Contributing to an Ignatian Perspective on Leadership
Ronald L. Dufresne, Karin Botto, E. Springs Steele

Abstract

Few authors have articulated an Ignatian perspective on leadership. While Lowney’s Heroic Leadership and Byron’s Next-Generation Leadership have presented thoughtful answers to the question, “What is Ignatian leadership?”, other perspectives on leadership in the literature—for example, transformational, authentic, or servant leadership—have hundreds of related papers, chapters, and books for amplification. This is not the case with an Ignatian perspective, where the aforementioned authors stand relatively alone. In this paper, we will contribute to an Ignatian perspective on leadership by mining aspects of Ignatian spirituality and producing our own theoretical model of Ignatian leadership.

Since the founding of the Society of Jesus in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and his companions, the Jesuits have worked actively in the fields of education, medicine, the arts, and science, improving lives and helping souls along the way (Lowney, 2003). The Jesuits are guided by the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, which is the source for the Ignatian “way of proceeding”—an engaged and active spirituality (Martin, 2010). Our project in this paper is to explore the Ignatian way of proceeding through the lens of leadership practice and present a leadership model, inspired by Saint Ignatius, that will contribute to the field.

Scholars and members of organizations alike have focused considerable effort on trying to develop perspectives, theories, assumptions, and frameworks of effective leadership. The results of this work, according to a recent search of the Business Source Complete research database, include over 125,000 articles

Ronald L. Dufresne, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Management, Karin Botto, M.S., is the Executive Director of Organization Development and Ignatian Leadership, and E. Springs Steele, Ph.D., is the Associate Provost for Mission, all at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, PA. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education, Saint Louis University, July 2013.
over the past 100 years. As an indication that the thirst for leadership knowledge has not waned—and has even grown substantially—over 90,000 of those articles have appeared over the past decade alone. Against the backdrop of complexity and challenges, it seems, the need to gain deeper and broader understandings of leadership is boundless.

Earlier leadership perspectives have included trait-based, behavioral, contingency, transformational, and charismatic approaches (Northouse, 2013). More recently, theories of servant and authentic leadership have garnered increased attention (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Greenleaf, 1977; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authors have plumbed the life stories of many people, trying to uncover their leadership “secrets,” from Colin Powell (Harari, 2003), Hillary Clinton (Shambaugh, 2010), and Queen Elizabeth (Higgins & Gilberd, 2000) to the likes of Attila the Hun (Roberts, 1985), Genghis Khan (Man, 2009), and Hitler (Roberts, 2004).

Each of these perspectives contributes to our understanding of what leadership is and how to be more effective leaders. Even “leaders” like Attila the Hun and Hitler present useful leadership insights, if only regarding how not to lead. With every additional perspective, our understanding of leadership grows in complexity; this is beneficial since the greater the complexity of the challenges faced, the greater the need for complexity in response (Lord, Hannah, & Jennings, 2011).

While several of these leadership perspectives have been explored robustly, there are other approaches that have been relatively less well developed. For example, servant leadership is a relatively new perspective that reframes leadership not as the use of power of those “in charge,” but rather as the emergent focus on fulfilling the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Despite its relative newness, there have been hundreds of articles and scores of books that have developed and expanded this perspective. There are other perspectives that have not been as fully explored, including the perspective that is at the heart of the present paper: Ignatian leadership.

Ignatian leadership is a leadership perspective grounded in Ignatian spirituality. While Ignatian spirituality is almost five centuries old and is conceptually very sound, robust, and well-developed, scholars have not developed a clear Ignatian leadership perspective that is commensurate with other leadership approaches. While there are notable contributions to the beginnings of an Ignatian leadership perspective by Lowney (2003) and Byron (2011), and given Ignatian spirituality’s focus on what are recognized as core leadership practices—including self-awareness, continuous learning, and concern for the common good—our hope is to
take the next step in developing a conceptual framework for articulating the nature of Ignatian leadership. Furthermore, given the public’s fascination with the leadership of Pope Francis—a member of the Society of Jesus—there is an appetite for learning the roots of his leadership from an Ignatian perspective (Allen, 2014; Krames, 2014; Lowney, 2013).

Our paper will proceed as follows. First, we will briefly review Ignatian spirituality to explore what is unique and distinctive about Ignatian practices and approaches as they relate to leadership. Second, we will summarize Lowney’s and Byron’s presentations of Ignatian leadership, as well as review closely related perspectives on leadership. Third, we will present our own framework of Ignatian leadership, which will both extend Lowney and Byron’s work as well as contribute our own perspective on what is distinct in this approach. Finally, we will discuss the implications of our framework for leadership scholars, educators, and practitioners.

**Ignatian Spirituality**

The primary source for Ignatian spirituality is the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. The *Exercises*, composed between 1522 and 1548, are a set of prayers, experiences, meditations, and movements written by Ignatius after a conversion experience following an injury, near death experience, and subsequent recuperation. The *Exercises* are broken into four “weeks” and were originally intended to be completed in a 30-day retreat format with a spiritual director. The director, taking into consideration the unique personality and circumstances (technically referred to as Context) of the retreatant, leads the retreatant through an iterative process of discernment that includes experience, reflection, action, and evaluation related to major life choices. As Fleming (2008: 38) explains, “The purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises*... is to facilitate the movement of God’s grace within us so that light and love of God inflame all possible decisions and resolutions about life situations.”

More recently, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* by Martin (2010) has become a popular source for a contemporary understanding and application of Ignatian spirituality. Martin (2010) explains how the life of “a sixteenth century soldier-turned-mystic” can help people “discover joy, peace and freedom and, not incidentally, experience God in their daily lives” (p. 1). He goes on to define Ignatian spirituality as “a way of living in relationship with God” (p. 2) and describes its four core elements as (1) finding God in all things, (2) being a contemplative in action, (3) incarnational spirituality, and (4) developing freedom and detachment in the process of decision-making, termed “indifference” by Ignatius.
Finding God in all things, according to Martin, means that every aspect of life is significant, and should be considered in relation to a God with whom each individual has a direct connection. Fleming (2008: 44) offers an amplification of this core element: “God is ever present, constantly in touch, communicating with us in many ways: in prayer and reading scripture, of course, but also in the events of our lives—through the people we meet and the work we do, through the things we see and hear, through our interior moods and affections.”

The second core element of Ignatian spirituality, being a contemplative in action, speaks to the aspiration that one remains reflective while active in the world helping others. At the time of the creation of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), most religious orders were contemplative and cloistered, not active outside the monastery. Martin (2010: 8) says, “Ignatius asks you to see the world as your monastery.” Fleming (2008: 50) concurs: “Ignatius practiced an active spirituality. He understood that people were actively engaged with work in the world....They shared life with each other. This active sharing of grace and gifts and talents eventually became the how for this evangelistic ministry.”

The third core element is incarnational spirituality. It is based on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, that God became fully human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a world-affirming, “get your hands dirty,” approach to life. It is deeply congruent with the first two core principles, presuming that God is present in every human situation and activity, and that we are called to act for the greater good (magis).

The final core principle is freedom and detachment. Ignatian “indifference.” Ignatius spent much of his life helping others make good decisions through the Exercises and personal spiritual direction. This process of discernment, as outlined in the Spiritual Exercises and noted above, helps individuals determine the best course of action in any particular situation. Its practice is predicated on “indifference,” which Martin (2010: 306) describes as, “the ability to be detached from one’s initial biases...the willingness to carefully balance the alternatives.”

A fundamental practice derived from the Exercises is the daily examen. Ignatius asked Jesuits, the religious order he founded, to practice this reflective technique twice a day in order to find God in the events of their daily lives. While highly adaptable to individual circumstances and personality, the typical elements of the examen include: gratitude, awareness of sin, review of the day, forgiveness, and resolution. Practiced on a regular basis, Fleming (2008: 20) affirms that the examen “is an indispensable tool to realize the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises—to detect God’s presence and to discern his will through close attention to the subtle interior movements of God’s spirit.”
One final note before turning from Ignatian spirituality to Ignatian leadership is to offer a definition of “Ignatian” in relation to any activity or undertaking (technically referred to as a “work” in official Jesuit documents). In the official document stemming from the most recent General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, “With Renewed Vigor and Zeal,” we find the following statement:

The heart of any Ignatian work is the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. Indeed, any work may be said to be Ignatian when it manifests the Ignatian charism: i.e., when it intentionally seeks God in all things; when it practices Ignatian discernment; when it engages the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation. (Decree 6.9)

So for leadership—or any other practice, for that matter—to be Ignatian, it must incorporate these elements.

**Existing Perspectives on Ignatian Leadership**

To date, the two clearest articulations of Ignatian leadership have been presented by Lowney (2003) in his book *Heroic Leadership* and by Byron (2010; 2011) in his book *Next-Generation Leadership* and recent article in *Journal of Jesuit Business Education*. Other authors have addressed Ignatian leadership—notable among them is Darmanin’s (2005) reflection on how aspects of Ignatian spirituality are manifested in modern leadership and organizational theories—but few have explicitly presented Ignatian leadership models like Lowney and Byron.

Lowney’s (2003) well-known formulation was informed by his Jesuit training as well as his experience in investment banking. Lowney integrates Ignatian spirituality, Jesuit history, and Jesuit practices to develop his four-pillar model of Ignatian leadership, consisting of self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism.

The first pillar, self-awareness, stems from continuous self-reflection on one’s strengths, weaknesses, values, and purpose. The Spiritual Exercises and the *examen* play a crucial role in this leadership pillar, as does the Jesuit practice of mentorship. Engaging in these self-awareness practices helps leaders balance the need to be engaged and action-oriented while also developing a deeper and more honest sense of self.

The second pillar in Lowney’s model, ingenuity, captures how the Jesuit principle of “indifference” affects one’s leadership. Reflecting on how Jesuits for
...centuries have lived “with one foot raised” (p. 31), Lowney argues leaders need to be free from attachments such as places or possessions. This indifference to material things allows leaders to stay true to personal and organizational values and goals while being flexible and creative in pursuing them. Leadership, then, is about being tactically autonomous and ingenious while remaining strategically obedient and faithful.

Lowney’s third pillar, love, is both self- and other-focused. Leaders need to love themselves, and, in the resultant more positive mindset, then love others around them. By focusing on what is lovable about each person, leaders are more likely to commit the time and energy to be compassionate and empathetic with others. Loving leaders are also more likely to invest themselves in the growth and development of others; they are less likely to “write off” people with whom they disagree.

Lastly, with his fourth pillar, Lowney argues that Ignatian leadership is built on heroism, which is about daring to find audacious ways to “help souls.” Here, Lowney captures the Jesuit concept of the *magis*, “the restless drive to look for something more in every opportunity and the confidence that one will find it” (p. 209). Leaders, when pursuing important objectives, can be called to take heroic risks.

Lowney asserts that these four pillars do not operate independently; rather, they are mutually reinforcing (pp. 250-253). Developing a deep sense of self-awareness, for example, will allow a leader to understand her core values and promote the freedom to pursue them (ingenuity), to see what is lovable within herself (love), and to feel more peace when confronting great challenges (heroism).

Turning to the work of William Byron, S.J., the former university president has written extensively on daily experiences with Ignatian spirituality, and an Ignatian dimension of leadership. In an appendix to his book *Next-Generation Leadership*, Byron (2010) compiles—along with James Connor, S.J.—twenty-one principles of Ignatian leadership “connected to the person and life of St. Ignatius of Loyola” (p. 223). Included in this list are such concepts as indifference, selflessness, *magis*, humility, discernment, and love. Byron and Connor relate each principle to the *Spiritual Exercises* or some other aspect of Ignatian spirituality and present them as meditations for young leaders to reflect on and discuss.

In an even more parsimonious presentation, Byron (2011) writes in *Journal of Jesuit Business Education* about the three aspects of Jesuit spirituality that inform an Ignatian dimension of leadership. In Byron’s view, the three distinctive aspects of Ignatian leadership are humility, *magis*, and the process of discernment. Each of these, he argues, is rooted in Ignatian spirituality and is valuable for religious and lay leadership.
Explaining the importance of humility, Byron (2011) cites St. Ignatius’ framework regarding the three levels of humility. The first level of humility is “understood as obedience to God’s will” (p. 12). The second level relates to the concept of indifference explored by Lowney (2003). Here, humility entails being indifferent to riches or poverty, honor or dishonor, and a long or short life; the only concern is which alternative better serves God. The third degree of humility is its highest form—not only is one indifferent, but one desires to be poor, despised, and seen as foolish, as was Christ. Ignatian leaders, then, must relinquish their own ego, desires, and self-aggrandizement to serve God and others.

*Magis*, which Lowney (2003) captured in his heroism pillar, reflects the purpose of pursuing the path of glorifying God with, as Byron (2011) notes, “fierce resolve” (p. 12). Byron’s (2011) perspective stitches together the concepts of humility and *magis* through the neologism “humbition,” which he borrows from the financial firm SEI Investments. To have humbition is to be both humble and ambitious; leaders should, then, not care about personal ego while at the same time daring to do great and meaningful work.

The last distinguishing characteristic of Ignatian leadership, according to Byron (2011) is discernment, which is "a special way to make decisions that bears directly on the way one can search out God’s will" (p. 17). This cornerstone of Jesuit spirituality takes on great importance in a perspective on Ignatian leadership given the centrality of making decisions in a leader’s life. As detailed by Byron (2011), discernment is a reflective form of decision-making that attends to the feelings (or “state[s] of soul,” p. 18) that accompany contemplating different courses of action. Discernment, then, entails leadership practices such as self-awareness, introspection, openness, and honesty.

**Related Leadership Perspectives**

Reviewing key aspects of Ignatian spirituality and existing perspectives on Ignatian leadership highlights several distinctive and core features, such as an action orientation, reflectivity, and a focus on loving others. To ensure that our contribution to an Ignatian leadership perspective is robust and grounded, in this section we briefly review the most relevant extant leadership theories. It is outside the scope of our paper to explore the full conceptual network, so we focus instead on those contemporary leadership theories that are most closely related to core Ignatian features. These contemporary theories include servant leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership.

The extant leadership perspective that most reflects the characteristics present in Ignatian spirituality and leadership is that of servant leadership. This
is, of course, not coincidental; Greenleaf (1977), the most influential voice in
developing the servant leadership perspective, was informed in his approach
partially by the leadership of Jesus demonstrated in the Gospels. Just as Byron’s
(2011) treatment of humility argues that leaders should seek to subjugate their
egos, Greenleaf (1977: 7) maintains that: “The servant-leader is servant first…
It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then
conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different
from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual
power drive or to acquire material possessions.” In a recent review of the literature
on servant leadership, Van Dierendonck (2011) synthesizes over three decades of
research and characterizes servant leaders as those who (1) empower and develop
people, (2) display humility, (3) are authentic, (4) are interpersonally accepting,
(5) provide direction, and (6) act as stewards of organizations. Clearly, servant
leadership shares features in common with Ignatian spirituality and the extant
perspectives on Ignatian leadership. Notably, servant leadership centers on the
other-oriented love described by Lowney (2003) and the humility described by
Byron (2011).

Another contemporary leadership perspective attracting considerable scholarly
attention is that of authentic leadership. While a concern with authenticity in leader-
ship has existed for generations, explicit academic focus on the perspective only
emerged relatively recently, following a 2004 conference on Authentic Leadership
Development at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
The emerging consensus on the authentic leadership perspective includes several
dimensions, captured in Walumbwa et al.’s (2008: 94) definition of authentic
leadership as “a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both
positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater
self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of informa-
tion, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers,
fostering positive self-development.” Beyond the generalized concern for posi-
tivity and ethicality, authentic leadership also shares in common with an Ignatian
approach the specific attributes of self-awareness and a more robust considera-
tion of leadership decision-making (captured in the “balanced processing” dimension).

The final contemporary leadership perspective with connections to an Ignat-
ian perspective which we will briefly review is transformational leadership. In its
simplest form, transformational leadership is concerned with leaders who trans-
form themselves, others, and even social systems for the better (Bass, 1985; 1998).
There are four leadership elements included in the model of transformational
leadership: (1) idealized influence, or the affective effect of positive role modeling;
(2) inspirational motivation, or the ability to motivate others toward a desirable vision; (3) individualized consideration, or the focus on the individual needs of others; and (4) intellectual stimulation, or the encouragement of questioning taken-for-granted “truths” (Bass, 1985). This framework certainly has connections with such Ignatian ideals as magis (e.g., inspirational motivation), love (e.g., individualized consideration), and discernment (e.g., intellectual stimulation). Darmanin (2005) characterized St. Ignatius himself as a transformational leader.

**Contributing to an Ignatian Leadership Perspective**

In light of our review of what has already been written and learned about Ignatian spirituality, Ignatian leadership, and closely related leadership perspectives, in this section we offer our own perspective on Ignatian leadership. As we wrote in our introduction, our intention here is not to set forth the definitive formulation that would answer the question, “What is Ignatian leadership?” Rather, our intention is to contribute to the conversation and to help advance further development of an Ignatian leadership perspective. Our objective is to build upon the work of, in particular, Martin (2010), Lowney (2003), and Byron (2010, 2011) by looking for themes and regularities that can bring even greater focus and utility to an Ignatian perspective on leadership.

Two consistent threads run throughout much of the Jesuit/Ignatian spirituality and leadership literature reviewed above—the theme of being a contemplative in action and the theme of pursuing humbled excellence. These two themes both expose leadership tensions and establish the context of our perspective. Ignatian leadership calls for leaders to be contemplatives in action, equally and simultaneously deeply reflective and action-oriented. Ignatian leaders balance the tension (Quinn, 2004) between these two practices by being neither mindlessly active nor inactively reflective; rather, Ignatian leaders at once go about setting the world on fire with their action and engaging in continuous, real-time reflection in the midst of action.

The second contextual theme is that of humbled excellence. Here, we draw on Byron’s (2011) ideal of “humbition,” which represents the creative balancing of the tension between humility and ambition. Ignatian leaders pursue excellence, not settling for just good enough when deciding which course of action better serves the greater good, the needs of others, and God. This provides an azimuth for the action part of being a contemplative in action. Activity is not valuable for its own sake; rather, it is valuable if it is in the pursuit of the greater glory of God and the common good. At the same time, Ignatian leaders are humble. Seeking excellence can tempt one’s ego into thinking it is the leader who is excellent.
Ignatian leaders know they play a vital role in contributing to the common good, but it is always the common good that takes priority, not one’s ego.

With these themes as context, the heart of our perspective on Ignatian leadership is structured by its polarities: reflection-action and self-other. Juxtaposing these two polarities allows us to organize what appear to us to be the important practices of Ignatian leadership. The reflection-action polarity is clearly connected to the contextual theme of Ignatian leaders as contemplatives in action; within this polarity we ask how Ignatian leaders enact this theme. Likewise, the self-other polarity is connected to the contextual theme of humbled excellence; within this polarity we ask how Ignatian leaders balance the need to grow and strive individually and collectively while still remaining grounded. When considering how these two themes and their polarities interrelate, we also recognized their close correlation with the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises as noted below, and developed the model portrayed as Figure 1 below. The four components of our model are (1) self-knowledge, (2) personal striving, (3) communal discernment, and (4) enacted love. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe in greater depth the components of our model, their connections to the Spiritual Exercises, and examples that illustrate each component. Later in this section we explain the dynamic process built into the model.

**IGNATIAN LEADERSHIP MODEL**

![Image of the Ignatian Leadership Model]

FIGURE 1

Self-Knowledge

In first quadrant of our model, we bring into focus the ends of the polarities that concern self and reflection. In this quadrant, which we label “Self-Knowledge,” we recognize the need for Ignatian leaders to develop an ever-deepening understanding of their values, motivations, talents and gifts, experiences, and
world-view. This resonates strongly with the primary goal of the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which is to come to know oneself as a “loved sinner.” And just as Ignatius asked the Jesuits to examine themselves twice daily to understand where God is present in their lives, so too should Ignatian leaders undertake a practice of personal reflection so he or she can better lead for the common good. A practice of continual reflection allows a leader to observe herself or himself in action. This process shines light on areas of growth, opportunities for humility and occasions to empower and inspire others.

In addition, Ignatian leaders attempt to uncover their vocation in life. Martin (2010: 342) explains, “Vocation overarches our work, jobs, and career and extends to the kind of person we hope to become. It is what we are called to do and who we are called to be.” Ignatian leaders authentically reflect on and discern who they are and which actions to take in the world to bring about the greater more universal good. Callahan (2013) argues how self-reflection helps uncover and test assumptions, creates personal accountability, and facilitates better decision-making. Among others, recommended methods of reflection and personal decision-making Ignatian leaders might use include: The *Spiritual Exercises*, the *examen*, spiritual direction, journaling, and the various methods of Ignatian discernment and prayer. What is most crucial is finding a method (or methods) that works for the leader to remain consistent in the practice. The leader achieves greater depth of reflection as the practice is built into his or her life and decision points.

To illustrate what it looks like for a leader to engage in the *Self-Knowledge* quadrant, we look to exemplar Greg Boyle, S.J., founder and Director of Homeboys Industries. Through the stories depicted in the book, *Tattoos on the Heart* and in the documentary, *G-Dog*, Boyle exhibits an ongoing process of self-reflection in relation to those he journeys with through life. His values, motivation, and world view are apparent in how he relates to others, makes daily decisions, and in the attention he gives each person with whom he interacts. It seems that each encounter with another human being is a chance for him to reflect deeply, show compassion, grow in humility, and demonstrate love. Boyle is also very aware of his own personal limitations. He surrounds himself with others who complement his strengths and blind spots. Based on his personal discernment of his vocation after a year in Bolivia working with the poor, Boyle chose to serve in one of the toughest areas of Los Angeles as the pastor of Dolores Mission Parish several decades ago. Since then, his work building the many facets of Homeboys Industries and more importantly touching the lives of thousands of people is an example of Ignatian leadership in action.
Personal Striving

The quadrant of our model that addresses the self-action interplay (labeled “Personal Striving”) captures the need for Ignatian leaders to apply their unique talents actively in pursuing the magis. As Lowney (2003: 15) writes, “we’re all leaders, and we’re leading all the time.” Ignatian leaders are both enlivened and burdened by this reality. As a result of their self-reflection (see above), leaders are aware of their personal values and purpose. With a bias for action, Ignatian leaders choose to engage in the world as a way to manifest their core values and purpose through their behaviors. This corresponds to the fundamental “election” in the Second Week of the Exercises to live in conformity to God’s will as exemplified in the life of Jesus. Thus Ignatian leaders, in their personal striving for the magis, are not simply doing more as leaders but acting more authentically and contributing more meaningfully to the greater good. Ignatian leaders employ their unique gifts consonant with the admonition found in Luke: “to whomever much is given, of him much be required.” We label this aspect of our model as Personal Striving to indicate the continuing nature of this quest. Ignatian leaders carry the burden of continuing to act in pursuit of their values and purpose, especially when it is difficult.

This self-action quadrant is visible in the leadership of James Martin, S.J., writer and Editor at Large of the Jesuit magazine, America, and best-selling author. After graduating from Wharton School of Business in 1982 and working for six year at General Electric, Martin began to notice interior movements urging him to reconsider his life path. His personal discernment exploring his values and life purpose led him to enter the Society of Jesus six year later. Through a series of experiences in his Jesuit formation described in a number of his books, he identifies and begins to apply his unique talents and abilities in the world, ultimately leading him to become a best-selling author and sought after speaker. His authentic style of personal sharing inspires and draws people to him and more importantly provides new ways for others to understand and connect with God. As a public figure on Facebook, Martin has over 196,000 followers. He frequently uses this forum to educate, inspire, and connect people. His posts are not about himself but always connected to his vocational purpose of helping others find God in all aspects of life. His unique interpretation of his vocation as a Jesuit priest demonstrates pursuit of the greater good and living out an authentic vocation.

Communal Discernment

Combining both other and reflection ends of the polarities produces the quadrant of our model labeled “Communal Discernment,” describing the process that a leader and group must undertake to make decisions leading to a shared hopeful
vision of the future. This process was integral to corporate decision-making for the Society of Jesus at its inception, and was in fact the means by which Ignatius and his early companions decided to form a religious order in 1539 (Futrell, 1970: 67). The essential elements include creating a “safe” non-hierarchical “space” for participants, developing a clear question or case to discern, providing sufficient instruction in recognizing and using the “tools” of Ignatian discernment (i.e., indifference, consolation, and desolation), and offering a simple process for each participant to contribute their thoughts and feelings.

In facilitating a communal discernment, Ignatian leaders recognize they are not driving their personal position but creating a space where communal wisdom can contribute to the positive future of an organization. They recognize in these complex times they do not hold all of the answers, and understand the importance of group members feeling valued and included in the decision-making process. This requires a “death to self” that finds its exemplar in the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises, where one is called to walk with Jesus through his Passion and Death.

Ignatian leaders also recognize the necessity of understanding the collective knowledge, opinions, thoughts, insights, and goals of their partners in discernment for developing a shared vision for the future. The Ignatian process of communal discernment solicits such information. In addition, once the collective knowledge is gathered, Ignatian discernment provides a framework for coming to a decision as to how a group might bring about the best course of action for the greater good. Thus, Ignatian leaders must be skilled at active listening, group dynamics, asking questions, analyzing information, interpreting movements of a group both verbal and non-verbal, and finally, articulating the final outcome of the process and the intended action. They also need to recognize when their own ego—which is an example of what Ignatius call “disordered affections”—blocks the best outcome for the whole. Ignatian leaders must model respect, generosity, and openness as a group attempts to discern communally.

A leader who demonstrated mastery of this quadrant is Pedro Arrupe, S.J., the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Arrupe led the Jesuits from 1965-83 and is often referred to as “the refounder of the Society” because of his leadership at the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1974-1975. During this time, the order recommitted to the mission of serving the poor and working for social justice in a document called, Our Mission Today: the Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice. Arrupe led the order through a several month-long process of communal discernment where they prayerfully decided how they would commit their time, attention, and resources in the future. Arrupe
understood that choosing this path likely meant great adversity and suffering to the Jesuits working across the globe. Father James Connor, S.J., who attended General Congregation 32, shared that Arrupe was a very attentive leader who continually reminded the Jesuits of their roots. He often asked the men to consider where they found inspiration from their own context and to recognize that this was how the Holy Spirit was leading the order. Connor said, “Arrupe always focused on the process of Ignatian discernment as he understood that was how good decisions were made” (personal correspondence). Connor also shared that Arrupe embodied the spirit he hoped the order would articulate through the communal discernment process. Arrupe demonstrated through word and action the importance of building community around a common mission.

Enacted Love

The final aspect of our model is what we are calling “Enacted Love,” the quadrant where the other and action ends of the polarities meet. Leadership is both an intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomenon; Enacted Love captures the interpersonal nature. This element of our model reflects the way in which Ignatian leaders both work with others (i.e., process-orientation) and have mutual impacts on and by others (i.e., outcome-orientation). In terms of process, Enacted Love calls on Ignatian leaders to manifest in their actions an honest love of others. The concept of love we use here is that of St. Thomas Aquinas—willing the good of another. It is a choice, not an emotion. Leaders prioritize the personal development of others, providing honest, descriptive, non-evaluative feedback. Leaders treat others with dignity and respect, listening deeply when in conversation. Of course, these processes are not exclusively the property of an Ignatian perspective; Ignatian leaders, however, know that these processes are essential to—not incidental to—leadership. In terms of outcome, Enacted Love sees Ignatian leadership involved in the work of “helping souls.” Leaders do not bemoan long-standing problems; rather, they seek to initiate mutual action to make an immediate and sustainable contribution to the greater good. In doing so they exemplify the goal of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises, manifesting their desire and ability to make “the constructive turn,” to incarnate what they have learned about leadership for the “good of neighbor and glory of God.” They become proactive, professionally competent agents of positive change, who will “set the world on fire.”

A leader who is often captured in the media demonstrating this quadrant is Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J.), the current leader of the Catholic Church. Whether he is embracing a man with a deformed face, dining with the workers of the Vatican or allowing a small child to remain on stage at a public
event, Pope Francis manifests his behaviors in an honest love for others. He actively
works to engage the hearts and minds of those who feel marginalized such as the
poor, the wounded, the disengaged and the disenfranchised. In a 2013 interview
in *America* magazine, and later published by Spadaro (2013), Pope Francis shared
personal insights related to this quadrant. He explained that he attempts to look
at people one at a time, despite the size of the audience, and to enter into personal
contact with them. This is a foundational behavior of the *Enacted Love* quadrant.

**Model Dynamism**

Although we have detailed the four central components of our model separ-
ately, given our context of contemplatives in action and humbled experience, the
model is best seen as dynamic. Just as the *Spiritual Exercises* iterates continuously
among context, experience, reflection, decision, action, and evaluation, so too
does our model call for continuous iteration. Ignatian leaders manage the creative
tensions (Quinn, 2004) embedded in the polarities through this continuous iter-
ation. For example, within the intrapersonal self-leadership and self-development
of an Ignatian leader, there is the continuous process of action-and-reflection.
Ignatian leaders employ the *examen* and other reflection tools to discern their
core values and purpose; their action is then a manifestation of striving to enact
those values and purposes. Further reflection on the experience of that striving
would provide valuable feedback if pursuing those values provokes consolation or
desolation. Over time, this iterative cycle would result in deeper self-knowledge
and more authentic action. Likewise, this iterative cycle would occur at the collective
level, where communal discernment would result in collective action that
would then inform further communal discernment. Furthermore, to the extent
that multiple members of a community are involved in self-leadership practices,
the community’s capacity for discernment and meaningful action will grow. To
the extent that multiple members of a community are engaged in better fulfilling
their vocations, their mutual love would be even better enacted. In Figure 1 above,
we portray this dynamic interaction among the four quadrants by linking each
quadrant graphically with the others.

**Discussion**

Our four-component model, resulting from pivoting action-reflection against
self-others within the context of being a contemplative in action and striving for
humbled excellence, provides a structure to develop and use what we see as four
critical components of leadership in the Ignatian tradition. As does any theoretical
model, ours attempts to capture the essential components, the boundary context,
and an explanation of the conceptual motivation of the model. Furthermore, any useful model must necessarily be parsimonious; as such, our model is not intended to capture every aspect of Ignatian spirituality that could be applied to leadership, only those that our research suggest to be broadly present in the tradition. Our aim, as explained above, is to enliven consideration of Ignatian leadership by scholars and practitioners alike.

Implications for Leadership Scholars

Our model of Ignatian leadership has implications for the community of leadership scholars. It builds on centuries-old practices that still have relevance today. We see our model as a contribution to the conversation on Ignatian leadership, and would be grateful to leadership scholars for entering and contributing further to this conversation. The richness of Ignatian spirituality and practices holds great promise for developing a clearly-recognizable perspective on Ignatian leadership that could stand alongside other perspectives such as authentic, servant, and transformational leadership.

In time, scholars interested in Ignatian leadership would need to develop the perspective clearly enough so as to be able to generate a valid measure of the theory. Such a valid measure would further advance the scholarship of this field since it would allow us to test the hypothesis that engaging in Ignatian leadership would result in meaningful, positive outcomes for individuals and organizations.

Implications for Leadership Educators

A consolidated perspective on Ignatian leadership would also be useful for the construction of an approach for Ignatian leader development. Such an approach would be beneficial for students of Jesuit colleges and universities, for alumni of these schools who wish to continue their formation, and for lay leaders and organizations who wish to learn from a robust Ignatian approach to engaging in the world. As an example, we have been using the present model in Ignatian leadership development with students, staff, faculty, and administrators at Saint Joseph’s University. With students, we have used the present model in academic leadership classes covering leadership theories and skills, as well as in co-curricular leadership development workshops. With staff, faculty, and administrators, we have used the model to provide structure to Ignatian leadership development programming, where the objective is to educate and support lay members of the Saint Joseph’s community, as they will be the chief bearers of the Ignatian identity in the future. The anecdotal feedback from all these constituencies has showed us how developing Ignatian leadership is beneficial for both their on- and off-campus
leadership, and they can now more readily see how their work as leaders manifests their development in Ignatian spirituality. It is our hope that other Jesuit colleges and universities will find the present model useful in their work with leadership development with students, staff, and alumni as well.

**Implications for Leaders**

Our model also has implications for the practice of leadership in organizations. Ignatian leaders and organizations hoping to develop Ignatian leaders could use this model in a holistic way by developing skills in all four quadrants. Individuals could develop a personal practice of on-going reflection and discernment on their motives, values, skills, behaviors and daily experiences to understand where, why and how their behaviors impact their leadership potential. As argued by Martin (2010), there is great virtue in developing a personally authentic approach to reflection; leaders need not follow a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach. In addition, this process can help an individual develop a personal, authentic vision and mission for their work. Organizations could provide learning experiences on reflective tools and processes such as the *examen* and provide ongoing coaching and mentoring by leaders who effectively use the processes. Role-modeling behaviors such as being present, attentive listening, sense-making, empathy, and flexibility at the organizational level infuses the practices into the culture. Ignatian leaders also need to undertake a thoughtful process of continually assessing vocation and purpose. Organizations can deepen this process through constructive conversation aimed at aligning talents, skills, and abilities with opportunities for personal and professional growth and development.

In addition, Ignatian leaders and organizations could learn processes and methods of communal discernment and engage with others through those methods to understand the varying perspectives of the organization. Discernment can be useful for both personal and professional decisions but also can be used at the organizational level for decisions such as resource allocation, understanding the mission of an organization, or making strategic decisions for a department. Leaders and organizations who engage in discernment practices role-model constructive conflict management practices as they create an open space of dialogue, listening, and sense-making. As an example of the power of communal discernment, over the past eighteen months, Saint Joseph’s University engaged in several campus-wide communal discernments about our mission statement, vision statement, strategic plan, and shared governance processes. The result was both a process and an outcome that manifests a respectful, loving community that is now recommitted to contributing to the mission from all corners of campus.
Discerning how an individual, leader, or organization can make a meaningful difference in the world flows from both personal and group processes. Ignatian leaders who work to help connect progress on real world issues to those he or she leads and serves, are ultimately creating a culture of discerned choices moving toward the magis, the greater good. The expectation that leaders are the sole source of inspired vision is both unrealistic and paralyzing. While there may be stray examples where a leader was able to generate a powerful vision as an individual, it is much more realistic—and fully in line with our model of Ignatian leadership—for a meaningful vision to emerge from collective discernment. This insight brings the important leadership aspect of “vision” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) into the daily life of organizational leaders. Finally, leaders and organizations could attempt to evaluate the decisions and outcomes of their discernments to determine if movement is occurring in a positive direction for both the people and organization.

Concluding Thoughts

One interesting aspect of developing our model was the need we felt to consider the religious and lay audiences who might be interested in Ignatian leadership. There is a version of Ignatian leadership that includes—and more accurately, requires—the centrality of God and Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly, many active Catholics and other Christians would embrace this version. There is another version, though, that may be more approachable to leaders who do not resonate with an explicitly Christian model. For them, Ignatian leadership is still something that might be valuable and meaningful, albeit embraced from a more secular standpoint. The magis, which is at the heart of our model, in the first version may take the form of pursuing the greater glory of God; in the second version it may take the form of pursuing the greater common good.

In our perspective, we follow Martin (2010), who advocates entering into Ignatian spirituality in a way that is authentic and challenging. Essentially, he attempts to meet the readers “where they are.” Likewise, we welcome leaders and leadership scholars to consider our model from “where they are,” embracing the version that is more meaningful, authentic, and challenging. Thus, while the exemplars we offered above were all Jesuits who embody the aspects of Ignatian leadership seen in our model, we encourage readers to see how their colleagues—those inhabiting their own immediate context—also embody one or more of the model’s components.
Contributing to an Ignatian Perspective on Leadership

References


