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THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY OF MUSIC LEADERS WITHIN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

ABSTRACT

Music leaders play a key role within faith-based communities as they help to shape the culture and spirituality of those communities. Despite functioning in said faith-based environments where the spiritual well-being of the community is of the utmost importance, music leaders often neglect to tend to their personal spirituality. Much has

been researched and written about the personal experience and spirituality of spiritual leaders (pastors) of faith-based communities yet there is a dearth of research relating to the experience of music leaders. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experience of their (music leaders') personal spirituality. Furthermore, how to develop guidelines to assist music leaders in integrating their personal spirituality into their role as music leaders.

Key terms: Church, faith-based community, musician, music leader, pastor, spirituality

1. INTRODUCTION

The music leader's role within a faith-based community can be described as just as important as that of the spiritual leader (pastor). Music within culture plays a critical role in expression of language, belief and experience. This role continues within faith-based communities (Coyle, 2018:76). Such is the importance that music leaders are employed full time by faith-based communities in order to shape their culture. The spiritual teaching is translated into song in order to (melodically and rhythmically) assist people to experience, re-experience and integrate the content of religious practice.

In the researcher's role as a music leader, he has often observed that although music leaders facilitate *religious* practices, the importance of a healthy *personal spirituality* often goes unattended. The researcher became curious about the research topic as a result of personal observation and conversations with music leaders about their



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experiences of their personal spirituality from a Personal Professional Leadership (PPL) perspective.

This study explores music leaders' experience in their personal spirituality within faith-based communities. In order to orientate the reader to the study, the methodology and framework as well as the steps that were followed during the course of the research are discussed below.

2. METHODOLOGY

By approaching the study from the framework of Personal and Professional Leadership (PPL) as well as employing a social constructionist, ontological methodology the researcher approached the study in two phases. Phase one aimed at exploring and describing music leaders' experience of their personal spirituality.

Phase 1 was explored through meaning-making phenomenological interviews with six music leaders that have five years plus experience as music leaders. The data were analysed independently by making use of an independent coder as well as the researcher using Tesch's open coding and descriptive method (Tesch, 1996). This was followed by an in-depth conversation where unanimity was reached between the independent coder and the researcher as to the themes and sub-themes of what emerged out of the research.

This study found that music leaders have a deep-seated desire for a connection with significance and meaning in their work and that their personal spirituality can be described as being just that, a connection with significance and meaning. It was also found that they have the tendency to lose sight of this connection when getting caught up in the performative nature of their work.

When experiencing a strong connection with their personal significance and meaning, they are able to connect better those around them with something bigger than themselves, namely the larger vision of the faith-based community. The development of a personal spirituality helps them to serve others within their context better and promote personal well-being.

2.1 Epistemology

This study endeavoured to understand the nature of how music leaders experience their personal spirituality, as well as the outcomes of personal actions or personal meanings assigned to these experiences (Bryman, 2015). The epistemology was therefore interpretive in nature (Roberts & Dutton, 2013).

2.2 Ontology

Unlike *objectivism*, which states that social phenomena are a result of external factors beyond our reach or control (Bryman, 2015), *social constructionism* takes the position that social phenomena as well as their meanings are constantly being shaped by social “actors” (Ibid.). People in cultures, communities or structures therefore play an active part in reality construction (Burr, 2015), seeing that the individual and shared experiences of the various role players attribute meaning, significance and value to reality (Benjamin, 2018).

The researcher approached the study in a *social constructionist* and *qualitative* manner, exploring music leaders’ experiences of their personal spirituality in faith-based communities as *phenomenological* in nature (Bryman, 2015; Carruthers, 2007).

2.3 Personal and professional leadership (PPL) as a framework

This study was done in the framework of personal and professional leadership (PPL). According to the PPL approach, human beings have eight life dimensions that are divided into two categories, namely the *inner* life dimension and the *external* life dimension (Smith, 2009:19). These dimensions are listed below.

Inner life dimension: The *spiritual* life dimension, the *physical* life dimension, the *mental* life dimension and the *emotional* life dimension.

External life dimension: The *social* life dimension, the *career* life dimension, the *financial* life dimension and the *ecological* life dimension.

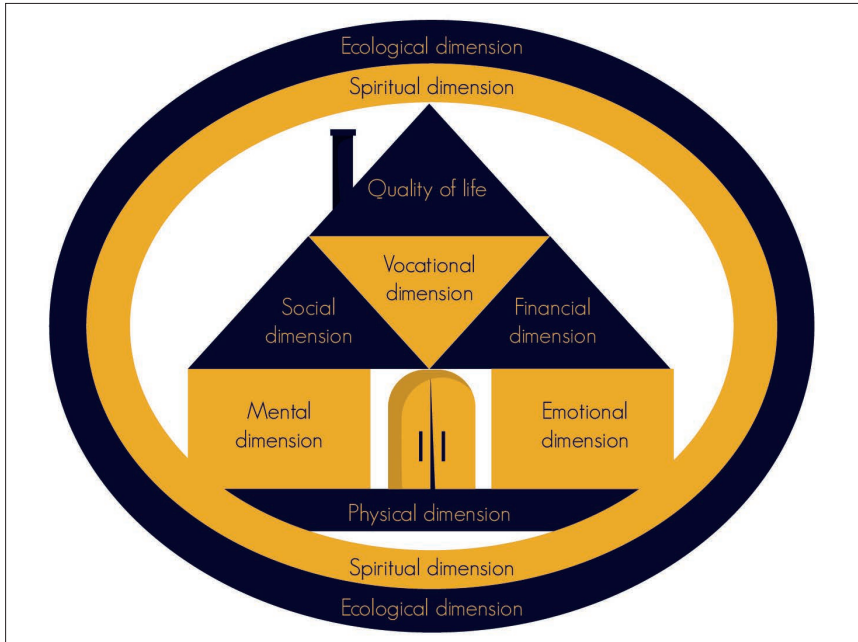


Figure 1: PPL House Model

The PPL approach propagates balance throughout these life dimensions. Smith (2009: 12) however, emphasises that the spiritual life dimension is seen as the circle that holds the house together (Smith, 2009b:3). The spiritual life dimension is therefore seen as the foundation of holistic living. The Life Dimensions House Model (Figure 1) presents an illustration of the PPL approach.

The inner life dimension is foundational to leadership in the PPL approach (Smith & Albertini, 2008: 12), with the spiritual life dimension integrating all life dimensions (Smith, 2009b:20). In the course of this study, the researcher concentrated on the spiritual life dimension as it pertains to music leaders, how they experience their personal spirituality in faith-based communities in order to integrate their (the music leader's) spirituality in their role as music leaders and to assist them in the management and nurturing of their personal spirituality in their roles in faith-based communities.

2.4 Research objectives

The intent of the research is to investigate music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality in faith-based communities and to develop guidelines from a PPL perspective to assist music leaders to manage and nurture their own spirituality in their roles as music leaders in faith-based communities.

The research objectives of this study are as set out below.

- **Explore** music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality.
- **Describe** music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality.
- **Develop** guidelines to assist music leaders in integrating their personal spirituality into their role as music leaders.

2.5 Research design

Babbie (2013:299) describes research design as the procedures and directives employed in tackling the research problem, while Bryman (2015:44-78) states that a research design relates to the measures that are used when conducting social research. In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach by capturing the lived experiences of participants in the topic of this study (Creswell, 2014:290). Individuals perceive and give meaning to their particular worlds; with this sense of meaning they then start to interact (or not) with their social reality.

This interaction is based on the value of meaning that the participants of a study attribute to the various realities that surround them (Creswell, 2014:291). The research design of this study is therefore *qualitative* and *phenomenological* in nature (Cox, 2019:180; Creswell, 2014:290; Moustakas, 1994:21).

3. PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

In the arch of the study, employing a social constructionist approach to data collection, six music leaders were willing to participate. Each participant had more than five years of experience as a music leader within faith-based communities. Each participant took part in an in-depth, meaning-making conversation with the

researcher, after which the data were decoded by an independent coder as well as the researcher.

4. EMERGING THEMES

Various themes emerged from the research findings. They are listed below:

Theme 1: More than a “muso” (Musicians’ slang for being a musician)

Participants communicated the experience of their career as being **deeper than the music**, a **higher calling** and that their role within faith-based communities was significant enough to be seen as **half of the sermon**. To the participants music is something that is profoundly meaningful and emotionally moving – not just to them personally, but also in a faith-based community setting. They also acknowledged their intentional use of music as a tool that enabled them to connect themselves and their faith-based communities with something bigger than the individuals (Levitin, 2019:87).

When analysing the participants’ experience through a PPL lens, the emotional response alone (although moving) elicited from the use of music in faith-based communities can be seen as an external reality rather than being a connection to the internal reality. The ability to truly transform and connect with meaning is limited (Panksepp & Bernatzky, 2002:135). The PPL approach would therefore warn of the likelihood of a significant dissonance between external realities and internal realities that could lead to personal unhappiness and a disconnection from a purposeful existence (Wort, 2013:186).

In light of the PPL approach, it is important that music leaders heed their internal realities and their connection to the “why” of what they are doing. As alluded to earlier, music and its temporary effect on the individual alone cannot sustain a sense of meaning, purpose or a connection to the internal self. It is therefore important that they heed the invitation to explore what it means to transcend their career and live with a consciousness of how their lives contribute to something greater than themselves (Dirk, Duffy & Eldridge, 2009:625).

Theme 2: The affirmation game

All participants reported a personal struggle with ego. Furthermore, they revealed

that due to the performative nature of their work it was easy to have their attention diverted from what they would call their true purpose. Some participants described periods of having had their attention diverted from their “mandate” and/or the “Source” and then, after self-examination and/or questioning (of intent, for example), had shifted their attention back to this “mandate” and/or “Source”.

Because the nature of religion is such that if one ticks all the boxes (Doebler, 2015; Pretorius, 2014) one can measure success or failure, “ego” seems to be comfortable in the religious framework, seeing that it is simpler to gauge success or failure with a checklist at hand (Reid Meloy, 1986:171; Rosenthal & Pittinski, 2008:617; Smith, 2012:30). Heeding the invitation to transcend one’s career starts with the development of a healthy personal spirituality not only as a defence against egocentric or even narcissistic (Rosenthal & Pittinski, 2008; Seibel, 2013:10) tendencies that lead to “emptiness”, but also for them to remain close to that sense of significance that, as discussed in theme 1, plays an essential part in the personal fulfilment and motivation of music leaders in faith-based communities (Smith, 2015:28).

Theme 3: A kind of culture

Organisationally the participants revealed their need for an understanding of the organisational purpose as well as for the surrounding teams to be in the “same space” in terms of organisational values and vision. The development of an organisational vernacular emerged as the organisational vision and values were cemented within the teams.

Participants frequently expressed the importance of agreeing with, or buying into the culture of the faith-based community to which they belong. It is also important that music team members are aligned with the culture of a specific faith-based community (Ellsworth, 2013:121; Schwartz, 2015:150).

Theme 4: Walk a path with others

Being a part of something bigger than themselves was a great contributor to the participants’ experience of significance, meaning and purpose. From a competency point of view (as leaders as well as musicians), they revealed a need to connect with peers and leaders that developed them both personally and professionally. Where these connections took place, it inevitably resulted in a positive team culture in the broader picture (Levitin, 2019:101).

Having said this, the participants emphasised the importance of the “relationship aspects” of what they do – with themselves, with the music team/band and with congregants and other leaders. It would seem as if the relational aspect, as a natural outflow of functioning in a larger community, gives the participants a sense of groundedness, considering that they, at some stage, inevitably have to get off the stage and connect with the people (Abernethy, 2015:266). They become less of a rock star and more human by stepping off the stage and *partaking* in community instead of only *facilitating* (Greenleaf, 2002:10; Hunter, 2007:34).

Theme 5: I am

Participants reported going through different seasons in their leadership journey. One such a season was a season of going through the motions, where there was no deep connection to meaning or purpose. This liminal space was an invitation to change and all participants indicated a positive response to this sense of existential frustration. From this theme emerged a strong sense of the importance of the development of a personal spirituality in which the participants found their own way of connecting to personal significance, purpose and meaning.

Frequently the participants referred to a past leadership style or approach to spirituality. Their descriptions show that they once adhered to a more rigid and religious (in other words, rule-based, measurable) way of interpreting and living out their faith. The participants noted a clear growth in their leadership styles as they gained experience. It is as if they needed to make the mistakes in order to gain a greater awareness of themselves and their unique path to a congruent spirituality within their functioning in faith-based communities (Ackerman, 2013:12; Fowler, 1995:15).

5. GUIDELINES AND PRACTICAL ACTIONS

The guidelines and practical actions that emerged from this study are placed within the framework of PPL. Three of the main principles of the PPL framework directed the development of the guidelines and practical actions. These principles are listed below as well as a summary of guidelines and practical actions developed through the study.

5.1 The spiritual life dimension forms the core of multidimensional human beings

The PPL approach views the spiritual life dimension as foundational to self-leadership because it is seen as the life dimension that integrates all of the life dimensions (Smith, 2012:36). Insight into and mastery of the spiritual life dimension help an individual to gain a better understanding of the inner world in order to develop an awareness and a sense of who one really is, what one's values are and one's sense of personal direction (Nhorria & Khurana, 2010; Covey, 2004; Smith, 2009b).

Insight into the spiritual life dimension also asks the question of whether an individual's internal realities such as their experience of their personal spirituality and their external realities are aligned with each other, what the challenges are to this alignment and how big the discrepancy is between these realities (Teichert, 2014; Smith, 2009b).

The bigger the discrepancy between the personal spiritual realities and the external realities the bigger the chronic discontent and sense of meaninglessness. The consequence, therefore, is a lower sense of holistic well-being.

5.2 Holistic well-being is about congruence with the authentic self

The main goal of personal leadership through the spiritual life dimension is to lead the individual nearer to the authentic self (Chan, Hannah & Gardner, 2005:96) by understanding the external realities and bridging the gap between the inner self and the external self (Vanini, 2006:235). Nadler and Tushman's (1995: 102) congruence model indicates that the many parts of an organisation such as the people, systems and technology are not as important as how they fit together. This same principle rings true for individuals in their different life dimensions, as without congruence between the different life dimensions there is disharmony and a lower sense of holistic well-being.

The congruence between the inner self and the external self, leads to a holistic well-being as it permeates to the other life dimensions (George, Ibarra, Goffee & Jones, 2017: 110). One of the objectives of this study is to formulate guidelines and practical actions to assist music leaders in integrating their spirituality into their role as music leader in a faith-based community, with the result being a congruent, holistic lifestyle that stems from within, as proposed by the PPL perspective (Avolio & Gardner, 2005:315).

5.3 Self-mastery is the foundation of sustainable professional competence

The PPL approach to leadership (Cashman, 2018:13) proposes that self-mastery in personal leadership, as a way of leading one's self, is further foundational to interpersonal leadership (relational mastery) and professional leadership (professional competence) towards living as a servant leader (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2017:93). Smith (2012:36) illustrates this principle and states that personal (self-) leadership, as Ethos (level 1), forms the basis for level 2: *Pathos* (interpersonal relationships) and level 3: *Logos* (leadership as competence). Wort's (2013:82) model of professional leadership development states that personal (character), interpersonal (caring) and professional (competence) leadership, all key concepts in PPL, lead to greater commitment to personal calling as well as to the faith-based community (Wort, 2013:83).

6. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Phase 1 of the study revealed that the participants experienced their personal spirituality as a connection with significance and meaning. The loss of a sense of significance and meaning relates to a negative experience of their personal spirituality, whereas the connection with significance and meaning relates to a positive experience of their personal spirituality. This connection with significance and meaning through a healthy spirituality is also a means of combatting ego, a temptation that is especially prevalent in music leaders due to the performative nature of their work.

Ultimately, the participants expressed a struggle with identity or cognitive dissonance at various stages of their lives. They further expressed that an individual or "own", personal spirituality emerged by way of various actions such as taking a sabbatical or regular personal time for reflective practice. The emergence of new beliefs, values and vision needs to be acknowledged and embraced as a part of a personal spirituality that is constantly in flux, evolution and growth.

Themes	Guidelines and practical actions
Theme 1: More than a muso	Guideline 1: Stay connected with significance and meaning Practical action: Cultivate spiritual experiences through regular mindfulness exercises and meditation.
Theme 2: The affirmation game	Guideline 2: Step off the stage Practical action: Remain grounded through interpersonal connection (relationships) with others. <i>Real life is not lived on the stage.</i>
Theme 3: A kind of culture	Guideline 3: Establish personal beliefs, values and vision Practical action 1: Awareness exercises Practical action 2: Write it down Practical action 3: Communicate it to others
Theme 4: Walk a path with	Guideline 4: Do not isolate yourself Practical action: Be accountable. Allow yourself to be mentored.
Theme 5: I am ...?	Guideline 5: Find your way Practical action: Find your practices. Explore and cultivate different avenues of mindfulness, meditation, prayer, reflection and continue to practise them.

Table 1 – A summary of the themes guidelines and actions

Table 1 presents the various themes that emerged from the research interviews. Guidelines were also developed in order to assist music leaders in integrating their spirituality into their role as music leader in faith-based communities.

6.1 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study will be discussed below under three main topics, namely that of a *lack of comparability*, *music leaders' personal spirituality* and the *PPL perspective*.

6.2 Lack of comparability

The researcher consulted UJ Digi-space as well as Google Scholar and found

that a dearth of comparable literature is available on the topic of music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality in faith-based communities. The lack of comparable research can therefore be described as a limitation.

6.3 Music leaders' personal spirituality

Most of the literature available on music leaders' personal spirituality in faith-based communities was written from a religious point of view and is not academic in nature. These writings take a dogmatic approach rather than an experiential approach and are difficult to verify as they consist mainly of the author's personal experience without the use of academic research methodology. The focus of this study was to describe music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality in faith-based communities, which focuses on the inner processes of music leaders.

6.4 PPL perspective

Although this study is based on the PPL perspective and will add to the body of knowledge, the PPL perspective as a framework is more based on developing scientific literature than peer-reviewed academic research (Teichert, 2014:74). This limits the ability of the researcher in contextualising the research in an academic body of knowledge, as the PPL perspective is broad in its approach across various fields.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to this study, recommendations with regard to further research opportunities about music leaders' experiences of their personal spirituality in faith-based communities are presented below.

1. Research opportunities

Recommendations for further research are as follows:

- The influence of spirituality as a mechanism for personal guidance for music leaders
- The role of spirituality as an existential anchor for music leaders
- Music leaders' relationships with faith-based communities
- The effect of spiritual practice on music leaders' function in faith-based communities

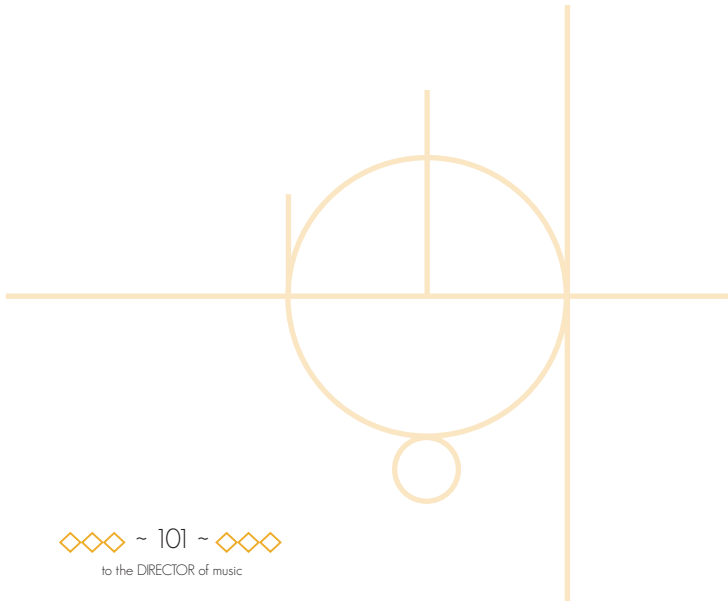
- How music leaders at different age levels experience their personal spirituality
– a comparison

8. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the participants experience their personal spirituality as a connection with significance and meaning. The loss of a sense of significance and meaning relates to a negative experience of their personal spirituality, whereas the connection with significance and meaning relates to a positive experience of their personal spirituality. This connection with significance and meaning through a healthy spirituality is also a means of combatting ego, a temptation that is especially prevalent in music leaders due to the performative nature of their work.

Ultimately, the participants have expressed a struggle with identity at various stages of their lives. They further expressed that an individual or “own”, personal spirituality emerged by way of various actions such as taking a sabbatical or regular personal time as reflective practice. The awakening to the emergence of new beliefs, values and vision needs to be stimulated and embraced as a part of a personal spirituality that is constantly in flux, evolution and growth.

The researcher has found that, in the case of music leaders, the more attention is given to the spiritual life dimension as a means of connecting with a true sense of self, the more congruent other life dimensions become, promoting a greater sense of significance and meaning.



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