Master of Letters in Organizational Leadership

Capstone Reflection

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Introduction

The purpose of this capstone reflection paper is to integrate and contextualize essential elements from the degree program with my area of professional interest in manufacturing.

My experience managing departments within military and corporate environments led me to recognize my need for leadership skills. The desire to empower and develop employees to their fullest potential became my goal. The Japanese use the term "muda" for wasted time or inefficiency. Managing teams to perform the same tasks leaves little room for innovation and improvement. Effective leadership, instilling a vision, and motivating teams to increase efficiency by sharing goals and strategies, avoids muda.

Edward Demming's discovery of inefficiencies in the manufacturing processes in the United States was not considered relevant by domestic automotive manufacturers. Management believed they could continue manufacturing without looking toward the future. Leadership did not appear to consider advancements in supply technology. When presented to Japanese manufacturers, Demming's ideas were deemed worth the risk to implement. As a result, the Toyota Corolla was considered higher quality than the Rolls Royce in 1985.

The potential for increased efficiency has arrived with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Unbridled projects such as ChatGPT and others impact social media, academia, and the scientific communities. These concerns recently led Dr. Geoffrey Hinton, "godfather of AI," to part ways with Google over concerns about the rate of advancement. Anthropocene and transhumanist agendas leveraging AI to meet their goals are also concerning. Many researchers believe, given our current course, the Earth's resources will run out by 2030.

My desire to lead future changes led me to OGS to learn research skills and become a scholar-practitioner, accountable to our employees while integrating AI where appropriate.

**Reflection on Foundations of Human Behavior**

The essential elements of Non-Christian, in contrast with Biblical Perspectives of Selected Christian Writers, provided a solid basis for understanding the variances in human behavior and frequent misunderstandings that lead to conflicts at my workplace and in society. My narrow worldview resulted from growing up in a church parsonage led by a former high school science teacher. As a result, or in spite of the academically rich biblically based environment my parents provided was put to the test upon entering college.

My epistemological perspective of biblical authority, verified by scientific proof (reason) and belief (faith) that we are created in God's image when collaborating with classmates on a project, became apparent. My narrow worldview, influenced by church life, sheltered me from humanism and divergent philosophies. Human behaviors based on naturalism, relativism, and New Age were studied during undergraduate work at Greenville University, a liberal arts institution primarily based on a Christian Worldview. Constructive dialogue during philosophy class resulted in critical thought and an appreciation of understanding a situation from another perspective to a limited, somewhat isolated worldview of parsonage life in small midwestern towns.

Ogaba explains the isolation argument as coherentism accounting for justification based on "one belief without giving due importance to the world outside, it is argued that coherentist account of justification is isolated from the world and, thereby, it is inadequate." (2019, p. 105) By studying human behavior through the eyes of philosophers under the guidance of Oxford Graduate School professors, I was able to gain an understanding of human behavior from a Christian Worldview. With reason and scripture, I "Have courage to decide by use of one's own understanding." Walters et al., p. 20, Kant, 1784)

Similarly, a deeper, more practical academic dive into the foundations of human behavior with regard to call, vocation, and life mission provided increased understanding and direction needed to become scholarly advocates for positive world change. Professor Alschuler suggests "[a]lmost every measure confirms that America's youth are in trouble." (Alschuler, 2000, Noebel, 2006, p.2). The lack of self-control in the behavior of America's youth appears to be increasing as suicide ranked second in deaths of 14–18 year olds (Ivey-Stephenson et al., 2020, p. 47).

Based on suicides, violent crime increase (Boman and Gallupe, 2020, p. 537), political unrest, economic instability, and countries involved in war, the need for transformational leaders in areas of government, military, and civilian workforce is greater than in 2000 when Professor Alschuler measured the condition of America's youth. The troubled youth (now young adults) the professor measured are in the workforce. The automotive manufacturing industry experiences low attendance, poor job performance, and a loss of direction or apathy toward production.

While our human resources department continues to address personnel conflicts, the root cause is often the employees' opinion is based on personal judgments and faith that what they believe is true, not justified belief or human reasoning. When counseled, the employee is asked to reflect on the logical evidence or reason behind the opinion that lead them to believe their action was appropriate.

As Johannes Scotus Erigena (810-877) suggested the supremacy of reason over faith, Walters et al. suggest, "Reason seeks faith and reason is the judge of all authority. Faith, to be faith, must be understood" (p.17). Reasoning with our employees is the first step in reconciling human conflict and working toward appropriate human behavior in the workplace.

At my workplace, appropriate behavior can vary due to the Latino, oriental, african-american, and Arab employees we have at the manufacturing plant. In addition to the language barriers, shared beliefs, values, traditions, or customs impact a group's behavior. The social construct of race or physical appearance should not be the determinant when our human resources department needs to address inappropriate human behavior.

Understanding the influence of our employee's worldviews and cultural biases provides the human resource specialist insight to efficiently address the situation. Viewing the case from the employee's perception allows the HR Specialist to provide applicable counsel that better relates to the employee, whereby understanding and learning occur.

The potential conflict is accommodating employees holding various worldviews. The epistemology of determining which worldview will outweigh another when disagreements occur relating to treatment perceived to be unfair. One worldview requires five prayer sessions which require specific break times. "..there should be some ground or reason by which one can select a particular set of beliefs to be the most relevant, that is, the most significant insofar as the candidate belief is to be compared with or related with" (Ogaba, 2019, p. 104). Determining the relevance of the employees' beliefs in light of their actions is the challenge.

Understanding the intersectionality of race, culture, education, values, and motivations allows our managers to more accurately address the human behavior of the individual when an abnormal situation occurs.

**Human Relations Skills in a Pluralistic Society**

As stated earlier, the intersectionality of race, culture, education, values, and motivations can negatively impact human behavior at our facility; the opportunity to pull ideas from cross-cultural dialogue can positively affect manufacturing. We foster social cohesion between the various cross-cultural groups to turn a potential negative into a positive.

Our company, comprised of workers of Mexican, Japanese, Venusualians, African-American, and Arab cultural backgrounds, provides opportunities to understand motivation based on their worldviews. Religious freedom and workplace accommodations such as prayer times and holidays are accommodated within reason. The attempts to meet their cultural needs regardless of creed, color, or religious affiliation reduce conflict and, in several cases, retains employees who would otherwise leave. Meeting personal and cultural needs results in less job abandonment when the production schedule is changed due to supply chain issues. The need for purpose in life is satisfied on a small scale when employees feel valued, even when they cannot complete roles due to circumstances beyond their control.

The attempt to accommodate various worldviews and cultural convictions at my workplace results in a more positive outlook with employees during extended work hours due to production delays. Workers clearly understand management's attempt to see from their worldview while not compromising other employees' worldviews and staying within company guidelines. Workers clearly understand management's attempt to see from their worldview while not compromising the manager's worldview while staying within company guidelines.

Accommodation of worldviews held by co-workers does not violate 2 Corinthians 10:5, which states we will bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The Christian worldview is maintained while God's gift of freewill allows others to adopt a different worldview while acting within the boundaries of the company handbook. Accommodation of all worldviews is similar to a Hegelianistic dialectic, emphasizing the collective or universal thought while leaving no room for individual thought. The postmodernist disregarding external reality in favor of whatever a person wants to believe allows too much to individual thought where feelings are acted on above human judgment.

Kierkegaard rejected Hegel's emphasis on an all-encompassing system due to lessening the importance of authentic, individual lives and subjective experience. The individual's struggle for authenticity or true worldview in today's society is more complicated with the advent of artificial intelligence. AI is similar to Hagel's all-encompassing dialectic. While AI has comprehensive knowledge of the internet and online databases with a wealth of information, it lacks the complexity, uniqueness, and subjective experience of individual lives in finding solutions to difficult situations. The quest for order and improvement to overcome manufacturing difficulties is often the result of inspiration from unique human experiences.

These improvements in manufacturing or "Kaizen" projects are evaluated from different viewpoints before attempting a trial run. The innovation and creativity provided by a pluralistic workforce are encouraged during collaboration. Drawing the best out of each diverse and unique group of individuals has also brought down prejudices in our workplace. When a cross-cultural team works on a common goal to improve the workflow or reduce waste, the entire group or society shares the benefits.

Reflection on Mentoring and Coaching

Researching leadership styles allowed me to understand and apply changes in how I implement changes in manufacturing. Reading John Maxwell's book on the 21 irrefutable leadership laws provided the framework required to execute a successful project with integrity while reducing obstacles. Motivating followers, as well as employees that are reluctant to do what needs to be done, requires the ability to influence the entire team regardless of race, culture, religion, and unique aspects of human beings.

Providing feedback is imperative in our business due to the pluralistic makeup of our employees. "when feedback-recipients from minority groups suspect that White feedback-givers' behavior is influenced by their own concerns about appearing racist, feedback-recipients are likely to perceive feedback from them as disingenuous and be more avoidant of the feedback" (Fulham et al., 2022, p. 2, Major et al., 2016, p.76). With frequent interracial interactions, leaders must be able to communicate effectively in a way that builds trust and integrity.

Honesty with employees during coaching builds integrity. Some tend to soften the blow when providing feedback by "sandwiching" negative actions between two positive actions (Fulham et al., 2022, p. 4). The "sandwich approach" can leave the employee unclear about the feedback session. While the mentor may want to hold back in the corrective conversation, the employee misses the opportunity to act on a character flaw or inappropriate action.

Listening to the concerns of others with genuine interest is part of a transformational leader's ability. Engaging with followers by understanding their needs while raising awareness of the target for the company to fulfill their obligations to the customer and providing future job opportunities for fellow employees.

Encouraging continuous learning to better develop the subordinate is a primary goal.

**Reflection on Professional Ethics**

While transhumanism and Anthropocene agendas are gaining focus in societal and, more recently, governmental conversations, the opportunity to lessen the positive impact and purpose of humanity is in the balance. Artificial intelligence is providing an answer to the search for human advancement. While transhumanists attempt to use technology to improve mental capacity and extend life to reach the next step in human existence, the Anthropocene's agenda is environmentally focused on protecting the planet at the potential cost of humanity.

While both concepts bring ethical concerns with potential inequality, human nature, and responsibility to manage the world God has provided, the urgency of these groups to carry out their agenda could be detrimental to humanity. Anthropocene pessimism is based on the idea that human activities have led to an unsustainable environment for our ecosystem. Transhumanism thought would see a technologically enhanced society of "super-humans" that would potentially arrive at a solution to avoid the dark future of a world unable to sustain human life and usher in the next stage of human "evolution."

My goal as a scholar-practitioner is to continue researching these emerging technologies before integration into the workplace. While technology has been part of God's plan to manage the world, the abuse or modification of God's human creation does not align with scripture.

Technology must also be introduced to employees as non-threatening to their job, religious, or ethical convictions. Leaders have a moral responsibility to be accountable for the decision to introduce AI technology to the employee's manufacturing processes. Reflective equilibrium should be applied when wearable technologies with embedded AI are considered. The enhanced performance of one employee should not give an unfair promotion advantage over the employee whose process does not allow the same wearable technology.

**Reflection on Principles of Sociological Engagement**

While my OL 710 research was focused on future transhuman and posthuman considerations in the workforce, it became apparent that sociological engagement will be significantly impacted. The advancement of technology has been moving faster than expected by several scientists and technologists. Dr. Geoffery Hinton, mentioned on page 10 of this paper, believes AI may "outstrip their human creators within a few years" (Knight, 2023). Instead of 30 to 50 years from now, Hinton suggests the time to be five to 20 years. We need to prepare.

While current sociological engagement at our plant involves interaction with human co-workers, building relationships while building trucks, during breaks, and frequently, away from work. The hours spent at work often result in a sense of inclusivity and teamwork with common purposes. Providing wages to support families and producing vehicles that others worldwide use for business is part of the social engagement in our workplace.

As we are made in the image of God, social engagement comes naturally. Social stratification may lead to division between upper and lower socioeconomic classes. The potential for conflicts between humans and posthumans may be much more significant than the haves and have nots. The opportunities for promotion, social mobility, and other benefits for humans will be more challenging to achieve when competing with transhuman or posthuman co-workers with advanced artificial intelligence.

At present, the challenges our company is facing deal with cultural conflicts, including allegations of discrimination, gender bias, and lack of inclusivity. This course has helped me identify the root causes of conflict between our workforce's various societal types. Understanding the cultural patterns within our diverse social structures and perspectives allows us to identify with our employees and reduce potential conflicts before they happen.

Reflection on Principles of Communication Skills and Conflict

Technology provides a multitude of methods to communicate. The ability to schedule a meeting with several workers at our plant and worldwide using Zoom, TEAM, and other applications has made it more convenient but frequently less effective. Several meetings end with a participant asking another participant to stay online after the group has left the session.

These sidebar conversations after an in-person meeting are where a substantial amount of business gets addressed. During the virtual meeting, the opportunity to raise a concern to a subset of participants is not as conducive as when the group is in the same room. Reluctance to request a sidebar may raise unwanted attention from others who may derail the intent of the conversation. Instead of addressing the concern, the issue does not get the attention needed to prevent a bad situation. The lack of face-to-face interaction in virtual meetings is another barrier to good communication. Non-verbal communication provides additional understanding in a face-to-face conversation.

Instead of returning to physical meetings to discuss issues and pass on information, the trend is to have fewer meetings. This is in part due to the Work From Home (WFH) option for many employees. A recent study shows that WFH employees spend more time engaged in meetings (Gibbs et al., 2021, p. 3). The employees we have working from home confirm they spend more hours working from home, primarily due to the inability to work without interruptions from virtual meetings.

Given the additional interruptions, frequent lack of quality audio, and non-technical Twelve Blocks to Listening covered in the class syllabus, I have held face-to-face meetings whenever possible and reduced the number of attendees to only the decision makers. Attendees communicate with their subordinates after the main meeting.

**Synthesis**

The plan for my future professional growth is to identify opportunities for application in light of the courses taken at OGS, resources provided by tutors and researchers, and lessons learned from case studies. The orientation classes conducted by our human resources department are an opportunity to encourage new employees to join a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration. Sharing knowledge, engaging in workshops, and encouraging employees to contribute ideas on how they believe a process would work more efficiently should be encouraged by the leadership.

The apostle Paul's writings to the Philippians (4:8-9) reference the rewards of researching to effect change. Our thought life is ours to manage regardless of the situation. Paul continued writing while in prison. Three main points that support learning and results of a disciplined thought life, according to Groeschel referencing Paul's writings, are:

1. Thought ("think about such things") to
2. Action ("put it into practice") to
3. Experience ("the God of peace will be with you") ( 2021, p.2)

A point of Groeschel's observation is the battle for our life is won or lost in our minds. His second point is our thoughts will control us (2021, p.27).

 My goal is a pure thought life to eliminate distractions, whereby lifelong learning can take place, motivated to develop leaders and empower others to adopt a curious mind, eager to research and seek new knowledge, innovation, and skills in these days of AI integration and an uncertain future. Through research, answers are found to address the demands of changing environments and worldviews. AI-augmented research may benefit researchers in data analysis and pattern recognition; however, human review should be completed for ethical considerations.

Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth

Researching the fundamentals of Godly leadership has provided spiritual growth and renewed my faith during a time of global pandemics with an uncertain outcome. The chance to focus on a future with the tools to research ideas in production, technology, worldviews, and relationships with like-minded tutors, professors, and classmates resulted in spiritual, social, and emotional growth.

My spiritual growth is the result of a deeper understanding of the human condition explained by authors such as John Maxwell, Peter Drucker, and Warren Bennis. Knowing yourself to better recognize the gaps is a major factor in relying on God and searching scripture. As many of the philosophers I was fortunate enough to study during this MLitt have done, I discovered the reliance on God as the true source of inspiration and understanding.

The opportunity to study with like minded fellow students with similar goals was invaluable. The study sessions and class discussions with people from various occupations, countries, and denominations provided a wealth of social interaction. Discussing research with those of another vocation as well as doctrinal backgrounds, gave me insight into other ways of interacting with co-workers.

Just after the start of my MLitt program, the COVID Pandemic started. The emotional toll on my co-workers who identified with their job was devastating. The possibility that I would not complete the MLitt program was a concern my wife and I lifted up in prayer. Why would God have provided a professor in Seguin, Texas to cross my path with an opportunity to study in the Oxford Tutorial Method with like-minded professors only to make it unattainable?

The answer was clear. My determination was strengthened. Emotions were given to God while using newly learned research tools to overcome obstacles.

**Conclusion**

The tutorial approach is a method I had been exposed to during my years in England. After graduating from an American College and immediately moving just north of Oxford, I began to understand the differences in the educational systems. The tutorial appeared much more interactive and thorough than the process of lectures followed by memorizing facts to be recalled during tests, then frequently forgotten by the next semester.

The American College teaching method often involves large classes with lectures and assignments. The Tutorial method I experienced was a small group of students and one-on-one sessions between the tutor and student. The interaction between tutor and student was invaluable in clarifying and directing the discipline being discussed.

The opportunity to discuss my academic goals in technology and human behavior was invaluable. While lectures in a classroom provide a basic understanding of a subject, the tutor's availability to dive deeper into my discipline by providing reference material to research was much more beneficial than going it alone.

The tutor/student experience of research and learning encouraged me to continue as a lifelong student and scholar-practitioner. The tutorial approach of research opened the door to the "Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life" (Hitz, 2021).

The examples provided by lifelong learners have equipped me with the tools to teach others in my profession to research what's being said in the media to find out for themselves what is true. Learning for our own well-being is the key to knowing and understanding the world we live in. Unlike social media, academic research brings out the best in us during social discourse with friends, family, and associates. My passion for learning about God's creation provides a rich, thought-provoking personal and professional life and several library cards.

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