Use of Discernment in Effective Decision Making: A Case for Method of Deep Conversation

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Abstract- The main purpose of this article is to introduce a concept of discernment, that could be employed in the process of decision making by organizational leaders. The idea gains importance in these difficult times as leaders make decisions by using only rational capacities, leaving out moral and emotional capacities that, this paper argues, are essential part of the process of discernment. The concept of discernment that is based on Truth-Goodness-Beauty framework, we believe, would help leaders in organizations make better decisions. We suggest deep conversation as a method for discerning a decision in the process of decision making. By creating a culture of discernment wherein practicing Deep Conversation and collaborative discernment are the norms, leaders’ decision making would become profound, robust and the decisions taken would give great consolations and fulfilment. That decision born out of discernment process would always remain aligned and connected to the original vision of organizations.

Keywords – Leadership; Discernment; Organizational Development; Management Decisions

I. INTRODUCTION

There has always been an emphasis on organizations to have a robust dedication to the core values and the mission so that they can respond efficiently and effectively to any kind of turbulence and consistently succeed (Campbell and Yeung,1991; Ireland and Hirc,1992; Fjortoft and Smart,1994; Paine,1994; Collins and Porras,1994). Discernment is important for organizations to make important choices in bizarre environments and it also helps organizations fulfil their responsibilities and thereby satisfy their stakeholders via fulfilling their vision and mission (Gallagher and Goodstein,2002). Discernment enables leaders to understand the humanity part of organizational decision making and evaluate their deepest values (Traüffer et al.,2010). Discerning leaders are spiritually mature enough to resist desolation and adopt consolation. The goals of the leaders need to be spiritually fulfilling and this is possible only through discernment. Discernment also helps the leader to choose the right qualities needed to be developed, those that are meaningful and for the common good of the organization. The leaders’ intentions, goals and actions are always assessed in the process of discernment. Journaling these assessments in the light of consolation and desolation is a good way of reflection and an anchor to remind the leader of the organization’s purpose (Rothausen, 2017).

Discernment is an important component in building selfless leadership in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment (Kok and Van den Heuvel, 2019). This ability enables leaders to feel, think, know, want, select and do only what is right for the current situation and to thereby affect other situations in the future for the good of everyone involved. A leader who practices discernment would be equipped to read the signs of times vividly and wisely and hence act upon with utmost wisdom, lucidity and soberness. Discernment creates an environment for sound decision making, creativity, profitability in the right sense, relational progress and healthy bonding. Discernment works well in an organizational culture which is we-based rather than me-based, a relationship-based culture. Hierarchical and closed formatted organizations are never conducive for good discernment (Joubert, 2019).

Discernment serves as a retrospective pause before implementing decisions and helps avoid costly mistakes. It enables the leaders to set a robust decision-making framework so that sound decisions are made in collaboration with their team which will benefit the organization in the long run (Benefiel, 2008). During the decision-making process, the alternatives which bring fear should be ignored and those that bring peace and rightfulness should be considered. A disordered decision alternative may bring excitement but leaves behind an aftertaste of emptiness. On the other
Discernment enhances the quality of decision making in the business environment by making decisions that reflect the organizational values. By practising the Ignatian rules of discernment, leaders would be equipped to make decisions that would be oriented towards the common good of the organization. Through the process of discernment, the source of one’s actions, thoughts and feelings could be perceived. These sources could be good or bad. By practising discernment, leaders can only be able to discern their own actions but also that of others (Seybold-Clegg et al., 2003).

Human beings are driven by motives, in daily life and at the time of making major decisions in life. What drives a man to start a business or a woman to choose a profession? Many things contribute to this. Or what drives a man who has been alcoholic for years to quit or an obese man to get thin? Many inner motives interact in a kind of movement that eventually drives the person to act. This is a dense complex of motives.

Discernment is a process of recognising these interior movements, consisting of desires, emotions, inclinations, intentions, feelings, and motivations, what is called, “motions of the soul.” Discernment involves becoming sensitive to these movements, reflecting on them, and understanding where they come from and where they lead us.

These interior movements take on two configurations, which are called consolation and desolation. Both consolation and desolation can move the leader towards the vision of an organization or pull away from it. Being true to the vision, with intentions of doing good to all give an experience of consolation. Whereas not being true and not having intention of doing good brings a dry feeling of desolation; at times such decision may bring profit but there would not be sense of satisfaction.

This is why we argue a case for discernment process leading to a decision in which we suggest a method what we call ‘Deep Conversation’. It is all about listening and responding to the call of deeper self where our deepest desires reside that reflect the cardinal virtues of life: Truth-Goodness-Beauty. As a discerning leader, you sift through your impulses, motives, inner movements and options to discover which ones lead you closer to being true and only doing good, and help you see beauty in that truth and goodness. This will be a true reflection and realisation of the vision and the purpose of your organization. The organizations that discern will survive any crisis, even COVID-19 cannot affect substantively. We believe that if an organization needs to be on the top of its league by handling customer and employee crisis well and constantly be true to its vision, then it needs more teams that discern before they decide. In order to create a discerning environment, the top management-most, if not all, should adopt discernment principles.

This article explores the principles of discernment Truth-Goodness-Beauty, the concept of discernment, the framework of discernment, pros of discernment and the cons of the absence of discernment. We then suggest a method of discernment -Deep Conversation- and explore its properties and steps to be followed in it.

II. DEFINITIONS OF DISCERNMENT

Discernment is derived from the Latin word, discernere which means “to distinguish” or “to separate” or “to sift through.” By sifting through the deeper experiences both internal and external, the discernment process helps to stay centred to the vision. Discernment includes as well as transcends emotional intelligence and intellectual analysis by assimilating one’s heart, soul and mind and differentiating between the real and the imaginary (Benefiel, 2008).

Several researchers have defined discernment with respect to different dimensions. With respect to the dimension of process: Discernment “is the interactional and communicative process that takes place within a community of practice to reflect on habits, actions and communication patterns, and to bring to the surface that which is relevant but hidden, in order to determine the best course of action for a particular situation” (Barensten, 2019, p.133). It is a process by which “judgements of conscience” are made and it is an important component of the development process of morals (Bernacchio, 2019, p.448). A process in which even the most insignificant variables are factored in and weighed in a selfless search of a great extrinsic course of action. (Hurlbut, 2014). “A never-ending relational and rational process.” (Joubert, 2019, p.148) as it is a continuous process which is in relational motion and keeps oneself always true to the inner self. Discernment is coupled by a commitment to be sensitive to others’ needs and enables their growth (Joubert, 2019).

With respect to the dimension of assessment: Discernment is an “in-depth way of assessing the risk/benefit ratio” (p. 36) wherein the opportunity/challenge is reviewed based on all the different perspectives (Blanchard, 2015).

With respect to the dimension of competence: Discernment is a competence which capacitates the assessment of actions morally, in the light of legitimate expectations. It enables to make the right decisions by considering the values which really matter and the reality which prevents from behaving appropriately (Entschew and Suchanek, 2017).
With respect to the dimension of judgement: Discernment is the search for truth and the objective judgement of new cultures, ideas and discoveries after being receptive to them (McGovern, 1988).

Another definition of Discernment is Positive Discrimination (Delbecq et al., 2003) where decision makers should be able to discern the differences which are important for the decision. Discernment can be improved by assessing the unique thinking patterns of the individuals analysed and creating a decision potential. Assessing differences which will complement each other is important for good discernment. This positive discernment should be encouraged among leaders in order to make effective evaluations (Connor, 2009).

III. DISCERNMENT – IN PRACTICE

Discernment has the capacity to bridge the gap between “objective moral principles and actual business practice” (p.447). Hence by keeping the business aims and tasks in a broader perspective in the background, discernment checks the adherence to moral principles. Discernment goes further beyond the prescribed decision-making models and the philosophical models of reasoning (Bernacchio, 2019). Discernment would help to build an environment with no power hassles or abuses or territorialism, but instead develop a group-oriented decision-making space where everyone shares a common understanding and work towards a common goal. Discernment actions are bound by time and are also contextual. Leaders who practice discernment possess a (1) relational interest in their relationship with God or others (2) self-awareness, as the relationship with one’s inner self is an important influencer of the discernment process. Discernment is sought in order to pursue peace or to avoid anxiety (Hurlbut, 2014). In this constantly changing world, discernment needs to be an ongoing process. New scenarios bring in new discernment and newer responses (Nicolás, 2009).

Discernment is interconnected with strategic decision making as both the approaches lead to the formulation of a thoughtful alternative. Discernment can be combined with strategic decision making by utilising these elements (1) Beginning the process of decision making with a reflective inner disposition (2) Having patience in revealing the underlying essence of the decision problem (3) Collecting abundant information which is painstaking, followed by benchmarking, innovation, reconciling differences, and collaborative problem solving (4) Prayer and reflection (5) Making decisions which are tentative and giving a lot of attention to results (6) Re-evaluation (Delbecq et al., 2003).

Post action review is another way to begin discerning. The learnings from the review need to be put into use by making appropriate changes and adjustments in the approach. In this way, the current approach can be adjusted, and the learnings can also be employed in the future. This kind of discerning involves three subcomponents namely: (1) “aligning and integrating achieving second-order change (2) assessing:learning from the present for the sake of increasing future change capacity (3) adjusting:changing the way we change” (Pasmore, 2016, p.80).

An important way of self-development is by discerning about situations by asking the three important discernment questions to evaluate any given situation. “Why did it happen?” “What did I learn?” and “What will I do?” By analysing the Why part, understanding of the roots of the situation in terms of why it was told or done is focussed upon. The next question focusses on the learnings from the situation by digging deep and uncovering useful lessons. The last question is about intentionally deciding on the applications of the lessons learnt which ultimately results in betterment (Coughlin, 2018). The process of discernment needs a community to discern well as all the factors like every experience, every data point and every positive fact need to be considered in the process (Nicolás, 2009). Discernment requires the consideration of others’ experiences and concerns as equally important in the judgement process, hence it is inherently social. Discernment demands the recognition of one’s fallibility and readiness to reanalyse one’s judgements with the knowledge of new experiences and that of peers (Bernacchio, 2019). Discernment focuses on both the relationships and the outcomes (Berlinger and Tumblin, 2004).

Hurlbut (2014) identified the stages of discernment process as (1) stimulus stage which is the initiation of the discernment process (2) self-searching stage which involves the evaluation of internal conflicts (3) emotional stage where responses are elicited (4) source identification stage where the source of the external stimuli is decoded (5) cognitive stage wherein the meaning is grasped (6) data-gathering stage wherein research is initiated (7) counsel-seeking stage wherein peer evaluation and insights are welcomed (8) conclusion stage which involves the assignment of the ultimate meaning to the experience (9) decision stage which involves judging whether the conclusions should be acted upon or not and if yes, how it should be done (10) action stage wherein a final plan is executed (11) self-doubt stage wherein post the action, all the doubts are cleared and lucidity is maintained (12) recursive stage which attempts to broaden the understanding by going back to any of the previous stages and (13) backward looking stage wherein in hindsight the entire process is viewed and also involves the wrapping of this process as a memory which can be utilised for other discernment processes in the future.

It is important to measure discernment practiced by organizational leaders. Traüffer (2008) initially developed a discernment practices indicator (DPI) scale containing 14 items in order to measure discernment. Another three-factor
instrument was developed to measure courage, faith and intuition which operationally define the discernment concept (Traüffer et al., 2010).

IV. TRUTH-GOODNESS-BEAUTY FRAMEWORK

It was Plato who initially formed the Platonic triad of Truth-Goodness-Beauty. But, it was Marsilio Ficino who gave these concepts a systematic treatment (Ficino, 1975). The framework of Truth-Goodness-Beauty are not just subjective opinions, but they are unique yet interconnected manifestations of reality. In order to gain knowledge and to restore the soul, humans need to pursue and then perceive Truth-Goodness-Beauty (Turley, 2014). All the virtues of truth, goodness and beauty are interconnected and work in cohesion in any given scenario (Martin, 2016).

This Platonic triad is a divine concept (Turley, 2014). Plato calls it eikon, eternal transcendent source of life in which the cosmic world functions as eikon, temporal form of the Transcendent. From this the entire cosmic reality is formed in which human beings are a part, not the whole (Plato, 1952). Human beings form their character with logos (rational capacities), ethos (emotional and moral capacities), and eros (desires and aesthetic capacities) (Plato, 1969).

According to Plato, Good is universal priority in which all true beings take part and from which all ideas emerge, and it is not merely a value or thing. Good is the divine light which guides the perception of everything. Good needs to be communicated to the human mind via Truth. According to Plato, Truth is the splendor of the Good, which the soul perceives. Truth refers to the understanding of how all worldly beings interact and draw their nature from the Good. For revelation of the Good to the human mind, not only is Truth needed, but also Beauty, which is triggered as a desire in the soul (Plato, 1969). Humans are drawn to the Truth and the Good through Beauty. Beauty allures and Truth (Turley, 2014).

V. DISCERNMENT – TRUTH-GOODNESS-BEAUTY

Discernment is an act by which we recognise what is true: Discernment demands the presence of a convinced truth which could be used as a standard for comparison (Hurlbut, 2014). Knowing the difference between the truth and error which motivates a person is the basis of discernment (Hayes, 1979). An important guideline of corporate discernment is that all the members should reveal the truth from their perspective so that the process is complete and a wholesome view is obtained (Boyd, 2005). It is a process wherein the group pursues the truth together in collaboration (Hurlbut, 2014). Man is able to discern well because his/her virtue places him/her in agreement with the true good (Ramos, 2012).

Discernment is an act by which we recognise what is good: The fundamental function of discernment is judging between what is good and evil and finally choosing the good. This demands the knowledge of what is actually good and what is evil (Scholl, 2001). Deliberation, perception of morals and reasoned choice help in discerning and promoting decisive action according to the good. Discernment of the necessary amount of external good (status, money, career, power, etc) required for a good life and how to get these goods in the best available path can be assisted by practical wisdom (Torrance, 2015).

Discernment is an act by which we recognise what is beautiful: The truly beautiful needs to be discerned from what is apparently beautiful (Ramos, 2012). The discernment of beauty often assumes the recognition of truth and goodness, while the recognition of goodness leads to the exploration of truth (Cornille, 2019). “As soon as we are willing to search within ourselves, we all sense what is right, we all discern what is beautiful; we have no need to be taught either one” (Norton, 1995, p. 47).

The elements of truth, goodness and beauty are closely related in the discernment process (Cornille, 2019). Every experience should be discerned with respect to its truth, goodness and beauty and that interpretation should be accounted for (Wattles, 2016). “Discernment is spontaneous because, through the virtue, man is in consonance with the good object, which has been perceived, known, as such, and has been immediately grasped as pleasing. When virtues orient affectivity, then the will delights in the good apprehended by the intellect: the will delights in the true good. This true good, the honestum, is the morally beautiful” (Ramos, 2012, p. 203). Discernment is at the core of every virtue. (A Primer on Virtue, 2013). By developing and employing practical wisdom, discernment of conflicts is possible by judging which virtue and how much of it is necessary for a given scenario (Torrance, 2015).

Hence, Discernment is the ability to recognise the cardinal virtues of truth, goodness, and beauty. Thereby, Discernment is connected to the triad.

Building a culture of discernment implies viewing the various decision alternatives through the lens of Truth-Goodness-Beauty, which are the deepest realities and the important bedrock of human existence (Gardner, 2011). These three virtues guide human existence. Gardner says that “each of the virtues encompasses an abstract realm of experience – verbal propositions, evocative experiences, and relations among human beings, respectively” (2011, p.
13). We need to affirm truth in the ways we make choices. Goodness involves morality and ethics. Moving beyond the realm of artistic attributes and individualised sense of beauty, it is valued more by the ways in which human beings are true and good. The virtues remove the decision-making process away from the narrow economic or material concerns. In fact, when these three virtues are employed in the decision-making process any decision would contribute to wellbeing of the society and environment.

Decision making functions mostly on the terrain of *logos*. But discernment involves all the three levels and the final decision will be profound. Discernment’s core is driven by a framework of life that is once again based on Truth-Goodness-Beauty. The framework has four elements that is drawn on Cottingham (2003) discusses in his book, *The Meaning of Life*. He says meaningful life is possible only by following the objective values of truth, goodness and beauty. “Human beings cannot live wholly and healthily except in responsiveness to objective values of truth, and beauty and goodness. If they deny those values or try to subordinate them to their own selfish ends, they find that meaning slips away” (Cottingham,2003,p.103).

1. **View life as a free and precious gift that comes from a source that generates truth, beauty, and goodness.**
   Seeing life as free gift is a true picture of reality. Realization of our life as a gift, not earned by us, makes us humble and grateful. This will make you view the world around you as, despite its limitations and flaws, transfigured by that Truth-Goodness-Beauty.

2. **Realise that life hinges upon the choice you make between good and evil.**
   In the routine course of life and work, we face a choice between good and not good, in case of a leader in his or her mission, the choice confronts. He or she should choose the good and that will help chart a moral course of life.

3. **Adopt a collective pattern of life and work that is structured by traditions of collective living.**
   Not only in major activities, but also you need to do things with support of others, in daily routine with a civic sense of accommodating others and sacrificing your comfort for others’ need. For individualism and self-interests corrupt, abuse, and overuse resources of nature and sources of life.

4. **Remember always that life is made meaningful not by success or material wealth, but by love of Beauty.**
   Not the love of the possessive or appetitive kind, but of the self-giving kind, guided by Truth and Goodness. Give yourselves totally for others in need. Only outgoing impulse can transcend one’s obsession with self-importance and reflect the self-giving radiance of the Creator.

Decisions that do not come from the framework of *Truth-Goodness-Beauty* might look successful, but they will lead finally to bankruptcy. Only the leaders who are in touch with their deeper self and its interior movements would be able to discern well and choose the right decision by ignoring the ego-gratifying options, which would make them feel guilty and desolated. At the same time, they should choose the right qualities needed to be developed, those that are truly meaningful and for the common good of the organization. That would be beautiful and respectable.

In the process of discernment, there must be a constant check of inordinate attachment to the leader’s ulterior motives that move one away from Truth and Goodness. Selfish interests may bring excitement initially but will leave behind an aftertaste of emptiness finally. On the other hand, the decisions after having discerned bring consolation that brings a sustainable calm energy. Consoling decisions would be fulfilling and in line with the moral values and the vision of the organization, whereas decisions which cause desolation create a feeling of emptiness. These decisions need not always make one happy. For example, laying off decisions for organizational goals may not bring happiness but brings consolation and fulfillment, because it comes from being true and doing good. Discerning leaders are mature enough to resist decisions that lead desolation and embrace ways of making decisions that bring consolation. Decisions taken after appropriate discernment sometimes may bring failures but personally leaders will experience consolation. Because leaders were true (*Truth*) to the purpose of their organization and intended to do good (*Goodness*) to all stakeholders. Despite all this if leaders suffer, that suffering will bring a deep sense of fulfilment (*Beauty*).

### VI. Failing to Discern

One of the main reasons for the failure of the development of leaders is the absence of practicing personal discernment. It is important for leaders to feel emotionally and spiritually when weighing the different decision alternatives for important business-impacting decisions or even smaller decisions like prioritising projects or responding to colleagues. Only the spiritually developed leaders would be able to discern well and choose the right decision alternative by ignoring the ego-gratifying options which would make the leaders feel guilty and desolated (Rothausen, 2017).

There are many examples of failing to discern in the organizational context. What if managers make an elaborate stunning presentation in a board meeting but the project proposed in the presentation did not fit into the organization’s
budget for the following year. This implies that the main core of the organization’s purpose was not considered while
decision making. In short, discernment was absent. Similarly, if the CEO presents an exciting product development
program which is much appreciated but even after three years, the proposed product is still not manufactured. This
again translates to mere decision making without discernment (Seybold-Clegg et al., 2003).

By discernment leaders will be able to perceive the source of actions, thoughts and feelings, helps increase
awareness of the connection between free will, understand the influence of good or bad in the thinking process, helps
take the right decisions that reflect the vision and core values of an organization. Ultimately, discerning culture
creates atmosphere of goodness at every level of organization, in every activity done and in every person involved in
the functioning of the organization.

For example, Enron failed because of the absence of discernment. There was no discernment in the board level.
Deep self-interest and profit motive were the reason for not checking on their decision-making process. As Jim
Collins says in his book, “How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In,” the organization failed to
be in touch with the interior movements (Collins, 2009) which helps in decision making and not discerned properly
that resulted in the fall out of Enron. Kenneth Lay, the founder of Enron set the goal of the organization as high stock
prices above everything else and the employees were forced to increase the return rates by borrowing more money
and trading assets. Ethical business practices were ignored, and non-standard accounting techniques were practiced.
Employees from the best B-schools were hired and rewarded with incentives based only on profits and growth which
made the work environment very tolerant to unhealthy practices. Enron also dismissed the lowest twenty percent of
the performers with no second chance thereby creating a culture of fear and mistrust. This system fuelled by rewards,
punishments and fear only resulted in illegal practices and debt creating strategies in order to push profits. All
warning signs were ignored and Lay lead the organization into irreparable losses because of his personal greed for

One of the main reasons for the failure of development of leaders is the absence of practicing personal
discernment. Profit making problems, unethical practices and deception of customers with fake promises are all the
outcomes of making decisions without discerning. Leaders who lack discernment would not be confident enough to
face the competitors. They would not influence positive changes. The integrity of the leader is challenged as absence
of discernment implies absence of truthful decisions and thereby absence of healthy results. When the integrity is
questioned, the influence exerted would decline. Ultimately, if the leader is powerless to influence, leadership would
be at stake.

VI. COLLABORATIVE CORPORATE DISCERNMENT

Discernment can be practiced at two modes: the individual level and the corporate level. They differ depending on
the focus they have. Corporate discernment can be divided in terms of the form and the function. Based on the form
of the institution, corporate discernment can be carried out at the leadership level, which comprises of a single or
more than two responsible leaders or the group level, which comprises of a group with responsibilities shared. In
terms of the purpose, corporate discernment can be carried out at for either assessment of performance or for decision
making. Individual discernment, on the other hand, helps in personal formation or competence building when
individuals need an intimacy with the inner self and also acts as personal guidance when the alternatives to choose
from look very similar and the morally right decision needs to be taken (Conniry Jr, 2006). Individual and corporate
discernment go hand in hand. Corporate discernment demands that the minds and hearts of the individuals involved
are well prepared for the discernment process. Individual discernment also demands the responsibility, nurturing and
the support of the team (cf.Benefiel, 2008). In the group discernment process, all the participants bring in their own
experience which enriches the process as a whole and enables the development of both the individuals and the group
as a whole. The success of this process is in how united the group is in achieving the agreed upon results without
contemplating on who is right and wrong. Group cohesion improves when the process is successfully completed
(Hurlbut, 2014). Discernment can be excelled by collaborative decision making in teams, which are also very
heterogenous and intergenerational in nature (Kok and Van den Heuvel, 2019).

Each discerning leader must take all others who work with him into confidence by involving them in the entire
discernment process. Ideally, in any organization, teams would have to collaborate and come up with important
decisions. Collaborative corporate discernment would need active participation of its team members which is bound
to result in differences with respect to the decision being made. It ensures freeing of disordered attachments and
selfish interests that are not serving the vision of the organisation and making sure that the rightful decisions taken
help realize the vision when put into practice.

To have a good collaborative discernment, each person who takes part in the discernment should know the matter
that is taken for discernment well. Complete quality information about the issue to be decided and the output that is
expected from the process should be accessible to all the participating members. In this way, discernment cannot be
merely used to justify either minor or major decisions. The content of the case will determine the participants of the collaborative discernment process. The participants should accept the reasons for and the conditions under which they participate in the discernment process. They should develop interior freedom, which means that they should put aside their own selfish interests and be liberated to pursue the truth in accordance with the organizational vision and values. This interior freedom would enable the development of unwarranted relationships with others with the goal of pursuing the common good of the organization even when it involves personal abandonment (cf. Sosa, 2017).

The main purpose of collaborative corporate discernment is to make a clear distinction between the right and the wrong in accordance with the organizational vision. This can be fulfilled only by merging the heart and the mind which implies shared sense of purpose because what is at stake in the process directly affects everyone. Here it involves emotional capacities (eros), rational capacities (logos) and moral capacities (ethos) of all who are taking part in the discernment process (Plato, 1969). Hence the participants need to have mutual knowledge of each other which would result in mutual trust and thereby enable active participation. There is an interior peace when the discernment is done right in agreement with the truth. It is necessary to reason out the pros and cons of making a certain decision against the horizon of the greater good of the organization based on the conditions experienced by the participants of the discernment process. A good collaborative discernment depends on the participants’ skill in employing their understanding to perceive what the greater good is based on the vision and the core values of the organization.

The collaborative corporate discernment process enables the transition from seeking to finding the truth. Examination of the interior movements of the participants enables the confirmation of the discernment process and helps to decide if the process should be continued and also how to go about it in accordance with the vision of the organization. Continuous observation of the interior movements of the participants helps to maintain a memory of the process. In the collaborative discernment, each participant should actively listen to others – active listening – and speak intentionally – intentional speaking (Adler, 1983; Hoppe, 2006). When you listen to what others speak you should put yourself in that person’s thought process and his intentions. In the same way, when you speak you must be conscious of your intentions of saying what you are saying. What happens here is that all have actively entered into the thought process of others in discernment and have been deeply conscious of intentions of what they spoke.

VII. DEEP CONVERSATION

Human life is enriched by social interactions in which there is a tacit mutual belief (Lewis,1979; Clark and Marshall,1981). This mutual belief, we argue, is gained mostly by conversation between human beings. Conversational analysis helps learn about how decisions are arrived at in most of the meetings (Huisman, 2001). “A conversation is a frank exchange of ideas and information with an implicit or explicit agenda” (Groysberg and Slind, 2012, p.79). Honest conversations in the form of a dialogue would help organizations survive any kind of uncertainties (McGuire and Palus, 2003). Conversations serve as a management tool as well as a leadership tool which empowers and motivates (McCann, 2014). The best form of engagement with the employees for organizational leaders is by having an ordinary transparent conversation instead of a series of orders. Smart leaders tend to initiate organizational practices which inculcate a conversational sensibility (Groysberg and Slind, 2012).

Conversations are a useful tool for leaders as much of their work gets done via conversations. Leaders also engage in two-way strategic conversations which serve to achieve the goals of the leader (Salacuse, 2005). The content of conversations is very important, and they can influence the right-wrong decisions (Gunia et al., 2012). Conversations should never be undirected but instead follow a shared agenda which is in line with the organization’s objectives. The intents of a conversation could be either to persuade or learn or entertain each other. Strategic decisions are also conveyed by explaining them instead of commanding them via conversations (Groysberg and Slind, 2012). When the conversations of leaders are effective, they help to achieve both personal and work-related goals (Barge et al., 1989).

Leaders can get intimate via conversations by imbibing trust, listening keenly and getting personal. Knowing when to refrain from talking and begin keen listening is important to gain conversational intimacy (Groysberg and Slind, 2012). It is important for leaders to avoid dominating the conversation and be more listening than talking in order to avoid inhibiting the others (Salacuse, 2005). Once intimacy is achieved through conversations and keen listening, earning the trust becomes easy across hierarchies. Gaining mental and emotional proximity is more important than physical proximity (Groysberg and Slind, 2012). Genuine conversations help in gaining increased credibility and engagement. Conversations provide equal opportunity to both the participants to discuss and present their view thereby expanding the employees’ role. Inclusive leaders convert employees into conversation partners (Groysberg and Slind, 2012).

Decision makers in an organization tend to consciously or unconsciously select their partners and the conversation type for any given conversation based on their inclination (Gunia et al., 2012). Conversations of leaders could be either interactive (two-way); conflicted (involves conflicts); personal (involves personal feelings) or individualized (customized based on the person involved). Strategic conversations of leaders take many forms and can be either
spontaneous or planned, conflicted or cordial, matter-of-fact or emotional (Salacuse, 2005). The important elements of organizational conversation include: (1) intimacy (develop close relations), (2) interactivity (enable two way communication), (3) inclusion (include the employees’ ideas) and (4) intentionality (convey strategy). All these elements need to be integrated into a single effective process (Groysberg and Slind, 2012).

In collaborative corporate discernment, use of a method of Deep Conversation is suggested. It is a kind of dialogue within each person and between others in discernment. Deep Conversation constitutes the essential core difference in the quality of the close and friendly dealings of those who share thoughts keeping in mind the purpose or the vision of the organization.

It improves our capacity to converse deeply with the purpose in mind. The conversation is an opportunity to present to others with simplicity and without making unnecessary speeches, what one has perceived as interior movements or as the fruit of one’s personal reflection on the point in question. On the other hand, our disposition to “listen to the other person” respectfully, without contradicting the movements that the other person has felt interiorly, can produce a new interior movements in the person listening, giving rise to a fresh way of perceiving things. The custom of Deep Conversation, the habit of listening attentively to others and knowing how to communicate one’s own experience and ideas simply and clearly contribute to good collaborative discernment when the matter under consideration requires it.

7.1 Properties of Deep Conversation

(1) Intentional Speaking: The main characteristic of deep conversation is intentional speaking. The intention of the conversation is analysed and categorized as personal motive or in line with the purpose of the organization. Perceptions are built based on the thought process, which is stated as intentions, as it is the thoughts which manifest into words and then into actions. Hence analysing the intentions becomes important. When the thinking is negative, it will create a negative perception and positive thinking creates positive perception.

(2) Active listening: Active listening involves taking part in the conversation by listening keenly and sincerely with full concentration and understanding to what the other person is saying and trying to find linkages with the intention. The listener should understand the reason for which he or she says.

There are steps in this Deep Conversation:

Step 1: It starts with a brief time of silence, if you prefer, call it a prayer. This is to gather yourself to gain a focus and become attentive to what is going on deep within you. This is the time in which you recognise inner motivations and intentions. This helps you develop proper dispositions to the whole process of discernment.

Step 2: Then the leader reads out the matter for discernment as discernment statements and reasons for and against.

Step 3: After spending few moments in silence on the matter, each one shares his/her feelings–consolation or desolation–about the statements.

Step 4: After all the persons have shared what they felt about the statements. The whole group could spend some time in silence allowing what they have heard from others and what you have said to sink into themselves. To facilitate this, the leader could summarise what the entire group shared about the statements. In the summary, the leader could identify convergences and divergences. This would possibly give a picture of what the group feels.

Step 5: The leader invites the members to share how they have been affected by what they have heard, and may suggest possible “effects” like these: What did you hear? Were you struck by a common theme? By something absent but which you expected to hear? Were you especially touched by a particular sharing? What emotions are you feeling now, in response to the first round? Did any insights occur to you? What were they? Where did you experience harmony with the others as they shared?

Step 6: Now there can be a true discussion, with the quick give and take typical of discussions, with people replying to each other quickly, agreeing, disagreeing, etc. The fact that the discussion is preceded by steps of active listening and intentional speaking from the heart should help the discussion be relatively free of manifestations of ego and preserve the spiritual qualities of attentiveness and sincerity.

These steps of Deep Conversation will result in a discerned decision.
VIII. CONCLUSION

Decision making is rooted in self-knowledge of individuals in the process, their deep awareness of the core purpose of the organization and their conviction about their actions for growth of the organization. In discernment, there is a connect with what goes on within, the interior movements, which actually brings union of minds and hearts among the employees leading to committed and loyal workforce. That will help the organization achieve any goals as the process of discernment is grounded in the fundamental virtues of truth, goodness and beauty. A leader in an organisation should not make mere decisions based on rational thinking on pros and cons. Instead, he or she must be competent to discern the decisions that would result in true, good, and beautiful impact. More than ever, in the post-COVID world, we require discerning leaders to steer through the losses and disruptions.

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