THE LEADER’S CALL OF SOLITUDE:

SOLITUDE AS A MECHANISM FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

DIMITRIOS BOURANTAS

The Athens University of Economics and Business
Department of Management Science & Technology
Evelpidon 47A & Lefkados,
113 62 Athens, Greece

OLGA EPITROPAKI

ALBA Graduate Business School
Athinas Ave. & Areos 2A
166 71 Vouliagmeni
Athens, Greece
e-mail: oepitrop@alba.edu.gr

EVI PAPALOIS

The Athens University of Economics and Business
Department of Management Science & Technology
Evelpidon 47A & Lefkados,
113 62 Athens, Greece

ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE 2007
The leader’s call of solitude: Solitude as a mechanism for authentic leadership development

ABSTRACT
Despite having been historically recognized as an important tool through which people gain understanding, enlightenment, insight and clarity, solitude has received limited attention in the context of organizational leadership. We propose a model in which we describe the role that solitude can play for authentic leadership development. We specifically suggest that leaders’ access to solitude offers them opportunities for reflection and contemplation and substantially enhances their levels of self-awareness, regulation and mindfulness, conditions that are critical for authentic leadership. We also discuss the contextual conditions as well as the individual differences that may moderate the relationship between solitude and authentic leadership development.

Keywords:
Solitude, authentic leadership, mindfulness
The leader’s call of solitude: Solitude as a mechanism for self-renewal and authentic leadership

Business leaders are continuously pressed to be on-call to multiple stakeholders and media – via phone, cell-phone, blackberry, e-mail or “open door” policies at the office. Expected and unexpected meetings, conversations and social interactions throughout the day thwart any opportunities a manager might have for extended, isolated periods of reflection (Jett & George, 2003; Thomas & Ayres, 1998). Even the physical and psychological work environment is designed in ways to promote flexibility and conversation and limit people’s chances for uninterrupted and isolated mental activity. Moreover, advances in information technology have increased the number of ways that a person can be in constant contact with others or interrupt one another (e.g., Czerwinski, Cutrell, & Horvitz, 2000; Jett & George, 2003; Speier, Valacich, & Vessey, 1999).

In such conditions, managers find they have no time or access to solitude, a state which has been considered conducive for reflection, self-awareness, complex decision making and creativity (e.g. Senge, 1990; Taylor, 1989; McDonald, 2005). Though, historically, philosophers, artists and religious thinkers have advocated periods of solitude for leaders and for others pursuing self-knowledge, peace or seeking to solve complex or emotionally ladden problem (e.g., Storr, 1988), little research has been done on the meaning and value of solitude for business leaders.

According to Buchholz (1997) one reason for that is the overemphasis that our society has placed on social relations and attachment. Time spent alone, separate from other people, is often experienced negatively and is considered a sign of abnormality and even mental illness.
Historically, however, solitude has been associated with beneficial outcomes such as spiritual growth and creativity. Many religious leaders, such as Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohhammed have spent a significant amount of time in solitude. Famous writers and poets such as Kafka, Gibbon and Rilke, have made solitude their creative regimen. Recently psychologists (e.g., Long et al., 2003) have highlighted the positive aspects of solitude, particularly the opportunity to engage in self-selected activities, relatively free of social encumbrances and expectations (e.g., Burger, 1998; Larson, 1990).

Purpose of the present paper is to explore the role of solitude for leadership development. We specifically propose that a model that highlights the importance of access to solitude for leader’s self-awareness, regulation, mindfulness and authentic leadership.

**SOLITUDE DEFINED**

Solitude is usually defined as “The state of being or living alone; seclusion; solitariness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1991, p.977). Solitude is, however, a much broader and richer concept than simply “being alone”.

In his philosophical analysis of solitude, Koch (1994) defines solitude as, most basically, mental disengagement of other people: “Solitude is, most ultimately, simply an experiential world in which other people are absent: that is enough for solitude, that is constant through all solitudes. Other people may be physically present, provided that our minds are disengaged from them; and the full range of disengaged activities, from reflective withdrawal to complete immersion in the tumbling rush of sensations, find their places along the spectrum of solitudes” (p. ) He also identifies
three features associated with solitude: physical isolation, social disengagement and reflection.

Long and Averil (2003) also conceptualize solitude as a state of relative social disengagement usually characterized by decreased social inhibitions and expectations and increased freedom to choose one’s mental and physical activities. They point out that although such a state is typically experienced when a person is alone, aloneness is not a necessary condition of solitude. Some people can find solitude amidst groups, such as in restaurants, trains, airplanes, where there are no expectations of interacting with others and they can remain anonymous. Seibert’s (1996) study on managerial reflection found that respondents cited such contexts for solitude as well as in their homes, where they sometimes found that being near to but not in the same room as family members afforded them time to think.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Winnicott (1958) had suggested as part of his object-relations theory, that part of a child’s healthy development includes solitude in the presence of protecting other, usually the mother. The mother’s non-demanding presence allows the child to experiment with solitude and to practice being alone, in a non-threatening manner. Winnicott believed such solitude to be part of the process by which young children develop a sense of “self”, as they learn to differentiate between the “I” and the “Other”.

The importance of solitude for self-awareness and self-discovery has been stressed in Hollenhorst and Jones’ (2001) definition of solitude. They define solitude as a “psychological detachment from society for the purpose of cultivating the inner world of the self. It is an act of emotionally isolating oneself for self-discovery, self-realization, meaning, wholeness and heightened awareness of one’s deepest feelings and impulses. It implies a morality that values itself at least occasionally, as above the
common good.” (p.). Wieland-Burston (1996) also points out that “we might call a humanistic search for solitude…the goal is less away from others but rather toward oneself” (p.92).

It is also of paramount importance to distinguish solitude from related concepts such as loneliness (Barbour, 2004). Loneliness is the generalized lack of satisfying personal, social or community relationship. It is an enduring condition of emotional distress that arises when a person feels estranged, misunderstood or rejected by others or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activities that provide social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy (Anderson, 1998). According to Koch (1994) loneliness is a painful emotion whereas solitude is not an emotion and it does not entail any specific desires or feelings. It is an open receptive to every variety of feeling and reflection. Whereas loneliness is intrinsically painful, solitude is equally open to both pleasant and painful feelings.

THE BENEFITS OF SOLITUDE

Despite the fact that in overall research on solitude is limited, there exists literature from various fields highlighting its positive effects on the individual. In the humanistic field, Emerson (1883, p. 40) suggested that solitude was not for the rare individual, but the democratic right of each individual to seek their own potential. He believed that solitude is related to the inner world of self-reliance and ingenuity. According to existential philosophers, solitude represents an experience of discovering the personal truth and the reason of being. Kierkegaard (1994), considers existential solitude as an inevitable condition (treaty) of life which is tightly connected with the experiences and the questions that we put regarding life and death. Solitude constitutes a situation at which - through a process of searching for the "truth" of existence - we discover what we really are. For Heidegger (1968), the
meaning of solitude has a positive dimension and constitutes one existential
(ontological) necessity. He develops the idea that people’s life is authentic and
integrated only when one makes his choices and acts by having conscience of its
freedom, responsibility and “solitude”. On the contrary, when the individual allows
others to determine the values and limits within which he will move, then meaning
and authenticity are being lost in his life. Moustakas (1961, p102), presents a
phenomenological perspective of solitude: “solitude constitutes the ideological
"shelter" and the situation at which the individual is found during the process of
recognition and acceptance of existence discriminating from others in order to live
authentically and be effective in his relations with them. The individual “enters” in a
situation of solitude when he feels the need to make the right choices or review some
aspects of his life”. According to this point of view, solitude does not constitute
simply a normal side of life but a necessity for authentic communication and overall
development of existence. Through solitude the individual achieves the deepening
integration and ego, by discovering and determining the values and the meaning of his
existence with regard to others. One dimension of solitude that is pointed out by
Moustakas and is of particular interest is that of “aloneness” which is experienced as
a "peaceful" situation and as an opportunity for the individual to wonder about
harmony in life, about relations with others and as an inner process helping the
individual facing all questions that concern human existence. Merton’s (1968)
opinions also point towards this direction. In a very rational way, he stresses mainly
the transcendence reached during solitude: the person who is afraid to stay alone, is
confronted by loneliness, even if he is surrounded by other persons. On the other
hand the person who is in a state of solitude and deep thinking and learns to live
peacefully through his experience comes closer to God.
Koch (1994) has specifically identified five benefits of solitude: (a) Freedom from social norms and constraints that control interpersonal life, b) attachment with self, c) attunement with nature, d) reflection including introspection, recollection, contemplative analysis, and e) creativity.

In the area of naturalistic studies, solitude is viewed as a state of contemplative reflection and has been related to mental and emotional health. Hammit (1982) has identified a number of cognitive benefits in solitude such as cognitive freedom, self-evaluation, personal autonomy, self-identity, emotional release and reflective thoughts. Hollenhorest and Jones (2001) have also argued that solitude as a psychological detachment from society, serves two primary functions: 1) affirmation of individual will and self determination, and 2) cultivating the inner world of the self. In this way, solitude contributes to the search of meaning, happiness, self-awareness and emotional maturity.

Storr (1988) has argued that the capacity to be alone is one aspect of an inner security and solitude is a mean of becoming aware of one’s deepest needs, feelings and impulses, of self-discovery and self-realization. For this reason he proposes that capacity to be alone is considered as a criterion of emotional maturity equally important to the capacity of the individual to make social relationships. He has further argued that, by separating us from our usual social and physical environments, solitude can remove those people and objects that define and confirm our identities. In that sense, solitude facilitates self-examination, re-conceptualization of the self, and coming to terms with change. Koch (1994) has also discussed how solitude facilitates self-attunement and reflection. On a more empirical level, studies have shown that people often gain from solitude a new understanding of themselves and their priorities (Long, 2000; Long, Seburn, Averill, & More, in press; Pedersen, 1997, 1999).
Recently, psychologists (e.g., Burger 1998, Larson 1990) have suggested that solitude provides an opportunity to engage in self-selected activities relatively free of social encumbrances and expectations. They have argued that we need time alone for reflection and insight and that solitude is an important tool for personal, spiritual and mental health, self-restoration, personal growth and creative development (Burke 1991, Suedfeld et al 1982, Maslow 1970, Leary et al 2003, Burger 1995, Koch 1994).

Long and Averil (2003), specifically, sum up the benefits of solitude as follows: First, freedom of choice with respect to actions and thoughts and they distinguish between “negative” and “positive” freedom. Negative freedom is freedom from constraints, while positive is the freedom to engage in desired activities. Koch (1994) offers a good example of one type of negative freedom afforded by solitude. The mere presence of other people, he notes, obliges us to coordinate our experience with theirs, thereby diminishing the scope of our actions. Solitude can minimize such intrusive self-consciousness by reducing the immediate demands of experiencing ourselves as the object of another person's thoughts and actions.

Not only solitude substantially contributes to a person’s self-attunement, self-discovery and renewal, it also enhances a person’s creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has found that adolescents who cannot tolerate being alone often fail to develop their creative talents because such development usually relies on solitary activity such as practicing one’s musical instrument or writing poetry in one’s journal. Creativity consists of generating new useful ideas with impact by forming new associations – combinations between previously unrelated ideas. Long and Averill (2003), also, argued that characteristics associated with solitude (e.g. freedom) offer opportunities for transition from the social “world of work” to the potentially creative world of “phantasy” and/or scientific theorizing. Imaginative involvement in multiple realities
potentially implies the reconstitution of cognitive structures imposed by the often highly structured environments and functions of the leaders.

Storr (1988) maintains that “learning, thinking, innovation and being in contact with one’s own world of imagination are all facilitated by solitude”. Specifically he believes that prayer and meditation, as practices of solitude state, facilitate integration by allowing time for previously unrelated thoughts and feelings to interact. “Being able to get in touch with one’s deepest thoughts and feelings, and providing time for them to regroup themselves into new formations and combinations, are important aspects of the creative processes” (p.28). Maslow (1970) also directly linked creativity to solitude by stating that the ability to become “lost in the present” seems to be a sine qua non for creativity-in whatever field as it has something to do with this ability to become timeless, selfless, outside of space, of society, of history” (p. 64). Recently, from a social network perspective, Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) and Perry-Smith (2006) have shown that weaker ties are generally beneficial for creativity, as people with weaker ties tend to engage in more autonomous thinking and devote attention and mental energy to idea generation to a greater degree than people with strong ties who devote significant amount of time and attention to cultivating relationships.

SOLITUDE AND MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a relatively new concept in organizational theory (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). It has roots in Buddhist and other contemplative traditions and is most commonly defined as the “…state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Mindfulness can be considered an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality. Mindfulness can suffer when people are occupied with multiple tasks or
preoccupied with concerns that detract from the quality of engagement with what is focally present. Mindfulness is also compromised when individuals behave compulsively or automatically, without awareness of or attention to one's behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Although mindfulness has been conceptualized as distinct to self-awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), insofar as it involves receptive attention to internal psychological states, we expect it to be associated with self-attunement, understanding and clarity of thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness is likely to facilitate conditions of open awareness that can be especially valuable for choosing behaviors that are consistent with one needs, values and interests (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

The role of solitude for mindfulness has not been explored but one could reasonably assume that solitude can facilitate mindfulness. Based on his sensory deprivation research, Suedfeld (1982) points out that, when levels of stimulation drop significantly below the optimum, as in a state of solitude, the person may "begin to generate (or perceive more sensitively) internal stimuli," such as physical sensations, daydreams, distorted thoughts, and shifting emotions (p. 64). As during sensory deprivation, the mind in solitude may be better attuned to and more present in the moment.

SOLITUDE AND LEADERSHIP

The role of solitude for leadership has been largely overlooked in existing leadership research. Emphasis has been placed in the relational nature of leadership (e.g., Uhl-Bien, 2006). As described by Hogg (2005): “Leadership is a relational term—it identifies a relationship in which some people are able to persuade others to adopt new values, attitudes and goals, and to exert effort on behalf of those values, attitudes,
and goals” (p. 53). Traditional research on leadership examines behavioral styles that are relationship-oriented or behaviors focused on developing high quality leader-follower relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1997).

The most prominent relationship-based approach is the leader–member exchange (LMX) theory. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), the central concept of LMX theory is that within work units, different types of relationships develop between leaders and their subordinates, or members. Managers and supervisors are thought to develop close relationships with only a few subordinates and have high quality exchanges with them. Another prominent relationship-based approach to leadership is that provided by Hollander (1964, 1978) who adopted a focus on leadership as a relational process, a two-way influence and social exchange relationship between leaders and followers. Despite his emphasis on the relational nature of leadership Hollander also stresses the role of leader’s internal processes an self-concept, “a major component of the leader–follower relationship is the leader's perception of his or her self relative to followers, and how they in turn perceive the leader” (p. 55).

A recent theoretical approach that pays attention to the leader’s “inner-theatre” is that of authentic leadership. Avolio et al. (2004) define authentic leaders as “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (p. 802-3). According to Avolio et al. (2004) authentic leadership can incorporate transformational, servant, spiritual or other forms of positive leadership. The key distinction is that authentic leaders are anchored by a deep sense of self and know where they stand on important issues,
values and beliefs. They also act as role-models and convey to others, through both actions and words what they represent in terms of principles, values and ethics.

A key factor contributing to the development of authentic leadership is the self-awareness or personal insight of the leader. According to Avolio et al., (2004) self-awareness is viewed in part as being linked to self-reflection “…by reflecting through introspection, authentic leaders gain clarity and concordance with respect to their core values, identity, emotions, motives and goals” (p. ). By learning who they are and what they value, authentic leaders build understanding and a sense of self that provides a strong anchor for their decisions and actions. Authentic leadership has also highlighted the role of self-regulation. Self-regulation is the process through which authentic leaders align their values with their intentions and actions. In our theoretical model (see Figure 1), we suggest that leader’s self-awareness, self-regulation as well as mindfulness, all require a state of solitude to flourish.

Authentic leadership begins with knowing yourself deeply (Drucker 1999). Leaders must struggle with questions such as: what type of leader am I, what do I want my legacy to be, what values do I want to ensure or embody in my business? (Tichy 1997). Kets de Vries (2001) suggests that healthy people have the capacity for self observation and self analysis and they are highly motivated to spend time on self – reflection. Self – awareness, as a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weakness, limitations and one’s values and motives is considered as fundamental dimension of emotional intelligence. Solitude, by creating the states of dissociation, freedom, inner peace, inner security and spirituality facilitates the process of introspection of search and understanding of the deeper genuine self. In solitude, leaders can listen to their inner voice, connect with themselves at a deeper level, understand their deepest or hidden desires, emotions, feelings and impulses. It is
easier for them to search for the meaning of life, their place in the universe and the legacy they wish to leave behind. Goleman et al. (2002, p.40) maintain that “perhaps the most strong (though least visible) sign of self-awareness is a propensity for self-reflection and thoughtfulness. Self-aware people typically find time to reflect quietly often by themselves. Many outstanding leaders in fact bring to their work life the thoughtful mode of self-reflection that they cultivate in their spiritual life. For some this means prayer or meditation for others it’s a more philosophical quest for self-understanding”. Storr (1988) suggested, that by extracting us from our customary social and physical contexts or at least altering our experience of them, solitude can remove those people and objects that define and confirm our identities and facilitate self-examination, re-conceptualization of the self and coming to terms with change. Through these quest and self-discovery, the leader defines and realizes his/her own identity, acquires a sense of destiny, a sense of purpose and meaning. Through this introspection, self-analysis and self-reflection the leader creates the necessary background to make fundamental choices and commitments and align his actions with his values, clarify his vision and his goals (Bruch & Ghoshal 2004). William George, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, supports this argumentation: “Self-awareness and other emotional intelligence skills come natural to some less so to others – but these skills can be learned. One of the techniques I found most useful in gaining deeper self awareness is meditation….I have meditated 20 minutes, twice a day ever since. Meditation makes me calmer, more focused and better able to discern what’s really important. Leaders by the very nature of their positions are under extreme pressure to keep up with the many voices clamoring for their attention. Indeed many leaders lose their way. It is only through a deep self-awareness that you can find your inner voice and listen to it. (Voices: HBR Summer 2004)
Solitude facilitates a leader to “find his voice” which is absolutely critical to becoming an authentic leader. Solitude offers the “quiet space” for continuous reflection and interpretation of the leader’s external and internal world. The leader has often to confront dilemmas, doubts, conflicts and competing values and goals. Leaders must go through an act of inner consensus building in which they resolve their own conflicts. Bruch and Ghoshal (2004) state that many managers report a disconnection between their feelings and their rationally developed goals. In this case, strong psychological conflicts and a sense of discomfort result, blocking purposeful action. Therefore leaders have to align their emotions and thoughts with their values and goals. Bruch and Ghoshal (2004) suggested specific strategies for this alignment which require an «inner work» of the leader which is facilitated during a state of solitude. Specifically they suggested: “freeing yourself of external expectations – such as taking some time off work to think and reflect which can help you pinpoint out your hidden emotions and honestly answer for your self what course you wish take”. Furthermore, in a state of solitude, leaders may find it easier to conceive and formulate a vision for the future which will express aspirations, hopes and dreams and will incorporate his/her values. More precisely, solitude is necessary for the process of visualization through which the leader could translate his vision into a vivid mental picture. This process of mental imaging is very useful, if not necessary, because the clearer and more vivid his picture, the stronger his/her passion and personal commitment (attachment) to the vision. A vivid mental picture will also facilitate communication, understanding and commitment to the vision by the leader’s followers. Experienced top athletes, consider the mental imagery very contributing to their success and they practice it usually (Feltz and Landers 1983). Koestenbaum (2002, p. 79), maintains that visioning means “to be at home on the infinity of inner space and time”. Solitude may help to achieve access to and control over that inner
space and time. “Visioning is the ability to shift from the natural to the reflective attitude from being who you are to reflecting who you are, from acting out who you are to observing and evaluating who you are, from seeing the world from within your subjective ego to seeing yourself objectively within the world, from acting to examine your action.” (p. 80). Solitude, thus, reinforces a leader’s focus and commitment to goals and long term objectives. Bruch and Ghosal (2004) suggest that focus requires “time to reflect regularly on your own behavior and being willing and able to choose what you do and not do each day”.

Furthermore, solitude helps leaders manage their painful emotions and inner tensions which may decrease their energy, their focus and commitment to vision and goals. Bruch and Ghosal (2004) argue that effective leaders know exactly how to process their painful emotions and inner tensions. “Most of them could name certain activities that help them cope with their strong emotions. One manager told us about his garden which had a strong stabilizing effect on him. During difficult periods, he spent long hours there, often talking to himself, about what bothered him. He knew that gardening would restore his inner balance so that could plan his next steps” (p. ). The same authors stress that the leader by reflecting and visualizing their former success and the ways in which they overcame certain obstacles, can reinforce their self-confidence, their sense of competence and strengthen their courage. Heifetz and Linsky (2002 p. 204) suggest that the leader has the need of a sanctuary, a place of reflection and renewal, where they can listen to themselves and reaffirm their deeper sense of self and purpose. “In turbulent seas of a change initiative, you need to find ways be steady and stabilize yourself. First, you must establish a safe harbor where each day you can reflect on the previous day’s journey, repair the psychological damage you have suffered renew your stores of emotional resources and reorient your moral compass. Harbor might be a physical place, such as the kitchen table of a
house, or a regular routine such a daily walk through the neighborhood” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Storr (1988, p. 19) states that the capacity to be alone is one aspect of an inner security. Koestenbaum (2002) states to be courageous is to be prepared for the isolation of leadership (p139)”. Courage requires inner security. “You must have power that comes from being comfortable with isolation so that you will be centered enough to wait patiently for results” (p. 150).

Furthermore, a leader in a state of solitude through introspection, self-discovery and self-management, finds it easier to realize and clarify their concerns about meeting moral standards and obligations to others and their concern about consequences of their own action. This contributes to what Winter and Barembaum call “responsibility disposition” which according to House at al. (1997) should be predictive of a leader’s integrity.

Finally, by facilitating the reflection as conscious act, solitude can contribute to the learning process and to a leader’s self-development. Initially, through self – awareness process and the formation of the “ideal self”, he realizes the gap which according to Senge (1990) is a source of creative tension for personal development. Also solitude facilitates the cognitive processes which are created by conscious thinking of his experiences, and rolling them over in his mind in order to draw lessons from them. Storr (1988) suggests that “thinking is predominantly a solitary activity although others may be present when an individual is concentrating upon his thoughts (Storr 1988, p28). Besides that, solitude contributes to the articulation of a leader’s stories through which he understands better himself, he learns and he teaches his followers. (Tichy, 1997).

On the basis of the above literature we build our theoretical model (see Figure 1) and we argue that access to solitude offers to the leader unique opportunities for reflection, self-examination and visioning, all critical conditions for self-awareness,
self-regulation, mindfulness as well as ultimately, authentic leadership development.

We specifically propose the following:

**Proposition 1:** Leader’s increased opportunities for solitude can enhance leader’s self-awareness.

**Proposition 2:** Leader’s increased opportunities for solitude can enhance leader’s self-regulation.

**Proposition 3:** Leader’s increased opportunities for solitude can enhance leader’s mindfulness.

**Proposition 4:** Leader’s increased opportunities for solitude can contribute to authentic leadership development, though enhancing leader’s self-awareness, regulation and mindfulness.

The positive effects of solitude to authentic leadership extend beyond the individual leader. There are positive effects on followers, too. Authentic leaders actively and continuously model for followers through their words and actions, guided by their high levels of self-awareness, regulation and mindfulness that have been encouraged by the solitude episodes. As positive role models, authentic leaders critically contribute to the development of authentic followers. As followers observe the leader displaying self-understanding and engaging in authentic behavior that reflects integrity and a commitment to core ethical values, they develop trust in the leader that fosters open and authentic behavior on their part. Over time, the interactions of the leader and follower evolve into an ‘authentic relationship’ (Gardner et al., 2005). We, thus, further suggest in our model (Figure 1) that authentic leadership positively
reinforces leader’s behaviors and actions through the development of an authentic leader-follower relation.

**Contextual characteristics and Individual differences**

The role of context is important for the relationship between solitude and leadership. Specifically the demands of a manager’s job for constant social interactions, meetings and interruptions make opportunities for solitude a rare experience, a luxury. In such conditions, the necessity for the leader to create opportunities for solitude reflection and contemplation is critical.

*Proposition 5: The positive effects of solitude on leader’s self awareness, regulation, mindfulness and authentic leadership will be more evident in a context where the leader’s job is characterized by high demands for social interaction.*

Furthermore it is important to take into account that there are wide individual differences in preference for, and tolerance of, solitude. Long et al. (2003) based on the existing literature and on empirical data conclude that in order to benefit from solitude the individual must be able to draw on inner resources to find meaning in situations in which external support are lacking. The individual capacity for solitude contains the ability to choose it voluntarily and to live it occasionally for specific reasons because otherwise there is a danger to be transformed to loneliness with negative consequences. Empirical research that has mainly used the preference for solitude scale, constructed by Burger (1995), shows that not all individuals possess the same degree of preference to spend time alone. Larson et al. (1997) considered solitude as an “ecological niche” that offers both opportunities and dangers and therefore the question of a person’s ability to profit from the first and avoid the second is posed. Also, given the fact that the positive effects of solitude are linked with or
facilitated by spatial and environmental elements (home, forest), the competence of solitude includes a person’s ability to choose what he feels comfortable with, enjoy and facilitate the positive effects. Other personality traits such as introversion, neuroticism and openness to experience (e.g., Burger, 1995; Long & Averill, 2003) have been associated with solitude but findings were rather inconclusive. The existing findings with respect to the personality correlates of positive solitude are admittedly meager and little is known about the people who are able to spend time alone in a constructive manner. However, introverts as well individuals high on openness to experience appear to have a stronger inclination to solitude.

**Proposition 6:** Individual differences such as preference for solitude and personality characteristics (e.g., introversion and openness to experience) will moderate the relation between solitude and leader's self-awareness, self-regulation and mindfulness and subsequently authentic leadership development.

**DISCUSSION**

Aim of the present paper was to offer additional insight on leadership processes by adding a critical component that has been largely neglected in existing leadership literature, that of solitude. As human beings, we are social by nature. We seek and enjoy the company of others and we may go to great lengths to avoid being alone. But too much sociality can be oppressive. We need time alone, access to solitude, as a relief from social stressors, as an opportunity for reflection and insight and a chance for personal, spiritual and creative development (e.g. Long et al.,2003; Burger, 1998; Koch, 1994). This need is of even higher importance for business leaders who are experiencing immense pressures for continuous social interactions that leave them no time to think (Comeau-Kirschner & Wah, 2000).
Our proposed model suggests that: (1) high demands of the leader’s job for social interaction increase the importance of finding opportunities for solitude episodes, during which the leader can freely engage in a process of reflection, contemplation and visioning; (2) increased opportunities for leader’s access to solitude can enhance their levels of self-awareness, self-regulation and mindfulness; (3) increased opportunities for leader’s access to solitude can facilitate the process of authentic leadership development; (4) not all people have similar needs for solitude and enjoy similar benefits from solitude occurrences and thus individual differences, such as preference for solitude and personality, are of great importance for understanding the relationship between solitude and leadership.

Although our approach appears to contradict current relational approaches to leadership, in reality our model enhances our understanding of leadership as a relational and social phenomenon. At first, it may seem odd to speak of solitude as a "vital social phenomenon" (Long & Averill, 2003). Solitude is inherently social in the sense that it relies upon the human capacity to reflect upon and interpret one's own experiences, a process that according to theorists such as George Mead and Vygotsky has the strong influence of socialization. As Bogdan (2000) and Long and Averill (2003) have argued, our ability for self-reflection and for considering our own thoughts arises from our development of the ability to represent the thoughts of others. From this perspective, the mental experience of solitude is inevitably as social as any other psychological experience. For leadership development especially, solitude offers the leader the opportunity to understand their self, their values, emotions, identity, motives and goals, and thus become more authentic in their interactions with followers. As if in a virtuous cycle, authentic leadership encourages authentic followership and thus solitude appears to play a catalytic role for the development of an authentic leader-follower relationship.
As far as leadership practice is concerned if the propositions mentioned above are empirically supported then some very useful implications will arise. For example, organizations could use the capacity or propensity to solitude could be included in leadership competence frameworks used for evaluation, selection or promotion as well as introduce practices and policies that will show the organization’s respect for the leader’s need for solitude and that can further help leaders create opportunities for solitude at the office. They can further re-examine the value of existing policies that allow constant social interaction, e.g., “open door” policies, and allow leaders some precious time for reflection, contemplation and connection to their inner self, their values, emotions and identity that can help them become authentic leaders and develop authentic leader-follower relationship, being mindful and truly present in their social interactions.
REFERENCES


Thomas, A. R., & Ayres, J. 1998. A principal's interruptions: Time lost or time gained? **International Journal of Educational Management,** 12, 244-249


FIGURE 1. A model for the role of solitude for authentic leadership development

- Job demands for social interaction
  - Meetings
  - Phone calls, e-mails etc.
  - Interruptions
  - “Open door” policies

- Individual differences
  - Preference for solitude
  - Personality

- Leader’s behaviors and actions
  - Styles
  - Decision-making
  - Strategy and vision
  - Inspiration
  - Creativity
  - Follower development

- Solitude episodes
  - Reflection
  - Contemplation
  - Visioning

- Leader’s self-awareness
  - Values
  - Emotions
  - Motives and goals

- Leader’s self-regulation
  - Impulse control
  - Internal conflicts resolution

- Authentic leadership

- Mindfulness

- Authentic leader-follower relation