campbell (2007), the most recent wholeness-related studies (Hart et al., 2020; Niemic et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2021) were all based (at the time of writing this) on an untested conceptual framework by Pargament et al. (2016), the latter being a co-author on all three papers. Such reliance by researchers on the same untested conceptual framework as the foundation for emergent wholeness studies risks a pre-mature narrowing of concept understanding. It is argued that a lack of empirical research into the actual meaning of wholeness and its constructs risks an incomplete foundation for wholeness research. There is also the propagation of culturally biased ethnocentric Western assumptions to consider, which critics levelled at the positive psychology movement (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Russo-Netzer, 2016). As Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008) noted, “*it is our contention that positive psychology is doomed to being narrow and ethnocentric as long as its researchers remain unaware of the cultural assumptions underlying their work*” (p. 565).

The most significant distinction was that predominant wholeness expositions, with the exception of Thakadipuram (2010), were found to be based on the ontological assumption of a material mind-body incomplete ego-self as comprising the entire human being, with scholars consequently concluding wholeness to be unattainable (Hart et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2021). It seemed almost paradoxical that a material view of what it means to be human was applied by these scholars, despite acknowledgement of the connection between wholeness and spirituality. This contrasted with the Vedāntic ontological perspective, where human beings are considered inherently whole through a spiritual dimension of Being/Self or *Brahmanic* consciousness, which illuminates the egoic mind-body self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Milne, 1993). Indeed, in addition to accounts by great Vedāntic sages, there are also interesting renditions by others, such as psychotherapist David Sagar, who captured his phenomenological experiences of wholeness from his practice of Vedānta in his book *A Strange Fire*, notwithstanding whether his impressions represented authentic realisation:

The particular spiritual practice that I have been following is largely informed by Vedanta, the ancient science of consciousness, explicated in texts such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, which can lead to the knowledge that one is already whole and complete. It involves that which has been known for millennia in the East as ‘enlightenment’, a dis-identification from the personality and the realization that one is already free from the apparent confines of the body-mind (Sagar & West, 2016, pp. 625–626).

The Vedāntic perspective thus posits that wholeness *is* attainable, through epistemological practices designed to create an inner experiential awareness of the spiritual substratum of Being, beyond empirical incomplete egoic mind-body self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018). Therefore, while both Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic expositions on wholeness were congruent in acknowledging the journey of wholeness to be a dynamic process, the former posits ultimate attainment, while the latter believes the process to be in perpetuity, due to the difference in underlying ontological assumptions about what constitutes a human being. This finding had potentially significant implications for my study and wholeness research, in challenging existing assumptions through using a different lens to explore the concept.

My next step was thus to identify the core constructs of wholeness from a Vedāntic perspective. These were identified as Being, consciousness, and joy (*satchitananda*). Vedanta views these constructs in a non-dualistic, inextricably interconnected way. However, for the purposes of this study, I adopted a

deconstructed approach to better understand wholeness, by conducting root theory contextualisations between selected key Western and Vedantic theorists pertaining to each construct. The terms Being, Self, consciousness, and joy which formed the foundation of Vedānta for centuries are still nascent in research. However, these are increasingly individually appearing in modern theories, evidencing growing scholarly focus, notwithstanding varying interpretations in meaning, and are becoming part of mainstream terminology.

While potential similarities were noted between the Vedāntic wholeness constructs and modern psycho-philosophy, there were also many differences. The most significant difference was found to be the ontological assumption of an incomplete mind-body material ego-self incognisant of a spiritual dimension, which continues to underpin modern Western psychology. As Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008) noted,

Consequently, when we look to other times and places, we find our Western atomistic and interiorized self is not a universal truth, but rather an interpretation based on little more than faith in the Cartesian assumption that grants epistemological priority to an ‘I’ that thinks. (p. 566).

The assumption underpinning psychology, as a result of such ontological stance, is that wholeness is unattainable (Hart et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2021). Vedānta, in contrast, holds wholeness to be attainable, through spiritual epistemological processes, and that this attainability *is* possible because the Self is inherently whole as the spiritual stable *Brahmanic/Self/Being* substratum (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Frydman, 1999; Venkataramiah, 2010). According to Frazier (2019), “*The Upanisadic confidence in the plasticity of the most basic structures of consciousness, means that eternity, infinity, and universality are achievable human goals for the person who reorients their perceptual habits and affective*” (p. 18). Interestingly, the Vedantic position was found to be supported by the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, which referred to wholeness as a completeness which can be regained (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b).

Moreover, since modern psychology essentially assumed an empirical egoic incomplete, empty self ontology, which according to Cushman (1990), greatly promoted the advertising industry and psychotherapy professions, by perpetuating a belief system that people needed something extrinsic in order to be whole. This belief is recognised by both Vedānta and psychologists as fostering a grasping mentality of selfishness, greed, excessive consumerism, and other socially detrimental behaviours, in an

attempt to fill the emptiness which paradoxically, only fuels it (Cushman, 1990; Fromm, 1939). As Bauer (1987) noted, “*Contemporary philosophers have thus provided us with a phenomenological description of the modern Western (emotivist) self. Lacking faith in common religious or moral principles, this self is for the most part overwhelmed by existential concerns and feelings of alienation*” (p. 43).

Furthermore, leadership studies to date largely adopted an externalist epistemological approach, focussed on having and doing, versus Being. This study adopted an internalist ontological focus by exploring wholeness through a Vedāntic lens, thereby contributing to the research stream of Being-centred leadership in workplace spirituality (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Fry & Kriger, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005). Moreover, scholars proposed the cause of greed to be rooted in a deprived ‘incomplete self’ ontology. In contrast, a spiritual ontology invokes wholeness, which dissolves the need for excess. Needless to say, the ontological distinction from a Vedāntic lens was therefore of great import for this study, in challenging taken for granted assumptions in wholeness research. This study therefore posited that to cultivate spiritual intelligence in addressing greed, leaders need to uncover wholeness within themselves, through the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy.

In summary, the key research gaps identified from the literature review were a lack of:

- empirical research on wholeness constructs;
- empirical research on wholeness from a Vedāntic lens both as a stand-alone phenomenon, and in the context of spiritual intelligence in leadership;
- phenomenological research on the wholeness constructs of Being, consciousness, or joy, either individually, or in the context of wholeness and spirituality in leadership; and
- empirical research on practical epistemologies of cultivating wholeness as defined by the constructs, toward developing spiritual intelligence in leadership.

Moreover, prevailing scholarly assumptions of wholeness, conceptually posited unattainability based on a materialistic, incomplete-self ontological assumption. Based on these theoretical findings, I formulated my research questions and constructed an initial conceptual framework (Figure 3), depicting the constructs of wholeness as Being, consciousness, and joy, and the dynamic interplay between the material empty self and spiritual Whole Self, as the basis for the fieldwork. The research methodology employed in empirically exploring the meaningfulness of wholeness as defined by the constructs, for spiritual intelligence in leadership, is discussed in the next chapter.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research process was guided by Maxwell's (2013) interactive research design model which included five main components: objectives, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity. The study objectives and research questions were covered in Chapter 1, and the initial conceptual framework in Chapter 2. This chapter discusses the research paradigm, design, methodology, and trustworthiness and authenticity strategies.

3.1 Research paradigm and hermeneutical phenomenological methodology

Due to the scarcity of research into both wholeness, and the Vedāntic-based constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy, this study categorised as nascent research (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). As such, it was exploratory in nature, focussed on generating new insights on the meaningfulness of an under-researched phenomenon (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). A qualitative research methodology was thus applied, utilising an interpretive phenomenological paradigm, playing toward the nominalist relativist ontological spectrum (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Similar to Vedānta, nominalism regards the external world as an intangible collection of names and forms based on subjective internal cognition, with no material reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This is distinct from a realist perspective of the external world as constituting concrete objective reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Interpretivism acknowledges the spiritual essence of the social world and is concerned with social integration and cohesion (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), co-sharing a philosophical stance with Vedānta, thereby lending itself compatibly to the lens and objectives of this study.

Interpretive phenomenology, also known as hermeneutical phenomenology, is based on the assumption that human beings are not independent of the world, but are revealed through their interpretations (Given, 2012; Tuohy et al., 2013). This contrasts with the Cartesian premise of separation between human beings and the world (Given, 2012). The Greek etymological root of hermeneutics meaning 'interpretation' and originally used in the Middle Ages for Biblical interpretation, subsequently developed both as a social science, and less commonly, management research methodology (Robinson & Kerr, 2015). Hermeneutical phenomenology holds meaning as the central focus (Maxwell, 2009), and is defined as attempting "*to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings*" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 141) from lived experiences (Given, 2012; Lala & Kinsella, 2011). Crucially, as with Vedānta,

phenomenology embraces Being at its core of knowledge generation (Lala & Kinsella, 2011), an identified Vedāntic wholeness construct.

Notwithstanding the focus on exploring phenomena through lived subjective experiences and interpretations, hermeneutical phenomenology also offered the potential for a critical analysis through uncovering background taken-for-granted assumptions (Given, 2012; Lala & Kinsella, 2011; Ramsook, 2018; Robinson & Kerr, 2015; Tuohy et al., 2013). For example, a Vedāntic lens challenges ontological realism assumptions, which propagate the belief that the only reality is that of the empirical or material self. Applying a Vedāntic lens thus presented a shift toward a more relativist ontological stance which allows for the existence of multiple cognitive-based realities (Moon & Blackman, 2014). From an epistemological view, a Vedāntic lens expands on objectivism, where reality is seen to exist purely in the object independent of subject (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), toward an integrated understanding of subject-object co-creation (Gadamer, 1997, as cited in Ramsook, 2018). Therefore, Vedāntic construct definitions were not imposed on participants. Instead, the study sought to understand wholeness and the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy from participants' own experiences. Unlike intermediate and mature archetypal studies, establishing and explaining causality is less of a focus for nascent research, since there is not much prior research from which to leverage (Edmondson & McManus, 2007), therefore this study did not seek to prove causality. However, processual implications were explored toward a robust understanding of the meaningfulness of wholeness (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.2 Research design and methodological fit

Russo-Netzer (2016) advocated a multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary approach, requiring humility in listening to non-traditional wisdom sources, lending a phenomenological human-centred voice to abstract theoretical definitions. Therefore, this study adopted a multi-faceted, integrated research design, congruent with recommendations by Russo-Netzer (2016), who held the fragmented, silo approach of Western research responsible for the dearth of understanding of wholeness in human well-being. Figure 4 depicts the overall research design, methods, and process.

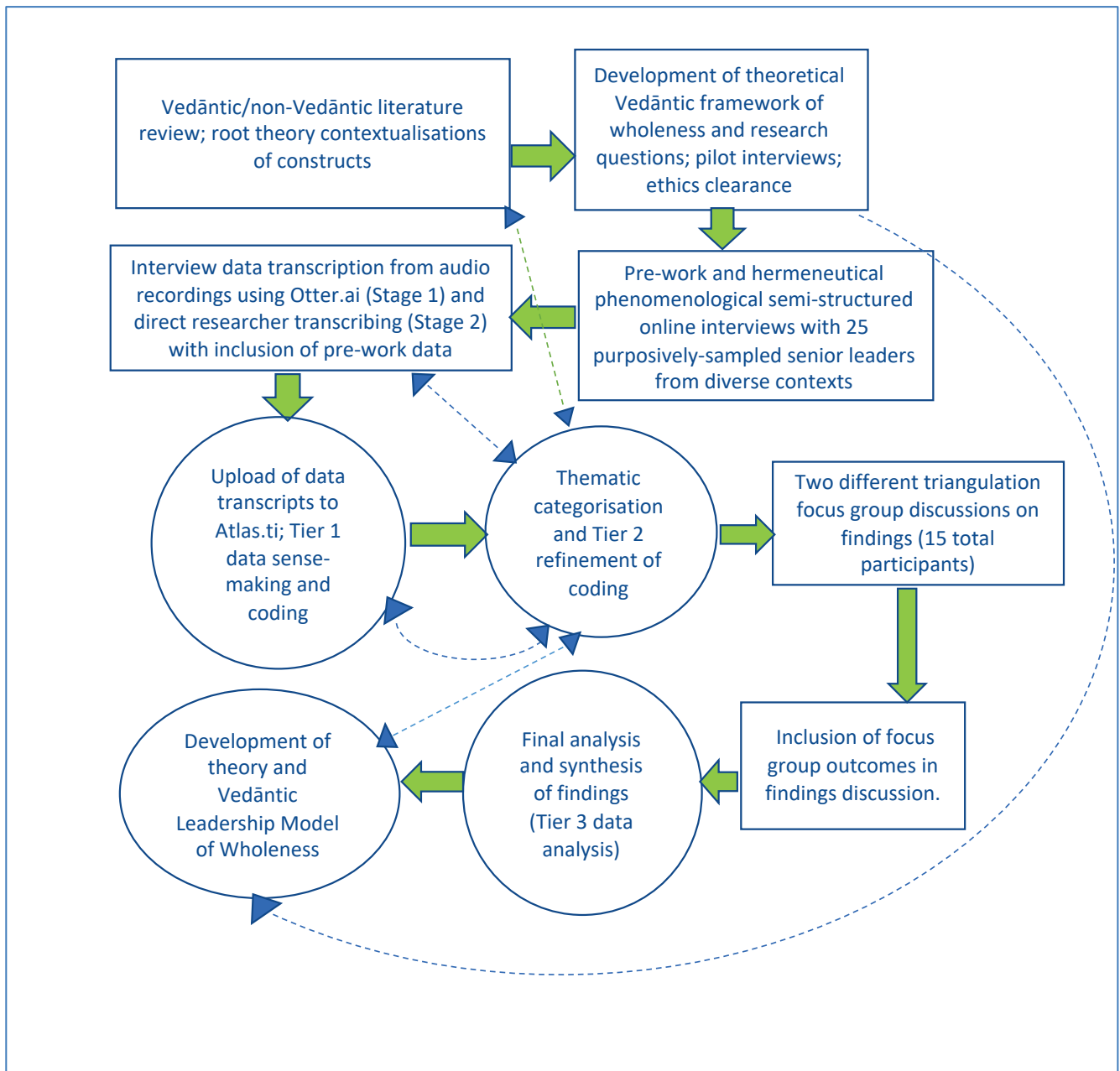


FIGURE 4: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND PROCESS

According to Maxwell (2013), qualitative research design ought to be a flexible and reflexive process, requiring continual assessment and adjustment during the study to factor in emerging developments. Therefore an iterative approach was applied, going back and forth among the different elements of the research process to reflect and refine (Maxwell, 2009). A hybrid of abduction, induction, and deduction were evident at different points in the research process, linking empirical observations with conceptual theories to enhance sense-making (Gehman et al., 2018). This approach mitigated the risk of abstraction

from a pure grounded theory approach (Blanche et al., 2006; Maxwell, 2013; Saunders et al., 2007), further supported by Wengraf (2001), who argued against a solely inductive approach and encouraged particular attentiveness to researcher conceptual frameworks. Moreover, Saunders et al. (2007) cautioned that grounded theory potentially risks a lengthy unfocussed process. Therefore, a purely inductive grounded theory approach was deemed inappropriate for this study, considering subject nascency and complexity.

Methodological fit was deemed important in ensuring cohesion toward a robust theoretical contribution (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). A methodological fit assessment with Edmondson and McManus's (2007) recommendations for nascent studies demonstrated commensurability for all research components, shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: METHODOLOGICAL FIT FOR NASCENT STUDIES

Research components	Methodological approach	Fit with Edmondson and McManus's (2007) recommendations for nascent studies
Research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended inquiry about the phenomenon • Exploratory, focussed on unpacking meaning • Not seeking to prove causality 	✓
Study type, data collection, and data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative study • Data collection through semi-structured interviews • Analysis using thematic categorization and coding toward pattern identification 	✓
Constructs, measures, and theoretical contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involved new constructs • No emphasis on formal measures • A suggestive theory intended to inspire further research 	✓

3.3 Data collection

A multi-method data collection approach was applied, comprising:

1. Email pre-work submissions in advance of each interview.
2. Hermeneutical phenomenological semi-structured leader interviews.
3. Two separately sampled focus group facilitations to triangulate findings.

This is discussed in further detail below.

3.3.1 Sampling strategy and descriptive statistics

The total study sample size from both interviews and focus groups was forty participants, comprising twenty-five and fifteen participants respectively. Maxwell (2009) argued that qualitative research typically involves smaller samples, enabling greater depth of understanding of unique context behind individual meanings, being less concerned than the quantitative research need for generalisable conclusions through large samples. For example, Thakadipuram's (2010) comparable wholeness study applied a total sample size of only ten leaders. However, such a small sample size may inhibit a robust presentation of the concept through low diversity of perspectives. Thus the sample size for this study was considered adequate, being well above the typically accepted norm for similar qualitative phenomenological studies of ten or less individuals (Beitin, 2012; Hanna & Mwale, 2017). An interview sample size of twenty-five enabled greater breadth and richness of individual insights, while mitigating risks from an overly large sample of dilution, saturation, and compromised depth of individual insights (Beitin, 2012; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Maxwell, 2009).

As the two focus groups served as findings triangulation, a smaller sample size was applied of 25% of the interview sample size. Thus, each focus group comprised a minimum of seven participants, totalling fifteen participants (seven and eight participants in each group respectively). At double the recommended total of six and exceeding 50% of the interview sample size, this strategy mitigated the risk of not meeting the minimum through late cancellations, which Bryman and Bell (2003) flagged as a common risk. However, there was full attendance in both focus groups. Moreover, each focus group fell within the recommended range of three to ten participants, with more than eight found to be unwieldy (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Non-probability purposive sampling was applied, utilising my networks and coaching database in selecting diverse participants likely to provide authentic insights into the concept (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a; Ramsook, 2018; Saunders et al., 2007). This approach was supported by Jones and Bartunek's (2021) emphasis on personal connection as providing a valuable window to insights, less likely to be uncovered by a positivist distance approach. Snowball sampling was found to be unnecessary, being more applicable to limited access contexts. However, one case of snowball sampling occurred when a participant recommended another leader for inclusion, due to such leader's

interest in spirituality, whom I thus included based on this and different leadership experience as an international cricket coach. Participants were not restricted to any particular age, ethnicity, religion, gender, or geographical location, but were drawn from diverse backgrounds and locations, facilitating representativeness and richness of insight (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a).

The interview selection criteria aimed at drawing experienced leaders from different walks of life, interested in holistic personal development and/or spirituality. Adhering to Pratt's (2008) recommendation to explain context rationale, the reason for sampling leaders specifically was based on the identified problem in the world of leadership greed, the need for more leadership studies within workplace spirituality (R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022), and the assumption that wholeness in leaders would likely have a greater impact in furthering wholeness at macro-levels in countering greed. Leaders were selected based on the following two criteria:

1. Leadership experience, defined for the purposes of this study as having had at least one direct report during their career, or experience with leading others, such as leaders of spiritual organisations. Since the criteria also included leaders who report to leaders, for example, directors to CEOs, and CEOs to shareholders, follower perspectives were naturally encompassed as well, thus enhancing concept exploration from different angles.
2. Leaders on a personal development journey of self-awareness, for example, through coaching, formal studies with a personal development focus, and/or who displayed spiritual inclinations such as altruism, integrity, compassion, and/or dedication to a spiritual path. It was assumed that such leaders were more likely to understand the concept in providing meaningful data.

The sampling strategy drew leaders from corporates, spiritual organisations, entrepreneurship, and NGOs *inter alia*. This encouraged diverse perspectives around a universal phenomenon for representativeness (Beitin, 2012; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a), versus restriction to a single organisational or industry context. The interview sample successfully achieved a holistic diversity of contexts, encompassing leaders from seven different locations (Durban, Cape Town, Harare, London, Warrington, Florida, and Rishikesh), thirteen different r/s traditions (see Figure 5), four nationalities (South African, British, Indian, and Zimbabwean), five age categories (ranging from 36 to 80 years old), and fifteen sectors (see Figure 5). The sample also reflected racial and gender diversity (Appendix C). Participants largely comprised a senior leadership level as intended, including CEOs, managing directors (“MD” s),

executive directors, and senior managers. Also included were two monks who head spiritual organisations. Detailed individual profiles are shown in Appendix C.

Significantly for this study, selecting participants across different r/s wisdom traditions, or none at all, enabled a multi-faceted understanding of wholeness and the Vedāntic constructs. This approach also mitigated the risk of confirmation bias, while authentically exploring whether the Vedāntic constructs were considered meaningful for wholeness outside a Vedāntic context. The majority of participants were Christian (36%). Only two participants, monks trained in the Vedāntic tradition, had explicit theoretical and experiential Vedantic knowledge, while the rest did not. The spiritual and sector distributions are shown in Figure 5 below. Descriptions are as provided by participants, including the term ‘Universal spirituality’ which was a popular description.

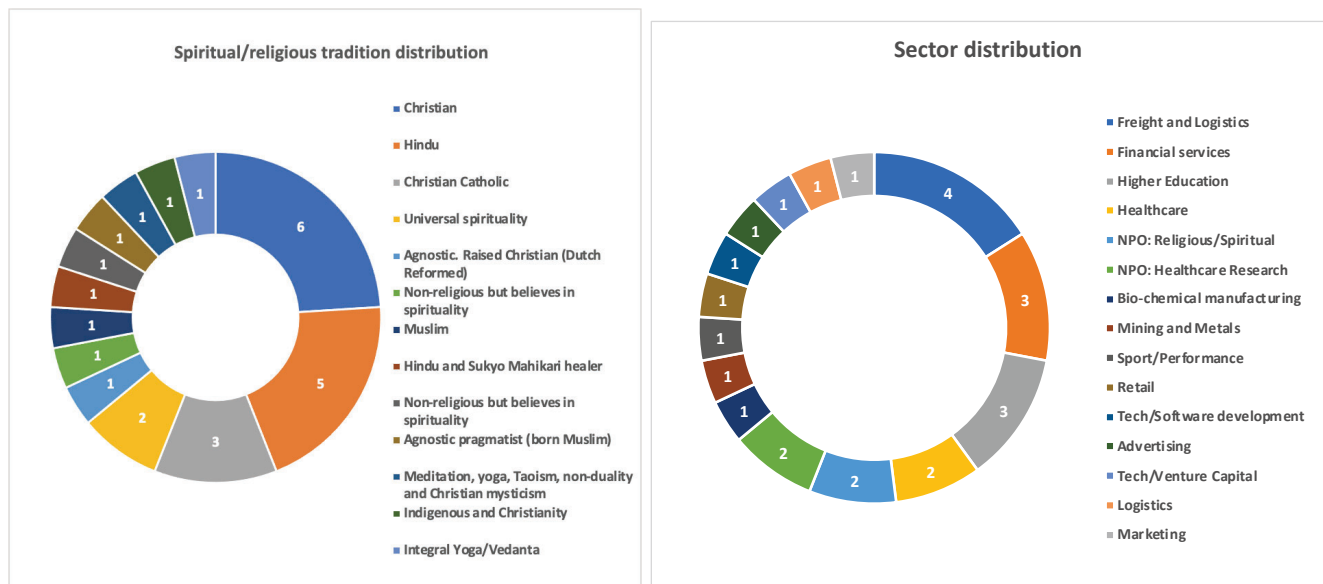


FIGURE 5: INTERVIEWEE SPIRITUAL TRADITION AND SECTOR DISTRIBUTION

The two focus groups comprised junior employees and managers by intentional research design, which enhanced methodological and data triangulation through perspective variation (Beitin, 2012; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a). Respondents were freshly sampled for each focus group and were distinct from the interview group in level of organisational seniority. This captured employee perspectives in terms of triangulating interview findings. The focus groups were diverse across r/s traditions (46% Christian, 26% Hindu, with the rest split between panentheism and universal spirituality); gender (67% female, 33% male); and race (47% white, 33% Indian and 20% Coloured/Khoi). Respondents were from seven

different geographical locations, including Dubai, Windhoek, Richards Bay, and Benoni, not represented in the interview sample, in addition to Durban and Cape Town.

3.3.2 Data collection: Pre-work and semi-structured interviews

Data collection comprised twenty-five hermeneutical phenomenological semi-structured leader interviews, together with advance pre-work email submissions by each participant. The pre-work comprised advance completion of descriptive statistics and the first two questions in the interview guide (Appendix B). These questions asked participants for their understanding of the meaning of wholeness and each of the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy. The interview guide was emailed to participants in advance, together with the study participation invitation, and consent to participate form. On receipt of signed consent forms, interviews were pre-scheduled at participants' convenience. Participants were requested to email their pre-work to me by the day before each interview. This allowed more than sufficient time for completion, which encouraged participation. All participants submitted pre-work except one (see Chapter 4).

The inclusion of pre-work in the data collection design enhanced the quality of insights by enabling advance reflection and articulation by participants of their thoughts. This was particularly relevant in light of the concept and constructs being relatively unexplored phenomena. Some participants went the extra mile and answered the entire interview guide in advance. Participants appreciated the opportunity for advance reflection and found it beneficial, as shared in Chapter 4. Advance receipt of participant answers also enabled advance researcher reflection on participant answers. This facilitated richer, semi-structured interviews by enabling probing to further unpack meaning. Moreover, the pre-work enabled interview efficiency and mitigated the risk of running over time, a particularly relevant consideration, given the sample profile of senior, time-pressed leaders. The pre-work also meant that participants independently answered questions free of researcher presence, which enhanced data trustworthiness.

An in-depth, semi-structured interviewing approach is considered conducive to an exploratory hermeneutical qualitative study, in allowing for co-creation (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Ramsook, 2018; Robinson & Kerr, 2015) and engaged participation (Given, 2012). This approach enabled probing for understanding and deeper insights into background meanings through open-ended questioning (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Lillrank, 2012; Saunders et al., 2007). In this way, the interviews were regarded as hermeneutic occurrences (Robinson & Kerr, 2015). This aligned to postmodernism (Borer

& Fontana, 2012), congruent with the epistemological humanistic stance of an interpretive paradigm, where participants were regarded as co-researcher “*experts in their own experience*” (Tuohy et al., 2013, p. 20), in contrast to a “*detached observer*” functionalist positivist approach (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 195; Jones & Bartunek, 2021). Johnson and Rowlands (2012) went so far as to liken in-depth interviewing to a teacher-student way of relating, the teacher being the participant, and the student the researcher. However, my interview approach adopted neither the extreme of researcher as student nor that of aloof observer, but an engaged co-researcher expert stance with participants instead. This approach was supported by both interpretivist and postmodernist perspectives, which considered findings as representing subjective relative social realities, counter to positivist reductionist preoccupations with objective social laws or “objectivist illusion” (Borer & Fontana, 2012; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Jones & Bartunek, 2021, p. 337; Spilka, 1970).

Moreover, semi-structured interviews supported a natural flow of conversation, by enabling participants to share experiences in a more relaxed manner, versus a standardised fully structured questionnaire approach which is better suited to quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 2007). According to Saunders et al. (2007), semi-structured interviews are therefore favoured by exploratory researchers over structured and unstructured interviewing alternatives. Observation was deemed unsuitable, as wholeness is a complex phenomenon, and therefore not easy to observe. Further advantages of interviewing over observation included less intrusion, greater focus, and direct verbalisation of input from participants (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Interviews were pre-scheduled for an hour at mutually suitable times, with advance sharing of the interview guide and study objectives to encourage reflection and participation (Saunders et al., 2007). This was based on Saunders et al.’s (2007) experience, who found participants more likely to acquiesce to interviews if they understood the study objectives, were aware of the interview duration, and found the interview timing convenient.

3.3.3 Research instruments

According to Blanche et al. (2006), the researcher is the primary research instrument in hermeneutical qualitative research, involving engaged participation through dialogue, whilst staying true to the data by facilitating authentic concept articulation (Given, 2012). To Given's (2012) point, this was not as easy as it sounded, since it involved exploring potentially previously unarticulated meanings by participants,

in addition to being mindful of my background assumptions (Robinson & Kerr, 2015). Therefore, I applied Given's (2012) recommendation, applying *“thought about developing lines of inquiry in ways that will allow for extending, disconfirming, and/or expanding” my understanding, to help “enter the hermeneutic circle in the most propitious way”* (p. 3). The pre-work assisted in this regard, as well as not providing participants with construct definitions. There was less emphasis on adopting a detached positivist stance, favouring a connection with participants instead (Jones & Bartunek, 2021). However, a balance between empathy and distanciation, supported by non-judgemental listening, was applied to uncover less obvious contextual insights (Blanche et al., 2006; Lillrank, 2012).

Increased reflexivity in the research world finds acknowledgement that the researcher is inherently part of the interview process, and that there can be no separation between knowledge and the knower (Lillrank, 2012). This is aligned to Vedāntic philosophy (Nisreysananda, 2005). Researcher experiential knowledge is hence advocated as being immensely valuable to a hermeneutical study and incorporation is encouraged (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Maxwell, 2009). Therefore, creating a safe and relaxed interview space for participants to share was facilitated by leveraging, rather than suppressing, my experience as an executive coach and yoga/meditation teacher (Jones & Bartunek, 2021). These skills supported intimacy and rapport which N. James and Busher (2012) and Johnson and Rowlands (2012) deemed as key to building trust in in-depth interviewing, the latter likening the process to a conversation between friends but with a pragmatic aim. The importance of establishing rapport was also echoed by N. James and Busher (2012) who, relevantly for this study, explored ways in which the researcher could achieve this when using online interviewing. These included sending a personalised advance welcome email letter to participants outlining research aims and information (N. James & Busher, 2012), which I incorporated. Additionally, non-judgementalism is particularly important in allowing for the lived experiences participants to shine through, unimpeded by imposition of researcher perspectives, along with respect for the inner and expressed world of the respondent (Given, 2012; Lillrank, 2012), in much the same way that coaching requires.

According to scholars, not only is researcher experiential knowledge becoming less stigmatised, but is increasingly acknowledged as offering advantages over novices, enabling such a researcher to identify deeper nuances of meaning in participant data, with a shorter learning curve in the interviewing process (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Robinson & Kerr, 2015). However, preconceived notions and assumptions can risk influencing data integrity, and my own integrity and reflective

processes were important in managing this (Finlay, 2012; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Robinson & Kerr, 2015).

A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions formulated around the research questions comprised the secondary research instrument (Appendix B). This aided interview focus on the study objectives (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007). Care was taken to ensure that the guide was logically sequenced and easily understandable, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2007). An open-ended question format was recommended for exploratory qualitative studies because it enables greater freedom of insight-sharing (Blanche et al., 2006; Edmondson & McManus, 2007). I was thus encouraged by Johnson and Rowlands's (2012) recommendation to “*go with the flow*”, while assertively guiding the interview back on track as necessary, a skill which I was comfortable with through my coaching experience (p. 12).

3.3.4 Data collection platform

Data collection was conducted fully online, which ensured COVID-19 pandemic safety. The pre-work was submitted via email, while interviews and focus group sessions were conducted via Zoom. Online focus groups offered particular advantage over in person, as participants had the option to remain anonymous by keeping their videos off or changing their online name, thereby encouraging inclusive participation (N. James & Busher, 2012). However most focus group participants felt safe and comfortable to voluntarily switch on videos, which encouraged better group discussion and connection.

Although Saunders et al. (2007) seemed unconvinced about researcher ability to connect with participants through online interview platforms, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which inspired widespread use of technology, proved virtual interviewing to be just as effective as in-person (Mallen, 2020; Ungtrakul et al., 2020), showing such reticence to be outdated. For example, Mallen (2020) praised the use of virtual platforms in medical general practice research during the pandemic, citing benefits as including greater access to geographically dispersed participants, convenience, and clearer transcription through better recordings. My experience concurred with these findings, having used online platforms extensively for coaching during the pandemic years.

Similarly, Hanna and Mwale (2017) found that online data collection overcame many of the challenges of in-person interviews such as scheduling inconveniences, discomfort of personal sharing, and impaired

recording quality due to noisy outside disturbances. Moreover, the wearing of masks for pandemic safety was another factor to consider in procuring clear speech recordings, being not applicable to online. Virtual interviews were found particularly suitable for studies seeking to understand a social phenomenon with potentially difficult questions, in affording physical researcher distance while maintaining interview intimacy (Hanna & Mwale, 2017; N. James & Busher, 2012). Moreover, individuals who are reticent by nature, feel more comfortable to engage online versus in person (N. James & Busher, 2012), which was congruent with my experience, particularly with the focus groups.

Online risks included impaired internet connection (Hanna & Mwale, 2017), participant internet accessibility, and electricity interruptions in South Africa due to load-shedding. I used a fibre wi-fi connection, Zoom licence, and uninterrupted power supply to ensure stable connectivity. Participant profiles as leaders meant ease of access to good wi-fi connectivity. Interviews were recorded using Zoom, with advance written participant consent, supported by note-taking, to ensure factual and accurate transcriptions toward meticulous data analysis (Bailey, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Saunders et al., 2007). Two recording devices were used, mitigating the risk of technical problems: Zoom via a laptop, and a mobile phone voice recorder. Both recordings were key-coded and stored on a password-protected database (OneDrive) to maintain data security.

3.3.5 Efficacy testing: Pilot interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted testing appropriateness of the interview guide (Hanna & Mwale, 2017), and interviewing approach, to fortify the effectiveness of the research instruments and data collection design (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The first interview was conducted via an audio-only WhatsApp call. The participant was a Christian counsellor and associate professor at a US-based Christian university. The interview guide was shared in advance, requiring pre-submission of the first two answers, followed by the interview. The participant ably answered all questions in his own understanding, albeit having no background in Vedānta and belonging to a different spiritual tradition. This was particularly useful in testing whether participants from various backgrounds could relate to the concept and its constructs, in providing their own meanings. It demonstrated that the participant did not find the concept or constructs to be esoteric. However, the interview guide was found to have too many questions. This led to a time overrun of fifteen minutes. Two extraneous questions were subsequently removed as a result which made the interview guide more focussed and concise.

The second pilot study was conducted a few weeks later with the improved interview guide, this time using Zoom audio and video. The participant was a commodities trader for an international company, with no direct reports, and also a yoga teacher with knowledge of both Vedānta and Buddhism. As with the first participant, the interview guide was shared in advance, requiring pre-work. The shortened interview guide offered greater efficacy this time in terms of flow, efficiency, and clarity, aiding in completion within the hour, despite additional probing of perspectives. When asked to feedback on the process, the participant said that he found the pre-work helpful in enabling advance reflection and preferred my video on throughout the interview. I thus kept my video on for all interviews and used Zoom. Overall, both pilots helped improve and confirm efficacy of the data collection design.

3.3.6 Triangulation: Focus groups

Post interview data analysis, triangulations were conducted through two different focus group facilitations to present and validate findings. The focus groups enabled both data and methodological triangulation checks for congruency and disparity of findings (Beitin, 2012). Since these participants comprised independent samples of junior employees, this enabled data triangulation through different perspectives, whilst the group session format served as methodological triangulation to individual interviews (Beitin, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007). Triangulation supported the credibility of primary data results by enabling a robust cross check between different sample findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007). I maintained a semi-structured approach, ensuring anchorage in study objectives, while adopting a facilitator style, as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007). The focus groups sessions were an hour each, pre-scheduled at lunch time, with advance sharing of study objectives and a short findings pre-read, to encourage reflection and participation (Saunders et al., 2007). Although completed on the hour, participants in both focus groups chose to stay on for thirty minutes after, continuing the discussion due to topic interest, while some also emailed me further input thereafter.

3.3.7 Research ethics

All ethical research considerations as stipulated in the UCT Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Handbook were complied with. Data collection commenced post receipt of UCT ethics clearance and signed interview consent from participants (Appendix A). No risk of harm was anticipated from the research. Participant concerns around confidentiality were allayed upfront, with the assurance that

confidentiality and identity anonymity would be upheld through key codes (Saunders et al., 2007). Permission was sought before recording in the consent form. Interview recordings were kept secure and confidential in a password protected OneDrive database using key codes. The interview guide (Appendix B) was shared in advance, so that participants were cognisant of the nature of the study. Covid-19 risks were not applicable as data collection was conducted online.

3.4 Data analysis processes

My data analysis process comprised two stages:

1. Conversion of data recordings into transcripts.
2. An iterative three-tier process of thematic analysis, categorisation, and coding.

These are described in further detail below.

3.4.1 Data transcription

The first stage of my data analysis process involved data transcription to facilitate the iterative rigour of systematic data analysis, whilst providing a robust audit trail. However, a disadvantage of manual transcription is significant time and energy consumption, with each transcript taking up to ten hours, negatively impacting research timelines and detracting from analysis focus due to fatigue (Bailey, 2008; Da Silva, 2021; Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore, to increase both efficiency and effectiveness of the research process, I explored artificial intelligence (“AI”) solutions, and selected Otter.ai online transcription software, based on reasonable costs, positive researcher reviews, and a successful pilot interview pre-test.

Interview and focus group Zoom recordings were uploaded to my password protected Otter.ai account, enabling swift AI transcription within fifteen minutes of upload. To protect participant anonymity, recording labels were key coded using P1, P2, and so on, with no actual names, while audio-only recordings were uploaded, not video. I found Otter.ai to be both reputable and affordable, with strict privacy policies and data access controls. Moreover, while outsourcing transcription to a human service provider presents potential data privacy risks (Da Silva, 2021), Otter.ai has no third party human involvement.

However, whilst Otter.ai provided a base level of accuracy, AI transcriptions are far from perfect and manual transcription was not eliminated in producing trustworthy transcripts. Therefore, I treated the outputs from Otter.ai as Stage 1 transcription. I then applied a Stage 2 transcription, which entailed manual line by line transcript review and editing against audio recordings, to ensure accuracy. I conducted this on Otter.ai, aided by the synchronised audio-transcript editing function, which also enabled deeper data immersion (Bailey, 2008; Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, I inserted the participant pre-work data onto the first page of each transcript, clearly labelling it as such so that the coding for each participant would have a complete audit trail back to transcript. Once complete, each transcript was downloaded to my password protected cloud-based OneDrive platform, with key code file labelling to protect participant confidentiality.

Transcription is considered an inherently interpretive and data reductive process, since it is not realistically possible to fully capture all complex nuances of human interactions (Bailey, 2008). Hence, decisions have to be made regarding the interpretation, representation, and level of data detail in line with study aims (Bailey, 2008). For this study, my transcription focussed on capturing relevant verbal cues, such as pauses, laughs, or emphases, as an aid to accurately interpreting data meaning (Bailey, 2008). Since Otter.ai does not capture such cues, these were manually inserted, where relevant, during the Stage 2 transcription process. Visual cues, such as physical gestures and room layout, were descoped as less relevant for this study, since the study was focussed on phenomenologically exploring the inner world and life experiences of participants (Bailey, 2008). I completed transcriptions within a week of each interview, which swift AI-supported transcription facilitated. This enabled clearer recall of other potentially important information, such as relevant context factors, and enhanced reflexivity, as well as on-going iterative data immersion and coding. A swift ongoing transcription approach also enabled refinement of the interview guide after fifteen interviews, to enhance data collection.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis, categorisation, and coding

The categorisation process is understood in qualitative research as inherently including coding decisions and patterns by the researcher through one lens, while another researcher may pick up the same data set and see different patterns (Grodal et al., 2021). Therefore the applied process of categorisation needs to be explicit and justifiably supported directly by the data (Grodal et al., 2021). The data analysis and

categorisation processes are detailed in this sub-chapter, whilst supporting data is presented together with codes and sub-codes in Chapter 4.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding, a classic interpretive phenomenology discovery method, involving the expression of “*meaningful patterns, stances of the participants, or concerns*” (Given, 2012, p. 4). I used ATLAS-ti, a qualitative data analysis software platform, to support my thematic data categorisation, coding, and analysis processes, because it provided an effective repository and methodical audit trail in working with transcripts, extensive search functionality, integrated researcher memo-taking, multi-dimensional data manoeuvring, and visual network data displays (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Paulus, 2018; Smit, 2014; Vicary et al., 2017). Such software does not eliminate the role of the researcher in the coding and thematic categorisation data analysis processes, but serves as a tool, offering a balance of proximity and distance between researcher and data for effective analysis (Smit, 2014; Vicary et al., 2017).

Post transcription, interview transcripts were uploaded onto ATLAS-ti. As with transcription, I did this throughout the process, rather than collectively at the end, to enable ongoing dynamic coding and analysis. This iterative process of working with the data, enabled me to identify emerging themes, refine the interview guide, and explore these accordingly in ensuing interviews. My thematic categorisation process involved the identification and integration of common themes from transcripts to enable the development of theories pertaining to patterns and relationships (Saunders et al., 2007). I applied a hybrid ‘template analysis’ approach (Saunders et al., 2007), using terms from both existing theory and participant data to generate codes. This is a typical combined deductive-inductive approach that allowed for flexibility and structure in the data analysis process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach mitigated Strauss and Corbin’s (1998, as cited in Saunders et al., 2007) argument that a purely template analysis categorisation approach risks a basis of existing understanding versus participant meaning. Moreover, the majority of codes were data-derived, with only three theory-derived codes, namely the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy.

The integration of data-driven codes with theory-derived codes was guided by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid thematic coding approach and Grodal et al. (2021)’s analysis of categorisation moves. Initial theory-formulated codes, derived directly from the research questions, formed over-

arching or superordinate categories to create an organised structure in ATLAS-ti, as recommended by Grodal et al. (2021), for example, ‘Meaningfulness of wholeness for leadership’. I then applied open coding to extract data-driven codes and sub-codes from the transcripts. These were derived from a systematic line by line review and unitisation process of each transcript, comprising unit data of sentences or paragraphs, which I systematically coded using descriptive titles (Saunders et al., 2007). My process of analysis was iterative throughout the process and involved a three-tier process of “generating”, “refining”, and “stabilising” codes or “categories” as recommended by Grodal et al., (2021, p. 596). This is depicted in Figure 6.

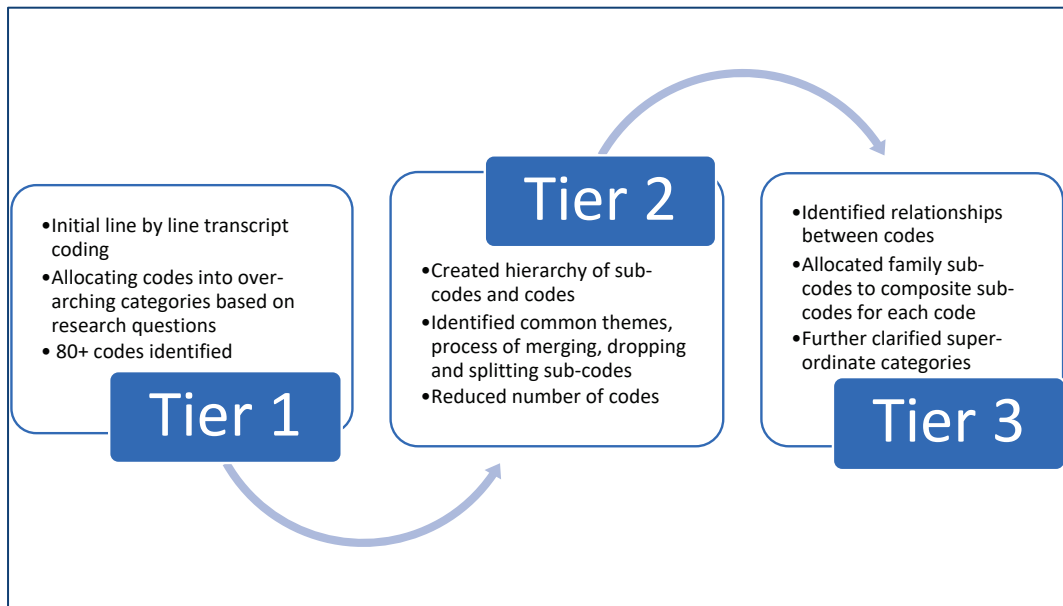


FIGURE 6: THREE-TIER CODING AND CATEGORISATION PROCESS

Tier 1 coding involved my initial review of transcripts and line by line coding. This yielded an unwieldy number of codes, which is typical of the initial coding phase (Grodal et al., 2021). Tier 2 coding involved “merging”, “dropping”, “splitting” and “relating” categories or sub-codes, based on Grodal et al.'s (2021) comprehensive framework of analytical categorisation moves (p. 593). My process of merging sub-codes involved identifying family sub-codes and linking these to a composite sub-code. For example I treated various virtues like integrity, wisdom, compassion and so on, as family sub-codes. I related these to the composite sub-code ‘Greater virtues-orientation’, within the overall code ‘Personal character development through virtues-orientation’. I dropped codes based on low frequency of occurrence and relevancy (Grodal et al., 2021). For example, one of the earlier interview participants mentioned consciousness in relation to drugs, therefore I created a sub-code ‘Drugs’ under the ‘Consciousness’

code. However, as he was the only participant to do so and it was a passing mention bearing little relevance to the research topic, this sub-code was dropped.

As recommended by Grodal et al. (2021), I also focussed on “puzzles” in the data, or what was surprising. One example was experiential descriptions by some participants of consciousness as a higher ‘inner voice’ (see Chapter 4.1.3). Another example of relating data were associations from some participants between consciousness and wisdom in decision-making. Post conclusion of data triangulation with the focus groups, a Tier 3 coding analysis was conducted to stabilise categories and synthesise findings, which also entailed renaming some categories to be more reflective of the data. I also generated “thematic count” tables (Tables 3 and 9 in Chapter 4), providing data numerical analyses of thematic code frequency in supporting the coding of key themes, as recommended by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014a) and Pratt (2008, p. 486). While useful toward data transparency and analytical decision-making (Pratt, 2009), cautioned the risks of numerical analyses as including possible positivist perceptions and inadequate participant representation. However, I presented the thematic count tables by participant, thereby showing participant representativeness, i.e., coding themes were calculated across participants, not intra-interview.

An alternate categorisation approach was Strauss and Corbin’s axial coding, “*specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it*” (1990, as cited in Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014b, p. 12). However, I found this more appropriate to grounded theory, preferring the logic and structure of Grodal et al.’s (2021) descriptive approach as more appropriate to this study. Drawing on both Robinson & Kerr’s (2015) and Given’s (2012) guidance on conducting hermeneutical research, I was intentional about drawing out both distinctions and commonalities in the data collection and thematic coding processes. Therefore divergent data examples not conforming to expectations were consciously sought, to ensure a robust representativeness of the phenomenon (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a). I used direct quotations to ensure interpretive rigour and preserve subjective participant meanings (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), in supporting coding decisions (see Chapter 4).

Maxwell and Chmiel (2014b) cautioned against the sole use of coding, based on the risk of decontextualization through data fragmentation, and recommended complementation with connecting strategies post thematic analysis. While proving causal relationships was not a relevant focus for this

study, being more of a quantitative pre-occupation (Edmondson & McManus, 2007), I identified inter-category connections as an aid toward exploring concept meaning through uncovering potential processual relationships. These were depicted in the final model in Chapter 5.

3.4.3 Linking data to theory through tables

According to Cloutier and Ravasi (2021), tables are an effective way to “organise”, “analyse”, and “display” data, promoting trustworthiness in qualitative research (p. 115). Whilst the use of tables was criticised as being “reductionist”, Cloutier and Ravasi (2021) counter-argued tables as constituting “ontologically and epistemologically neutral” researcher “tools”, particularly useful in linking data to theory (pp. 113-114). Therefore, I used tables extensively for data organisation, analysis and display, specifically, “data source”, “concept evidence”, and “coding scheme” tables (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021, p. 128), as described below:

- A data source table, showing descriptive statistics by participant (Appendix C).
- Concept-evidence and coding scheme tables, which I merged together, showing family and composite sub-code descriptions together with supporting direct data quotations (Chapter 4).

For the data analysis process, I favoured figures over tables for depicting my methodological and coding analysis processes, as recommended by (Pratt, 2009), being a more effective visual display of the unfolding steps in assisting transparency and logic (Figure 6).

3.5 Research rigour: Trustworthiness and authenticity strategies

Reliability and validity as traditionally defined for quantitative research are deemed less relevant for qualitative research, therefore accepted qualitative-relevant criteria were applied instead, namely: trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability; and authenticity (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Ramsook, 2018). Yin (2010) outlined three main approaches toward ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research, which were incorporated as described in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: STRATEGY TO ENSURE RESEARCH TRUSTWORTHINESS

Yin's (2010) recommendations	How this was incorporated
A methodical approach. Yin (2010) asserted that “methodic-ness” avoids “unexplained bias or	Use of a semi-structured interview guide; Maxwell's (2013) interactive research design; methodological fit through

deliberate distortion in carrying out research”, minimises carelessness, and promotes study completeness (p. 20).	Edmondson and McManus's (2007) framework; application of Grodal et al.'s (2021) categorisation moves in the coding process; and Schutz's (1973) steps to ensure conceptual model rigour.
Transparency of data analysis processes.	An audit trail of documentation and analytical processes was maintained to enable independent analysis and process understanding, facilitated by ATLAS-ti (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007; Yin, 2010). The use of Figure 6 to depict steps in the methodological and data analysis processes (Pratt, 2009).
Adherence to data, by ensuring that study conclusions were based on an “explicit set of evidence” comprising actual language by participants (Yin, 2010, p. 20).	The extensive use of directly transcribed participant quotes and thick descriptions (Pratt, 2009), presented in concept-evidence and coding scheme tables in Chapter 4 (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

Credibility was addressed through data and methodological triangulation, enabling a sense-check on findings, strengthened through two different focus group discussions on different days, with a different participant profile from the interview sample (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007). Both focus groups concurred with the findings, confirming that it made sense to them in their experience. Feedback from the focus groups is shared in Chapter 4.4.

Dependability was addressed through:

- Extensive thick participant descriptions from directly transcribed recordings, adherence to a methodical approach, and robust audit trails of research processes and researcher logic, as described in Table 2 (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007; Yin, 2010).
- The use of concept-evidence and coding scheme tables to clearly depict links between data and theory (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).
- Researcher clarification of participant meanings enabled by an open-ended semi-structured interview format (Given, 2012; Saunders et al., 2007).
- Quality data through advance sharing of a semi-structured interview guide, enabling reflection (Saunders et al., 2007).

Moreover, Saunders et al. (2007) argued that non-standardised interviews often invoke even greater rigour to overcome biased perceptions from scholars who propagate quantitative research to the exclusion of other forms. A semi-structured format enabled advance sharing of interview questions, allowing participants time for reflection, which mitigated answers being governed by a prevailing mood

on the interview day. This promoted data credibility “by enabling the interviewee to consider the information being requested” (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 320) without researcher presence, particularly relevant given the uncommon nature of the concept and constructs. Pre-work also mitigated, to some extent, that respondent validation of interview transcripts (Saunders et al., 2007) was not applied, feasibility deemed unlikely due to additional time imposition on busy senior leader participants.

The use of critical incident technique where participants described relevant experiences pertaining to the concept also aided in ensuring that data was grounded in lived experience versus abstraction (Saunders et al., 2007). Imposition of researcher beliefs and perspectives onto participants was minimised by my formal training and background experience as a financial auditor, coach, and yoga teacher, in consciously applying ethical awareness, attentive listening, and a realistic degree of bracketing or *epoché* (Lillrank, 2012). Like coaching, skilful research interviewing techniques to minimise bias imposition include the use of neutral tone and open-ended questioning (Saunders et al., 2007).

Confirmability pertaining to researcher bias was supported by reflexivity and conscious awareness of assumptions through critical subjectivity, fore-structure (Maxwell, 2013; Tuohy et al., 2013), and focus group triangulations (Ramsook, 2018). I maintained a researcher journal, recording reflexivity (Maxwell, 2009), and any pertinent contextual interview factors (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a; Ramsook, 2018; Saunders et al., 2007). I included reflections and assumptions at various points in this chapter, as well as making explicit my Vedāntic knowledge, and study context in Chapter 1.2. Scholars regard researcher curiosity around what the phenomena means from participant lived experiences as an aid to objectivity and openness to fresh perspectives (Vicary et al., 2017). I found myself deeply curious and interested to explore what the Vedāntic constructs meant practically for a sample of participants with largely no Vedāntic knowledge. To this end, no definitions of wholeness or the constructs of Being, consciousness, or joy were provided to participants, allowing for representation of their own phenomenological meanings.

Maxwell (2013) asserted personal researcher experiential knowledge to be an invaluable addition of credibility and depth to research, notwithstanding critical rigour. Therefore I drew upon my coaching expertise in balancing the “hermeneutics of empathy with the hermeneutics of questioning” (Rajasinghe, 2020, p. 182), with feasible *epoché* (Lala & Kinsella, 2011). While complete *epoché* is regarded as

impossible by some scholars, such as Merleau-Ponty (Küpers, 2009), due to the intrinsic interwoven nature of ‘Beingness’ and experiencing (Lala & Kinsella, 2011; Tuohy et al., 2013), a realistic application can be beneficial toward mitigating bias risk while connecting to the unimpeded essence of the phenomenon (Vicary et al., 2017). Researcher awareness of pre-conceived notions through reflexivity is recognised as a form of *epoché* (Vicary et al., 2017). I applied reflexivity through regular reflective researcher journaling, capturing relevant experiences, feelings, and thought processes, bringing my assumptions to light in promoting learning, rigour, and transparency (Finlay, 2012; Jones & Bartunek, 2021; Küpers, 2009; Tuohy et al., 2013; Vicary et al., 2017; Yin, 2010). I used Microsoft OneNote, finding access convenience and layout flexibility conducive to regular, meaningful reflexive journaling. I also applied transcript-linked memo-taking in ATLAS-ti where relevant, albeit to a lesser extent (Paulus, 2018; Vicary et al., 2017).

Since replicability is accepted as less relevant for qualitative research due to “contextual uniqueness”, the more relevant criterion of **transferability** was applied, aided by thick descriptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 413). Therefore the emphasis was heuristic, bringing to light observations to facilitate search and discovery processes in other settings (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a). According to Maxwell and Chmiel, (2014), “*The imposition of quantitative views of generalization on qualitative research has frequently been criticized*” (p. 8). Thus, while wholeness is a universal concept (Niemic et al., 2020; Pargament et al., 2016; Thakadipuram, 2010), findings were regarded as one of many possible portrayals, rather than a conclusive version of reality. Therefore, in contrast to the realist view that qualitative research theories can apprehend social reality in totality, according to Bryman and Bell (2003), a halfway stance around realism is adopted by many qualitative researchers, who “*treat their accounts as one of a number of possible representations rather than as definitive versions of social reality*”, supported by strategies such as thick descriptions and triangulation, which was the stance in this study (p. 415).

Authenticity of findings was therefore addressed through representativeness of perspectives and thick descriptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007), evidenced by the descriptive statistics in Appendix C, and extensive data quotations in Chapter 4, respectively. According to Saunders et al. (2007), diverse participants within a sample contributes toward generalisability, a view shared by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014). Maxwell and Chmiel (2014) deplored the frequent under-rating of diversity in research, asserting that

“An important aspect of internal generalizability is adequately understanding and representing the diversity in the phenomena of interest in the setting or group of people studied” (p. 5). Therefore the study sample encompassed a diverse profile of leaders toward representativeness (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a), notably also including less spiritually active leaders. Moreover, the vast majority of both interview and focus group participants lacked explicit knowledge of Vedānta. The sample also included leaders who report to leaders, thus factoring in follower perspectives as well. The diversity in sample selection and halfway stance around realism applied in this study was congruent with a postmodernist outlook which advocates diversity, criticising “theoretical biases toward uniformity” as a threat to internal generalisability (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a, p. 5).

Moreover, the semi-structured phenomenological interview design enabled me to clarify meanings as intended by participants in representing diverse cultural concept interpretations (Saunders et al., 2007). This was supported by direct quotes to authentically show participant meanings (Bryman & Bell, 2007), minimising rejection or idealisation of lived meanings (Given, 2012). My assumption that the interviews would yield meaningful data was aided by thoughtful selection criteria, namely, leaders on a journey of spirituality and/or personal development, thus likely to understand the concept under study. Although most leaders met the requirements, one was not explicitly on a personal development or spiritual journey. This variation contributed toward sample variation for addressing methodological bias (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a), supported by two triangulation focus groups of different participants.

Interviews are at a particular point in time, and may not encompass other contexts, requiring researchers to infer meaning from the brief interaction to other aspects of the participant’s life (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a). This is known as fundamental attribution error in psychology, defined as falsely generalising a person’s behaviour to all contexts as a result of concluding such behaviour to stem from the nature of the person, whilst ignoring the features of each situation (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a). However the study was not behaviourally focussed but aimed at exploring participant concept understandings. Methodical rigour around the conceptual model was applied, by drawing from Schutz’s (1973) theory of social phenomenology as used by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) in their hybrid deductive-inductive approach, notably, the postulates of:

1. Logical consistency: applying a degree of clarity and logic to the conceptual framework and method.
2. Subjective interpretation: whereby the conceptual framework, while grounded in theory, was supported by subjective participant meanings, shown through thick descriptions.
3. Adequacy: consistency between conceptual constructs and “*those found in common-sense experience*” with a model that is “*recognizable and understood by the ‘actors’ within everyday life*” (Schutz, 1973, as cited in Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 81).

These postulates were validated as such by the focus groups, upon presentation of the model, and is further explained in Chapter 5. Maturation pertaining to impact on management style from recent events (Saunders et al., 2007) encompassed lived experiences of participants, in so far as these related to the cultivation of wholeness and meaningfulness for leadership. This was particularly evident from participant references to the COVID-19 pandemic as shared in Chapter 4.

4. RESEARCH DATA: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The study was completed in line with the research methodology described in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I present the findings from the interviews and pre-work submissions, as well as triangulation results from the focus groups. The primary research question sought to explore whether wholeness as conceptualised by Vedānta, could be meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership outside a Vedāntic context. This chapter thus set out the data and findings in the following order:

- Leaders' experiences of the meaningfulness of Being, consciousness, and joy as constructs of wholeness, outside a Vedāntic tradition.
- Leaders' perspectives on whether wholeness, as conceptualised, is meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership.
- Leaders' experiences of the enabling and detracting processes of wholeness.

The findings were presented using direct quotations to illustrate participant perspectives. To strike a balance between data and data interpretation, I presented the data using both “power quotes” in the text body, and supporting “proof quotes” in concept-evidence and coding scheme tables, as recommended by Pratt (2008, p. 501). Power quotes were exemplary quotes clearly demonstrating the findings, while proof quotes served as further support. Interviewee quotes were denoted by the key code ‘Px’, while focus group quotes were denoted using ‘Fx’ (x refers to the number assigned to each participant).

4.1 Meaningfulness of Being, consciousness, and joy outside a Vedāntic context

Twenty-four out of twenty-five interviewees (96%) clearly articulated their understandings of Being, consciousness, and joy, in relation to wholeness and found the constructs meaningful. Moreover, all fifteen participants (100%) across both focus groups agreed with the interview findings and confirmed that it made sense to them. The interviewee exception was P21, a medical research scientist director who was also the only exception in not completing the pre-work. While P21 was able to clearly explain his understanding of wholeness, consciousness, and joy, he confessed to having “no idea” what Being meant. I experienced the participant as struggling to explicitly focus on the topic at hand, constantly diverting the interview to his career passion and organisational aims, referencing the concept of “fulfilment” rather than wholeness. In the interest of research rigour, I did not presume an

interchangeable meaning between the concepts of fulfilment and wholeness, and therefore cited P21 as an exception to the findings instead. It must be noted that P21 did not explicitly disagree that wholeness and the constructs were not meaningful for leadership, he was merely unable to comment. He agreed that completing the pre-work might have provided him opportunity for reflection.

Due to the timing of the study, participants were asked at the end whether the COVID-19 pandemic had any impact on their understanding of the concept and constructs, i.e., would their answers have been different pre-pandemic. The majority answered that meanings for them would have been the same, for example, *“I don’t think my answers would have been different, to be honest”* [P5], but that *“the pandemic slowed things down”* [P2] and *“necessitated additional self-reflection, which brought it to the fore again”* [P1] with increased relevance for leadership.

My data collection design sought perspectives from diverse participants, mostly without Vedāntic knowledge or background, as shown in the descriptive statistics in Chapter 3 and Appendix C. In deconstructing whether wholeness as conceptualised was meaningful for participants, I firstly present the data pertaining to how leaders emotionally experienced and cognitively sense-made Being, consciousness, and joy to wholeness in section 4.1.1. Thereafter, I present the data on the phenomenological meanings of the constructs. A phenomenological deconstruction of the constructs is shown in Figure 7 below. Codes and sub-codes are defined and supported by data quotation tables in the ensuing sub-chapters.

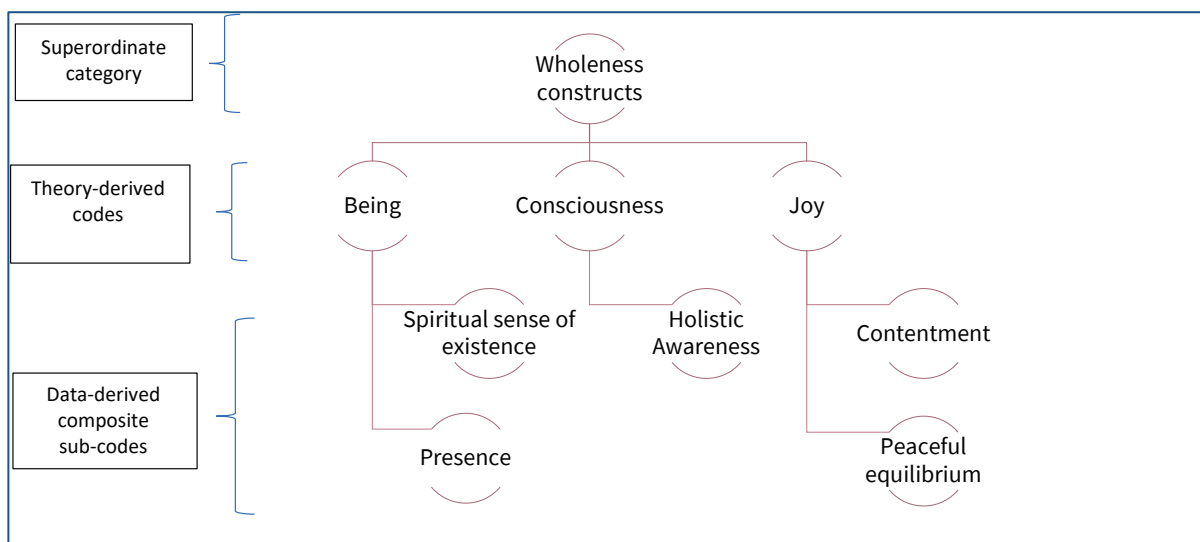


FIGURE 7: PHENOMENOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF BEING, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND JOY

A thematic count of the codes and composite sub-codes from Figure 7 showing statistical frequency of descriptions by participant, is presented in Table 3. Meanings were found to be mostly similar across participants, the main variation being the explicit incorporation of spirituality into descriptions by participants with a more active spiritual understanding.

TABLE 3: THEMATIC COUNT OF CODES AND SUB-CODES BY PARTICIPANT: WHOLENESS CONSTRUCTS

Participant	Found the constructs of Being, consciousness and joy to be meaningful to wholeness	Being		Consciousness	Joy		Explanation of '0s' - outlying participant descriptions
		Spiritual sense of existence	Presence	Holistic awareness	Contentment	Peaceful equilibrium	
P1	1	1		1		1	
P2	1		1	1	1	1	
P3	1		1	1	1		
P4	1	1		1	1		
P5	1		1	1	1	1	
P6	1	1		1	1	1	
P7	1		1	1	0	0	Playfulness
P8	1	1		1	1	1	
P9	1		1	1	1	1	
P10	1	1		1	1		
P11	1	1		1	1	1	
P12	1	1		1	1		
P13	1	1		1		1	
P14	1		1	1		1	
P15	1	1	1	1	1		
P16	1	1		1		1	
P17	1	1		1	0	0	
P18	1	1		1	1		
P19	1		1	1	1		
P20	1	1		1	1	1	
P21	0	0	0	1		1	Had "no idea"
P22	1	1		1	1		
P23	1		1	1	0	0	State of bliss
P24	1	1		1	0	0	Happy
P25	1		1	1		1	
Totals	24	15	10	25	15	13	
%	96%	60%	40%	100%	60%	52%	

4.1.1 How leaders experienced and sense-made the Vedāntic wholeness constructs

Apart from P21, all leaders felt that Being, consciousness, and joy constituted fundamental constructs of wholeness and were able to sense-make why they felt so in their own understanding. The data showed consistently that, apart from the two Vedāntic monks, these were novel constructs of wholeness for

participants, and they had never thought about wholeness this way before. For example, Muslim-born but currently ‘agnostic pragmatist’ P17’s response was: “*I have not thought about wholeness in the context of these attributes, however, it seems reasonable to conclude that a sense of wholeness would incorporate each of these elements (amongst others)*”. Moreover, the constructs were found to be meaningful and relatable by both actively spiritual and not so actively spiritual leaders. An example of the latter, CEO P14 said, “*I just think that this is a really interesting area of work. And I think the interplay between consciousness, Being, and joy has made me think around what I should be learning about*”.

Some leaders sense-made the constructs by relating it to their own spiritual and cultural traditions. One such example was P22, a Christian senior finance executive for an international mining company living in Zimbabwe. She persisted with the pre-work despite experiencing initial overwhelm, flowing into finding commonality, meaning, and insight through relating the constructs to her own African wisdom tradition constructs of “*umuntu, ngubuntu, ngabantu*”:

So Being is the nature and essence of me. So that's me without doing, without showing anything else, it's just me. And then consciousness is the state of awareness and responsiveness to one's surroundings - that's me in relation to others. And then joy is just a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. So when I was reflecting on this, when I saw the questions, I thought '*Joh, I'm in too deep, I can't do this*'. And then I just had to step back and start thinking to say, '*Okay, but let me go along with this and see where it takes me*'. So I thought of the saying '*umuntu, ngubuntu, ngabantu*' - it speaks well to the meaning of the three words in relation to wholeness, right? Because I am a person, but I am a person because of others, because I relate to the others. So if you look at Being - Being speaks to you as a person. And then '*ngubuntu, ngabantu*' speaks to your consciousness and your relationship to this to your surroundings. And then if you are in harmony, if those two are in harmony, then it creates pleasure and happiness, right? [P22].

Two distinct aspects emerged from the interviews, which were also apparent in P22’s quote above. Firstly, there seemed to be a common theme around how leaders *emotionally experienced* reflecting on the constructs of Being, consciousness and joy. This was followed by *cognitively sense-making* the constructs in their own experiential understanding to wholeness. Although these two aspects are interwoven, the distinction is that many leaders shared their reflective emotional experience of the pre-work in the interview, followed by their actual sense-making. I therefore considered both aspects relevant to the findings, since ascertaining the meaningfulness of the constructs outside a Vedāntic

context had consequently extended to include not just cognitive sense-making, but also the emotional experiencing of such constructs, thereby providing a more robust analysis. Findings for both aspects are discussed below with supporting data quotations.

Emotional experience

Like P22, many leaders confessed to struggling at first with the pre-work, sharing how they realised on reflection that the constructs made “complete sense” [P5] for them in relation to wholeness. Most said that they had never thought about wholeness this way before and would not have thought of these constructs. For P15, it was an “aha moment”. Emotions ranged from overwhelm to intrigue to curiosity to delight. P12 said: *“I loved thinking about it in that way...it allowed me the space to think about how they're all connected, and what the connection is”*. Many reported finding such reflection unexpectedly insightful and valuable. MD P10 shared how the wholeness constructs were a novel realisation for him:

When I first read the questions and I had to answer it, I was like, *‘Okay, so now we're talking about wholeness, now, we're talking about these three things’*. It took me a while to link them, you know? So it wasn't intuitive, I can tell you that. But as I started answering the questions, I was like, *‘This is obvious’* - these three things create that one thing. So these three things are the pillars of that one thing...But it wasn't obvious to me. If you had asked me, *‘What is wholeness?’*, I would have never used those three words Being, consciousness, and joy. I would have never used that... I mean when you reflect on it, it's pretty obvious. But it's not intuitive. It wasn't intuitive for me...When I read those two questions, it wasn't immediately, *‘Oh this one relates to this’*. But then I suddenly got it. [P10]

Despite some leaders feeling initial overwhelm and self-doubt at having never reflected on these constructs before in relation to wholeness, enabling time to pause and reflect brought new insight. One example was P23, a medical research scientist working directly with the COVID-19 pandemic, who experienced reflecting on the constructs as unexpectedly beneficial:

It was wonderful, actually...Because we don't sit and reflect on these things...We don't look at everything in our world and look at how they connect to each other. And this was a wonderful opportunity to do so. And of course the last two years, it's just been terrible with the pandemic...I haven't been doing the stuff that I normally do that gives me that stillness so that I can reflect on things. So I lost a little bit of connection with my inner self. So this gave me that glimpse. It gave me the window which I didn't give myself - that space to reflect...I've actually benefitted. I didn't expect to benefit. I just did...And so I think

that's a clear example of how wholeness influences leadership, influences your ability to grow through every experience. [P23]

Further data examples of how leaders emotionally experienced sense-making the constructs to wholeness, finding novelty, usefulness, and meaning, are shared in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4: HOW LEADERS EXPERIENCED SENSE-MAKING THE CONSTRUCTS TO WHOLENESS

How leaders experienced sense-making the constructs	Supporting data: Quotations
<p>Had never thought about it before in relation to wholeness. Found it useful to deconstruct wholeness in this way.</p>	<p><i>I've never really thought about them in their individual categories. So, it was interesting getting your questions...But as I was thinking about it, and reflecting and then obviously responding to the pre-work, it made complete sense that this is kind of all together. And in a way, I suppose, there's blurred lines between all of them, but they all contribute to this sense of wholeness. And I think if you were missing elements of that, I think it would impact how 'whole' people feel, in particular stages of where they're at, right? So, I've never thought of it in its individual context. I mean, I'm familiar with each one of them. You know, you spend time reflecting on each one of them, like 'Am I being aware of what I'm doing, how am I feeling? Am I in the moment? Or am I just scurrying through everything that I'm doing'? But I've never tied them back to, wow, when these stack up, that is how I feel. I feel complete, you know? I know what ingredients I need to make myself feel that way. Which I don't think everyone always thinks about... Because in order to feel joy, you need to be doing certain things. In order to be in that place of being present versus just doing things, you need to be doing certain things which gets you to that point. And of course, being mindful and conscious about everything you're doing, how are you saying it, your impact -again, for me, there's a foundational element - if that's not in place, I can't bring those elements, and as a result, bring my whole self to what I'm doing or where I'm at...But I hadn't broken it down. I hadn't thought about it the way you'd asked the question, which I think was incredibly useful. [P5]</i></p>
<p>Had never thought about it before. Discovered insight and meaning for leadership and authentic self.</p>	<p><i>I never really thought about it before. When I saw your questions, I thought, 'Hmm okay, I need to think about this'. It didn't just occur to me. Obviously, in my spiritual journey and my reading up and my experiencing Being and joy and consciousness - they are all topics that are explored in various different contexts from different angles. But to see it together and side by side with leadership, was for me an 'aha moment'. Because I've always said, and I will continue to say it, one needs to be aware of oneself, your cognitive biases, ego. You know, I did a lot of work with my ego to understand myself, impact on others. So when I saw the words, Being and consciousness and joy I smiled, and I thought, 'Oh, wow, this is so amazing'. Because we don't want to sound too esoteric or they'll say, 'Oh, you're into mumbo-jumbo when you're in a leadership role'. But these are all powerful concepts that impact self. And self is what you need to bring to the table when you are a leader. Authentic self. [P15]</i></p>

<p>Struggled initially to define the constructs but found that they made sense in relation to wholeness. Joy, particularly, was a new insight.</p>	<p><i>I think conceptually they make sense because there's quite a lot of overlap between the three. I battled to really define them individually. I actually found wholeness easier to define than each of the individual elements. So where you asked questions around the individual elements, I found those quite tricky to define, because I find wholeness as a feeling rather than something that - like I said, I haven't really applied myself to the theory of it in any great degree...Because when I reflected specifically on joy, I was thinking about how joy is different from happiness... I would not have necessarily considered joy. Being and consciousness, I think I probably would have seen as part of wholeness. Joy - I would not have had the mental model to think around that as being part of wholeness. I would have known there needs to be a positive feeling, but I wouldn't have defined it as joy necessarily. But it is the only thing that makes sense. [P14]</i></p>
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Cognitive sense-making

Once past the emotional experience of reflecting on something new to them, leaders were clearly able to cognitively sense-make the constructs to wholeness, supporting the inclusion of Being, consciousness, and joy as constructs of wholeness. For example, human resource executive P2’s exposition was:

Being is a state of staying in the present, consciousness is the awareness of your state, and joy is the result of having the awareness of your Being. These constructs are sign posts as to how close one is to the fullness of wholeness. Wholeness to me would a calibration of the three constructs in reaching a state of harmony and balance within yourself. [P2]

Retail general manager P11’s description reflected her spiritual Christian understanding:

My Being and purpose in life is linked to following God and being Christian. Consciousness, being present, is a critical part of being Christian. Not living in the past or the future but for the now, is the only real way to experience God and the great purpose He gives me day to day. If I am not conscious, then I miss the moment to live my purpose. This is not easy to practice though. Its relationship with wholeness is critical as I can’t ever be better if I am not aware of my short-comings or don’t use my empathy and intuition in my relationship with others. Joy, for me joy and peace are linked. If I am whole despite my shortcomings and challenges, I rest in the peace and joy given by the Lord. This is at its peak when nothing is going well, or things are most challenging. I also believe in God knowing his plans for me, so when I am disappointed, I still find peace and joy knowing that He is in control. [P11]

While P11 described consciousness as both integral to being Christian and to wholeness, she said that “*Consciousness is not something that is spoken about specifically*” in Christianity. She felt that

consciousness “*probably revealed itself more in the last five years*” and was therefore “*much more newer to me than joy*” [P11].

The spiritual import of these particular constructs of wholeness were also understood by less spiritually active leaders. For example, P1, an agnostic US-based senior IT executive, observed that while wholeness might comprise other “categories” such as “health”, “security”, or “being a good parent”, he felt that fulfilling these categories would not necessarily result in wholeness as conceptualised through Being, consciousness, and joy:

And again, I mean, the categories can vary per individual, but I would argue that pretty much everyone will need health and security, like Maslow's pyramid kind of thing, right? At the very least. However, I don't think that's enough...I think you can have all of those things, and you can still not have Being, consciousness, and joy. So, I suppose it contributes, but it's not necessarily the whole. I mean if you think of, well I'm stereotyping, but like a Wall Street banker-type that might believe he or she has all of those things. But if you have to now zoom out and be a third-party observer, and you see what motivates that person, and how that person executes, you can, hypothetically deduce that, fundamentally, they're still driven by money and greed, and is a capitalist creature - as opposed to a Zen Buddhist monk who'd go at the other end of the spectrum. So, I suppose what I'm saying is that having those categories is helpful, but not necessarily all that you need for Being, consciousness, and joy. [P1]

P1’s observation alluded to the Vedāntic constructs as specifically addressing the spiritual dimension of wholeness, whilst the other categories do not. Further examples are shared in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5: HOW LEADERS COGNITIVELY SENSE-MADE THE CONSTRUCTS TO WHOLENESS

Supporting data quotations
<p><i>Being seems to me to be “existence in time and space” and part of wholeness, i.e., the thought, feeling or person needs to exist before they can be whole. Consciousness is the awakening or awareness of Being, and one cannot be “whole” without it. Joy seems to be the emotional response to when “wholeness” is reached or “touched”. [P4]</i></p>
<p><i>Being means the Soul. Consciousness means the presence of the mind with intentionality of action. Joy means a state of peace. The three concepts are the constitutive elements of wholeness...Because I think, firstly, if we look at Being, it is for us to understand what it represents. That our souls are our own Being - our fullness is in our souls, right? And of course, then if you want to be whole, you then need to work on those concepts. And then joy becomes the outcome of that process of Being... by the time you reach the point of joy, you are at the point where then you are whole... I speak about the three R's. And how I speak about the three R's is that the first R is this idea of 'rekindling' the dying embers of the soul. And that is basically the first R. And then the second R is 'rehabilitating' the soul, because of the journeys that we go through and the brokenness. And once you have done those two, then the soul 'radiates', right? And once then the soul radiates, only then you can flourish ad</i></p>

infinitum. So for me, by the time you flourish ad infinitum, you are whole. And that is how then I related the building blocks of wholeness. [P13]

Wholeness I guess is a combination of being present, conscious, and having a deep sense of joy. These feelings are present when I feel love for myself and love for the world around me. [P14]

...being able to understand your Being, and how you are connected to so much more than just your physical self or your body, is one aspect of Being. And then consciousness is linked to that because you've got to be conscious of your mind, your body, and the environment and those around you and how all of those pieces create your reality and your experiences. And for me, then joy comes as a result of the environmental context - your conscious awareness and being attuned to all that's happening around you. To be able to identify and take in those moments of joy, those moments of contentment, or happiness, as they come up and as you experience them. [P12]

4.1.2 Being: Phenomenological meanings

Twenty-two out of twenty-five leaders (88%) found Being to be a fundamental construct of wholeness. For example, P25 described Being as, “*Living in the present which is fundamental to wholeness*”. From the three leaders who did not, P21 was unable to explain what Being meant, while P1 and P10 felt that the construct of Being on its own could not result in wholeness, because in their understanding it implied a state of aimlessly existing without purpose. For example, P10 said, “*Being to me means existing or living. If a person is just existing or living, they cannot be experiencing wholeness*”. P1 explained further:

Just existing without the need to exist for a purpose. A Zen master or deeply spiritual monk comes to mind that doesn't feel the need to participate in worldly pursuits and is at peace just with existing. Personally, I struggle with this concept. I tie a lot of my self-respect to being worthy, e.g., being a good provider for my family, being a good father, being respected by those important to me, being seen as competent and intelligent, and so on. If I had to lose some or all of these things, I'm not sure I'd be content just Being – I would probably have significant inner turmoil and seek new ways in which to be worthy. That is probably an evolutionary thing though – you want to feel valued to the tribe to avoid getting kicked out, and thus improve your odds of survival. [P1]

For P1 and P10, consciousness and joy were thus necessary additional constructs, and they clearly related all three constructs to wholeness when grouped together. This was interesting because Vedāntic theory insists on clustering all three constructs together, yet neither leader was from a Vedāntic background. This supported the meaningfulness for wholeness of presenting all three constructs together.

Leaders with a more active spiritual life and theological beliefs described Being in terms of their spiritual identity or existence. For example P11 said, “*I find my Being and daily existence rooted in being a Christ follower. Each day I transgress but He accepts me past my shortfalls*”. Others with a less active spiritual life described Being as a state of presence, such as P14, “*Being for me is the ability to be present, open with no judgement or fear. It is a state of high energy and awareness of my body but calm in my thoughts*”. Some integrated both spiritual identity and presence in their descriptions. Based on the data, two composite sub-codes were thus identified for Being:

1. **Spiritual sense of existence:** “*My Being is related to my innermost self: my soul and or my spiritual existence/my energy, my aura, my presence*” [P15].
2. **Presence:** “*My experience of Being: Moments of ‘snapping into’ being fully present with no thoughts of the past, present or future. Not trying to do or force anything*” [P19].

A code definition with composite, and family sub-codes for Being are shown in Table 6, with additional supporting data quotations.

TABLE 6: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: BEING

Code definition: Sense of existence beyond the material dimension, involving spiritual identity and presence.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Spiritual sense of existence</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Existence, soul, God, Self</p>	<p><i>Being means the Soul</i> [P13]</p> <p><i>‘Being’ indicates existence. Everyone feels that they exist. This is undeniable because even the denier has the feeling of existence. When we pay attention to our feeling of existence, we at first feel that we exist as a body and a mind. However, on deeper inner searching we may discover that existence or Being is independent of the body and mind and that our essential nature is pure Being.</i> [P8]</p> <p><i>That which I am and who I have been created to be...God created me for a purpose, and I need to walk aligned to His purpose in my life. As St. Luke says in the book of Acts “For in Him (Jesus) we live and move and have our being” - Acts 17:28... My identity is in Jesus.</i> [P6]</p> <p><i>There is only one homogeneous essence in all forms, which is Being, which is the Absolute or the Whole, which is the Self or Atman or Brahman or the Infinite. This Being or Self is not anywhere else. It is one's own innermost Self. The Self or Brahman or the Eternal or the Whole is the substratum, and the names and forms are drawn on the canvas of the Self... ‘Sat’ or Being or the Self always exists.</i> [P20]</p> <p><i>I think, being able to understand your Being, and how you are connected to so much more than just your physical self or your body, is one aspect of Being.</i> [P12]</p>

<p>Presence</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Presence, stillness, equanimity, awareness, true self</p>	<p><i>Taking in the present moment with acceptance and appreciation that this is all that there is, and it can be no other way. [P25]</i></p> <p><i>Being is presence, stillness...almost like a dissolution of time. Being is an awareness and a stillness and certainly like an equanimity. [P7]</i></p> <p><i>For me, it is when your true self is present. This means that your spirituality, your mind, and body are one and present. [P9]</i></p> <p><i>Being is to be present, to live in this moment, or in the now. Being is an awareness to always keep coming back to what is happening now. A heightened awareness of Being enhances wholeness through improved perception, integration with higher meanings, and responses in spiritual intelligence. [P23]</i></p>
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4.1.3 Consciousness: Phenomenological meanings

All twenty-five leaders (100%) described their understanding of consciousness in terms of awareness and found consciousness essential to wholeness. Examples included P11, *“Its relationship with wholeness is critical as I can’t ever be better if I am not aware of my short-comings”*, and P10, *“Consciousness to me means to be aware of oneself, the environment that you are in, and how you react to and influence that environment. To experience wholeness, a person must first experience consciousness. Wholeness cannot exist without consciousness”*.

Such awareness was described on a spectrum of experiential understanding. For leaders with a more advanced spiritual understanding, consciousness was described as a unified awareness extending beyond oneself and the material world, evoking spiritual wisdom beyond instinctual living. For example, Vedāntic monk P20 explained consciousness as, *“a mass of Wisdom. It is the Infinite wherein there is neither seer nor knower. It is Pure Awareness, beyond the reach of the senses, the mind, and the intellect. The ego-sense is also totally dead there”*. Describing consciousness as spiritual intelligence beyond animal instinct, P6 explained consciousness in terms of her Christian understanding:

Consciousness is a gift from God that separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. We do not act on instinct like animals and as a result, we are held responsible for our actions. As a result of this gift, I am able to be fully attuned to God’s presence in my life through the presence of the Holy Spirit. [P6]

Explaining the link between consciousness and wholeness, Vedāntic monk P8 said, *“Consciousness is not limited to the individual, on account of being infinite. It pervades all of creation. So wholeness also*

means at-one-ment with creation through the medium of consciousness". Interestingly, P19, who is not overtly spiritually active and not from a Vedāntic background, but does practice meditation, confirmed this experientially: *"My experience of consciousness: Moments of intense awareness and clarity, as if the layers of personality have just fallen away allowing a feeling not being separate"*. P7 expressed similarly: *"Consciousness is a broader awareness, an awareness that talks about interconnectivity, a perception of a deeper reality, almost like a unified field of reality. Consciousness is interconnectedness into something bigger. Awareness. There's a softness to it"*.

For less spiritually active participants, consciousness was understood in an externalised way with no overt spiritual connection. For example, P21 said, *"I think consciousness is just being aware of the impact you have on yourself and on everyone else, because we are social beings"*. For P14, it was an expanded awareness within oneself of body, mind, and immediate surroundings:

Consciousness still feels mental although I know it to be more than that. Awareness of myself and the world around me is how I define consciousness. When I feel fully conscious, I am aware of my feelings, thoughts, and how they affect my body. [P14]

Interestingly, three leaders described experiencing an expanded awareness through consciousness through a distinct 'inner voice', occurring at distinct points in their lives to assist them in some way. What is remarkable, is that these leaders ranged from not actively spiritual to actively spiritual across different traditions, yet their accounts were similar. P1, an agnostic senior international IT executive, and not actively spiritual, described his experience:

I have this odd thing that happens to me from time to time that comes to mind – I talk to myself out loud and a stern voice, almost like there is a 'true' self that is hidden until it is really needed. This happens rarely – I can only recall it happening about 10 times or so in my life. I would then advise myself against my instincts or come to higher realization about myself or my circumstances. For example, my most recent one was where I stopped myself in the middle of the passage, for no apparent rhyme or reason, and told myself out loud *"You're stuck in a rut. You're following the same patterns on a daily basis, and it is not fulfilling. Your discipline is slipping. You're surviving, not living. You've accepted too much that you can change if you had the will. You need to make some changes and stick to it. Do this now. Don't delay"*. This is a very stern and commanding persona; it leaves no room for debate or compromise. It is almost like the purest form of a disembodied Ennea Type 8 that addresses me. And then I'd snap out of it and get intense resolve

to act upon it and follow through on it as well. Perhaps this is this a form of higher consciousness stepping in to make corrections when it thinks my lower form of consciousness is putting me on autopilot? [P1]

P2, an HR executive who practices a range of different spiritual traditions from Taoism to yoga, described a similar experience:

I think it happened when I was in Durban, actually, because there is a breakout experience that just particularly stands out differently. I think consciousness for me was a journey of going within. Firstly let me start there. And I would call it 'the voice'...So I always call it 'the voice' because there's an internal dialogue that takes place. And so I remember [laughs], it's going to be a funny story, but this is how it went. I was in Gateway looking for parking. And a voice said to me, *'Turn left, turn, right'*. And I thought, 'Okay'. And I followed it. And there was parking. And I was like, *'Okay, so here you are'*, and it said, *'Yep'* and it answered back. And so I kind of worked out that there's a me and there's another me, and how do I become conscious of the two...consciousness for me is awareness...awakened to the awareness, I think today's people call it 'woke'... And it grew, Nerisha, into various aspects of myself, the more I accepted the fact that it is me, I am suddenly aware of aspects of myself, and how to bring about a balance into some of those things. And it got me on a journey of *'What serves you?'*, in terms of the habitual things that I put in my life... *'let's look at your life, let's look at your behaviour'*. Not in a judgmental way of playing wrong or right, or moral way...I call it my quarter life crisis...because I eventually went through this where I'll ask, *'Does this serve me? And if not, then why am I continuing with it?'*. And then I started pursuing *me*. And habits that do serve me, greater good, from a clarity of mind, clarity of thinking, a way of Being, since this is the heart of the topic as well...and it eventually evolved to, *'How do I cultivate that in a way that is meaningful, in a way that is a service to others around me?'*. And I guess it woke me to the notion that the best version of myself is the best way I can serve those around me. [P2]

P6, a devout Christian, distinguished the 'inner voice' as the "Holy Spirit", and awareness of guidance from God:

So for me, at the end of the day, *'What did I do wrong? What could I do better?'*. And that's where the Holy Spirit comes into it because the Holy Spirit convicts you - that little voice that says, *'No, I don't think you should be doing that'* - you know, that is the Holy Spirit, who's saying to you, *'You know, watch your words'*...And that's the amazing thing about God as well is that He does talk, you know, He does. So you might have read something in your morning meditation, and then you have a conversation with somebody, and that same passage comes through, and then you're going past a shop window and the same passage, and you say *'Okay, God, I get the picture - You're saying yes, or You're saying no'*. So it's not always an audible voice, but there's always that confirmation. [P6]

In all three cases, the ‘inner voice’ represented a loving inner awareness that guided these leaders into wiser, life-affirming decision-making. The common descriptive thread between actively and not so actively spiritual participants was an experience of holistic awareness, which formed the composite sub-code. A code definition, with composite and family sub-codes for consciousness are shown in Table 7 with additional supporting data quotations.

TABLE 7: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: CONSCIOUSNESS

Code definition: An intelligent, holistic awareness within and beyond self through Being.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Holistic awareness</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Awareness, inner voice, Holy Spirit, higher wisdom</p>	<p><i>Any creature that is ‘awake’ and can manipulate its surroundings in a manner that involves higher order thinking, i.e., beyond just acting on instinct like an insect, can be seen as conscious in the literal definition of the word. On a practical/tactical basis, I think consciousness is tied to mindfulness, self-awareness, and self-control. Not getting caught up in the whims of your emotions, especially the negative ones like anger. Being able to focus on the breath and take yourself out of autopilot and being very aware of the fact that you have a choice on how to act in this moment. [P1]</i></p> <p><i>Linked to Being is consciousness. Consciousness is an awareness of the impact of one’s actions on oneself, on others, and on the planet. Consciousness is only possible through awareness and knowledge, and this may come to light through learning, feelings, feedback, or as the result of hurt or pain. It is possible to be unconscious of the impact of your actions on yourself, others, and the planet – especially since common sense is not really very common at all, and short-term thinking/gain can affect deeper consideration. [P5]</i></p> <p><i>Consciousness: my mindfulness, my awareness, my awakening, my deep thoughts, and emotions and reactions linked to these. It’s about an awareness to self and our different roles/our different lenses. And even beyond to other aspects of our world and surrounds. [P15]</i></p> <p><i>Consciousness speaks to how attuned you are to yourself and others, in terms of how you come across to others and how the world sees you. Knowing how the chessboard is setup or created and the rules of engagement, is also about consciousness. I think consciousness speaks to self-awareness and awareness of others and the environment, and all the emotional, political, and even psychological influences, transactions, and interactions taking place. I think it’s also about understanding who you are, your personality, and how your energy can impact others, and how others can have an impact and influence on who you are, how you show-up and feel. [P12]</i></p> <p><i>The Self is the source of Consciousness or light. The universe, external or internal, and body and mind are inert, and do not have light or consciousness of their own...The nature of Pure Consciousness is Pure Awareness. There is neither thinking nor perception here, and there is neither ‘within ’ nor ‘without’ here. It is a homogeneous essence of Wisdom (Consciousness)-Joy (Bliss). Pure Consciousness is neither physical consciousness nor mental consciousness. It is absolute Consciousness on which depends and rests physical and mental consciousness. There is no thinking in</i></p>

	<i>pure Consciousness. There is also no play of the senses in Pure Consciousness. There is neither seeing nor hearing in It, nor is there any perception here. [P20]</i>
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4.1.4 Joy: Phenomenological meanings

Most leaders (84%) described joy as a state of contentment arising from awareness, which could be experienced even amidst the polarities of life, as distinct from excitement or happiness. For example, P6 said:

Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. I see joy as that deep-centred contentment that cannot be affected by the storms that life may throw at you. The assurance that you are loved by God and that He walks alongside you. Joy is very different from happiness and one can experience joy even in the midst of suffering and hardship. [P6]

While understandings around the similarities between joy and contentment differed, all twenty-five leaders (100%) concluded that joy and/or contentment were fundamental to wholeness. This is because leaders associated joy and/or contentment with feeling complete, free from the state of constant wanting and comparison, and being at peace with one's lot in life regardless of external circumstances. For example, joy for P18, *"means being completely fulfilled with your sense of self and being happy with your life"*, while P4 said, *"To experience true joy in my mind you need to be able to be happy for others while you are happy with yourself, and not always want more or compare to others...This creates a balance to living a wholesome life"*. This understanding was similar across both spiritually active and not so spiritually active leaders, although the former, like P6 above, linked the source of such joy to spiritual connection with God, while the latter associated it with gratitude.

P2 explained his experience of joy as a spiritual inner state of Being, independent of external acquisition:

We all have an inner world, but not necessarily all of us have the same outer world. And that's the irony of it. And that's why did wisdom always say, *'The kingdom of heaven is within you'*. Because it is not without, it is within you, and so to go within. And that's where that wisdom for me kicks in is around...It's all accessible to all of us. But somehow, I think we are so outwardly focused, *and 'I don't have that car, I don't have that house, I don't have this'*. And we think that acquisition of the external equates to that peace and that stability, and that presence, and that awareness. Because I think the people who have the external things market it as if everything is well. You and I know that majority of the people in psychological

institutions are not necessarily those without - majority of them are those that do have. And it's just an easy way of going, 'Just because I have the wealth doesn't equate to the peace and the awareness for joy'. I think it's quite an important thing...But joy is not happiness. It's something beyond happiness. It's a state of Being. I think once you are present and aware, there is a flow and a state of Being called joy that, for me, becomes an outlet of those two states. And so what I say to people is, whether you live in a sack or a palace, once you attain those two things, suddenly the world and your presence and how you conduct your way of Being out of the inward flow, suddenly it changes the very dynamic and the outlook of life itself. And you are operating then from a state of joy. You get fluxes and flows on that, yes, definitely. It's part of it. But I think over time, you are able then to operate in a way that is joyous, peaceful, tranquil, stable, because you are present and aware of who and what you are. [P2]

While I expected leaders to equate joy to contentment, I found it interesting that leaders without a Vedāntic background, like P2, associated joy with a peaceful inner equilibrium despite external circumstances. P2's exposition exemplified a similarity of phenomenological understanding with Vedānta. P8, a Vedāntic monk explained:

We have to make this distinction that joy, or in Sanskrit, *ananda*, is not what we usually consider to be happiness. Or what even in the English language we would call joy, which is more like an emotion that you feel. So this is a state of Being. And Swami Venkatesananda gave a lovely definition: '*Ananda* is that happiness which has no opposite'...So it means we're not swinging from one thing to another. [P8]

The Biblical exposition also distinguished joy from happiness, as a spiritual state which can be experienced even amidst trials and tribulations. P6 explained:

It is interesting how many references there are to joy in the Bible and the assurance that this is what God wishes you to experience – which underlines how very different it is to happiness. Women like Mother Teresa experienced extraordinary joy even in the most difficult circumstances. [P6]

For P8, joy, contentment, and wholeness all implied a state of inner completeness, experienced through spiritual practices. He shared his observations from teaching yoga:

And we get a taste of it when we do any kind of spiritual practice - you do get a taste of that completeness. Because usually, most people even if they're doing Hatha Yoga, asanas, pranayama, relaxation, I always point out to them - and they may not be there for spiritual reasons, they may just be there for health reasons - but at the end of that class, there will be hardly anyone in whom a desire now is active. They will all be

in a state of contentment. So, they will not feel any lack at that point of time. And that is merely because through the spiritual practices, we have come closer to our true nature. So contentment, I would say is also another word indicating the same thing ultimately. If you really go into what contentment means, then that also really is none different from *satchitananda* or wholeness. [P8]

With the exceptions of P25, P10, and P12, all leaders linked joy to contentment, for example P19, “*My experience of joy: Moments of contentment with what is*”. While P25 also described his understanding of joy as an inner state of equilibrium, he equated this more to contentment than joy, seeing the two as distinct:

Personally, I prefer the term contentment as opposed to joy in that joy implies a state of euphoria whereas contentment is a mere state of stoicism. Contentment resonates with being able to internalise the states of sadness and happiness whilst still maintaining an equilibrium. This state means that it is easier to put the ups and downs of life into perspective and not having an expectation that one’s emotional state has to always be overtly on the positive side. [P25]

P10 concurred, saying, “*Joy to me means happiness or delight. I don’t believe a person needs to experience joy to achieve wholeness. Wholeness, to me, is more experienced in a state of contentment than in a state of joy*”. When asked why, P10 further explained, “*Because my view is that when you are content, you can be unhappy at times and you can be happy at times - you can be sad, and you can be joyful, but you can still be content*”. Thus P10 associated contentment with inner equilibrium like P25. P12 said, “*I think joy can be fleeting, its experienced for just a few moments. Feeling content and at peace is a feeling that is more constant*”. However, P14 felt differently: “*I like joy better than contentment. Because joy feels more real. Contentment almost still feels somewhat empty*”.

A possible distinction between traditional Vedāntic theory and phenomenological understanding is that some leaders described experiencing joy as an *outcome* of Being and consciousness through awareness and presence, as exemplified by quotes from P14, P2, and P9. However Vedāntic monks P8 and P20 described joy as a “simultaneous” experience with Being and consciousness. The commonality is that all three constructs were viewed as related, either consequentially or in a simultaneous way. P9 explained how she experiences the link between joy and wholeness as awareness in the moment:

It's the word you used – joy, instead of happiness. Because normally people are always seeking happiness...While for me, I see it as moments. And if then I see it as a moment... it goes back to being

aware, to recognise and then be grateful...Then all of that just sums it up to being whole...And I don't know about others, maybe others seek a substance or seek people in order to be joyful - for me it's just recognising the moment. And then being grateful. And then you have joy. Because it's interesting that you ask about wholeness without being happy. I don't know...having joy you can still be whole...I do believe you can. Because joy for me is a moment. [P9]

Based on the data, two main sub-codes were identified for joy:

1. Contentment
2. Peaceful equilibrium

Another sub-code which some leaders associated with joy was 'gratitude'. However, based on participant descriptions, gratitude could be seen as an antecedent of joy rather than a characteristic (see example quotes by P4, P5, P9, and P14). A code definition with composite and corresponding family sub-codes for joy are shown in Table 8, with additional supporting data quotations.

TABLE 8: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: JOY

Code definition: State of contentment and peaceful inner stability amidst the polarities of life, evoked through awareness.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Contentment</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Arising from awareness, satisfaction with oneself and life, gratitude</p>	<p><i>This has only just come to me now, but I almost get a link to the understanding of Being and the way I've said it as awareness. So first, you're aware, and then you're conscious of it...so awareness is the key. Then you can move to acceptance, and acceptance is probably a part of consciousness there. And then once you accept that I have everything that I need, and I want, then you can move towards joy. [P4]</i></p> <p><i>A feeling of personal satisfaction and great peace and joy, but not necessarily linked to any one incident or event. [P15]</i></p> <p><i>In my opinion, joy is a choice. It is an emotion that starts with a thought. It is not fleeting elation or momentary excitement. Whilst one can be joyful in moment, I believe that one can have a joyful disposition. People with a joyful disposition tend to have a positive outlook on life. Joy emanates from gratitude in the smallest daily observations and experiences as opposed to 'big ticket' events. One can feel joy when looking at a sunrise as much as one can feel joy when seeing one's own child being joyful. [P5]</i></p>
<p>Peaceful equilibrium</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Peace, inner equilibrium amidst life's swings, not</p>	<p><i>Joy for me wells up periodically like a wave normally precipitated by gratitude. I become consciously aware how grateful I am for my life, family, circumstances, and health and this creates a deep sense of joy. It is different from happiness as it feels much deeper and is less likely to be related to a specific external event...Because when I reflected specifically on joy, I was thinking about how joy is different from happiness. Because happiness is obviously this rather temporary thing that's generally as a result of an</i></p>

externally dependent, distinct from happiness	<p><i>external environmental thing that's happened. So you win the lottery, you're really happy. But it's not a calm sort of happiness. It's a very enthusiastic happiness, which is generally temporary in nature. [P14]</i></p> <p><i>And I think one of the things that is important to me, joy, and peace - it's very wrapped together. Because the ability to maintain and hold that, despite your circumstances, that's really what the practice of living is. Being present is just living. It's living well through my losses and my bad times, and being present through that, and still holding your peace. And I think the best descriptions of the experience of joy and peace is not when everything is wonderful. It's the opposite. When it's actually so bad, and you can still stand in a place and go, 'I still feel grounded and joy and peace, despite the fact that I can't see anything that should make me feel that way'. [P11]</i></p> <p><i>This Joy is Pure Bliss or Pure Joy, which does not depend on anything else. Man always wants everlasting happiness, but due to ignorance he seeks this in external objects. He naturally meets with failure in the endeavour as the sense-objects have no power to give this lasting happiness. Then he applies discrimination, turns his mind inwards, searches within himself, and finds the eternal happiness which is underlying in his own Self. The Self is an embodiment of Knowledge (Consciousness) and Bliss (Joy). This Ananda or Joy is eternal, uncaused, and is not excelled by anything else. It is the real nature of the Self. It is different and distinct from the pleasure derived from the sense-objects which is temporary, and which ultimately leads to pain and sorrow. [P20]</i></p>
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4.1.5 Wholeness: A state of spiritual completeness

All twenty-five leaders (100%) described their understanding of wholeness. The most prevalent theme was a sense of inner completeness, despite external difficulties. For example P5, a senior executive in a listed healthcare company said:

Wholeness is a sense of being content, or even ‘complete’. Content and at peace with every element of your Being, i.e., physical, spiritual, emotional, etc. When a person you meet is referred to as being ‘wholesome’, it implies that they give off an energy of kindness, goodness, resilience, and authenticity, with all elements of their Being in harmony. Wholeness is not related to age. It also does not mean that there are no struggles. It does however shift how the person reacts to struggles and there is an underlying sense of calm and confidence. [P5]

More actively spiritual participants described this inner completeness as derived from spiritual connection, referencing the construct of Being. For example P6 described wholeness as: “*Knowing that I have nothing to gain, nothing to lose, nothing to prove and nothing to hide because I understand and know who I am in Jesus and that I live before an audience of One*”. P12 felt similarly, drawing on all three constructs:

I understand wholeness as being complete in your Being. It’s a feeling of being complete. We often look at our life and see the gaps or missing pieces and think that if we had it, we would feel whole or complete.

At the superficial level it could be material like a job title, position, car, home, career. On the personal level it would be relationships and the sense of belonging that you feel with partner, spouse, family, friends, and with yourself, i.e., your physical well-being, being happy, understanding and accepting who you are with all your capabilities and limitations. On the spiritual level, I think it's the feeling of being connected to something bigger/greater than you are, perhaps to nature or the universal energy, the Divine Creator, or the energy within you that sustains and animates you. [P12]

Similarly, P7 connected wholeness to a sustaining force and connection beyond material perception, leading to psychological independence or “self-sufficiency”:

So wholeness, I think is a sense of connectedness to something beyond one's perception of reality or immediate reality. So a connection to a bigger and more unified energy. Interconnectedness. I think wholeness is about being present and being still and, in that sense, a self-sufficiency. So not needing anything else. And an important part of wholeness is feeling connected to some sort of energising force that feels abundant, so there's no sense of depletion. [P7]

P8 explained further how this inner completeness arises, referencing the construct of consciousness:

I mean, consciousness is whole, because consciousness in its essence is infinite. So, that is where you experience wholeness or, I also like to use the word completeness. You're complete - there is nothing lacking in you. And that is the nature of consciousness - it is not lacking anything, it is complete, and therefore, it is whole. So, wholeness really is the experience or the feeling that one is not lacking anything. [P8]

Exploring the characteristic of wholeness to hold the polarities of life, when asked whether one could feel whole without feeling happy, P10 responded, referencing the construct of contentment:

I think 100% you can. I mean, it's like the dark and the light, and the yin and the yang... And the one thing that I've realised over my life is that you can't experience happiness without sadness. You can't experience pain without relief, you can't experience all of those things, if you don't know the opposite of what you're feeling, or what you're experiencing... So to me contentment is that. You've got to have one with the other. I mean, we've all been through rough patches in our lives, we've all been through good stuff in our lives. But the people who are experienced in wholeness know that, and they can deal with that or recognise it. [P10]

Further supporting wholeness as an inner orientation or attitude, when asked whether he could still feel whole if he didn't have everything externally, P4 replied, *“Yes, because it's just in my mind that I have everything. I don't have everything. But I have everything in my mind that I want, and I need, and I like”*. One might argue that such wholeness may result in complacency. However, that was not felt to be the case. P17 explained:

Contentment in and of itself is generally related to that idea, right? The idea of not wanting more or not wanting to chase. You can quite easily translate that into not wanting to grow. So that's when I say, wholeness is not indicative of an attitude of stagnancy. And rather, it's an appreciation for where you are, with the full acknowledgement of work that needs to be done. [P17]

P10 too, felt that wholeness is not perfection of self but an acceptance of oneself, while striving to improve:

To me wholeness is the acceptance of every part of yourself – knowing that you exist as a whole being. As humans we are preconditioned to strive for personal perfection and to ‘look for the good in everyone’. My view of wholeness is that we need to accept our imperfections. We need to accept ourselves as we are even if we know we have to strive to work on ourselves and improve ourselves. [P10]

4.2 The meaningfulness of wholeness for spiritual intelligence in leadership

Twenty-four out of twenty-five participants (96%) found wholeness as conceptualised deeply meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership. For example, executive operations director P15 felt that wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joy was critical to leadership beyond egotism of self and others, not only because of the positive impact, but also conversely because of the destructive impact of leaders who are not whole. She said:

I really think it's integral. You can't be an effective leader of self and of others if you're not whole - if you're not conscious of who you are, your purpose and your impact on others, if you don't have personal joy, if you're not a happy person. If all your monsters are running around, if your Being, just your Being is disrupted, that centre of all the circles is disrupted - how can you be a leader then? Then you are broken. And then you're going to break other people... Wholeness comes with knowing your place in the world and your purpose. Because then you're not fighting, then it's not your ego wanting. It's not your ego wanting to prove or to achieve, or to prosper. It's not about ego, it's not about you anymore. It's about I want to give more than I take from this earth. [P15]

Medical scientist P21, who did not complete the pre-work and struggled to explicate wholeness, felt differently:

I don't think it has had any impact on my leadership. I have always taken the view that people should want to follow me. I got no interest in people who don't want to follow me. If you don't like what I'm doing and you don't want to follow what I'm saying or what I want done, then go your own way. But I'm not trying to make people follow me when they don't want to. You should want to. So I guess that's the only difference. I'm not sure if that's related to anything on wholeness. [P21]

However, fellow medical scientist P23 felt that wholeness was immensely valuable to spiritual intelligence in leadership both personally and at a macro-level. She described the macro-implications of greater wholeness in leadership as “*enabling communities to grow, to come out of poverty*”, drawing a contrast to:

...leaders like Trump, purely ego-driven, right? Zuma, purely monetary-driven. And it didn't matter. So then you can see the stifling in growth, the stifling in prosperity - that is a result of leadership that's not from a place of wholeness. And how the world actually has lost that appreciation for wholeness and lost placing high value and celebrating leadership that's coming from wholeness. [P23]

P19 observed that, “*Wholeness is crucial to spiritual intelligence*”. P20, an 80-year-old monk and spiritual leader living in the Himalayan foothills of India, shared similar observations:

All those present difficulties which you are having in this society, so much of warfare, and so much of other things - you see, when they are having this, it is because the leaders are not good enough. The leaders are not guided by some important concepts - what is idealism, what is good for the people, they don't consider. They think only about their own selfish interest. Every leader thinks, '*How I can make the best of this institution now, for my own individual personal benefit?*'. So because that is there, then nobody thinks of the society. Nobody thinks of the whole... So if there's this wholeness in leadership, it has great import for leaders and organisation and society. Wholeness is a highly meaningful concept. And it is essential, in order to have spiritual intelligence in leadership...When leaders are guided by this spiritual intelligence, then only can they be a boon for the society, for the organisation. And then they will be guided by that. All their actions will have the basis of this wholeness. And then whatever they do will be for the good of the society. That is why it is of great value, it is very beneficial...It is very, very necessary. Without that our things will not improve. [P20]

While acknowledging positive macro-implications, CEO P14 also recognised the difficulty of unlocking wholeness organisationally, due to the scarcity of leaders who are whole:

If leaders are able to grow and are whole in the sense described above, I believe that organisations and societies would be much better. The energy would be positive, and a growth mindset would ensue. Leaders would be role models rather than people burdened with responsibility of control...Organisations who value this through their values and vision, as well as rewarding behaviours and leaders who exhibit these characteristics, are enablers of wholeness. Leaders who are able to express Being, consciousness, and joy are able to positively effect wholeness in the people around them. But everyone is on their own journey, so I still feel this is hard to synchronize organisationally especially as most people and leaders are not whole! [P14]

Moreover, many participants felt that the current global context rendered wholeness in leadership even more relevant. For example, P18 said, *“I really think it's a relevant topic, especially in the pandemic world that we live in. I think because we forget the spiritual side”*. P14 concurred, and shared his experience on why the pandemic context sparked a need for greater wholeness in leaders:

The pandemic has filled many organisations and people with fear. We have been isolated from each other, spent time away from people we care about, worried about our health and futures. Existing models of work and living have been challenged. Digital engagement has been efficient but not very personal. People have missed the connection with others. For me, this has challenged my growth. I have found that I have become more task-oriented and less conscious of others. I feel dissatisfaction with my effectiveness as a leader as I feel fragmented and alone. I see staff engaging with irritation and frustration. This is on the back of higher than prior period performance! Another confirmation to me that external results do not create real joy. This topic is very pertinent as we come through this period, and we need leaders who are able to see the value of wholeness and promote it within their organisations. [P14]

P12, who embarked on a journey of wholeness involving courageous personal and career choices, described the impact on his leadership, as *“compassion, empathy, and clarity to make decisions. And enable and empower others in my team to experiment, explore and collaborate more”*.

Four main codes emerged on how wholeness as conceptualised, was found meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership:

- Personal character development through virtues-orientation.
- Wisdom in decision-making.
- Humane approach to leading people.
- Macro-implications for organisations and societies.

These were consolidated from related composite sub-codes. The first three pertain to the category ‘Leadership of others’ and is shown in Figure 8 below. Macro-implications for organisations and societies were treated as an outcome and formed a separate category.

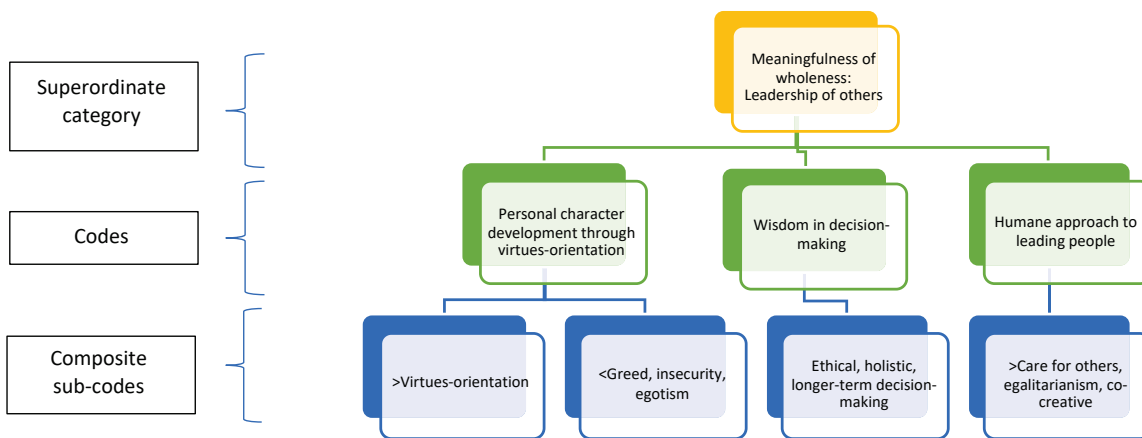


FIGURE 8: ANALYSIS OF MEANINGFULNESS OF WHOLENESS FOR LEADERSHIP OF OTHERS

A thematic count of codes and composite sub-codes showing statistical frequency by participant is shown in Table 9 below. Each code is discussed with supporting data in ensuing sub-chapters.

TABLE 9: THEMATIC COUNT OF CODES AND COMPOSITE SUB-CODES BY PARTICIPANT: LEADERSHIP

Participant	Personal character development through virtues-orientation		Wisdom in decision-making	Humane approach to leading people	Macro-implications	
	> Virtues-orientation	<Greed, egotism, insecurity	Ethical, holistic, longer term decision-making	>Care for others, 'seeing' people/egalitarianism, co-creative approach	Organisations	Society
P1	1	1	1	1	1	1
P2	1	1		1		
P3	1	1		1	1	1
P4	1	1	1	1	1	1
P5	1	1	1	1	1	1
P6	1	1		1	1	
P7	1	1	1	1	1	1
P8	1	1	1	1	1	1
P9	1	1	1	1	1	1
P10	1	1		1	1	1
P11	1	1		1	1	1
P12	1	1	1	1	1	1
P13	1	1	1	1	1	1
P14	1	1	1	1	1	1
P15	1	1	1	1	1	1
P16	1	1	1	1	1	1
P17	1	1	1		1	1
P18	1		1	1	1	1
P19	1	1	1	1	1	1
P20	1	1	1	1	1	1
P21						
P22	1	1	1	1	1	1
P23	1	1	1	1	1	1
P24	1					1
P25	1	1	1	1	1	1
Totals	24	22	18	22	22	22
%	96%	88%	72%	88%	88%	88%

4.2.1 Personal character development through virtues-orientation

A recurring and significant finding on the meaningfulness of wholeness as conceptualised for spiritual intelligence in leadership related to personal character development from a more virtues-oriented way of Being. Participants (96%) found that wholeness would result in greater virtues-orientation, with 88% stating that greater wholeness would correspondingly result in less greed, egotism, and insecurity in leadership. Leaders described a range of virtues from the impact of wholeness on their leadership.

Integrity emerged as a popular example of what one would see from wholeness in leadership. P8 said frankly, *“it is impossible for someone who's on the path of this wholeness to be false and to step out of truth”*. He explained further:

So wholeness has within itself what we call ethics or morality. So truthfulness, morality, less desire, or greed - these that can be controlled, so that people don't just run with these things. There would possibly be more freedom. Because when one is in a state of wholeness, there is not this necessity to control others - because controlling others is also a sign of lack. Those of us who are control freaks, it's a sure sign of lacking, we're lacking. So, it allows also to give others opportunity to express and be themselves. So the spin-off is quite remarkable actually on all these many levels. [P8]

These observations were echoed by other participants in the examples below. Many also described experiencing a less controlling and autocratic approach from their journeys toward wholeness, as compared with earlier leadership styles in their careers, along with less selfishness. Moreover, greed emerged recurringly as the antithesis to wholeness:

So they are direct opposites, absolutely contradict each other. If you are greedy, you are not whole. If you are whole, you are not greedy. But we all have the greed monster, and we all lock him up. Some, we let out all the time. Sometimes we let out when we want to. And some people...now we talk about the very spiritual people, the monster is locked up so far away that he doesn't even feature anywhere in their everyday life... Greed is brokenness. Greed is the direct opposite of wholeness. It's destructive, it's like cancer, it's like poison. And you've got to lock it up far away and throw the key away. You can't even let it out. If you let it out in its entirety, it might not be able to go back. [P15]

Servant leadership was another popular virtue example from wholeness. Participants felt that leaders who are whole go beyond focussing on their own need for power, wealth, fame, and self-gain to instead focussing on being of selflessly beneficial service to others. For example, P11 observed that leaders who are whole *“will truly understand their purpose of leadership, not for self-gain but for others. They will unlock their full potential and capacity”*, while P20 said:

When he has got this sense of wholeness, then he will be guided by virtue...And they will also have a spiritual basis for their thinking or activities, and for everything that they do...Because where the society, people are not guided by this sense of wholeness, they are prompted by this sense of personal motive and personal desires and doing wrong things for the company or the sake of the prestige, or name and fame,

etc. These are all selfish considerations. A good leader, who is imbued with these ideals of Being, consciousness, and joy, and also of this wholeness, he cannot have these personal petty considerations. [P20]

P2 felt similarly, drawing a link between wholeness, less ego-focussed “wanting”, and greater service-orientation:

For me, you've hit it nicely...you've added it to leadership and the workplace. It's a nice tee-off because it is about service to others. And that's one of the things that I'd like to say. The ego is a lot about self. *'I must get recognised'* - to compensate. Because the ego itself is, I call it a small child that always requires attention because wet nappy, crying, angry, and it wants all the attention - is *'me, me, me, me, me'*. And once you as a leader, especially in the workplace, family, or society, once you reach a state of oneness with yourself, wholeness with yourself, the most natural response is then to look without and ask, *'How then do I assist in changing the outlook and reset my internal?'*... then we are more wholesome in our response to the people around us as opposed to trying to squeeze them into this narrow path. Or trying to squeeze the juice out of them because this is what *we* want. And so we're not operating from a state of wanting, but more a state of releasing and allowing people to be in a particular way that's wholesome to the community, to themselves, and everybody around us. [P2]

The data analysis revealed two connected aspects of leadership from wholeness:

1. Greater personal character development through a more virtues-oriented way of Being, i.e., positive *self-leadership*.
2. A consequent expression of such virtues-orientation in relation to *leadership of others*.

From a self-leadership perspective, wholeness is rejuvenating and connected to authenticity. P11 described the impact as, *“if my cup isn't full, then I can't give you the best of me. And in order for me to give you the best of me, I need to be at a place where I'm consistently renewing my wholeness every day”*. P4 echoed this, describing the impact as evoking his *“authentic self”* when he consciously nurtures wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joy:

I would say that I've been able to get into a flow or rhythm in my leadership style when I'm feeling that way. And be able to help people change their minds with problems. So when I've experienced that Being, consciousness, joy, I feel like I am my authentic self and then I become that authentic self for other people.

And that is, I think the best place. It's best for them and it's best for me, so it's a reciprocal...the oxygen mask on first comes to mind - before you can be of value to others, you need to take care of yourself. And that would be being whole. That unlocks your power as a leader. So if you're not whole, and you're the shining light, you're the epicentre or the pinnacle of the organisation...it's going to lean whichever way you lean. So being whole would be able to help others work out their wholeness and make the organisation a little bit whole together. And that's what you want. [P4]

This tallied with P8's explanation:

Wholeness is my Being. So the Being has to act - it has to come from Being. So it's not something you can actually apply, it's not a skill, it's not a tool - it is you. It is the real you that is now acting in whatever role it is, whether it's a leader or a follower. So the key thing always is to try and be established in that. [P8]

Human capital head P2 described the different virtues that arise from his experiences of wholeness in leading others:

So there's a patience, there's a level of care, there's grace. And so as a leader, when you start adopting those qualities, you find that suddenly there is a flow. I like using the word 'a flow', a grace, a peace that accompanies you when you are dealing with people. [P2]

Spirituality emerged as a theme in invoking a virtuous orientation of Being, including integrity, servant leadership, humility, purity of intention, and spiritual love. For example, P6 a devoted Christian, observed how serving through one's work from wholeness implies being "*secure in yourself*" in a way that is "*not a pride*". She explained pride as "*one of the things that can take you away from wholeness...because suddenly you're no longer needing God because I can do this by myself and then pride comes before a fall as we all know*". For P6, wholeness through spirituality keeps her conscious of underlying motivations, purifying her intentions as service to God and not the ego. She said, "*we're in a broken world because selfishness is a very easy thing to do. And we can become clouded by things*". The point is that whilst servant leadership may seem virtuous on the surface, without the link between wholeness and spiritual intelligence, there is a risk of egotism. Therefore, her approach to practising servant leadership from wholeness, is "*What can I do to make the lot of other people better without pushing myself up? I don't need that*".

For Zimbabwean executive director P22, wholeness also inculcates the spiritual virtue of egalitarianism, *“that every human being or essentially everything that you come into contact with, is equally the same - there is no class”*. P6 described similarly how love for God inspires her toward the virtue of universal love and egalitarianism through seeing God or the universal spiritual essence in all:

If you love God, you're never going to want to let Him down. You're never going to want to do something that is going to dismay Him or sadden Him or disappoint Him. And yes, we do mess up because we're human, and the world is a broken world. But if you love God, you are just going to want to keep doing what He wants and love your neighbour...We can't choose who our neighbour is. Everybody we meet is God on earth. [P6]

Vedāntic monk P20 expressed similar sentiments, expanding on the societal import of egalitarianism through spiritual intelligence:

Vedanta teaches that there is a common Self or common Consciousness in all, which is the Whole. It asks us to behold the One Self in all, to see the One in the many. It denotes one's identity with the rest of humanity. There is no stranger in this world. Everyone is related to one another in the kinship of the Spirit, of the Whole. Seeing or being aware of the Self or the Whole, one should give up 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness'. One should not hate one's neighbour or brother. One should not try to exploit him, as he is one's own Self only. If the Vedanta philosophy is rightly understood and put into practice, and acted up to, then all evils that emanate from factional or racial or communal prejudices can be obliterated. The idea of Wholeness unites all, it gives room to all, without excluding anyone...Hence one must radiate love to one and all. [P20]

P22 similarly experienced a link between spirituality, wholeness, and virtues, recounting how it helps her see in a holistic way:

So for you to experience wholeness, you need to look at the whole. You need to look at your heart, your mind, your soul, so that now as you enter into the world, you are looking at you, you are looking at your surroundings, seeing other people, other plants, other everything that co-exists with you. And if you can live in that, then you can say, I'm living a cohesive whole, I'm doing everything that I'd like to do, I'm relating with everyone and everything in my space with respect and compassion. [P22]

She related her inspiring experiences of growing up in poverty and experiencing extreme suffering in life, even as she overcome obstacles to become a successful Board executive. Yet, as she grew into greater inner wholeness as a result, she never forgets to help others not feel incomplete as she had, through acts of compassion:

So if I see people selling vegetables, I just buy. Even if I don't need it, I just buy and sometimes I buy everything that they have. Because I know the journey that they're walking, because I walked that journey. It's a difficult journey. So it's just to take other people out of their suffering, it makes me happy. And I recently started paying school fees for children from places not where I come from, but from another place. So I've paid for their school fees up to the end of 2023. Because I believe that each time I cried for school fees, or each time a teacher would ask me to stand up because I did not pay or because my shoes were broken, it really made me feel incomplete. It made me feel like less of a human being. So I want to give others an experience to feel respected, to just feel great. And not go to school with the fear of, *'Today, I'll be raised again because I haven't paid school fees or because my shoes are broken'*. [P22]

P11 shared how virtues of personal integrity and accountability are evoked through her spiritual identity. She shared how people love to hire her, *"because they like the fact that I can be autonomous, and they can trust my decision-making"*, however, she explained that *"they don't understand why it's like that"*:

It's because they don't have to check on me. Because I'm actually reporting back to God. So if I do things that are incorrect, and I treat people poorly, I really think the repercussions are graver for me - because God would disapprove of that...And it's the same with whatever job I have - I respect it as a gift from God to be able to lead people. [P11]

Other virtues linked to wholeness were integrity and noble purpose. P12 described these in relation to the "Great Resignation", a phenomenon he personally observed as stemming from more virtues-aligned decision-making for self and the greater whole:

I'm going to link it to another topic that's quite topical right now, which is this concept of the 'Great Resignation' - where especially white-collar professional employees are feeling the lack of purpose in the workspaces, in their environment, in the decisions that they're making, in the products that they are creating to serve humanity which don't actually serve humanity. I think there's a genuine shift in consciousness on what is authentic, what is real, what is purposeful, what is genuine value-creation versus what is greed, what is power, what is poor decision-making, but is incomplete in its virtues. And I think, because leaders are grappling with how they make change - in some instances, they can't - it's resulting in

the Great Resignation - *'I don't want to be part of this anymore, I can't be part of this anymore'*. And what's happening from my experience in this space is that when those decisions are made, individuals then pursue more purposeful action, more purposeful careers, more purposeful life-orientation, and balance between their values and what they see as being a positive contribution to the world. [P12]

For P22, greater wholeness also strengthened her virtues of courage and integrity, exemplified by standing up to the Board on matters incongruent with her values:

And then when my actions are not aligned with my values, this is a very difficult space. I had an instance, where we were doing the financials and I raised it with the Group to say, *'This thing that we are doing does not work, it doesn't resonate well'*. And unfortunately, I was overruled. And recently, we were discussing something, and I told them that, *'If you want to do it, count me out, because it doesn't resonate with my values'*. And I don't want to create that conflict in me to wake up every day doing something that does not work well for me. [P22]

Surrender was another virtue cited as a result of greater wholeness. For example, P15 described how wholeness helped her relinquish the need to always “win”, both as a parent and senior corporate executive:

So I've become very self-aware - how I show up, how I communicate with people, when to step back, when to step forward, when to be assertive, or when to allow the other person their way, when to allow somebody else to win...I allow my eight-year-old small wins as well...And so she also feels very important when I let her eat a chocolate cake for breakfast. But sometimes small wins are important. Being self-aware, doesn't mean you giving yourself away - it means you allowing others to also have their say and their way. [P15]

P11 described the opposite scenario, where leaders who are insecure through lacking wholeness, constantly focus on proving themselves, thereby derailing excellence:

I watch a lot of leaders all the time. And because they operate from a place of not being whole, their levels of insecurity in themselves - they overcompensate for things that I can see they may be lacking some confidence in. They're not forgiving with themselves if they're not winning all the time...So I'm now going to overcompensate and overcompensate - and you derail your focus completely. Instead of

taking all your energy into really making a difference, you're trying to prove yourself all the time. And you never ever hit this best work thing. Because you can't seem to transcend past your situation. [P11]

Venture capital CEO and chairman P7 expressed similar sentiments, citing his experiences of stakeholders who operate from a space of insecurity or “scarcity” versus wholeness:

Certainly in my world, where I'm dealing a lot with partners that are shareholders, whether they're management or people providing capital, you always end up in a negative space when people feel like they're operating from a space of scarcity. It's a big problem. And some people by their nature, that's where they operate from, and that's the worst type of partners to ever have. Because you'll always end up in a space where someone has to win, someone has to lose. And that's not what it should be. But sometimes, it may not be person's default nature, but the circumstances or particular pressure at the time, can create the feeling of scarcity. And that is really when negative things happen and it's really tough times...things unravel when people can't step into a space of generosity. So as I have become more conscious, I operate less from a place of scarcity, which then I think unlocks that feeling in others. [P7]

Based on the data, two main composite sub-codes were identified:

- Greater virtues-orientation.
- Less greed, egotism, and insecurity.

A code definition for ‘Personal character development’ with composite and family sub-codes are shown in Table 10, with additional supporting data quotations.

TABLE 10: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: PERSONAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Code definition: Development of positive character virtues from wholeness with reduced greed, egotism, and insecurity	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Greater virtues-orientation</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Integrity, servant leadership, spirituality, egalitarianism, love, calmness, understanding, well-</p>	<p><i>Because you're not in a position of insecurity. I know that everything that I've got has been given to me for a time and a purpose - so it's not from a thing of insecurity. No matter what position I'm going to do, let me serve. And let me be glad in that. And there's no menial work, because it's work that we've been given to do...So I think it's not having insecurity, it's remaining humble - I've got nothing to prove. I've been given a job, and I must do it to the best of my ability. I've got people below me who I need to grow their potential...And out of that comes the joy and the fulfilment, and all those other things, because you know that at the end of the day you go to bed having done your job well. [P6]</i></p>

<p>being, contentment, humility, authenticity, selflessness/altruism, noble purpose, gratitude, peace, patience, surrender/flow, courage, self-worth, kindness, empathy, respect for diversity</p> <p>Less greed, egotism, and insecurity</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Greed, egotism, insecurity, fear, controlling</p>	<p><i>So the impact on my leadership is, I was self-assured, I was confident, but I was also vulnerable - which is something that I never used to show. I never wanted to show vulnerability. I would not even attend work parties, those things that I didn't know how they were going to end. And then it also helped me create decent relationships built on respect of Being, on respect of the person - not who they are, not what they can give me, or what I can give them. And then it gives me a sense of inner peace and happiness - happiness for me and a shared happiness. So that's what you get from wholeness. [P22]</i></p> <p><i>When you are whole, in part of that wholeness, you embrace your own strengths as an individual, but you also embrace your inadequacies. You embrace your deficits; you embrace your lack of technical skills in certain areas. It is what it is. So you are able to acknowledge it and say, 'I don't know, but let's learn about it together'. So you open yourself to learning. You open yourself to people and make yourself more accessible because immediately you're starting from a point of 'I don't know, I'm acknowledging, I'm not arrogant about this. I'm acknowledging I don't know and let's journey together'. So you tend to draw people to you, you tend to have more support, people have far more confidence in your leadership ability. And then you have more impact on peoples' lives, because then you become more accessible. And I think empathy is such an important aspect of leadership interaction. [P23]</i></p>
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4.2.2 Wisdom in decision-making

Seventy-two percent of leaders felt that greater wholeness in leadership would result in wiser decision-making, with decisions that are ethical, longer-term, and for the greater good of humanity. P23 explained:

I think that the transition with leadership that embraces wholeness, versus leadership that does not, is evident in society and where we are right now. Leaders that embrace wholeness or lead from a position of wholeness are leading with Ubuntu - *'I am because you are'*. They are leading because they are serving humanity. They are providing direction, they are giving guidance, they make clear decisions about the end goal - which is to improve people's lives, enhance quality, build long-term. A leader that does not go from a space of wholeness looks purely at self-gratification, or looks at, and not necessarily monetary - *'How can I be more powerful? How can I appear more successful?'* - so it's inwardly focused compared to with wholeness, it's outwardly focused. So, at a macro level, and if you look at the shift in the world, we're all going either right wing, far right or far left. No one is saying, from a position of wholeness, how do we bring balance? How do we go beyond the populist opinion, *'Me, me, me, me, you know, how do I benefit?'* How do we go to say, *'What's the right thing to do?'*, from a moral point of view, from a point of view of goodness of values, and of building in a positive direction? Rather than, yes, you're building in a positive direction when you inwardly focus, but only one person benefits rather than a group or society or a community. [P23]

P20 explained how wisdom arises from wholeness as conceptualised:

When one is having this concept of Being, consciousness, and joy, there will be no ego sense, and one will be guided by wisdom - wisdom which is beyond petty considerations. So, because he is the whole or he thinks he is one with the whole or with the Self, he will be guided by wisdom. There won't be any sense of mine-ness also. So egoism will not be there, and mine-ness also will not be there. [P20]

Drawing on the consciousness construct, marketing manager P9 explained:

So, for me, it goes back to being conscious. When you are conscious, you are aware. And as a leader, in order for you to be aware and be conscious, it means you have to listen. You have to listen to the rhythm of your own company, the rhythm of the society where you work - you have to be aware. And so, in order for you as a leader to practice wholeness, you have to be aware. And it's almost as if your consciousness and your awareness will indeed make you whole now. It also almost as if you have to have some foresight as well, to look beyond just yourself and your company, to also look outside of the company. [P9]

This is because conscious awareness unlocks a systemic understanding of the interconnectedness of creation. When rooted in wholeness from spiritual intelligence, such understanding results in both wise and ethical decision-making, beyond the narrow confines of self-gain at the expense of the greater whole. For example, P22 asserted spiritual intelligence and wholeness to be *“integral to each other. I don't believe you can separate them”*. She explained further that, *“you can live a shallow life”*, but *“if there is spirituality, I think it draws you to look at breadth and the depth, because you are not solely focused on yourself. And you are not solely focused on the other, but you are focused on everything”*. Echoing these sentiments, P19 felt that wholeness was fundamental to spiritual intelligence. He explained how such wholeness in leadership would unlock a greater systems-thinking awareness of the interdependence between humans and nature, resulting in more conscious decision-making through a circular understanding of cause and effect:

Once one recognises that humans are not apart from the natural world, and don't have to be - that all life ranks on par with our own and that our fates are inextricably intertwined - we can begin to make business decisions with greater awareness of consequences for human and non-human life and communities...Leaders that are more whole will recognise that they are not outside of nature. They are part of nature, and we're actually part of this whole process. And I think, particularly in the Western culture, we stand apart and all our actions have been to dominate and subjugate nature. But once you

realise that actually you are part of it, and by doing what you've been doing has a negative consequence for you as well in the long run. And I think the wholeness journey is crucial to that recognition that we are not separate. We are actually all in this together - we sit on one planet and everybody's depending on each other to survive. [P19]

P7 felt that wholeness in leaders would create a better world, through consciousness of “connection” and “intergenerational responsibility” beyond just one’s own family, resulting in more longer-term, responsible decision-making:

I mean part of the problem is that one, we don't see ourselves as humans being connected to other beings, whether that's the Earth and other beings. We've lost that sense of connection. Which is why it's so easy to damage the environment or to make decisions that in the short-term help us, but in the long-term damage the environment. Because we don't feel closeness like we do for our family, right? We've lost that sense of connection. So if you can grow that sense of awareness and connection, we simply will be less disposed to be bad actors in terms of the environment. But even at a simple level. Let's say, okay, we're asking people too much to say, *'We feel connected to the plants and the animals and the earth and the water'* - certainly, we should be able to say, *'Hey, we're connected to the next generation or the generation afterwards'*. But we've even lost that connection. We've lost intergenerational responsibility and connectivity. Currently, people operate where they can't see beyond themselves. Some people can see beyond themselves and their family - they see that as a unit. Some people see beyond their family to their tribe and their immediate community. Some people see beyond that to their country or city. Some people go, *'We're one world'*. And then really more enlightened leaders, our Mandelas...really felt deeply connected intergenerationally, so they can make these decisions that were really in their minds and their hearts - they were really doing it for a generation that would be born after they had long passed away. But they felt so clearly connected to it - they feel so very deeply connected at an intergenerational level, that it was not difficult for them to be leaders in such a way. So certainly, just being connected more, and realising that we're connected to some bigger consciousness should hopefully expand our ability to feel connected to the next generation or the generation after. And hopefully, even just connected to all beings. And then I think that has really important repercussions, or impact in how we make decisions, and how we act in the world. [P7]

P1 shared his observations from working “in an American corporate”, and “the transactional nature of capitalism on a daily basis”, where some leaders are solely “motivated by money”, which “*leads to just predatory behaviour in the grand scheme of things. Everything is transactional. And then also, you tend to be more short-termist*”. He felt that greater wholeness would lead to far better outcomes in the long

run. P12 too, felt that such wholeness in leadership would result in “greater good” through “wiser decision-making”. He explored the root causes of current human disconnection in the world, and the challenge of overcoming such a systemically ingrained problem in fostering more ethical decision-making:

...toxic leadership, it's driven by values of greed, of power, all of those attributes that are not really associated with sustainability...So I think if leaders were more whole, then the world would see a lot more wiser decision-making...I mean, choosing war over peace, that's a conscious decision which leaders are making right now in the current global political arena. Decisions, like, *'Should I bring a product to market knowing that it's inferior in quality, it's having an impact on so many other variables in the world in terms of sustainability, waste in the planet, packaging waste, pollution, etc., - do I still create that product?'*. And the reality is that the world is still operating in a space of just not complete whole leadership. Because the world hasn't shifted quick enough into being a more self-sustaining ecosystem, or system that's circular and waste-free and equitable. It's because the old systems in the world have created huge divides - divides link to equity. The old organisation, values, structures, systems, cultures created disparity and disconnectedness and toxic work environments and political work environments, where people are driving agendas to compete and become successful - because that's what was ingrained as a societal thing to do. Whereas I think conscious and whole leadership teaches you to make decisions that are linked to the greater good. Factoring in the people, the planet aspect. Factoring in sustainability - how sustainable is this idea, this venture, this product at the core of your strategy, the core of your thinking? I think that hasn't existed before. And in the last decade, I think that shift has started happening with leaders seeing or understanding it, but not being able to make that change happen, because the system is so ingrained and systemic. How do you make that whole global system change to create more balance and equality in the world, less disparity? [P12]

A potential solution lies in understanding that leading with wholeness at a macro-level is the product of collectively cultivating wholeness at an individual level. P1 explained:

I think the more whole you are, the less you are a victim of your own neuroses, right? And absolutely everyone has them, it's just a matter of degree of how many you have, or how neurotic you are. And I think that if you are more whole, you will be more likely to offset those neuroses and make the right decisions as opposed to just being on autopilot, what your psychology tells you to do. And if you take that in, you extrapolate it from leadership to organisation to society. [P1]

Other impacts of wholeness in decision-making included greater clarity, and impartiality. In P17’s experience wholeness “allows for a more detached, objective and often more appropriate response to situations”, because, as explained by P20, “one’s activities or actions will not be any longer guided by this sense of egoism or mine-ness”. P15 found that greater wholeness enhanced intuitive clarity in her decision-making, resulting in speed and decisiveness, versus when she did not feel whole:

When you are whole, I'm able to make decisions confidently, quickly, and accurately. I am able to see the wood from the trees. And I'm able to see the pros and cons very quickly. And I'm able to be very insightful. I call it ‘gut instinct’ ...I'm able to have this degree of intuition that I normally wouldn't have if one of my circles are disrupted. So if I'm not whole, I can't think with clarity. I can't make decisions decisively. In a case of crises and crises management, if I'm broken, or one of my circles are broken in some way, I actually cannot think quickly on my feet, and make decisions in a decisive and confident manner. So it's very important for leaders to be able to have this degree of wholeness in order to be effective. Because we make a lot of decisions in the situation on the ground - we don't have days and days to deliberate or to consult. Sometimes you have to quickly act. And so I think that is also one of the advantages of wholeness. [P15]

A code definition for ‘Wisdom in decision-making’, with composite and family sub-codes is shown in Table 11 with further supporting data quotations.

TABLE 11: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: WISDOM IN DECISION-MAKING

Code definition: Wisdom in decision-making from holistic consciousness and virtues-orientation of wholeness, resulting in decisions that are ethical, longer-term, and for the greater good of humanity.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Ethical, holistic, longer-term decision-making</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Ethical, longer-term focus, greater good, wisdom, awareness, interconnectedness/ interdependence/intergenerational responsibility, wholeness as the primary goal, creating value for society</p>	<p><i>I think when we talk about ethical decisions and to move humanity forward, there certainly seems, at least in the world, to be a degree of selfishness and concern for your constituency. And I think if people consider humanity above all else, you're guided by ethical decision-making and thinking about sustainability, and the longer term. And so I think there'd be a definite shift. And that shift is probably essential, especially when you look at the challenges that we are facing. COVID has helped us to understand how the impact can be a global impact. [P25]</i></p> <p><i>It [wholeness] enhances the ability to have vision. It enhances your ability to see a person, a problem, a challenge, an issue, in its entirety. You just don't have a tunnel vision. You have a broader perspective, a more grounded perspective of reality. [P23]</i></p> <p><i>That's because my understanding of wisdom is that it's beyond intelligence. So it would be the subset of Being and consciousness. And then once you've mastered that,</i></p>

	<i>you're looking to wisdom...So the mind and brain will give you intelligence, but the soul, the heart is so you can see stuff at a different levels. It's the third eye, the sixth sense, the differentiator that people have when they know. And it's because they have these things that have led them to be wise. [P4]</i>
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4.2.3 Humane approach to leading people

Participants described how greater wholeness results in a more humane leadership approach. Higher education executive director P13 simply said, “*The impact is humanising*”. Key themes cited by leaders included greater care for employees, egalitarianism, and a more co-creative approach. P8 observed that prioritising one’s wholeness is not a self-serving endeavour, because it encompasses honouring the wholeness of others too:

Then the question is: If this wholeness is important to me, I must realise that it is as important that I'm in wholeness, and that everybody else also is in wholeness, right? Because really, it would be incomplete to only want one's own completeness and not the completeness of others. So first and foremost in my mind should be the welfare of the others - that they also have the opportunity and capacity to experience their own wholeness. [P8]

Another theme included, “*seeing people and making time for them*” [P6]. Linked to the theme of ‘seeing people’, P22 related an inspiring story of how she lives the virtue of egalitarianism in her leadership:

So for instance, the way that I treat someone who is the CEO, or the way that I treat someone who is the guard, or someone who is the cleaner, is exactly the same. I value the individual first. And then we'll speak about what we do and who we are later. But if you can relate to the individual first, it helps a lot. You have that compassion; you have that understanding of what they do. And the minute they see that you have that compassion, and you see them as a person, you are saying, ‘*Yes, I see you*’, then they will treat you differently. It will not be work – but it will be a relationship where you can actually discuss other things. I remember in Tsumeb, there was a lady who used to clean our offices. And she used to make this nice bread from the south of Namibia. And I asked her, ‘*Can you teach me how to make it?*’. And we started sharing recipes and stuff like that. But people could never understand how I could have a friendship with someone who is very different from what I do. [P22]

An import of wholeness thus is that organisational leadership hierarchy serves a purely practical purpose and is not mistaken for superiority. P18 described how wholeness through joy and consciousness expresses in care for others in her leadership style:

So consciousness, are you really aware of your team, how we basically operate? So you're conscious you're dealing with different people, people are going through different things - so how do you balance that to make sure you're conscious and understand different people's dynamics? It has helped me in this role to be able to understand that. So when I come in the office, I greet everybody. It just welcomes that spirit of people that they can be free, they can come to your office. If you come to the office, and you exemplify that joy within yourself, I think it will be easier for people to relate to you. [P18]

Her approach was particularly poignant in light of a suicide case at her company, which she attributed to leadership without wholeness. She felt that greater wholeness in leaders would result in a decrease in employee mental health issues, particularly relevant with the global pandemic context, and echoed by other participants. She said:

I think we'd have less people that have mental issues...Because I think the mental issues that are arriving, there's a lot of it. Mental health has risen. I think it's because people are feeling like, *'I'm not doing enough or I'm suffering'*. So I feel that will really decrease the level of people that are suffering. Because we had an incident last year where an employee actually hanged himself because he felt that the manager was not appreciating the work that they were doing. So these mental issues are caused because you've got these leaders that are not understanding - exactly what you are saying - the wholesomeness. Making somebody feel complete. Even if it's just appreciating the little things. I mean we should be understanding that we're living in a society of pandemic now, so you know the struggles that people are going through. I mean, you spend 90% of your time at work, but at work, you are not happy as well. You sort of say to yourself, *'What exactly am I living for'*, you know? So if we had leaders like that, I think we would really decrease the number of rates of people that are having mental depression. I really think so. [P18]

Supporting P18's point, P10 said, *"What I would see is the world being a bit kinder to each other, a bit nicer to each other. Because people who are content don't have to prove anything to anyone else"*. He shared the impact on his leadership style from his journey toward greater wholeness, which included overcoming personal suffering and a sincere intention to find inner contentment:

The people that work with me, a lot of them have said to me, *'You know, you are a different person, you are much happier now than you used to be'*...I think that I've probably become a little bit more empathetic as a result of wholeness. I was a bit harder before. So in terms of my leadership style, it was probably a bit harder than it is now. I'm a lot more forgiving. And I'm a lot more understanding of what's going on in other people's lives and what they're experiencing. And not being so hard about, like, *'This is the rule,*

and you must stick to the rule no matter what's going on'. I still believe that people shouldn't bring their personal stuff to work. I don't believe that people should come and bear their personal stuff out at work, because I think that a job has to get done. But at the end of the day, you've got to be empathetic, and you've got to give people a little bit of space to deal with the problems or the challenges that they're going through. And I was definitely not like that when I started out. [P10]

P1 similarly described himself as being an autocratic leader earlier in his career. He shared how his journey toward wholeness, which arose from dealing with a debilitating physical injury, his MBA learnings, and coaching, resulted in a more caring and co-creative leadership approach. He specifically referencing the consciousness construct:

When I work with others now, historically, what I might have done is I would have been more directive, like, *'This is my mandate, this is yours. These are your deadlines, let's get it done. Let me know if you need help'*. But now just the delivery of the request would be a lot different, more collaborative, and there would also be offers to say, *'Hey, let's work on this together. How do you feel?'*. I think it's a more full spectrum approach, realising that there's different ways to achieve it. And some of them are more sustainable and build relationships in the long run that actually get you more than just handling things in a transactional manner. And it just makes you feel better when you do that...I would argue that that's probably a consciousness thing - you know, just be more aware of the self and the impact of behaviours, as opposed to just going on autopilot and doing what comes naturally to your psychological profile. [P1]

P22 explained how the joy construct of wholeness in leadership impacts employee retention and engagement:

It makes you a good leader if you observe wholeness. Because you are looking out for yourself, you are looking out for the others and then you are creating joy, which is the greatest thing...You will lose people if you are not whole. They may stay for the money, but then they will not show up in the best way. And they will not be comfortable to ask you or to share ideas with you, right? Because you don't know everything, you need everyone to be at their best game. [P22]

A code definition for a 'Humane approach to leading people', with composite and family sub-codes are shown in Table 12, with further supporting data quotations.

TABLE 12: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: HUMANE APPROACH TO LEADING PEOPLE

Code definition: Greater care for others, egalitarianism, honouring the wholeness of others through a recognition of common humanity, and leading with a co-creative approach.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Greater care for others, egalitarianism, co-creative approach</p> <p><u>Family codes:</u> Care, compassion, empathy, egalitarianism, humanising, care for mental health of employees, honouring others' right to wholeness, co-creation/collaborative, understanding, recognition, listening, empowering, 'seeing' others</p>	<p><i>One of the questions I had internally for a long time is 'Fantastic, you are whole. Then what?' We call it leadership, as if it's a position, right? Because for me, its, I am able to parent with a lot more clarity. I am aware of the fact that, 'Hey you're looking now to superimpose your own experiences on your child. Don't do that, move that away. Help them to explore. Help them to define their true calling, their path. And so when you talk leadership, in that sense, I then ensure that the people in my life are not just positions. But they too, are people who are on their path. And so my question to myself is, 'How do you help this person get to the next level?' [P2}</i></p> <p><i>I still am in contact with my old team with 'How's it going? How are you doing?' Because I genuinely cared about the people in my team. Even the ones, where they're no good - they should have not gone to the employment stage - but I still care in terms of finding out, although it didn't work out, if they are okay and are doing well. [P9]</i></p> <p><i>It's a gift to lead other people. You are helping them develop their lives, you're helping them grow value for themselves, you're helping them build their own careers, you're helping them build a foundation that they can create value for their families. It's an extraordinary place to be. It's huge. Whatever time we encounter with the people that report into us - what we impart to them, or how we try to lead them, can have a very strong bearing on how they go on to carve out their own journey. And we don't talk about it on those levels, but that's how serious it is. [P11]</i></p> <p><i>...my leadership style becomes a lot more generous and empowering with people around me. So giving them the space to think, the space to articulate, the space to express themselves. I slow down, I don't talk as much. I listen more. So I think what it [wholeness] creates is just a much more generous space and energy that people feel they can bring their fuller selves to, in engagement with myself, with the team. And you can create or facilitate that generosity and abundance and just that spaciousness for people to fully express themselves. So I think a greater awareness of self creates more generosity, and people being able to fully express themselves. So then I get much better results and alignment around just people being more productive and creative at work. [P7]</i></p>

4.2.4 Macro-implications for organisations and society

Participants (88%) felt that greater wholeness in leadership would have significant positive macro-implications for organisations and society. P11 explained the ripple effect:

People have this thing about, there's organisations and society - it's actually the same thing. You and I exist in society - we're the human being that lives in the community that comes into that organisation. Should we work in an organisation that is able to show us how to unlock our own capacity, we do good

in the organisation, but we also go out into our communities, and we make a difference there. We make a difference in our families, and we make a difference in all the areas that we impact. So I think that wholeness is almost like a cornerstone of living a healthier life. And there's so many aspects. It touches all the aspects. [P11]

P8 felt that leaders who were more whole would naturally be aligned with truth. Therefore their organisations would primarily, *“be based on truth, truthfulness and truth - and all those values connected with truth would be foremost in any governance”*. He felt that *“it doesn't take much”* to realise the implications *“of corporates, of governments, of small businesses, of everything being done, where people are then automatically naturally aligning themselves with truth and being truthful”*, surmising that, *“Basically, there wouldn't be too many problems left in this world, isn't it?”*. Moreover, P20 observed that,

When they are guided by these principles, then they will think of the good of the whole, rather than good of themselves. They will think of the good of the whole and what is in conformity with wholeness. That will be uppermost in their mind. They will think, *‘What is good for the whole that I should do? What will be for the common good of the society or of the organisation? And what will be for the good of all - for all people, all the members of the society?’*. [P20]

Organisations

Common themes around implications for organisations from wholeness in leadership included a shift away from pure profit focus, toward more holistic business models, greater good, and a more human wellness focussed, co-creative culture. P4 said:

I think it could be hugely impactful, because it might seem like a small thing, but it's actually not. Because a leader of an organisation could be one person and that seems quite small when you've got 500, 1 000 or whatever - but they're able to set the culture by their actions. [P4]

P8 said, *“It has to be the primary goal of your organisational company that everybody can step into wholeness. It cannot be a secondary goal, or tertiary goal, or a means to something else. It has to be primary”*. Leaders described what they would expect to see in organisational culture as a result of greater wholeness in leadership. Common themes included a shift to “co-creation”, and greater focus on “human wellness”, particularly mental health issues and the “spiritual health of the organisation”. P16 explained:

I think organisations moving away from driving profit for shareholders as the primary outcome. We would have organisations which are in tune with the planet and the needs of the planet, working in harmony with the planet, and how we work with the resources that the planet gives us. And how we do that in a respectful way...It would be working in organisations which are grounded in love, and an expression of compassion and kindness and understanding. I think the next stage of development within organisations is a trans-disciplinary space where it is co-creation, and we're moving beyond the confines of specialisms and silos where we co-create. And obviously, you need to have levels of expertise within that...And I think wellness will become, as we have seen over the last few years, particularly accelerated by COVID. Human wellness needs to be the grounding for all performance. And there will be far greater sense of sensitivity around the mental and the physical, but obviously, you need spiritual health of the organisation as well. So an openness to that... So I think just greater ecology, greater balance for all concerned - planet, through humans, into the products which are being created. [P16]

However, P17, research head for a UK-owned financial services company, felt that although wholeness in leadership would definitely have a “positive influence”, he didn’t think that the “world is structured that way”, due to profit motive:

So you can sprinkle these sorts of leaders throughout the world or throughout the organisation and there's no doubt they'll have a positive influence, to the extent that they can drive positive impact or positive change...In organisations, I don't think it would make that much of a difference...I don't think the world is structured that way. So that's what I'm getting to. So that's not why a corporation exists, right? A corporation exists for profit motive. And I don't know if outcomes would be that much different. So let me give you a very practical example. What if you had all these sorts of people at Exxon Mobil? Would outcomes be different? [P17]

P23, felt differently, linking corporate purpose to individual virtues:

We all have the corporate goals for success and for outputs and for impact. And yes, we need to deliver on all those elements. But when you are able to give of yourself because you understand the greater good, you understand things not just from a selfish perspective of, *'How does this benefit me?'*. [P23]

Drawing on the virtue of integrity from wholeness, and what that would mean for organisations in terms of business models and more holistic success measures, she further explained:

When I think about what brings success, we look at the hard outcomes - how much money you made, the profits, or how many bars of gold you generated, etc. We don't look at the system in totality to say, *what were the metrics of success in the organisation that led to that good output? What did we sacrifice? What did we destroy? How many of our ethical principles were violated? How many people had to lose their jobs in order for us to show a profit? How many shortcuts did we take?* So it's about bringing integrity into the process. It's about looking at integrity, moral values. So it's not just about being profit-driven, output-driven, but it's really about what capacity have we built? What innovation? How much of ourselves - how much did we grow in this process? So looking at not just outputs but looking at the softer elements - giving it more priority. Giving it more visibility. That when we talk about profits, we also talking about, these are the domains of output: one is our profit margin, two is how much of growth in the individuals, how we were able to do this without compromising ethics and values, keeping true to the core principles. So I would say that it's about looking holistically at the entire business and to be very clear about how you find balance, how you bring about participation across all levels. And how you maintain your integrity. [P23]

When asked about the impact on profitability from a wholeness approach, leaders generally felt that not only would there be no adverse impact, but that profitability and business performance would improve as a result. Reasons as to why they felt this way included improved organisational sustainability, and a positive impact on employee motivation, engagement, and retention. P22 explained:

So if you are a leader, and you want people to follow you, it's always good to have wholeness, to have consideration of everything. Not to specifically look out for yourself, but to look out for everything. Yes, you want the company to do well. But the company to do well in what? Do you just want to give shareholders the profits? Do you want to look at the sustainability aspect? Are you looking at developing the people who are helping you on the journey to meet those objectives that you want to meet? So if you look at it holistically, then it means that you will deliver something that is great, and then people will willingly follow you because they are inspired by your vision. And they also feel comfortable to deliver for you despite that it's difficult. [P22]

P6 felt similarly, linking such approach to reputation and employee trust:

I would say that we would still make profit, and we'd probably make more profits if you dealt ethically with people. Because if you deal ethically, then you're going to get more business - because you're going to be known to be an ethical organisation. If you have transparency, if your workers are happy, and they

believe in what you do, and they believe in you as a leader, they will want to work there, they will want to be more productive there. [P6]

Furthermore, P1 argued that such approach would result in longer-term sustainability and better shareholder value:

Even if you look at it from a results perspective for the company, I would argue that being more whole will allow you to do things that are better in the long run, knowing that it's not just about the money but if I actually go through effort to bring the people along with me on the journey and focus more on the soft stuff, I will have a more sustainable organisation where people are more loyal to the company. Overall it's a more harmonious set up, and it leads to more shareholder value and good to society as well. [P1]

P11 felt that greater wholeness in leadership would result in greater alignment of organisational purpose toward positive societal contribution:

I think then we become more aligned in our purpose. So if we truly want to build great organisations that make a difference as sustainable businesses, or make a difference within society, we are clear about that purpose. And then we're honest about how we are achieving the milestones every day. We're honest about whether we're on that journey. And we'll probably get there faster - because we're cutting out all the other noise. We're staying true, again, to the purpose. And if leaders can lead like that and build cultures around that, and then build organisations around that, the impact in society is absolutely incredible. Because organisations operate in society - what they can give back into society is going to actually be far greater. [P11]

Moreover, P13 described how leadership wholeness would result in integrity of organisational purpose, resulting in reciprocity from society back to the organisation:

So the difference there of the impact is what the organisation will pursue. In other words, I'm talking about the fine print - that fine print will be the big print. So in other words, a corporate which is saying to you, *'Take insurance'* - but the intention is to make money in trying to reject your claim. Then they will say, *'Listen, you know what? We're interested in your health'*, - if it's health - *'And let's sit down and see, what is it that will make you healthy, and then help you'*. And believe me, you will pay them more than you are paying them now. The so-called Corporate Social Investment will not be an added on - it will be the key of the organisation. Because then they know that if we invest in a society that we are in, that society will invest ten times back to the organisation. [P13]

Leaders also felt that greater wholeness in organisations would result in a different business model from pure profit generation, to one of societal value creation. P14 explained further:

I think the focus would be less around growth and proving results in the short-term, and more about value that we create in the long-term. And by value I don't just mean profit. So I think profit as an ultimate objective is very much ego driven. Profit and sales are very much ego-driven - whereas creating value for society would be a greater objective in more organisations. [P14]

Society

Less greed and a kinder, more equitable world emerged as the predominant themes of greater leadership wholeness at a societal level. P4 felt that *“if there was more of this in the world, I think it would be a different place to experience, where people were more compassionate”*. P10 simply said, *“Well certainly the poverty gap wouldn't be as bad”*. He explained further:

I don't think that the wealth of the world would be in the hands of so few if that was the case. Because I think the whole purpose of business would be different...And I mean, I'm a capitalist at heart. But at the end of the day, if you look at those countries that have a good mix between capitalism and socialism, they are the happy places to live... If you have leaders that are more whole, that's what they drive. [P10]

When asked why he thought more leaders were not whole, P10 replied, referencing the constructs:

Because they are greedy. I mean, that's the bottom line. It's greed. I mean, isn't it greed that messes up the world at the end of the day? And you can't be greedy and experience wholeness, can you? Because you're not going to be conscious. I mean, if you look at your three things - a greedy person, can't have consciousness. There's no way, can they? [P10]

Monk P8 concurred with the observations of greed as the antithesis of wholeness, observing that:

Where there's wholeness, there's no desire. So greed, which is one of the key ingredients for corruption and so on - in the utopian world, it would be absent. Or at least people could become aware, *‘I'm acting out of greed now, and therefore, I'm going down the wrong road’*... Because that which is whole maintains itself in a state of balance and harmony at all stages. And that is what righteousness is - its maintaining harmony, which means harmony in society, harmony in the company, harmony in the family, harmony in the institution, harmony everywhere. [P8]

Executive operations director P15 reflected further on how society reinforces greed, in contrast to how children are taught:

We teach our children this, but as we grow up as adults...I think the competitiveness of society reinforces greed. I don't know when it happens in the life stages, but suddenly, when you enter corporate, suddenly when you into your early adult life, suddenly greed becomes the fuel in the tank - *'I want more. I want more money, I want more this, I want more that. I want to take more than I give more'*. You know, *'I just want to take, take, take, and I want it all'*. [P15]

Finance director P3 expressed similar observations around greed and the endless pursuit of more, linking the solution to the contentment aspect of wholeness:

I think the world would be a better place. I think as companies, businesses, politicians, everyone - the more power you get through leadership, sometimes it results in too much greed and disparity. I think from society in general, there needs to be less greed in the world. I think that's a big problem where people lose sight of it and the whole world always wants more. Everyone wants more. Why? Why do we always want more? Why don't we want less? Why don't we want to just be happy and content?...I think that's what it really boils down to - being content and happy with what you've got. [P3]

P15 was unequivocal about the necessity of leadership wholeness and its macro-impact on the world:

When you're not whole, where you're not the best version of who you are, you can't grow another person. You can't empower other people. You can't be 100% effective. You can't be beneficial to the circles you're part of, that eco-system. And then you're broken. And a broken person can't fix another broken person. And it becomes systemic. These issues, these dilemmas become systemic. Then you can't call yourself a leader. A leader is somebody who is whole, with all due respect. The more senior you are, doesn't mean you're a leader. Leaders have to be whole. You cannot be a leader if you don't have wholeness, if you don't understand yourself deeply, if you're not your best version of yourself. Because you are destroying people. I look around and I see human beings getting destroyed. Look at Russia and Ukraine - it's one broken person's view of the world that's destroying others, innocent people. It happens at a microcosm, it happens at a macrocosm, it happens at all levels. So as leaders, we need to appreciate who we are, warts and all. We need to keep our monsters in the cage. And we only need to let our best versions impact others. And if one can do that as leaders, imagine how great we all can be. Imagine the world if we all know our monsters and keep it in the cage. You know, if Putin can keep his monster in his cage, a million

refugees won't be leaving Ukraine today. Children and mothers and women leaving their men behind to fight senselessly something they don't understand. [P15]

A code definition for 'Macro-implications', with composite and family sub-codes are shown in Table 13 with additional supporting data quotations.

TABLE 13: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: MACRO-IMPLICATIONS

Code definition: Positive macro-implications at organisational and societal levels involving holistic economic and business models that honour integrity and equitable well-being.	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
<p>Organisations</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Shared-value business models aligned to holistic purpose, greater environmental, social and governance consideration, greater profitability, culture of integrity, care, trust, safety, creativity and harmony, greater employee wellness, productivity, and loyalty</p> <p>Society</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Kinder world, smaller poverty gap, less greed and corruption, ethical governance, consideration for the greater whole</p>	<p><i>I do think that wholeness of a leadership style really does have a positive impact on people around you. You know, if you can lead that way, jeez, the way that other people are able to respond to it and made to feel safe to be themselves is incredibly powerful in organisations... there can only be good that would come from this, right? I think that for any organisation and society to be well rounded in how they deliver products, services, how they impact the environment, and the community where they're in, how they treat their customers -you know, not a 'take, take, take' mentality, I think that's very important. It's about shared value. I think it's hard in business, because I don't think business leaders have grown up being taught this in business schools. It's all about profits and market share and things like that. And that's important but I think it's about how you achieve that? Is it the short game? Or is it the long game? Is it being completely transparent with all of these things? Or is it having these hidden agendas - that typical hardcore sales approach versus actually customers buying what you are selling because they trust you. They trust your organisation. I think there's a huge difference there. And I wouldn't want to be in an organisation where the brand isn't seen in that way in the market. I certainly wouldn't want to be involved in an organisation that isn't mindful of the impact on community and on people. [P5]</i></p> <p><i>Generally an organisational culture is cultivated by the traits that the leader considers important. Whatever elements of wholeness that are cultivated by the leaders should spill onto the entire organisation...that's under the hope that each person's wholeness definition has good intentions. Then if everyone had good intentions, and in terms of the definition of wholeness, then it will be good for the society because I should think everyone that they lead should be able to draw from that. And they in turn, do good within the society. [P24]</i></p> <p><i>I would say that 100% as a leader, you got to look at your profitability. But that's not the only thing. I'm pretty sure that if you include the philosophy of wholeness, I think at the end of the day, you'll probably increase your profitability. Because if you create an environment that's not conducive to thinking out the box, and to be able to put things forward and discuss things and ask questions, I think you're limiting the potential of the organisation. So obviously, there's a balance. You can't listen to everything of everybody who thinks they've got a bright idea and they know best. But I think you'll get a lot more out of your team by subscribing to this philosophy, than not. [P3]</i></p>

<p><i>And then also...COVID-19, which now we are having repercussions that are experienced from it. It's not just people's health, but it's actually mental health. At some point, we all didn't know what was happening. Then people lost jobs. Then the economy closed and opened and then lots of people died. There's just been so much trauma and so many changes that are unprecedented that they will literally be talking about it in 100 years' time. We are living it. So a company that is practising wholeness will also push mental health awareness and mental health for everybody. Not just say, 'We've got a therapist, here's a number'. Or it's like when we ask a person genuinely, 'How are you? How's it going?' So it starts at the top of the company, trickles down. We would have to, if we are in that wholeness company, figure out a way we greet maybe, or change the way we do things, the culture - have a culture of caring, rather than putting it as values. [P9]</i></p>
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4.3 Cultivating wholeness: Detracting and enabling processes

Participants were able to clearly identify both what takes them away from wholeness into feeling incomplete, and the enabling processes that aid them toward wholeness. Many experienced this as a dynamic interplay. For example, P15 said: *“It fluctuates. That's what I'm saying in terms of wholeness. It's not just, 'Oh, I've achieved this now forever in my life'”*. Many leaders shared that wholeness takes intentional effort, sharing self-leadership processes and practices of self-leadership. For example, P10 found that awareness and being “connected” to himself helps him lead himself more swiftly out of states of feeling incomplete:

I guess what takes me away and makes me feel incomplete - it's when I'm not connected with myself. I guess that's really what it is at the end of the day, and I sometimes do lose that. But I'm much better now at pulling myself back to myself and getting my stuff together. I mean, I wasn't great at that in the past and I would sometimes mope around for a week or whatever. I don't think I do that anymore. [P10]

Findings on detractors and enablers of wholeness are discussed in more detail below.

4.3.1 Detractors from wholeness

The main underlying root theme on detractors from wholeness into incompleteness was a loss of spiritual awareness or inner connection with self, which talked to the significance of the wholeness constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy. For example, P10 explained, *“If I lose the connection with myself and my own Being or spirituality, or whatever it is, then I feel incomplete”*. In P11’s experience, *“Feeling incomplete - comparison to others and forgetting that the Lord completes me”*. Higher education executive director P13 explained why such disconnection detracts from wholeness:

So basically, let's start with the ego. You know the ego really is a dark hole, right? It never has enough. And therefore, it doesn't matter what you give it, you will not have enough. And therefore, you can't be whole. Because as long as that hole is not filled, you pursue it. And it won't be filled. And therefore, you can't reach the state of wholeness. [P13]

P14 explained further, *“the reality is that the aggressive expression of ego is often as a consequence of lack of personal joy, personal awareness. So if you felt whole, you would have no need to express yourself in those ways”*. International cricket coach P16 felt similarly,

Ego is a product of the personal mind. So we are whole but when we don't understand how we're creating our reality, then we go into duality. And ego is all the stories that go with the personal mind, which creates duality. So they are at two ends of the pole really. [P16]

Monk P20 explained that *“All suffering comes only because of our ignorance, because of our lack of this understanding, because of our forgetfulness. Because we forget that we are the whole - 'I am the Self', and not this individual self”*. P17 explained similarly how wholeness emerges from shedding false identifications to reveal the real Self free of such mental “trappings”:

Mainly the trappings of being you - human, your identity, everything you attach to your sense of your sense of self. I'll make the point it's probably a very, very deep abyss that you need to go out and clear the cobwebs off. But just to be able to peer down the abyss and separate your ideas, or your emotions, or your conditioning, or even your biological constraints, or gifts, from the sense of who you are. The sense that you exist. That's the journey I'm referring to... Yes, you are in some realm in the social construct. But the sense that you exist, that sense is largely independent of those labels. ... You've got a kind of do a bit of soul searching to figure that out. [P17]

Common accounts of what creates such loss of inner awareness included externalisation through greed, overbusyness, and stress. In P3's observation, *“I think sometimes greed, sometimes pressure”*. P5 shared her experience:

I think the things that detract and make it difficult is definitely when there's a lot going on, and it feels like a lot of it is out of your control. I think whenever things are out of our control, we get anxious, we get stressed, we feel like we need to bring things back into some semblance of control. And so I think that often saps energy. It makes us focus on what can't be done, what isn't being done. So everything shifts almost to the dark side, do you know what I mean? Everything is just, it's harder. And the sad thing is, I

think we get into a cycle of, we go there, and then we find our way back again. I think the key is how quickly can you realise you're in that space and get yourself back into the light. [P5]

P2 described how the loss of wholeness occurs through a loss of awareness of his “internal state” when he finds himself dragged too much into the external world, including watching negativity on the news. He described the process that he uses to regain his wholeness, using a metaphor of what happens for him when the ocean (externalising) starts to destabilise the boat (inner awareness/connection to self):

I think for me it's when I lose sight of my internal state. And what I mean by that is that your eyes cut externally, and then you start responding to the movement of everything outside. And suddenly, you follow the movement and suddenly you feel out of sync. The guide would say, to stay afloat, the boat has to stay so that the sea doesn't get into the boat. And when I look too much at the sea, I allow the water to get into the boat, and suddenly, I'm finding myself, like, *'Gotta get the bucket out'*. And the way I see the bucket is me coming back in, and be like, *'You are not that. Come back to where you are'*. And that's how I start getting centred. And that's why breath work works for me, in the sense that, it brings me back to myself, it makes me present, and then suddenly I gain perspective. And I gain clarity, and the all-important question, *'Hey does that serve you? Do not persist on that kind of behaviour'*. News is a typical example. You know, we sit there and we're watching the news, and we allow the negativity to come in. And by its nature, when it fills you with fear, anxiety, those kind of emotions gets you out of... We've got to develop the ability to observe without absorbing. And I think in the nature of observing, we actually absorb, that's how we let it in - instead of just viewing it and seeing it for what it is. So those are the things that for me definitely get my boat out of sync or out of balance as it were. [P2]

Many described the sense of incompleteness as stemming from negative thoughts provoking insecurity and low self-esteem, triggered by externalisation of attention and comparison. P4 described how this takes him away from wholeness, while a mental shift helps him back:

...the thoughts that you are less than...and comparisons. Emotions and attitudes, I think that's linked very much to the thoughts. I feel like I can control that as much as I can control the thoughts. So it's not that great, but it's getting better. And I feel like I'm making progress. The outer reality of people, places, things and events, I think if I become overly self-conscious, then that takes me away from being complete, because it makes me focus on what I have, in terms of the physical right now...And then you can get into places where you start comparing what you have, *'I'm not tall enough, I'm not whatever'*, versus not having... Being able to change my mind, I'm able to feel whole again. [P4]

P7 recounted similar experiences of how feeling undervalued and people-pleasing to compensate takes him away from feeling whole, and how awareness helps him back:

I think I've been very successful in many ways...but driven sometimes out of what I would call a negative identity...being a good guy, being the person people liked and doing the right thing would bring you success in life. And the negative piece of that is you always fall into the trap of being the pleaser and being the martyr, of self-sacrifice as a badge to get acceptance and identity and being valued in the world. And it's been a big pattern throughout my life. And as I started to work on it, become older, you start to strive to free that into a positive identity...But the negative side does take you away from that every time you're stressed. For me, it's a trigger that I feel undervalued. It triggers me into that other space, and where can I find value, and I sometimes end up in my default old pattern which is to seek it in self-sacrifice and pleasing. Then I find that my energy levels can become much lower, emotional, all sorts of things, these batteries just become much lower, start to drain. But if I manage to be aware of that, I can kind of pull myself out of it and then work on the positive identity stuff, where there's much more flow. [P7]

Other examples of wholeness detractors included:

- Physical health issues - *“if I'm physically not well”* [P4].
- Relationship issues - *“if I'm out of alignment in my relationships with the people that matter in my life”* [P4].
- Lack of inner harmony – *“Other people and myself suffering, when I have a feeling that my thoughts are disconnected with my emotions and my soul, when my actions are not aligned with my values and when my relationships are strained”* [P22].
- Negative thinking – *“Overthinking things definitely takes me away from wholeness especially about the past”* [P19].
- Uncertainty - *“if things are uncertain, it takes away from my wholeness...Because it's uncertain, it's almost as if it's in pieces - awareness, recognition, gratitude, everything. Because now I'm in a world or experiencing something I'm not familiar with”* [P9].
- Perceived failure and lack of recognition – *“When things do not go the way that I planned – whether it's work or social life - makes me feel incomplete. Failure, not achieving my goals, when I put in hard work and not being recognised, I feel a sense of incomplete”* [P18].

- Perceived loss of control – “a feeling of being without autonomy with regard to one’s existence. There are degrees to this though, and loss of one’s physical freedoms need not manifest as a loss of wholeness” [P17].
- External threat to safety - “During the riots last year, wholeness was definitely compromised. Safety and security were definitely compromised. I was feeling very angry and disloyal to the country as a whole” [P15].

A code definition, composite, and family sub-codes for detractors of wholeness is shown in Table 14 with further supporting data quotations.

TABLE 14: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: DETRACTORS OF WHOLENES

Code definition: Externalisation and insecure thinking, which create feelings of incompleteness, arising from a loss of conscious awareness and/or spiritual connection with self	
Composite and family sub-codes	Additional supporting data quotations
Externalisation of attention <u>Family sub-codes:</u> Loss of spiritual awareness/connection with self, relationship issues, stress, over-busyness, safety issues (pandemic, looting), health issues	<p><i>Wholeness also is found within. External events/factors still make me feel fragmented... I find day to day frustrations, negative thoughts, feels of self-doubt, fear and external failures make me feel incomplete and fragmented. Being tired/low energy also plays a significant part in feeling incomplete... So the reason it's fleeting, I think, is because I don't feel whole when I have self-doubt. And I've had quite a lot of self-doubt, or concerns or fears. So I think there's so many external environmental factors that create, certainly in me, self-doubt, and fear, that it's difficult to maintain a sense of wholeness. How I do that better? I'm still on the journey to figure that out. [P14]</i></p> <p><i>What takes me away from wholeness is when I am so rushed that I don't appreciate all the nuances, when I don't dedicate the necessary time to focus on what it is at hand. It doesn't matter what it is. When I can't be still, I can't be in the moment, I can't be aware of everything going on. And I'm shifting too fast, cycling in and out of whatever it is I'm doing... the lack of balance with all the things - it takes it away. So I think not dedicating enough time and focus, not being able to integrate and respond adequately because you are so rushed. You can't pull from experiences, you can't pull from emotion, you can't pull from your value systems adequately. So you just end up sort of functioning at a very low level. I call it low level, because you're just giving a response to get on with something else. So I think that time pressure - it's the biggest issue that takes you away from being whole. When people tell me, 'Oh, I didn't do things properly, I didn't have time', I say, 'That's an excuse. I don't accept that'. But the reality is, for you to do things properly, you have to be in that moment. [P23]</i></p>
Insecure, negative thinking <u>Family sub-codes:</u> Low self-esteem, comparison, egotism through false identity, over	<p><i>Insecure thinking is the root cause of all human suffering. When we've got fearful, insecure thinking, that flips us into the illusion. So it looks like the world starts to happen to us. Really the only thing which we can ever experience, is that we can only ever be experiencing our thoughts in the moment. And thought and feeling are the same thing. So they're two sides to the same coin. And so when we think we're having a feeling, and we think that it's coming from somewhere other than our thinking, then we</i></p>

<p>thinking, greed, fear of failure and uncertainty, perceived loss of control</p>	<p><i>go into the illusion... So how does that relate back into wholeness is that we segment, we split off. And so we move out of wholeness into the illusion or into duality. And so that for me is critical, is the key really - is that duality happens when we think that we're experiencing something other than our thinking. And our suffering only ever comes from our thinking. [P16]</i></p> <p><i>Fear for me plays a big role. When I feel that separation then there's so many things going on in my mind around, what could possibly happen. And that anxiety and that fear is what drives me away from wholeness. That's the biggest one for me. Because at times I feel self-assured, and at other times, when these fearful thoughts of whatever start creeping in is when you lose that comfort, that peace within and you start feeling agitated and anxious. So for me, the big thing is fear. And of course, fear manifests in so many different ways. And that manifestation makes you act as you wouldn't normally act. And so all of that drifts then away from the self-assured feeling, which I also think is a part of feeling whole. [P25]</i></p>
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4.3.2 Enabling processes of wholeness

Three composite sub-codes emerged on what leaders found helped them toward greater wholeness. These centred around the theme of intentionality and talked to the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy:

- Unintentional life events of crisis or suffering.
- Intentional practices.
- Intentional learning experiences.

Many participants felt that the journey towards wholeness required intentionality, often sparked by unintentional life events of suffering triggering the necessary *awareness* of one's lack of wholeness, and conscious intentionality to cultivate wholeness. Such life events included severe physical illness, depression, relationship break ups, and toxic workplace experiences. The stories below show that none of the participants lead perfect lives or have perfect circumstances, despite being successful leaders. Their accounts of journeying toward wholeness despite ongoing challenges in their lives, supported the finding that wholeness is a state of inner completeness, not outer perfection. P1 shared experiences of how he consciously embarked on the journey of wholeness following a crippling injury, which led him to further studies and coaching as intentional learning opportunities to support this:

I'm of the opinion that there needs to be a real intent to be whole, as opposed to it just being something you might stumble across if you read the right self-help books and chat to the right people. I think that many people aren't even aware of the construct of wholeness and the value it would have...I think the thing that would be needed for some people is there needs to be some kind of event that triggers deep self-reflection, right? It's like maybe you have some kind of a crisis or disaster in your life - some manner of event that makes you realise, *'I need to work on some aspects of myself'*. And that might trigger the education and self-reflection and of all those other things that I think would support wholeness...for myself there was an event that triggered the introspection. [P1]

Monk P8 echoed these sentiments, *"The key, first of all of course, is there has to be this intent. Intention has to be there that I want to live in wholeness, discover my own wholeness"*. P1 further described how from awareness, arises a conscious intention to take the necessary action, and the joy one feels as a result:

I would say that things that are poorly developed in each of those categories, health, love, security, and so on, I think those will take away from wholeness. And then every now and again, you come to the realisation that one or more of these aspects are lacking. And then it's one thing realising its lacking, it's another thing acting upon it. And when we do act upon it, you can feel the joy you get from it - you realise, *'Oh, I was missing this thing. And it was a good idea to do something about it again'*. [P1]

P9 felt similarly:

So with the crisis I want to say maybe my life was boring, but that's a term that's just too light. I also don't want to use the cliché of being 'awakened' - it's almost, I was awakened and half-waking and half just doing things. When your world is shaken a bit, you start to appreciate, and recognise something... the crisis is so hard and such a shock. It shocks you into being grateful and being whole. [P9]

Life trigger events of suffering re-ignited Being, and intentional consciousness. For P13, *"Spending time with yourself manifests into wholeness...this idea of discovering who you are. And once you discover who you are, then you arrive at the point of being whole...finding yourself, you are able to identify what you need to pursue"*. In his case, it took being diagnosed with depression to spark a process of introspection, self-awareness, and intentionality to be whole. This involved making conscious holistic choices around his well-being, most crucially the realisation that he had ignored his spirituality. He explained how being more intentional about spirituality helped him become more whole:

I was diagnosed with depression two years ago, and at the time of that diagnosis, I knew that I can't take these pills forever. But then I invested in understanding what caused this depression...And therefore, just with that example, I am whole. I feel whole in the sense that I am. Because in also part of that spending time with myself, was to discover myself, right? That I don't have to eat because there's food, you know, I must eat a particular amount of food. And I think that also goes with how I look at my studies, how I look at my work, how I look at my family - now all of a sudden, I find that I don't have to chase all of those things. There's always been time for them. But I will be intentional about what I do when I do. So that for me is an example of how I then relate with this idea of spending time with yourself, and making yourself feel whole... But then out of that, I then began to realise that part of what I have left out was my spiritual journey. And that is where the pursuit of the journey of the soul began. And then I went back into my life, and began to open up and dig deep within myself, to find out what are the things that I would have perhaps ignored, that I should not have ignored? And perhaps I thought that I dealt but didn't deal with. And I cried, and cried, and cried, and cried. And I think, because I did cry, then I became okay. And then I began to be intentional about my spirituality. [P13]

Spirituality was a common theme. For example, P15 said, "*Spirituality is one of the mechanisms I will use, for example, to achieve wholeness*". Referencing the constructs, P14 said, "*I think work at self-love, spiritual development, and care for others are enablers of this growth of wholeness. Individual internal work is needed to grow a joyful sense of being and create calm consciousness*". Moreover, leaders with a deep spiritual connection reported fewer difficulties in staying connected to being whole, for example, P6, who finds her wholeness in God and spirituality:

When I consider all that God has done for me throughout my life, how can I ever feel incomplete?...And I mean it's just the most amazing thing, and that is that wholeness that we know. And as I say we mess up and we sometimes think we can go our own way. But there's that constant pulling back - He's always reaching down into our lives and kind of saying, *'I'm here for you'*. So I mean, how can you not feel whole? [P6]

P11's sense of wholeness too came from "*Setting all my faith and hope in God*". She added, "*If leaders are spiritual, it might be easier to embrace wholeness but for those who are not, mindfulness practices can help. Coaching to managing ego, more education around it to embrace the understanding or lack of*". Referencing the constructs, she advised that wholeness is "*something to practice. It's all about the awareness and the practising to get into that state of mind or Being*".

For P22, the journey to wholeness started whilst serving her articles as a chartered accountant, post growing up in extreme poverty. Encountering work stress and health issues led her to find her spiritual path. Following a successful career trajectory to Board level, she worked so hard that she suffered a stroke, and then almost lost her life to COVID. She recounted how her experiences of intense suffering finally made her more intentional about wholeness, through consciousness of her humanness:

What takes me back into feeling whole is not to suffer a lot - which is why I have become more pragmatic around the approach to my health. Because the stroke that I suffered was really bad and then I had COVID. And it was really, really bad. I nearly died and the hospitals were full. And I was sick for about six weeks, and then I had long COVID. So yes, I've been a sickling all my life. The first time I was hospitalised, I was in Grade two. And I thought there was a different relationship between illness and death. I thought illness was separate from death. But when I had the stroke, I started doubting that. And then when I had COVID, I could clearly see the link, because I could not breathe, right? So if I can restore my health, I think I can start feeling whole again...But I think I rested late, because when I came back from the rest, that's when I had the stroke. So it's just being conscious that you are a human being. And there is a break point for everything. Because I don't think I realised that in the beginning. [P22]

Leaders who consciously embarked on a wholeness journey through intentional practices and learning, following trigger events of suffering, found that they could recognise states of incompleteness, regaining their inner wholeness more swiftly through awareness and self-leadership. For many, meditation was the enabling practice. P3 said, *“I would certainly recommend meditation. I think meditation calms everything, and it just allows you to look at things”*. P7 explained:

If you're not meditating regularly, or not taking time to step back, you can lose that sense of wholeness and lose this sense of Being...So I think the idea of daily practice and reflection, whether it's journaling, meditation, some sort of reflection on self, and some sort of practice of improving the tools of perception, and awareness, which is meditation or such like, is the beginning of that journey. And beginning and end of that journey, in a way. It's this stuff you got to keep on doing. So you start with self. [P7]

Conscious practices like meditation bring joy, from awareness of Being. For P9, childhood hardships inspired gratitude for the basics in life. She shared how simple regular meditation helps her self-lead back into wholeness when she falls into feelings of incompleteness:

I've gone through a number of hardships. And I mean hardships may be different for different people. So for me, it's different changes in my life from when I was as little as three, where my mom and dad separated, and then having to live in different situations because my mum couldn't take care of me...So for me then I had goals. Mine were very simple goals, and they mostly based on study, or career, or things like that. And I used to recognise that maybe I may not have a family like everybody else or have kids like everybody else, which I still don't have. I did recognise that very early. So then what actually brought joy to me was my studies and my job, and my friends and family that I have. There was a point, when I reached 30 - there was a change in my career where then I reached my goal - I wanted to be a marketing manager. Then I just reached that goal. Now every day that I have is like a blessing or an added extra since then. But then I had moments where I was unhappy...but I've reached my goal, I'm fine - I have food, I have a home, I have shelter. So it's like *'So what more do you want?'* So that's when I started looking at just being aware. I even have an app, where at the end of the day, I meditate, to just be aware of my surroundings...It's like we're so busy, we run around. But when I do that for just two minutes or three minutes or five minutes, it's like I'm aware and then I recognise where I am, or recognise the day, recognise the people or anything that touched me. Then I'm grateful. Grateful that, *'Oh, I'm going back to sleep in a bed, comfortable bed. I have food, I have a job'*. Then I'm like, *'Ha, after all, I'm not unhappy. I am actually happy. I'm in a good space'*. [P9]

P2 shared how “breathwork” helps him regain wholeness through releasing from externalising into awareness of his inner world:

What takes me back is shutting the outside world and doing my breathwork. This enables me to be present, that leads to being centred, and it brings an awareness to what state I am in. I then am able to respond and shift towards the state I intend to be in, and this leaves me feeling whole [P2]

Intentional learning experiences toward wholeness recommended by leaders included coaching, therapy, and formal learning. P7 explained:

I think that beyond the daily practice. It's quite useful to have people that can be mirrors, who understand this language that you shared, you know, your own default patterns...They can help you just hold up a mirror, and just give you perspective. Even for an instant, that perspective will pull you out. So your daily practices are mostly useful, but sometimes they're not enough. [P7]

A code definition, with composite and family sub-codes are shown in Table 15 with further supporting data quotations.

TABLE 15: DEFINITION, SUB-CODES, AND QUOTES: ENABLING PROCESSES OF WHOLENESS

<p>Code definition: Processes of shifting from incompleteness toward wholeness by life events triggering suffering, evoking awareness of Being and conscious intentionality to adopt ongoing wholeness practices.</p>	
<p>Composite and family sub-codes</p>	<p>Additional supporting data quotations</p>
<p>Unintentional life event triggering suffering, awareness, and intentionality</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Physical illness/health issues, depression, relationship breakups, toxic work situations</p>	<p><i>So I guess life experiences, they teach you, because I grew up in rural areas. But you learned to appreciate how you basically grew up because I look at myself where I am and the milestones that I've achieved over the years. So it makes me understand the wholesomeness and the joy of where I am compared to others, my progression. Being also a mother. I know that I'm a single parent, but you become aware of the challenges that you go through, but also overcoming that - because if I see my daughter, always she's doing such an outstanding work at school, it just brings me joy to say, as much as I've had maybe something bad happening within my relationship with the father, but something came out of it. That joy came out of it. Whatever milestone or struggles that you go through, there's always something that will turn out positive. So I look at that in terms of my life and say, as much as I've went through the struggles but there's some positivity around what came out in my struggles...So consciousness, I'm aware that I did fail sometimes, but I'm aware also of my successes. [P18]</i></p> <p><i>It's what I have experienced in my life. And I think if I hadn't gone through what I'd gone through in my personal life, I probably wouldn't have as good an appreciation for what I tried to describe to you in that response. Because if I had married, for me, the perfect woman, I wouldn't have experienced all that hardship. Because, I mean, let's face it, my career, it's been challenging in many ways...but it hasn't been something that's really challenged me to look inside myself and really search for me. So, in a weird way, I think that that probably in the end saved me in many ways. Because if I had spent my whole career being like that, and then my whole personal life being happy and never having any challenges, I don't know - maybe I would have would have ended up, I don't know what, arrogant or something. [P10]</i></p>
<p>Intentional practices</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Spiritual connection, prayer, solitude, time for reflection, meditation, surrender, gratitude, exercise, healthy routines, slowing down, spending time in nature, simplicity</p>	<p><i>And I spend a lot of time in reflecting and work hard to get back into alignment. Because then I find I can get myself back to being really complete...So the first thing I would recommend is just get up earlier in the morning. Because how you start your day impacts everybody that you're going to come into contact with for the whole day. So if you're not making a little bit of time for yourself every morning before the craziness begins, then I find it's really difficult to deliver excellence and to arrive and make such a profoundly positive contribution on people around you. And in that time, do whatever it is that sets you up for the day. And that's different for different people, right? I mean, you're either moving your body, you're meditating, you're reading, or listening to something, you're watching the sunrise and drinking your coffee and writing in your journal. Whatever it takes, do that. Do that for an hour before you allow the world in. And then I think your ability to approach the world and the challenges of the day - you're just at a different level. And then the key thing is to do it consistently. So don't do it now and again - do it every single day. I think that makes all the difference in the world. [P5]</i></p> <p><i>So I grew up in a church. But I really didn't have the true meaning or the true experience of living a spiritual life, until about 27. And I had broken up with an eight-year relationship. And I think I was at that stage...I was just trying to find meaning to life. What's next, what do I really want? And it was funny, I went back to partying all the time - Thursday, Friday,</i></p>

	<p><i>Saturday night - and Sunday, I'd be at church, right? So I had these two different worlds going on for me, and work was still going quite fine. And eventually, God had a very special connection with me. And I ended up moving up to Johannesburg, without family, without friends - just took my car and a few things. And my spiritual life really started to grow from that point, where I didn't have too many people around me. And I think it's very significant, because its points of separation that I think many people crave in their lives, where they can go away and find themselves again. And I've had distinct periods like that, from that Joburg period, where I'd find myself quite alone. I'd be working, etc., - but in my alone time, just trying to seek purpose and meaning all the time. And it was transformational for me. And I was fortunate that by the end of my 20s, God took me on this journey of really finding a purpose that doesn't exist because of work, or my mother or a boyfriend, kids...and there's no material thing and there's actually no person that can really close this gap - only God. [P11]</i></p>
<p>Intentional learning experiences</p> <p><u>Family sub-codes:</u> Coaching, books, therapy, formal studies</p>	<p><i>If someone came to me and said, 'I want to be more whole'. I would say to them, go and spend some time with someone who's going to help you to look inside yourself and understand yourself better. And then look at that and understand the impact that you are having on yourself in your daily life and how you are treating yourself - are you treating yourself well, to start with? And then are you treating everyone around you well? Because if you're not, there's a reason why you're not. You're either unhappy with them, or you're unhappy inside yourself. So if someone came to me and said to me, 'Look, I would like to become a more whole person, to experience more wholeness', I would definitely recommend to them that they go and seek some external assistance in getting there. Because it's very difficult to do it by yourself...I mean there may be people that can. There's not only coaching and psychology, there's spirituality, there's meditation, there's all sorts of stuff. But at the end of the day, I found it easier for me to sit down with someone and talk to someone, because I find it easy to talk. So I don't mind telling people about myself. I don't mind saying to people 'I'm unhappy here' or being honest about myself with someone else. [P10]</i></p>

4.4 Triangulation of findings with focus groups

Both focus groups concurred with the interview findings and confirmed that it made sense to them. As with the interviewees, the constructs brought new insight. For example, F14 said that while Being and wholeness made sense to him, “*It's never been in my radar that joy is an integral part of wholeness. So that was standing out for me, but yes, it does make sense*”, adding, “*I am intentionally going to focus on it*”. Another example was F3, who expressed that she struggled with understanding wholeness, “*But when you break it down into saying that it encompasses Being, joy, and consciousness, I think then that actually helps make a lot more sense. And it's a lot more applicable*”. Similar to the interview findings, F3 felt, “*But I think it doesn't just jump out at you. It's only when you break it down and really think about that, it starts to unravel*”. Moreover, both focus groups found wholeness, as conceptualised, meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership. F5 said, “*Instantly, yes. The minute you group the words consciousness and leadership, joy, and contentment together - for me, it's a win*”. Further supporting quotes are shown in Table 16:

TABLE 16: FOCUS GROUPS' FEEDBACK ON FINDINGS

Supporting data quotations
<p><i>I think that the work and research you are doing is so important, and I wish that it was a topic more explored already. It just makes sense that a sense of wholeness, and within that spiritual intelligence, play an important role in leadership. I think if more leaders, and people in power globally dedicated more time to being more self-aware and spiritually intelligent, then the world would be a lot less soul-crushing for so many, and this widely accepted culture of greed, competition, and pushing everyone to their absolute limits would hopefully disappear. This could only lead to improved workdays, better employee retention, happier staff, happier families – the knock-on effect would be endless. It just makes sense. [F2]</i></p>
<p><i>Yeah, I think it absolutely does. Because each element speaks to one another. I mean, the way I interpret it - and I didn't even think of the leadership aspect - but if you're not whole, if you're not content, how will you then support? Because with leaders, you lead by example. If you don't have that sense of awareness, that sense of joy and Being, I think it just boils down to you being miserable. And then there's miserable decisions being passed down. And how are you supposed to set an example? That's my understanding of it. So they definitely speak to each other. It definitely makes sense and what's needed in leadership. [F6]</i></p>
<p><i>The link between wholeness and a greater spiritual intelligence does not just make sense but I feel that it should be on the forefront of any company's agenda. For a company to be successful and sustainable on a long-term basis, it has to be led by spiritual intelligent leaders on all levels of the company. Nothing sustainable, enriching, and lasting has ever come from a place of greed, ego, and insecurity. [F7]</i></p>
<p><i>It did make perfect sense to me. I actually do think it's fundamental in life to have all of that and wholeness as well. You definitely see it in the workplace, especially in leadership, where you know when someone's whole and when someone's not. You see it in the behaviour and how it impacts those around them. [F4]</i></p>
<p><i>So to me, it makes a lot of sense, especially from an operational perspective. But in this current era that we live in, we have this thing called positive organisational psychology, right? Its failed dismally because it took the views of the West. It took views from Freud and a lot of other psychologists, and it tried to differentiate the intrinsic and extrinsic reward system of the employee – give for what you give. And to become whole, or to lead with wholeness, when you see in nature, you find animals leading other animals – it's a primal way of working. A servant leader, will, through nature, automatically enable the rest of their team to serve and to not want to expect anything, and to want to work to a collective greater good. [F8]</i></p>
<p><i>I mean, harmony is not hard to create when you drop your ego at the door, because there is a sense of oneness. And it's not your agenda or my agenda, it's our agenda. And we all work here for the same purpose on the same planet. I hope this research gets embraced by multiple organisations, and that the topic flourishes just the way EQ did at some stage. [F9]</i></p>

Like the interviewees, the focus groups felt that greed was detrimental to leadership, and the antithesis of wholeness. F8 said, “Greed is unsustainable. I mean the effects of greed today is inflationary... We are all born with the ability of wholeness, the ability of Being, and mental illness is basically an absence of the ability to become oneself”. I also presented the final model in Chapter 5 to both focus groups. The feedback was that it made sense and was also practical. For example:

And it's all these pieces that you ponder on as a leader individually, and now wow, it's all together. Like that model that you have on that slide, I think that's fantastic. And personally, I would like to make that part of my goal. So actually practically work on going, right, what am I doing in this space?... because ultimately, if I'm better for myself in that wholeness internally then I can be better for others and an organisation. I agree with the practicality of that process. And I think it's made things a lot more concise when you think about things, so this is really awesome. [F10]

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND MODEL

This chapter presents the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness (“the model”) and Whole Self Theory, based on the data findings, followed by a discussion of each aspect of the model.

5.1 The Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness and Whole Self theory

Based on a synthesis of empirical data findings and existing literature, the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness encompassing the Whole Self theory is presented in Figure 9 below. The model evolved and expanded significantly from the initial theoretical framework in section 2.6 to include data-based construct meanings, and leadership impact findings. While Being and consciousness remained the same terminology-wise, the construct of joy morphed into ‘joyful contentment’ to reflect the prevalence of participant descriptions more accurately, since many participants used joy and contentment interchangeably, considering these to be intrinsically linked, as shown in section 4.1.4.

Constituting qualitative exploratory research, this study did not seek to prove causality. However, in understanding concept meaningfulness for spiritual intelligence in leadership, the study sought to also gain an understanding of causal processes toward wholeness. This approach was supported by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014) who observed that, “*Arguments that an understanding of causal processes is a valid goal of qualitative research are increasingly common*”, versus an emphasis on “*causal laws*” (p. 6). Therefore the arrows in the model do not represent causal laws but refer to possible data-supported causal process relationships. These are indicated by the arrow labels ‘enkindles’ and ‘engenders’ in Figure 9 below.

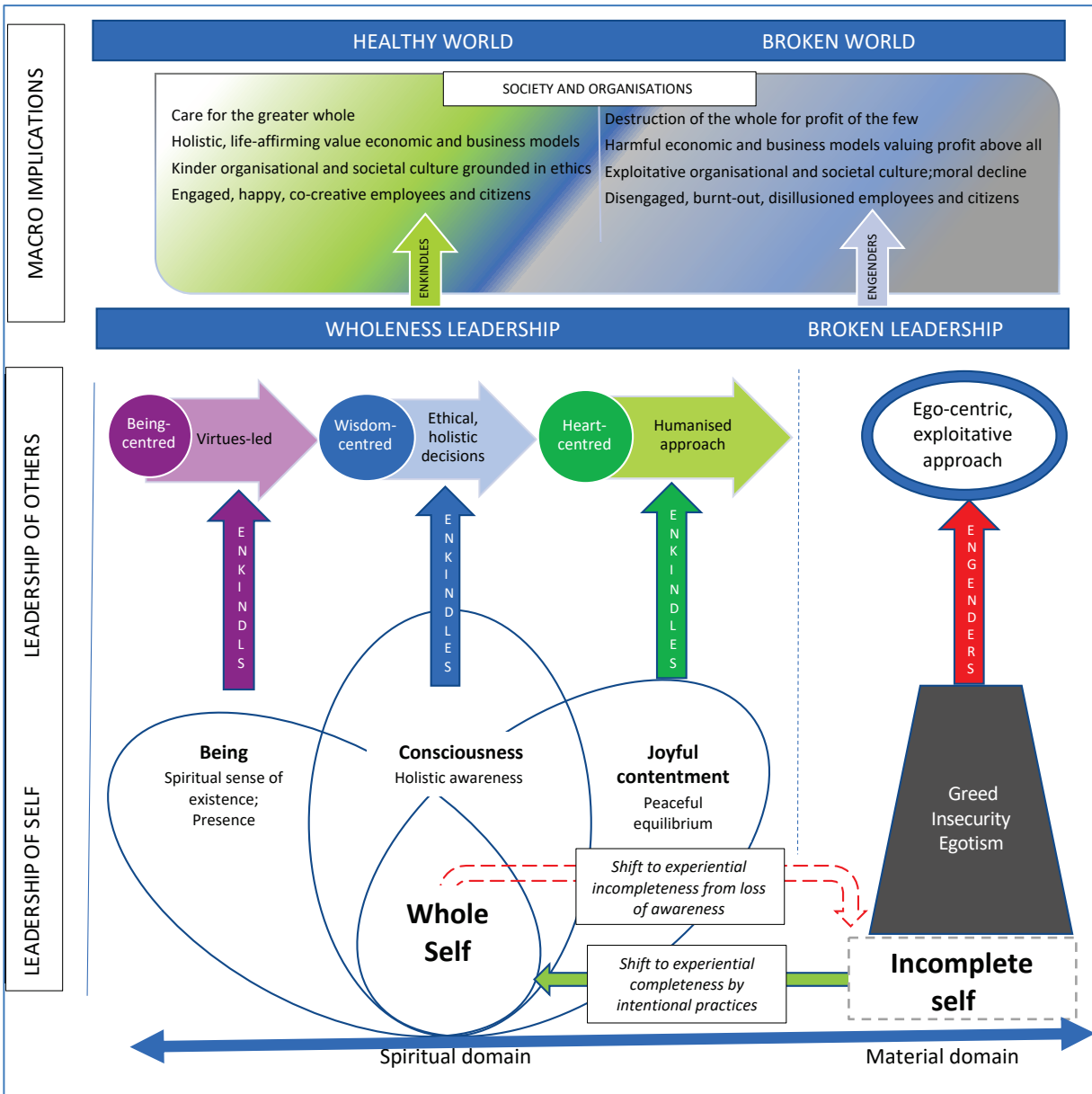


FIGURE 9: VEDĀNTIC LEADERSHIP MODEL OF WHOLENESS

The Whole Self theory represents an epistemological intrapersonal processual interplay between the egoic material incomplete self and the spiritual Whole Self, as depicted in Figure 9. Drawing on both the data and Vedānta, the theory is that Whole Self foundationally rests on a stable domain of spiritual understanding, regarded as the essence of wholeness, constituted by Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment. The incomplete self, in contrast, rests on an unstable egoic mind-body material domain, which is ever changing.

The shift in perception, awareness, and experiential knowledge from the unstable, material domain to encompass the spiritual domain of wholeness is depicted by processes of spiritual intelligence. Ventegodt et al. (2003) described transcendence as “*going beyond our boundaries. In Maslow’s interpretation of the word, transcendence means being present in such a way that we forget ourselves and melt away into the world that surrounds us*” (p. 1055). It is this ‘melting’ which dissolves the attachment to the egoic mind-body identity of incompleteness, into experiential awareness of the spiritual Whole Self, evoking a sense of oneness instead of separation. Some may argue a dissolution of the ego-self to be undesirable for functioning in the world, and therefore desist the philosophy as impractical. However, in Vedānta, it is not a dissolution of the egoic incomplete self that is sought, but a dissolution of the *attachment* to the ontological belief of the material incomplete self as sole identity (Sagar & West, 2016).

This renders wholeness attainable, aligned to spiritual intelligence which recognises the transcendent dimension of human beings beyond the material (Emmons, 2000; Neubert, 2019). The Whole Self theory thus offers an expanded perspective to prevailing psychology wholeness theories which posit the self in purely material terms and thus argue wholeness to be unattainable (Hart et al., 2020). Moreover, both the data and theory showed that the incomplete self can give rise to greed, insecurity, and egotism, which has repercussions for leadership as discussed in section 5.3 below. To Sarvapriyananda's (2014) point, “*Ethics are, thus, grounded in the ontology of the self*” (p. 210).

5.2 Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment: Meaningful wholeness constructs

As presented in chapter 4.1, the data showed practical meaningfulness of Being, consciousness, and joy as constructs of wholeness outside a Vedāntic context, since participants across diverse contexts and spiritual traditions clearly related to the constructs in their own understanding, both cognitively and emotionally. Construct definitions were not shared in advance with participants. Moreover, all three constructs presented together, as in the Vedāntic tradition, created meaning for participants, in contrast to just one construct in isolation (section 4.1.1). While Being appeared in two wholeness models to date (Campbell, 2007; Thakadipuram, 2010), this was not previously empirically explored as a wholeness construct. Moreover, consciousness and joy were not identified as constructs of wholeness in studies to date. Therefore the findings provided an extension to wholeness theory, by contributing three novel,

phenomenologically supported constructs of wholeness. Indeed, without the consciousness and joy constructs, I would argue that the Being construct alone might not inspire or motivate one to undertake a journey of spiritual wholeness – a point raised by some participants, who found all three constructs to be far more meaningful to wholeness together, versus just one. Moreover, were it not for the inclusion of joyful contentment connected to such Being and consciousness, there would arguably be no feeling of inner completeness. Thus the endless ‘incomplete self’ predicament of constant wanting (Cordaro et al., 2016; Cushman, 1990) would not be quenched, since human beings intrinsically want to feel joyful and whole, which is the fruit of spiritual intelligence (Casioppo, 2020; Emmons, 2020).

Some phenomenological understandings, pertaining specifically to consciousness, did not necessarily tally exactly with Advaita Vedānta, being from a dualistic understanding, and not the highest spiritual experience of non-duality. This was anticipated, since realisation of consciousness through the non-dual spiritual state is rare, especially in organisational contexts (Fry & Kriger, 2009). Notwithstanding this, phenomenological descriptions were remarkably close to Vedāntic ones, for example, describing Being as ‘existence’, and consciousness as ‘awareness’. The data pertaining to consciousness thus encompassed a dualistic/non-dualistic spectrum based on the various depth of spiritual understandings of participants. It is worth mentioning that recognised Advaita Vedāntic saints such as Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramakrishna encompassed both dualism and non-dualism, evidenced by their documented experiences of both dualistic spiritual love for *Brahman*/Self and non-dual oneness with such *Brahman*/Self (M. Gupta, 1942; Venkataramiah, 2010), true to the all-encompassing spirit of non-dualism. However, the research aim was not concerned with testing congruence between Vedāntic definitions and layman understanding, but with whether such Vedāntic concepts offered practical meaningfulness outside a Vedāntic context in participants’ own understanding.

The data showed that while there may be other constructs of wholeness such as health, prosperity, and relationships, it is arguably specifically the constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy that directly link wholeness to spirituality. As some participants pointed out, a person might be considered externally whole through health, prosperity, and relationships but lack spiritual intelligence and its attendant virtues, and thus still feel incomplete. Moreover, the other constructs are largely dependent on external factors. It is rare for a human being to have all such external boxes ticked to one’s satisfaction simultaneously for any extended period of time. This would render the concept of wholeness not very

meaningful or practical. Indeed if wholeness is considered inextricably linked to spirituality, then it stands to reason, supported by universal spiritual teachings, that such wholeness is to be found *within* and is not an externally dependent state. This is not to say that external factors may not influence wholeness, but that is different from implying these as potentially fundamental constructs.

Moreover, based on leaders' sense-making of Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment, the data suggested that it is specifically these constructs which contribute to wholeness as an externally independent inner state of completeness (section 4.1.5). Of course, as the sample comprised leaders who are fortunate to have a base level of physical and financial security, with scant worries about shelter and food, one might argue that those living below the poverty line, for example, may have a different view. That being said, in both Vedāntic and Christian traditions, the monastic path requires renunciation of wealth and security, with many exemplars including Saint Francis of Assisi and Ramana Maharshi, who attained spiritual wholeness without stable fulfilment of these basic needs. But the point of the research was aimed at ordinary leaders in the world.

Participant examples showed that Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment are generated within, evoking a state of wholeness independent of external circumstances. This directly tackles the antithetical phenomenon of greed through the incomplete-self predicament, depicted in Figure 9. Descriptions of personal lived experiences supported this, showing that such experiences can be accessible to leaders in the world - not just to monks, mystics, or ascetics. However, it requires sincere intentionality. While spiritual receptivity is helpful in sustaining such wholeness, even participants without active spirituality in their lives were able to recount understandings and practices of Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment, as shown by the data. The resultant feeling of inner wholeness from Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment toward cultivating spiritual intelligence is thus arguably accessible to both spiritually active and not so spiritually active humans, and moreover, across different spiritual traditions. It is this independent, inner accessibility to wholeness which also demonstrated meaningfulness of the wholeness constructs beyond a Vedāntic context for spiritual intelligence in leadership, breaking free from the notion of constantly fuelling external needs to feel complete. Based on theory and study findings, a revised definition for wholeness is suggested:

Wholeness is a spiritual state of inner completeness through Being, a holistic awareness through consciousness, and joyful contentment - which enkindles a more virtuous orientation, wiser decision-making, and humanised approach to leadership of self and others.

Definitions of Being, consciousness, and joy, based on phenomenological findings, were included in Tables 6, 7, and 8 respectively in section 4.1.

5.3 Meaningfulness for spiritual intelligence in leadership

Wholeness, as conceptualised, was found holistically meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership as shown by the data in section 4.2. Findings were grouped into three superordinate categories based on underlying themes: Leadership of self; leadership of others; and macro-implications for organisations and society, each containing codes and categories (see Figure 10 below). These are shown in the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness (Figure 9) and are discussed below.

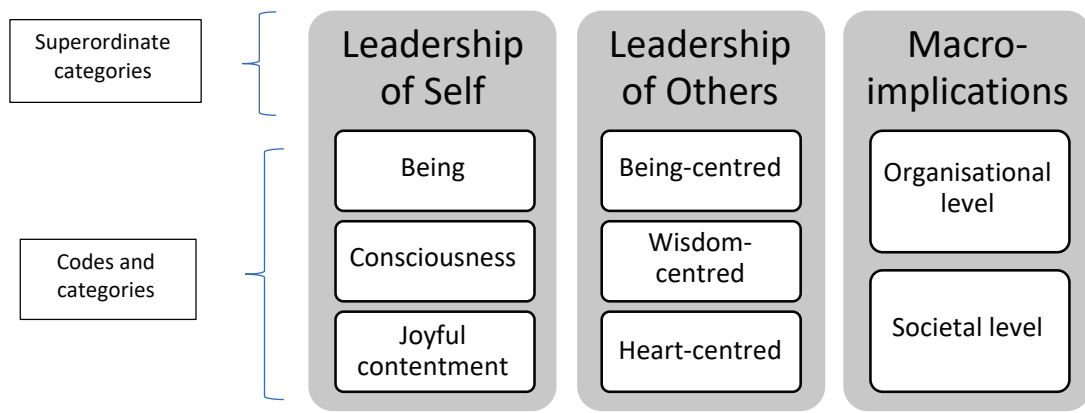


FIGURE 10: HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MEANINGFULNESS FOR LEADERSHIP OF WHOLENES

5.3.1 Leadership of self: Processual interplay between the Whole Self and incomplete self

Both actively spiritual and not so spiritually active leaders described the wholeness constructs of Being, consciousness, and joy as positively impacting them, *by enabling them to lead themselves* more effectively toward wholeness through greater virtues-orientation, citing different examples of virtues including integrity, self-restraint, calmness, surrender, and compassion (section 4.2.1). Being virtuous was one of the core components of spiritual intelligence theoretically identified by Emmons (2000), thus

wholeness as conceptualised by the constructs demonstrated meaningfulness for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership. While Niemiec et al. (2020) conceptualised links between character strengths, spirituality, and wholeness, this was not empirically tested. The study findings therefore presented a contribution to theory, with empirical phenomenological data linking virtues to wholeness as conceptualised through the Vedāntic wholeness constructs (section 4.2.1). Furthermore, the study provided empirical phenomenological data on processes and practices that take leaders away from and toward wholeness (section 4.3). This offered an additional contribution to existing theory since the intrapersonal processual interplay between such wholeness and incompleteness was not empirically explored in wholeness studies to date. Enabling and detracting processes of wholeness based on the data in section 4.3 are summarised in Figure 11 below.

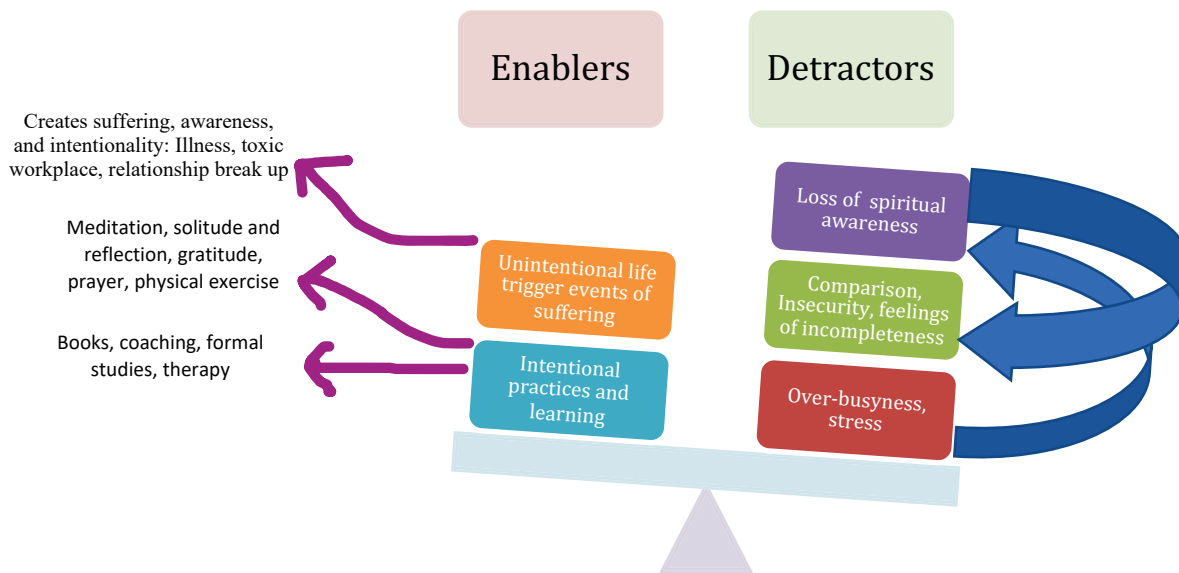


FIGURE 11: ENABLERS AND DETRACTORS OF WHOLENES

Life trigger events of suffering were commonly cited by leaders as sparking intentional processes and practices toward wholeness and spirituality (section 4.3). Indeed, the study empirically supported both spiritual Vedāntic texts and scholarly studies in showing wholeness to be a dynamic process, and not a static attainment. While the theme of suffering as an initial wholeness enabler corresponded with Thakadipuram's (2010) findings, this study went a step further in empirically exploring the processual wholeness-incompleteness interplay and intentional sustaining practices, which is epistemologically crucial toward cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership.

The ability of humans to self-lead toward wholeness is arguably an expression of spiritual intelligence, since it encompasses spiritual awareness and conscious decision-making aligned to more virtuous ways of Being (section 4.2), in contrast to discontent and greed. Greed emerged as a constant theme in the data across all three superordinate categories, considered by participants as diametrically opposed to wholeness (section 4.2.4). The data showed that wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joy evokes awareness, creating contentment, and a sense of completeness in oneself and one's circumstances (section 4.1). Moreover, many leaders reported that this subdues the constant feeling of desire and wanting, which stems from feelings of not being or having enough (section 4.1.5).

Conscious awareness of this inner dynamic interplay between the enablers and detractors of one's state of wholeness, empowers a process of self-leadership, whereby one intentionally seeks to come out of the feeling of incompleteness with all its attendant miseries, to abide in the state of wholeness with its attendant virtues instead (section 4.3). Participants felt that leaders who are able to lead themselves effectively thus, are then authentically equipped to lead others in a way that is holistically beneficial to self, others, and the planet, in contrast to leaders who lack wholeness as conceptualised (section 4.2). The Whole Self theory, with its processual interplay of the detractors and enablers of wholeness, offers a practical path toward cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership, through self-leadership into wholeness.

Vedāntic epistemologies pertaining to Being, consciousness, and joy were designed to help humans toward wholeness through greater psychological fitness, maturation, and integration (Tahora et al., 2019). While these may be the aims of traditional psychology, the critical distinction is that once psychological steadiness is attained, spiritual wisdom traditions like Vedānta, extend the healing process to encompass psycho-spiritual unification, and do not simply stop at the level of the psychological ego self (Welwood, 1999). This is described by Welwood (1984, 1999) as addressing both the heavenly and earthly dynamics of being human, awakening to awareness of the play between form and formlessness, and what lies beyond the conditioned ego-self, which is critical to spiritual integration from wholeness. Vedānta acknowledges the material incomplete self yet expands the theory to encompass a spiritual Whole Self ontology as a path to address the problems of the incomplete self. According to Lucas (2014), TMA teacher James Swartz argued that Western transpersonal psychology,

distorts authentic Advaita by applying its metaphysical concepts to the ego's dysfunctional patterns, reversing traditional Advaita *sadhana*, which assumes a mature, healthy ego. It is only from this foundation that Advaita then attempts to reveal the true nature of the universal self. This occurs not by attempting to destroy the ego...but by embracing a greater, impersonal self that allows the ego to function in its proper place (p. 19).

Welwood's (1984, 1999) recommendations on integration between psychological work and spiritual development may assist leaders in the self-awareness, psychological stability, and discernment necessary for an authentic spiritual path, providing support for the psychological challenges from dismantling old egoic structures encountered in spiritual advancement. However, Welwood (1984) acknowledged that notwithstanding psychological support, ultimately, a spiritual awakening toward wholeness is aided and sustained by spiritual epistemologies like meditation, congruent with Vedāntic teachings. This was reflected in the data, where many leaders mentioned prayer and meditation as practices which help them foster Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment toward inner wholeness, depicted in the model (Figure 9) as intentional practices toward the Whole Self.

5.3.2 Leadership of others

Three themes predominated the data, which were clustered into three over-arching categories based on underlying characteristics, namely, 'Being-centred', 'Wisdom-centred', and 'Heart-centred'.

Being-centred

The data suggested that the Being construct of wholeness enkindles a virtues-oriented leadership of self, also supported by the consciousness construct (section 4.2.1). Leaders described this as characterised by two contrasting forces: an *expression* of such virtues, and *minimisation* of vices such as greed, insecurity, and egotism. The human expression of virtues and overcoming of vices has long been considered a marker of spiritual intelligence, enjoined in spiritual texts across all major world religious traditions such as the Bhagavad Gītā, Bible, and Koran (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). As Radhakrishnan (1914a) extolled, "*Virtue is a mode of being and not of doing*" (p. 173). Therefore I categorised these findings as a 'Being-centred' expression of leadership, which also aligned to Fry and Kriger's (2009) spiritual Being-centred leadership theory (p. 1667). While it could be argued that the cultivation of values could also pertain to values-based leadership ("VBL") and not necessarily to spirituality in leadership, the data from this study

specifically highlighted virtues, not values. Moreover, a review of VBL by Copeland (2014) included only authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership – omitting spirituality in leadership. Copeland’s (2014) review also revealed a lack of clarity on the definitions of VBL constructs, no mention of virtues, and no linkage to ‘Being’, i.e., there is scant ontological consideration – an observation also noted by Fry and Kriger (2009).

Since virtues expression and vices minimisation are typically authentically observed through expression in relation to others, I categorised ‘Personal character development through virtues-orientation’ under ‘Leadership of others’ in the model (Figure 9). As the data showed, a naturally expected outcome from an inwardly virtues-oriented ‘Leadership of self’ is an outwardly virtues-led expression of such leadership, which includes tendencies such as altruism, compassion, wisdom, self-restraint, and inner equilibrium, among others. Benefiel (2005) explained,

They [leaders] learn that the spiritual journey is about their transformation, rather than about the material gain they can procure from it. They ultimately learn that self-preservation is not the highest good, experiencing the relativization of self and organization to a higher purpose (p. 744).

Wisdom-centred

The data presented in section 4.2.2 suggested that wholeness through the Being and consciousness constructs enkindles wiser decision-making in leadership. This provided empirical support to Hee and Gurd’s (2010) theoretical findings from their leadership study of the Bhagavad Gītā that, “*Decision effectiveness thrives on awareness*” (p. 401). According to many participants, holistic awareness and a virtues-led expression of leadership considers the good of the greater whole. Data examples showed that this constitutes wisdom, since it encompasses an understanding of cause and effect, and systems-thinking, therefore such decision-making naturally seeks to avoid destruction of the greater whole. Participants felt that decision-making from leaders who are more whole would likely be more ethical, holistic, and longer-term. Conversely decision-making for personal gain at the expense of others was eschewed as ultimately creating harm for self and others. Such decision-making is considered unwise, since all creatures, including human beings, are guided at the most basic instinctual level to use intelligence to survive. At higher levels of spiritual intelligence, there is wisdom in understanding that intelligence employed toward survival of the whole also ensures survival of the self. Since such decision-making was associated with wisdom, I categorised ‘Wisdom in decision-making’ as a ‘Wisdom-centred’

expression of leadership. The data showed that wholeness as conceptualised leads to beneficent decision-making, not just for self but also for others. Therefore ‘Wisdom in decision-making’ was categorised under the ‘Leadership of others’ section of the model (Figure 9).

Heart-centred

The data findings in section 4.2.2 showed that leaders with greater spiritual wholeness from Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment are more likely to lead others in a positive, humane way, since such wholeness brings less egoic self-focus from leaders desiring ever more wealth, power, and fame. As Kets de Vries (2016b) noted, *“Throughout history, all of the major world religions have recognized that suffering and evil are caused by excessive desire or desires that have a selfish purpose”* (p. 9). Thus there is a greater servant leadership orientation, egalitarianism - honouring the wholeness of others rooted in seeing the underlying common spiritual essence in all (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018; Nihreysananda, 2005; Sarvapriyananda, 2014). Leadership then involves a more caring, co-creative stance, rather than a controlling one. Leaders reported examples of ‘seeing’ others in an egalitarian way from holistic awareness (consciousness) and spiritual identity (Being). Treating others in this way was viewed as a natural expression of the spiritual intelligence of wholeness, because one sees the Whole Self in others, and is not rooted in the incomplete self (Dhiman & Kriger, 2018). This also talks to the transcendence and sanctification components of spiritual intelligence by Emmons (2000), in transcending the material egoic identity and sanctifying ways of relating through spiritual understanding. Since such way of leading was associated with heart qualities like compassion, love, and care, I categorised this as a ‘Heart-centred’ expression of leadership. It stems not from weakness, or an ego-centric desire to be a popular leader but is enkindled by the spiritual intelligence of wholeness from Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment.

5.3.3 Macro-implications for organisations and society

The data in section 4.2.2 showed that macro-implications of greater leadership wholeness as conceptualised at organisational and societal levels would potentially include a kinder culture with more inclusive, holistic business and socio-economic models, because leaders who are more whole within themselves are less likely to be greedy. This has potentially profound implications since greed *“undermines the fairness on which the welfare and stability of the community are built”* (Kets de Vries, 2016b, p. 9). Findings on greater wholeness as conceptualised toward spiritual intelligence in leadership

were that business and socio-economic models would potentially be based on the greater good, rather than what serves the few at the expense of the many. This ‘greater good’ consideration implied a holistic inclusion of people, other living creatures, and the planet. Thus ‘wholeness leadership’, as depicted in the model (Figure 9) may potentially enkindle positive macro-level social and environmental outcomes, notwithstanding the consideration of other structural factors, such as power and influence, which lay beyond the scope of this study.

Participants also felt that leaders who were more whole would place the longer-term sustainability of the organisation above short-term selfish interests, including creating a more caring, servant-leadership culture. These findings empirically confirmed theoretical scholarly expositions on the potentially positive macro-implications of spirituality in leadership. For example Benefiel (2005) asserted that leaders who sustain “*individual spiritual transformation*”,

are more available to the needs of the people they serve, and more available to their organizations. Because their egos have been relativized to the higher good, they can use their skills and energies to serve the good of the organization as a whole, rather than using them to fill their own ego needs (p. 734 - 735).

However, spirituality in leadership is a broad construct. The contributing findings from this study focussed on the wholeness aspect of spirituality, as uniquely conceptualised by Vedānta, thus offering a novel yet practical specific pathway to developing such spiritual intelligence. Conversely, participants described ‘broken leadership’ as being the current state of the world and the result of a lack of wholeness in leadership. Leaders described such broken leadership as exhibiting an exploitative orientation, perpetuating solely profit-centred business and economic models, fuelling social injustice, disharmony, and the environmental crisis (section 4.2.4). The data suggested that this is primarily because broken leadership is engendered by greed, which participants viewed as antithetical to wholeness.

While psychoanalysts identified the root cause of greed to be emotional deprivation, leading to an insecure, incomplete self (Kets de Vries, 2016b; Nikelly, 2006), Vedānta and other spiritual traditions posited the cause to also include spiritual deprivation, and that such emptiness or incompleteness can be addressed through a spiritual ontological understanding, bringing about wholeness. This was demonstrated in the data, where more spiritually active leaders explicitly talked about how their

spirituality makes them feel whole (section 4.3.2). As discussed in chapter 2, eminent psychologists agreed such unification to be the very purpose of spirituality (W. James, 1902), while Alcoholics Anonymous explicitly utilises such understanding of “*spiritual emptiness*” in the rehabilitation of addiction (Mitroff, 1998, p. 76). The data showed that practices fostering Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment help create wholeness, evoking a sense of inner completeness coupled with less wanting. This circles back to the ontological implications of the spiritual domain of Whole Self versus the material domain of the incomplete self, as depicted in the model (Figure 9). Therefore the Whole Self theory and processual interplay is crucial toward the epistemological meaningfulness of wholeness as conceptualised for spiritual intelligence in leadership.

While out of scope for this study, the role of complex structural factors such as power and value systems also need be considered in shaping macro-level outcomes. Structural factors may serve as constraints and enablers to leaders in decision-making, along with influencing institutional systems of production, waste, and consumption, amidst a context of neo-liberal capitalism and globalisation. However, while many organisational culture studies focussed on these external factors, “*very few models focus on exploring the invisible and internal level of basic assumptions*” (Erez & Gati, 2004, p. 585). Moreover, of relevance to the stance of this study is the assertion by Erez and Gati (2004) in the exploration of both top down and bottom up organisational culture influences that “*behavioral changes at the individual level, through bottom-up processes, become shared behavioral norms and values, modifying the culture of a macro level entity*” (p. 584). This assertion supports data findings from this study that behavioural shifts at individual leader levels toward spiritual wholeness of the Self as conceptualised are likely to foster positive cultural macro-implications at organisational and societal levels. As Dhiman and Kriger (2018) noted,

The alternative is for businesses to continue to cause suffering for their workers, their managers, and their owners. Well-being based on the equanimity of residing in ever-constant awareness of the Self, we conclude, is the only enduring path to deep personal and organizational wellness and happiness (p. 93).

Nevertheless, this study, being exploratory and qualitative in nature, did not seek to prove any causality in that sense, but may serve to inspire further such research.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the overall study, followed by a discussion on contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Introduction: Study review

This study explored whether wholeness as conceptualised from a Vedāntic lens could be meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership outside a Vedāntic context, as an antidote to greed and the human predicament of incompleteness. Such greed was theorised as arising from the ‘incomplete self’ predicament, consequential of a lack of spiritual intelligence. Applying a Vedāntic lens to wholeness, three fundamental constructs were identified, namely, Being, consciousness, and joy, referred to as *satchitananda* in the Vedāntic tradition. Root theory contextualisations were conducted comparing Vedāntic meanings with scholarly expositions. All three constructs were found individually nascent in research but evidenced growing scholarly interest. In addressing the research question, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach was applied through semi-structured interviews with twenty-five purposively sampled leaders across diverse sectors and spiritual traditions. The findings were then triangulated with two different focus groups comprising fifteen junior leaders collectively, thus totalling forty study participants overall. Data analysis was conducted through thematic categorisation and coding of transcripts.

Wholeness, as conceptualised through the Vedāntic constructs, was found fundamentally meaningful outside a Vedāntic context, with leaders expressing emotional and cognitive resonance with the constructs in relation to wholeness. This finding was common across both spiritually active and not so spiritually active leaders, which implied relatability of the constructs regardless of spiritual orientation. Moreover, the findings showed wholeness as conceptualised to be holistically meaningful for spiritual intelligence in leadership, encompassing leadership of both self and others, with the potential for positive organisational and social macro-implications. The main themes included a Being-centred virtues-orientation, wisdom-centred decision-making, and a heart-centred leadership approach. Relevantly for the problem in the world purpose of this study, greed emerged as the antithesis of wholeness as conceptualised. Leaders felt that wholeness as conceptualised would result in less greed in leadership, since a sense of inner completeness would give rise to fewer desires and greater contentment. Macro-

implications for society and organisations included a shift from solely profit-centric approaches to more holistic and inclusive business and economic models, and a kinder culture.

6.2 Study contributions

Wholeness, while extolled by luminary psychologists as the central purpose of spirituality and fundamental to human flourishing, remains nascent in research. No studies to date have empirically explored the constructs of wholeness. Furthermore, no studies to date were found empirically exploring the meaningfulness of the Vedāntic constructs of Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment in relation to wholeness – each construct also nascent in research. Moreover, systematic reviews on workplace spirituality studies identified a need for more qualitative research into leadership, specifically recommending Eastern spiritual lenses, due to rising interest trends (Dent et al., 2005; R. K. Singh & Singh, 2022).

The study contributed three novel constructs to the nascent concept of wholeness, as well as an extension to extant leadership theories in workplace spirituality. The data showed the Vedāntic constructs of Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment to be both meaningful and essential to wholeness in the lived experiences of leaders, contributing empirical phenomenological understandings of all three constructs, toward a research phenomenon which remains massively under researched. Leaders who were spiritually active, as well as those less so, related to the wholeness constructs both emotionally and cognitively in their own understandings, thus showing wholeness as conceptualised to be both meaningful and comfortably accessible, despite being novel to participants.

The study also showed wholeness, as conceptualised, to be meaningful for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership in a holistic and relatable way, giving rise to the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness. The model depicts positive implications for both intrapersonal and interpersonal leadership, as well as organisational and societal macro implications. This contributes to evolving leadership theories, supported by Fry and Kriger's (2009) assertion that, "*It is especially important for a being-centered leader to engage in a continual quest for greater awareness, consciousness, and experienced oneness with Being*" (p. 1688). Moreover, the study findings explicitly showed such wholeness to be an antidote to the problem of greed in leadership, contributing a potentially crucial focus area for leadership development.

Contained within the model, is the Whole Self theory, a core study contribution showing the intrapersonal epistemological processual interplay between the Whole Self and incomplete self through phenomenologically based self-leadership processes. This contributes a practical understanding of the enablers and detractors of wholeness toward cultivating greater spiritual intelligence in leadership from wholeness as conceptualised by Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment (see section 6.2.1 below for a practical guide). The Whole Self theory contribution significantly included expanding wholeness theories from the current assumption in Western psychology that wholeness is unattainable based on a materialistic incomplete ego mind-body self ontology, with the Vedāntic assumption that wholeness is dynamic but indeed attainable based on a spiritual Whole Self ontology and intentional practices, as depicted in the model (Figure 9).

By applying a Vedāntic lens, the study contributed multi-disciplinary knowledge from an ancient Eastern spiritual wisdom tradition toward both wholeness and leadership workplace spirituality, supporting postmodernist and postcolonial scholarly calls to expand prevailing Western-centric theories into more culturally inclusive ones, whilst challenging taken for granted ontological and epistemological assumptions. Encompassing a different worldview of the attainability of wholeness supported pragmatic aims of encouraging the cultivation of spiritual intelligence from wholeness as conceptualised.

6.2.1 A practical guide for leaders on developing spiritual intelligence through wholeness

How can anyone, including leaders, cultivate wholeness from Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment toward spiritual intelligence? What are the practical steps that one could take? Based on a synthesis of both the data in chapter 4 and Vedāntic practices, I included a suggested practical guide (Appendix D). These practices are designed to be accessible to anyone, regardless of spiritual or religious orientation since the data showed the wholeness constructs to be meaningful across diverse orientations.

6.3 Study limitations

Possibly the greatest limitation was undertaking to study a phenomenon which, being spiritual in nature, does not lend itself easily to traditional Western research methods. In Vedānta, wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joy is authentically known through direct spiritual experience, not intellectual study.

However, Vedānta posits that when such spiritual knowledge is brought to light through intellectual processes of hearing, contemplating, and assimilation, it may inspire the journey of experiential wholeness through spiritual realisation. This was the ethos underpinning this endeavour.

The sample, while diverse, was not fully representative of all major r/s traditions, the main omission being Judaism. No response was received from a Jewish leader who was invited to participate. Furthermore, while interview and focus group participants spanned six countries, the majority were based in South Africa. The study results therefore were mainly from a South African perspective, although it could be argued that the concept of wholeness and perspectives shared are potentially meaningful for all humanity. Moreover, many examples cited were applicable to a global context, specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another limitation was the inherent nature of the qualitative research coding process, where data analysis represents one interpretation from multiple possibilities. Different researchers may have emphasised different themes. This limitation was addressed by explicitly sharing thick direct data quotations as much as possible, to enable a reasonable objective assessment. The study was designed from an exploratory, phenomenological stance to first establish concept meaningfulness, since concept nascency limited the opportunity to conduct a deeper dive experiential case study as currently premature. While participants were selected based on likely orientation toward spiritual intelligence and/or personal development which can be considered a limitation, it would be interesting to conduct the study on leaders with contrasting selection criteria attributes, to explore whether wholeness as conceptualised is meaningful for such leaders as well. As the study adopted an interpretive approach, there was a limitation in making organisational and societal claims. Although the study was explicit in not seeking to make causal claims, macro-level implications were included, staying true to the data as well as adopting a holistic study approach, based on recommendations by Russo-Netzer (2016).

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Since the study tackled a multi-disciplinary topic, future research could span the fields of leadership and workplace spirituality, psychology, and interfaith spirituality, inter alia. This could include:

- Further inter-disciplinary studies on wholeness as an antidote to greed, perhaps within a broader framing of the relationship between wholeness and greed, and the psychological underpinnings of greed in both the leadership and psychology domains, toward tackling this problem.
- Further phenomenological explorations identifying other constructs of wholeness.
- Examining wholeness from the lenses of other spiritual wisdom traditions to gain further, cross-cultural, multi-faith insights into the phenomenon.
- Use of the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness and Whole Self theory in coaching and leadership development interventions.
- Use of the Vedāntic Leadership Model of Wholeness in further workplace spirituality studies.
- Exploring the inclusion of wholeness and spiritual intelligence in higher education leadership such as Executive MBA programmes, with impact studies on leadership wholeness as a pedagogical purpose.
- Re-visiting the *Sat-Chit-Ananda* scale (K. Singh et al., 2018) to reflect the phenomenological meanings of Being, consciousness, and joy from this study, whilst cognisant that the spiritual nature of these phenomena may risk diminishment from a reductionist treatment of measurement.
- Conducting the study on leaders with contrasting selection criteria attributes, such as no interest in spirituality and/or personal development.
- Conducting a deeper dive empirical experiential case study, for example, taking a group of leaders to India for an immersive authentic Vedāntic spiritual experience over a period and studying any changes to wholeness to leadership of self and others thereafter.
- Further inter-disciplinary explorations of the macro-level implications of wholeness in leadership, using different methodological approaches exploring possible causal relationships.

6.5 Conclusion

It is my ethos as a researcher that whilst appreciating human diversity, a time may come when we are also able to acknowledge our common and unifying essence as human beings, a view rooted in the spiritual intelligence of wholeness, which transcends divisive and polarising assumptions based on race, gender, culture and so forth. It is therefore my hope that this study serves to inspire leaders with an experiential, pragmatic way of cultivating spiritual intelligence through wholeness from Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment – toward leading in a way that is noble and beneficial to this

planet, its inhabitants, and future generations. As the great sage Ramana Maharshi illumined, *“Realisation of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity”* (Venkataramiah, 2010, p. 16). May this study also inspire further multi-disciplinary studies into wholeness and spiritual intelligence in leadership, moreover from other spiritual wisdom traditions lenses too. In light of the current worsening world crisis, perhaps spiritual intelligence evoked from wholeness through Being, consciousness, and joyful contentment is not just about effective leadership, but about imperative leadership.

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APPENDIX A: Participant consent form



PhD INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM:

Participant name:

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Nerisha Maharaj as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD at the UCT Graduate School of Business. I understand that the research is designed to gather information about the study entitled, 'A Vedāntic Lens on Wholeness toward Spiritual Intelligence in Leadership', and that I will be one of approximately 25 participants being interviewed one on one for this research (in addition to a different sample of 10 – 15 people comprising focus groups).

Background and purpose of the research

The research aims to shine a novel perspective on the nascent concept of Wholeness, using the selected research lens of the ancient Vedāntic wisdom tradition, which deals primarily with the science of the Self and unified consciousness. Our interview will explore your perspectives on the constructs of Being, consciousness and joy, in relation to the concept of Wholeness, and its meaningfulness for cultivating spiritual intelligence in leadership. The study sample will include a diversity of leaders across different contexts. Participation will comprise a pre-review of the attached interview guide, followed by a 1-hour online Zoom interview. It would be deeply appreciated if Questions 1 and 2, and the short descriptive stats section in the interview guide could be answered as pre-work, emailed to me by a day in advance of the interview.

Ethics approval

Ethical consent for the study has been approved by the UCT Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee, and by UCT's DSA and HR for any UCT student or staff participants respectively.

Participation and confidentiality

- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, that I will not be compensated and that I may withdraw at any time.
- The interview will take approximately 45 - 60 minutes to complete and will be recorded.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

Consent

I consent to participate in this interview, based on the terms outlined above and subject to the following additional condition of my own (if any).

Signed by interviewee:

Date

Signed by Student:

Date

APPENDIX B: Interview guide



PhD Research Interview Guide: A Vedāntic Lens on Wholeness toward Spiritual Intelligence in Leadership

Psychologists across the ages, including Carl Jung, William James and Erich Fromm, extolled wholeness as fundamental to human flourishing. Yet, wholeness remains scarcely researched in the world of human science. Ancient spiritual wisdom traditions held an intrinsic understanding of wholeness. What can we learn about wholeness, from time-honoured spiritual wisdom traditions? And what could wholeness mean for spiritual intelligence in leadership, in a world increasingly beset by suffering and chaos? Spiritual intelligence is the capacity and ability to uphold virtue and ethical decision-making, by navigating life’s complexities through a consciousness of the underlying interconnectedness and unity of all life. This is based on an experiential awareness beyond physical perception, rooted in Self-knowledge. The research aims to shine a light on the meaningfulness of wholeness, offering a contribution toward more spiritually intelligent leadership of self and others. The selected research lens is the ancient Vedāntic wisdom tradition, which deals primarily with the science of the Self and unified consciousness. Vedānta enthusiasts included luminary philosophers Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aldous Huxley and Henry David Thoreau. Three wholeness constructs will be explored, namely, Being, consciousness and joy.

Descriptive statistics – please complete and send in advance of the interview

The purpose of these descriptive statistics is purely to indicate diversity of participation, which is important to the analysis and credibility of findings. Participant identities, anonymity and information will be protected. If you prefer not to answer any particular question, please indicate as ‘n/a’.

Job Title:	Race and nationality:
Sector:	Spiritual or religious tradition:
Age:	Education level:
Gender:	Location:

The Meaning of Wholeness

1. What is your understanding of the meaning of wholeness? How do you understand wholeness in relation to spiritual intelligence (*pre-work*)
2. What do Being, consciousness and joy mean to you? Please explain each construct, in your own understanding, exploring how these are meaningful to wholeness, if at all. (*pre-work*)
3. What takes you away from wholeness into feeling incomplete, and what takes you into feeling whole?

The Meaningfulness of Wholeness for Leadership

4. What was the impact on your leadership when you experienced wholeness through Being, consciousness and joy in your life?

5. What is the import/meaningfulness for leadership, organisations and society of such wholeness in leaders for spiritual intelligence in leadership, if any? What does leadership without such wholeness look like?
6. How can leaders cultivate greater wholeness in themselves and organisations? Specifically relate these to your understanding of Being, consciousness and joy.
7. To what extent, if any, have your interview perspectives been influenced by the pandemic context?

APPENDIX C: Interview descriptive statistics

Participant key code	Job title	Sector	Age	Gender	Race	Nationality	Spiritual or religious tradition	Education level	Location
P1	Vice President of Global Transformation	Tech/Software development	41	Male	White	South African	Currently agnostic. Raised as Christian (Dutch Reformed)	Master's degree	United States - Florida
P2	Head of Human Capital	Financial services	42	Male	African Black	South African	Meditation, yoga, Taoism, non-duality and Christian mystic	Honours	South Africa - Cape Town
P3	Financial Director	Advertising	37	Male	White	South African	Christian	CA(SA)	South Africa - Durban
P4	Chief Innovation Officer	Marketing	39	Male	White	South African	Spiritual but undefined (raised Catholic)	Honours	South Africa - Durban
P5	Deputy GM: Service Executive	Healthcare	50	Female	White	South African	Christian	Post graduate	South Africa - Durban
P6	Library Manager	Higher Education	59	Female	White	South African	Christian	Tertiary	South Africa - Cape Town
P7	CEO & Chairman	Tech/Venture Capital	46	Male	Indian	South African	Hindu	Master's degree	South Africa - Cape Town
P8	Sannyasi (Hindu monk). Ashram spiritual leader and spiritual head of a children's school	NPO: Religious/Spiritual	50	Male	White	South African	Integral Yoga/Vedanta	Honours in Psychology	South Africa - Cape Town
P9	Marketing Manager	Freight and Logistics	38	Female	African Black	South African	Christian	Master's degree	South Africa - Durban
P10	Managing Director	Freight and Logistics	53	Male	White	South African	Christian (raised Roman Catholic)	CA(SA)	South Africa - Durban
P11	GM	Retail	45	Female	Indian	South African	Christian	Master's degree (Executive MBA)	South Africa - Cape Town
P12	Manager: Corporate Partnerships and Career Services	Higher Education	40	Male	Indian	South African	Hindu	Master's degree	South Africa - Cape Town
P13	Executive Director	Higher Education	47	Male	African Black	South African	Indigenous and Christianity	Master's degree	South Africa - Cape Town
P14	CEO	Logistics	42	Male	White	South African	Non-religious but believes in spirituality	Master's degree	South Africa - Durban
P15	Operations Director	Financial Services/Banking	50	Female	Indian	South African	Practising Hindu and Sukyo Mahikari healer	Honours	South Africa - Durban
P16	International Cricket Coach	Sport/Performance	57	Male	White	British	Universal spirituality, Christian background	PhD	South Africa - Cape Town
P17	Head of Research	Financial services	39	Male	Indian	South African	Agnostic Pragmatist (born Muslim)	Master's degree	United Kingdom - London
P18	Group Risk and Internal Audit Manager	Freight and Logistics	38	Female	African Black	South African	Christian	Master's degree (MBA)	South Africa - Durban
P19	Finance Manager (Former MD)	Bio-chemical manufacturing	54	Male	White	South African	Universal spirituality	Master's degree	United Kingdom - Warrington
P20	Sannyasi (Hindu monk). Vice President of global spiritual organisation and former civil service officer	NPO: Religious/Spiritual	79	Male	Indian	Indian	Hindu	Master's degree in Arts (M.A.) Political Science	Rishikesh - India
P21	Medical scientist. Director: AIDS Research (PBO). Professor of Global Health: Columbia University.	Healthcare/Research	61	Male	Indian	South African	Muslim	PhD	South Africa - Durban
P22	Director: Group Service Management	Mining and Metals	46	Female	Black Zimbabwean	Zimbabwean	Christian Catholic	Master's degree (Executive MBA)	Zimbabwe - Harare/Canada -Toronto
P23	Medical director	Medical research	53	Female	Indian	South African	Hindu	PhD	South Africa - Durban
P24	Financial Director	Freight	36	Female	African Black	South African	Catholic	Master's degree	South Africa - Durban
P25	Chief Operating Officer	Healthcare	43	Male	Indian	South African	Hindu	Master's degree (MBA)	South Africa - Durban

APPENDIX D: Practical guide on developing spiritual intelligence through wholeness

Leadership of self

1. Set aside time every morning at sunrise for daily meditation. To start with, do not worry about the duration – what matters initially is the regularity and sincerity of practice. Your own practice will guide you onward from there. If you can learn initially from an experienced and genuine spiritual teacher, all the better.
2. Spiritualise the practice. Connect to God or Higher Consciousness or the Divine Light in whatever way feels comfortable for you. Feel the sacred Presence in your heart and all around you.
3. Cultivate a pure and sincere intention for spiritual wholeness through Self-realisation.

Practices of Being

- Be free of compulsive thinking. Go beyond the mind. Notice the silence between the thoughts and behind external sounds with each breath. Notice the silence of Being.
- Enquire: Who am I beyond this body and mind? Who am I beyond my job title, gender, race, bank balance, qualifications, and relationships? Feel the wholeness of your Being beyond the material dimension. When thoughts arise, ask: From where do these thoughts arise? From where does the mind arise? Who is observing these thoughts? Who am I? Go to the source of Being beyond the ego. This is the Vedāntic technique of self-enquiry.
- Spend time in nature, just Being. Not doing, not thinking. Feel your underlying oneness with all life. Notice the expansiveness of the sky, the majesty of the trees, the silent glory of the rising sun, the Presence of nature.

Practices of consciousness

- Actively purify the mind and heart through the cultivation of virtues. Start with practising truthfulness and integrity in thought, word, and deed.
- Be aware of the underlying spiritual Consciousness within and around you, the sacred Light which illumines everything. It is like being aware not just of the lamp, but the electricity which enables the lamp to function. This expands one's consciousness beyond the material. Know yourself and all beings as one with that Consciousness. Let go of the individual ego sense.

- Practice calmness in walking, talking, thinking, and most especially, in breathing. It is difficult to be awake in consciousness and have a calm mind when the breath is not peaceful.

Practices of joyful contentment

- Practice gratitude daily, feeling a sense of genuine joy in your heart for the blessings that are showered upon you in so many little ways. Either write this in a journal, or just reflect on the top three to five things that you are grateful for at the end of each day, while driving home or during quiet time. Make it habitual. Invite yourself to also give thanks for the hidden blessings that may be contained in adversity.
- Be content with what you have. Discern between authentic needs, and the excessive, restless desires of the mind. Break free of the trap of unnecessary desires for more wealth, name, and fame. If the sense of incompleteness and wanting arises, hold this in awareness. Engage in the practices of Being. It will dissolve.
- Take care of yourself holistically. Make time to nurture the mind, heart, and spirit, through these practices. Nourish the body through exercise and pure food in a balanced way.

Leadership of others

- Let your dealings with others be aligned to the highest expression of your Being, through consciously practising integrity, non-harming, purity of intention and other virtues. Do not worry if you fall every so often. That keeps us humble. Just keep on doing your best.
- Employ conscious wisdom in decision-making. Create holistic business models and meaningful wholeness metrics, with the intention to create as little harm as possible to people and planet, while creating a sustainable and flourishing organisation.
- Treat employees as spiritual beings, going beyond race, gender, job title, and so forth. If difficult people-related actions need to be taken, these can still be done humanely, with compassion, respect, and fairness.