‘ASL TALK’

An Investigation of Authentic Spiritual Leadership (‘ASL’):
A Discursive Study

Een onderzoek in authentiek spiritueel leiderschap (‘ASL’):
Een discursieve studie

Proefschrift

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# Table of Content

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CH 1.

### INTRODUCTION TO ‘ASL’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘ASL’ and ....</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ASL’ and Leadership - A brief history of leadership studies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ASL’ and CSR</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT IS TO COME</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CH 2.

### METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Interviews</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for selecting the Interviewees: The Network</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Saturation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interviewees</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two levels of Investigation: Inspired by Grounded Theory and Discourse Analysis</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Qualitative Research</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory (GT)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Analysis (DA)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CH 3.

### Three Foci or Idea(l)s of ASL:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, Spirituality and Leadership</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Authenticity, Spirituality and Leadership

### Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realizing the authentic ethical self (beyond words)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being authentic – being freely on a ‘guided’ path</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodiment of altruistic qualities</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A practical, non-sectarian and liberating philosophy</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social and mindful practice</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A beneficial, never-ending journey</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic and spiritual development</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a serving and sustainable mission</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive, respectful and meaningful practice</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CH 4.**

**Revealing the Dilemmas and Stories**

| Authenticity - Inauthenticity Dilemma         | 107 |
| Personal level                                | 108 |
| Authentic spiritual leadership level          | 114 |
| Individual - Collective Dilemma              | 118 |
| Self-centred and supporting authenticity      | 118 |
| Evolution and development of authentic spiritual leadership | 122 |
| Spirituality - Business Dilemma              | 126 |
| Spiritual and business resources: Three Moves | 129 |
| Bridging repertoires through exchanging terms and vivid metaphors | 130 |
| Stories of ASL - Making the unthinkable thinkable | 132 |
| ASL: Selfless Service                         | 133 |
| ASL: Spirituality improves leadership         | 138 |
| ASL: Ethical and Supportive                   | 140 |

**CH 5.**

**Construction of ‘ASL Talk’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>147</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selflessness or (Selfless) Service</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Authentic Self</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornerstone: Oneness, Non-duality</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CH 6.**

**The Controversy of ASL**

| Narcissism vs. Authenticity and Selflessness   | 155 |
| Critics on Authenticity                        | 155 |
| Selflessness                                   | 160 |

| Narcissism vs. Authenticity and Selflessness   | 160 |
| Critics on Authenticity                        | 160 |
| Selflessness                                   | 164 |
RESPONSES OF ‘ASL TALK’

NO CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND CULTS VS. APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY

RESPONSES OF ‘ASL TALK’

THE VISION VS. THE MISSION

RESPONSES OF ‘ASL TALK’

CH 7. 181

ASL TALK: ‘WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?’ 181

ETHICAL PROFIT AND CSR IN THE LIGHT OF ‘ASL TALK’ 184

ETHICAL PROFIT? 184

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY 186

ASL TALK IN ASSOCIATION TO SOCIO-CULTURAL MOVEMENTS 188

ASL TALK – A COMPLEX DIALECTICAL DISCOURSE 191

ASL TALK – THE SOURCE OF LEADERSHIP 194

CONCLUDING REMARKS 197

CH 8. 199

FINAL REFLECTIONS: ‘SOMETHING’ GOT LOST 199

REFERENCES 203

SUMMARY (DUTCH) 213
Acknowledgements

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Dedicated to Mo Chuisle
Ch 1. 
Introduction to ‘ASL’

Contemporary conditions appear to foster many academic and non-academic discourses about ethical and unethical leadership. I have met self-professed ‘leaders’ who told me that they try their best to be and to stay ethical in their businesses, and who said that they wanted to contribute to society, and who claimed to work for a (spiritual) mission. But every time I read a newspaper, I seem to read about ‘leaders’, who have polluted the environment, cheated the citizenry, or been exorbitantly greedy.

In my work, I came across the term ‘Authentic Leadership’. The first event I attended where this term played a major role occurred under the title ‘Authentic Leadership for Sustainable Development’; it was a conference in Delft the Netherlands in September 2004. I met people, especially persons claiming to be ‘leaders’, who showed enthusiasm for ethics. They described a kind of inner fire or mission, which they had discovered and which motivated them ‘to change the world’ or to so-called make ‘their contribution’. This inner fire and passion seemed to inspire and to touch others at the conference. Also many young (future-)leaders from developing countries participated enthusiastically in the Delft conference. They explained that they were academically educated in the Netherlands and that after finishing their education, they had turned down highly paid jobs in western countries to make worthwhile contributions to their native countries. They described highly ethical, sometimes spiritual values, which they wanted to integrate into their work. To name what they practice or what they wanted to achieve, they often used the term ‘Authentic Leadership’. I discovered that there was a whole community – or a network of people, behind the conference, who professed to be interested in authenticity, spirituality and leadership.

The organizer of the 2004 conference was Atem Ramsundersingh. Mr. Ramsundersingh was the initial driving force behind the ‘Authentic Leadership Movement’, which I have come to study. At the beginning of my research, I ‘just wanted to know more about’ authentic leadership. At the Delft conference, and conferences and seminars I later attended, the participants often discussed ideas such as authenticity, spirituality and leadership. These three terms seemed for the attendees to belong together; they were a single gestalt for the participants. The combination seemed to be crucial to them to define ethical and sustainable leadership. This ‘trinity’ seemed to form and hold a whole network of diverse people together. Thus, I had discovered a community that seemed to be defined by its belief in Authentic Spiritual Leadership (henceforth ASL).

Such a community, which claims to be held together by a common concept such as ASL, is deeply controversial. There is a lot of scepticism about and criticism of the combining of authenticity, spirituality and leadership (Boje, 2000,
Authentic Spiritual Leadership

2008; Zhuravleva and Jones, 2006; Carrette and King, 2005; Bell and Taylor, 2003; Tourish and Pinnington, 2002; Fenwick and Lange, 1998). Some authors describe and/or predict horrible effects of such a unity. They see it as a modern form of spiritual repression that just keeps authoritarian systems intact.

Spirituality and business seem at first view to constitute at best a tension, at worst a contradiction; two areas or worlds, which can’t be more controversial and can’t be more distant from each other. What has business to do with spirituality and what is the connection between spirituality and business? If the stereotypical image of a leader today as promulgated by the dominant media narrative is taken, business seems to be far removed from spiritual or ethical values. The business vocabulary reminds one much more of militarism (McKenzie, 1997) than of spirituality. It is a ‘dog eat dog’ mentality that is shown in the news and not a spiritual attitude of helping and serving others.

With this controversial background, it is interesting to ask: ‘How is ASL understood in this network of people?’ Which implies: ‘What is it that holds the network together?’ and ‘What is/are this group’s idea/s of ASL?’

To explore the group’s conception of ASL in-depth, I conducted open interviews and analyzed them via a shortened form of Grounded Theory (GT). Furthermore, Discourse Analysis (DA) inspired investigation was undertaken of what the people interviewed meant by ‘authenticity’, ‘spirituality’, ‘leadership’ and ‘Authentic Spiritual Leadership’ (ASL). The aim was not to study ASL deductively, as a theory or religious concept, but to localize it as an idea that a concrete group of people shared with one another.

Thus, I have undertaken an inductive study of the concept of ‘ASL’, intending to show what holds a specific group of people together, on the level of their beliefs, who profess to ASL. Important was therefore the meaning of ASL for my interviewees (Blumer, 1969/1986), and in particular the meaning of the words in their use that constructs a truth for the people involved. Discourses are action-oriented, situated and constructed (Potter, 2004). They construct worlds; they do not only represent things. Discourse is thus to be understood as a key to understanding social life, and hence to my understanding of ASL; ASL is researched here as ‘ASL talk’.

The research has been designed to explore what a concrete population, defined by its attachment to the term ‘Authentic Spiritual Leadership’ (ASL), actually believes. What are the problems and dilemmas in the defining and the use of the term, and how do these self-proclaimed ‘leaders’ bridge the different worlds of spirituality and leadership? I wanted to listen to them and not to confront them with my personal views or someone else’s theories. I sought to ‘dive’ into their world(s). They were treated by me with respect as experts in ASL. Treating them like that, allowed them to show and tell me everything they wanted to.
Their personal views became the main data for my analysis. In the research, I have tried to make the interviewees ‘hearable’, and to tell the interviewees’ stories by making use of as many quotes as possible. To some extent, ASL’s representatives have, I believe, via my research been enabled to ‘speak’ to the reader.

The network researched here identifies itself with the ‘Himalayan Tradition’. What the ‘Himalayan Tradition’ means will be discussed later on, when the network is examined further. I came in contact with the Himalayan Tradition in 2003, when I became the director of the Himalayan Institute Europe. The Himalayan Institute is an education and training centre, which for a long-time has offered Yoga teacher education and diverse spiritual seminars, courses and lectures. Since 2005 I have worked as the director of the Human Culture Academy (HCA) Research Institute together, with the founder of the Himalayan Institute Europe, Wolfgang Bischoff. The HCA is a consulting company, which accompanies and facilitates the development and growth of people and organizations worldwide through leadership training, seminars, mentoring and coaching.

I do not consider myself to be in the Himalayan Tradition, but I have a strong interest in spiritual development. I have meditated since childhood, but I have always resisted attributing meditation to any particular tradition. Today, I would say, that if one insists on me positioning me, that I am the closest to the Vipassana Tradition.

This background let me become “part of the family” (in the words of the people from the network). This position entailed restrictions and benefits for my research, because it influenced, of course, the interview situation. On the one hand, it put constraints on me such as not being able to ask ‘outsider’ questions. Even if I had sympathy for the topic of ASL, I believed I had to dissociate myself from it, to analyse it. What turned out to be helpful here for me was to treat ASL as an object, i.e. as ‘ASL talk’.

On the other hand, being an ‘insider’ easily opened for me the way to the interviewees. They freely talked to me in a confident manner and recommended me to other interviewees. I also had access to information about ‘context’ and I had the possibility to join the network’s conferences and meetings. This allowed me to check if what the interviewees said in the interviews was consistent with how they speak about among themselves and was not just created to ‘please’ me.

Some of my data I have interpreted via DA (Discourse Analysis). This technique led me to focus on the details of the ‘ASL talk’, and on how ‘ASL talk’ is constructed, communicated and made convincing.

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1 Vipassana is based on the Pali-Canon, which includes the oldest speeches of Buddha (6. – 5. Century before Christ), mainly it’s based on satipatthana sutta and anapanasati sutta. In the language of India in the time of the Buddha, passana meant 'seeing with open eyes’. Vipassana means observing things as they really are, not just as they seem to be.
It is already clear, I assume, that I have not chosen to write about ASL from the inside out. I potentially could have developed a research methodology wherein I chose to reduce the distance between myself as researcher and the researched, to a minimum. But I have chosen to write a thesis about ASL and not of ASL.

‘ASL’ and .....

Dian-Marie Hosking (1988; 2005; 2006) has pointed out that one needs to understand (con-)text to comprehend circumstance, speech or events. She means that ‘text’ means, exists and operates via the setting or situation within which it is defined, exchanged and is operational. ‘ASL talk’ relates especially strongly to two contexts, namely that of ‘leadership studies’ and that of ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR). The ‘con-‘ is what comes with the ‘text’ whereby the text signifies, means and has import.

‘ASL’ and Leadership - A brief history of leadership studies

The first important (con-)text of ASL are leadership theories. Therefore a brief history of leadership studies shall enhance the understanding of ‘ASL talk’.

Parry and Bryman (2006) break down the history of leadership research into five stages: the trait approach (until the late 1940s), the style approach (until the late 1960s), the contingency approach (until the early 1980s), the New Leadership approach (from the early 1980s), and the post-charismatic and post-transformational leadership approach (from the late 1990s). These stages indicate what is most prominent at different time periods. Of course previous approaches still exist and achieve even sometimes a renaissance.

The first stage, the trait approach, for example still finds its adherents. Especially related to authentic and spiritual leadership, leadership traits get researched again. Boje (2000, 2003) critically reviews this movement of trait theories. The original trait theories implied that leaders are born, rather than developed. The main interest was to find and define qualities, which distinguish effective leaders from less effective leaders or from non-leaders. This approach resulted in selecting leaders, rather than in training or developing leaders. But this changed with the next stage of leadership, where approaches became famous, which emphasized leadership styles instead of traits. The attention shifted to the behaviour of a leader and hence leadership training became a big issue (and a big market).

Stogdill (1948) reviewed trait theories and often found that trait theories are divided into two phases. The first phase goes from 1904 to 1948 and the second phase starts 1949 and ends in 1970. Stogdill found 1948 quite insignificant cor-
relations between personal traits and leadership traits hence he concluded that leadership also depends on the context, and on how adequate the behaviour of the leader is in specific situations. The situation includes goals and desires of the followers and leadership is an interaction of variables, which are fluid and constantly changing. Boje (2000, 2003) interpreted, that Stogdill found it absurd that leaders have unique traits, which are different from non-leaders. The universal trait theories started to melt and influences from the context and the followers had to be taken into account. As Boje (2000, 2003) put it, a new leadership theory was needed to make sure that Leader Professors were not “as extinct as dinosaurs” and a “bureaucratic cage was put around the leader traits”. Following Boje, bureaucracy was quite boring and “So the Leader Professors sailed to the island of Situation, not because they distrusted the bureaucratic cage, but to escape the Myers-Briggs\(^2\) trait theory of personality types”. For Boje, the leaders on the “Island of Situation” are chameleons, who change behaviour with situations. Authenticity seems to get lost in the desire to perfectly fit all kinds of situations.

Stogdill analysed 163 Studies from 1948 to 1970 (second phase of trait theories). The focus of research and the methods changed after 1948. However Stogdill (Bass and Stogdill, 1990, p. 87) found some traits, which characterize a successful leader. For example: strong drive for responsibility, desire for completion of tasks, vigour and persistence in the pursuit of goals, originality in problem solving, Self-confidence and a sense of personal identity. Here, the first aspects of authenticity were related to leadership. Bass and Stogdill (1990) consider the time between 1945 and 1960 as mostly concerned with empirical research. In these years, some important theoretical issues were ignored, which arose again later. Boje (2000, 2003) described that Stogdill 1974 turned back from the “Isle of Situation”. With new methods some significant correlations between traits and leader performance were found, but as Boje concluded “it was too late, the entire Leader Academy had already settled on the Isle of Situation and were bent on restricting leadership to just the WILL TO SERVE.” The theorists now over-emphasized the situation and forgot about traits (and the will to power). Later, however, some approaches can be related to trait theories again, for example Theory XY and studies about leadership motivation.

McGregor’s (1960) popular (trait) Theory X and Y was based on Maslow’s need hierarchy. His book about ‘The Human Side of Enterprise’ is still influencing current leadership authors such as Peter Drucker or Warren Bennis. Theory X described the view that employees must be threatened, commanded and controlled to achieve desired goals because they inherently dislike work and, if possible, try to avoid it. Security is most important for the employees and they show no personal ambition. Contrastingly Theory Y contends that people are self-

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2 Myers and Briggs based their work on Carl Jung’s theories and designed a survey instrument to measure 16 personality traits/learning style types.
motivated and self-directed. They view their work as something natural and job satisfaction is the key to engage them and to ensure their commitments. Under proper conditions employees seek responsibility, are creative and make good decisions. Boje (2000, 2003) called Y the preferred new age leader, who cares about employees’ developmental needs. He saw McGregor’s work as serving the task “to re-socialize the masses to appreciate the WILL TO SERVE over the WILL TO POWER”. In theory Y, McGregor described a humanistic view of the employee (self-motivated, responsible, interested in self-development), which goes in the direction of humanization of the organization. But the underlying ethical motive doesn’t become clear, so that theory Y can also be used just to seduce the workers. Profitability and higher performance still can be the only motivation for a Y-leader. When is a leader really caring about the people? Or does the leader just pretend to care about them (to serve them) in order to deepen their commitment and so improve their efficiency?

Studies on motivation came, for example, from McCCelland (1987), who researched the motivation of leaders and developed a theory of needs. Boje (2000, 2003) thought that McCCelland used “stories on the Isle of Trait, to identify leader Traits”. In Boje’s view “McCCelland combined the NEED FOR POWER with two more bureaucratic needs”. McCCelland used the TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) to distinguish between:

- the need for achievement: leaders are result driven, have the desire to perform difficult and challenging tasks and want to have success.
- the need for power: 1. Personal: leaders with a high need for personal power want to direct employees 2. Institutional: leaders work to achieve organizational goals
- the need for affiliation: leaders desire good interpersonal relationships.

For McCCelland the leader driven by a need for achievement is a better leader than a leader who is driven by the two other motivations. But this kind of leader can expect too much from his/her employees and overburden them. A high need for affiliation can destroy objectivity and make decision-making much more complicated. If the leader is motivated by power, it is obviously better for the organization if s/he is motivated by institutional power than by personal power. The three needs are inherent in every individual, but the profile can be changed through leadership training. Nothing is said here about what kind of achievements the leader should desire. Should these achievements be ethical, beneficial or just in the profit interest of the company? Are the organization’s goals not questionable? The leader shall have the right motivation here in the sense of the organization. A broader context or responsibility is not taken into account.
After 1980, charismatic and transformational leadership theories were developed (see below), which are not directly trait theories, but which are partly founded in trait theories.

Boje (2000, 2003) came to the conclusion that “Trait study had been reborn or … was born again”. He critically stated that the trait call of this millennium addresses spiritual traits, which appeared surprisingly then everywhere. Furthermore, he stressed how convenient it is that “the academy of leadership no longer has a WILL TO POWER and is submitted to the WILL TO SERVE”. Spiritual Leadership for Boje once again restricts leadership to “WILL TO SERVE” and he warns that spirit leaders have the charisma Max Weber warned against. For him “this harkens back to the quest for Social Darwinism, in the late 1800s, where the rich justified their Darwinian Robber Baron tactics of exploitations on the Godly decree that “the poor were just meant to be poor”. But he also admitted that there is a hope for a “genuine and authentic spirit”.

Following Boje, the leader in the 1990s was “powerful, a tall, intelligent, assertive and confident man.” In the 2000s, the leader has the “WILL TO SERVE”, s/he is trustworthy, ethical and spiritual. Boje (2000, 2003) questioned:

“Could it be that there is a genealogy of leadership (Foucault, 1979), a change in the meaning of leadership over time? That is, our societies are socially constructing (erecting would be the male power word) what is an effective leader, and changing that construction over time. When we needed (WILL TO POWER) Robber Barons, one set of traits mattered (self-determined, powerful, aggressive, and not too ethical or bright). When WWII happened we needed more WILL TO POWER military strong masculine/man traits (authoritarian, directive, self-confident with national loyalty). When the Japanese recovered and launched an economic war, we needed HEROIC leaders who were visionary (full of codes, vision statements, and churning reorganization everywhere). Now we are in the 2000s, what kind of leader do we need? After Richard Nixon, OJ Simpson, Phil Knight, and Bill Clinton, people are clamoring for a leader who can be trusted. WILL TO SERVE is where it’s at. Ethics and spiritual values seem to be a test of credibility and trust.”

Boje further summarized some critical problems with trait theories: relativity of traits, neglecting interaction effects, universalism (neglecting situational effects), dialectic (neglecting evolution and contradictions of traits), the question of ‘is the trait cause or effect?’, ignoring cultural factors, positive trait bias, neglecting interwoven processes and complexity theory, and so on. Trait theories also often neglect the question of authenticity. Is it all theatre? Is the leader just performing those traits, which are expected? Each situation and each epoch requires and expects different traits. As Boje (2000, 2003) described it: “Industrial theatre broke with feudal, and the postmodern theatre is trying to break with modern; each characterizes leaders with different traits.”
The trait theories moved from an ideal image to an elitist image of the great leader. The ethical or even spiritual traits, which were related to leadership in Greek philosophy got lost in the times where only success and power were important. When trait theories moved toward a more situation- and follower-related construction, they opened the way for humanistic thoughts (again). Ideas like responsibility, ethics and authenticity (a sense of personal identity) glimpsed through the theories (again).

As mentioned above, trait theories were mainly guiding research until 1940ies. Because trait theories seem not to be able to sufficiently explain (successful) leadership, researchers turn away from the question: Who is a (successful) Leader? They instead concentrate now on the question: How does a (successful) leader behave? What is s/he actually doing? Parry and Bryman (2006) call this next stage ‘The Style Approach’. This stage is related to so-called behavioural theories, which assume that leaders can be made, trained and developed and hence opened the whole field of leadership development, because now leaders were able to learn capabilities and the right behaviour, which lead to success. Leadership was now seen as a process, as the interaction between leaders and followers. This also put the followers now more in the focus of interest.

The headstone of this research line was the Iowa study, from Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939), which researched children and observed the effects of leadership styles on the atmosphere of small groups. They distinguished three leadership styles:

1. The autocratic leadership style is based on (total) authority. This leadership style assumes that employees need close supervision to perform certain tasks. The autocratic leader has the power of decision-making.
2. The democratic leadership style refers more to teams. The leader respects and listens to the team members. They can influence his/her decisions, but s/he still will make the final decision. Through participating in decisions employees have more job satisfaction and accept changes better.
3. The laissez-faire leadership style is based on having no authority, no control and no power of decision-making. It works best (or only) when employees are highly self-dependent and well experienced.

Lewin, Lippitt and White found in their study that the democratic leadership style had the best influence on the working atmosphere, group cohesion, task interest, task quality, and motivation. In the sense of leader-follower relationship, an ethical understanding seems to underlie the leadership styles here.

After the Iowa Study, the Ohio State study was conducted in the 50’s and 60’s. The aim of this research was to describe and to measure leadership behaviour. The relationship between leadership behaviour and performance, efficiency and satisfaction was researched. They first used the LBDQ (Leader Behaviour
Description Questionnaire). Later this approach was further developed by Halpin and Winer (1957), who modified the questionnaire. They described four factors: Consideration, Initiating Structure, Production Emphasis, and Sensitivity or Social Awareness.

Consideration describes that the leader is focused on relationships and on employees (people-oriented). The leader supports his/her employees. Initiating structure describes the orientation on goals and tasks (task-oriented). The leader structures both work and roles to achieve goals. Out of this, the famous Ohio-State-Leadership-Quadrant was developed.

Around the same time, the Michigan Study was conducted. In this study, three characteristics of effective leaders were described: task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and participation. Additional to the Ohio study here, participative leadership was discussed and hence leadership was seen not only in relation to leading individuals, it was now also related to teams. Participative leaders lead at a group level and at an individual level. S/he develops group cohesion and facilitates the members. Participative leadership assumes that people are most committed when they are involved in decisions.

In these theories, it seems that there is often a dilemma between task-oriented and people-oriented. It can be constructed as either-or or as independent dimensions. The best way seems to be to balance these two. Often these theories overemphasize these two dimensions and neglect the fact that there are more than two leadership styles than these two. Ethical issues or authenticity is not directly discussed; it appears sometimes only in the background of people orientation. The relatively recent recognition of the need to respect employees in trait and behavioural theories is mostly founded on the belief that this increases profitability and commitment. Parry and Bryman (2006) summarize that the style approach rarely investigated informal leadership processes, intra-group differences, implicit leadership theories and situational influences.

As a new trend (stage) then in the 1970s, the contingency approach arose with a focus on situational factors. The main interest was to define situational variables which moderate the effectiveness of different leadership approaches.

Parry and Bryman (2006) refer as an example for this stage to Fiedler’s (1967) Contingency theory, which draws on trait and behavioural theories. It also uses the task vs. people orientation to discriminate between leadership styles. Central is the fact that leadership effectiveness depends on the situation and is not universal, but the leader’s ability to lead is ‘contingent’ upon various situations. Fiedler also invented the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) approach to identify what the leader believes about the others. For him, leadership is mainly related to power and influence:

“Leadership is, by definition, an interpersonal relation, in which power and influence are unevenly distributed so that one person is able to direct and control the actions and
behaviors of others to a greater extent than they direct and control his. In such a relationship between the leader and his members, the personality of the leader is likely to determine to a large extent, the degree to which he can influence the behavior of his group.” (Fiedler 1967, 11)

Fiedler made a distinction between leadership style and leadership behaviour. Leadership behaviour can differ from situation to situation. The leadership style refers to the goals and needs, which motivate the leader’s behaviour and which are consistent over different situations. Effectiveness is measured in the number of pieces per hour, error ratio and time needed. Ethical aspects are not included. Effectiveness only means reaching the set goals. Hierarchical organizations with standardised and structured tasks and high powered positions are characterized as positive, even if the employees have not a lot of breathing space. Fiedler’s model implicates that the work situation should be changed to fit the leader rather than changing the leader to fit the situation. In general contingency approaches face many problems (Parry and Bryman, 2006), such as inconsistent findings, unclear selection of situational factors, lack of guidance for leaders in conflicting situations and they seem not to move on far from the style approach in defining leader behaviours.

In the 1980s a number of new approaches emerged, which were differently named, but which all indicated a new way of defining and researching leadership. Parry and Bryman (2006) call this stage, the ‘New Leadership Approach’.

In many western countries, society values changed in the 1960s and, with that, the understanding of work and leadership changed. The way people work changed and the expectations of the employees and leaders changed (von Rosenstiel, 1993). Besides an orientation on the career, people showed also an orientation on free time. Only monetary rewards for the people were not sufficient anymore. The question was, would the ‘new’ generation, who entered the organizations, also start to change the organizations from the inside. Inglehart and Welzel (1998) describe cultural changes and changes in society values. They call it a ‘silent revolution’. They assumes that people who grow up in deprivation or scarcity (e.g. during war) are more likely to have materialistic values and needs (physiological needs, stability, security), than people who grow up in times with no shortages. This hypothesis is based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. He uses this hypothesis to explain the change from materialistic to post-materialistic values (post-materialism). Post-materialism signifies the period when people become more and more free of materialistic needs. The people who grow up with material wealth develop needs for individual development, self-realization and personal freedom. They value democratic decisions, humanistic ideas and sustainable development for a healthy environment. Besides the material wealth, some other factors seem to evoke this change in values: technological development, which satisfies the needs of more and more people in the
world, peace between many western countries for a whole generation, global communication (internet) and mobility, and a higher level of education in many countries. These post-materialistic values entered also the leadership world and transformed the old theories. The economic world and the leaders were confronted with global, complex and fast changing markets, new technologies and a fast growing Asian economy. Additionally, several ethical traumas occurred in the business world and were broadcast widely by the media.

Through all that, leadership theories started to change. The distinction between leader and manager was made and the relationship between leader and employee became reciprocal instead of unilateral (Situational leadership). In the 1980s and 1990s (neo)charismatic and transformational theories became popular.

(Neo)charismatic theories are based on the work of Max Weber (1905, 1934). Weber’s concept of charisma is the foundation for (neo)charismatic leadership theories. Charisma, in Weber’s writings, is extraordinary, nearly magical, so that it seems that it is not teachable and even if Weber’s concept is quite abstract and misses a detailed description, it brings the focus to the relationship between leader and follower. New approaches emphasize that the charismatic leader mediates values and meaning to the followers through being an inspiring example and through developing an inspiring vision.

House (1971) for example explains that a charismatic leader has an impressive influence on followers, who identify with him/her, with his/her values and visions. Like Weber, he says that charismatic leadership appears when situations are critical or stressful. He describes four attributes of a charismatic leader: dominant personality, high self-confidence, desire to influence others and a strong sense and conviction of one’s own moral values. Besides these attributes, House links several behaviours to charismatic leadership like: role modelling, image building, and formulating ideological visions. His concept of image building is quite controversy, because it refers to the building up of an image of a successful and competent leader. It often gives the impression that the leader needs only to convince the followers that s/he is great and that the mission is good. It doesn’t say anything about the ethical value of the mission. House himself developed his theory further and formulated a ‘value based leadership’ (House, Delbecq and Taris, 1997), where the motives of the leader, the followers and the organizational context are of central interest.

Like Weber and House, also Conger and Kanungo (1998) say that charisma is an attribute created by followers, but they were very aware of the risk of misuse of charismatic leadership and they broach the issue. Consequently they distinguish between ethical and unethical charisma. They define ethical behaviour according to Thomas Aquinas’ moral goodness. Hence, “on the basis of the objective act itself, the subjective motive of the actor; and the context in which the
act is performed” (Conger and Kanungo, 1998, p. 213) it can be judged if behaviour is ethical or not.

This direct evaluation of charismatic leadership as ethical or not, overcomes the indifference to ethics in leadership, which was inherent in some earlier charismatic leadership theories. Weber related ethics to economics, but didn’t suggest that a charismatic leader needs to be a positive, ethical force. Hence, it was often criticised that both Gandhi and Hitler could be called charismatic leaders. Out of these critics, for example, the concept of spiritual or servant leadership developed.

Other critics considered charismatic leadership as theoretical (Gardner and Avolio, 1998), as impression management, which lacks authenticity. Further disadvantages include a high level of obedience and subordination, so that followers get dependent on the leader and lose their own moral sense. Delegation can turn out to be problematic and creativity and diversity can be suppressed sometimes. The charismatic leader, who is not ethical in the Conger and Kanungo sense, can become selfish, arrogant, and narcissistic. Such a leader can create a cult or sect as well as misuse and manipulate people. If the question of ethics is not asked, a charismatic leader can be extremely dangerous – and not only in politics.

Besides charismatic leadership, transformational leadership was very popular in the new leadership stage (Parry and Bryman, 2006). Burns (1978), building on Max Weber, made the famous distinction between transforming and transactional leadership. His concept of transforming leadership still guides research and leadership studies. Burns mainly wanted to implement a theory of moral leadership.

“Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality... transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both.” (Burns 1978, 20)

Burns’ transforming leadership is related to ethics, moral values, vision, service and development. Contrastingly, transactional leadership is not related to an enduring, higher purpose. The purpose is just an exchange of valued things or resources and nothing further holds leader and follower together. The transactional leader uses management by exception (active or passive) and followers are motivated by reward or punishment.

Burns also differentiates between control, power and leadership. One can control things, because they have no motives. Power holders, who treat followers as things, are no leaders. Leadership facilitates followers to reach higher levels of needs (related to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) and moral development
(related to Kohlberg’s moral stages of development). The inner development of the follower is essential for transforming leadership. The true leader, for Burns, is self-actualized and always wants to grow and to develop. Here are some parallels to Authentic Leadership. The authentic, transforming leader engages the full person of the follower and even develops followers into leaders. Burns himself uses the term ‘Authentic Leadership’.

“Authentic leadership is a collective process, I contend, and it emerges from the clash and congruence of motives and goals of leaders and followers. [...] It means that, in the reaching out by leaders to potential followers, broader and higher ranges of motivation come into play and both goals and means of achieving them are informed by the force of higher end-values and modal values.” (Burns 1978, 460)

The importance of a positive moral perspective in current Authentic Leadership theories (e.g. Avolio & Gardner, 2005) is also based on Burns’ concepts of transforming leadership. Avolio and Gardner (2005) distinguish that a transformational leader (following the definitions of Burns 1978 and Bass 1985) has to be authentic, but that, on the other hand, an authentic leader doesn’t have to be transformational.

The transformational leadership theory from Bass is related to the work from House (1971) and from Burns (1978). The moral perspective of Burns is left out in Bass’ (1985) model of transformational leadership. In later works, Bass (1990, 1999) came back to Burns’ idea of positive moral perspectives. Bass (1999) noted that authentic transformational leadership is grounded in moral foundations. In addition, three moral aspects are important: the moral character of the leader, the ethical values of the leader’s vision, and the morality of the process of social ethical choices and actions. These moral aspects distinguish between transformational and pseudo-transformational or between authentic and inauthentic transformational leadership. Accordingly, Bass, in his recent work, came to the agreement with Burns that Hitler was, in this sense, not a transformational leader (Bass and Riggio, 2005).

Transformational leadership for Bennis motivates followers through identification with the leader’s vision. Leadership is the power or energy behind and inside the organisation, which keeps the organisation alive (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Bennis became famous for his distinction between management and leadership. This distinction goes back to Zaleznik and de Vries (1975), who contrasted the traditional manager, who tries to keep up the status quo, with the charismatic leader, who actively brings change about. Bennis & Nanus (2003, p. 20) noted, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.”

Kouzes and Posner (2007) assume that employees are not so much motivated by fear or rewards, but by visions which capture their imagination. The vision needs to be communicated by the leader in such a way that makes it pos-
sible for the employees to adopt it as their own. The leader needs to enable the employees to act and to put the vision and their ideas into practice.

Parry and Bryman (2006) summarize that since the 1980’s, alternative stances have emerged centring on ‘leaders’ as ‘managers of meaning’. The vision of the leader and the communication of the vision became central topics. Further the authors describe a methodological shift from quantitative to qualitative studies at this stage.

Parry and Bryman (2006) describe a fifth stage of leadership theory and research: ‘The Post-charismatic and Post-transformational Leadership Approach’. Here the distributed nature of leadership, the dark side of charisma and the critique of narcissistic and pseudo-transformational leader led to an approach which makes leadership more open for debating and testing and raised the question about the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ of leadership. Interest in authenticity, spirituality and leadership has been developed within this trend.

An interesting approach to integrate the theories of leadership, business, human development and spirituality comes from Wilber (2000a). Spirituality is seen as an integral component of leadership and as one variable of an integrated leadership development model (Wilber, 2000a). Human development is achieved through the interaction of individual, community, and environment. Korac-Kakabadse & Korac-Kakabadse (1997) state that spiritual leaders must reflect on their lives to discover and understand their purposes so that they can lead with authenticity and integrity. Spirituality is seen by Cacioppe (2000) as important in helping human beings to experience the fundamental meaning and purpose of their work. He argues that leaders have an essential role in integrating spirituality at work at the individual, team, and organizational level.

Spirituality, as a source of values, also influences the behaviour of the leader, because Fry (2005) argues that leaders’ values create their attitudes, which drive their behaviours. He (2003, p. 694–695) defines spiritual leadership as “the values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that all have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership”. Spiritual leadership is, for him, related to ‘calling’ (experience of transcendence or service to others) and ‘membership’ (establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love).

Parry and Bryman (2006) write that spiritual leadership approaches could integrate concepts such as altruistic love, honesty and integrity on the one side and narcissism and pseudo-transformational on the other. But there is also fear of ‘value engineering’ wherein it is claimed that the management of meaning amounts to the colonization of the minds of members of organizations. From the Foucaultian tradition there is the accusation that the imposition of ‘self-discipline’ demands that organization members control and discipline their
selves --- i.e. a demand for the normative enslavement of personnel. In this tradition the entry of ‘spirituality’ into business is seen as a very negative repressive social psychological development. And from the (post-)habermasian tradition the concern is that the ‘life-world’ of employees is being invaded even more thoroughly by the ‘system-world’ of planned organization under the name of ‘spirituality’.

As the thesis will illustrate, ‘ASL’ is part and parcel of the contemporary agenda and discussions in leadership studies. But it appears to belong to a very controversial dimension to that agenda.

‘ASL’ and CSR

My ASL interviewees claimed that the current global situation, with all its demanding environmental, economic and moral problems, is the arena for sustainable and responsible action. The scope seems to be extremely wide but the interviewees see this as being crucial and hence CSR is an important (con-)text of ASL. Current global problems are constructed by the network as ‘challenges’, which require a new leadership approach; an approach like ‘ASL’.

They use the term ‘challenges’ to illustrate that they see the global problems and crises as challenging. This is an apparently optimistic view of human potential, situated in a pessimistic global situation with all its demanding problems. The people from the network I researched claim that we are standing at a critical moment in history, and that we must actively choose the future of our earth. This is very much in line with the Preamble of the Earth Charter:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations (Lubbers, van Genugten and Lambooy, 2008, p. 79).

The Earth Charter of 2000, is called a ‘People’s Document’. In 2003, UNESCO recognized the Earth Charter as an important framework for sustainable development. The Charter is intended to further promote ethical and spiritual principles; it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and our responsibilities to respect, love and protect our earth and life. As we will see this is very similar to what the interviewees say they are encouraging. Very much in the line
of ASL, Lubbers, van Genugten and Lambooy (2008) have asserted that the Earth Charter, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), constitutes the ethical basis for future leadership.

In the recent past, such an ethical basis has been missing, in the view of the interviewees. My interviewees see ASL as entailing CSR. Business and ethics have been treated separately and life has been characterized by individualisation, realism, egoism and economisation. Lubbers, van Genugten and Lambooy (2008, p. 21) warn that:

“this era of globalisation draws businessmen, politicians and journalists into a ‘Bermuda Triangle’ of short term interests and actions…”

Ignorance and the tendency to exploit nature and people for profit has according to the ASL perspective led the world into too many urgent problems.

“We are living in a world where the natural resources of the Earth are being plundered for corporate profits and where the toxic waste from our factories is causing species to become extinct at a faster rate than ever before.” (Barrett, 1998, p. 25)

This quote is already more than 10 years old, but the problems are still the same ones as are identified in my interviews. Popular books like ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ (Gore, 2006), ‘Earth in the Balance’ (Gore, 2006b), ‘High Noon’ (Rischard, 2002), ‘Storm Warning’ (the book on which the movie ‘The Great Warming’ is based) (Dotto, 2000); and famous movies like ‘An Inconvenient Truth’, ‘The Day After Tomorrow’, ’The Great Warming’, ‘Flow-For Love of Water’, ‘Earthlings’; or worldwide events like ‘Live Earth’, all mirror the contemporary broad interest in these problems. Environmental politics are obviously a controversial topic and a political issue, which of course raise attention and fear. Sustainability is also a big economic issue, which has the possibility to offer opportunities to make (a great deal of) money and to polish up old ‘dusty’ images. There is already a phrase for this: ‘greenwashing’. Greenwashing describes practices wherein people or organizations try to mislead their costumers and consumers into believing that the people or organizations are environmentally friendly. Being green, showing corporate social responsibility (CSR), and being environmentally responsible and sustainable, are currently efficient marketing strategies and are important for one’s image. Thus, false CSR (or ASL) is an issue.

CSR sceptics emphasize that there is an unavoidable or even inescapable conflict between CSR and profit maximizing. Margolis, Elfenbein, and Walsh (2007; 2008) show in another meta-study with 167 studies over 35 years that there is a positive, but weak, relationship between socially responsible corporate behaviour and good financial performance. They claim that behaving in a ‘good’ way is not a huge risk, it is much more risky to behave irresponsibly and aso-
cially, because then one’s company is perceived mainly by its misdeeds and it is very difficult to overcome such an image. But, however business savvy CSR may or may not be, this is never the principal issue for ‘ASL’. But the role of (the need for and/or the prestige of) ‘business success’ for my interviewees, is an important issue.

Münstermann (2007) describes the changing challenges for leadership through integrating social and CSR aspects in corporate management. Leaders are responsible for the realization of CSR in companies. CSR becomes more and more just another aspect of effective leadership. Leaders supposedly need to integrate CSR into their leadership. Gminder (2006) sees CSR as appearing on the agenda of politics, business and science, but still it seems that leaders fail to implement it. The question is whether or not CSR is a serious trend, a general movement or temporary fashion? Can leaders/organisations really act in an ethical and responsible manner? Is ethical profit possible in business context?

An important question now is: ‘How can CSR be performed?’ and no longer ‘What is CSR?’. Frederick (1994) described it as an evolution from CSR₁ (a philosophical-ethical concept of corporate social responsibility) to CSR₂ (an action-oriented managerial concept of corporate social responsiveness). CSR₁ was in his view concerned with abstract issues while CSR₂ is much more focused upon practical concerns. CSR₂ is also related to the capability of a corporation to respond to contemporary social pressures. CSR in this stage is not often discussed in relation to ethical foundations; it is more practical and more empirical. Frederick (as cited in Dunne, 2007, p. 373) points out that CSR₁ and CSR₂ could synthesize one day into CSR₃,

“which will clarify both the moral dimension implied by CSR₁ and the managerial dimension of CSR₂”.

This quote illustrates that Frederick thought that the underlying ethical concepts needed to be clarified and that CSR₁ and CSR₂ should be amalgamated to be effective. Some members of the ‘ASL’ network I studies seem to think that ASL achieves the needed integration. They believe that ‘leaders’ are needed to drive the ‘new environmental movement’. Bennis and Goldsmith (2003) describe three reasons why leaders are so important. The first is that they are responsible for the effectiveness of organizations. Secondly, leaders enable others to establish a vision or a guiding purpose. Finally, people doubt the integrity of institutions. Apparently never before have leaders faced so many challenges and such a fast rate of change. But maybe leaders supposedly were also never so influential as they are today. These authors think (p. 84) that:

“With a shift in leadership paradigms comes a new orientation toward society; new roles and ways of behaving; and new values, morals, and commitments that reorient us to what it means to be human.”
Thus, in the ‘‘ASL talk’’ I have studied CSR and leadership were really combined into a single gestalt.

**An Overview of what is to come**

The thesis is divided into four parts. The first part consists of chapter 1 and 2. Chapter 1 delivers the introduction to ASL and its (con-)text (Leadership research stages and CSR). Chapter 2 enfolds the applied methodology, containing background information about the used mixed methodology and about the interviewees, the network and the interview context.

The second part of the thesis consists of three chapters presenting the outcomes of the conducted interviews (chapters 3, 4 and 5). Here the constructed idea(l) of ASL is outlined. Firstly, the interview findings are illustrated in chapter 3. These findings are presented in terms of key qualities, which were separated into three foci or idea(l)s: an authenticity foci, a spirituality foci and a leadership foci. The analysis is closely linked with exemplary quotes from the interviewees, to help enliven and indeed ground the themes. Aspects of Discourse Analysis are then used to examine these quotes further in respect of their manner of construction and context. In chapter 4, three central dilemmas, which emerged in the interviews, are explored in more detail, and some exemplary stories about ASL are discussed. In chapter 5 the conceptual construction of ASL or the idea(l) of ASL is reconstructed. The underlying question is here: What kind of image did the interviewees try to produce of ASL?

The third part of the book focuses on the debate between ASL and its apparent antithesis (chapter 6). I will make use of an article from Tourish and Pinnington (2002), which is an exemplar of the antithetical position wherein severe criticism of ASL is presented. Their article emphasizes that authenticity, spirituality and leadership should not be brought together because bringing them together creates horrible effects such as narcissism or what is known in the leadership literature as the Hitler Problem. Here I ask: ‘What are the important points of criticism related to ASL, and how would the interviewees defend their conception of ASL against these points?’

The fourth part of the thesis concentrates on the contribution of ‘ASL talk’ – what is it good for? In chapter 7 questions, which were raised in the introduction, are reconsidered on the basis of ‘ASL talk’ (Ethical Profit, CSR) and ‘ASL talk’ is placed in association with current socio-cultural movements. Chapter 7 also concludes that ‘ASL talk’ is a very paradoxical or dialectical construction, which can be criticised qua the 'real-world' effects and as a very hermetic text. In chapter 8 I briefly present my final reflections and ask if ‘something got lost’ in the research process.
Ch 2.
Methodology

The general aim of this work is the qualitative exploration of the concepts of authenticity, spirituality, leadership and Authentic Spiritual Leadership (ASL). ASL is a phenomenon, which is highly meaningful for the selected interviewees and which they seem to believe has consequences on their behaviour and their work. The thesis concentrates on understanding and describing their view of ASL.

The thesis makes use of an inductive approach to the phenomenon of ASL. This intention can be realised with qualitative methods because they allow the researcher to focus on the perspective(s) of the researched (Flick, 2005). An empathic understanding and use of ‘self resonance’ (Breuer, 1996) is also possible in qualitative research. Such procedures can allow the discovery of something new, even if a lot is known about the phenomenon (Flick, 2005, Strauss and Corbin, 1996). In this case, I am aware that there is already a lot of literature about authenticity (Taylor, 2003; Harter 2002; Erickson, 1995; Bugental, 1980; Adorno 1964/1973), authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Cooper, Scandura, and Schriesheim, 2005; Eagly, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang, 2005; Gardner et al 2005; Hannah and Chan, 2004; Avolio et al, 2004; Avolio, Luthans and Walumba, 2004; George, 2003; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; May et al, 2003), spirituality (Hadot, 2006; Wilber 1991, 1997, 2000, 2007, 2008; Goertzen and Barbuto, 2001) spirituality and business/leadership (Boje, 2008; Grün, 2006; Dent, Higgins and Wharff, 2005; Reave, 2005; Fry, 2003, 2005; Wilber, 2000a; Manz, 1998; Heider, 1997; Fairholm, 1996;). But few studies have focused on the living text(s) of ASL. The leadership literature wants to know what the relationship is between ‘authentic belief’ and organizational success. But my interest is more on the specific experiences of people who have identified themselves with ASL. I wish to make a move back from the abstract and causal, and away from the quantitative generalization of outcomes, towards the specific concrete experiences of persons (Flick, 2005, Strauss and Corbin, 1996, or Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The aim is not to prove a pre-existing hypothesis about ASL; rather it is to explore what professionals who identify with ASL have to say.

Much leadership research focuses on sense-making (Hosking, 1988; Weick, 1995) or management of meaning (Parry and Bryman, 2006; Smircich and Morgan 1982) as a leadership phenomena or tool. Supposedly leaders define meaning for their subordinates and for organization. This approach needs to look closely at ‘leaders’ beliefs. In my research I have studied persons who have self-identified themselves as ‘leaders’. Do they really ‘lead’ --- this is a question I cannot answer. Nor can most other research into ‘leadership’. So called ‘leaders’
Authentic Spiritual Leadership (Alvesson and Willmott, 2001) may do much less than they claim, think that they do, or other’s claim that they do. There may be much more informal leadership, chaos, or participative leadership than most researchers think there is. I do not know. I have chosen to explore ASL --- the narrative, the text and the expressions of belief. ASL in my research is a ‘text’ to be explored and analyzed. If you wish, my approach is very semiotic. There is an ASL text; there are persons who believe that the text is very significant; I want to examine the text and the in so far as I can, the making of the text significant.

I investigated my interviews on two different levels. The first level is concentrated on the content of the interviews. I was inspired here by Grounded Theory (henceforth GT). I did not using GT to draw inductive conclusions or to create an inductive theory of ASL --- I used the technique of grounded theory to see what themes repeated themselves in my data and at what point I had achieved ‘saturation’ in my data collecting. Qua ‘theory’ I am working in a situation of over-determination. There is more than enough written about sense-making, authenticity and leadership. As I have already noted, there are debates already going on about whether spirituality and authenticity are ethically valuable for organizational leadership or dangerous for it. And I know that those debates have been going on and plan to address them.

Thus my research goal:

With multiple qualitative methods, to listen to (self-proclaimed) texts of ‘ASL’, emanating from a single network; and to compare the texts on a content and rhetorical (or process) level, to the claims of critics.

The underlying research question is: How did the interviewees describe, define and perceive ASL?

Looking only at the content would mean discarding interesting aspects of the interviews, such as the construction and function of the discourse. Approaching the interviews only via some sort of content analysis (however, grounded) would also limit the possibilities of being critical and of linking to the con-text of the texts. By ‘critical’ I do not mean suspicious or negative, but looking to understand the assumptions, social relatedness and the textual con-text of what is said (Hosking, 1988 and 2006). For this reason, a second method was used to approach the data: Discourse Analysis. Using Discourse Analysis (henceforth DA) made it possible to research what kind of rhetorical resources were used, how they were constructed and what the function behind them was. DA gives an impression of what the interviewees are interactively accomplishing here and now in the interviews.
The Interviews

I wanted to use in-depth interviews to get a more thorough insight into the concept of ASL. People from a specific network, who have been brought together by their idea of ASL, and who have experiences and interest in the topic, were my informants. And I tried to treat them as ‘informants’ --- I was there to listen to their knowledge. I wanted to understand their beliefs. I wanted to know how the interviewees perceived themselves in the context of ASL. How would they describe and define ASL? What are their experiences related to ASL? How did they manage to bridge different and/or paradoxical areas --- such as, ethics and business? Where did they see difficulties and hindrances for themselves within ASL?

The complexity of ASL can be explored by using interviews because interviews provide a direct contact to the interview partners, the flexibility, the spontaneity and the freedom of subjective conceptions. In the interviews personal questions were discussed with significant people from all over the world, which belong to the network. Their socialisation, their context, their philosophies and their personal experiences were important data for the exploration. Critical questions about difficulties, dilemmas, mistakes and misunderstandings were also addressed.

The interviews were kept very open and flexible, so that each interview was unique. The questions were open-ended which left room for the stories and long explanations of the interviewees. The questions encouraged the interviewee to describe his/her own perspective, experiences and so forth. A question guideline, which touched on similar topics, was used to construct each of the interviews to make them comparable. Some information about the interviewee, the interview situation and the perception/remarks of the interviewer were additionally noted. The interviewer adapted further questions to what was already described by the interviewee. The in the interview guide listed questions were used as clues, as prototypical questions. The interviewer could modulate them, choose relevant questions or formulate other questions. The idea was that the questions flow naturally related to the information, which the respondent provided.

The interviews always started with introductions and a few sentences about the research and the interview procedure. It was explained to the interviewees that they could take as much time as they want for their answers and that their personal, detailed descriptions, their personal experiences, stories and subjective opinions are requested. It was also mentioned that there are no right or wrong answers. The interviewer filled in the flyleaf with some information about the interview situation (date of interview, location of interview, starting time, duration of interview) and with some demographic data about the interviewee
(Name, Position/Task/Firm/Organization, Telephone/Fax/E-Mail, Age, Religion/Philosophy). Then the interviewee was asked for permission to record the interview and to use it for the research. All interviewees agreed. After the interview the interviewer wrote down some remarks about impressions of the interview and the interviewee (e.g. timing, openness), the environment, the location, the atmosphere, own emotions etc.

The already mentioned question guideline included the topics: personal background (spiritual, religious, philosophical); authenticity; leadership, spirituality, and ASL.

Example questions about the personal background were: Where do you come from? (country, education, family etc.); What is your spiritual/religious background?; What do you believe in?; Which religious or philosophical traditions influenced you?

Example questions about the authenticity were: What do you understand under the term ‘authenticity’?; How would you describe ‘authenticity’?; What means an ‘authentic life’ for you?; How do you know that you act authentically?; When do you feel authentic? In which moments or environments?; What are the hindrances in your life or in yourself? What inhibits you to live authentic?

Example questions about leadership were: What means leadership/leading for you?; How do you lead?; How do you describe your leadership?; What is ‘good’/ ‘bad’ leadership for you?; Where do you see difficulties, contradictions, hindrances for ‘good’ leadership?

Example questions about spirituality were: What means spirituality for you?; What kind of practices/exercises do you do?; What do you think, what is spirituality today?; How can we live a spiritual life?

Example questions about ASL were: What is the relationship between authenticity/spirituality and leadership?; Is authenticity/spirituality important for leadership? How would you describe ASL? What are your experiences related to ASL? How do you manage to bridge different and/or paradoxical areas (e.g. ethics and business, authenticity/spirituality and leadership)?; Where do you see difficulties and hindrances related to ASL?

In the interviews these questions became very much personalized. Many supplementary questions were used to open up and to deepen the interviewee’s answers. Because of the insider position, the whole interview situation was characterized by a personal atmosphere. This intimate context, of course, varied between the interviews, but anyway it influenced the interview situation and hence ‘ASL talk’. As already discussed in the introduction this special circumstance entailed restrictions and benefits for the research. But furthermore the special openness and confidence from the interviewees demanded a careful and respon-
sible treatment of the data. That’s why the interview extracts are labelled from A – I (Every interviewee got one letter attributed). To keep the interviewees as anonymous as possible, male pronouns (this may be excused by all female participants) are used.

Two interviews were conducted in German. All other interviews were made in English. The interviews had an average length of 1 hour and 10 minutes. The shortest one was 32 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 44 minutes. After all the interviews there was an informal talk. At these talks additional people were recommended as interview partners. It was then usually easy to get in contact with these people and to arrange a meeting. The interview situations were quite diverse. One interview was at a seminar about leadership, one was at a university, one was at the home of one interviewee, one was in the office of the interviewee, one was in a hotel meeting room, and the some were conducted at one of the conferences of the network in 2007 in Rishikesh, India: “Beyond Concepts and Minds - International Dialogue”.

Every interview was carefully transcribed, but without using transcription notation conventions, such as the so-called “Jefferson system” (developed by the conversation analyst Gail Jefferson), which are often used in Discourse Analysis (see e.g. Antaki et al., 2003). The reason was that the research interest is limited here to the use and function of different conversation of sense-making constructions. I did not explore the fine details of timing and intonations, so my transcriptions are not as detailed as in some DA studies. One strand of DA, influenced by conversation analysis, focuses on ‘turn taking’ and issues such as pauses and interruptions. Hereby structures of power and (often) competition are observed. These were not my themes. I was interested in a particular field of sense-making – how is ‘ASL talk’ constructed, maintained and defended against incoherence?

Another reason not to go too much into in-depth detail of the linguistic features of my interviews was that the interviewees and the interviewer were not native speakers and many linguistic features were related to the use of a foreign language. Thus, pauses (often focussed on in conversation analysis oriented DA) are as likely to be caused by participants’ unfamiliarity with English as for any other reason.

It was important that the transcription could be constantly checked against the recording. Through the analysing process, I sometimes re-listened to the recordings if I was unsure about anything or if I wanted to obtain a better feeling of the situation and the content.

After looking at the interview situation, I now want to turn to the researched network with the question: What constitutes this network?
Criteria for selecting the Interviewees: The Network

The selected interviewees have an understanding of ASL forged through actual practice. They have, for example, participated or lectured in conferences about ASL and belong to the network of people who believe the combination of authenticity, spirituality and leadership has positive effects. They are interested in understanding and practising ASL.

Especially interesting is the point that the interviewees have different cultural backgrounds. They come from: India, the Netherlands, Taiwan, USA, Egypt, Malaysia, and Germany. They work in different fields and so they have had very different experiences throughout their lives. The interviewees are members of different religions or traditions. These traditions range from: Humanistic, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Taoistic, Confucian to Yoga (especially to the Himalayan Yoga tradition). I also tried to create a mix of female and male interviewees who are interested in the topic.

I got in contact with these people through a ‘snowball effect’. Four out of the nine interviewees were related closely to the same tradition (Himalayan Tradition). Additionally, interviewees who were not so closely related to the Himalayan Tradition or who had a more critical view were selected. They all belong to a community, which is based on the interest in authenticity, spirituality and business. They are working in different fields, in different parts of the world and have different experiences with ASL, but the concept of ASL brings them always back together. They organize in the context of the Foundation ‘China-Europe Dialogue and Exchange for Sustainable Development’ seminars and conferences all over the world. The first conference I attended was in Delft (the Netherlands) in September 2004. The characteristic title was ‘Authentic Leadership for Sustainable Development’. Here I got in contact with a few central figures of the network, which I interviewed then later on. In April 2005 the next meeting took place in Beijing (China). It was called the ‘International Dialogue Diving into Harmony; Providing Leadership for Sustainable Development’. I was not able to join it, but I got informed by emails, Skype, brochures, videos and so on. In 2006 some events, which I also couldn’t attend were organized: the ‘Pre-events International Dialogue Values for Development’, the ‘1st Global Development Learning Network World Forum’ and the ‘Dialogue on Inner Management’. In February 2007 I was able to participate in the conference ‘International Dialogue Beyond Concepts and Minds: A Matter of Science?’, which was held in Rishikesh, India. I used the time and the possibility to do a few more interviews here. Another event in 2007 occurred under the title ‘International Dialogue Values for Development Towards a Life-Sustaining Civilization’ (Xi’an, China). The last conference, where I could meet the network, was called ‘International Dialogue Cultural Diversity as Catalyst for Citizenship,
Creativity and Communication. Enabling Sustainable Lifestyles’ (in the Rolzaal/Hall of Knights, Dutch Parliament, The Hague, the Netherlands. March, 2009). All meetings and events were characterized by a nearly ‘familial’ atmosphere. The members from the network obviously enjoy meeting each other. Many of them have contacts over years and very confidential relationships. The social aspects of these conferences are visibly very important. Beside lectures, there are usually round tables, group discussions, and facilitated dialogues. They try to apply here what they call ‘creative learning methods and techniques’ (meta-plan, open space, dialogues, visualizations, etc). The ‘familial’ character, the strong connection to spirituality and the intention of inspiration certainly raises resistance in some participants. It is interesting how far this is reflected in ‘ASL talk’. For further research it could be interesting to find people, who left the network, and to see if these people maybe share the view of the criticism, which is illustrated later on in the thesis. But for now the focus is on the people, who share the idea of ASL and join somehow the network.

Even if I was not able to go to all events, I still was able to keep in contact with the people. Mainly because it is really a 21st century network, which uses a lot of new media, to keep in contact and to organize new events. They hold Skype meetings, use Facebook, offer RSS feeds (to publish frequently updated news), make videoconferences and form Internet platforms. At the same time they value their traditions, ancient wisdom and spirituality. Because the Himalayan Traditions is especially important here for defining the network and because the spiritual background influences the understanding of ASL, I want shortly to illustrate it in box 1.

The Himalayan Tradition

Four interviewees relate themselves closely to Indian Philosophies, to Yoga and especially to the Himalayan Tradition (e.g. Swami Rama, 1978 and 1992, or Swami Veda Bharati, 1986). Swami Veda as a famous teacher of this tradition is also one of the Interviewees here. He is a central figure of the network. Swami Rama (1925 – 1996) as the lineage holder of the tradition and as the one who brought the tradition to the West is well-known by nearly all the members of the network. The Himalayan Tradition is based in Indian Philosophy. The Indian Philosophy has a very long and rich tradition which is a form of Yoga- and Samkhya-Philosophy. It has its roots in the Vedic texts (ca. 1500 to 900 before Christ), in the Bhagawat-Gita and the Upanishads (ca. 900 to 300 before Christ) (Tigunait, 1983). Very important is the Samkhya Philosophy with its fundamental writing Samkhya Karika and the Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali. An overview can be found in Wahsner (2002). Here only some important aspects, which are important for the Himalaya Tradition and for the definition of ASL, shall be summarized:

The purpose of the tradition is to awaken the divine flame within each human being. For that, every student has to go through self-exploration to come to know his or her true self. Furthermore, the students learn the purification of thoughts and emotions. These practices lead to ethical behaviour and clarity of the mind. Mindfulness, (mantra) meditation and different forms of breathing awareness are also essential in the development of the student. In the tradition, it is said that the teachers of the tradition are
taught to work only for others, so that suffering among people may be reduced and they may come to realize their birthright: self-knowledge (Swami Rama, 1978).

Moral, ethical behaviour is elemental for spiritual development in the Himalayan Tradition. The moral, ethical demands in (Raja) Yoga are defined in the restraints – ‘Yamas’ and in the observances – ‘Niyamas’. The yamas are in short: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (authenticity), asteya (no stealing), bramacharya (continence) and aparigraha (non-attachment). The niyamas contain in short: shaucha (purity of mind and body), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), svadhyaya (learning and study which lead to wisdom, Mantra recitation, self-study) and ishvara pranidhana (surrender to god or the last reality). These aspects of the yamas and niyamas can also be found in the interviews. They are also analogous to the Buddhist moral precepts of sila, and they can be further related to Christian and Islamic moral imperatives (Ten commandments in the Bible, ten verses in the Qur’an).

Swami Rama (1978) defined Yoga concisely as ‘Meditation in Action’ and the Baghavad Gita (2, 48) says ‘Equanimity is called Yoga’. In the Himalayan tradition, Yoga means to dignify every moment in life. The ultimate aim is spiritual purification and self-understanding leading to samadhi or union with the divine. “Be sincere and truthful; be fearless and equanimous; show goodwill to all; don’t harm any living creature. All these are the virtues that reveal the real nature of human beings: Divinity.” (Baghavad Gita 16:1-3). In Yoga, authenticity is the knowledge of the Atman (Self). Brahman and Atman, cosmic and individual consciousness or Self, are one and the same in their nature. This understanding of oneness can be found in most of the interviews. The Self is, in its true, authentic nature, positive, divine, and all-embracing. To realize this is the goal of authenticity. The term ‘self-realization’ is a translation of Atman Jnana, Sanskrit for knowledge of the true self (authenticity). Jnana refers to knowledge gained from personal experience, as opposed to, e.g. book knowledge. So knowing your Self can be based only on your own experiences, as also described in the interviews.

Box 1

Five of the interviewees belong to the inner circle of the network and play important rules in keeping the network alive. These five meet regularly and keep in contact via Internet. Two belong to the inner circle of the network, but are not involved in organizing the meetings and conferences. And two of the interviewees belong more to the intellectual con-text of the network. They share the idea of ASL, but they don’t for instance join in during the yearly conferences or seminars. One I met at a seminar about innovative leadership in 2004 and the other one after a lecture in 2006.

The chosen group represents a very selective collection of people and, of course, their answers cannot be generalized as in quantitative research, but it is a group of people who are all very interested and involved in ASL and who spoke very openly about their personal experiences of ASL. The interviews delivered detailed reports of ASL. Those interviewed are very active in the ASL conferences, seminars or claim to apply ASL in their own organizations. They claim to have concrete experiences with applying ASL, with hindrances from inside and outside, and with dealing with the perceptions of others.
Theoretical Saturation

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are influenced by each other, and data collection often continues until ‘saturation’ is reached.

The interviews were analysed to categorize their contents and to try and achieve analytic saturation. I also made use of Discourse Analysis to examine how the ASL text or discourse was delivered and structured. Grounded Theory and Discourse Analysis do not require a large number of participants (Flick, 2005, Strauss and Corbin, 1996); they require rich and meaningful data, which comes from in-depth, unstructured interviews, with open-ended questions.

In Grounded Theory, the criterion for judging when to stop sampling is the situation of theoretical saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain this situation as the point when no additional ideas are to be found in the data. The categories are saturated but not all categories are equally relevant, therefore, the depth of analysis differs. Because the researcher cannot know in advance how many participants will be required to reach saturation, it seems unrealistic to specify the concrete number of participants in advance.

I was focused on categories and concepts in my analysis, and not on the achievement of a specific mass of data. I wanted to go into depth with the interviews and not to make a knowledge claim based on a large number of interviewees. When no further information from the analysis process of the interviews seemed to be gained, the interviewing phase was brought to an end (last Interview was in 2007). There would always be some different aspects, if you asked more people, but the central themes seemed to be arising again and again. To analyse the interviews in depth was very intensive work, I was concerned with details and it required me reading and re-reading the data many times. Every sentence and sometimes every word was included in the analysis process. Analysis also on occasion brought me back to re-listening to the recorded interviews. Thus holding a great number of interviews was not the goal; but trying to listen to what really was said in the interviews and to give enough room (interview time) for every interviewee was what was important.

The Interviewees

Since 2004, nine interviews were conducted:

1. Dr. C. Otto Scharmer
Dr. C. Otto Scharmer was born in Germany. He holds a Ph.D. in economics and management from Witten-Herdecke University, Germany. His article "Strategic Leadership within the Triad Growth-Employment-Ecology" won the McKinsey Research Award in 1991. His most recent work has included research in the
form of dialogue interviews with 150 eminent thinkers on leadership, strategy, and knowledge creation (see for more information see: http://www.dialogonleadership.org).

He is co-founder of the MIT Leadership Lab, has lectured at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, been a visiting professor at the Helsinki School of Economics, and a faculty member of the Fujitsu Global Knowledge Institute in Tokyo. He is also co-founder of the Global Institute for Responsible Leadership. He is lecturer and co-founder of the Project ELIAS (Emerging Leaders for Innovations Across Systems) at MIT and a co-founder of the Society for Organizational Learning, and he has consulted with multinational firms and international institutions in the USA, Europe, and Asia.

A synthesis of this research has resulted in a theoretical framework and practice called presencing, which he elaborates on in his book, ‘Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges’ (2007), as well as in a co-authored book with Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, ‘Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future’ (2004). He used presencing to facilitate profound innovation and change processes. He is an active member of the Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership where he leads a module together with Arawana Hayashi.

2. Atem S. Ramsundersingh

Atem S. Ramsundersingh was raised in an Asian (Indian) family in Surinam (South America), educated in a Dutch culture and has had the opportunity to practice as a professional in more than 50 developing countries and countries in transition, including countries in Europe. He is a graduate in Civil Engineering/Infrastructure Planning and Management (Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands, 1988).

Mr. Ramsundersingh has been appointed as an Extraordinary Visiting Professor of the University of Blas Pascal in Cordoba, Argentina. He was senior lecturer and module coordinator in Strategic Urban Infrastructure Planning and Management with UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, The Netherlands. He has been an advisor to many national, regional and local governments in formulating long-term visions for infrastructure and urban development. In this position, he brings in experiences with the application of methods for establishing ‘human connectivity’ (i.e. through dialogues) in building urban coalitions for sustainable development. He is also active, e.g. as a chairman, in several social projects and foundations.

He was Sr. Water Management and Institutions Specialist in the World Bank, based in Washington DC, USA. In this position, he focused on water conflicts, transformation of organizations and institutions, and the innovation of knowledge networks and communities. He was also dealing with transformation of (water/urban) organizations, capacity development, creativity in learning
events and knowledge communities. Since January 2009 he is the new CEO of STB Technologies Pte Ltd, Singapore.

Mr. Ramsundersingh organizes and initiates many workshops, seminars and conferences, also under the topic of Authentic Leadership. Moreover, he has written an article about Authentic Leadership in the field of water management (Bischoff and Ramsundersingh, 2003).

3. Prof. Hong-Yuan Lee
Prof. Hong-Yuan Lee was born in Taiwan. He is influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. He is the Deputy Magistrate of Taipei County. Hong-Yuan Lee obtained both his Msc (1982) and PhD (1984) from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (University of Iowa, U.S.A). He is a Professor of the Faculty of Hydraulic Engineering within the Department of Civil Engineering (National Taiwan University), and visiting Professor of UNESCO-IHE, Nanjing Hydraulic Research Institute, and Hohai University. His career includes the Chief of Water Resources Department of Taiwan Provincial Government during the period of 1997-1999.

He also has been engaged in advising, project implementation and consultancy in the field of water engineering for many organizations globally. Hong-Yuan Lee has obtained ample international experience of case exploration and management in the area of water, environment and urban infrastructure constitution. During the time of being a government officer, Hong-Yuan Lee made his contribution to the reconstruction and the reorganization of water conservancy in Taiwan. While participating in the process of policymaking, he said that he realized that Sustainable Development must be the only method to solve the problems caused by over-exploration and climate change while the traditional measures based on engineering can do nothing.

He has produced many articles about Sustainable Development Policy in the press at home and abroad, and has closely communicated with the international top organizations in this field and has devoted himself to accelerating cooperation with China and the international community (especially in Europe). He is also interested in Authentic Leadership and in the connection between Authentic Leadership and Sustainable Development. He has participated and lectured in conferences related to this topic.

4. Swami Veda Bharati, PhD
Swami Veda Bharati was born in 1933 in Dehradun, India. From childhood, he was trained to read the scriptures of various religious traditions including Buddhism, Jaina, Islam and Christianity. He has participated in numerous interfaith dialogues through his entire career of public speaking and teaching. Swami Veda Bharati keeps the ancient wisdom of the tradition of yoga and the Vedas. For the past 55 years he has been an international teacher, lecturer and writer.
Before taking his vows of swamihood in 1982, he was known as Dr. Usharbudh Arya. A prolific writer and speaker, he is the author of numerous books including: ‘Superconscious Meditation’, ‘Mantra and Meditation’, ‘Meditation and the Art of Dying’, ‘Philosophy of Hatha Yoga’ and ‘Yoga-sutras of Patanjali’.

He was initiated by his spiritual Master, Swami Rama of the Himalayas. Swami Veda Bharati has been teaching and guiding thousands of people worldwide. He also founded and supports many social projects in India.

In 1954-56, he participated in numerous conferences of the World Congress of Faiths and in 1999 attended and spoke at the World Parliament of Religions in Cape Town, South Africa. He still participates in many conferences all over the world and offers his insights and wisdom not only to spiritual seekers but also to business people. He gave lectures on Authentic Leadership conferences and he supports the integration of spiritual issues into business.

Currently, he is Director of the Himalayan Institute for Yoga Science, Rishikesh, India. He is also Director and Preceptor of Sadhana Mandir Trust.

5. Mrs. B. Maithili
Mrs. B. Maithili was born in the south of India. She is the director of the Rural Development Institute (RDI) which is part of the Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust (HIHT), Dehradun, Uttarakhand, in India. She has been responsible for its operations for the last number of years and RDI has now become one of the largest NGOs in Uttarakhand.

The Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust is a voluntary organization working in the field of health and rural development. They want to develop integrated and cost effective approaches to health care and development that addresses the needs of the local population. Sri Swami Rama, a visionary sage who founded the medical city to provide basic amenities to the poor people of rural Uttarakhand, founded HIHT. Their philosophy is love, serve, and remember.

The outreach activities of the Institute are carried out through the Rural Development Institute (RDI). RDI is part of the HIHT but functions separately and carries out developmental work in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. They are serving 1000 villages using a multi-dimensional approach of health care, education, irrigation, sanitation, and livelihood programs. Special attention is given to the needs of women and children. Mrs. B. Maithili tries to bring about Authentic Leadership in her work and in her trainings. She joins related conferences and seminars in India.

6. Marieke de Vrij
Marieke de Vrij was born in the Netherlands in 1953. She gives many lectures, and she offers workshops, seminars, meetings and group counselling for leaders and scientists. She also works a lot with female leaders. Mrs. de Vrij wants to
enhance social change and innovation in many areas and to contribute to a better future for mankind. She describes herself as a kind of spiritual teacher.

The Foundation for Social and Spiritual Innovation of Mankind was established in the Netherlands in 1994 to support and assist Mrs. de Vrij in her efforts. This foundation organizes a great number of meetings etc. where Mrs. de Vrij gives lectures on many different subjects. Around 35 of her papers have been published in Dutch and one paper titled ‘Down’s Syndrome’ has been translated into English. She has also written several books and booklets, like ‘Management, evenwicht tussen gevoel en zakelijkheid’ (together with Johan Bontje, who wrote a book in Dutch about Authentic Leadership; Bontje, Kerpsteen, and Vreeswijk, 2005). She also lectures at leadership conferences.

Mrs. de Vrij is cooperating with many experts in various fields where spiritual insights are tested by practical experience. This is done in subjects of: remedial education, psychiatry, criminality, management, euthanasia, mental disablement, fatigue symptoms, water treatment, nature and environment, man-woman relationships and physical therapies. Furthermore, there is a close cooperation with professional groups in the medical field and supervision is also given to groups of people working in other areas.

7. André van Heemstra
Born 1946, in the Netherlands André van Heemstra has lived in many different countries since his youth (Guatemala, United States, Spain, Brazil). He studied Law at Utrecht University, Netherlands. In 1970, he started working for Unilever. After an initial career with Lever in the Netherlands, he joined East Africa Industries, Kenya, in 1980 as director of marketing and sales.
In 1984, he was appointed managing director, detergents and personal products, Turkey. In 1988, he became senior marketing member in foods and drinks coordination at the Rotterdam headquarters and two years later, senior regional manager, Foods Executive North Europe. In 1992, he was made chairman of Langnese-Iglo GmbH in Germany.
He was appointed personnel director in May 2000 following the retirement of Jan Peelen. Prior to this appointment, he was president of the Southeast Asia and Australasia Group; a position he held since July 1996. In May 1998, Japan and Korea were added to this region and the group was renamed East Asia Pacific. Mr. Heemstra is interested and experienced in many modern leadership approaches. He is also involved in research about Authentic Leadership.

8. Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish
He was born in Egypt in 1937. In the year 1956, at the age of 19, he began his studies in Chemistry and Medicine at the University of Graz, Austria; where he received his Ph.D. in Pharmacology in 1969. Thereafter, he then engaged him-
self in pharmaceutical research, taking on the position as Head of Division for pharmaceutical research until 1977.

In 1975, on a visit to Egypt together with his family, he was overwhelmed by the country's pressing problems in education, overpopulation and pollution. His admiration for his country led him to establish, in 1977, a comprehensive development initiative on the threefold principles of social development "striving to inspire, aid and develop our human and natural resources."

32

which he called SEKEM - "After much consideration, I chose the name, Sekem, the reason being, that the Egyptians had recognised the light and warmth of the sun as well as the third life giving force, permeating and enlivening the earth's entire being. The name Sekem portrays this."

Abouleish emphasized that the initiative was to "embody" itself as a community from the beginning: "A community in which people from all walks of life, from all nations and cultures, from all vocations and age groups, could work together, learning from one another and helping each other, sounding as one in a symphony of harmony and peace." From out of this community the "Council of the Future" had been born. "The goal of this council is to strengthen our direction and simultaneously renewing it according to contemporary needs. To achieve this, we draw our source of inspiration from spiritual and natural science, religion and art," he explained.

2003 Ibrahim Abouleish received the alternative Nobel Prize for the development of a business model for the 21st Century - "...for a business model for the 21st century in which commercial success is integrated with and promotes the social and cultural development of society through the ‘economics of love’" (see for more details: www.rightlivelihood.org/sekem).

Tan Sri Datuk Dr Mohan was born in Malaysia. He graduated in Medicine from Mysore University (India) and completed his postgraduate from Mahidol University, Bangkok. He commenced his career in 1978 in Sabah, Malaysia. He became the Assistant Director of Medical Services in 1980 and later went on to establish a large private medical practice group in Sabah, Malaysia.

Between 1996 and 2000, Tan Sri Datuk Mohan was actively involved in many International Conferences and was part of the Business delegations internationally with the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He headed the Business Delegation of the G15 Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe in November 1996.

He was appointed as the Honorary Consul in Malaysia for the Republic of Botswana 1999, a position he holds to date. He was also a member of the National Economic Consultative Council II.

He is also the Presidential Board Member, Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust, India (Founded by H.H. Swami Rama of the Himalayas) and President of the Association of Himalayan Yoga Meditation Societies (International).
Tan Sri Datuk Dr Mohan Swami J.P. is currently the Executive Chairman of Chase Perdana Berhad and Executive Deputy Chairman of Sitt Tatt Berhad, both listed in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. He is also the Chairman of Epsom Properties Ltd, a company listed in the Bombay and Madras Stock Exchange.

He participated on conferences about Authentic Leadership and Good Governance and is a central figure of the researched network.

**Two Levels of Investigation: Inspired by Grounded Theory and Discourse Analysis**

In contrast to many deductive approaches, I wanted to concentrate on what the interviewees actually told me about ASL. I try to follow the techniques of Grounded Theory and to give the data the highest priority.

As already mentioned, the interviews have been explored on two levels. The first level of analysis concentrated on the content of the interviews. The interviews were investigated as inspired by Grounded Theory. The underlying research question was: How do the interviewees describe, define and perceive ASL? I have tried to maintain the formulations of the interviewees and to give exemplary quotes.

The second level data analysis had the aim to gain another perspective. Via Discourse Analysis I analysed the ways the interviewees constructed their speech. ASL is very controversial and topics such as spirituality, authenticity, and ethics have of course been handled as separated fields apart from business and leadership. One can assume that it is not easy to (re-)unite ASL terminology and business terminology and that discourse ‘construction work’ would be needed. Thus I was interested in the ‘How the interviewees bridged the seemingly incompatible fields of ASL and business.

GT and DA are qualitative methods. They share some aspects of the same epistemological history; the discussion of these aspects is helpful to understand these methods and their theoretical foundations. The area of conflict between quantitative and qualitative methodology is crucial to their history. It is relevant for this thesis because it illustrates, also, why my research has been approached with qualitative instead of quantitative methods. So let us firstly in brief consider the history of qualitative research in general, before turning to GT and DA separately.

**History of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research has a long history. As Flick (2005) mentioned, already Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) used qualitative descriptive methods, in addition to
experimental methods. There has always been a debate between the quantitative, standardised and experimental approaches, and the qualitative, descriptive approaches. The quantitative methods were, for a long time, perceived as the more scientific ones. Positivist social science traditionally perceived the researchers’ subjectivity as negative and biasing. Instead, positivist understandings of research emphasized ‘objectivity’. Underlying all of this was the belief that objective observation of an external reality is possible. Positivism assumes an objective world, which can be represented, measured, predicted and explained by scientific methods.

In Psychology, quantitative research has been the more popular because many researchers in have wanted to be understood as (natural) scientists. In the 1960s, criticisms was made of quantitative research and the related understanding of the role of theory creation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The fact that a very important impact came from the natural sciences (physics) was ironic because research in psychology, which had tried to be scientific in a natural scientific way, followed ideas outdated in physics. Quantum mechanics, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and Schrödinger’s cat all brought a simply epistemology of objectivity into doubt. Subjectivity was more or less rehabilitated (Flick, 2005). The opinion, that all data was already interpreted at the same time it is observed, influenced research methodologies (Capra, 1997).

Hence qualitative research found its way back into Social Science (Flick, 2005). Central to qualitative research is the idea of being able to understand the researched better in natural language than in quantitative terms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is more exploratory and problem-driven, rather than conclusive and method-driven (Strauss and Corbin, 1996).

During the 1970s and 1980s, more concerns about the limitations of quantitative data emerged. Critics addressed claimed that positivist quantitative research designs gave insufficient attention to lived experience, which is complex, subjective and embedded in specific social and historical contexts (Silverman, 2001). Silverman discusses in his work questions of ethics and defends (as did Goffman and Garfinkel) interpretivism. Interpretivism is very different from positivism. It does not assume an objective world; but rather an intersubjective one. Interpretivism searches for patterns of meaning instead of causal relations among variables. Contrasting to positivism, it tries to understand the definitions of the people researched and how these people ‘produce’ their reality. Positivism seems to ignore the difference between the natural and the social world (Silverman, 2000). It is crucial for me that my methods be appropriate to the nature of my research question.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000/2005) have described seven moments (or phases) of qualitative research. These moments compete with each other and define one
another. New spaces have been created for qualitative research but some options have also been closed down. In the ‘traditional period’ (1900 to 1950), qualitative research was concerned with the ‘other’ and the ‘foreign’ (in ethnography). Its goal was to achieve relatively objective descriptions of foreign cultures. The following, modernist phase or golden age (1950-1970), was characterised by attempts as formalization in the tradition of Glaser and Strauss (1967). The third moment, of blurred genres, (1970-1986) was marked by different paradigms and theoretical models. The researchers chose from a range of methods. Since the mid 1980s, a crisis of representation (1986-1990) has arisen. How to present findings became an important issue. The awareness has increased that doing (qualitative) research means constructing versions of reality. The evaluation and quality of research and findings have more and more been discussed. The question is whether or not traditional quantitative quality criteria can be applied to qualitative research and otherwise, which criteria are adequate.

In the postmodern period (1990-1995) narratives seem to replace theories, or theories are read as narratives. The sixth moment (post-experimental inquiry, 1995-2000) is when qualitative research has been related to democratic principles. The methodologically contested present (2000-2004), is a time of conflict and tension, followed by the fractured future which is now (2005-…).

The ‘future’ is the eighth period, where qualitative research is concerned with moral discourses and critical discussions about democracy, freedom, community globalization and so forth. In the 21st century, qualitative research the authors claim should be concerned with social justice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008), with speech, the concrete and special, the local and with historical context (Toulmin, 1994).

In general, the whole ‘qualitative-quantitative debate’ is unending. To question which approach is ‘better’ often seems trivial because both quantitative and qualitative research are based on rich and varied traditions and have addressed many diverse research issues. There are also attempts to combine both methodologies (Flick, 2005). Qualitative and quantitative research can go hand in hand and enrich each other. The goal of the research is important in selecting the appropriate methodology. Because the aim in my research is to explore what emerges when self-proclaimed ‘leaders’ are asked to talk about ASL, qualitative approaches were adequate and beneficial.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) have criticised that quantitative and qualitative research have often formed a metaphor for western (colonial) knowledge and therefore for a limited claim to power and truth. They think that qualitative research can be used to address social justice issues and that ethics must be considered in the whole research process. The aim of my research is to be aware of these aspects and of what is not said, i.e. which voices are suppressed and what has been made marginal (see also Boje, 2001). I think that qualitative methods
give a very good opportunity to include issues like ethics and humanization. It was my intention to describe differences in the interview outcomes and not to suppress them. I do not think that this means that my research is totally relativistic. Giving room to diversity doesn’t mean that nothing matters anymore; there is a postmodern ethic (Bauman, 1993). The challenge of the postmodern world I believe is to develop humanism and not to get lost in relativism.

**Grounded Theory (GT)**

**History of Grounded Theory**

In qualitative research, the methods are meant to suit the subject of interest and not vice versa (Flick, 2005). The research subject or object is not divided into variables. The phenomenon is researched in its (original) complexity and in its daily context. Qualitative research doesn’t use an experimental laboratory; instead it looks into the field. Often it is concerned with special situations and special people. The goal is not to verify existing theories; it is to discover something new.

Grounded Theory is one of the most frequently used methods in qualitative research during the last decades. It is an inductive approach, which gives priority to the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed and Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990/1996) advanced the ‘Grounded Theory Approach’.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed GT to understand their subjects of research better and to investigate emerging themes in interview transcripts. Themes are important terms, expressions or words, which researched interviewees use persistently. Glaser and Strauss wanted to ground theory in real data and thereby in real life. Their intention was to develop theories inductively, rather than using a logical deductive approach. They wanted to discard a priori hypothesis, which are common in quantitative research. They didn’t want to start with (abstract) theory and test it afterwards. But their ‘induction’ was hermeneutically naïve. One cannot escape language, tradition and one’s theoretical background. One can ‘bracket’ one’s normal concepts and try to stand open to one’s data. And while Glaser and Strauss’ claim to purely inductive theory building seems illogical in retrospect, their research technique has lived on as a crucial contribution to qualitative research. Of course, I set out to study ‘ASL talk’ --- thus I was ‘sensitivized’ to a particular theme. However much my interviewees might talk about the weather or the coffee, this research was never going to become about those themes. Thus I entered the research with a research theme. But so did Glaser and Strauss as well. Their research was about patient/nursing care in a hospital. Their claim is that they discovered unexpected and new things about that relationship by meticulously studying their data (conversations and observations), instead of by trying to test a hypothesis. In effect,
their two research techniques --- the coding of the data content, and the using of the principle of saturation as key criteria --- form their contribution to how to do research. And I have made use of these two techniques. So what is relevant in their work for me was to look at a defined field of interest and then to allow relevant aspects (themes) to emerge out of the data itself.

GT as I see it thus is not exclusively inductive; there is also deductive work to do, but not in the sense that guiding research theories and hypothesis are logically deducted before going into the field from literature. Glaser (1998) explained that after the researcher starts to find out what is happening from the data, s/he starts deducting where more relevant data/cases can be found. This is called ‘theoretical sampling’. In the whole process of GT, one moves back and forth, between inductive and deductive strategies and between different phases of the analysing process. In contrast to quantitative research, deduction here in a way serves induction. Induction drawn from the meanings of the interviewee’s experiences is the main source of the findings.

A second limit to GT’s inductive turn is to be found in the discussion of the results. Glaser and Strauss discovered that how patients were ‘socially valued’ played a major role in hospital care. An attractive middleclass mother, even if clearly terminal, got ‘better’ care than a down-and-out wino; even if their really was more that could be done for the latter. How ‘status’ played itself out on the hospital ward is a theme about social class, privilege and hierarchy. In GT one is free to discuss, evaluate and debate one’s results. The inductive turn to the data collection/analysis is not meant to hamper debate and the critical discussion of results. Thus while I made use of GT in the collecting and analysing of my data, I also engage in the debate with the literature on ASL in the last portion of this book.

**Theoretical Background of Grounded Theory**

Symbolic interactionism provided the theoretical foundational theory for GT. The notion of symbolic interactionism was shaped by Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1938). It is thought that the meaning of ‘things’ is crucial. A ‘thing’ is for Blumer (1969/1986) a wide-ranging concept, which includes physical objects (such as, a table), social objects (categories of people) and abstract objects (ethical principles). The meaning of a ‘thing’ or ‘object’ is established in human interaction, hence:

“…objects are human constructs and not self-existing entities with intrinsic natures.”

Blumer (1969/1986, p. 68)

Blumer (1969/1986, p. 2) set out three basic premises for symbolic interactionism:
1. “...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.”
2. “...the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.”
3. “...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.”

Human interactions are in this sense always mediated by the use of symbols or by ascribing meaning to one another’s actions. This way of interacting, which Blumer called ‘symbolic interaction’, is thus very different from behaviourist explanations of human behaviour. Behaviourism doesn’t acknowledge the intervening existence of interpretation between stimulus and response.

Symbolic interactionism “focuses on how we attach symbolic meanings to interpersonal relations” (Silverman, 2006, p. 14). It refers to the belief that people act according to how they interpret and understand the meaning of particular symbols or events. The underlying assumption, as related to this thesis, is that leaders act according to how they interpret and understand the meaning of ‘ASL’. But this cannot be proven within the boundaries of my research. The interviewees can be asked for their definitions and understandings of the meaning of ‘ASL ‘and they can be asked to talk about their daily practices and behaviour, but this is always related to their own (self-) perception(s) and I have not observed the interviewees at work.

In symbolic interactionalism (SI) it is assumed that reality is constantly changing because it is constructed by on-going negotiations between people. Hence GT, insofar as it stays loyal to SI, does not provide final findings. It displays the meanings that are ‘locally’ produced, lived and acted upon within the field under research. Thus, my research does not set out to provide final findings; instead it attempts to provide tentative insight into a social construction: ‘ASL’. This is ‘just’ a cut, out of reality; limited in time and space --- i.e. a selective group of interviewees whose opinions and perceptions are (in principle) changing over time, wherein their views are influenced by their current mood, by the interviewer and their relationships and so on. Research is part of an ongoing discussion. It sheds light on a part of ‘reality’. It displays the perspectives of a specific group within a certain moment. There are always blind spots – or things we cannot see, for instance: what is going on within the person; how does he or she perform, act, really behave when the researcher is gone, what are the hidden or underlying intentions, i.e. what lies underneath? We can only ask and analyse the answers and stories in our data – and not claim to any further ‘truth’.

Qualitative research methodologies make you aware of the limits to your knowing and that is one of the advantages of using qualitative methods. Con-
crete, specific and personal experiences get new value – they are the focus of interest. The personal understanding of a phenomenon and not a universal, empirical truth is what is sought after. Research engages with more personal and ‘ethical’ truth. This also can be called a ‘discourse truth’ because language is crucial to the sharing and creation of the social worlds studied (Potter and Wetherell, 2006). And we act according to our understandings of the world. GT can help to understand the conceptions of the interviewees and via GT it is possible to discover new and unexpected aspects of ASL. GT can help me to overcome prejudices and blind spots. It brings me closer to the data so that I can speak most of the time with the words of the interviewees. Even if one’s data is always merely a cut out of reality, it is on a very practical level. The interviewees were free to talk in detail about personal daily experience, about what they saw as the practical applications of ASL, and about the hindrances and problems they had encountered. I am convinced that this concrete level of research gets closer to lived practice and to actual belief than does abstract theorizing.

The interviewees may answer differently if they were asked tomorrow again the same questions, but also some essential statements will probably be still the same. Qualitative research also emphasizes the context as an interesting aspect to what gets said, which needs to be included in the research process. Hence the researcher can explore why the interviewees talk in the way they do, what is the context of what they say, and how do current circumstances influence the interviewee’s text.

If we allow for personal and ethical truth, we respect the dignity of the individual researched. We are not just using the interviewees for purposes of generalisation; we haven’t reduced them to numbers. Facets of discourses are not suppressed, they can all be analysed and presented. The reader also is empowered because the analysing process is explicitly explained. The data is presented in a way (for example through quotes) that the reader can follow the argumentation and build his/her own opinion.

Of course, the interviewees try to create a positive image of themselves in their talk, but this doesn’t mean that we have to disregard our data. In fact, this will be an aspect of analysis (see the Discourse Analysis chapter). The interviewees perform many activities in their talk. So the content of what they try to communicate and how they do this can be analysed within the general terms of GT and afterwards in more detail with Discourse Analysis.

Application of Grounded Theory
The aim of Grounded Theory (GT) is to understand core concepts on the basis of one’s empirical data. “All (everything) is data” is a statement from Glaser (2001, p.145), which is also a general GT statement. The data comes, in our case, from the interviews. The core concept here is Authentic Spiritual Leadership. Re-
member that the interviewees all belong to a single network that has identified itself as in pursuit of ASL. Thus network membership and ‘ASL’ as a label (or focus) are joined. My logic here is very circular. The network is ‘ASL’ and the analysis groups interview text along the lines of authenticity, spirituality and leadership. But Glaser and Strauss were in a hospital ward and they researched care relationships as they occur in a hospital. Hospital care served as a basic given or assumption within which GT was developed. In my study, ‘ASL’ plays the function that the hospital played for Glaser & Strauss. It is the con-text or primary given upon which the rest is based.

To research the text of ‘Authentic Spiritual Leadership’ I read and re-read the data repeatedly and labelled variables, (called categories, concepts and properties) and their interrelationships. My task was to perceive these variables and relationships. This is called theoretical sensitivity and is influenced by the theoretical literature and by one’s own presumptions (Glaser, 1978). Awareness, reflection, open-mindedness and constant comparison of data, are essential in GT (Strauss, 1991). GT research is a continuous learning process, which brings one closer and closer to the data. One has to develop a feeling for ‘what is going on’ in one’s data.

The research started with broad questions to the interviewees, to identify what sort of phenomenon Authentic Spiritual Leadership was in their eyes. I wanted to learn about the phenomenon (‘object’) from the interviewees. This way of investigation makes it possible to discover new concepts and new connections between concepts.

An initial question was: “How do you describe ASL?” This question is broad and open, but it also provides direction for the study by focusing on the key phenomena of interest; their description of Authentic Spiritual Leadership. The questions developed and changed through the research process because I tried to make sure that I took the interviewees’ perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon fully into account.

**Steps of Grounded Theory**

The interviews were transcribed and if required translated. The transcripts were made with time references so that I was able to re-listen to the actual speech repeatedly. Furthermore, laughs, coughs, interjections, hesitation sounds and so forth were noted.

Coding the transcriptions is the central process in GT (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), which breaks down, reduces, conceptualises and reassembles the data in new ways. Data reduction is “the process of selecting, focussing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10).
The researcher has to label important parts of the transcriptions with ‘Codes’.

“Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. [...] Codes usually are attached to “chunks” of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. [...] Codes are used to retrieve and organize the chunks mentioned earlier. The organizing part will entail some system for categorizing the various chunks, so the researcher can quickly find, pull out and cluster segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme.” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56f)

GT is a lively process that requires openness and flexibility. This all helps the researcher to find something new and surprising that may be in her (his) data. However, as Strauss and Corbin (1996) remind the researcher, analyzing is always an interpretation and construction process. So the researcher is deeply involved and tries to overcome his/her own presumptions, prejudices and blind spots. Asking questions constantly and comparing everything to everything else form the methods of analysis. While analysing, I made many notes (memos) related to the data, which helped me to generate questions, to keep aware of my own prejudices, and to simply keep emerging ideas in mind.

Coding in Grounded Theory methodology is the process of developing categories of concepts and themes that emerge from the data. It is concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the data/text. Each line, sentence, paragraph etc. was read in search of the answer to the repeated question: "What is ‘Authentic Spiritual Leadership’ about? What is being referenced here? What is represented here? " Three questions in particular guided the process:

1) When the people from the network talk about authenticity, what do they talk about...?
2) When the people from the network talk about spirituality, what do they talk about...?
3) When the people from the network talk about leadership, what do they talk about...?

Every interview was compared with every other interview so that similar phenomenon could be put together. I tried to take care that my codes were not too abstract, and not too remote from the original data. To ensure that the codes are data based, I used in-vivo codes, i.e. words or explanations from the actual interviewees.
Debates on Grounded Theory

Criticism of GT itself comes e.g. from Goldthorpe (2000), who criticised the extreme inductivism of GT and pointed out that it is very ad hoc. Some criticism of GT has claimed that it is a return to simple "Baconian" inductivism. Flick (2005) describes the problems and boundaries of GT. GT produces masses of data and an endless process of coding and comparison. He and other critical authors mention that the method seems nearly like an art and that there are problems in learning and applying GT.

Furthermore, a main point of criticism is that the quality of research is hard to determine. The quality criteria of quantitative research cannot be easily applied to GT. Some authors think that the quantitative research quality criteria are not adequate for qualitative research (Agar, 1986) or like Lincoln and Guba (1985) they propose different criteria for judging qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1996) think that the criteria of quantitative research need to be redefined for the reality of qualitative research to be able to account for the complexity and changing reality of social phenomenon.

Let’s turn now to the quality criteria of research, which are derived from quantitative research and are redefined for qualitative research. The focus is on the question what makes good GT, rather than on an extended debate into falsification etc.

Quality of Grounded Theory research

Glaser and Strauss (1967) have identified the following criteria for a ‘good’ Grounded Theory study: “fit”, "relevance", "work"" and "modifiability". They emphasized the practicality and applicability of their theory for the solution of practical problems. Here ‘validity’ means that the concept(s) shall represent and ‘fit’ the data and that the praxis validates the theory. Strauss and Corbin (1996) thought that the quality of research results does not depend on how exact one follows the rules and strategies, but on the ability of the researcher, including her creativity and ‘virtuosity’, to handle the data.

Another quality criterion in quantitative research is ‘reliability’. Reliability in GT is very complicated because the underlying understanding of an always changing social reality (see Theoretical Background) and continuously developing theories makes it quite absurd to think about replication. That’s why Strauss and Corbin (1996) thought of reliability as an always provisional verification, which is based on the process of checking and re-checking one’s assertions throughout the whole GT process (internal validity). In my research process, for example, the emerging categories and relationships were checked repeatedly against the interview data. I have also addressed the issue of external validity throughout my work. External validity requires that explicit and detailed infor-
information about the process and decisions taken during the research is given. This information is given here in chapter 2 where information is provided about how the data was collected and interpreted, and in chapter 3 and 4, where many quotes allow the reader to follow the analysing process.

Strauss and Corbin (1996) have named seven evaluation criteria. These criteria can also, hopefully, help as guidelines for the reader of the present work to evaluate what has been achieved. All the evaluation criteria are formulated in questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1996). I tried to ‘answer’ these questions and have used these questions to make the research process more evident and comprehensible.

Strauss and Corbin start with the question: ‘How was the original sample selected?’ and ‘On what grounds?’ The network and the criteria for selecting the interviewees are explicit above. The procedure theoretical saturation has been described. I have also introduced all the interviewees with a short commentary of their Curricula Vitae, so that the reader can see who they are, what their professions are, what their origins are and what their relationship to ASL is.

The second and third questions ask; ‘What major categories emerged?’ and ‘What indicated these categories?’ As explained above, three sensitivizing or basic categories were used: authenticity, spirituality and leadership; and then concepts emerging in the data were grouped together. I always tried, as far as was possible, to stay with what the interviewees actually said, and as already mentioned I used ‘in-vivo-codes’ (words and sayings from the interviewees which built the source for naming the categories). The extensive quotations of the interviewees also give their voices priority and provide a direct possibility for the reader to ‘listen’ to what they said.

The next criterion is, ‘Which categories influenced theoretical sampling and how?’ The interest or focus on the ‘ASL text’ guided the selection of interviewees. After some interviews, which developed through the ‘snowball effect’, I realized that the interviewees all had a very positive view of ASL. Hence, I tried to get also more critical interviewees who still had an interest in the topic. I found a number of interviewees who were more critical of ASL, but were still involved with it and belonged somehow to the network.

Questions five and six are related to the hypotheses about relationships among categories. Mainly I tried to derive these relationships from the data. I later rechecked them against the data and corrected or adjusted them. If there were discrepancies or exceptions, I mention and describe them in the findings. Discrepancies are seen in GT (Strauss and Corbin, 1996) as very important and informative. They tell a lot about the data and give new insights. Discrepancies and dilemmas have been further explored through Discourse Analysis.

The last quality criterion deals with how and why the core category was selected. The core category was selected in advance and defined the whole re-
search, but it was kept as open as possible and also as flexible as possible. The core category was ‘Authentic Spiritual Leadership’ and through the help of GT I wanted to find out what people from the network thought about this concept. I have tried to make my procedures in the research process explicit, so that the reader can form his/her own opinion about what was done and about interviews.

A general point has to be made here, which is also important for following the research procedures. The intention of using GT is not to construct a static, final theory; rather it is to gain a better (more practical) understandings. The concept of a final theory, would be a contradiction to the theoretical background of GT. GT helped me to ‘handle’ the data and still allowed me to stay close to what the interviewees had actually said. A final theory (or penultimate conclusion) would reduce and suppress differences; it would also undervalue context. This was not the intention of my research.

I have made use of GT’s research techniques, but I have not tried to formulate a single totalizing inductive theory of the ‘ASL text’ or of ethical (idealistic) networks, or of anything else. GT’s inductive rigor attracted me to it. But I did not want to make some sort of (new or old) leadership theory. I used GT to explore the concept of ASL, as it is constructed by the people from the researched network and not to draw a theoretical conclusion about leadership, spirituality, business ethics or whatever. Once I had made use of GT to clarify my data, I switched to making use of Discourse Analysis to further explore the ‘ASL text’.

**Discourse Analysis (DA)**

**History of Discourse Analysis**

There are many types of Discourse Analysis (DA). To avoid methodological confusion the current thesis concentrates on the work of Potter and Wetherell (2006) and Edwards and Potter (2000). Potter and Wetherell (2006) called DA a relatively new approach, but it can be traced back to established theories in philosophy, sociology and literary theory. Language is central to all social activities, but it only became an interesting research object in Psychology in the late 1950s and 1960s. The research was influenced by the linguist Noam Chomsky. In contrast to Chomsky, Potter and Wetherell (2006) are not interested in what goes on inside the person (cognitions). They see DA as being concerned with how people actually use language. The interest in the function of language is related to John Austin’s speech act theory where words are seen as deeds and language is seen as human practice. Potter and Wetherell (2006) made the criticism that the research tradition, which followed the ideas of Austin, had stayed too abstract and de-contextualized. That’s why ethnomethodology was an important root of DA. Conversation Analysis - a more direct appropriation of ethnometh-
Methodology

Ethnomethodology, in general, is concerned with the methods ordinary people use to make sense of their social lives. It supposes that most expressions are indexical, i.e. they change their meaning in different contexts; and that the reader/listener has to continuously construct meaning on the basis of context information. A central thinker of ethnomethodology was Harold Garfinkel, who was interested in the reflexive character of language --- i.e. the object and the word reflect back and forth, the one on the other. In practical human existence the object and the word are almost inseparable – i.e. they are (well-nigh) reflections of one another.

Another influence on DA has come out of semiology, the science of signs. The French semiologist Roland Barthes emphasized that there are always additional levels of meanings (of significations) --- i.e. there is always (endlessly) the meaning of the meaning. The second level of signification, he called ‘myth’. He wrote, for example, about wine in France and explored the significance of wine to the French (Barthes, 1970). He showed that wine is very symbolic for hospitality and for the national identity. He explicitly mentioned the connection between wine and the socio-economics of its production. He wanted to detect the artificiality of those signs which disguise their historical and social origins. Potter and Wetherell (2006) criticised, that semiology can produce idealized analyses which are too static. More attention needs to be paid to the use of language and changes of process. If semiology is modified this way it also falls under post-structuralism.

Edwards and Potter (2000), and Potter and Wetherell (2006); hoped that DA would become more than a new research field in social psychology. They understand DA as a radical new perspective and as radical theoretical rethinking and reconstruction. Wood and Kroger (2000, p. 1) saw DA as:

“…a perspective on social life that contains both methodological and con conceptual elements. Discourse Analysis involves ways of thinking about discourse (theoretical and metatheoretical elements) and ways of treating discourse as data (methodological elements). Discourse Analysis is thus not simply an alternative to conventional methodologies; it is an alternative to the perspectives in which those methodologies are embedded.”

DA is seen by these authors as more than a shift in methodology. They see the basic assumptions (such as language is action) as important in their own right and as a foundation for research.

odology is also relevant to DA (Potter, 1996), even if it seems to be dismissive of DA. Potter (1996) saw further specific areas in which Conversation Analysis (CA) and DA come together.
Theoretical Background of Discourse Analysis
The theoretical background of DA lies in (linguistic) Philosophy, Sociology, Ethnomethodology, Semiotics and Conversational Theory (Potter and Wetherell, 2006). It is characterised by a meta-theoretical emphasis on Constructionism; it emphasizes the way versions of the world or of reality are constructed in discourse. Wittgenstein (1953) described in his Philosophical Investigations the meaning of words is in their use and asserted that it is important to look for the use of words in the constructing of ‘truth’. Discourse becomes the key of understanding social life and in our case ‘ASL’. Potter (2004) described discourse as action-oriented, situated and constructed. Discourse constructs the world; it does not only represent it. This constructionist approach has come into conflict with other forms of social research, which are more committed to some kind of realism (e.g. conversation analysis and ethnomethodology) (Button and Sharrock, 1993). GT, for instance, is much more ‘realist’ than is DA.

DA is broadly based on a social constructionist theory. There are many different definitions, but Gergen (1985) described some assumptions which are implicit in most social constructionist efforts: there is a fundamental doubt in the ‘taken-for-granted’ world; knowledge is seen as historically, socially and culturally specific; knowledge is not necessarily dependent on empirical validity, it is rather constructed by social processes; and (scientific) explanations of phenomena are not neutral, because they are social actions, which serve to sustain certain (power) patterns.

An important influence on Potter and Wetherell’s DA seems to be the reflexive turn (here pointing to a growth in self-consciousness and self-doubt) in social science, which occurred mainly during the second half of the twentieth century. The confidence in science, as a kind of pre-eminent model of rational understanding, was questioned. Science itself is a socially constituted activity; i.e. a discursive activity (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) like many other activities, and it has lost its quality of having access to a kind of transcendent truth (Woolgar, 1988).

Furthermore, it became clear that all (scientific) observations are imbued with theoretical interpretations and presumptions, whether it is in Physics or in Psychology. Kuhn (1962) illustrated that ruling theories or paradigms profoundly influence the perception of the scientist. A paradigm is not simply the current popular theory. A paradigm includes a whole ‘worldview’. A paradigm shift is, according to Kuhn, a scientific revolution, which takes place when anomalies are discovered (acknowledged), which cannot be explained by the current paradigm. A kind of intellectual ‘battle’ starts between the supporters of a new paradigm and the supporters of the old paradigm. A scientific revolution is not only a question of logic; it seems to be also a question of discourse (and perhaps of power and politics).
Applications of Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a research method which is used in many diverse fields and which has sometimes been defined in different ways. The differences even start with the definition of what ‘discourse’ is.

DA can furthermore vary in what is focused upon. Some research is restricted to conclusions about discourse itself and focuses mainly on language. DA in social psychology (referring to Edwards and Potter (2000) and Potter and Wetherell, 2006) has a much broader focus because from their point of view all discourse is action and all action is discursive.

As already mentioned, the understanding and application of DA in the current thesis refer mainly to Potter and Wetherell (2006), and Edwards and Potter (2000). For them, discourse is an essential part of cultural and social life. Potter and Wetherell (2006) claim that there is no (traditional) method to analyze discourse, but they give quite detailed instructions for doing so, which were very helpful for the current research.

Potter and Wetherell (2006) and Edwards and Potter (2000) use the term ‘discourse’ in its most open sense. It includes all forms of spoken interaction and written text, so it also includes interviews like the ones I have done and transcribed, which were conducted on the subject of ‘ASL’. Learning to talk means learning cultural and social rules. Language provides the categories, concepts and words to understand self and other (Potter, 2004). Hence through analysing the language in the interviews, the interviewees and their concept of ASL can be more clearly understood.

DA is, in general, concerned with actions, practices and the use of particular discursive devices for ‘ideological’ purposes in the contemporary society. For Stubbs (1983), DA is concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence and with how the interrelationships between language and society work.

Edwards and Potter (2000) have called DA ‘Discursive Psychology’ because they want to emphasize that there is more than a methodological shift taking place here. For them, a drastic theoretical rethinking is implied when DA is applied. Further to this, they want to avoid some of the terminological confusion that makes DA a highly ambiguous category.

DA (Discursive Psychology) is concerned with how events and experiences are described and constructed. The organization and function of talk is in the focus of analysis. People construct their discourse in a way that it does communicative work; it is a part of their social practices.

Edwards and Potter (2000) have questioned whether discourse is a direct route to cognition or not. They thought, “the epistemologies of our everyday discourse are organized around adequacy and usefulness rather than validity and correctness” (p. 16). As a consequence, discourse itself is the topic of interest
and not the underlying cognitive processes, because cognition occurs in rhetoric. People construct different suitable versions of stories or events to criticize, blame, justify, excuse, and so forth. They do discourse to tackle the pragmatic business at hand.

Potter (2004) named three discourse-analytic questions: ‘What is the discourse doing?’ ‘How is the discourse constructed to make ‘something’ happen?’ and ‘What resources are available to perform this activity?’ I will apply these three questions to my interview data.

**Steps of Discourse Analysis**

Potter and Wetherell (2006) have described several steps or stages of DA. These stages are not strictly sequential, they are fluid and I moved between the different steps in the research process.

The first step is to develop the research question. The research question gives priority to the discourse itself. In my research, I looked at the interviews in their ‘own right’ and at how they are constructed. The focus of interest is on the function of the different constructions.

With DA, I wanted to explore how the described and constructed their ‘ASL text’. How did they organize their talk and what is the function of their constructions? What kind of communicative work did they perform? How did the interviewees talk about ASL? And what is gained by them by their constructions?

The aim is not to validate the ‘real’ attitudes or behaviour of the interviewees, neither to judge the accuracy (validity and correctness) of their descriptions of ASL. This is not what DA is good at. DA focuses on meaning in use – i.e. ‘ASL talk’ as purposeful (compare Wittgenstein, 1953).

I will explore what sorts of rhetorical or discursive ‘resources’ were used. ‘Resources’ can be words, categories, or broader organizations such as ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). There are a variety of terms to describe the sort of discursive resources that the interviewees shared, for example Billig (1991) called them ‘ideologies’ and Parker (1992) ‘discourses’.

Interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) are systems of terms which characterize and evaluate events. Different persons can use the same repertoire and one person can use different repertoires to do different sorts of ‘accounting’ (to give an account but also to account for) tasks. After finding out which resources are used, it can be explored what was the function of using these specific resources. What kind of resources were used together and how were different resources linked to one another?

With DA, the following questions emerged from the data: ‘How do the interviewees bridge different fields, e.g. authenticity/spirituality and leader-
ship/business?’ These are usually two different areas, two different worlds. And, ‘How do the interviewees transform terms from one area to another so easily?’ And finally, ‘How do they talk about Authenticity, Spirituality and Leadership?’

Two things interested me the most: the dilemmas and the stories. What kind of dilemmas can be found in the ‘talk’ and what kind of stories do the interviewees tell me? I have used only some extracts out of the interviews, which gave insight into these questions. Thus this data analysis was theory driven. I assumed that category mixing or interrelatedness was important and I assumed that how the interviewees made use of stories would be revealing. I wanted to theorize with DA the work that some exemplary stories do in ‘ASL talk’. Anyway a full theorization of stories would have been beyond the scope of the thesis. Furthermore, I was focused on what dilemmas were reported. While in GT I tried to immerse myself in the data; via DA I focused on a few specific aspects of the data.

The next four steps from Potter and Wetherell (2006) are about sample selection, collection of records and documents, interviews and transcription. I have already discussed these points in detail in terms of GT.

Stage number six is concerned with coding the data. The coding process is not the analysis itself; it is more, a pragmatic way to make the data manageable. I used the coding from the GT approach, so that I had a very comprehensive working through of the interviews. All relevant text passages were copied and pasted in new documents. Then in the analysis, I read and reread all the documents very carefully, and made many notes. I had already an elaborated access to the data through the GT application. I felt familiar with the interviews, but I also started to read them in a new way --- via the focus of DA, which was very interesting. I looked more at the discourse itself: at constructions, repertoires etc. Potter and Wetherell (2006, p. 175) say that:

“It is important to re-emphasize that there is no method to Discourse Analysis in the way we traditionally think of an experimental method or content analysis method.”

Even if there is no traditional method, Potter and Wetherell give quite detailed instructions, and also discuss in their stage eight, the question of validation. They have named four validation criteria: coherence, participants’ orientation, new problems and fruitfulness.

Here coherence means that the analytic claims should give coherence to some main passages; clarifying why they belong together and which functions they fulfil. Hereby it is useful to look for exceptions because they can deliver very helpful information.

The second criterion is the orientation of the participants. It is important what they describe as consistent or as different. For example, the spiritual and
the business repertoires, found in the interviews, seem to be incompatible. This is at least the impression one gains when reading mainstream business literature of the early and mid 20th century. The interviewees also recognize this incompatibility and the difficulties of integrating or to bridging the two regions. They often used stories as a method to overcome these difficulties (see chapter 3 and 4).

The third criterion refers to the emergence of new problems. The use of different repertoires serves certain functions. Using different repertoires together fulfils a task and solves problems, but also creates new problems and contradictions. Tensions need to be reduced: in the same way as the tension between dissonant information needs to be reduced (to be compared with ‘cognitive dissonance’ from Festinger, 1957). Analysing arising problems can increase the understanding of the use of rhetorical resources by the interviewees.

The last criterion of validity is fruitfulness. Potter and Wetherell (2006) emphasize this point as maybe being the most powerful for DA. The analysing should make sense of new kinds of discourses and explain different aspects and functions of discourse. Through DA a fresh view of ‘ASL talk’ will be attempted. More quality issues of DA are discussed in the following chapter.

Debates on Discourse Analysis

There are some problematic issues related to DA, such as: the relationship between discourse and mental states, the relationship between discourse and the world ‘out there’, and the question of reflexivity (Potter and Wetherell, 2006).

The relationship between what people say and what their internal states are has to be treated as suspicious. This is because there are many influences, which can alter the relationship. However, there are two different views in psychology; some psychologists ‘trust’ the descriptions people give, whereas other psychologists think that there are always conscious or unconscious delusions. DA takes another position, and discards the question of accurate or inaccurate description of mental states. In DA the debate about the relationship between discourse and mental states is irrelevant; i.e. the focus is on the discourse itself. In the present thesis, the focus is only on the discourse in the interviews (of ‘ASL talk’) and not on the mental states of the interviewees.

The second problematic relationship refers the world out there. Critics often claim that DA denies the existence of a material world, out there, or at least it seems that such ‘real world processes’ are not researched. DA, in return, asks if there is a ‘real world’, which is independent from human constructive activities. DA wants to analyse the constructing work: language constructs reality for a discourse analyst.

The last problematic issue is that of ‘reflexivity’. The point is that the researchers’ “accounts of how people’s language use is constructed are themselves
constructions” of the researcher (Potter and Wetherell, 2006, p. 182). In the sense of DA, it’s quite clear that the researcher also constructs versions of reality through his/her own language use. Hence I tried to be aware of this and also to remind the reader that this text or thesis is a multifaceted social achievement. The steps of research, analysing, interpretations and investigations are being made as explicit as possible.

**Quality of Discourse Analysis**

Antaki et al. (2003) have discussed what DA is *not* and named six analytical shortcomings:

1. under-analysis through summary;
2. under-analysis through taking sides;
3. under-analysis through over-quotation or through isolated quotation;
4. the circular identification of discourses and mental constructs;
5. false survey; and
6. analysis that consists in simply spotting features.

I have tried to be aware of these shortcomings in order to increase the quality of the research. Keeping these points in mind was very helpful in the analysis process. DA is an adequate method to look at the constructions of the interviewees’ discourses, but it is also often misunderstood and many people think that ‘anything goes’ (Antaki et al., 2003). I now want to describe shortly how I tried to apply these critical points in my work.

The first point addresses the fact that ‘something needs to be done’ with the data to call it analysis. It is not ‘anything’, it is not just a detailed transcription of the data; like an interview and it is not just a simple summary of what was said. Of course, parts of the interviews are quoted and/or summarized (as recommended by Potter and Wetherell, 2006 and Edwards and Potter, 2000), when the findings are presented, but they are taken as examples for what I want to illustrate. For example, when I explain how the interviewees bridge spirituality and business, I give examples and relate what I say to extracts from the interviews. Giving examples from the interviews allows the reader to follow my thoughts and analysis.

The second shortcoming is that it is not analysis if the researcher values what is said in his/her own moral stance. Such bias can also produce blind spots and flatten the data analysis. Hence I try to avoid this as far as is possible. Preferably, my own values shall not influence the data selection and analysing, so I have tried to be aware of my own stance and to keep it for the discussion later on.
The next critical point is that just simply giving quotes is not analysis itself. I give many quotes in the present work (as recommended by Potter and Wetherell, 2006), so that the reader can really get direct access to the interviews and build his/her own opinion, but the quotes on their own are, of course, not the analysis (see also the first shortcoming).

The fourth shortcoming warns of circularity: when socially shared issues (repertoires) are quoted in explanation for utterances the ‘analysis’ is in fact circular. In the present work, I show, for example, how specific repertoires are drawn upon to deal with the problem that authenticity, spirituality and leadership seem to come from two different and maybe incompatible fields. Analysing what kind of conversational work the interviewees do and not just repeating what they said is important. The research here doesn’t intend to explain inner mental processes, so the circularity of quoting inner thoughts or feelings as reasons why the speakers speak as they do can easily be avoided.

The fifth analytical danger is often referred to in qualitative research. It is the question of generalizing from one's data to the world at large. It’s not the intention of the thesis to generalize to any universal category. The practical use of the findings are much more important in DA; the thesis explores what the interviewees do in their discourses.

The last shortcoming of DA is about the attention to the details of utterances; this attention is required but does not qualify DA automatically as satisfactory. I don’t analyse all conversational, structural features in the interview data; I try to look more for what the interviewees do and how they do it. Because my topic is ‘ASL’ some moves of the interviewees in their discourse are selected (and are not selected) and analysed. A forward and backward motion from a more general to a more specific analysis of the interview data is involved here. I do not claim to have done a complete Discourse Analysis of the data. Antaki et al. (2003) describe these shortcomings with the intention to encourage DA research. They are also used here to increase the value of using DA for analysing the interviews.

Using two complementary methodologies in general gives more rich and multifaceted insight into the data and required an even more intense examination of the interviews. It allowed me to view the discourse from different angles, without having to push my research at the end into a totalizing static theory. This way of analysing left the end of the research (i.e. ‘the results’) open and created an explorative and fluid process, which values the interview data.

**Methodology in Conclusion**

My research has not been done in the empiric-deductive style of reasoning. I have had a basic sensitivizing concept --- ASL (Authentic Spiritual Leadership),
which I have researched as ‘ASL talk’. In interviews of persons who have identified themselves with ASL by being members of a network defined around ASL, what do the interviewees understand as ‘ASL’? That ‘understanding’ I have researched first via GT research techniques and thereafter I have made use of DA (Discourse Analysis) techniques to look in more detail at how the interviewees construct ‘ASL’ as a discourse.

My research is ‘post-positivist’ in the sense that I assume that there is an ASL discourse --- spoken by my interviewees --- that I as a researcher can (re-)present, analyze and interpret. Thus there is a researched/researcher differentiation here around ASL --- I assume that I can ascribe ‘ASL talk’ to my interviewees and that I can characterize with GT techniques key (content) aspects to that ‘ASL talk’ and with DA key ways that the interviewees construct, stabilize and maintain their ‘ASL talk’.

Finally, I as the researcher will in the concluding phase to this project compare the ‘ASL talk’ I have discovered to comparable discourse(s) discovered (reported) by other researchers. And I will reflect upon the significance I see in ‘ASL talk’ and the significance they have attributed at ‘ASL talk’ (or comparable phenomena).
Ch 3. Three Foci or Idea(l)s of ASL: Authenticity, Spirituality and Leadership

As explained in the previous chapter, the focus of analysis is on what the interviewees actually told me and how they managed to ‘(re-)unite’ authenticity, spirituality and leadership in their text. Following the already discussed methodological framework, the interview data is treated as discourse: as ‘ASL talk’. To reveal the content of the interviews, the data was investigated as inspired by Grounded Theory, through three questions:

1. When the people from the network talk about authenticity, what do they talk about...?
2. When the people from the network talk about spirituality, what do they talk about...?
3. When the people from the network talk about leadership, what do they talk about...?

Discovery of these three topics would seem, in terms of ‘ASL’, to be self-evident. After all, the network was defined by its members’ common interest in the combining of just these three themes. Nevertheless, how the interviewees defined the combination, is of crucial interest and hence what appeared as key elements in their understanding of the themes needs to be presented. The analysis is closely linked with exemplary quotes from the interviewees, to make it more transparent. Thus despite the evident tautology --- ‘ASL is about ASL’ --- the three terms did form key categories of my GT (Grounded Theory) examination of the data.

To examine the quotes further in respect to how they are constructed and stabilized, Discourse Analysis will be used later. The organization and function of ‘ASL talk’ is the focus here. In the network the members constructed their ‘ASL talk’ in ways that did communicative work, which I examine with DA. Let us now turn to the three themes and to their functions in ‘ASL talk’.
Authentic Spiritual Leadership

Authenticity

The first theme is ‘authenticity’. For the interviewees authenticity is defined by:

1. Realizing authentic ethical Self;
2. Being authentic-Being on the path;
3. Embodiment of altruistic qualities

These three key elements appear in different ways in the interviews and fulfil diverse purposes, which shall now be discussed in detail.

Realizing the authentic ethical Self (beyond words)
The interviewees define authenticity as discovering and understanding one’s self: i.e. the authentic self or the true nature of human ‘being’. For one interviewee (A1), it is like an inner fire. Authenticity implies reaching an authentic core or an authentic self; this means for some interviewees, to reach a “soul-level” (A2) or touching a universal force, or contact with the ultimate forces of one’s own being. Some emphasized the feeling of connectivity - the connection to others or to a greater collectivity/connectivity (Field or Society). One (C1) spoke of a greater body of resonance or zeitgeist --- i.e. the connectivity to the essential self, to the actual, to one’s own nature (Wesenskern), or to one’s own potential (C2). Authenticity helps one to gain access to the deeper potential within and let one’s potential emerge. It allows one to realize deeper realms of being. The interviewees have different definitions of the “core thing” or of ‘the self’, but whatever this core or the authentic self is, it is always related to true convictions and personal conscience. Supposedly, if you follow your core, you will be on the right path. All the interviewees see their authentic self or core as something positive and as an ethical force, and also as the source of their leadership.

In an extract, interviewee (A1) points out how important it is to realize your authentic self because it then determines the direction of your life. For this interviewee, the realization of the authentic self is a spiritual issue and the precondition for acting authentically. For him, it is so powerful that you can’t stop it --- like a big fire. He uses the term ‘fire’, here, as a metaphor for the authentic self. It seems to be an overwhelming force, which profoundly influences his career. It enabled him to give everything up and to start a totally new career. He appears to have been quite powerless against this movement, but he tries to frame it in a positive sense. Giving up everything to an uncontrollable outer force, which you can’t stop, is for many people frightening, and the interviewee brings in positive effects and a spiritual dimension to account for this. He explains that it is the
reason why he does not feel stress. The inner fire must be discovered. He connects this insight with spirituality, referring to his spiritual teacher, Swami Veda. To be more concrete, he adds a date; and he also seems to expect the interviewer to remember what Swami Veda said (‘You know’).

A1
‘That’s why I don’t have stress. I try to understand the direction and keep moving into this direction. Everybody and everything, every money to move into this direction. So ‘Creative Learning’ comes from this fire. Going to the [name of institution the interviewee works for] comes from that fire. I don’t care about giving up everything here in [name of the country the interviewee left for his new job] and going there. You can’t stop if the mission that has become the realization has become the driving force. What Swami Veda said the 9th of September, you know: Someday, sometime that fire must be discovered. Then you start understanding and acting authentically.’

The ‘You know’ involves the interviewer as in ‘We both know it’; protecting from potential disagreement. His demonstrates his respect for Swami Veda and supports his spiritual view that ‘letting go’ is very valuable (see also A8, to come), and is not frightening. Not being attached to something is important in the Himalayan Tradition (Swami Veda). In this sense, the interviewee his spiritual development and reduces the possibility of questions about what happened to his old company/organization, or how did others respond, or what were the negative effects of his ‘change’. With the terms ‘someday’ and ‘sometime’ he creates room for possibilities. ‘Sooner or later’ the fire ‘must’ occur; which leaves no choice. The authentic self must be discovered. Otherwise, one will never understand and never act authentically. He switches from ‘I’ to ‘you’ in the extract --- so what he says is not only true from him, but for everybody.

In another extract (A2) the same interviewee uses the word ‘soul’ to talk about the authentic self.

A2
‘I just use the word ‘soul’. I think there is a very joyful level. When you arrive on that level, the joy is so true and it’s firing, giving you a lot of energy at this level. I don’t know whether you would say it is, you are approaching a level where you see your Self or you touch that soul and that’s why you become so convinced, that is it, we should build a house now to give the flower a place. And everybody thinks that, oh he was planning the house. I was not planning the house. I just build that house to give that flower a place. Of course, you would say that because the other way around you don’t understand. But you serve the objectives in that sense.
So for me that is the deepest level to find a place. I think for me I not found it yet, maybe I don’t know the words. I have the feeling that I touched a part of my soul, not of my soul, but a universal force and that gives you an excellent, a quiet joy. Not a joy like in a party, celebrating a nice success or somebody’s birthday. But a joy that feels good and gives you the energy to do something meaningful.’
He emphasizes the joy and energy felt when you realize the authentic self. Similar to the extract before, he explains positive effects of authenticity. It seems that this should motivate others to ‘touch’ their authentic self. It also creates a more emotional connection to the recipient. He offers a ‘private’ insight into his personal feelings. Personal feelings are not easy to question or to challenge; he explains his feelings in more detail to prevent misunderstanding. His joy is not superficial, such as at a party; his joy goes deep and mobilizes the energy needed to do something meaningful. To explain what it means to do something meaningful, he uses metaphors with narratives of planning, nurturing and housing. He also does this in the ‘flower story’, which is discussed in detail later on.

In general, metaphors are very important in ‘ASL talk’. As in speech about spiritual traditions, metaphors and stories are very important. The listener is responsible for the interpretation and it is expected that the interpretations change during one’s spiritual development.

Much more problematic for the interviewee seems to be his construction of the notion of ‘soul’, which he uses to talk about the authentic self. He searches for words here. The description is obviously difficult for him. That he expresses his search for words leaves room for correction and offers a possibility for different interpretations. The interviewer can respond to this rhetorical move by providing ‘the right words’, or by staying mute and refraining from filling in the meaning. Either way, the possibility of the speaker being held accountable is minimised.

This also reminds one of the spiritual approach, wherein it is ‘common knowledge’ that spiritual experiences cannot be verbalised. He also makes use of the unchallengeable level of feeling. His following comments show backtracking and self-correction, most notably when he tries to substitute ‘universal force’ for ‘soul’. Especially in western societies, the concept of a ‘soul’ has a rich theological and philosophical history. The idea of a ‘universal force’, on the other hand, is more present in Eastern philosophies. Different religious and spiritual traditions seem to hold diverse views about the ‘authentic self’. Some traditions talk about the ‘soul’, others about the ‘Non-Self’ or some sort of ‘universal consciousness’.

The interviewees seem to often to use just different expressions for the same thing; and they often emphasize that words and concepts ‘different associations’, and that you can easily ‘get caught with words’. They worry about ‘slips in words’ and say that they don’t have ‘really good words’ to depict things. And that they need ‘maybe to say it in other words’. All these phrases have the function of minimising accountability, and of preventing one from being judged for the usage of specific words. This attitude to words also ‘proves’ in a way their spiritual understanding and awareness of the problem of verbalisation. They
want to demonstrate that they are very cautious with words and concepts. This also maybe intended to raise awareness in the recipient.

The interviewees describe a difference between theory/words and practice (Heider, 1997). They think that the nature of events, as well as spiritual experiences and insights, cannot be captured in words and that ASL is concerned with the (indescribable) source of leadership.

For instance, the interviewees do not show interest in ongoing (academic) discussions about Authentic Leadership or Spiritual Leadership. They don’t broach the issue of rigorous definition. They are concerned about application, development and communication. They see ASL from a very practical viewpoint. They seem to base their concepts mostly in spiritual traditions, and then to look for language, which is understandable and acceptable in a business world. In this sense, they use ‘ASL talk’ as a bridge, i.e. as a way to communicate and to be eclectic. They explicitly emphasize that practice has priority over theory: theories are intellectual games, helpful but not sufficient. As Heider (1997, p. 129) pointed out:

“People who see the world in terms of theories often have a very intricate view of what is happening. Clarity is difficult for them.”

Real insight and wisdom supposedly only arises on an experimental level. For example in Taoism (Lao-tse, 1999; Lao Tzu, 1997), its said that ‘the Tao can’t be told’. Deep tranquillity is needed to experience it, and for that, no desire is required. The Tao, as the deepest, indefinable reality and truth is comparable with the Indian Brahman and the Buddhist dharmakaya. This ‘last truth’ is not speakable and cannot be realized just with the intellect. It is a kind of awareness one can achieve through meditation.

C1

Question: When do you feel authentic?

Answer: ‘If you be authentic or not, is coherent to how far you can be absolute present and how far you can produce a connectivity to a greater field. So are you really connected to this field or are you just dreaming about. One technique is of course meditation. There you can experience a certain form of authenticity.’

Authenticity is a not speakable/verbal experience of the connection with God. Personal experiences are crucial here. In line with that, for the interviewees authenticity is a form of practical, spiritual development, and not theoretical. Asking the interviewees to talk about something that ‘can’t be told’, apparently leads to some difficulties in discursive explanations. Interestingly, the way they handle this is similar to the spiritual traditions --- i.e. via metaphors, stories, open questions etc. Similarly, spiritual and religious traditions often emphasize congruence with a greater and higher Self, which contains the innermost core of
the person and the whole cosmos, at the same time. This corresponds to ‘Atman’ in Hinduism, to the ‘divine spark in ourselves’ from Meister Eckhart, and to the Buddha-nature. Hence if an interviewee talks about the ‘soul’ or a ‘universal force’, it is a personal experience which is meant that can be illustrated and pictured through words, but not captured through words. It is important to realize that the authentic self entails ‘connectivity’. The authentic self is not what is often called the ‘ego’. In fact, one needs to reduce his/her ego to realize the authentic self.

The interviewees describe authenticity as being related to the recognition of unconscious drives, thoughts etc., but they emphasize the development of consciousness from a spiritual point of view. Human nature is not aggressive or full of conflicts; these things are on the surface, and hinder one from realizing one’s own self and hidden potential. Some interviewees emphasize that it is important that (Western) Psychology, Sociology or Biology don’t justify aggression and destructive emotions as normal or natural in a way which makes further improvement or development unnecessary. There is always an ethical component or a moral philosophical background.

For the interviewees, awareness is crucial. The concept of awareness that the interviewees use, comes from a spiritual repertoire and is related to meditation, being in the ‘here and now’ and to ‘mindfulness’. In the discourse of the interviewees, the person is free and self-determining. Authenticity requires a certain degree of freedom, the propensity for self-reflection, and the belief in a ‘true’ self. The true self can make decisions about its roles and how the roles are going to be performed. It also is able to reflect on behaviour. The person is not just a victim; he or she is responsible and capable of developing.

In extract C2 the interviewee gives examples of ecology and peace movements, which illustrate the interest in humanity at large.

C2
‘In this sense I would say that authentic as a part of Authentic Leadership is based on who I really am. It’s a certain genuineness, no disguise, directness, but not in the sense of spontaneity, in the sense of connectivity to the essential Self, to the actual, to the own nature or to the own potential. This is one root in my opinion; the other root of authenticity is related to community. That means that it must become public or social, or must pick-up the presence of something that is present in the society at this current historic moment. To the individual part must a connection to a greater collectivity, you can call it Collective or Field or Society be added. A greater resonance body and maybe a zeitgeist. Zeitgeist in the sense of what is present in the people at this current historic moment. For me this was the Ecology movement, the environmental-, the Anti-AKW [note by the author: Anti-nuclear movement] movement, the peace movement. That was
authentic. My own personal Self was evoked because I was part of a collective resource, of a common, collective field that manifested itself at a certain historic situation.’

Other interviewees give many examples of their interest in the ‘whole world’. In extract (A2) the interviewee explains that realizing the authentic self ‘gives you the energy to do something meaningful’. This seems to be crucial in relation to ‘ASL talk’. For all the interviewees, authenticity leads to an ethical life, similar to religious and spiritual traditions, which emphasize a moral and ethical way of life. One tradition tells us, ‘Love thy neighbour’; another says, Salaam Walekum - "May peace be with you"; another says, Bhavatu sabba mangalam or Sarve bhavantu sukhinah - "May all beings be happy." They all call for peace and tolerance. Here, the interviewees find a profound foundation for their stance. What is central in ‘ASL talk’ is ‘selfless service to others’ and ‘spiritual/personal growth’.

The ethical life in ‘ASL talk’ is based on ethical values. The interviewees describe that these values come from themselves, referring to their soul level or to an inner judgement.

A3
‘So, I think there must be something that touches me very deep. I call it the soul level, the level of the soul. It goes deep. You can’t deny it. You can’t… I mean in the past I would say I would be blind, I wouldn’t even know that it touched me whatever, I just do it because it’s good, because it’s good to be political left. I was reading the books of Marx and so on. That was so external. It’s good to have another… it was deep in me but I couldn’t see the deepness. It’s good because it’s good, because you are left.’

A4
‘It’s at the border if it’s ethical or not. And then the third level is the truth in oneself. Can I live with it, not satisfied, taught, something I wanted to do, something I did, nobody knows, but can I live with it. I think for me that’s the bottom line of authenticity. If I do something and it doesn’t come back as a thought of proud then I think I done good. If I done something bad and it keeps bothering you like you shouldn’t have acted like that. So for me that judgement, that inner judgement is the criteria for me whether I be authentic or not. And I see the line when I’m too much manipulating it will disturb it. Sooner or later I will try to correct it.’

The ethics the subjects seem to claim are based in themselves; they are not copied. The interviewees emphasize that their ethics come naturally through spiritual practices, like meditation or purification (e.g. E1).

E1
*Question: How would you describe [ethics]?*
*Answer: ’Yes. How can I describe it [ethics]? The word I find is purification. It is in the deepest soul that purification… it is not possible to do handlings of speaking or speaking words of connected to people on a way when not based on purification... Purification is*
a way of living where you reach out to the soul contact in people, or in animals - you find worlds in nature.’

The most important level is the ‘truth in oneself’ (A4), which is interrelated to authenticity. The ultimate criteria seems to be ‘Can I live with it’ (A4). This question only makes ethical sense if there is (the assumption of) an ethical self.

‘ASL talk’ does not limit itself to a certain religious or philosophical tradition. The interviewees draw freely from different sources, but at the same time, they try to formulate their position in terms of ‘universal truths’ and ethical authenticity. The authentic self in ‘ASL talk’ is an ethical (non-)Self, i.e. it is divine and connected to life itself, and it is a positive force for the benefit of all.

**Being authentic – being freely on a ‘guided’ path**

Being authentic is explained by the interviewees as being a ‘real’ human being, and as being your ‘real’ self. This requires being as honest as possible to yourself, i.e. being true to yourself. It is a realization of true authentic responsibility. It means living according to principles and values. You are to find the truth in yourself and develop an inner judgement referring to in the question: “Can I live with it?” (A4). One interviewee understands this as the main criterion for authenticity. Behaviour (and leadership) has to be responsible to your inner judgement.

Being authentic implies being consistent and being the same person in all circumstances as well as being in harmony with who you are. One interviewee describes authenticity, referring to Taoism, as harmony between your spirit, your mind, and your body (F1).

F1

‘So for us it is harmony. For Taoism, the basic principle for me, for my understanding is just harmony - Harmony and balance. So Taoism is balance between Ying and Yang. Everything is harmony, if you are in balance then you are authentic. Harmony is between your spirit, your mind and your body. If you find a balance between your spirit, your mind and your body, then you are a real person and you know what you should do, how you should behave and - everything is guided.’

These extracts (A1) (F1) give an idea of what it means to be ‘guided’. Being authentic is seemingly connected to following a ‘guided path’. The interviewee first talks about ‘for us’ and then replaces it with ‘for Taoism’. It’s unclear whom he means by ‘us’ – is it a certain group, the network, Asian people? ‘Us’ implies that there are more people believing in the same idea. Then he uses Taoism as a reference. To make it more personal and possibly to avoid accounta-
bility, he emphasizes that it is *his understanding*. But the next sentence starts with ‘so Taoism is’, and so on.

Relating himself to Taoism helps him to base his concept of harmony and guidance. The Tao is the (eternal) way and order of nature, of things, and of the universe. The questions for a spiritual development and for authenticity are: ‘How we can integrate with the Law of Nature?’ ‘How can we know what we should do and experience that everything is guided’? In extract F1 the interviewee explains that this happens ‘If you find a balance between your spirit, your mind and your body’. In Taoism, a state of natural silence is sought --- a state of quiescence in which everything returns back to its original state. The interviewee described a way of “non-action” (called Wuwei or Wu-Wei), where one brings one’s own will into harmony with the will of nature by understanding the law and order or the way nature ‘works’. Bringing things into harmony as the interviewee puts it in extract F1 (e.g. Yin and Yang) overcomes one’s own arrogance (e.g. F10 later on) and is very essential for authentic development. Taoism provides a philosophical background here, which gives a different value to ‘being on a guided path’. The way the interviewee talks about that ‘everything is guided’, that you then know ‘what you should do’, and ‘how you should behave’, emphasizes religious belief and not personal freedom. The interviewee (F4) also emphasizes ‘that God uses him’, that he is like a ‘machine’, or like a ‘vehicle’. In, for example an existentialistic view, this could be interpreted as being dominated by external forces.

Existentialism discussed authenticity with respect to freedom. The experience of freedom here is necessary for the state of authenticity. The interviewees apparently know aspects of these philosophical stances and freedom and responsibility is present in the interviews and is constructed as relevant for authentic spiritual leadership. Even if the interviewees often express that everything is guided, they emphasize at the same time, that a leader is free to make his/her own decisions. They say that the leader can decide to act or not to act in a sustainable and responsible manner. Every new situation offers a person the freedom to make a decision and the decision affects ‘all mankind’. This construction of freedom means that there is great responsibility, but it also means that every leader at every time is able to make the choice of whether or not to be an authentic spiritual leader. This framing serves ‘ASL talk’ in its inspirational function: everybody at every time can freely start to walk on the (guided) path. In Sartre’s language, we are condemned to this freedom, and also the interviewees say that they are ‘condemned’ to play this role in life; i.e. to follow their mission and they express the view that everyone is the architect of his/her own life. Extract F4 and F5 show, for example, besides a kind of powerlessness or lack of personal freedom, also a kind of power. The interviewee is one with God and people listen to him.
Authenticity requires courage to handle uncertainty and to take responsibility for the consequences of one’s own choices. This takes one back to the formulated requirements a leader needs: s/he has to handle uncertainty, fast changing environments and insecurity of the markets and s/he has to take responsibility for the outcomes of his/her decisions.

The interviewees construct an authentic life as a high ideal and they describe themselves as on a path to being authentic. One interviewee describes authenticity in different layers. Learning and practising authenticity removes surfaces layer by layer; gradually you know who you are and how you should behave as a person and as a leader (e.g. F2). The way the interviewee frames it is that he says it’s an ‘easy’ path; it is all inside and everything is already there (F2, F3). You ‘just’ have to discover it. He depicts a picture of an onion where layer by layer gets peeled off. First he talks about his case, but to keep it limited to himself wouldn’t make a lot of sense in relation to ‘ASL talk’, which wants to address others, hence he continues with using ‘you’ instead. The rest of the extract stays in general terms (every time, something, somebody). Also the other interviewees often use very general terms. On the one hand this serves ‘ASL talk’ as very open concepts or ideas ‘speak to everybody’, but on the other hand, this form of address can be criticised as empty and meaningless.

The interviewee in F2 ends with the ambiguous words ‘gradually you’ll know…’. This could be interpreted that the interviewee graciously is refusing to answer further questions on this topic, but it also offers and emphasizes the perspective that nobody needs to expect that authenticity is developed all at once. It is a gradually development process – a path. But the way the interviewee puts it here implies also if you follow the path you will be successful, you be bound to be successful. This definiteness supports the motivational function of ‘ASL talk’. The positive effects are often formulated by the interviewees like a promise or guarantee. One only needs to make the ‘right’ efforts, follow the ‘right’ path or practice in the ‘right’ way. This argumentation structure is known from spiritual traditions. These formulations are also used in cults and they can lead to exclusion and suppression of those who not follow the ‘right’ path.

F2
‘For my case, I would say it’s all there. You have to discover it. It is in body with you, when you are a kid; it’s with you all the time. Every time you make a mistake, every time somebody teaches you something, it just removes the cover layer by layer. And gradually you’ll know who you are, you’ll know you are awake, you’ll know how you should behave as a person, as a leader.’

F3
‘You have to think with your heart. It’s all there.’
F4
‘Then I seriously know that’s me, just as a machine, as a vehicle. God uses my hand, my mind, my body to do something. Me and him are one.’

F5
‘He listens to me. Why he listens to me? Because he is not listening to my voice, he listens to a voice of God.’

H1
‘What I find enjoyable is peace of mind, knowing that the decision, which you make, the action that you take, is well based and is coming from pure thinking and not from thinking which is anyway affected by impurities.’

The interviewees describe different experiences of authenticity. They all report having had experiences where they felt more authentic, where they felt more in contact with their true self or with the final forces of their own being. They perceive it as a kind of security, an insight, where they surely know that there is an inner life. Such insights are not easy to question or to ‘shake’. The interviewees say that the experience of authenticity feels like, “Wow, this is what I was searching for!” Some interviewees say it feels like ‘all doubts get quelled at that moment’. These general descriptions help again to address ‘everybody’, because who doesn’t want to find what s/he was searching for and have all doubts quelled. It is so broad, nearly universal, that no uncertainties or suspicions arise. Even if one feels doubt; ‘ASL talk’ promises that it will get quelled.

Other positive results of being ‘authentic’ named by the interviewees: the experience of a growth of consciousness, knowing that there are certain grounds beyond the mind, being aware of the moment and being totally present (C1), feeling joy (A2, H3), calming down, being on the right path, and being more in harmony (F1) and closer to the heart (F3). Some describe the feeling that their thinking has become clearer and their mind has become more peaceful and pure (H3).

In extract F3 the interviewee talks about thinking with your heart. Such unusual constructions are always good to catch attention (compare also e.g. H3). Thinking is usually connected to brain functions and the heart is understood to be a muscular organ that pumps blood throughout the body. Of course, the heart is often associated with emotions, especially love and compassion. These associations give sense to ‘thinking with your heart’, as including love and compassion into your thoughts and as using these emotions as motivation for your actions or judgements. What one associates with the heart can be different, but the direction is clear. This corresponds with ‘ASL talk’, in general, which leaves plenty of room for interpretations, but does have a sort of direction.

These are just a few examples of talk about ‘authenticity’. To make ‘ASL talk’ appealing, the interviewees formulate diverse positive descriptors. They
mention many socially desirable effects, which probably ‘everybody’ would like to achieve.

In extract A5, the interviewee gives a very detailed explanation of his ‘path’ or development. He illustrates here what ‘being authentic’ means to him, and how it has changed him and (very important for ‘ASL talk’) how it benefits him and his work ‘everywhere’. At the beginning of the extract, we are told that it’s a long path (lasts ‘5 to 6 years’) and that he stands only at the beginning (‘discovered a little bit’). This claims a kind of humbleness and creates an alliance with the listener (he is not so different from me). First he describes how he was and that he rapidly lost interest, etcetera. This gives him a good opportunity to say next what he has now learned. He continues to jump back to the past, to show his weaknesses and to compare them with his strengths now. Through these contrasting moves, he clearly gives value and weight to the qualities of communication he has gained, such as: being present, calmness, opening up, patience, reflection, awareness, respect (‘even with the taxi driver’ – even if the word ‘even’ is in this relation rather disrespectful). He emphasizes that ‘it’s so nice not to have an agenda like why am I here’ – something very unusual in the business world. To explain how advantageous it is, he uses the picture of ‘throwing gifts and balls’. Later on he corrects that; the ‘only agenda is: ‘I want to know why’. He apparently seeks to repair possible damage to his status as an effective businessman. Maybe because he recognizes that having no agenda, not even knowing why, is perceived as too abnormal in business context.

The interviewee brings further spirituality in (Swami Veda, God) and reflects, then, on the concept of coincidence. He aligns himself in a way with ‘sceptics’ and explains that he used to understand coincidence as a mathematical process (no magic). It’s interesting that ‘coincidence’ can, for example, be translated into German with very different meanings: ‘Fügung’ – destiny, fate; or as ‘Zufall’ – chance, randomness. These different implications are actually even opposites. Anyway the interviewee makes clear in which direction he wants to use it. He wants to confirm his general (‘somewhere at sometime at someplace’) appreciation of communication, and give spiritual value to it as well. At the end, he mentions all the positive effects, but he also explains that he is not going ‘everywhere’. He tries to bring his account to a more realistic or realisable level, so that others also could follow it. He also says that his ability has grown, which implies a development seemingly open for everybody.

This extract illustrates the difficulty of reconciling the positions of spirituality and of business. The two exist in different registers. Proceeding too far down the road of either damages the other, requiring continuous significant repair work. The dilemma between spirituality and business will be discussed in more detail in chapter later.
A5

Question: What do you do in communication with other people to create that ‘soul’ in a meeting? Do you do anything?

Answer: ‘Well, let’s say more recently last 5,6 years I’m trying to, like I said before, because of all these things I discovered a little bit of the power of looking at somebody in a holistic way. Whatever this, for me at this level of my development, means. Because in the past I was, if I talked to you and in the first 5 minutes I would hear things that wouldn’t fit in my plans I would lose complete interest and even don’t have the desire to meet you again. The change I’m going through is that I have now learned in communication just to be there and to open up. I learned in time that there is a reason why this communication must take place, whether you like it or not. In the past I had a very arrogant attitude of saying, ‘who was this person, what was, oh I don’t know, I don’t have time, it’s unimportant, I don’t want to do this.’ I think, very irritating for some people, and, also later on, very shameful for myself. I discovered for me communication with anybody, even with the taxi driver, even in a meeting when somebody invites me and says, we invited you for this meeting, can you please make time. Now I look from a point of view and that is automatic, not like switching something over like a bottom or whatever, I don’t know why they invited me, but I have to be there. So you go there and you sit down without any agenda, it’s so nice not to have an agenda like why am I here. They have asked a question and you just go there and that is why we now give you an open thing like, it’s like people are throwing gifts and balls and is there anything that is a message that I should take away home. And that has completely changed my way of meeting, communicating, meeting new people. In the past, when Swami Veda or somebody calls and says, that friend of mine would you like to send him an email, communicate, I said, oh my God, I have a lot to do, why devoting my attention to something else. Now I see there must be reason why. I don’t need to know all the reasons but just do it and see what happens without an agenda. The only agenda is: I want to know why. I’m excited in the Indian counter; I was a guy who never believed the concept of coincidence for a spiritual reason, for me coincidence was a mathematical process, when it happens, it happens, no magic, nothing. Today, for me every single communication with human beings or being somewhere at sometime at someplace, it’s like a gift and I think, ‘I feel great having that attitude…’

(…)

And that appreciation in communication has become a gift in my life now, in my work, in my profession, everywhere. So I try to go back to my habit, I don’t say automatically if somebody calls, can you come now, of course. It’s not to jump and go to everywhere, but I’m very conscious, you see that calmness, that reflection ability now, that discrimination ability now to listen to that voice and say, ‘yes I have to be, here maybe I’m going to miss something, but I can’t make it now, there, I will go there what ever happens, I must be there.’ And that is also an ability that has grown and that changed the whole way of communication because you think of the spiritual value of why am I there, why have they invited me…’

As shown, the interviewees describe authenticity as being on a guided path that is very fruitful for them and others. ‘ASL talk’ tries to be socially acceptable and desirable. Not only the outcomes of authenticity are socially desirable, also the attributes and qualities that the interviewees relate to authenticity are broadly accepted and desired.
**Embodyment of altruistic qualities**

The interviewees name attributes and qualities of authenticity such as: genuineness, directness, openness, honesty, integrity, humility, curiosity, and humbleness (e.g. D1). An important point is altruism, which means here acting (leading) without seeking personal success. One interviewee says that the only goal is benevolence and some interviewees emphasize selfless service and selfless love (e.g. D2, D3). Furthermore, they refer to authenticity as compassion for others, love for others, which means always caring and serving others. It is important for them to be never selfish and egotistic, to respect others and listen to them. (see chapter ‘Selflessness’)

D1
‘My whole life has been dedicated to improving myself, eternally from the very beginning, and to me being humble is very important.’

D2
*Question: So would you say there are principles for being authentic?*
*Answer: ‘Altruism! That is the only one. Altruism!’*

*Question: That is the only principle?*
*Answer: ‘Actions without seeking fruits! Selfless service! Selfless love!’*

D3
*Question: Regarding this thought of authenticity what is your thought, your definition on authenticity?*
*Answer: ‘To be an authentic person one has to be true to oneself without self interest, without seeking personal success. His only goal is benevolence. And once he has that it is of no matter what he believes in, as long as he is bringing benefit. When Buddha was sending out his first rank of monks, he said: “Wander, travel, my monks, for the benefit of the many, for the comfort of the many.” As long as the person is working for the benefit and the comfort of the many - and his own personal ego, his own personal success comes last - then he is authentic. So the person whose primary motive is benefit of the many and comfort of the many, not his personal success, not his personal recognition, then he is authentic. He may be working in any area; he may be trying to save the tradition of witchcraft, of flute making, or making clay pots, or saving a music- or a dance form, as long as it is not Me but *Them*, then he’s authentic. And if his acts bring benefit to others, *without* destroying somebody else’s benefit. That’s where Hitler has failed. Hitler was strongly moved because after the First World War Germany had lost its colonies, Germany’s economic position. People were carrying card loads of money to buy a load of bread and he pulled Germany out of that. But in the process he destroyed others, so that will be one thing, *compassion* for the others.’

In extract D3 the interviewee discusses the embodiment of altruistic qualities in detail. He repeats many times that it is important that authenticity requires thinking and acting for the benefit of others. He not only repeats this, he also places it in different contexts and uses different terms to describe it. He uses Buddha as
his reference to support that ‘authenticity’ always needs to be ‘for the benefit of the many’. The Buddhist philosophy is part of most of the interviewees backgrounds and it is a shared resource.

The authentic experience of the Self is, in an absolute sense, an experience of an open space of consciousness, an open space of awareness where accordingly no individual, constant, concrete or separated Self can be found. The concept of an individual, constant, and separated Self leads to suffering in the Buddhist understanding. The interviewees also describe such an understanding of the Self as an illusion and as a source of many actual problems on a personal and even on a global level. Separation (of the one Self from the other) leads to egocentrism and hence to irresponsibility, encouraging unethical and unsustainable behaviour (leadership).

In the interviewees’ texts, there are often two dimensions: an absolute ultimate and a relative dimension of everything (the world, the mind and the consciousness). In a more relative sense, the authentic experience of the Non-Self implies the understanding of interconnectedness with all phenomena. At this relative dimension, the regularities of cause and effect and of impermanence are active. The interviewees say that for people to live out their fullest potential, they need an insight into the nature of existence. A person is nothing except patterns of thoughts, habits, emotions and body, of none of which can contain the Self. These insights lead to liberation and release of all suffering (Enlightenment-Nibbāna); and to right mindfulness (samma-sati), ethical behaviour, comprehension of connectivity, compassion and harmony in our daily lives. These realizations also naturally help us to develop benevolence.

The reference to the Buddha allows the interviewee to activate a whole philosophy to support his arguments. Possible fears and doubts against selflessness and acting for the benefit of others are grounded in the Buddhist philosophy. But this only works for ‘ASL talk’ if the recipient is knowledgeable of this background. Just in case the (western) recipient doesn’t know the references, the interviewee constructs a counterexample of benevolence. He uses Hitler as an extreme example of the destruction of the benefit of others. Hitler is widely known in western societies for his cruelties. The interviewee starts by saying that ‘Hitler was strongly moved because after the First World War Germany had lost its colonies, the base to Germany’s economic position. People were carrying car loads of money to buy a load of bread, and he pulled Germany out of that’. This positive construction is shocking and unusual. This interviewee comes from Asia, where the perception of Hitler is often different from that in the West. Also the interviewer is German, so that he maybe responding to her.

Acting in a true and authentic way requires knowing ‘who you are’ and acting on one’s insights. One behaves consciously and is aware of the consequences of
one’s actions. The consequences are to be judged by questioning: ‘How does my behaviour or attitude benefit or hurt an individual, the humanity at large, or the environment?’ (e.g. G1) The interviewee in G1 explicitly includes, besides behaviour and action, attitudes. He seems to worry that this level is often forgotten. Being good is not only something you perform, it is an inner quality. Spiritual traditions often emphasize that intention or what is on your mind is important. In extract G1 the interviewee limits the perspective to humankind, other interviewees include all beings and the environment. Usually they try to emphasize that one needs to see the big picture (G2 later on). For example, all beings are included. All beings are equal. A sign of development is if one is more and more compassionate and extends the scope. The interviewees are probably aware of this and consequently they often try to include the whole world in their perspective. They even include, sometimes, the divine or spiritual world. To let it not become too general, they give from time to time concrete examples (e.g. D3, A5). But they avoid discussing the difficult topic of what is really beneficial, how one knows that s/he benefits ‘a person or the humanity at large’. Indeed this is a complex question. The interviewees handle it similar to their way of speaking about spiritual traditions. They set some basic ethical values and leave the rest open.

For ‘ASL talk’, just sitting around and meditating is not the answer. ASL needs activity: helping to support others, and leading in an authentic way.

G1
‘Yes. I would always put ‘authentic’ to a last test in terms of: How does it benefit the individual and the humanity at large? How does it hurt a person or the humanity at large? That’s what I would use as a parameter to define authenticity - be it in behaviour, be it in actions or be it in attitude.’

If one lives in an authentic way, one is ‘not just drifting in the stream of life’ (e.g. I1). On the first view, this seems to be in opposition to extract F1. In Taoism one does integrate into the law of nature, i.e. into the ‘stream of life’. On a second view, the term ‘drifting’ makes the difference. ‘Drifting’ is passive and has the connotation of a loss of orientation (having no vision, no goal). This association is even strengthened through the additional use of the word ‘just’. Such passivity is not ASL. Integration into the law of nature requires awareness, understanding, and bringing things into harmony. In ‘ASL talk’ we have to find a vision, a goal or a mission to life. But in the Taoist writings Deng Ming-Dao (Ming-Dao, 1993) advocates that we all are born with a destiny and that we have to fulfill our destiny.

I1
‘Yes, with the awareness of: "what I’m doing here and now" So not just drifting in the stream of life, but there … having a vision, a goal in life.’

**Spirituality**

Spirituality is the second central concept. The interviewees supposedly bridge spirituality and leadership, but what is their understanding of spirituality?

The interviewees describe spirituality as:

1. A practical, non-sectarian and liberating Philosophy
2. A social and mindful Practice
3. A beneficial, never-ending Journey

How the interviewees construct these aspects of spirituality and what their functions in relation to ‘ASL talk’ is discussed next.

**A practical, non-sectarian and liberating Philosophy**

All the interviewees have a very practical understanding of spirituality. Spirituality is for them a very practical philosophy. Spiritual development and acting in the world have to come together (e.g. B1, C3, I2). In extract B1, the interviewee talks about his spiritual teacher Swami Rama (Himalayan Tradition) and how he advised him to take the ‘middle road first’. By citing him, he gives a spiritual validation for combining spirituality and the other aspects of life (private and professional). Like the other interviewees, he emphasizes through his framing that one doesn’t need to become a monk. He ends the extract with ‘balance the spiritual’. This is apparently easy to say, but hard to manage, even at a discursive level.

*B1*

‘He said, “I don’t want you to sit here and start worrying about your money and your practice and your wife and your children.” He said, “Take the middle road first – balance the spiritual”.

Another interviewee describes very enthusiastic getting out of the ‘cheese cover’ and fully diving into the world (C4). These metaphors have an inspiring effect. Nobody wants to be a little mouse kept under a cheese cover, and ‘diving’ into
the world, sounds quite promising and exciting. As the interviewee explains: ‘it stands in contrast to a lot of classical meditative teachings’, which get the association here of being contemplative, and keeping you away from the world. He uses this contrast to bring in and include people who believe that meditation and spirituality are not something practical. But in extract C3, the interviewee refers to the ‘Shambhala path’ – which is definitely *not* something new. He uses this old tradition to say that this is the ‘DNA’ which evolves today.

Besides the practical (‘weekday-related’ – C5) aspect of spirituality, he also advocates for an open, fluid (C5), liberating (C9 later on) and non-sectarian (C3) spirituality, which gives room to all traditions. He emphasizes that this ‘obviously touches a need in the present world’. ‘Obviously’ means that it is apparent, clear, evident; it requires some work to question something *obvious*. This is meant to evoke a tendency to agree ---- an ‘of course’ tendency. The construction of spirituality in ‘ASL talk’ is so (post)modern, so open and flexible, that it supposedly is to a large extent free from critique.

C3
‘Then there was the King of the Shambhala kingdom; it’s half a myth, half something else, he came to Buddha and said, ‘I really admire you and your teachings, but I have a job to do, I’m the king. My people need me and I cannot go into a monastery for years. I’m the king that is my job in this world. But is there also a practice for me?’ The answer was ‘yes’, and that is the Shambhala path. This directly speaks to me, because I feel that this is also my impulse. Following a deep spiritual schooling path and being in the world. That is the signature of what we have today, of what is evolving, that’s the core, the DNA, or one element of the DNA. This people achieve something a lot of people are talking about but never reach, an opening. They practice it. They provide space for people with the same tradition, for people with other traditions, and for people with no conscious tradition. And that obviously touched a need in the present world.’

C4
‘I think this is absolutely central, it’s the initial point of the presencing process and it stands in contrast to a lot of classical meditative teachings, because the starting point is not the contemplation, but to buzz off, to get out of your cheese cover and go into the world and fully dive into it. So what I’m doing is organizing environments where this is possible. That’s the starting point. Seeing and Sensing. You connect to your own context there, it gets practical. But there you also leave the classical Business context and you get to the further Sustainability contexts and so on.’

C5
‘This is the interesting thing that happens now at the beginning of the new century. There are deeper and more fluid forms, more weekday-related forms of spirituality now. Spirituality in the sense of the ability to use the real energy-, inspiration- and power sources inside.’
Spirituality in ‘ASL talk’ is framed with the freshness of something new and grounded in respected (spiritual or religious) traditions. The interviewees say that spirituality should combine ancient wisdom or tradition (e.g. the Vedic times – G3) and contemporary knowledge. One interviewee explains that what we call modern or advanced has to be re-examined with deeper spiritual values (G2). He concludes that ‘once the two are in synergy then we’ll be complete’. In the sense of ‘ASL talk’, leadership needs to be re-examined and valued with spirituality and authenticity, then it can be complete.

In extract G3, the interviewee emphasizes the combination of eastern and western philosophies. ‘ASL talk’ strives here to value both eastern and western traditions and not to exclude anybody. What is conspicuous in this extract is the form of the self-presentation. Usually the interviewees try to present themselves in a very humble way, because arrogance and pride are related to inauthenticity. However to make ‘ASL talk’ work, they also have to demonstrate sometimes their expertise and knowledge, especially in the business field, but also of course in a spiritual sense. The interviewee here depicts himself as ‘different from others’, reading ‘books of great people’, ‘never’ restricting himself etcetera. This illustrates a picture of someone special, literate, smart and open for different knowledge, may it be eastern or western. He also states ‘I always knew, I would serve society in a very meaningful way’. He always knew it already, shows a lot of confidence, even with a spiritual touch of precognition. Then saying, he knew that he would serve society in a very meaningful way, implies that he serves society today and that in a very meaningful way. This self-presentation can create a ‘gulf’ between the interviewee and others, but it also supports the image of an expert.

G2

‘You know, I feel always we should have the big picture in mind. But the action rests with the individual. Sometimes we hope for change in the world, but the change begins from the individual. And we always have to be positive and strengthen positive examples across the world. It is happening, but still the gulf and the bridge between the final forces are there within an individual. And the world as we see it today or the way we connect ourselves to bridge other connectivities… not there in the true sense. What we call modern or what we call advanced has to be relooked with the deeper spiritual values. And once the two are in synergy then we’ll be complete.’

G3

‘I always knew I was different from others. Yet I was with them. I always knew, I would serve society in a very meaningful way. I did not know how. And I was always looking ... I always went through the books of great people. As I was growing older, I understood that it was a spiritual yearning that I had. And it went into both – eastern and western philosophy. And for some reason, I never restricted myself to one thing. I always wanted it to be contemporary, yet I had spiritual inclinations more on the Vedic times and I knew always, I had to combine the two - these deep truths with modern
For the interviewees, spirituality is not indoctrination, not too religious or too much involved in rituals; it’s more an opening up and a standing on your own feet (e.g. C3, E2). Especially in extract E2, the interviewee distances himself from ‘spiritual directions which are working with Gurus’. He confirms that ‘we have to stand on our own feet’ and learn from each other. One critique of combining spirituality and business addresses the similarity to cults. An important aspect of cults are the adored Gurus, hence it is interesting that the interviewee here explicitly dissociates from such things.

To underline the ‘inauthenticity’ of such Gurus, the interviewee gives two examples and ends with saying that he knows more than ten examples, showing that these are not isolated cases. The interviewee expresses discontentedness with his choice of words and the interviewer helps out. The interviewer comes up with the word ‘attachment’ which is broadly used in spiritual repertoires. After some translation, the interviewee acknowledges the term ‘attachment’ as adequate. Involving the interviewer in such a way creates a common ground and hence brings ‘ASL talk’ forward. Spirituality in ASL is framed as a liberating philosophy; therefore Gurus are a critical topic. The interviewees talk about spiritual teachers (call them even ‘Gurudev’), but define them as supporting, open and authentic, in contrast to the suppressing cultic Gurus.

E2
Answer: ‘I know there are a lot of spiritual directions who are working with Gurus, but that’s not my direction. I think that we can learn from each other but we have to stand on our own feet.’

Question: And you have always to practice on your own...
Answer: ‘Yes, always. If there is too much adoration to the Guru then there is less adoration to your own higher self…and… the word adoration is not the word I like…but if we use the word “Gefangen” [captured, caught, imprisoned] if we use the word connection then it is not good to be too much connected to the Guru than to your own higher self.’

Question: Do you mean attachment?
Answer: ‘I don’t understand that word. Can you say it in German?’

Question: Attachment in German is “Anhaften”.
Answer: ‘Yes that’s a good word for it. How special sometimes people are, sometimes more than, sometimes, they always stay human and they can make false and with adoration you are not open to see the falseness. Some people in my assignment had connection with gurus, and they were thinking this is the most holy person on earth. Then I knew in the same year because some people give me consultancy for 1 year, a woman who was pregnant and aborted a child of the Guru and his own wife didn’t know about it and other females want to live zölibat - without sex - celibacy, and all people have to follow her and all people around her had love relationship then she felt in love with a
very young man. She doesn’t speak open about it. I know more than 10 examples of such things.’

In relation to one’s framing of spirituality the question of ‘God’ is always relevant. The interviewees have different beliefs; they believe in different Gods or supernatural beings, but they also share some themes. Most apparently they believe that God is within you. In extract G4 this is nicely wrapped into an appealing little story. The story begins with ‘It was to find God …’, which sounds like a good start --- short and pregnant. Then the flowery phrase ‘… and I still remember once …’, which reminds of ‘once upon a time’, and provides a meaningful introduction, because what you remember still must be significant in a way. Next a short description of the context delivers a picture of the situation. ‘You know, I have been searching and I haven’t found God’, which is more a statement than a question, but the sister answers it anyway ‘But, [sister/brother], he is within you. Where are you searching?’ The whole construction, especially the illustration of a ‘just’ situation (sitting just together, just saying something, just turning around, just about twelve) makes the ‘insight’ so simple, but also so profound. It also has a strong emotional dimension (the young sister, finding the answer of where to find God). The story communicates a non-sectarian, practical and liberating view of God and so of Spirituality. Everybody can find God inside themselves.

G4
‘It was to find God. And I still remember once, I was sitting across with my sister and I’d come home after a very heavy day and I just said: ‘You know, I have been searching and I haven’t found God.’ And she just turned around, I must have been around 18 at that time and she was just about twelve, she turned round and said: ‘But, [sister/brother], he is within you. Where are you searching?’ That was … that profundity of that statement has never left me.’

In extract I2 the interviewee refers to Allah/Islam. The word Islam means ‘submission’; Submission to and acceptance of God:

‘We are all of God, and towards Him we are progressing.’ (Qur’an ii:156)

In extract I2 it is said that Allah has 99 names⁴, which are stated in the Qur’an (Koran). A big part of the Koran (Qur’an) describes the attributes and actions.

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⁴ The 99 Names of Allah - for example: The All-Compassionate-The All-Merciful-The Absolute Ruler-The Pure One-The Source of Peace-The Inspirer of Faith-The Guardian-The Victorious-The Compeller-The Greatest-The Creator-The Maker of Order-The Shaper of Beauty-The Forgiving-The Subduer-The Giver of All-The Sustainer-The Opener-The Knower of All-The Constrictor-The Reliever-The Giver of Life-The Taker of Life-The Ever Living One-The Self-Existing One-The Finder-The Glorious-The Only One-The One-The Satisfier of All Needs-The All Powerful-The Creator of All
Mohammed received as a divine revelation. The interviewee here explains that he tries to develop and embody these qualities in his daily life. He emphasizes that meditation has to be practical and that this is what is ‘modern today’. He gives some examples of trying to be thankful in different situations, even if it is not always easy and the question ‘Why’ comes up. His logic is similar to Christians who try to embody the qualities of Jesus.

In relation to ‘ASL talk’, several aspects of Islam are interesting:

- The human being is seen as a spiritual and physical whole, which can’t be separated. There is no big conflict between body and soul. The whole being needs to be awakened to eternal life.
- Islam sees earthly life as a kind of past-time and tries to redirect the human being to essential values and to real joy, instead of to impermanent, physical comforts and pleasures. The impermanence and misleading character of physical pleasures are stressed as in Buddhism.
- According to Islam, humans are not evil or bad in their nature. True (authentic) human nature is not the source of evil, because one is born innocent and not responsible for the sins of others.
- Allah gave humans the purest and best nature. External forces are shaping and influencing human beings throughout their lives; every being is able to develop and has potential. Authenticity is to preserve or to rediscover one’s true, pure nature, which is full of faith and virtue (49:7).
- Personal development and authenticity are central themes (particularly for the Sufis). One has to discover God in him- or herself, because one can’t know what is not in oneself. Self-discovery leads to God: God is within you. Al Ghazzali (also: Al-Ghazali) (2007, p. 19) emphasized self-knowledge, because

“KNOWLEDGE of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: "He who knows himself knows God"”

There are 5 basics in the Islamic faith: the confession of faith Schahada, praying five times a day, helping the poor, fasting at Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca. Helping the poor is a central task in life, which suits ‘ASL talk’. Prophet Mohammed said (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 2004, p. 7):

Power-The Expediter-The Delayer-The First-The Last-The Manifest One-The Hidden One-The Protecting Friend-The Supreme One-The Doer of Good-The Guide to Repentance-The Avenger-The Forgiver-The Clement-The Owner of All-The Lord of Majesty and Bounty-The Equitable One-The Rich-The Enricher-The Preventer of Harm-The Creator of The Harmful-The Creator of Good-The Light-The Guide-The Originator-The Everlasting One-The Inheritor of All-The Righteous Teacher-The Patient One
“What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.”

Helping others, social justice, hospitality and so on are central themes in the Koran. One wishes for others what one wishes. This basic principle can be found in the interviews (and in Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Taoist, Islamic, and Yoga Philosophies).

In extract I2, the interviewee answers by saying what meditation does not mean for him. His searching for words and pauses show difficulty on a discursive level. He obviously wants to express something that he assumes to be difficult to express and/or to accept. He proposes different examples, illustrates problematic situations, and reassures (‘Right?’). Then he comes to his ‘conclusion’ (‘And therefore…’). From here on, the discourse seems to flow easier. Now he can express what he finds ‘modern today’. Even if meditating on the 99 names of Allah is something new and unknown, practicing ‘good’ qualities in real life must’ be acceptable and appreciated. ‘ASL talk’ does not insist on a certain tradition or philosophy, the backgrounds are variable, but spirituality has to be practical and ‘Life is simply an exercise field’.

I2

Question: You also said that you meditate the 99 names of Allah. How do you meditate them?

Answer: ‘Not meditation by sitting somewhere and considering - no, but, by... He is the thanking one. That is terrible that... I just want to try that. I want to be grateful to my fate, I want to thank you for coming, I want to thank my friend, who accompanies me always so dear. I want to practice that. And often one is confronted in life with situations, where one says, "Why should I thank you?" Right? And therefore: practicing in real life, in the daily life not at home in your private cubbyhole. Life is simply the exercise field. If someone faces up to life, one has to make enough exercises. So, that is mine… the kind of the meditation, which I find modern today.’

G5

‘I think, it is learning to understand that you have human potentials and you have to develop it to the maximum. We always slip to the animal in us. We think, the divine in us is something outside of us, something that is not within our reach. But the key is to be a human being while keeping your awareness of your connection with the divine.’

The interviewees often talk about the feeling of oneness (with God). God protects you and gives energy and power for one’s life mission. One interviewee believes that the Gods send messages (through messengers) and that they give you a mission in life. God uses your hand, your mind and your body (e.g. F4) and gives answers to your questions. He thinks that people follow you because you are a tool for God (e.g. F5).
Whatever the understanding of God may be, the interviewees emphasize a connection with the divine (G5) or a universal force (A2). As in extract G5 which claims that the divine is something in us and in ‘our reach’. The interviewees describe that they believe and respect that different voices can talk about the same reality in many ways and that listening to diverse expressions enriches our vision of God or the universal force. These definitions keep ‘ASL talk’ open for different beliefs and make it reachable. In ‘ASL talk’ a strong appeal or request is inherent (such as in G5: You have to develop your human potentials to the maximum). As illustrated in the following chapter ‘ASL talk’ further emphasizes that spirituality is a social and mindful practice for everybody.

A social and mindful Practice

The interviewees communicate that spirituality today is more social. The individual component is enriched through a social component. It is not only that spirituality is more outgoing, personal spiritual development can be enhanced through group processes. This construction is especially applicable for leadership training, where usually a group of people participates. Otherwise the training is in danger of loosing its function. ASL is framed here as learnable and teachable. Even if the teacher can also be in the situation or reality (C6), leadership training definitely finds a place in ‘ASL talk’ (e.g. C6, C7).

In extract C6 the interviewee explains that people, who cannot achieve a deepened spiritual awareness because of their individual development, can experience this in a group situation. In extract C7 the interviewee connects meditation with the experience of authenticity, which illustrates how closely the concepts of spirituality and authenticity are interwoven in ‘ASL talk’. He emphasizes the enrichment of spiritual development through group processes. As he formulates it, you cannot only experience your own authenticity, but also that of the situation or of somebody else’. In extract C6, the interviewee uses a lot of spiritual concepts to describe the meaning of leadership training. He also cites Ken Wilber and Spiral Dynamics as famous examples to support his arguments.

The book ‘Spiral Dynamics’ from Don E. Beck and Christopher C. Cowan (1996/2003) is a source of ‘ASL talk’; it refers back to the work of Clare W. Graves who described cyclical levels of existence. Spiral Dynamics (SD) assumes that different times produce different minds and that human nature is not fixed. People’s existential problems change and people adapt to their environment by constructing new, more complex, conceptual models of the world that allow them to handle new problems. These constructed models are organized around so-called Memes. Memes are systems of core values, which are related to both individuals and entire cultures and which include all previous lev-
The Idea(l) of ASL

eels of thought. The spiral dynamics theory describes a gradual movement from the first tier (subsistence) to the second tier (being-level of existence).

What is called here second tier, Ken Wilber (Wilber and Cohen, 2005) calls ‘integral’. Both terms illustrate what can be seen as the next stage of development in our post-modern culture. It describes a more integrated and comprehensive perspective of self and the cosmos. Wilber and Cohen (2005) emphasize, like the interviewees, the difference between a direct spiritual experience and an intellectual understanding of spirituality. The interviewees establish further (also similar to Wilber and Cohen) in ‘ASL talk’ the idea(l) that direct spiritual experience changes one’s worldview and ethics forever. The ethical imperative evolves; the person needs to be ethical, responsible and authentic, to achieve personal spiritual development (in SD terms: yellow-authenticity-“I”). Spiritual development supposedly leads to the evolution of consciousness itself (in SD: turquoise-holistic-“we”). This link between spirituality and ethics is cited in support of ASL as an ethical and sustainable vision of leadership. In ‘ASL talk’ it is a ‘natural law’ that spiritual development leads to an ethical life. This linkage is also made in many spiritual discourses (see above e.g. in Buddhism).

SD can be used to develop a new leadership theory such as in ASL. Following the ideas of SD, it can be said that leadership theories change over time and that ethics, authenticity and spirituality can (or cannot) be integrated into business. Leadership theories in times of empires and exploitation (SD: red), in times of authority and control (SD: blue), and in times of materialistic values (SD: orange) are success-oriented, heroic and powerful. Only when new values, new structures (networks, systemic, global, holistic structures) appear, can leadership theories be relevant that justify authentic leadership. Employees have to become more powerful, so that leadership theories will need to include their needs. As Boje (2000, 2003) has said, ‘the will to power (needs to be) turned into the will to serve in leadership theories.’

The interviewees talk about a globally interrelated world, where leadership affects society and nature on a large scale. They explain that global problems, new structures, new technologies, and leadership crises, require new leadership approaches, which can handle ethical needs, complexity, and the new world economy. Hence leadership theories need to (re)discover in that leadership can be connected with ethics, authenticity and spirituality. The “I”-component (authenticity, spirituality) then meets the “we”-component (ethics, social, groups).

C6
‘That is the ‘Wirklichkeitsmeditation’ I mentioned; a meditative penetration of the Reality you are concerned with. (…) My experiences are that if you really focus your challenges, your abilities will grow out of these challenges. That means that the contemplative penetration, the deepened meditation of reality itself becomes your teacher. The
situation is actually the teacher. To apply it on Ken Wilber or the Spiral Dynamics categories: People, who cannot achieve a deepened spiritual awareness because of their individual development, can absolutely experience this in group situations. That is exactly what I mean. That is the social challenge. Situations can be container, where the participating people find an access to the deeper layers quicker than in classical individual training. But I don’t want to say that you don’t need individual training, just that this is not primary. That means Leadership training o.k… and whereof, in the field you are concerned with.’

C7
‘If you be authentic or not, is coherent to how far you can be absolutely present and how far you can produce a connectivity to a greater field. So are you really connected to this field or are you just dreaming about it? One technique is, of course, meditation. There, you can experience a certain form of authenticity. Also in certain group processes or communities you can experience the same thing (…) What I experienced there was definitely another kind of authenticity because I experienced other elements of myself. And in certain working situations, in certain Community Development Processes, in Team-Development Processes one experiences a similar form of learning. If you reach a certain zenith, a certain depth, a reversal point in change processes or in dialogue processes learning occurs. There I experience authenticity, not only of my own, but also of the situation or of somebody else…’

In extract C8 the interviewee talks more about the “we”-component. He explains that a direct connection, entails resonance that can guide your actions when you realize that you are part of the bigger field. He combines this assertion with expressions about future potential, movement, force, something new, etcetera, which all have a very energetic quality. The social component is crucial for handling ‘the challenges we are facing on an individual and on a social level’.

C8
‘I had experiences of authenticity in the social movement of the 70’s and 80’s, but you can also say that I became part of a bigger field. And the field is related to a certain potential. In the sense of this movement, this potential was not only an individual biography or career, it was related to the entire generation. I experienced this as a future force that became socially affective. And this I saw again, if people bring something new into the world. And I also experienced in myself the ability to bring a future potential into the world. That is a really subtle level of perception. Not just conceiving an idea, but a direct connection, a resonance body, that you can establish and that can guide your actions. (…) It’s a very specific and subtle level of experiences, which is maybe today more accessible than in the past and which is maybe today more important than ever, if we want to bear the challenges we are facing on an individual and on a social level.’

A very important aspect of spirituality in ‘ASL talk’ refers one’s own practice (e.g. I2, C3, B2, A6). One principle of practice the interviewees share is the idea that one must ‘make use of every moment’ (carpe diem) – be aware, and be here and now.
For all the interviewees, it is very important to integrate their spirituality into daily life. Life is the exercise field and daily situations become the teacher (e.g. I2 above). Facing the challenges of life is a modern way of meditation, as one interviewee formulates it. Another interviewee calls it “the middle way/road” (referring to the Buddha) (e.g. B1) or meditation of reality (“Wirklichkeitsmeditation”) (e.g. C6).

Practising spirituality in real, daily life on a daily basis is crucial. For one interviewee, practising should be a habit. In extract A6, the interviewee notices that he ‘was never used to…’, which implies a change, a development, which was maybe not easy. But it is a habit now, so there is a force of habit now, which promises to make spirituality easier. All the things he could not do, he can now do, even if ‘nobody believes it’. By using his own name in third person, he brings in some humour and makes his text more attractive.

For ‘ASL talk’, practice has to be constructed as important and essential, but also as realizable. Some interviewees emphasize, that you don’t have to become a monk (e.g. A7, F6). The problem or dilemma of seriousness and reliability in business is crucial here. Looking at extract A7 and F6 illustrate the need to be accepted in the business field as ‘one of them’. The interviewee in A7 describes that one has to ‘connect at the level of reality’ to be taken serious. When he tries to define this more clearly, he starts looking for words and then ‘jumps’ to philosophy. It seems difficult to explain what a connection at the level of reality means. Talking about personal philosophy is much easier. ‘When it’s time for them to learn, be there, but don’t force them,’ sounds plausible. More unclear is why people believe you are idealistic, if you force them. The whole construct of ASL has an idealistic touch, which can be perceived as quixotic or ideal-theoretic. Forcing somebody into beliefs would contradict the concept of ASL.

In extract F6, the interviewee uses an example (being vegetarian) to illustrate the problem of being perceived as different. It always depends on the context if vegetarianism is unusual or not, but the interviewee describes it as a hindrance for communication. It implies that being different makes communication difficult, which affects the social component of spirituality. ASL as a kind of leadership needs communication. In both extracts, but in particular in extract F6, a kind of arrogance is visible through the word choice (e.g. ‘ordinary people’, ‘they feel duty’, ‘you are holy we are devils’). This reflects again the already mentioned problem of self-presentation in ‘ASL talk’.

A6

‘I think that through those methodologies and those techniques you are cultivating a habit, a new habit, something I was never used to doing, sitting down, quietly, not talking, (his own name) talks a lot, I have that image and nobody believes that I can sit down and shut my mouth for nearly a whole day, ten hours in silence. So that habit is a habit now.’
A7
‘… For example, people in Holland when you do that today, the people say, oh he became a monk you can’t take him seriously anymore. I think you have to connect at the level of the reality and you have to do it in a way, sometimes I would say with my philosophy, I say, when it’s time for them to learn be there but don’t force them because if you force them they will declare you to be idealistic.’

F6
‘To eat, drink, and behave like just ordinary people, is needed because I need that to communicate with people. For example if you become vegetarian, it’s very difficult for you to communicate, because you are different. If you are a vegetarian..., everybody vegetarian meal .... everybody feels uncomfortable. When we meet this guy, is he a monk, a vegetarian? Then they feel duty. You are holy we are devils. Gradually there is a distance between them. Then when you tell them the message they do not necessarily listen to you. You are not one of them.’

Central in spiritual practices is mindfulness, awareness and concentration. To cultivate awareness and concentration, attentive observation is essential. Some interviewees observe their breath or their thoughts. One says he tries to exercise self-observation constantly (e.g. D5). Most of the interviewees call these practices meditation (e.g. C1, I2, C6, B2, A8, A9, C7). It is a focusing or relaxing process, which gives deeper insights into life and helps one to learn that “letting go“ is important (e.g. A8). Also you become able to know and control your mind. It’s self-exploration and a self-reflective process, which helps you to develop qualities like patience. It is important that spiritual practice has a very practical meaning and the interviewees ‘use’ it in a practical way, and emphasize positive outcomes in their daily work (e.g. A8, A9).

In Extract A8, the interviewee reveals that he has lost a lot of energy. In a physical sense, this is nonsense, but in a spiritual context he talks about losing energy. Then he starts drawing upon a physical repertoire and uses the term ‘molecules’ ‘which try to escape’. He compares the mind with a pot and presents a picture of it with little molecules inside, moving, trying to escape – this image he evokes is quite vivid and it demands solution, because nobody wants confusion, frenzy and chaos in his or her mind. So he explains that through meditation one gets the opportunity to learn about silence, patience and through that one can control the chaos.

He includes the ‘pot’-metaphor in the sentence about the mind, so that the physical repertoire is used in the middle of discussing the spiritual. This connects, here, the ‘Eastern’ spiritual repertoire with the more ‘Western’ scientific, physical repertoire. Because so many people believe in (Western) science, and science has a positive image of objectivity and is implicitly connected with a sense of truth or truthful finding, ASL talk cannot ignore it. Scientific language or repertoires supposedly make ideas more trustworthy and reliable for people. So the interviewee gains, through this construction, not only a vivid metaphor,
but also, the connection between spiritual and scientific language, and thus he tries to secure more acceptance of the spiritual in the business world. The other interviewees often use the scientific repertoire to show that there is a verifiable theory and research behind spirituality.

Extract A8 and extract A9 illustrate in an exemplary way how much effort the interviewees make to convey the usefulness of spiritual practices. In A8 the interviewee goes very much into details. This could have the function to show his commitment, that he is living according to his precepts, or it may be helping him to shift the conversation onto ground where he is ‘happy’. Giving details makes the discourse appear more realistic and demonstrates his own expertise. In both extracts, examples, metaphors and contrasts of past and present are used. The interviewee expresses (A9) that he has to ‘say thanks’ to his meditation and to his ‘skill of inner meeting’, which underlines how beneficial it has been for him to practice them. Then he uses the expression of ‘or whatever’ which implies an open list, and reduces his accountability for his choice of words. He also communicates that spiritual practices provide ‘release’, because then you will know ‘that it’s not the end of the world’ and that ‘you have the right to do this as well’. He seems to teach mindfulness and (self-)acceptance.

Mindfulness *(sati)* or right mindfulness *(sammasati)* are an essential quality for Buddhism. For right mindfulness, pure awareness is not enough. Additionally, equanimity, presence and acceptance, must be practiced and developed, so that the mind doesn’t lose its balance, and one learns to let go. Impersonal, non-reactive and holistic perceptions then become possible, which increases understanding and wisdom, without self-interest or egoistic intention. Practising mindfulness leads to experiential insight, for example, about cause and effect, impermanence and interrelatedness, all of which make ethical behaviour essential.

A8

‘For me the whole meditation process, even the breathing process, brings back my attention to, first of all, to observe things. Where I don’t feel guilty or I don’t feel like, oh my God, standing up and… it gives me the feeling of meditation, let the thought come. I also have a routine next to it, I write down what in the first two, three minutes come, like, oh my God I have to do this I have to do that. What I release from that, so that process helps me to release, to let go, and learn the secret of the patience, I was really impatient, very impatient. When I said I have a great idea now, I would have justified it for myself; it’s such a great idea it must be good for the world, so let’s do it now and somebody said, well can we wait till tomorrow? I would say, no, no now. That creates a negative environment and things will happen, but not with joy. And I learned now in the meditation… in the beginning of meditation, when you practise some of these mantras, in the beginning when you start to do the whole Mala, you look at your Mala, you open your eyes, ‘oh just a quarter’. So the principles of patience I learned there.
And because you want to raise a higher force, you have the desire to conform to that force, you learn to be patient. You learn to finish your spiritual task, like homework in the school; I don’t like it but I have to do it. That’s the way I started it, you know. Now it is a habit. You just go and in that emptiness is the understanding of the power of patience, is the understanding of the power of silence, you see more, you digest and then you see a lot more and instead of the impulsive… So people used to tell me, you are a great guy, you have ten thoughts in one second, great. But now I realize that if I would have that patience, that moment of reflection, don’t act, just sit back, think and then when the right time comes, you act, then it will be more powerful. So I lost a lot of energy, I don’t think I’m sorry, but I learned a lot from that. And my meditation gives me the opportunity to learn a lot about silence, patience. Through these two things, also the moment of reflection and reflect, okay maybe I should wait, it’s not the end of the world, that inner dialogue, and therefore your mind, the number of molecules that is trying to escape from this pot and arrive on your desk next morning, it’s controlled. And therefore your voice, your body language, everything, your approach. Sometimes I lose that and then I see when I lose that focus or I lose that gift. Now I have also the eyes to see that I have done something that hurts somebody, I was too fast, too impulsive. Your scope, because of your calmness, you see more in people, you see a lot more in people, so for me meditation is a very practical thing, not to find liberation or plan for my paradise life or liberating my soul whatever concept or belief. I’m not interested in that.’

A9

Question: Is that an inner dialogue?
‘That is an inner dialogue. You go in that room, that’s a training, that’s a habit, that becomes a habit, you go to that room and in that room you hear a voice, ‘that’s not the end of the world’. I must say thanks to my meditation, thanks to that skill of inner meeting or whatever. You have the ability once you are there to redraw yourself, to feel your breath and to focus and you don’t feel hesitant, in the last 20 years that was impossible. I almost exploded; sometimes I even showed my explosion. And now I feel like okay, you have the right to do this as well. So you see, what is very inspiring for me is the unity of the opposites thinking, practising that in the real field, not as a theory.’

Some interviewees emphasize silencing or ‘quieting down’, they want to still themselves at all levels, i.e. to still their senses (e.g. G6, G7). Love and silence help to get access to the higher self/force, one interviewee declares (G8, G9, A8). This interviewee relates ‘quieting down’ to listening to your conscience. The sense of right and wrong is important for ‘ASL talk’, because of the already discussed ‘inner judgement’. To make the right decisions, one needs to know what is right and beneficial for others, and that is difficult. As the interviewee in G6 notices, one can also listen to the ‘wrong things’. ‘ASL talk’ is continuously concerned with the question of ethical foundations. Here the interviewee relates these to the ‘right practice’ and warns against misunderstanding.

G6
‘But there is always the necessity to listen deeply: Because if you would listen within the realm of the mind, if you are not trained, you know, or found the right path, you might be listening to the wrong things. And that strengthens the conviction that that is
the right thing. You have to learn to – I would use the word “quieten down” – to even listen to the voice of conscience.’

G7
‘True. I would say “pause”. Pauses take a moment to first still oneself at all levels. We all have that time and opportunity to still ourselves for even a minute. You still your senses. And when you make that as a regular habit – that’s when you will be able to listen to silence. And only in silence can you truly listen to your conscience also.’

G8
‘You know, one, I feel … The way I have learned it is to balance my time. I gave a part of my time to my higher self. And silence helps me get access to that … higher self.’

G9
‘One is to try to bring the awareness of the goal of life. Many times I – we – end up making these plans, most of my time goes into my work. So, most of the time, we are planning, how to be where we are, how to continue, how to grow further on. But to keep this awareness, that this is not all in life, I have to take out time, to go to my inner self, which will be ultimately the thing I will carry, when I leave. This .... is what... It is gaining more strength these days and I think that awareness is the key – and taking time out. Time. Almost on a daily basis. To know what we have done, how we have contributed, how we are relating to others. And take time to relate to oneself within. This is the key. And for me I ... my personal thing is love and silence as a key to the inner self.’

The construction of spirituality as social and mindful, helps to combine it with leadership. Also the way the interviewees formulate the central characteristics of spirituality smoothes the way for ‘ASL talk’, as we will see next.

A beneficial, never-ending Journey

One interviewee described his development as changing from being explosive and impulsive to being able to lead an inner dialogue. He has learned how to be silent, how to reflect, and how to bring himself into contact with his authentic self. He has developed from being controlled by confused energy to being controlled by guided and organized energy, from being impatient to being patient, from external to internal drives, from rapidly losing interest to opening up and really listening to people (e.g. A5, A10).

In extract A10, the interviewee uses a scientific (physical) verbal repertoire. He talks about entropy and draws a vivid, powerful picture of it – with molecules which fly left, right, up and down, with high speed and sometimes even explode the pot… and then he ends by saying that this was his experience. He is to be seen as an exploding pot with wild molecules! – What a picture! Then he talks about having lots of ideas; or very enthusiastic energy, which doesn’t really sound all that bad. That this is all too much becomes clear through
the realisation that he then got no sleep and through the scientific metaphor he used before. He turns to the business repertoire, talking about professional life, work and earning money. At the end of this extract, he uses the spiritual repertoire and talks again about being full of energy; but now a guided and controlled energy. The ‘solution’ is described in spiritual terms.

It is interesting how much effort the interviewee does to illustrate the ‘differences’ and the benefits. The interviewee mentions that he also falls back into old habits sometimes, which implies that he is not at the ‘end of the journey’. Falling back into old habits seems not to be a problem here, because he knows now what to do.

A10

Question: What happened? What makes the difference?

‘Oh, a lot of differences. The biggest difference that you can see and experience is that you don’t have…. you know the entropy law, the thermal law that when you boil water in a closed pot, what happens in the pot, all the molecules fly like left, right, up, down with high speed, even explode the pot, that was what I was indeed. I had a lot of ideas, a very enthusiastic energy, I wanted to do this, I wanted to do that. Somebody called me and said, ‘you want to join this.’ I said, ‘yes I want to do that’. I was not sleeping. When I became a professional, having a professional life, working, earning money whatever, I was the same; I was full of life, full of energy. Now the energy is there but it is guided, it is organized. And every time I fall back to my old habit, which still happens, then, in my view, I’m not authentic anymore, so I have to go back to that space where I can organize my energy.’

Another interviewee says he has learned to balance time. He now spends a part of his time honouring the higher self. Silence helps him to get access to that higher self. Another interviewee explains it was like a second ‘growing up’ and that trust grows from moment to moment. Spiritual/personal development is a journey for the interviewees, which never ends. For the interviewees, development is needed in order to become more authentic. It is a path to authenticity and to ASL. One interviewee feels it is like crossing one bridge after another. These constructions are very helpful for ‘ASL talk’, because they describe gains in authenticity; spirituality ‘invites’ others to begin the ‘journey’. You just need to go ‘bridge after bridge’. In ‘ASL talk’, the spiritual development and the development of authenticity (see above) are often framed very similarly. This illustrates the difficulties of the interviewees to differentiate between their different concepts. They link their key terms closely in their discourse, and sometimes their terms are replaced the one by the other. An authentic person is for them a spiritual person and vice versa. ‘Authenticity’ seems at some places to be closer to leadership and easier to integrate than ‘Spirituality’.

The interviewees say the reason why they got interested in this ‘journey’ is because they were seeking for answers and that they (always) had a tendency to
question things. The ability to reflect on things, and their own selves, combined with the desire to improve, to develop, and to learn more, helped them to find their path. The way the interviewees formulate it, makes it easy to identify with their ideas. Who is not seeking for answers or wants to learn more? The preconditions for a development of spirituality (or authenticity) are constructed in a way that everybody can meet them.

In extract E3, the interviewee says that ‘normally all the people have an inner way to go, to learn something here on earth that is a little bit different from past lives’. It again is emphasized that spiritual growth is for everybody. The expression ‘I think’ weakens or softens the argument, here, maybe the interviewee is uncertain if others (the interviewer or possible recipients) believe in reincarnation (past lives). The word ‘normally’ is also interesting because it can implicate something general or something normal, which strengthens the argument or it can be understood as ‘there are exceptions’. The interviewee refers then to the concept of a ‘mission’ (which is discussed later on). First he says ‘sometimes it will be a mission’, then he says that the mission is not always clearly defined, and then he explains that he believes ‘that there is no one here on earth without a mission’. The whole extract shows his problems of managing his concepts of a spiritual journey and mission. The interviewee emphasizes that the mission is ‘for yourself’ and ‘in second way it can help or reach other people’. This understanding seems to be quite difficult to express, especially if we think of the social aspect of spirituality, which is examined in the previous chapter. Spirituality (and authenticity) in ‘ASL talk’ has to be beneficial for the leader him- or herself and others. In E3, a dilemma appears between ‘always for the benefit of others’ and ‘for yourself’. In the spiritual view you first need to develop yourself, to be able to help others.

E3
‘I think that normally all the people have an inner way to go, to learn something here on earth that is a little bit different from past lives… and sometimes it will be a mission... But not everyone has a mission what is clearly defined for themselves and is seen by others. But I believe that there is no one here on earth without a mission, but the mission is.... through their own growth process and sometimes the growth process also stimulates others. I think everyone has a mission but first thing they have to know the mission is for yourself and in second way it can help or reach other people or touch other people.’

Extract B2 gives an impression that even if the journey is beneficial, it is not so easy all the time. In particular, if one’s journey is related to the business world there are difficulties to be expected. The critical stance (no perfect world, no ideal situation, everything is changing, there are several demands in the business which one needs to meet, expressing the difficulties and the struggling etcetera),
which the interviewee expresses here, lets him appear as more serious and more experienced in the business world. This supports his position as an ‘expert’ of ASL. By formulating what he wishes (would love to) to have happen as a result of his spiritual development, he shows, on the one side, his ‘humblestness’ (I’m not there yet, I still have bad qualities and so on). On the other side, he uses these formulations to illustrate what spiritual practice can do for you. He even expresses the hope that ‘one day’ all bad qualities (ego, pride, jealousy) will be eradicated – a condition which he associates with enlightenment. But as also other interviewees express it, enlightenment is not the goal. In the purpose of ‘ASL talk’, enlightenment does not work as an aim. As shown, ASL has to be practical and suitable in a business context. Enlightenment would also mean a kind of endpoint and ‘ASL talk’ functions much better linked to a ‘never-ending’ process of development. Another consideration is that enlightenment is too abstract, too far away, and maybe too much related to spirituality (especially Buddhism) to fit the requirements of ‘ASL talk’. For the interviewees, it is not so easy to manage their positions. They have to justify why they put this limitation on spirituality. ‘ASL talk’ is a difficult balancing act in many ways. The interviewees need to illustrate, on the one hand, the benefits of spirituality in business for business people (as already often exemplified). On the other hand, they additionally need to show the influence from business on their spirituality.

B2

‘I think spiritual qualities, there are many spiritual qualities but in essence I would love to be a person who would be able to call myself very disciplined and able to do my meditation practices in time, able to implement my spiritual practice in my business world perfectly which is not possible because there is no perfect world, there is no ideal situation. Situations change and circumstances change from person to person and business to business. I would love to be able to use this spiritualism to improve my own personality, my personal development, which again I feel I am not yet able to do it so successfully… to take away ego, to take away my pride or search for some recognition. Even though I have so many titles given by the government to me and honours - sometimes the few split seconds of this interest comes where you want some more… and I still feel I have given up everything and I want to give up on the one hand and the mind plays tricks on the other hand – because somebody else has got it so there is this jealousy, you know. But I am fighting, I am using my spiritual practice, which I have been doing all these years to try to reduce and probably, hopefully one day eradicate those bad qualities. But again I am in an environment where it is very difficult for me not to have such pursuits because in the business world you have to entertain people, you have to meet persons, so you need the right attire, you need the right environment in order to do high level business… otherwise bankers do not want to see you, otherwise, you know, other businessmen will think “How can I do business with this guy when he is wearing a Dhoti or a dirty shirt you know or whatever”’

In the last part of extract B2, the interviewee accounts for his adjusted spirituality ‘in order to do high level business’. He gives examples, which mainly refer
to appearance (e.g. the right attire, right environment, no Dhoti\(^5\) or dirty shirt), and does not refer to inner conditions, while the inner work is much more important than the outer look. To enhance the acceptance, he also uses the hedging device of ‘You know …’. There are several different functions of ‘You know…’ in the interaction. Here it is interesting that it involves the interviewer, and indicates the expectations that she has knowledge of both fields: business and spirituality. Considering the whole extract, the interviewee seems to perceive the interviewer more on the spiritual side, hence his text is built on spiritual issues, which he tries to integrate into business. Both ways, either coming from spirituality and encountering business, or coming from business and encountering spirituality, are possible in ‘ASL talk’. After discussing the interviewees’ constructions of authenticity and spirituality, we can now turn to their definition of leadership and its function for ‘ASL talk’.

**Leadership**

The last crucial hub in ‘ASL talk’ is leadership. The interviewees explain leadership in terms of:

1. Authentic and spiritual Development
2. Having a serving and sustainable Mission
3. Supportive, respectful and meaningful Practice.

The following three sections will illustrate what is to be encountered in the interviews related to these three items.

**Authentic and spiritual Development**

The interviewees describe in ‘ASL talk’ that leaders should be authentic and spiritual. They should take care of others, feel responsible, and have higher ethical values and ambitious spiritual goals. They should take up principles and put them into practice. The interviewees say that authentic spiritual leaders are going out ‘there’ to discover where development possibilities are and where they can help. They emphasize that authentic spiritual leaders discover the inner fire or passion; some call it mission or calling.

Furthermore, they note that a leader needs to integrate work into his or her meaning of life, to achieve a good work/life balance. An authentic spiritual leader perceives the meaning or purpose of work, and wants to bring peace and

\(^5\) The Dhoti is a traditional Indian dress for man.
benefit to the many. One can start anywhere, working in any area, as long as it is not the "I" but "The other" who is the focus of the benefit (e.g. D3). The interviewees explain further that authentic spiritual leaders work and progress without harming anyone else’s benefit, because they respect others.

Authentic spiritual leaders embody several attitudes and qualities, such as: being humble, being altruistic and staying simple. Their own personal ego and personal success or recognition comes last. They have compassion for others and they want to help and serve others (e.g. D3).

Some interviewees also say that such leaders are always prepared and skilful and that they have not only spiritual qualities, but they also have leadership qualities. All interviewees think that an authentic spiritual leader is inspiring for others and strengthens positive attitudes across the organization and the world. These constructions are very much idealized and often lack critical reflection. This is one reason why ASL appears often as an ideal. ‘ASL talk’ needs to manage this, if ASL shall be perceived as something concrete and applicable.

As already mentioned, the interviewees emphasize that authentic spiritual leaders try to bridge spirituality and business; they try to follow a deeply spiritual path, while being in the world (e.g. C3). In ‘ASL talk’ the interviewees use different ways to define ASL. They, for example, draw on stories and metaphors. Mainly, they utilize their personal awareness. Personal experiences are difficult to question and therefore they give the interviewees some freedom to unfold their concepts.

To express that (self-)questioning plays a significant part in ASL, they talk about their own questions (e.g. G10, F7). In extract G10, the interviewee says that he wanted to find out ‘Who I am, along with the opportunity to serve humanity’. Serving humanity is a very broad idea(l), but still refers to a practical aspect, besides finding out ‘Who I am’. The extract implies also that there must be ‘something’ which unites these two aspects. This something can be filled in then with ASL, in the rest of the discourse.

The interviewees name questions like: Who I am? Why I be here? What can I do in life? What am I doing here and now? What are the consequences of my actions? or What is the real sense of life (e.g. F7, I3)? Raising such questions does not mean that the interviewees answer them, and it gives them the opportunity to communicate that ASL requires one to be mindful, to reflect, and to get to a deeper understanding of who one is, what one does, and what are the consequences of one’s actions, and so on.

In extract I3, the interviewee changes from ‘one’ to ‘I’, to ‘the people’, to ‘you’, to ‘they’, to ‘we’, etcetera, to give weight to his questioning. He also demands ever more awareness by saying that this is not enough. Then he says people need to know, and that you (the interviewer) should practice awareness. It is quite unclear whom he is talking about here. This may be meant to give more
importance to the questions than to the questioner. Addressing the interviewer directly and assigning her the ability to practice ASL with others, may increase sympathy. It also implicates that ASL is learnable and teachable, which offers the opportunity for training. He further says ‘Because we simply have this (one) life’, which brings a sense of emergency in (it’s now or never, there’s just one chance). No matter, if the interviewee believes in reincarnation or not, there is always a kind of emergency constructed to ‘force’ the development of ASL.

G10
‘I wanted something that would club my spiritual aspirations to find who I am, along with the opportunity to serve humanity.’

F7
‘Then I went back to school, then I started teaching, I gradually started thinking ‘who am I?’, ‘why am I here?’ …

I3
‘…If one does not have higher values, no more ambitious goals, if one works only in such a way "I work, so that I can marry, so that I can have a car etc. to be human and good that’s not enough. Or I work, so that all people around me are doing well, so that’s not enough. So that there is perhaps a culture progress, it’s also not enough. The people need to know - not have to - it would be wonderful, if you practice with them, why are they actually there, why do they exist? What is the sense of the whole life? And which role is mine according to my abilities and fate? Because we simply have this life, so that something can happen, what is it?’

One interviewee says it is important to balance between economical, spiritual, and human rights (I4). To illustrate this, he uses the metaphor of three musical instruments, which need to be in harmony to sound good together. It shows that the concepts are independent, but that they together can create something bigger. It is abstract, but full of metaphors, which can be filled in by the recipient. To underline his ideas he turns to examples. His examples are about what one individual would think about the other. But he leaves out what the spiritual person would think about the others. In ‘ASL talk’ generally the opposition from the business side seems to be perceived as higher than from the spiritual side.

Another interviewee describes ASL as an integration of leadership, art, meditation and community. Authentic spiritual leaders bring the divinity (spirituality and authenticity) into the outside-world and into outer world-actions, so that they can act on their insights and with love. Spiritual values should enrich and determine leadership in the view of the interviewees. The concepts of authenticity and spirituality are used in ‘ASL talk’ as ethical foundations for leadership.
I4
‘Yes, out of the connection. Thus economics, then spirit and really sense of human rights. These three - and those three are independent personalities. Independent Individuals. If one plays alone, or if one plays loudly and the other quietly – it does not sound. If one plays alone and we cannot follow, he is a little ahead - that is not beautiful. Those are the social diseases. Social diseases result from the fact that these three do not sound together. The politician, who means, the economist is a stupid guy and understands nothing and this dreamer there, the spiritual human being, who only dreams… I am the one who arranges and organizes the world. Then it is a sick society.’

To develop authenticity and spirituality in leadership, it is essential according to these sources to get used to self-reflection and observation. One needs self-awareness and the ability to accept oneself. Self-acceptance leads to deeper calmness (e.g. E4), to real leadership, and it gives one the courage to be oneself, whatever happens (e.g. E5). Self-acceptance is not only important in psychological, therapeutic settings; it has a further a spiritual meaning. In extract E5 this is visible. You need to be in the ‘here and now’ and to accept reality (yourself) as it is. To make this more clear, the interviewee differentiates between positive and negative ‘Hochmut’ (arrogance or pride). Spirituality does not require making yourself ‘little’. Overcoming the ego means to be humble, but not to perceive yourself as bad or incompetent. This seems to be difficult to manage, in ‘ASL talk’. The psychological concepts often seem to be opposing the spiritual idea(1)s. It is necessary to construct self-acceptance in a way that still requires development. Self-acceptance in ‘ASL talk’ can’t be passive; it is an active process (e.g. E4 deepening the level of acceptance). This kind of acceptance can be translated as ‘equanimity’ in spiritual terms. It means to observe things (oneself) without judgement. This is a very essential spiritual quality, which the interviewees try to relate to leadership (e.g. in communications).

E4
‘…a kind of calmness is there when you are so in touch with yourself that there is no fight in yourself about who you are. You should take yourself in a very deep level about the things you like about yourself and the things you like less; and how deep your acceptance is, the better you can stay calm.’

E5
‘They want to be it in future but they are not now. Therefore it is negative because they are not accepting themselves into this, who they are, and when there is, you can say there is a positive Hochmut [Hochmut can be translated as pride or arrogance] then people have the courage to be themselves, even if it cost a lot. And you have this, one side people with negative Hochmut and, on the other side, you have people not with… not sure, ‘unsicher’ [insecure] with themeselves. And they are so… make themselves so little every time again that they are also not interested with themselves and that they are good, they are, and in that feeling of tension, real leadership cannot be born.’
The interviewees explain that to become a more authentic and spiritual leader one has to overcome his or her weaknesses or bad qualities. Firstly, you have to realize your weaknesses and only then can you gradually get rid of them (e.g. F8), for example through meditation (e.g. F9). Overcoming human weaknesses like ego, pride etc., are formulated, as requirements for the development of ASL, but at the same time there are some ego-eccentric self-presentations in ‘ASL talk’. In extract F8, for example, the interviewee says that he can connect people, he is very good in getting money, and he has ‘some power’. It sounds even a little like he has supernatural powers. Then he turns the whole thing around and says ‘But not me, it’s him’. After presenting himself in this extraordinary way, he takes himself fully out of the picture, and replaces himself with God. This ranges from blasphemy to extreme selflessness, and mirrors the mentioned interaction of power and powerlessness. After this turn, he comes then to his human weaknesses, which distance him from God, who does not have human weaknesses. Then he explains that he will have to get gradually rid of his weaknesses, and insures that the interviewer understood him with an ‘Okay?’’. The interviewee assumes that the interviewer knows from earlier discourse that by ‘him’ God is meant here and he seems not to expect difficulties, when he says that it’s God, not him. Otherwise he probably would use more explanations. Also, at other places in the interviews, further explanations seem sometimes to be missing. This has different functions, but it illustrates as well the ‘insidersness’ attributed to the interviewer. The interviewees expect the interviewer to know the background and to share in some of their discursive resources. One example is extract F9. The very short and self-evident answer ‘You just have to meditate’ would not work as an answer to someone, not within the community.

F8
‘So my concentration is building a platform. By doing that I know that is my mission. I know I have some power. I know I can connect this people. I know I’m very good in getting money. But not me, it’s him [God]. But I know as a human being I have so many weaknesses. So I gradually have to get rid of this weakness. Okay?’

F9
Answer: ‘...So I have to get rid of these weaknesses so that I won’t fail in this mission.’
Question: So how do you do that? How do you get rid of these weaknesses? What do you do?
Answer: ‘You just have to meditate.’

A11
‘...So I would say I have come across in leaders the hesitation, not to know how to go beyond this superficial level, don’t see the relationship between their health, their body and their mental qualities. They also think that they will live forever. So it would be great to think of a sort of exercise or campaign where you make clear to leaders you will not live forever, at least not in this body. You see that in India, in China, in the West, once people become a leader they don’t want to let go. I would like to see a sort of in-
instrument you stick into the finger and they realise, ‘ah I will not live forever’. So I think when you know that you will not live forever, you will automatically start doing things to give other people a chance, to allow other people to grow, to be honest to your self, to be honest to society, to be accountable and to put one step down and let other people grow. And a lot of greediness you see, greediness driven because they think money makes you happy and a big house makes you happy. So I would like to think of an exercise where you bring them close to death. If you are going to die in the next 5 minutes, what will you think about yourself? What do you want other people to say about you? I mean such an exercise that you realise, oh my God, I have not thought about that yet in my life. I’m just doing bad things and think I will live forever. And then, of course, in that category you have leaders, business people who want to make quick profits, quick reputation, everything is about money…”

One interviewee demonstrates, with a lot of effort, that leaders can learn best from death, because confrontation with death can teach us that we will die and that we are mortal (A11). It is not so easy to manage this argument and he tries to express himself in different formulations. There is also some speed of speech in this extract, which strengthens the impression of personal enthusiasm. Talking about death is difficult. Maybe not so much in a spiritual context, but in a business context, it is very unusual. He even considers talking about death as an exercise for leaders, which sounds bizarre. To justify this he lists all the positive effects that such an insight could have. The insight is constructed here as a spiritual realization, but the outcomes are applicable to leadership. After a confrontation with death, in the interviewee’s framing, one starts practising seriously, because he or she realizes the value and dignity of life and that every moment is precious. One becomes more authentic and begins to support the development of others, which suits the concept of ASL.

**Having a serving and sustainable Mission**

The interviewees underline that authentic spiritual leaders realize and follow an inner calling, a mission or more generally an aim. In their work they never forget this aim, through which they know the direction and keep moving in this direction. The aim is the driving force and the mission is the most important aspect of their leadership. Some interviewees frame their mission as the sense or purpose of life. The authentic spiritual leader has to get rid of weaknesses (ego, bad qualities etc.) to fulfil the mission (e.g. F8, F9). The aim of the mission can change in ‘ASL talk’, but it is always related to help others and to change the world in some way. It includes a combination of personal development, finding out “who I am” and the opportunity to serve humanity as an inner call (e.g. G10).
The interviewee in extract F10 says ‘No “Me”’, to express that the mission means no egoism and no selfishness. This short expression works because the interviewee draws generally a lot on spiritual repertoires, otherwise the phrase would be unclear. The way the interviewee puts his words protects the argument to a certain extent from being questioned and criticised for trying general statements about ‘good’ and ‘bad’. He says ‘as long as you think’, so it is very much in the eye of the beholder what ‘good’ means. This of course can be received as too subjective, but it suits ‘ASL talk’, which implies an inner truth and inner, ethical judgement.

The difficult aspect of handling ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in ‘ASL talk’ appears also for example in extract A3 (above). The interviewee tries to contrast inner judgement and external levels of ‘It’s good because (everyone says that) it’s good’. ‘ASL talk’ needs to define ASL as positive, ethical and good, but there are many fundamental difficulties to such definitions. The interviewees use concepts such as selflessness, selfless service, a beneficial mission to underline the ‘goodness’ of ASL, but in the end, they have to ‘escape’ the definition problem with spiritual repertoires and by asserting an unquestionable ‘inner judgement’.

F10
‘As long as you think your mission is a good will, good intention, good to the human being and that is my principle. No “Me”.’

For some interviewees, the mission is like a passion or an inner desire. In ‘ASL talk’ authentic spiritual leaders do their work as a service (serving society, humanity at large ‘in a very meaningful way’). The interviewees note that facilitating people in the process of learning and enriching themselves, is the best way to serve them. Some interviewees critically remark that money and power are needed to survive, and to be able to serve others. Some interviewees construct service as selfless and say that ASL is selfless service (see Individual-Collective Dilemma: Selflessness).

One interviewee warns that leaders have to watch out not to become too fanatical (A13), because fanaticism even for a ‘good’ purpose is still destructive. He uses his own experiences as an illustration here, and without addressing directly others, he gives advice. The way he constructs his discourse empowers the concept of a mission, even if he cautions against extremism. The whole extract seems to support the emotional aspect of involvement in a mission (passion). Mission is so powerful that it seems to be overwhelming sometimes. At the end of the extract, he uses only the term ‘passionate’, which is perceived more positively than ‘fanatic’ and displays his enthusiasm more than his concerns.

He expresses the beneficial intention of his mission (serving, helping, changing the world), without going into detail, because his topic seems to be maintaining the ‘balancing act’. His example of ‘believing in stars’ further supports the righteousness of his mission, because the mission is as true as the stars.
It seems to be a question of communication. The mission itself is as far away as the stars from being directly scrutinized.

A13
‘Another hindrance is of course you have to balance between…, even if you say, justify it for yourself that I have a mission, I have to change the world, even in that passion, that desire, and that mission to serve, you don’t become a fanatic. If you become a fanatic of course you justify to help the poor, to help the poor countries and suppressed people whatsoever, but it can destroy a lot of, so your own level of passion can be a destructive force. And I see that in my work that whenever I start to become too passionate and too fanatic in sense of that people get scared and stay behind. And whenever I manage to balance it, that you inspire people to follow your view and your path, your mission to help. Too much of…, even this is an idealistic view is destructive. And I see also a difference in my personal performance that fanaticism even it is good, like you try to convince everybody it’s good to believe in stars, because I have seen the stars and you must believe it, you do it in a fanatic way they say this guy is crazy. I have to watch out that I don’t become too passionate.’

An important aspect of a mission or calling in ‘ASL talk’ is the desire to change something. The interviewees say that they want to make a difference for human beings, for the environment, or for their own local community. One interviewee answers the question ‘What means “your Self” for you?’ with ‘A human being who can make a difference for his/her environment, who can help humanity into a higher level of peaceful coexistence and to sustainable prosperity’ (H2). This seems to be an inappropriate answer. To manage the mismatch he says that ‘You can describe it in many ways’. Especially the last part (into a higher level of…) seems to be quite rehearsed. He seems to be presenting a well-honed image (may it be a personal or organizational). Anyway the interviewee gives a nice, short definition of what the mission means for him.

Other interviewees say, more generally, that it is important to make something happen in life. Important for ‘ASL talk’ is that leaders can be concerned with different problem areas, but that they all want to contribute something. Authentic spiritual leaders are able to create something and make things come true. The interviewees express their belief that small solutions can bring big changes or that the individual who makes a difference can help the system to change. One interviewee says that you should have the big picture in mind but that action rests with the individual (e.g. G2). So it’s important to start with your own development and “to be the change you want to create”. One interviewee expresses that you cannot bring the change you seek until you want to learn. To serve ‘ASL talk’ the formulations have to be optimistic. Change has to rest with the individual, because it addresses the individual. The recipient has to be convinced that it all makes sense, and that the mission is powerful and ethical, and that one can change something, and that if you don’t give up and keep on doing your work, change will happen sometime, somehow (e.g. G11).
H2
Question: And what means “your Self” for you?
Answer: ‘You recognize that... I think you can describe it in many ways. It is a human being who can make a difference for his/her environment, who can help the human race into a higher level of peaceful coexistence and of sustainable prosperity.

G11
‘And we realize not one solution helps. Because different people have different needs. For some people services help, some people needs help, so when you asked, you know: what do you do when things are not working or the knowledge is not working, or ... – you just don’t give up. You keep doing your work. You just keep on and on. And you know, change will happen sometime, somehow.’

In ‘ASL talk’, the mission is related to sustainability. The interviewees frame sustainability as a reason why ASL needs to be developed. They also construct it as an aspect of ASL and as an intended outcome.

Sustainability, for some interviewees, not only entails protecting our resources for the next generation, it is much more universal, it also includes protecting our spiritual dimension as human beings. For the interviewees, sustainability is an ethical, social and spiritual responsibility. Sustainability is a popular concept and hence it can be used to facilitate ‘ASL talk’. The interviewees let the current definition of sustainability appear as much more limited than their view. They use a broadly discussed and famous concept and push it over its boundaries. They concede that the mainstream definition works because it is practical and people understand it, but they also use it as illustration for narrowness. This is similar to what the interviewees do with the concept of leadership in ‘ASL talk’. They use the known definitions and add a spiritual dimension. Sustainability in ‘ASL talk’ needs a kind of spiritual awareness and means non-destructiveness, don’t kill, or don’t exploit nature. One interviewee explains his view in more detail: Sustainability makes sure that the water is clean, but even though the water is clean, it can be dead water, the water can be ‘unhappy’. For him, sustainability should go one step beyond: ‘But is the water happy?’ ‘Will it connect with the happiness of the soul?’ ‘Or will it add happiness to your gunas, to your mental energy?’ (A14). The interviewee refers to Dr. Emoto to account for his argument and uses spiritual terms (e.g. gunas) to place his thought in a spiritual context. First, he discusses the ‘egocentric’ boundaries of the ‘old’ understanding of sustainability. Then he can describe leaders, who should see the ‘bigger picture’ (compared with ‘ordinary’ people). The water example helps him to enlarge his field of concern. It allows him to talk about respect and appreciation of water. His constructional work is needed because it is not easily said, that one should respect water and that water should be happy. The horizon for sustainability or ethics is always different, depending on cultural, social or individual aspects. Sometimes, respect for different cultures or different human
beings is lacking, sometimes other species are not respected, and sometimes the environment is not included.

**A14**
‘Well my view on sustainable development is that, it’s not protecting our resources for the next generation. I find that very limited because it’s very human centred approach as if only human beings are on this planet or in this cosmic system, it’s only dealing with this planet, it doesn’t talk about the universal system, the whole universe, sun, moon whatever. So actually it’s limited but it works, it’s practical, people understand and so on. I think for leaders I would try to confront them with the bigger picture of the advantages of non-destructiveness, don’t kill the nature, don’t exploit the nature. Far more the bigger picture of sustainability makes sure the water is clean. And Dr. Emoto\(^6\) from Japan proof that even though water is clean it can be dead water, the water is unhappy. So if you go to that level I would say sustainability for me doesn’t stop at the moment you say, oh, you see, we managed to purify dirty water into clean water. For me sustainability goes one step beyond. When you say, good, congratulations you managed to clean water, so you can drink it, it won’t harm you. But is that water happy? Will it connect with the happiness of your soul? Or will it add happiness to your gunas\(^7\) to your mental energy? Is that so? Let’s make a photo of the crystal. Oh my God, this water is clean but it’s not happy. Let’s make it happy then. So you show respect, you show appreciation to that water.’

**F11**
‘Sustainability I would say… It’s just a guideline for the new human behaviour. It is a guideline for the new human being. I mean if we behave like this the earth will be destroyed. Global warming, all the disasters… Just look at the film “The day after tomorrow”. The earth will be destroyed within 20 years. Is not strange. So we are all human being, okay, who can survive? A new human being. So who is that new human being? The new human being is… those people purifying themselves, they practice sustainability in their daily life. The governments practise that in all their regulation. They recycle the waste, they recycle the water, they save energy, they don’t produce steel too much anymore. They don’t consume so much gasoline. Then they can control the situation and then they can survive through that process.’

Sustainability in ‘ASL talk’ combines the chemical, physical, mechanical and the spiritual dimensions. For some interviewees, it is a guideline for ‘new’ human behaviour, for ‘new’ human beings, who are purifying themselves and practicing sustainability in their daily lives (e.g. F11). The interviewees construct sustainability as a morality: as living in harmony with nature, appreciating

\(^6\) Dr. Emoto is known for his controversial claim that if human thoughts are directed at water before it is frozen, images of the resulting water crystals will be beautiful or ugly. This is depending upon whether the thoughts were positive or negative (books: Emoto, M. (2002). Die Botschaft des Wassers 1. KOHA-VerlagGmbH Burgrain)

\(^7\) The Sanskrit word *Guna* refers to qualities, like *Sattva* (harmony, purity), *Rajas* (energy, activity) and *Tamas* (obscurity, chaos). Look for more information in the Bhagavadgita or in Samkhya-Philosophy.
nature, respecting the earth and the supernatural. One interviewee explains: ‘People should learn to look at things in Buddha’s scale’. More generally, the interviewees ask: What is important in the long term? And is it beneficial? The answers to these questions give direction (an inner compass).

For the interviewees, sustainability must be reflected in leadership, only then can leadership become authentic and spiritual.

**Supportive, respectful and meaningful Practice**

Leadership in ‘ASL talk’ is constructed by the interviewees as supportive, respectful, and meaningful. ASL means, for the interviewees, to facilitate different people’s growth and development so that they become self-reliant. It also means to support diversity (e.g. H3). Diversity is like sustainability a popular current topic. Therefore, the interviewees can use it for displaying their up-to-datedness. Diversity is associated with openness, respect and tolerance. Often the discourses about diversity emphasize the support and preservation of diversity and compare biodiversity with cultural or workforce diversity. Control or boundaries of diversity are often kept out of the discussions, because they are supposedly related to ignorance, intolerance and suppression. That could be the reason why the interviewee formulates ideas about boundaries quite complicatedly and says that some forms are not ‘in happy marriage with our company’. He sets limitations for diversity and he supposedly does it in the interest of his company. This means that people get excluded when their growth does not suit the company. To soften the consequences, the interviewee notices that these people may suitable somewhere else, and that people shouldn’t be static. They should change, grow and develop – but it should not affect business (results?). As also discussed, diversity is a difficult and interesting concept in ‘ASL talk’. It is valued, but it is also limited. In extract H3 the organizational image seems to play a big role. The interviewee identifies with his company (‘We’) and tries to emphasize his own contributions. Identification with a company or organization seems to be difficult to handle in ‘ASL talk’, because ASL in general should be applicable in all fields and independent from the specific organization. ‘ASL talk’ addresses more the individual than the organization, and it refers usually to a higher purpose (mission), rather than to business aims. It seems to be easier to set diversity in a spiritual context and to talk about ‘sprinkling the seeds’ (G12) than to place it in a business context, where the business aims have to be reckoned with.

**H3**

‘I think so, yes. I’m also, and that is what makes me so very comfortable with some of the very basic thinking in this company here... I know I also have made my contribu-
tion to it... but we firmly embrace the idea of “you grow, we grow”. So personal growth must perceive business growth... Business growth, which is not invested in personal growth is not sustainable. The whole question is: How do you want people to grow? That will be diverse and he must allow for different people to look into different directions. Some forms of growth will not be in happy marriage with our company – but maybe it will be suitable elsewhere – but we cannot work with people who are static, because static attitudes are going to affect the business. But then it’s up to the leadership to provide the platforms, which allow people to grow. That growth — I find so much evidence for that — derives from understanding the meaningfulness in your work, and the meaningfulness comes from being able to interpret what you are doing on a daily basis in a wider context. This is the contribution, which I’m making to this company, which is well beyond the bottom line.’

G12
‘... And like Swami Rama who knew when he was planting a seed, he would build the land, prepare the ground and sow it. He never wasted it. But I feel, you know, I feel more on the compassion side: I knew Swami Rama also had, but I like to sprinkle the seeds. Which of it sprouts, sprouts. .... , doesn’t it? So good. You know, at least one has come up, I mean...’

Leading means caring for the employees in the view of the interviewees. Authentic spiritual leaders help people to make progress and they support human development. Some interviewees call this awakening, enlivenment or growth of consciousness. They facilitate others by giving them responsibilities and opportunities, bringing space and room for experience and creativity. They build platforms, which allow people to grow and where people can meet. One interviewee holds the opinion that when it is time for people to learn, it is important for the leader to be there, but not to force them (A7). Authentic spiritual leaders in ‘ASL talk’ share knowledge and insights with others; also they share the credit. In extract F12, the interviewee mentions that he serves people by leading them and that he has to be their friends and their parents. The phrase being their ‘parents’ pushes the picture of somebody who takes care, very far. It also implies that the employees are children, depending on the leader. The interviewee probably wanted to illustrate his selfless caring attitude, but his construction opens him to critique. ‘ASL talk’ has to manage that taking care or supporting others is not perceived as arrogant, self-righteousness, or as presumption. On a discursive level, it needs different examples (e.g. F12) or metaphors (e.g. G12) to avoid falling into ‘paternalism’. Often the interviewees use the expression of providing ‘platforms’ (e.g. H3) or emphasize the ‘growth’ of people, but still hierarchies are implicitly involved.

F12
‘He served people by leading them. I serve people by leading them. But now I not just lead them, I have to be their friends, I have to be their parents, I have to take care of...’
The interviewees explain that authentic spiritual leaders perceive their work as meaningful and that they help employees to understand the meaning of their work in a wider context and to integrate it into the meaning of life. Authentic spiritual leaders supposedly are working for a common purpose, not only for money, and they try to communicate these and other ethical values to their employees. They embrace these values in the principles of their organizations (e.g. H3, H4). As in H4, it is noticeable that the employee’s perception is important. Even if ‘ASL talk’ emphasizes the personal, leadership still is concerned with leading others. Consequently it is crucial that the others perceive the leader as authentic. In extract H5, it is also remarked that people need to feel respected and ‘capable of collaborating for a common purpose’. It is not explained here what the common purpose is. It could be anything: a higher ethical goal or profit interests of the company.

In H5 and H6 the topic of diversity comes up again. Interestingly, the interviewee, in extract H6, warns against faked diversity. As discussed above, this interviewee limited diversity earlier in regards to his company. Now he alerts us that even if a company is open for females, it could happen that females are changed by the work into ‘men’. This is a quite well known problem and the interviewee seems not to need a lot of explanation. Furthermore it helps him to display his awareness of such problems and his interest in feminist issues. It also implicates that respect not only entails being open toward others, it also means not changing the other into somebody else. The interviewee uses the verb ‘to bridge’ to illustrate that collaboration is possible, while differences persist. He then says that we know things from different angles, which gives value to all perspectives. ‘ASL talk’ is constructed as being open to all kind of diversity and it supports diversity as a modern value.

H4
‘Authenticity also means embracing the values in the principles of the organisation; and being seen to adopt them.’

H5
‘You must keep yourself very, very open and be curious for what the opinions of others are. In that respect, I think it is important for authentic leaders to develop a capability to operate with very, very different people. And to be able to set the example in a way that people from very diverse backgrounds feel respected and feel capable of collaborating for a common purpose.’

H6
‘So the respect for differences should be the starting point! There is, for example, it’s a subject in itself, there is a big danger that a company, which is opening itself up to females is in reality changing the females into men. And that is one. Once the starting must be we respect differences, now how do we bridge… how do we allocate from that angle; where is the communality? Can we go to a higher level of interpretation, because
we know that many things from this angle and from that angle, you see something different.’

In extract H7, the interviewee appreciates diversity, explicitly. Diversity is the answer to complexity (another popular term) and he supposedly applies it to his own company. He seems to be very enthusiastic to give examples and to illustrate the elements of the theory (first, second, third). Besides demonstrating his ‘modern’ understanding of the world (e.g. complexity, change, Butterfly Effect), he uses this discourse to appreciate his company (‘Which has chosen freely to operate around the world, with practically every country’). He also manages through his constructions to position himself as a very experienced leader. This is important for ‘ASL talk’ if it wants to be convincing to other leaders.

H7
‘The heart of the theory is that diversity is the answer to complexity. If you want to survive in a very complex world, you need internal diversity to cope with that. The reason is as follows – you see in the first place: Any organisation which wants to survive must realise that they can only do so if they are evolving at least in pace with a changing environment and the environment is always changing. And the environment is certainly if you come to a company like mine, which has chosen freely to operate around the world, with practically every country. And then… the world is complex. It is complex… and they have certain parameters to describe the complexity. The complexity is characterised by multiplicity so you have many countries, you have many different consumers, you have many different methods of distributing, you have many different NGO’s who are interfering; you have all the differences in natural laws and regulations. So it is… multiplicity is always there. The second element is interdependence and that is very, very important…; every day we learn more and more about how relationships – how things are interacting which each other – things which we thought were independent from each other in the past – they appear suddenly to be interrelated. So we have the “Butterfly in Tokyo Effect” here… The third is ambiguity; many things can be interpreted in one or more ways, in the end managers must make a choice but it is good to be aware that ambiguity is there in the first case and that in responsible positions we are called upon to be with ambiguity. (…).The way through is by building sufficient diversity in the organisation, so that in the organisation you have the capability of looking at external reality from different angles. And then you start getting the perspective. (…)

The interviewees emphasize that leaders need to respect the environment, different (ancient) cultures, diversity, all beings, and the divine (e.g. D4, A14, F11, H5, H6, H7). Such leaders need to think in totality and in holistic concepts. An authentic spiritual leader feels responsible, but is also able to see what s/he is doing and what is really needed (G5). Authentic spiritual leaders treat and lead others respectfully (e.g. H5, G13). They really listen to their employees and colleagues, they are open for different opinions, internal dissent and attend to others when making decisions (H6). One interviewee expresses the philosophy
that one gets one’s position because of the mission, nothing else. For ‘ASL talk’ it is important to convey such ‘humble’ qualities, because it suits the spiritual perspective.

D4
‘…but the fact remains that under the guide of globalisation all of these ancient cultures are actually being suppressed and wiped out. As I said at the congress in China: 6000 languages are destined to become extinct by the end of the century, 3000 by the year 2050, and I am very conscious of it that not only these languages, cultures and their epic stories and their songs and their dances and their crops have a right to survive, but the world has a right to help them survive so that the world is not impoverished. In the globalisation fashion, that part is often being ignored, the wisdom of the so called non-western people is not given the same recognition…’

G13
‘I feel we have to understand that we have to learn to respect. Respect environment, respect cultures and respect human beings.’

Some of the interviewees mention that leaders can learn from spiritual teachers, how to treat others. They say that they learned from spiritual teachers (e.g. Swami Rama, Himalaya Tradition) and that they try to imitate some of the teacher’s qualities in their leadership (e.g. G14, B3). Following their constructions, authentic spiritual leaders can learn from the way a spiritual teacher treats his/her pupils. Such a teacher imbues, within his or her students, enthusiasm and courage. One interviewee says that a spiritual teacher develops in the students the ability to start the endeavour of walking inwards and helps the students to use their own creativity to serve humanity at large. This supporting attitude suits well into ‘ASL talk’. Further the interviewees describe that spiritual teachers provide an environment where you can unfold what you want to unfold, seek what you want to seek. Providing such development space also supposedly is applicable in leadership. The interviewee in G12 remarks that a teacher (Swami Rama) has planted the seed; he prepares the ground and sows it. He never wastes it. A spiritual teacher in ‘ASL talk’ facilitates the growth of people and furthers one’s own experiences. The teacher’s discipline always comes with love (G14), s/he gives his/her students (self-)confidence and makes them self-reliant (e.g. B3). In the same way, an authentic spiritual leader facilitates employees in the ‘ASL talk’. In the interviews such spiritual teachers are presented very positively. They are described as authentic and easily discriminated from cult Gurus (see above E2), who are characterized as inauthentic.

In extract B3, the interviewee provides the example that his teacher sometimes even shouted at people. This could be perceived as inauthentic or authoritarian. He adds that his ‘Gurudev’ winked at him at the same time to express that the inner attitude was not aggressive or hostile. The interviewee relates this example
to his own leadership, where he wants not to be perceived as too soft or weak. It is a justification of his ‘hard’ leadership methods. The function is here to implicate that even harsh words and strong treatment can come with ‘love’ and good intentions.

G14
‘But I learned with Swami Rama, discipline comes with love. It is not just discipline alone.’

B3
‘No it is a business – Gurudev [The interviewee calls Swami Rama “Gurudev” – it’s a title of respect.] also taught me to take a path where you balance both because in the business field there is a lot of do’s and don’ts – if you become too caring and you become too – how do you put that – soft or weak – the staff and some of the people who do not understand in a matured way - they will think that the leader is very weak – so you need to balance that – and I have seen Gurudev doing that – again I took it from his example because when he was supervising the construction work in the hospital, sometimes it was very slow and he would raise his voice and shout at them but he will wink at me at the same time – he will wink at me and I think “what is my Gurudev not patient, not disciplined – he’s shouting at the people like that?”- Then he will walk away - he said, “Son, if you don’t shout – these guys will never work” So I followed those kind of principles.’

E6
‘My authentic-self is very open to people; I have a lot of connection on our soul level…’

In the view of the interviewees leaders should lead mainly by example. They should inspire people through their work and through their authentic behaviour. One interviewee explains that if you balance mission and passion, then you inspire people to follow your view and your path (A13).

In ‘ASL talk’, collaboration, communication and dialogue are very important for ASL. The interviewees recognize the spiritual value of communication and of meeting people (e.g. A5). Accordingly, they emphasize that there is always a reason for a meeting, it’s always meaningful in some way. One interviewee emphasizes that an authentic spiritual leader has to develop empathy and interest in any information he or she gets from people or from nature.

Leaders should treat others with openness and respect, really listen to them and communicate on an equal level. In the view of the interviewees, this includes acceptance of diverse people and means not acting too differently, i.e. not acting for example like a monk, because other people should feel comfortable so that they can develop trust.

Several interviewees also described that they experience communication on a higher (mental or spiritual) level, and feel being connected with others, for ex-
ample, they experience a connection on the soul level (e.g. E6). Such connections are not easily questioned, and they deliver a nice picture of deep and meaningful relationships. For ‘ASL talk’, it is important that such meetings and communication results in mutual inspiration, enrichment and enhancement, also in the business context. ‘ASL talk’ has to show credibly that spirituality and authenticity improve leadership. The main focus in the interviews here is a personal perspective. The individual benefits are probably easier to handle in ‘ASL talk’, because they are not as conflicting as ASL is in relationship to organizational interests. Further, personal examples can be used and can hardly questioned. But business aspects cannot be fully excluded in ‘ASL talk’ if it is to make sense.

I have indicated what the interviewees talked about when they talked about authenticity, spirituality and leadership. The discursive functions of these constructions were explored in relation to ‘ASL talk’. In the discussion of the three hubs, some fundamental dilemmas appeared. Further analysis of these dilemmas will expose further the nature of the discursive levels of ‘ASL talk’, as explored in the next chapter. Furthermore, my investigation of the data has shown that the interviewees tend to use stories (similar to spiritual traditions). To examine the function of these stories in ‘ASL talk’, some exemplary stories will be discussed in chapter 4.
Ch 4.
Revealing the Dilemmas and Stories

Inspired through Discourse Analysis three main dilemmas could be investigated in the interviews:

1. Authenticity - Inauthenticity Dilemma
2. Individual – Collective Dilemma
3. Spirituality – Business Dilemma

These dilemmas give interesting insights into the data and can enhance the understanding of ASL. Furthermore Discourse Analysis encourages one to look for stories in the data. These stories illustrate important controversial aspects of ‘ASL talk’ and represent the perception and construction of ASL in the researched network.

Authenticity - Inauthenticity Dilemma

Through Discourse Analysis a dilemma between authenticity and inauthenticity became obvious in the interviews. The interviewees need to define authenticity because it delivers the ground to build up a definition of ASL. They have to be very careful in constructing it because it has to fit their ‘authentic’ self-presentation and their definition of ASL. It also needs to be constructed as appealing and reachable.

Constructing a definition of authenticity needs a related construction of inauthenticity, otherwise the construct of authenticity would collapse on a conceptual level. Practically, the interviewees use their (counter-)examples of inauthenticity in their discourses to define authenticity and to show advantages of authenticity. Related to inauthenticity the interviewees name attributes and qualities like proud, regretful, disguise, self-interest, and egotism. For them inauthentic behaviour is destructive and causes many current problems on a personal, organisational and global level.

The interviewees need to explain what is not authentic to account for authenticity. Hence, conceptual tensions arise between authenticity and inauthenticity. The interviewees have also to handle the more practical tension between their own authenticity and their own inauthenticity. They have to construct and place themselves in this tension field and they have to demonstrate their experiences and expertise with it to accomplish a status of an inspiring role model.
The dilemma between authenticity and inauthenticity arises on different construction levels of authenticity and the interviewees have to do some construction work to handle it.

**Personal level**

Often authenticity is constructed by the interviewees on an individual, personal ‘I’-level – concerning, for example, special abilities or qualities, concerning the self (self-exploration, -discovering, -mirroring, -development, -observation (e.g. D5) with reference to the true, real nature of the self (e.g. C2 above) or of human beings, or concerning a personal (spiritual) mission, calling in life (e.g. E7).

In chapter 3, the different aspects of authenticity are discussed. Authenticity is related for the interviewees to the authentic Self, but in some discourses the question of the location of authenticity comes up. Considering for example the construction in extract D5 illustrates that authenticity resides not necessarily in the totality of behaviour but rather in the continual attempt to apply a critical self-reflection. As obvious here the self-reflection is informed by an ideal of how one should behave (e.g. altruistic). The way the interviewee puts his discourse together still leaves room for the authentic self (‘remain authentic’), but also places authenticity in either this self-reflection process or in the criteria applied as basis for judgement within that self-critique. For ‘ASL talk’ it is intriguing that he brings these three elements (authentic self, self-reflection, and an ideal of behaviour) under the topic of authenticity together. It is a very demanding composition and maybe that is also the reason why the interviewee then admits that he sometimes gives himself ‘a little leeway’ – an option for ‘little’ inauthentic behaviour (see also next chapter).

D5

‘No, I’m not authentic all the time, but from my very childhood I have one great gift, and that is observing each one of my thoughts, and each tone of my voice, and when I have spoken... I said: “Oh no, there was sharpness in this voice, change it...”’. Or: “Hey, this thought wasn’t purely altruistic, change it” So through that self-observation I try to remain authentic. At times I have given in to temptation being aware that “Okay I’m giving myself a little leeway.”’

E7

‘I think that normally all the people have an inner way to go, to learn something here on earth that is a little bit different from past lives... and sometimes it will be a mission... But not everyone has a mission what is clearly for themselves and is seen by others. But I believe that there is no one here on earth without a mission, but the mission is... through their own growth process and sometimes the growth process also stimulating others. I think everyone has a mission but first thing they have to know is that the mis-
sion is for yourself and in second way it can help or reach other people or touch other 
people.’

When the interviewees use an ‘I’ perspective, they typically hurry to explain that 
they are only on the path (e.g. B4), always learning, still developing (e.g. H8), 
not always authentic (e.g. D5) or similar things. They try to avoid, through this, 
the possible contradiction that an authentic person (leader) won’t say that he or 
she is authentic. If this is really a contradiction it is debatable but for the inte-
viewees, authenticity is not compatible with arrogance, a big ego or pride, so 
that they have to construct themselves in a way which shows some modesty. An 
overconfident self-presentation could be perceived as inauthentic. Their often 
humble self-presentation has the function to appear as authentic. It seems to be 
quite difficult to present yourself as authentic; there is always the risk that it 
turns out to be perceived as inauthentic. Hence constructional and linguistic 
strategies like footing, telling stories etc. are required.

B4
‘In my opinion okay I might not be the ideal candidate. I would also like to be an 
authentic leader, but I am on the path to being one - and I do not know how long more it 
would take.’

H8
‘…What has fascinated me is that the development always continues. It never stops! At 
least for me it has not stopped. I’m learning every day; I’m learning new things, some-
thing, which maybe has come in a natural way, but something, which affected my per-
formance and my attitude to work...’

Process of Authenticity (Bringing in moments of inauthenticity)
The interviewees construct authenticity as a process, so that inauthenticity can 
be admitted because it is just a moment in the process. Inauthenticity then 
doesn’t drastically alter the development of authenticity. This construction gains 
also in that the interviewees don’t need to say if they are authentic or inauthentic 
because it is an ongoing development and there can be moments of being more 
authentic and moments of being less authentic or inauthentic.

The interviewees describe authenticity as being related to sincerity, honesty, 
truthfulness or integrity, and hence they also try to be open and talk about their 
own inauthenticity (e.g. D5), weaknesses (e.g. B2 above) or about the hindran-
ces to being authentic (e.g. E8). So that by admitting inauthentic behaviour they 
become authentic.

E8
‘I think there are ups and downs... And mostly it happens more on authentic level when 
there is more rest for the persons. But too much rest, not doing anything, being lazy, so 
they have something needing some.... for the experience, to do it the right way, to be
authentic. And when you are lazy you aren’t experiencing and when there is always too much to do, then it is not easy to stay authentic.’

An interesting example is presented in box 2. Here an interviewee brings in a vivid example of his own inauthenticity. His self-presentation tries to balance the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity and he makes a remarkable discrimination between justifying and compromising to bring inauthentic behaviour back in line with authenticity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justifying and Compromising</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D6</strong></td>
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<td>Question: So what is the symptom of going away from authenticity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer: When you know that it doesn’t fit your principles what you are doing. But even then if you remain aware and not justifying it… I’ll give you a small example: Have you seen my nice sterling? I don’t have it here… I will show you my nice sterling silver Mont-blanc pen. I’m very proud of it, to that degree I’m not authentic. Two years ago I was passing this airport Mont-blanc shop in Chicago. And there was a solid silver pen sitting there… “Well, if I don’t buy it I can feed so many children, I can give one more scholarship, no no no, that is not good for you, don’t do it.” Finally it does look better not to have conflict… have it? Go on… So I bought it, very expensive, 200 something Dollars… I have it! I must admit that I’m a bit attached to it, because so expensive…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question: And then you would say this is not authentic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: If you are aware that this is a compromise you are making then you have one little spot, but it will not alter you drastically. The moment you start justifying it then you change your principles.</td>
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Extract D6 directly follows extract D5 where the interviewee explains that he sometimes gives in to temptations. In extract D6, he gives now an example of his own inauthentic behaviour. He tells it like a little story, which is very descriptive and understandable. He mentions the inner conflicts and footnotes his own inner dialogue. He also mentions that he could feed children with the money or give scholarships. So he demonstrates that buying the pen for him has huge (negative) effects. Small things can have serious effects and especially when he does something. With this negative example he also implicitly says that he usually gives everything for others. He shows responsibility by an act of ‘selfishness’. The moral seems to be that one (an authentic spiritual leader) should always give and serve others but sometimes s/he also can take a little break, do something for him/herself. It is important that the person is aware of his/her own weaknesses, actions and the consequences.

At the end, he explains that small little spots do not alter ‘you’ drastically, when you are attentive. One has to realize one’s own weaknesses like attachments. Never change your own principles through justifying these things because this would be inauthentic. In D5 he explains that through self-observation one can stay authentic.

He makes a difference here between justifying and compromising. Justifying is inauthentic; it changes your principles and it is related to ignorance. Only through self-awareness can inauthentic actions turn into authentic behaviour. Then justifying turns
Dilemmas and Stories

into compromising. The term compromise is related to negotiations, to finding the middle ground, to giving and taking. ‘We together’ find a compromise. Justifying means defending something, the personal position or the individual behaviour, it is ‘against’ others and not together with them. The difference makes the attitudes, the thoughts about it, the inner tendency to justify and judge everything. This construction can be traced back into a spiritual background. One related aspect is that spiritual traditions try to teach self-awareness. The ‘student’ learns to become aware of his/her own thoughts, own sensations, his/her own breath or, more generally, of his/her one’s own behaviour. Meditation is the most common practice used to become more aware of oneself. It also often includes the aspect of stopping the inner voice of judgement. It can be understood, related to justification of inauthentic behaviour, as stopping justifying. It shouldn’t be misunderstood as ‘everything goes’ no matter if it is ethical or not. One can see it as accepting yourself and what you did. An inauthentic act would multiply itself if you continue worrying. Producing negative thoughts would only lead to more inauthentic behaviour (justifying). It is like a circle, which has to be broken by awareness and acceptance. Then the inauthentic behaviour doesn’t stop the process of becoming more and more authentic.

Listening back to the recording of the interview (D) also shows that the interviewee tells this little story (D5 and D6) with some humour. Using humour and some laughter makes the little story even more emotive and it helps to overcome the dilemma between authenticity and inauthenticity.

The giving of examples of their own inauthenticity and the descriptive and vivid construction makes the interviewees appealing; the recipient can identify and sympathize with them. Vivid examples can create an impression of perceptual re-experience. The speaker seems to re-experience the situation and invites the listener/reader to (re-)experience it with him/her. It also demonstrates the awareness of the speaker, his/her good qualities in observing and remembering things, which suits their self-presentation as attentive, concentrated and awake. Often these are very detailed descriptions in the use of package problems, like the dilemma of authenticity and inauthenticity. Many interviewees embed their experiences in a little narrative, which supports the plausibility of their description. It also let’s their stories often appear as normal, as something we all experience and their reactions seem to be necessary, understandable and reasonable.

Normality of Inauthenticity

Also it seems to be normal to act inauthentically from time to time. The interviewees emphasize that we all have human weaknesses – that’s okay! Just be aware of them and don’t change your principles and values. Accept yourself and try your best. Normality is a good excuse, if it is normal everybody can do it without being blamed or without the need to justify it. Some questions follow:
Where is the border? When is it not normal anymore? When it is normal why change? Why try so hard to become more authentic?

The interviewees explain this at other points but it is interesting how they construct here this breathing space, this relief for themselves and hence for others. DA is aware of discrepancies in discourses – they are ‘normal’. They don’t have to be suppressed, they are interesting and remarkable. The interviewees emphasize that authentic behaviour is always benevolence, is always serving others, but this ‘always’ has its exceptions here. Authenticity constructed as a process is fluid, allows up and downs, even breaks. Inauthentic moments are possible and can be even turned into authentic moments. This flexible construction of authenticity makes the concept robust against practical attacks, but it also can increase conceptual critics. Well the interviewees are professionals and so are probably more concerned with practical aspects.

**Turning inauthenticity into authenticity**

A15

‘I think for me there are several levels, but there are normal obstructions. For example if I don’t like somebody’s image, I wouldn’t buy, I would avoid working with that person. I think that is not authentic, that’s too much of the blind bias effect that personally don’t like him and avoid him. The experiences I have with working with that kind of people, where I did work with them, I always ended with the conclusion I could have done it even without them and perhaps have more fun, less destructive. But that’s I think one of the hindrances that you are hindered by the energy of other people, the negative energy of other people.’

In extract A15, the interviewee also emphasizes the normality of weaknesses (“normal obstructions”). He admits his own inauthenticity (“blind bias”), but at the end he explains that this also has a function, so that his inauthentic behaviour here is understandable and even makes sense. His inauthentic manners become more the quality of a good intuition. Admitting failures or here especially inauthenticity is often handled at the end as some kind of quality. It seems to be nearly impossible for someone to admit his/her ‘bad’ attributes or ‘bad’ behaviour, without explaining it, defending it or turning it into something good. There are always good reasons for it, often these reasons come from outside (external attribution) and are limited in time. Good, authentic behaviour instead often is attributed to the internal and it seems to be inherent in the person. These constructions help the person to create a reasonable self-image of being authentic, while even sometimes acting inauthentically.

On the one hand, it’s a quality to admit one’s own mistakes – it makes one more ‘authentic’, open and honest. It also shows self-awareness (an important spiritual quality) and that one is able to learn from one’s mistakes (e.g. G15, F13). On the other hand, the interviewees show that ‘bad’ behaviour can turn into something good (e.g. A15).
G15
‘I make many mistakes, I make a fool of myself in the process of working myself out - but I think, ‘it is a healthy process’. It makes me stronger from within. And that is a core for my functioning outside.’

F13
‘If you get in trouble, or you do suffering, than you start thinking. What’s going on? Is something wrong with me, or should I change my behaviour? So we learn from failure. The Chinese we say, ‘Failure is the mother of success.’”

**Personal freedom and responsibility**

Their construction underlines that there are always options and choices to make. Even if one acted inauthentically, there is still the alternative to change, to develop, to learn from it. It is always a very personal decision and the choice has to be made again and again. This includes a personal freedom; one can decide to act in an ethical, beneficial way or in an egotistical and inauthentic way. The situational influence is quite reduced in these constructions. In business contexts the situational influences are often emphasized and crucial. Pressures from outside are directing decisions and developments, so that the leader doesn’t seem to be free in making his/her decisions. Spirituality has a totally different understanding and sees the person/leader in full responsibility.

That the interviewees construct authenticity and hence ASL in this way, make it attainable for everybody who wants it. So it’s totally up to the person, to the leader if s/he wants to develop ASL. The here created personal freedom leads definitely to personal responsibility – a never-ending responsibility. Rendering authenticity as a personal choice ‘blames’ also those who are not choosing it. Why are they not choosing the beneficial, good way? It seems to betray their deficiency, their inadequacy, and their lack of interest. These inauthentic ‘others’ can be understood as blind or ignorant against their personal freedom and responsibility or as too selfish to make the ‘right’ choices. Anyway constructing ‘personal freedom’ can lead to an inescapable mandatory choice.

**Authenticity as the true human nature**

Authenticity is constructed here as relating to the self and it is believed here, that we are authentic deep in our nature. Inauthenticity takes place on a different level; it is more related to behaviour. The true self is not inauthentic. This is a delusion for the interviewees. This understanding is congruent with spiritual understandings of the self and ‘true’ human nature. This conceptualisation maintains that authenticity is natural, inherent in every person, so that everyone can discover it. Authenticity becomes practically immune from danger; it can’t be destroyed, and it’s at the bottom line. Inauthenticity is on the surface. Things on the surface are changing, easy to transform and are not able to change what lies underneath. The thought of the possibility of an inauthentic self is extremely de-
nied here. We can’t discover an inauthentic, ‘bad’ self. To construct this belief as a fact, as the underlying truth, the foundation is laid to develop an ethical definition of ASL which becomes unquestionable. In a discourse, a grounded truth in any way must be constructed upon which to build up the rest of the construction. It’s like a house which needs a strong, stable, unshakeable foundation – otherwise it would collapse. In science, such unquestionable constructs seem to be unscientific (even if they are still there), but in a discourse, they are practically needed and useful.

Their construction of an ethical, spiritual self justifies also what they do and explains why they want to integrate spirituality into business. The inner fire (e.g. A1 above) forces one to move on, it’s an inner drive to make a contribution (e.g. B5), to change the world (e.g. A13), to serve humanity (e.g. G16). They use terms like passion or desire (e.g. A13) so that it gets a very emotional touch. This true or authentic self is hard to question, it is a kind of belief or inner experience, but it also does a very central job here, because it excludes a definition of authenticity, which is negative, destructive or more neutral.

B5
‘I was initiated by Gurudev and there was no stopping after that, you know, because he reviewed everything that I wanted to know – he had answers to all the questions. And I think he gave me a different type of inspiration to contribute to society – then he said, “You are going back after this two weeks” not staying here (laughing) – go back to work. He said, “I don’t want you to sit here and start worrying about your money and your practice and your wife and your children. He said take the middle road first – balance the spiritual. But I promise you that every month I will meet you or you will meet me”. Which he did – he kept to that part of the bargain and never went away from me for more than 30 days.’

G16
‘The fact that you are a citizen of two worlds: inner and outer, you know that the journey has begun. In fact, I thought, the journey had ended, but Swami Rama over a period of years pointed out, that that was the beginning, not the end. But over the years he imbued within us enthusiasm, courage and the ability to start the endeavour of walking inward. And using our creativity to serve humanity at large.’

Authentic Spiritual Leadership Level

On the ASL level, the interviewees need to present themselves as powerful, successful leaders to function as a role model for other leaders. They also need to show, why they are not inauthentic leaders, when they explain that there are so

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8 The often-repeated question, if Hitler was authentic, is denied fundamentally through these constructs. One interviewee describes in more detail why Hitler was not authentic (see e.g. D3 above).
many inauthentic leaders in the world. They have to relate themselves to the group or category of (successful) leaders and at the same time they have to discriminate themselves from inauthentic leaders.

Besides their humble self-presentation, which suits the image of being authentic and spiritual, the interviewees express a positive self-concept, with high self-confidence, high-perceived self-efficacy and a positive self-perception. They are aware of their qualities and abilities and know how to apply them efficiently. But some interviewees warn that one has to be careful not to become overconfident (e.g. F14) because this would be a hindrance to being authentic. Several interviewees perceive themselves as being different from most others or even as exceptions. They feel special in a way, but try, at the same time, not to feel superior or arrogant. Often they emphasize that everybody is equal and should be treated equally. It seems to be a quite difficult balancing act to construct an efficient image of an authentic, spiritual leader.

F14
‘Because I know in a previous life, I was a general. I was defeated by one battle, because I was overconfident.’

**Spiritual and business repertoires**

What the interviewees do to present themselves in the field of ASL is, for example, to draw on different repertoires.

A16
‘And later on when I met people like Master C. and I talk to him, he says to me, look you have two things… I asking the question, I don’t know why because it’s practical to ask a question about the future. I said I’m not going to ask you about my future, I’m going to ask you the question, why am I doing the things the way I do? Where does that energy come from? Why, which are the engines that are driving me to never say ‘no’ when somebody asks me for help I can’t do that. So he said, look you have the excellent skill as a problem solver, no matter what kind of problems people ask you, I have this problem, you have the ability to immediately find a solution for people, not only water… or whatever, PhD, money, whatever. And the other ability you have is you look forward. So the combination of forward looking, looking to the future, but also solving the problem of this man or that woman, or that child today. That makes you unique and that’s why a lot of people come to you. Because you have that and therefore, how do you say, you are condemned to play that role in life. So all these things, Kumbha Mela and Swami Veda, and I always felt like that, but it was good, how do you say, confirmation that look, there is nothing else, this is it and I’m so happy with that. Ja, that’s what I love. And at that journey I’m enjoying it with my wife, with my kids, my brothers.’

For example, in Extract A16, the interviewee describes himself and implicitly the good/authentic leader in terms of the business repertoire (e.g. excellent skill as a problem solver, ability to look forward), in terms of the spiritual repertoire
(e.g. energy, being unique, play that role in life, love, journey, Kumbha Mela, Swami Veda) and he also draws from a scientific (technical) repertoire talking about engines, energy. Interestingly he uses somebody else (Master C.) as the one who talks about his qualities. This shouldn’t let him appear as arrogant even if he states that he possesses quite tremendous qualities (excellent skill as a problem solver, no matter what kind of problems… you have the ability to immediately find a solution for people,... for whatever etc.). He uses the conversational practice of footing (Goffman, 1979) here to do the job for him. Footing is one strategy here to present oneself as successful and authentic, without being perceived as inauthentic for that.

As he, in his own words, says, he got a confirmation, a confirmation to be “condemned to play that role in life”. It’s his destiny, nothing else and now because he knows “that’s it”, he loves it, he enjoys the journey. The extract ends in emotional and quite spiritual expressions, which illustrate the joy of knowing what to do in life and especially in work, and brings it together with private life (family).

Also the other interviewees construct themselves using business and spiritual resources. They describe themselves with attributes from both worlds. Their understanding of the topic of ASL requires that they construct themselves in terms of both fields and it helps to create the image of a successful leader, who can be authentic.

The concept of a Mission: Interplay of Power and Powerlessness

The concept of a ‘mission’ the interviewees construct and use here is very helpful to overcome dilemmas as we will see also later on. Here it helps to manage the problem of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Often the interviewees use the term mission, which comes from a spiritual repertoire, to construct themselves as the fulfiller of a mission. They try to do that through their work. So this construction brings, once again, the spiritual and the business repertoires together. Furthermore, the way they use the term mission ensures that they are not perceived as selfish or working for profit or appreciation because that would be inauthentic for them.

The mission is an essential aspect of self-construction here, and it is essential for the ASL construction in general. Being tasked by a mission is a situational reason. It comes from outside, but it has to be discovered inside. It allows success for the ‘good’ purpose; it allows the leader to make profit and to become powerful. The mission provides the aim for work and radically differentiates leadership from inauthentic motives. The interviewees construct the mission as ethical and beneficial for others, so that the mission is, by definition, authentic, and excludes inauthentic leadership.

The mission also provides reasons for becoming a leader at all and why one should become active and not just develop the one’s own authenticity at home.
Authenticity is already constructed as toward others, as helping and supporting others, but the mission seems to set the situational context and the role one has to play (e.g. A16). The mission brings authenticity to business and protects it from inauthenticity. This construction also implies that leadership without a mission or higher aim is inauthentic.

The attributes of the interviewees are partly internal and partly external (God, destiny) (e.g. F4, F5 above). They see themselves as ‘the architect of their lives’ so they feel responsible, powerful and able to change things (high perceived self-efficacy). They perceive themselves as the cause of change. On the other hand, some describe that they feel like a tool; a tool for the gods or like a tool for the mission, for the calling, or for the destiny, whatever is important for them. One interviewee says his growth came naturally because events were created for him which enabled him to take decisions and that the fundamental decisions were made by his spiritual teacher (“Gurudev”) (B6). This illustrates a certain powerlessness of the interviewees.

B6
‘I wouldn’t call it intuitive power but I could be able to gauge people from meeting them and talking to them – this was a special help that I received from Gurudev and the growth actually came quite naturally because I think events were created which enable me to take decisions and I always thought that the decisions were made by Gurudev.’

As a consequence they do not ‘earn’ the tribute and acknowledgement, it goes to another instance and they can thus avoid their ‘ego blowing up’ (inauthenticity). To keep your ego small and to reduce or to eradicate your arrogance and pride is a central theme in spiritual development and important here for authenticity. Ego- and Selflessness is a spiritual value which the interviewees want to attain here in the name of ASL.

External attributions also function as an excuse or justification for what they do. So, for example, if work (their mission) takes all their time and attention and nothing is left for the family or if other people are left behind, it is not their fault and it’s hard to argue against this valuable higher purpose. They have the feeling that they ‘have to’ do what they do and that the mission is the most important in life. But most of the interviewees see this also as a dilemma and they try to balance it (e.g. A13). The kind of powerlessness they describe here is not perceived as negative by them. They seem to perceive it as an honour and as a certain level of spiritual development.
Individual – Collective Dilemma

Self-centred and supporting Authenticity

Authenticity can be constructed as a very personal, individual thing, which affects only the person and nothing beyond. Contrastingly, authenticity is here constructed by the interviewees in relation to a bigger field, to the community, humanity at large, towards others etc. (e.g. H2, G17).

G17
‘Yes. I would always put “authentic” to a last test in terms of: how does it benefit the individual and the humanity at large? How does it hurt a person or the humanity at large? That I would use as a parameter to define authenticity, be it in behaviour, be it in actions or be it in attitude.’

C9
‘There is a difference between your own authenticity and the authenticity of others: In what degree are your actions conducive for your own authenticity and the authenticity of others? It’s an important discrimination, because you can maximize your own authenticity at the expense of the authenticity of others. Maybe a more female authenticity supports also the authenticity of others. Look at the “Presence of the Circle Being” Interview with the “Circle of Seven”, there is a female authenticity in pure culture described. And this is very different from the classical, western ‘Hero-Authenticity’, which maximizes only one’s own greatness at the expense of the other people. That is not very effective if you think about Leadership.

A second discrimination is between an individual authenticity and a community authenticity: There is an old type of authenticity, an old spirituality, an old form of collective identity which is superior and shaping for the individual. The old model is of collectivization, where the individual freedom gets lost. And there is a new form. “Circle of Seven” is again an example. If you develop the collective identity, you develop the individual, one’s own identity. What you experience as a collective or common presence, allows you a deeper approach to your own Self and vice versa.’

Some interviewees discriminate to emphasize this ground between being self-centred and supporting authenticity (e.g. C9). The interviewees perceive a dilemma here between individual (hero) and collective (female) authenticity, which they try to overcome. The construction of an eastern, more female authenticity is discussed in detail in box 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authenticity – An eastern and female quality?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual authenticity is described as more western, more male. The attributes of giving, helping and serving are related to eastern philosophies and to female qualities. This draws on a quite common picture: the individual, strong, hard, self-centred, business qualities are male and western, and the collective, soft, selfless, spiritual qualities are eastern and female. It’s quite amazing how strong and lasting these conceptualizations</td>
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are and how they get empowered again and again through their use in different discourses. Today it seems that they are often used to please the female and the eastern cultures. They have the connotations that female, eastern qualities are ‘good’, more authentic even than male, western qualities which are reckoned as being ‘bad’ and inauthentic. There seems to be a re-discovering of eastern, female values and an appreciation of them, consequently, the other (the male and western) values have to be depreciated. The contrast between good and bad is always rhetorically effective and the use of common prejudices makes it easier to implicate what is good and what is bad. The different valuing here of the eastern, female and western, male, express some modernity. Old traditional views seem to be overcome by the interviewees. They are placed in a modern, maybe marginal environment where earlier suppressed values are re-valued again. These values are socially desired in such environments like traditional values were socially desired in traditional contexts. It is great that discriminated values come back to appreciation, but there is also a risk that prejudices and generalisations of attributes get strengthened. Furthermore, the western, male values get suppressed or get the connotation of being bad, out of date etc. It seems to be easier and more rhetorically effective to construct a contrast than to construct an integration attempt.

**Box 3**

**Selflessness**

Some interviewees relate themselves to ‘eastern’ philosophies. The different traditions are not equivalent to what is said in the interviews, but they form the background and influence the discourse constructions of the interviewees. Interesting examples are the interviewees who relate themselves to the ‘Himalayan Tradition’. They define authenticity and ASL as selfless service. The other interviewees already use the term service, which is already difficult to handle in a business context. The term ‘selfless’ seems nearly unthinkable in the business world. The interviewees need a lot of construction work to make this claim work. The interviewees use, for example, stories to create the conditions for selfless service. An example of an interviewee who does some effort to justify selflessness is given in extract D7; the interviewee justifies selflessness with a brief historical overview. He uses references from western and eastern cultures. ‘All philosophers’ were emphasizing selflessness. It is constructed as a common truth, which then got lost, because people started to justify their weaknesses and their bad actions. Hence selflessness has to be rediscovered. If it is not rediscovered then only the strongest will survive in inhumane societies.

**D7**

*Answer:* Any philosophy of life that brings benefit to others without excluding somebody. And it is not motivated by desire for personal success. What I don’t like about sustainable development, is the Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy, there is no difference. Up to 150 – 200 years ago, all the philosophers afterwards agreed on transcendental principles of some kind. That was one thing. The Chinese, the Indian, the Greeks, whoever, all were emphasizing altruism, selflessness; it was an essential part of
all systems of philosophies. Socrates like everybody else was speaking of that. Third was, that the philosophers were not there to justify human weaknesses. What has happened to the combination of the theory of evolution... Not the theory of evolution but the philosophy that has risen out of the theory of evolution, the survival of the fittest meaning survival of the physically strongest?

Question: Darwin’s theory...

Answer: There is nothing wrong with the theories of science, but with the philosophy that has come out of it. So make yourself strong, physically strong, you’ll wipe out the other species! Elbow everybody out! Then the philosophy, that everything is economics, which as Marxism. Means of production and distribution is everything. The philosophy of utilitarianism: The father who was a British government official in India; John Stuart Mil, because they had to justify their acts. And then the modern system of psychology in which you say: ‘It’s alright to be angry; behaviourism. And you justify that, you start teaching people, if philosophy were there, they would work on reducing their level of anger and replacing it with something else. Well, sex is a normal natural urgency of human beings, but where do you draw the line?

Selflessness and selfless service are traditional virtues in many cultures and religions. They are closely related to altruism and ethics. Selflessness is a spiritual term, which appears as strange and extreme in a business setting. It is so unusual that it raises resistance and opposition if one would directly confront a traditional business leader with such a term. It has such an extreme position in this individual-collective dilemma that it attracts a lot of attention. Here the leader or the business world seems to be confronted with something totally new and foreign. The claim initiates questions, criticisms, thoughts, and different kinds of reactions. That’s an effective function of a claim. The most important point of making a claim is to force a reaction; whether positive or negative is subordinated. It has to catch some attention otherwise it is useless. Then to set it in the right light, the context becomes important. The interviewees have to construct a context (for example through a story), which make selflessness thinkable and comprehensible.

Talking about selflessness links the interviewee immediately to spirituality. Just mentioning the term creates a special image. The term seems to be quite unquestioned in ‘eastern’ philosophies and that’s mainly the background the interviewees draw on here. Contrastingly, in more ‘western’ philosophies, it’s hardly questioned if selflessness is possible at all. Some main questions are: Can we act selflessly or is everything we choose selfish by definition? The main topic is authenticity here which essentially involves knowing oneself, and now the interviewees talk about selflessness. Do these two concepts go together? Can we act (lead) really selflessly for the benefit of others without expecting reward? Even if the interviewees make this thinkable through a spiritual background construction, one could still criticise that there is always a reward for the person because if one helps others, s/he develops in a spiritual sense – so it is a kind of benefit for the person. The point is that these positive side-benefits for the per-
son should not be the driving force. The drive is constructed here as benevolence so that it comes out of the person and that it is not just a reaction to external, normative requirements. The interviewees ground it in the interrelatedness of all beings and in their ethical understanding of the self. So if you act for the benefit of others, it also benefits the whole, and so also you. Again there is an explanation why one should do it, why it is positive for him/her. It seems that at the end always such an explanation is needed to persuade. This is quite a contradiction to their definitions. On a practical level it functions as an explanation.

The dilemma between individual and collective authenticity is managed in the interviewees through integrating the individual in the collective. The individual gets carried away with the collective like the drop in the ocean. Personal, spiritual development (authenticity) is still central but it means to support also other people’s growth (authenticity).

**Function of Collective Authenticity**

The positive, collective and supportive construction of authenticity in the interviews serves different tasks. For example, the task that authenticity is never selfish or egotistic, it is always giving, serving, and helping others. It shows also the benefits for others because it’s not only a personal thing, which is only beneficial for the individual. This makes it interesting for responsible and sustainable leadership because it goes beyond the leader and it can spread out in the organization. Authenticity is based on altruism, (selfless) service and love (e.g. D2, E9) and so also ASL is constructed by the interviewees as (selfless) service. A self-centred construction of authenticity wouldn’t be very effective in the field of leadership as one interviewee explains explicitly (C9). This is a very important point, which also affects the construction of spirituality. Both spirituality and authenticity are related to the person, him- or herself, to a personal development and now the interviewees construct both terms in a way that they are additionally related to others. They take it from an individual level to a collective level. The two concepts get an outgoing quality; a ‘serving others’ connotation, a ‘being in the world’ dimension (e.g. C3). In extract C9, the interviewee emphasizes, additionally, that if you develop the collective identity, you develop the individual identity. The personal development builds the foundation but then authenticity goes beyond the individual.

If authenticity had been constructed as only a ‘personal development’ thing, it wouldn’t have been able to serve as the foundation for the construction of ASL.

E9

‘…So the thing that you have to care for, is yourself... and you don’t have to stop ‘them’ loving, then you can understand. If you do that your heart becomes wider, you know that there is a teaching; you have to learn to love them all and that the special love for one or a few more people… and that it can be special love for one or more people…’
that it can be special but never may stop the love of a bigger group of persons or for the theme you have to work on and that’s not always the easiest part.’

Evolution and Development of Authentic Spiritual Leadership

The dilemma between the individual and the collective is also mirrored in the different constructions of a collective evolution of ASL or an individual development.

Evolution of Authentic Spiritual Leadership

In extract A17, the interviewee talks about the “evolution to spiritual, authentic leadership”. He brings authenticity and spirituality together with leadership and unites them. He constructs it in a way that makes the terms equal, interchangeable concepts. It’s an evolution in the same direction.

A17

‘I see superficial leaders, when they start understanding the term superficial, they will look for superficial solutions, which is a good beginning because at least they are looking for a solution. So for me in the evolution to spiritual, authentic leadership, the evolution is, first you start to destroy then we taught you to understand that you have to approach, find your solutions in an integrated way. So what was in the definition of integrated ways 10, 15, 20 years ago? 20 years ago you understand disciplinary, integrated approach, it was I want you make nice furniture, cut the trees, bring them and we will make nice furniture and we will make money. I’m creative, I’m successful, and I’m a great business leader. Then came the era of, no, no, no, wait a minute, if you cut a tree, you are destroying something, plant another tree. See, we are planting trees. But still the driving force is exploitation, profit making. Success is defined as profit making. I think now we are approaching the era of when people say, it’s not nice to cut another tree, it’s not nice even to plant another tree, it belongs to the fact that the furniture you are making is not made by children or you not exploit the poor people for the cheap selling and you are selling for a high price in another country. So you get all these rules of corporate, social responsibilities. The ethics are coming in; that’s another value that’s coming up. And then I think the ultimate level is the spiritual level. For the leaders it will be very normal to act in a spiritual way. And when that happens, then I think we will approach a more peaceful and sustainable way of enjoying what this cosmic system is offering to us. And even if we live longer and we have no joy in that longer life because now we live longer but we don’t have quality. We end up, you should feel happy at the end of the time but all the people I meet, I meet very few people who were really happy. You see their face and everything. I don’t want to die like that. I want to have a big smile on my face when I’m eighty.’

Extract A17, is constructed like an enthusiastic speech. It shall persuade that it will be normal in the future to act in a spiritual, responsible and ethical way, even in business. The interviewee uses the example of the developing and changing definition of ‘integrated ways’. There is a comparison which first has its
highlight in reaching the ultimate level – the spiritual level and then even includes the happiness of life and a happy, contented way of dying. The way he constructs this speech makes it difficult to ask why this evolution should happen. Such an emotive end even makes it difficult to get back to a rational level. The small steps he takes to illustrate the development of the definition of ‘integrated ways’ and the direct speech, make it all very plausible and so, on the other hand, it is not so easy to question. Business has also here a negative connotation and often, as in all the interviews, spirituality helps to get it to a more peaceful and sustainable stage.

Evolution usually is used to describe the process by which living organisms develop and diversify from earlier forms over time. The concept is generally attributed to Darwin, who proposed a theory of evolution by natural selection⁹. The theory explains that more adequately adapted varieties of an organism not only survive over time but also tend to reproduce themselves more successfully than their less well-adapted competitors. The focus here is not on the accuracy of Darwin’s theory or on contesting it, rather on the meaning of the term ‘evolution’. Evolution implies a development from more simple forms to more complex, higher forms – this is probably what the interviewee wants to express; a natural development towards something better, higher, more adequate to deal with the current challenges in the world. There ‘evolves’ a ‘new’ leadership style, which can lead to solutions in an integrated way. It seems to have natural, biological motivation and source and can’t be stopped.

That would mean we don’t have to intervene. It would come naturally. No leadership trainings or other interventions would be needed(?). To naturalize the arising of ASL means that the interviewees cut their own expertise. They wouldn’t be needed as examples or experts. So besides emphasizing the inescapable development of ASL something else, another construction is needed to get this expertise back.

**Development of Authentic Leadership**

In extract A17, the interviewee constructs himself as a ‘teacher’, or as one of the ‘teachers’ (“…then we taught you…”). Some interviewees construct themselves in this way or they say “you should teach them…” or they say in leadership training, ‘this and this is needed’. Through these constructions the reality of ASL as a teachable concept is emphasized and the interviewees get their status of experts back.

They talk always about a support for their ‘own’, individual personal development, of their ‘own’ approach. Many interviewees mention that learning from

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⁹ A similar theory of evolution was proposed independently by Alfred Wallace. Darwin and Wallace’s account of evolution by natural selection was given its first public airing at the Linnean Society of London on 1st July 1858.
examples and mutual exchange facilitates the development of ASL. This seems also to influence their construction of themselves as possible, inspiring examples and as mutual partners (A18), who are exchanging, here, their experiences through the medium of an interview. This all would mean that maybe there is more to do than just to wait for the natural evolution of ASL.

Besides the ‘inescapable’ movement toward more spirituality and ethics in business, ASL is constructed as teachable and so it shall motivate people to participate in this evolution. It seems to be open and accessible for everybody to develop their ‘own’ ASL.

A18
‘…The reason why I’m writing this is I have seen a lot of leaders in developing countries also in rich countries who practice their old habits but have a space somewhere where they know they are not right. When you talk to them in a bar or during a dinner, you sit next to them and talk and they ask you questions about, [Name of the interviewee], you have always these ideas. And then you tell them a little bit of your secrets. “I have it too but I don’t do it, I don’t do it in my practice because people get confused.” So people feel that they are wrong but they don’t have the power to say, ‘I don’t want this anymore, I want to go this way.’ And for them… you have people who do the wrong things but are aware that they are doing the wrong things. Question of those people, ‘Is there anybody else who are doing things in the way I desire?’ And I think if you manage to speak openly and inspire those people to say, it’s okay you are doing wrong things, it’s okay that you have the desire, now meet that person also who has the same problem as you have. He is doing the wrong thing but he feels that it should be different...’

B7
Question: So when you say I would like to be an authentic leader, what kind of picture do you have?
Answer: I have a picture of a person who is able to balance the spiritual and the commercial or the material world. I still have not mastered it after so many years and the more I get thinking of getting actively involved in it the more it is becoming difficult. And again I am quoting Gurudev, when I asked him, when the times were really bad, I couldn’t manage my work and then he gave me help in the hospital and then I said, “My meditation practices are affected, I am travelling in the plane, how do you want me to do my practice? – when I stop doing my Nadi Shodanam they are looking at me and this and that... He said, “Son, that is the biggest task, if you had gone into the robes and become a Sanyasi, it is so easy because he said, you would in the mountain you have no worries, somebody will give you food, but you are in the material world and you have no spiritual experience you will be egoistic and a proud and a bad leader and a bad person, you do not know.” He said, “bring both of them together, see where you can merge it into a path” and he said, “that is the most difficult path to balance the material and spiritual world” and I feel that in a way I have been going bridge after bridge on this...
H9

‘Heartmath is a technique, which you can practise, which has a theory behind it. The theory behind it is that... the brain can be in different moods and states but has a whole spectrum in between complete frustration and a very high level of appreciation. As you move from frustration to appreciation and the other way around... that has an effect on the heart. A measurable effect! And you measure the effect in terms of variability of the heartbeat, because you have a heartbeat of sixty in a minute but it goes up and down over time. It goes up and down and if you are frustrated it goes up and down in a very ragged pattern and if you are in an appreciative mood it follows a nice...this way [the interviewee showed a wave movement with his hand in the air]. And you have the computer, the feedback, biofeedback and look at the computer and you can see whether you are in, what they say, if you are in the ‘coherence state’ or not. Heartmath says you can turn it around, because the heart as an organ is emitting much more powerful electrical impulses than the brain. If you exercise your heart and bring your heart in a right pattern and do that 25 minutes every day or when suddenly somebody puts you under pressure and you have to react or suddenly somebody angers you or irritates you, you have to react in a sensible way, you can bring your heart into a state of coherence and that affects the quality of your mind or the quality of the decisions you make. So essentially it’s a method against stress, against unnecessary bad stress. And we’ve done also internally in [name of organisation], we’ve done exercise; we’ve done tests with it, we’ve got twenty people who do it over a half year against a test group and then you’ll find significant differences... a number of indicators which are relevant for their health.’

H10

‘...I’ve always done quite a lot of exercising, running, all my life, not marathon, but I run almost every day and now we have special programs available with trainers who... in particular with the job I have... it’s very difficult to say, you have got to do that weekly, I can’t do that. So we work with an institute, which provides trainers at the hour and at the place where you want it. So, for example, this early morning I came from New York and I immediately I had training... At my house, I spent an hour and a half in exercising... With that same institute we tried Tai Chi, I find that also... I started about seven or eight months ago, but I find that also very, very beneficial... What I find enjoyable is peace of mind, knowing that the decision, which you make, the action that you take, are well based and are coming from pure thinking and not from thinking which is anyway affected by impurities.

Question: Can you describe maybe a little bit more the peace in your mind, or the state...?

Answer: Yes, well, it is the ability to take distance and to look at a problem in an integrated way; not allowing yourself to get irritated by things, thinking through... having the appropriate dialogue with a number of relevant people, letting the thought shape and taking the decision at the right moment.’

The interviewees connect the individual development of ASL with the development of authenticity and with the development of spiritual qualities. Often they give examples of personal experiences or of useful techniques, like meditation (e.g. B7, B2, C1, C6, A8, A9), self-observation (e.g. D5), ‘Heart math’ (H9), Tai Chi (H12D zu H10), meditation of the 99 names of Allah (I2) or exercises,
which make one realize that he or she will die etc (A11). All descriptions of practices include their practical usefulness, and even if it’s not easy to integrate them into daily business/leadership (e.g. B7, B2), the benefits on the daily business level are highly emphasized (e.g. H9, A8). The interviewees sometimes explain in detail what they do, how they practice. The interviewee in extract A8, for example, says, “I also have a routine next to it [meditation], I write down what in the first two, three minutes come, like, ‘Oh my God, I have to do this, I have to do that.” The interviewees also describe how they practice at work, in meetings, or on the way. The way they talk about it, makes it more realistic. They demonstrate that they are not monks, that they are busy in daily work and that they are concerned with real, practical (business) problems, but they agree that it is possible to integrate spiritual practices into this environment. They give a clear stance, although they are careful not to appear as esoteric. What they do is of practical use, not for ‘paradise’ or liberation, (e.g. A8) and the developed spiritual qualities enrich their daily work.

**Spirituality – Business Dilemma**

The interviewees describe a central dilemma between spirituality and business (e.g. B7, B2). It’s not easy to implement spiritual practice in the business world (B2, B8). Business is evaluated quite negatively by the interviewees. They often relate it to irresponsible profit making; it’s superficial (B3), there is no mercy in the business field, there is only the survival of the fittest (B9) and so on. But even if the interviewees describe this dilemma, they are also ambitious to overcome it. The interviewees see it as a big task and they try to balance these two poles (e.g. B7, B9). Their construction of ASL helps to fill or overcome the gap between spirituality and business. This dilemma even makes ASL initially necessary.

B8
‘I see more and more people have got immersed in the day to day life, they have forgotten about spirituality and the importance of God, the church or the temple, you know. That’s come to a stage where those people with money, they are seeking something – most often, I think this is a principle of law, that somebody has reached the top, they are looking for something else then, which they cannot buy with their money.’

B9
‘I hope to think… (laugh) But I still have a lot to catch up with because the leadership in the spiritual world is different from the leadership in a business world – in the business world I am sure, you have seen and experienced sometimes, it is a cut throat world – people have no mercy – it’s totally different from the… you are working at two different poles: spiritual and commercial. There it is the survival of the fittest in the commercial. They will go to all type of tricks in the trade, its dirty tricks or good tricks to
bring you down and they want to be one up and everybody wants to make as much money as possible. Spirituality has very little part to play in the business environment according to most businessmen. But what I am trying to do is inculcate this spirit where I would be able to balance this and most of my business colleagues, my business associates from other companies from overseas and all... over the last 10 years they realised that I am a slightly different person – and they always ask me, “hey how do you do this?” “how do you do this?” So I feel sometimes humble then... I can be… like an example… They have told me many times, “You are one of the few, who can balance this right” – I said, “No I am struggling”. They say, “No I see you, you are so disciplined, you eat vegetarian food, you know… and you are able to do this and that” I said “no – thanks to my master”

One interviewee thinks that spirituality and business should be bridged between people. In extract 15, this interviewee uses a vivid metaphor to show that economics, spirit and a sense of human rights are three qualities which are separated, but which can and should ‘play’ together. To bring the metaphor to life, he includes the participants of the interview situation and gives them roles in this ‘play’ . He directly addresses the people present and he uses an art repertoire (musical instruments, sound, play etc.) here to illustrate his picture. In the purpose of explaining or even teaching (“What a pity that we have no colour disks here!”), he uses his art metaphor and after his conclusion that it is most beautiful if the three instruments play together, he switches to the economic repertoire (economic life, management, economic regularities, house-keeping economist) to show now that also here the different qualities should come together and that “it is an illusion that you can transform an economist into a philosopher”.

The interviewee I constructs the solution in finding partners, one from each field. These people shall work together and ‘sound together’. The interviewee perceives a dilemma between business and spirituality, which can’t be bridged inside a single person. For him these things are separated and in the same way as each musical instrument makes its own sound, each person has his/her own qualities. These qualities can come together while each one keeps his/her own individuality, just as musical instruments come together in a concert. Each part needs to respect the other and then they can learn to work together in harmony. The picture implies that the people just wait for the opportunity to ‘play’ together. The question of whether they want to cooperate is excluded.

Using this versatile metaphor helps this interviewee to express a different perspective on ASL. It’s very clear that one single instrument, like a piano, can’t produce the sound of a violin. This metaphor makes it difficult to answer why a human being can’t be connected with the spirit when s/he keeps house. Human beings are much more complex, are able to play different, even opposite roles and integrate very different aspects in their lives. Through the metaphor the individuality and the connection between individuals are emphasized. People seem
to have different qualities, one is good in housekeeping and another is more concerned with ethics. Mutual respect and understanding is required. Real meetings only take place, for the interviewee, on a mental, spiritual level (I6).

I5  
Answer: ... What a pity that we have no colour disks here. But perhaps we take musical instruments now. You play the cello, he is the violin and I’m a piano. Actually the Cellist can play very beautifully alone. It is still more beautiful, if there is a duet. Between us there are wonderful things - cello and piano. And it is much more beautiful, if we three sound and play together. So, in the economic life one has to manage… and there are economic regularities of that game, which forces one to remain always behind a thing and one forgets actually that there is still someone, a human being. One is never connected with the spirit, if one keeps house in such a way. Therefore one looks for others - has to, and it is an illusion that you can transform an economist into a philosopher. That is not possible… Instead he (the economist) can look for a partner, a man of letters, a philosopher and both can sound and play together. And if both sound together, it is not yet that beautiful – the third is very important! The third is someone, who always argues with the human rights, who sees more than literature and art and philosophy and science and everything like that. Therefore, when he says: "Listen! Human beings have rights and not everything that you do supports human development. There are still things we have to take care of. Humans must learn, need peace and rest, etc. …!" He then sounds together with the three. Therefore I do not think it is advisable that one makes a symphony here alone from that…, but it is very beautiful, if an accord can arise - a harmony… ‘

Question: Out of the connection?  
Answer: Yes, out of the connection. Thus economics, then spirit and really sense of right. These three - and those three are independent personalities. Independent Individuals. If one plays alone, or if one plays loud and the other quiet – it does not sound. If one plays alone and we cannot follow, he is a little ahead - that is not beautiful. Those are the social diseases. Social diseases result from the fact that these three do not sound together. The politician, who claims that the economist is a stupid guy and understands nothing and this dreamer there, the spiritual human being, who only dreams… I am the one who arranges and organizes the world. Then it is a sick society.

I6  
‘…the simple ones who are not thinking – they never really meet. Even if they marry and live together for many years, there is no fertilization. Real meetings only take place on a mental, spiritual level…’

ASL is here constructed as a way of meeting and coming together of different fields. On an individual level, it means that the person discovers a goal in life; they discover the answer to the question, ‘For what am I here?’ (I1 above). Partly the interviewee I is contradictory to the rest of the network. Sometimes he seems to admit that ASL may be possible even in one person, but he sees it as more important for ASL to bring people from different fields together.
Spiritual and Business resources: Three Moves

Most of the interviewees draw freely on spiritual repertoires and also combine them quite easily with business repertoires. For them, spirituality is highly valued and an important part of their lives. They have many experiences in this field and are likely to talk about it, but how do they manage now to bridge it with business issues?

A19
Question: How do you do it? What do you do?
Answer: I try at least to sit down on my meditation seat every day. I wish I could do that at least twice, but in meetings where I get bored, I’m practicing observing my breath and I’m practising my Mantra. When I move in my car, in a traffic jam. I try to use these moments to contemplate, like when I will have to give a lecture and I didn’t have time, so I went to sleep, woke up and meditated then in a few minutes, yesterday in the train I close my eyes for 15 minutes between Rotterdam and Delft, and in those 15 minutes I prepared my lecture. This morning between midnight and one o’clock I prepared a PowerPoint and this morning I gave the lecture. It’s so rich to be organized in your mental world, using meditation, focusing, relaxing. But it has to be a habit otherwise it’s so… I did it in the beginning now I have to concentrate, so focus, focus, no it doesn’t work your old habits are going to draw on you and even it happens. So you can be full of energy…now I see people like myself in my team or in my partnerships or in my business and I see people with such unorganized high potential energy and I say to them the same Swami Veda told me ten years ago, oh not ten years ago, almost 15 years ago, meditate, you can channel your energy then.

In extract A19, the interviewee is switching, for example, from the spiritual field, using spiritual resources (spiritual practice: meditation, observing breathing, practising Mantra, contemplation, mental world, focusing, relaxing) to the business field, using business resources (meetings, lectures, no time, preparing PowerPoint, team, partnership, business). This example shall illustrate three moves, which are used by the interviewees to integrate spirituality into business:

1. Business resources to construct the context and a positive image
In business, people are used to time pressure and travelling, being in the car, in the train, between places, having ‘just’ 15 minutes to do the ‘job’. In business you have to be prepared for the things you do, like for a lecture. Being prepared gives a good impression, you do good work, and you can convince others. Being prepared, shows that you are concerned with the topic. In ‘high’ business, you work even in the night (between midnight and one o’clock). The business resource the interviewee draws on, refers to ‘high’ leadership, to the image of a high, hard working leader, who always works, always is prepared and who is highly efficient (preparing a lecture in 15 minutes). So this resource helps the interviewee, in this context, to construct an image of himself as a highly efficient leader, who knows the business world and the pressure or ‘stress’ a leader
has to face. Also he offers through known terms, which refer to common experiences of leaders, a possibility to identify with him.

He admits, too, that he gets bored in meetings, but this is an experience all leaders probably share with him. It appears like a shared secret; something you only talk about ‘under colleagues’. Of course, people get sometimes bored in meetings, but as a leader you won’t tell the people who are your subordinates. A leader has to keep up the motivation of the team, but to admit boredom shows, in this context, that the interviewee appears to be honest here. Maybe he felt ‘under colleagues’ in the interview, but, however, to express this, gives the feeling of openness and functions as a connection to other leaders who know all this from their own business context.

2. Introducing Spiritual resources and delivering the solution out of it
What the interviewee does now is use this special situation to bring in his spiritual practices (“practising observing my breathing and I’m practising my Mantra”). So he gives a kind of ‘solution’ – what to do when you get bored in meetings and also it is a way of making use of time. Time efficiency, time management are things leaders want to improve. And the interviewee continues with these examples of time pressure or ‘useless’ time (traffic jam) and gives examples of what he does to give sense to these time spaces. These different examples give different options to identify and they emphasize their usefulness in different situations, and underline their importance.

3. Leading positive outcomes back to the business resource
At the end, the interviewee articulates the positive results in the business resource: being prepared, giving good lectures etc. The ‘problems’ appear in the business context, the ‘solutions’ come from the spiritual context and the positive results are again placed in the business context.

These three moves give the opportunity to identify with the context, they allow the leader to beneficially integrate spirituality and they seem to make things easy on a practical level. Desired and problematic issues are constructed in the business repertoire and the ‘way out’ in the spiritual repertoire. ‘ASL talk’ make it sound so easy and practical.

Bridging repertoires through exchanging terms and vivid metaphors

The interviewees use different approaches to bring spirituality and business closer together. Sometimes they juggle with terms and use them quite unexpectedly and unusually. They construct them in new contexts and exchange them between different repertoires. This shall be illustrated in two examples:
A. Organization
In extract A19, the interviewee does something interesting; he uses a term that is coming from the business repertoire ‘organization’ – ‘organizing’ and puts it together with terms from the spiritual repertoire (“It’s so rich to be organized in your mental world, using meditation, focusing, relaxing”). Organizing your mental world, like you organize your business world, like you organize your work, your time, a meeting etc. The term originates from Latin *organum* meaning ‘instrument’, ‘tool’ and it means bringing things into a structured order; coordinating things efficiently. So using the mental abilities efficiently, bringing order and structure in – who wouldn’t like to do that and especially since a leader needs to organize things, so why should he not organise the mind? The spiritual practices offers useful tools to get focused, concentrated and ‘organized’ – in this sense the interviewee bridges the two resources, exchanging terms to bring these two ‘worlds’ together.

B. Energy
Another interesting term the interviewee uses in extract A19 is energy. Energy in western societies is often first related to power derived from the utilization of physical or chemical resources. In the business context, energy makes machines work or it is there to provide light or heat in the company. Energy, in a spiritual sense, refers more to the mental power of a person, the strength of somebody. From a spiritual perspective, it is related to the level of consciousness and awareness. Meditation increases the energy – so that one can feel ‘full of energy’ or ‘channel energy’. Channelled energy has much more power than unorganized energy, even if it is high potential energy. The interviewee here says he ‘sees’ the high potential energy of others and also he observes that this energy is unorganized. This implies, in other words, that he is perceptive; he has a kind of spiritual ability or sense to perceive this. He acknowledges the high potential other people have and offers an opportunity for them to use these potentials. Addressing or pleasing people through appreciating their qualities, is a good strategy to ‘sell’ something (for example: his own opinion).

In this example, it seems that the transition from a business repertoire to a spiritual repertoire becomes more fluid through the unusual use of these terms. In the extract, he changes several times from one repertoire to the other, but it appears as quite normal. There are no interruptions. It seems natural and that’s probably also the function of it. The integration of spirituality into business shall emerge as natural (see also Evolution of ASL above). The interviewee creates the impression that he has already integrated these two worlds and that he knows how to balance them and how to exchange issues from one world to the other. He can easily juggle with business tasks and spiritual tasks and is an inhabitant of both
worlds. Furthermore, the interviewee (and also other interviewees) shows his residence in the scientific world.

**Stories of ASL - Making the unthinkable thinkable**

In this section the work that stories do in discourse is theorized. A full theorization of all the stories is beyond the scope of the thesis, but the meanings of particular stories that ASL participants draw upon in constructing particular repertoires can be deconstructed here to enhance the understanding of 'ASL talk'. Stories never have a fixed meaning, however, they are always used contextually and this both reinforces parts of their meaning and destabilises other parts.

A story is, according to Ricoeur (1984), a sequence of actions and experiences. It can be real or imaginary. Some of the stories the interviewees told in the interviews are already quoted and discussed, for example, the Shambhala story C3, the musical instrument story I5 or the Pen story D6.

Storytelling is a method of telling something. Knowledge can be transferred implicitly or explicitly. The story usually wants the listener to reach to a special conclusion or it motivates the recipient to do something. A story gains more attention as a simple talk. The people can listen easier and concentrate better and it is more likely that the listener/reader keeps it better in mind. Even if details get lost, the core of the oral story won’t be forgotten so fast. It has something to do with the way our memory works (Birbaumer and Schmidt, 2005) that stories have these effects.

As already mentioned, language and stories play an essential role in our reality construction. The interviewees construct, through their stories, a world in the mind of the listener/reader. As the image in the mind becomes more vivid and visual so also does it become more appealing and emotionally charged. Telling a story has a communicative interactional function and it helps people to make sense of their lives.

An essential concept in the current work is spirituality. The interviewees are all concerned (more or less) with spirituality. Interestingly, storytelling is a central method in spiritual traditions. Wisdom and knowledge are transferred through stories. Stories are seen as the adequate method of teaching. A story has the advantage that the listener/reader can understand it in his/her own way. S/he can relate it to current problematical issues or challenges in life. From a spiritual point of view, the receiver understands what s/he is ready to understand. One person can, at different stages in life, comprehend the same story in very diverse ways. The story provides room for the imagination, for one’s own interpretations and for one’s own valuing. From an ethical point of view, it allows differences and diversity to a certain extent, but we also have to see that a story is
never neutral. Inherent in stories are beliefs, philosophies, and principles and stories are constructed to fulfil several functions.

Let’s turn now to some exemplary extracts in respect of their construction of stories and their functions in relation to ASL.

**ASL: Selfless Service**

An attention-grabbing move in ‘ASL talk’ is that the interviewees use the concept of ‘selfless service’. Already the term ‘service’ seems odd to business repertoires, but ‘selfless service’ seems nearly unthinkable in such context. Therefore it is interesting to ask: How do the interviewees manage this difficult discursive task?

**The Kumbha Mela Story**

‘…I love what I do and the way I do it, and the people with whom I’m doing it. I mentioned I did a lecture in the Dutch water mafia two months ago in September. The title of that lecture, 15 minutes lecture, was “The Passion of Innovation” and I don’t have passion in the romantic sense, nor the passion one experiences when desiring to eat food, but passion is much more the desire and dedication to help people to make progress and the desire to eradicate all the poverty in the world as well as the desire to provide for people who don’t have an opportunity. I don’t feel guilty, but I feel, I have the power to do something for them. That is my… It’s strange to say I love that, but love in the sense of… Ja I love that, it makes me happy that I can do that - that I’m in a position to do that for people. Nothing else. And at that journey, you meet a lot of interesting people and it lets you believe that it's a great way to live your life in a useful way, in a certain way. I’m happy that I have this desire, I have a passion, I have something that ties me. And I think I can’t get rid of somebody, …I told the story of, when we went to the Kumbha Mela. At the university, they saw the photo of the Kumbha Mela, which I use at the back of my folders, then they ask me questions and I told them the story that I went all the way there excited but when the moment came to take a dive in the water, I found myself standing there with all the clothes of everybody. And then, when I was convinced that I should also jump, then it was time, the Sadu started to kick everybody out. 20 minutes then you have to leave. I lost; I have to wait for another 144 years. One philosopher, who saw that, said, ‘That is a nice example of the bodhisattva’. Yes that was my realization in the Kumbha Mela, I started to understand my mantra and I began to understand my whole life, which is work as a ‘slave’. Work, work. Not work as work, but serve, serve, serve. That’s the string.’

In the *Kumbha Mela Story* the interviewee wants to express his deep passion for his work. To avoid any misunderstanding, he emphasizes that it is not a ‘ro-

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10 Kumbha Mela is a sacred Hindu pilgrimage, which is attended by millions of people. A ritual bath at a special time and place is the major event. It is based upon the following story: thousands of years ago, gods and demons made a temporary agreement to work
mantic’ passion. He also uses the term ‘love’, he loves what he is doing, but he is uncertain if it is not odd to use this term in this regard. He loves to help people – of course he loves not that there is poverty in the world. Using the term love brings the discourse to a very emotional level. Also when listening back, one realises that the interview shows that also his voice became very emotional here. He says also that this is a great way to live your life. He gives sense and value to his own life and through that to ASL. To get away from this very personal and emotional level and maybe to justify and account for what he just said, he starts telling a little story. He introduces the story by explaining that he told this story before (after request). He is aware of telling a story and he does it very nicely. He starts with a short introduction, then shortly presents the main part and gives, then, the conclusion in the third-person perspective. A philosopher (‘a man of wisdom’) gives the explanation and so he gives sense to what the interviewee did in his own story. The philosopher says it is a good example of bodhisattva\footnote{11 Bodhisattva: bodhi means enlightened and sattva means existence. In Sanskrit it is understood as an 'enlightenment-being'. Bodhisattva has different meanings in the different traditions, but mainly it refers to a being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others. The nature of the Bodhisattva is illustrated by a little story, in which three people are walking through a desert: “Parched and thirsty, they spy a high wall ahead. They approach and circumnavigate it, but it has no entrance or doorway. One climbs upon the shoulders of the others, looks inside, yells ‘Eureka!’, and jumps inside. The second then climbs up and repeats the actions of the first. The third laboriously climbs the wall without assistance and sees a lush garden inside the wall. It has cooling water, trees, fruit, etc. But, instead of jumping into the garden, the third person jumps back out into the desert and seeks out desert wanderers to tell them about the garden and how to find it. The third person is the Bodhisattva.” (Pollock, 2005, page 43)}\footnote{11 Bodhisattva: bodhi means enlightened and sattva means existence. In Sanskrit it is understood as an 'enlightenment-being'. Bodhisattva has different meanings in the different traditions, but mainly it refers to a being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others. The nature of the Bodhisattva is illustrated by a little story, in which three people are walking through a desert: “Parched and thirsty, they spy a high wall ahead. They approach and circumnavigate it, but it has no entrance or doorway. One climbs upon the shoulders of the others, looks inside, yells ‘Eureka!’, and jumps inside. The second then climbs up and repeats the actions of the first. The third laboriously climbs the wall without assistance and sees a lush garden inside the wall. It has cooling water, trees, fruit, etc. But, instead of jumping into the garden, the third person jumps back out into the desert and seeks out desert wanderers to tell them about the garden and how to find it. The third person is the Bodhisattva.” (Pollock, 2005, page 43)} so for a very high developed (in a spiritual sense) and compassionate being. It would be a big conflict if somebody would say this about him- or herself (see Authenticity – Inauthenticity Dilemma), but if somebody else says it and if this person is a philosopher, then it brings about another effect. It’s a story, so it is okay to use a philosopher here without a name or context. Many things are left open here and many spiritual terms are probably unknown to the reader, but this all helps to create the atmosphere. It is a spiritual story, which helped him to understand his ‘whole life’ (the meaning of his work) and which helps the reader to understand him. The story is the explanation why he loves his work, why he is so passionate, why work is serving for him. Love and service appear for him together to get the nectar of immortality (amrita) and to share it equally. However, when the Kumbha (pot) with the nectar appeared, the demons took it and ran fast away with it. After that, the gods and demons fought in the sky about the pot for twelve days and twelve nights (equivalent to twelve human years). During this battle, drops of amrta fell down on four locations in India. At these locations the Kumbha Mela is celebrated.
as strange to the business world; maybe other leaders would find it very odd to be so passionate for work, so the interviewee tries to make it more understandable and comprehensible through his story. He also tries to produce a humble and compassionate self-image, which he couldn’t produce without using the story and ‘the philosopher’. He also uses the word ‘slave’ at the end to describe himself. He did it humorous, but it shall express how much and how hard he works.

The Kumbha Mela story conveys also the values of compassion, kindness, love etc. and behaviour guidelines (be caring for others, serve others, help others making progress, remain reticent etc.) to the reader. And even if you think you lost, you gain something from it – an insight into the sense or purpose of your life. The story should motivate the reader to think about attitudes. Maybe it’s good to take ‘a back-seat’ sometimes and to let others go first. Maybe it’s good to work ‘as a slave’ when it is for a good purpose and serving humanity. As discussed above, here, the concept of selflessness comes into focus. The story is used here to illustrate practical selflessness and its benefits to one on a personal, professional and spiritual level.

**The Harvard Story**

Answer: …I tell you a story. We asked the graduates in Harvard for 15 years (great, what the Americans all undertake): What would you like to do when you leave Harvard? And “I want to make a good career of course, I want to marry, want to have a house, I want a car, I want children... O.k. etc.” That is more than 80 per cent. And then there are [Name of the interviewer], they are not normal - say: "I want to go out there and look, where are development possibilities? Where are emergencies? Where can I help someone with this stuff that I learned here in Harvard? Only very few! And - the Americans are always too smart - they followed these children which they have asked, after 10, 15 years they asked them again: what is realized from that? Who is the richest of the world from those people? One of the 80 % or one of the 20%?

**Question:** Well, one of the few!

**Answer:** Yes. Because if one gives, one becomes rich. It’s a normal law, it’s a mental, spiritual law. If one gives, one becomes rich. If now one wants to take only from the society, he becomes never rich. Now richly at spirit... Yes, and therefore: What will one give? If I give, if everyone gives, then anyway everyone receives. So to give this attitude to the entrepreneurs thus that one is willing to give...

In this extract the interviewee also uses a story and he also introduces it as a story. He uses the story here like a teaching tool. It is a kind of report of a survey, which he gives here. He seems to use this example more often than just in the interview context here. He also addresses the interviewer directly and gives him/her a special appreciation. It is an efficient move to address somebody directly. It raises the whole attention of a person (compare e.g. with the cocktail
party effect\textsuperscript{12}). He ends his story with a kind of rhetorical question. After the expected answer, he offers the ethical conclusion: “If one gives, one becomes rich”. He calls it a spiritual law. What he says reminds one of the saying from the Bible, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). His little ‘scientific’ research story made it possible for him to end with saying that also entrepreneurs should acquire this attitude of giving. It shows that he thinks it’s something new and unknown for leaders. It seems to be questionable if leaders are able to be giving or to act selflessly. He tries to show that giving makes one (spiritually) rich. He seems to talk firstly about financial richness and then later, he constructs it as spiritual richness. So even if it appears unclear whether a ‘giving’ leader can become financially rich, s/he can still become spiritually rich. The whole effort he makes to say, at the end, that leaders should also be willing to give, demonstrates how difficult this is for him to say. Leaders are not usually seen as ‘givers’; they are perceived more often as selfish, profit orientated, people whose only desire is to get more and more. An authentic spiritual leader is constructed as a ‘giver’, as (selflessly) serving others, as working for the benefit of others thus this is something new and odd, which in order to be introduced needs the use of a story. Many people would perceive this notion of a caring leader as a contradiction. The image of a leader as a grasping, self-centred individual is quite fixed and stories in the news about corrupt and totally irresponsible leaders do everything to support this impression. It’s not easy to destroy and overcome such an image. Some negative examples of corrupt leaders sometimes become even prototypes in the minds of the people. Contrasting information about leaders is suppressed and images can only slowly be changed. A giving leader seems nearly to be unthinkable, so a ‘scientific’ background story makes it more thinkable here.

The Tree Story

Answer:…There are two different aspects to that: One is the people who represent their cultures and the other is people which are just serving… not representing cultures as such, but they brought changes like the one that you’re talking about; somebody cleaning up a whole village… Like, for example, this woman, who started the ‘Chipko-Movement’\textsuperscript{13}, here in the mountains. The people were coming; and cutting out the forest in the mountains. These forests were protected by the villagers and villagers have certain rights to forest-products. Now these people came and they were talking with the politicians. Nothing of the scale of which is happening in the United States or Europe

\textsuperscript{12} It is the effect that we are able to hear our names even at a crowded and noisy party. If someone over the other side of the party room says our name, our attention goes immediately to that talk.

\textsuperscript{13} The Chipko-Movement was a group of female villagers in India who acted to prevent the felling of trees and reclaimed their traditional forest rights. They hugged the trees and so saved them with their bodies from the contractor’s axes.
was happening here, but still here… they would come and cut the forest. So the people say: “What can we do? We are mountain people, we are hospitable people, and we can’t throw them out. They’re our guests…” So then they come, but when the time comes in the morning, this woman said: “Let’s all go and hug the trees.” This happened three hundred years ago to the people known as Bishnoi14. These people haven’t heard of that and three hundred men, women and children allowed themselves to be cut… with the forest.

Question: They were killed?
Answer: Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur was building a palace. He sent out cutters and this was the Bishnoi-Village, among whom… I should introduce you to Bishnoi-Leaders. The Bishnoi is a sect, five hundred years old, they teaching: “No life form is to be hurt; no trees to be cut”. And in the desert of Rajasthan, there are the only villages that are green. They have something to teach us… They become lawyers, they become judges, they become professors, but they keep the tradition, these are the people to talk to. This woman in the mountains, some decades back, she said to men, women and children: “Just come, hug the trees.”

Question: And they cut the trees and killed them?
Answer: No, not this… This one I’m talking of hugging and killing that was three hundred years back in Rajasthan, but this one here, in the mountains, so the cutters had to stop. This has become known as the Chipko-Movement, started by an illiterate mother or grandmother, and everybody followed…

The interviewee here uses a story to illustrate what it means when people are “just serving”. To show that simple female people can bring changes, even if they are not from the United States or Europe, he presents a story about people in the mountains. He jumps from the present to the past and it is quite complicated to follow him. The story produces an image, in the mind of the listener/reader, of humble, friendly and simple village people, hugging trees and protecting the trees with their bodies and lives. Three hundred people were killed – the interviewee lists “man, woman and children” – which is more emotional than saying “people”. Then he says that they were “cut” with the forest, so that the interviewer asked if they were killed. The interviewee doesn’t really respond to this question. He clarifies this at the end of the extract after the interviewer asked a second time. The death of people makes the story very serious and the interviewee seems to intend that, because the topic is serious for him. He really wants to bring attention to people who are usually not recognized in western societies. This also becomes obvious at other parts of this interview (e.g. D4).

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14 The Bishnoi of Rajasthan, India, are seen today as an example of ecologically aware people who for generations have been practising environmental conservation, holistic science, and what today would be termed as wise resource management. For more information about the Bishnoi tradition and other related topics see e.g.,‘The Encyclopaedia on Religion and Nature’ from Taylor (2005). This encyclopaedia explores different spiritual/religious connections to nature (environmentalism) and describes urgent efforts to create a more compassionate and environmentally sustainable world.
He also says that those people can teach us something. He adds that they “become lawyers, they become judges, they become professors, but they keep the tradition”. He makes a connection between appreciated jobs and keeping the traditions. It seems that he tries to make the listener/reader think: Think about the value of traditions, about the meaning of (selfless) serving, about the relationship to nature. He perceives a blind spot in western societies. They ignore the knowledge and wisdom of eastern people. They look for prestige like jobs with a high status, but they miss the worth of traditions. He demonstrates that a village woman can start a whole movement. This seems to have a motivational function – everybody can initiate change. ASL can be found everywhere, it brings positive change and it shall serve the world.

**ASL: Spirituality improves Leadership**

An important aspect for the interviewees is that spirituality improves leadership. This needs to be transferred by ‘ASL talk’. Also here stories are used to integrate spirituality practically into leadership.

**The Throat Story**

‘I also have the awareness now that, oh if somebody else would have done it to me, I would feel like you do now. That is so powerful. I was blind for that kind of information you get from people and from nature. You don’t see; you are blind. That’s why my passion to believe in that knowledge has so many layers and so many things. And the more people you go to, the more authentic knowledge you will find or messages you will get. And when that becomes a sort of experience based belief and all the books and all the philosophers and all the masters are saying that, then you are more convinced that this is the way to prepare yourself... to serve the world, to perform your job in the world. I would say that is the subject behind my meditation, very practical. I’m not using meditation to say, ‘oh I’m so tired, I need my quiet time now so I’m going to have ten hours, not yet. But I’m thinking of a time when my body gets a little bit feverish or whatever, then I try to also listen to that voice of the body and just go to sleep, for example, or to focus on my breathing. I used to have a lot of throat problems when I worked too hard, or spoke too fast, I would lose my voice. And one day Swami[^15] [name of the Swami] who was sitting in the car and saw that I was stroking again my throat said, “While we are driving why don’t you practise focusing on your breathing here [in the throat].” And I started doing that and for the last six, five years I have not lost my voice anymore, I don’t even have throat problems.’

[^15]: ‘Swami’ is an honorific (religious/spiritual) title, which is derived from Sanskrit and means ‘spiritual master’ or ‘the owner of oneself’. It is a title added to one's name to emphasize learning and mastery of Yoga, devotion to God, and devotion to the swami's spiritual masters.
Another little story we find in this extract. The interviewee points up to the practical use of his meditation and how this helps him to perform his job. To give a vivid example, he tells the short story about a Swami and how he learned, through observing his breath, to stop his throat problems. This little story combines spirituality (the Swami and observing the breath) with leadership (working hard and speaking fast) and it shows how easy and practical it is – you can practice while driving, and it relieves you from your illnesses. The story has an appealing note – it seems that it shall motivate the reader to start practising.

Spiritual practices are quite foreign in the ‘mainstream’ business world. There are, of course, many movements, which offer spiritual issues to business people (Business-Yoga, Zen in Business, Meditation for leaders etc.). However the interviewee uses his short story to introduce here this topic, because he seems to perceive that it is not common, as yet, in his environment. There are still people who have no relationship with spirituality, people who wouldn’t perhaps take him seriously anymore. To emphasize the practical use of his meditation is the first step to build a bridge to these people and his little story invites them to give it a try. The interviewee tries to take the term meditation out of an esoteric context.

The story also emphasizes that spirituality in general improves your leadership: it increases your empathy, it helps you when you are exhausted and makes you aware of information, you couldn’t perceive without spiritual development. ASL provides you with new (extrasensory) powers, which increase your leadership abilities and help you to serve the world. The interviewees always see ASL in service of others, they exclude by defining ASL in an ethical way, that ASL could be used for exploitation or in egoistic self-interest.

The Skyscrapers Story

Answer: I was trained as a medical doctor with emphasis on tropical diseases. I had a good proud practice of working for the government until 1985. I had worked for a period of about 7 years, actually. And then I had this inspiration to go and look for some answers, which I did. I started reading books after books after books. I couldn’t find any answers or specific answers until I stumbled upon “The living with the Himalayan Masters” and then I went in search of the author by Gurudev – Swami Rama and found him in Rishikesh. And it was as though he was expecting me there on that day and we had a very good meeting. He described it as a reunion. But for me it was in my short memory as … it was a great opportunity. And he then transformed my whole life and … transformed my life, wherein he sort of woke me up something from within and then I realized that I had a mission in life… as a goal objective. And he encouraged me to go into business, which I did, which went very rapidly, because I had very little business knowledge. I never attended any MBAs or Business Schools and from medical practice to go into business… which meant very big business because it involved business in public listed companies dealing with construction properties which were huge construction contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars and...
Question: You built skyscrapers or something?
Answer: Yes, we did. And of course not me but engineers.
Question: You bought this company or you build it up?
Answer: I grew it… I grew it.
Question: You grew it.
Answer: It went from a staff of about 60 to about a 1,000. And I bought another company, then. Which is also listed in the stock exchange, which dealt with industrial gases and electrodes and semi conductors. We grew that company also. Now it has work in Singapore, China, and we’re expanding also rapidly. But, that was my Gurudev’s instruction to me to go into business. And I think I was just perfect. Somebody was training me alone and giving me the knowledge, which I did not have and I managed to conduct the business in a way that it amazes me that I could do it.

This story pictures how the interviewee came in contact with spirituality and that spirituality made a great leader out of him. He came in contact with spirituality because he was looking for answers. These answers he found in one book and later in the author of this book, Swami Rama. This meeting was very spiritual already because Swami Rama was expecting him and described it as a reunion. This event changed his whole life and he became aware of his mission. The spiritual teacher sent him out to go into business. It was not his self-interest and it was a new field for him, but anyway with the guidance of Swami Rama and with his new spiritual background he ‘grew’ a successful business.

Compared with the story before, where spirituality was very practical and concrete, here spirituality has a general influence on leadership. Even a foreigner (a medical doctor) in the business world can become a very successful leader. The interviewee says that it even amazed him, that he was able to do that.

**ASL: Ethical and Supportive**

‘ASL talk’ apparently tries to create an ethical and supportive image of leadership. What this means and why it is beneficial is illustrated also through stories.

**The Flower Story**

‘… But then after a while when people start talking and I listen to their stories, I see and make that connection with my deepest, deepest feeling. If the connection is made then I reach a moment when I cannot just turn my back and walk away and say ‘bye, it has been nice meeting you’ and well whatever. No. Then the next step I do is make a promise and I’m bound by this promise. Like ‘okay we’ll see what we can do, but I think that is a good idea’. So, I think there must be something that touches me very deep. I call it the soul level, the level of the soul. It goes deep. You can’t deny it. You can’t… I mean in the past I would say I would be blind, I wouldn’t even know that it touched me whatever, I just do it because it’s good, because it’s good to be on the political left. I was reading the books of Marx and so on. That was so external. It’s good to have another…
It was deep in me but I couldn’t see the deepness. It’s good because it’s good, because you are left.

Then I start discovering, no, it has nothing to do with Marxism or with Socialism; it’s something else. So for me if it goes, if a connection is made with some people or event and it goes deep in me, I don’t want to get rid of that. When I connect with you in a deep level, I will think of an event to let us do things together. That’s another thing that you have an event and you, who do I like and how do I feel… I want you. It is both and those things that go deep do so when I connect with an event or activity then I can fully commit to create a whole palace to give that flower a beautiful place, and not the other way around. I also have this. But those are, I would say those things I don’t feel the real passion to build a house and say, hmm now it’s time to decorate the house with a nice flower and a nice garden. I would say the real thing that touches me in life is like, ‘Oh my god, this is a flower, it would be very beautiful I put this flower in a garden, let’s create a garden to give that flower a place’. I think that is a new feeling I’m discovering…’

In this extract the interviewee talks about stories in a little story. He states that if he starts talking and listening to stories of people then a connection is made on a ‘soul level’. A story has a touching function. It builds a connection and evokes personal feelings. The interviewees seem to be interested in building such a connection with the listener/reader through using many stories. In the extract are two main stories included (the Marxist and the flower stories). The Marxist story helps to explain his use of the term ‘soul level’ and shows his knowledge (reading Marx and so on) and his wisdom (going beyond these books and political parties – and understanding the meaning behind them). It illustrates that ASL has a deep level of inner judgement. Based on the belief in an ethical self, there is also a deep ethical judgement possible. In this deepness one can discriminate between good and bad. This is an important point for ASL, because it needs this ethical foundation and it is always the question who sets the standards of morality and who validates them. The interviewees believe that when we are able to discover our authentic selves, we are also able to decide what is right or wrong, what is beneficial for others or what harms others. Fundamental is here the faith that below all layers (which are produced through socialisation, experiences, habits, clinging, desires etc.): the authentic self is naturally a positive force. This can be of course questioned, but it is essential here for understanding that the interviewees think that combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership is not only helpful, but also needed.

The last story explains his understanding of a deep connection. He seems to feel the need to explain it in different ways, so that he can present himself in different ways and illustrate what this connection is and the consequences of this connection. The last story is rich in metaphors and creates a lovely picture, where we see the interviewee as a kind of gardener taking care of a beautiful flower. This picture is very uncommon in a business context. Who speaks to their colleagues or subordinates in such a way? He illustrates two ways of treat-
ing somebody else here. He doesn’t say whether he is talking about colleagues, subordinates, or other leaders. He leaves that open, so that the recipient can fill in what s/he wants. The two ways are: creating a place first and then putting a ‘flower’ in that place or creating a place for/around that ‘beautiful flower’. He prefers the second way and says that he discovers this more and more. In another resource or with other words you could say, for example, that he describes an ethical humanization process, where he puts the human being in the centre of interest. It says that the environment is created for the person and it is not a process of fitting a person (employee) into an already existing environment (company, job). It shows that ASL means to value and respect others. Through his metaphor, he says that he likes to create, for example, a conference for a person, which he perceives as special. To directly say this would appear probably strange to other leaders, that’s why he uses the picture, with all its open variables, to do the job.

The implicit image of himself as a gardener lets him appear as the creator. He couldn’t say this easily or explicitly about himself without being perceived as arrogant. He also gains here the impression that what he is doing is supporting the growth and development of others. So under the topic of ASL he can present himself as supporting and serving others and as a powerful leader without the link with arrogance. The little story and the metaphor help him to manage these aspects of ASL, which are not easy to construct in harmony.

**The Horse Story**

Answer: I have so many weaknesses. Oh, one example, just like...ah, I can bias very easily.

Question: You can bias? Means you make a wrong decision?
Answer: Not necessarily wrong, but not fair.

Question: Not fair decision?
Answer: Not fair decision.

Question: Not neutral decision? And that is a weakness?
Answer: Because I’m a human being.

Question: And that is a weakness?
Answer: This is a major weakness. It’s a major weakness. Because you think all this is a small project. Fine. But you get to a moment... like in my previous life I was a very great general. I can even...I was him, the most popular guy in China.

... Question: This general, when did he live? When was this?
Answer: 1800 years ago.

... Question: The general was a real human being. He was a god. He came there to fulfil the mission.
Answer: As a general. And he lost.
Answer: He lost. He got killed.
Question: He got killed. And you say he made a mistake out of his weakness.
Answer: … He comes for a mission. And then he becomes so arrogant.

Question: Arrogant?
Answer: Arrogant. Thought, he is so good, so brave. Killed so many people, never got defeated in any single battle. And then he became so arrogant that he did not appreciate his subordinates.

Question: So he didn’t listen to people and…
Answer: He didn’t listen to people, because he was arrogant. So great, so he didn’t listen to people. He had a horse; he didn’t even like the horse. He rode a horse, the horse ran 100 miles per day. He took it for granted. You are my horse.

Question: So he didn’t care for the horse?
Answer: He didn’t care for the horse. So his mistake, his weaknesses due to the horse. So one battle the horse was so angry. Okay. It’s a very long story. The horse was so angry. I rode on him. I win the battle, I got the credit. You’re still a horse, You’re still eating grass - nothing else. So the horse gets pissed off, throws me from his back and I was cut and killed. So all the dynasty is destroyed just because I did not take good care of the horse. And the story is the horse and him they were general theme in heaven. He was the prince and the horse was the colleague. So the emperor of the heaven “You two go to China. Do this: You become a general, you a horse.” So they were colleagues. And then he ride on his colleague for so many years, he forgot that he was his colleague. Thought, you are a horse...

Question: And he didn’t treat him…?
Answer: He didn’t treat him well. And his colleague tells him, you become a general because you were the princess, nothing else. So he throws him out in a battle and he was cut and killed. And all the mission is over.

Question: So, what is your conclusion out of that realisation?
Answer: Conclusion out of that is I did not realize in this life. Master C. asked me to study him. You have to know him, his path, what he did, not the good things, the bad things, his weakness. And then I realize in my life I’m still making the same mistakes.

Question: The same mistakes?
Answer: Not to this scale. But still this is my weakness my weakness is his weakness. So I have to get rid of these weaknesses. So that I won’t fail in this mission.

Question: So how do you do that? How do you get rid of these weaknesses? What do you do?
Answer: You just have to meditate.

The horse story is quite an unusual story for western societies. It is a story about a previous life. This is only shortly mentioned, because the interviewee probably knows that people in western cultures often don’t believe in reincarnation. However he also feels free enough in the interview situation to present this story. He uses often the third-person, so that the listener/reader nearly can forget that it is himself, he talks about.

He talks about his weaknesses. Firstly, he talks about his weakness of biased, unfair decision making. The interviewer enquires several times. After asking if this is a weakness, the interviewee explains that it is so, because he is a human being. Firstly, it seems to be a justification, but then the interviewer asked again if this is a weakness. It seems to be a misunderstanding, but the
interviewee answers with a confirmation. Being a human being is the major weakness for the interviewee, because human beings “think all this is a small project”. “But you get to a moment…” of realization, of an insight or whatever. Here he starts his story. He uses it to illustrate that human beings have a mission in life and they shouldn’t become arrogant. The horse in the story is also a metaphor for subordinates, so he can talk also about leadership.

He demonstrates, through his story, that leaders should care for their subordinates, that they are actually equal - “colleagues”. Leaders need to respect and appreciate subordinates otherwise they will fail their mission.

He realizes his own weaknesses through reflecting on this story. The story shall maybe also motivate others to reflect on their weaknesses. Realizing weaknesses and failures, helps the leader to develop (see also F4). Overcoming weaknesses is possible through meditation; the interviewee says at the end of the extract: “You just have to meditate” - sounds like the easy way out.

The story is a way of presenting himself. Firstly, he admits his weaknesses in line with a definition of ASL. So he shows that he is aware of his weaknesses and is open to admitting them like an authentic spiritual leader, who knows him/herself and is honest with him/herself and with others, should do. Then, the reader/listener gets to know that he believes in previous lives. He constructs himself through the character of his previous life. If he would say, “I was a god” instead of “he was good” it would sound totally strange and absurd for people from western socialization. For a long period, the relationship between the interviewer and the General is very loose. It appears most of the time as a separated story/person. If we take the extract out of the context, it would appear as a simple third-person story. The context of a story is always very important. The short notice of “like in my previous life…” shows the relationship to the interviewer. The general is a heroic character in a tragedy (Compare with Boje’s understanding of tragedy; Boje, 2001). The hero is defeated by his own arrogance (weakness), but hope exists for the interviewee by coming to an understanding of these weaknesses.

Horse coaching or seminars for leaders with horses are the modern variant to this story. Here also the leader shall learn from a horse how to treat subordinates. It seems that leaders first need to learn to respect, to open up and appreciate their employees. The horse story doesn’t question if leadership is needed, it just illustrates that it should happen in a certain way. It also doesn’t question at all if it is ethical to kill people – a general just needs to win. An understanding of this, in another way, could be: a leader needs to fulfil his/her mission, even at a cost of other people. In the sense of ASL the general is not ethical, he is not an authentic spiritual leader. The interviewee tries to learn from the general’s unethical mistakes and through combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership he hopes to fulfil his mission this time.
It’s furthermore a short story about revolution. The horse gets into the position of power. After the general exploits the horse without giving any credit to him, the horse turns the whole ‘story’ around. It has a touch of Marxism. The suppressed and exploited labour stands up against the greedy capitalist. The workers (the horse) had already the power, but through maltreatment they realized it and used it. The general (capitalist, leader) gets killed and the mission fails.

The whole story introduces the idea of a mission, of working not for one’s own benefit. The whole story is very mysterious, symbolic and mediates several values, like equality and justice. It has an obvious eastern (spiritual) context, but addresses also all kind of leaders.

The story shows that authentic spiritual leaders need to listen to employees, need to be aware that they are not better than their employees, they need to respect and appreciate them. The authentic spiritual leaders need to realize and overcome their weaknesses and this is possible through meditation (spirituality).

The interviewees talk about how they respect, serve and facilitate their employees and colleagues. They keep the concept of leadership, but they try to construct it in a new way. They leave the power position to the leader, but subordinate him/her to the benefit of others, to the mission. Leadership becomes selfless service – to sell this idea the interviewees do here a lot of construction work. How they put up a whole construction of ASL will be demonstrated in the next chapter.
Ch 5.
Construction of ‘ASL talk’

After examining the concepts of authenticity, spirituality and leadership of ‘ASL’ talk of the people in the network and after exploring their dilemmas and stories, let’s now turn to the idea(l) of ASL itself. What kind of image do the interviewees try to produce of ‘ASL’?

In the view of the members of the network, authenticity, spirituality and leadership can be treated separately, but all are needed for business to be ethical and sustainable. Dividing up authenticity, spirituality and leadership leads to confusion and destruction. The concepts need each other in order to clarify their inter-related identities. Only on the basis of bringing these ‘worlds’ (of meaning) together and of (re)uniting them, can we overcome destructive illusions. When spirituality and business are disconnected, the interviewees warn, false conclusions will result. In the construction of ‘ASL talk’ of the interviewees, the separation of spirituality and business leads to irresponsible egoistic profit seeking, and a business world without ethical conscience. ‘ASL talk’ does not really offer much of a choice. ‘ASL talk’ clearly demands ASL.

The interviewees describe leaders as facing vast and rapid global change and challenges in all fields of business. Hence, they need to realise all of their authentic potential, in order to successfully manage the complexity and diversity that they face. Their authentic potential supposedly allows them then to produce creative, responsible and sustainable solutions.

The interviewees reflect on the modern times and try to grasp the current situation of leaders. What do they face? What do they need? Where can they look for new solutions? These are all questions which ‘ASL talk’ is willing to answer.

In ‘ASL talk’, current leadership crises will not be resolved by simply adding new professional skills to old ways of being and acting. Growing beyond the crises requires authentic spiritual transformation, which demands the development of as yet unrealised human potentials and abilities. A new way of ethical leading is required. In this rendering, ‘ASL talk’ provides a chance not only to handle the crises, but also to grow beyond them. The crises or leadership challenges are thus turned into development possibilities. ‘Something new’ and ‘better’ can develop; hidden potentials and secret abilities can be realised. Problems are now chances, and crises lead to transformation. ‘ASL talk’ cleverly tries to meet the needs of leaders who do not know how to handle complexity and uncertainty, with their professional skills. ‘ASL talk’ offers these leaders a relatively new and promising resource: Spirituality.
Together with the concept of spirituality, new lines of argumentation are developed in ‘ASL talk’. For example, those based upon the knowledge and experience of oneness and interrelatedness. In ‘ASL talk’ global economic and environmental problems require a new sustainable leadership style, bringing ethics back into business. Authenticity, spirituality and leadership need to be bridged and this integration leads ‘naturally’ to selfless service and ethical business (including CSR). In ‘ASL talk’, spirituality and business can enrich each other if work is perceived as a mission. Spirituality helps to develop inner, hidden potential, internal motivation and values: such as compassion, love and kindness. Work, as a mission to selflessly serve others supports personal spiritual development.

Within ‘ASL talk’, spiritual practices apparently help to discover the authentic self and to develop an inner ethical judgement. Furthermore, ASL improves communication, concentration, presencing, creativity, etcetera in daily business. All things, leaders like to hear.

‘ASL talk’ further constructs an image of the 21st Century leader, whose capabilities include, not only the ability to learn from the past, but also the wisdom to know when to let go of the old and the out-dated. More importantly, authentic spiritual leaders develop the capacity to stay in a state of quiet unknowing, in order to perceive what their deepest ‘truth’ is, and to ‘presence’ what the future is calling for from them. In this way, an authentic spiritual leader inspires, supports, and facilitates others to take the whole organisation into the (un-)known future. The abilities are really quite imprecise, but they sound modern and promising.

To make ‘ASL talk’ work, each aspect of the interviewees’ concepts of ASL needs grounding. ASL is based on spirituality. Concepts like ‘mission’ or ‘selflessness’ are grounded in the ASL understanding of the authentic self as egoless and ethical. The self is egoless --- i.e. there is no ‘I’, or ‘me’, or ‘mine’. The cornerstone is one’s understanding of oneness and non-duality. Everything is interrelated and interdependent. This insight needs to be founded in one’s own experience. Intellectual understanding will help, but not change one into an authentic person. But concepts like selflessness or selfless service are often perceived to be very soft and not realistic for business people. On the other hand, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, authenticity can be perceived and constructed as a tool for suppression and exploitation.

For ‘ASL talk’, theories and concepts are like buildings: they need a strong foundation. The underlying fundament is to be found in here personal experience, which can be theoretically attacked as being excessively subjective, but seen from a spiritual viewpoint, there is nothing more valid.
Let’s now look at the different aspects of ASL (mission, selflessness, the authentic self, oneness) and their meaning for the conceptual building of ASL (see fig. 1). The related dilemmas have already been discussed in detail above.

![Authentic Spiritual Leadership Diagram]

**Figure 1: Authentic Spiritual Leadership**

### Mission

ASL requires that one understand work as a mission. Mission is a spiritual term and is also used in this sense here. In leadership theories, sometimes the higher purpose of work or similar concepts are integrated.

“Authentic Leaders do not take on a leadership role or engage in leadership activities for status, honour or other personal rewards” (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 397).

These constructions miss the spiritual aspect of realizing one’s mission. As one interviewee expressed it: inauthentic leaders do not realize “the true authentic responsibility that is given to them. They are enjoying the power given to them, the money that is given to them, the drivers, the houses… whatever, the power to become corrupt”. Authentic spiritual leaders are intrinsically motivated by personal conviction, value-based causes and/or a mission they want to promote through their leadership. This interviewee claims that he “came to this life for a mission.” The mission gives spiritual meaning to one’s life and work in ‘ASL talk’. Leadership theories and ‘ASL talk’ need the concept of the mission or higher purpose to distance themselves clearly from self-interested leadership and to give a positive and ethical connotation to leadership.

As George (2003) puts it, authentic leaders are grounded in a purpose or a mission, and are driven by passion and purpose, not by greed. In ‘ASL talk’, authentic spiritual leaders lead with high integrity and have a deep sense of purpose.
They want to build enduring, sustainable organizations, which can survive even if they leave them. Similarly George (2003, p. 9) says:

“We need leaders who lead with purpose, values, and integrity; leaders who build enduring organizations, motivate their employees to provide superior customer service, and create long-term value for shareholders”

In ‘ASL talk’, the shareholder perspective is not the only one, the stakeholder perspective is also valued. Hence, responsibility is emphasized over and above economic profitability. Organization and leadership have to serve all ‘parties’ (including ‘the environment’). George (2003) thinks that authentic leaders try to make a difference in the lives of the people they serve (e.g. customers and employees). One interviewee says he leads by serving and that is for him an expression of authenticity. He explains, “Authenticity means to never be selfish. Your mission should be full of good will and good intention. It must be good to the human being. Always unselfish, always giving, always offering.” The mission includes all (human) beings. The mission is not limited, for the interviewees, to the organizational context. Authentic leaders give up self-interest for the collective good of their organization, community, and/or the entire society (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). It seems to be a trend to widen the scope of the discourse to take-on sustainability. ‘ASL talk’ includes nature, all living beings, and a spiritual component.

In the view of the interviewees, authentic spiritual leaders experience oneness: a connection to a greater ‘collectivity’, or to a greater (universal) force, that is manifest through them. As George Bernard Shaw says in a phrase very well received by ‘ASL talk’:

“This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose you consider a mighty one, the being a force of nature…” (cited in Senge et al., 2004, p. 137).

For example, one interviewee mentions that through meditation he experienced that he had functioned as a machine, as a vehicle, and he responded: “God use my hand, my mind and my body to do something. Me and him are one. ‘Him’ for me is my spirit, is my mind.” Here, the already discussed interplay of power and powerlessness is obvious. In ‘ASL talk’, joy is emphasized and ‘being used’ for a mission (via the power or force of nature) is demonstrated.

The mission constitutes an important link in ASL between spirituality and business. As shown in previous chapters, the concept of a mission fulfils several tasks in ‘ASL talk’. It helps to integrate spirituality into business and champions one’s own spiritual development, which requires reducing one’s own ego. The mission is always in service to others and is based in ‘ASL talk’ on the idea of selflessness.
Selflessness or (Selfless) Service

The concepts of selflessness and selfless service are of course to be found in the major religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism). These form the background of the interviewees and help to support the conceptual grounding of ASL. The religious traditions also link leadership to ethics, authenticity and spirituality. The separation of these terms seems, in ‘ASL talk’, to be an illusion; i.e. the illusion of a separated self produces the disjunction of ethics, authenticity, spirituality and leadership.

The interviewees described many aspects, in line with Taoism, or at least with the interpretations of Taoism that Heider (1997) made in his book ‘The Tao of Leadership’. Selflessness, ethics, spirituality, authenticity, facilitation and oneness are concepts inherent in the Tao found repeatedly in the interviews. The way the Tao and the interviewees describe an authentic spiritual leader is captured in a quote repeated in ‘ASL talk’ from Nelson Mandela:

“It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.” (as cited in Barr and Dowding, 2008, p. 231)

Leading from behind, being humble, and serving others are the central qualities for an authentic spiritual leader in ‘ASL talk’. Criticism could warn that leading from behind could involve opaqueness and uncertainty. It also implies the danger that the leader thinks to know the ‘truth’ and acts like a puppet player.

The theory of servant leadership developed by Greenleaf matches ASL thinking (1970, 1977, 2003). Like the interviewees, Greenleaf puts serving first, and emphasizes the ethical use of power. Leadership means serving others; and serving others means supporting their growth. Serving is the primary aim in ‘ASL talk’. Spears (2002) described some qualities of a servant leader: listening (to others and to the personal inner voice), empathy, awareness (general and self-awareness), dreaming great dreams, the ability to think outside the box, foresight (presence), stewardship, the commitment to the growth of people and the capability to build communities. All these ‘desirable’ qualities are also used in ‘ASL talk’ to create as arresting an image of an authentic spiritual leader as possible. In comparison to servant leadership, ‘ASL talk’ adds the concept of selflessness. This controversial concept raises attention and discussion and needs conceptual support in ‘ASL talk’. The way the interviewees construct their ideas of the authentic self and of oneness, provides the needed conceptual foundations of ‘ASL talk’ – at least in the belief of the interviewees.
The Authentic Self

The interviewees take a further step than what is found in existing leadership theories; they talk about selflessness and selfless service. The addition of selflessness refers to their underlying spiritual understanding of the authentic self. The authentic self is in its nature connected to everything integrated and divine. It is a positive force, as Andrew Cohen also expresses it:

“There is a part of each one of us that is already free from ego, and that is what I call the ‘Authentic Self’. Underneath the fears and desires of the separate ego, the authentic self already exists integrated, full, and complete. And it's that self that I try to awaken people to, because it's in light of the discovery of one's own authentic self, and the authentic self in others, that we can begin to understand what an obstruction ego actually is, and we can experience for ourselves another possibility.” (Cohen, 2003)

Cohen and the interviewees see ‘negative emotions’ - or as the Dalai Lama calls them ‘destructive emotions’ - like fear, hate, greed etc., as grounded on the perception of the separate self. Destructive emotions are seen as a great cause of suffering (Goleman, 2004). Buddhism calls the three emotions of aggression, clinging and delusion ‘the three poisons’. Destructive emotions are those that are harmful to oneself and/or others. Reductive, from the perspective of ‘ASL talk’, scientific theories are usually concerned with questions like how does anger appear in the brain, but they don’t ask if anger is good or bad in a fundamental ethical sense. Here philosophy and religion are needed to remind us of our humanity. As quoted in Goleman (2004, p. 58), the Dalai Lama apparently truly believes that “we are compassionate deep in our nature”. Compassion includes both self and others in the understanding of the interviewees. This positive construction of the authentic self is required in ‘ASL talk’ to establish the idea of selflessness and to turn ASL into an ethical force. A negative or egoistic understanding of the authentic self wouldn’t work in ‘ASL talk’. To avoid psychological or philosophical discussions, the authentic self is placed in a spiritual context.

Following Buddhism, three levels of consciousness are differentiated: gross, subtle and very subtle. Emotions appear like ‘waves on the surface of the ocean’ only on the gross (body-environment) and subtle (‘I’) levels (Goleman, 2004). The very subtle level is pure awareness, without particular objects. In the ‘ocean depths’, destructive emotions are not incorporated. Destructive emotions are like clouds in front of the sun, they seem massive, but turn into nothing if we try to grasp them. The problem is that they nevertheless have an effect: they obscure the sun.

The interviewees see human nature as covered with different layers, which have to be penetrated tier by tier. The authentic self is already there, it doesn’t
need to be developed – it needs to be (re)discovered, unfolded and/or exposed. This is authenticity. Discovering true human nature and unfolding its deepest potential means realizing that the authentic self is non-dual, it is not separated. The experience of the authentic self is an experience of oneness in the description of the interviewees

**Cornerstone: Oneness, Non-duality**

The underlying assumption of oneness (non-duality), prepares the ground for selfless, serving leadership. Ethical understanding arises out of ‘spiritual insight’. For ‘ASL talk’, it is advantageous that ‘spiritual insight’ is hard to question. Either you have insight or you don’t:

“A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.” (Albert Einstein as cited in Sullivan, 1972, p.1)

The one is constructed by Einstein and the interviewees as part of the whole. The scope of compassion is widened to embrace the greater whole. ‘ASL talk’ refers to a process of freeing oneself that is apparently self-evidently valuable. It is equivalent to striving for authenticity. The path is the goal in ‘ASL talk’.

The religious and spiritual traditions discussed emphasize oneness as the last, most fundamental, reality; and suggest that every being can overcome the illusion or delusion of separation through self-exploration (authenticity). The illusion of separation is also constructed by the interviewees as the source of all kinds of trouble, beginning with egoism and self-centredness, and ending in current global problems. As Joseph Jaworski in the book *Presence* (Senge et al., 2004, p. 72) says:

“It’s as if the perceived separation of humans from one another, and from other forms of life, is the glue that holds our current story together. We’ve got to find out what it will take to break free of this tragic story.”

‘ASL talk’ claims that (Andrew Cohen, 2005) at the dawn of the twenty-first century leaders are beginning to look to the spiritual truth of oneness. The understanding and even more important the experience of oneness can for
Cohen be a “source for a new, deeper, and higher perspective from which to engage in the global marketplace”.

The interviewees construct spiritual experience as the natural source of values and ethical behaviour. Moral precepts become clear by themselves. If the interrelatedness of everything and everyone comes to awareness on an experiential level, the ego melts and action is oriented to the benefit of others. Spiritual insight into the impermanence of all things leads to sustainable and ethical leadership in the ‘ASL talk’. The one who understands the cornerstones, understands the whole building. And even the cornerstones are to a certain extent protected from doubt in ‘ASL talk’, because truth is all based, in the end, on irreducible and thus difficult to question ‘personal’ experiences.

In ‘ASL talk’, personal experiences are crucial. They form the ground of understanding and judgement. The authentic self, for example, is not realizable on an intellectual level. It has to be experienced. After experiencing the authentic self, this realization has to be put into further practice. The importance of personal experience is grounded in spirituality.

ASL is constructed as a practical and personal concept in ‘ASL talk’ and it has to be understood or experienced on a practical and personal level, to fully feel its force. Nevertheless, on a theoretical level, it is very interesting and fruitful to examine the debate about the effect of combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership, as the next chapters will illustrate. ASL is very controversial, as we will also see in the next part.
The Controversy of ASL

Spirituality at work has received a lot of attention in the last decade and in organizational studies (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Today many books on leadership have ‘spirit’ or ‘spiritual’ in their titles, and these terms have started to appear in books on organizational behaviour (Robbins, 2003). Fairholm (1996) was one of the first who used the terms ‘spiritual’ and ‘leadership’ together. Besides the literature, spirituality like authenticity has become a popular topic for many conferences worldwide. As Cooper et al. (2005) emphasize in the field of Authentic Leadership the development of theory is characterised by competing and unclear definitions. The boundaries of the concept are diffuse and the correlations to other concepts are non-specific.

There are already multiple meanings of the root, ‘spirit’. The English word ‘spirit’ comes from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath’. One meaning of spirit is related to God or to the Holy Spirit, i.e. to transcendence. A second meaning of spirit refers to the human capacity to search for meaning in life. To be spiritual means here to live a life full with meaning (Cavanaugh et al., 2001). This can include belief in a transcendent reality, in God for example, or not. Howard (2002) states that: spirituality is connected to the self, to others, to nature and to a higher power. Biberman and Tischler (2008) see spirituality as a process that moves one in either, or both, of the following directions: 1. Inward to a deeper experience of a ‘higher reality’, and/or, 2. Towards being interconnected with everything. For Cavanaugh et al. (2001) spirituality involves a worldview and a path. Spirituality here is very general and abstract. Spirituality can include a worldview and a path, but it says nothing specific about either the worldview or the path. The worldview supposedly gives meaning to our lives and the path provides practises that cultivate and express the worldview in our daily lives.

Goertzen & Barbuto (2001) found in their review of the literature on individual spirituality, that spirituality is often linked to self-actualization, purpose and meaning of life. Health and wellness supposedly are outcomes of spirituality, and spirituality can be found in the workplace (spirituality and leadership). For Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 13):

“Workplace spirituality is a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy.”
Spirituality it has been claimed is necessary in business for ethical behaviour. Authors such as Barrett (1998), Biberman (2003), Cashman (1998, 2003), Greenleaf (2002) and Jaworski (1996), emphasized the importance of spiritual leadership or spirituality in business.

Wilber (2000a) is responsible for an effort to integrate theories of leadership, business, human development and spirituality. Spirituality is seen here as an integral component of leadership and as a variable in an integrated leadership development model (Wilber, 2000a). Human development supposedly is achieved through the interaction of individual, community, and environment. Leaders can learn to deepen their intuition and inner knowledge, through shared consciousness (Wilber, 2000a). Korac-Kakabadse & Korac-Kakabadse (1997) have stated that spiritual leaders must reflect on their lives to discover and understand their purposes, so that they can lead with authenticity and integrity. Spirituality is seen by Cacioppe (2000) as important in helping human beings to experience the fundamental meaning and purpose of their work. He argues that leaders have an essential role in integrating spirituality at work, at the individual, team and organizational level.

Strack et al. (2002) interviewed leaders who defined spirituality as a kind of transcendent power (e.g. God), and as the source of values and meaning, and as an awareness of the inner self, and as a way of integrating all aspects of the person into a whole. Spirituality, as a source of values it is asserted influences the behaviour of the leader, because (Fry, 2005) leaders’ values create their attitudes that drive their behaviours. He (Fry, 2003, p. 694–695) defined spiritual leadership as:

“the values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that all have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership”.

Spiritual leadership for him is related to a ‘calling’ (experience of transcendence or service to others) and ‘membership’ (establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love).

Dent et al. (2005) have analysed academic articles about workplace spirituality and about spiritual leadership. They used qualitative narrative analysis to examine their material and found that most authors defined spirituality as transformational, moral and ethical. Some authors have connected spirituality to religion, but many articles also suggested that spirituality could be defined separately from religion.

In many articles, spirituality is linked to integrity, honesty, goodness, knowledge, wholeness, congruency, interconnectedness, team-work, etc. Spirituality seems to be linked to a search for meaning, reflection and reflective thinking, as well as inner connectedness, creativity, transformation, sacredness and energy. Spiritual development seems to be a continuing process and is part of the person’s personal and moral development. Spiritual development is linked
to achieving greater awareness and to overcoming boundaries through, for example, meditating, being in nature, reflective thinking, praying, reading spiritual texts, and so on.

Whittington et al. (2005) identified ten spiritual leadership qualities of the Apostle Paul, based on Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. The authors described these qualities as necessary for legacy leadership. For them, the most important measure is how the followers’ lives are changed through leadership. Spiritual leadership is follower-centred and not self–centred. It includes aspects of authenticity and comes very close to servant leadership. The authors noted that their characteristics of Paul’s leadership style are consistent with the competencies of emotional intelligence from Goleman (Goleman, 1997 and Goleman, Boyzatis, and McKee, 2002).

Central, in all forms of positive leadership, like e.g. transformational, ethical, servant or spiritual leadership, is their tendency to include all possible positive qualities and aspects of the leader and of his or her leadership. All kinds of positive outcomes are named, so it is, of course, very difficult to define them, to differentiate them, and to practically control the claims. Authentic Leadership seems to include a conglomeration of all kinds of ‘nice’ values, attitudes, behaviours, outcomes, and so on. Positive Leadership theories talk usually about the positive sides of leaders and leadership. But what are the negative sides?

The growing field of positive leadership theories can be criticised for being a method to keep up old power structures, hierarchies, and system orders – i.e. as being an attempt to justify leadership itself. Some authors think that leadership is antiquated and that the development of business and society requires networking instead of leadership. From a critical perspective, positive leadership theories seem to be a last account or justification for leadership and hierarchy as a conservative reaction to changing demands and values.

In particular, bringing authenticity, spirituality and leadership together is very controversial, and in the view of some authors even dangerous. Critics of workplace spirituality often argue that it has only the aim of increasing financial profit and that it is another form of (defence of) neo-liberalism. Boje (2000 and 2008) warned that spirituality is too often used instrumentally in the business context. Spirituality in such cases is misused as a tool to motivate employees to higher levels of identification and commitment in order to increase their performance. Boje emphasizes the need for critical reflection on how spirituality is (mis)used or abused (‘spiritual abuse’) in the name of business, to reinforce authority, hierarchical structures, injustice and oppression. Besides his scepticism, Boje (2008, p. 172) points to how Critical Theory founders had an ambivalent take on what he calls ‘critical spirituality’:
“That is, that while spiritual practices are appropriated by the state and by business capitalism in order to co-opt the masses, there is opportunity, now and again, to use spirituality as a form of resistance, as a way to bring about distributive justice by making power aware of the embedded mechanisms of exploitation and oppression.”

For Boje, critical theory also perceives a positive way of integrating spirituality into business, which leads to equality, social justice and is beneficial to business and society. Many other critical writers describe, besides their criticism, a positive chance for spirituality in business. It depends on the nature of the understanding and reflection on spirituality and the applications. Boje ends his chapter with the words:

"At issue is how is „love thy neighbor as thyself“ put into practice?"

How this is put into practice is indeed the crucial point; spiritual leadership is not bad or beneficial per se. Carrette and King (2005) propose that spirituality today is easily consumable and that it therefore can support corporate capitalist ideology. Spirituality has become more and more commodified, especially in the consulting business and in the self-help literature (McGee, 2005; Cullen, 2009). Instead of facilitating transformation and development, spirituality gets utilized to fit the individual into the organization and into existing society. Organizations always are seeking for methods of control to keep their employees in line. Spirituality can be used to enhance this control to and colonize the private spirits of the workers.

Some authors are critical of the result-orientated discourses about workplace spirituality. For example, Bell and Taylor (2003) argue that recent spirituality and workplace discourse over emphasizes much organizational purposes. Most of the articles about spiritual leadership seem to carefully avoid talking directly to the relationship between spiritual leadership and productivity, because issues of productivity and profit are linked to materialism and egotism, and spirituality supposedly is anti-materialistic and anti-egotistic. But Dent et al. (2005) found that many authors argue that spiritual leadership empowers employees to be more creative, more honest, stronger, more resilient, and more compassionate.

Some criticism focuses on (e.g. Fenwick and Lange, 1998) the conflicts between business aims and spiritual aims. Pursuit of material gain drives one to focus on individual success and greediness, and of wanting to have more and more goods, while spiritual gain opposingly would entail having less, letting go, and even giving up on the ego-self. The business field wants the individual to subordinate his or her power, creativity and knowledge to the profit and to the bottom-line; while spirituality demands that one uses all of his/her capacities to serve others. Zhuravleva and Jones (2006) have warned that techniques like meditation, in the
hands of leaders, could be misused to manipulate employees in the way that the organization wants.

Combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership, can create horrible effects, in the view of some critical authors. The here researched network is of exactly the opposite opinion: the separation of authenticity, spirituality and leadership is for them what leads to horrible effects, such as unethical business, and the destruction and pollution of the world. Supposedly only the unity of the ASL concepts facilitates sustainable, humanistic and ethical values in organizations.

An exemplary criticism comes from Tourish and Pinnington (2002), who wrote an article about transformational leadership, corporate cultism, and spirituality. They asked in their article the provoking question, “Is this trinity is unholy in the workplace?”

I’m not interested here in transformational leadership per se, but in their general criticism of the trinity of authenticity, spirituality and leadership. According to their article, leaders who mix authenticity, spirituality and leadership are:

a) Narcissists;  
b) They don’t accept corrective feedback; and  
c) They overestimate the need for vision.

These three characteristics lead to several serious problems/dangers for the leader him-/herself, the employees, and the whole organization:

- The danger of one truth;  
- The danger of exploitation;  
- The danger of fake;  
- The danger of the Hitler Problem; and  
- The danger of cults and spirituality.

The article from Tourish and Pinnington (2002), with the three destructive characteristics and the related dangers, is used here as the ‘Antithesis of ASL’. Important points of criticism related to ASL and how the interviewees would defend their concept of ASL against these points, will be discussed next. Connected questions, which were raised in the Introduction, will then be (re-)considered in chapter 7, on the basis of my findings. For example the questions, ‘Can leaders/organizations act in an ethical way?’ and ‘Is corporate social responsibility a general movement or a momentary trend?’, will be discussed.
Narcissism vs. Authenticity and Selflessness

The first destructive characteristic of a leader who combines authenticity, spirituality and leadership, is narcissism (Tourish and Pinnington, 2002). The narcissistic leader overestimates him-/herself, has a strong need for power, is proud, lacks empathy, and often does not listen to others. These attributes are similar to the attributes of cult leaders, in the view of Tourish and Wohlforth (2000). The leader perceives “reality through the distorting prism of his or her vision,” (Tourish and Pinnington, 2002, p. 152) and ignores dissonant information. The leader’s view of reality becomes very limited and the leader cannot integrate facets of reality, which disagree with his/her vision. The egocentric leader thinks that s/he knows the truth and s/he knows the one correct way of doing things.

In contrast to the concept of narcissism, from Tourish and Pinnington, the interviewees talked of ASL as embracing authenticity and selflessness. Both these concepts are very controversial as well, thus it is interesting to explore the criticism of authenticity and selflessness and later on to see the ‘response’ from the interviewees.

Critics on Authenticity

Some critics see authenticity as responsible for the emergence of the ‘me generation’, i.e. a culture of narcissism, obsessed with self-gratification. The ‘me generation’ finds its expression in the contemporary ‘cult’ of the individual, and in the championing of egoistical self-fulfilment. This kind of authenticity is only self-centred and often exists to the detriment of others.

Three main criticisms of authenticity are selected here, because of their relevance for the ‘ASL talk’: Faked Authenticity, Postmodern Criticism and Modern Malaises.

Inauthenticity, Fake, and Faked Authenticity

In general, it is possible to philosophically differentiate between, inauthentic forms of authenticity: or inauthenticity, the fake and faked authenticity.

The ‘fake’ seems to be the most harmless. The fake can even become authentic. It entails ‘sob stuff’ or ‘kitsch’. It is quite obviously nonsense; it can have its own charm, and it offers the fun of ironical reflection. Faked authenticity, on the other hand, wants to be taken seriously. It tries to appear authentic and it wants to be perceived as authentic. The pseudo wants to be seen as the real, and it can start to replace the original. Irony and critical discussion are seen by some as undesirable. But as Kierkegaard (1841/2002) put it, an authentic human life is not possible without irony. Faked authenticity makes it difficult to
live an authentic life, and furthermore it makes reality itself inauthentic. If you think of an authentic place, history, life style etc., you can’t find such a ‘real’ thing. Such things are always changing. The effort to make things appear authentic, will end in faked authenticity. In this sense, one can say there is no ‘ASL’ – not as a ‘real’ thing, not as something static.

Tourish and Pinnington wrote that every leader today seems to be pressed to formulate a vision and therefore many leaders fake having one (danger of fake). Leadership theories support the belief that every leader needs to formulate and communicate a compelling vision. Thus many leaders try hard to find one and have to fake their authenticity. This can lead to leaders who are honoured by the stock market, but who are really bad people (Tourish, 1998). Tourish and Pinnington (2002, p. 154) wrote:

“In such circumstances, corporate paranoia, frenetic activity and cultic norms that penalize open discussion may rapidly take root.”

Price (2003) has warned that authentic transformational/spiritual leaders might, like other leaders, act in an immoral way, but still claim to be true to their higher selves. The effort to be an authentic spiritual leader might even increase the level of inauthenticity. Leaders might (need to) ignore, hide or repress their problems and dilemmas. Leaders might start to fake their authenticity and spirituality because they feel the pressure of society to embody a difficult to achieve leadership style. Bass & Steidlmeier (1999 p. 182) focus on the negative sides of charismatic/pseudo-transformational leaders, who paradoxically fake their authenticity and who make use of their positions to feed their narcissism, authoritarianism and need for power. Authenticity or spirituality in business can be used as a way to manipulate and exploit workers, to realize materialistic objectives (e.g. Cavanagh & Bandsuch, 2002; Tourish and Pinnington, 2002).

**Postmodern Criticism**

Postmodern theorists like Lyotard (1984) or Baudrillard (1994) criticise the ‘arrogance’ of modern rationality, which makes use of dogmatic systems to explain everything and to propagate the superiority of Science and Technology. Postmodern Philosophy tries to deconstruct such systems. Postmodern Philosophy focuses on three basic assumptions: (1) Reality is (at least partly) constructed and is an interpretation (constructivism), (2) sense-making is dependent upon contexts, and (3) no single perspective should be allowed to become too dominant. By putting absolute systems into doubt, Post-modernism confronts the individual with her- himself (van Quekelberghe, 2006). It opens, in this sense, the way towards authenticity and spirituality. It also offers opportunity for dialogue between different religions through its emphasis on ‘Other’, difference and context. Globalization and contemporary communication could help to realize the
Stoics’ idea of world citizenship, related to ethics and authenticity. But Postmodern Philosophy also broaches the issue of the risks to authenticity in our Postmodern Societies.

Most Postmodern thinkers (e.g. Lyotard, 1999) claim to decode and deconstruct conceptions about human nature, and the ways in which supposed knowledge of human nature is constructed by writers, texts and readers. For postmodernist thinkers, there are no objective definitions of who and what human beings are and therefore there is nothing like a ‘true human nature’ or ‘human potential’ or a ‘true humanity’. Stable continuous identity construction is questioned and terms like “Patchwork-Identity” (Keupp, 1999) or “floating identities” (List, 2000) are embraced.

Postmodern critics attack the ideal of authenticity not as a symptom of cultural decline, but on the grounds that it is a kind of trick leading to domination, because it is in principle impossible to attain. Similar to Postmodern critics, Tourish and Pinnington describe that authenticity and spirituality are often used as tricks for dominating employees (danger of exploitation).

The so-called ‘authentic’ self can never be more than an effect of the play of signifiers, in which the self is always already situated. The self here is regarded as inescapably caught in a phenomenologically opaque structure of signs. Postmodern critics come to the conclusion that an authentic self is a delusion, with the hidden purpose of control and exclusion. Authenticity is seen as an impulse towards closure, and suppression of the inner heterogeneity of desire.

Theodor Adorno (1964, 1973) called this kind of faked authenticity “the jargon of authenticity”. The jargon of authenticity (Eigentlichkeit) is a language that seems to express a need for meaning and liberation, but which in actual fact only serves to mystify, and to bring others ‘down’ while raising ‘us’ up. In Adorno’s view, language through "the jargon" is made manipulative to promote the cause of Capitalism. And “the jargon” protects itself from all ‘negatives’ and critics. Criticism is seen as a failure on the part of the person, who speaks out against the criticized. The truth belongs to the people who use “the jargon” and what they defend raises their personal human value. The words of “the jargon” sound holy, what Adorno called “aura”.

Tourish and Pinnington explained that people who combine spirituality and leadership believe in only one truth (danger of one truth, danger of cults). This truth is the vision or mission, and to protect it one creates an aura around it. Through spirituality and sacredness the basics of the mission and of the leadership are sheltered. This is taken to the extreme in cults.

People --- devoted followers in cults or employees in an organization--- can quite easily pretend to know the secrets inherent in “the jargon” and they can pretend, like others, that all wisdom is discovered by themselves as free individuals. Thus they feign authenticity.
As Tourish and Pinnington illustrated, people with lower status like employees try their best to align themselves with people with higher status like the leaders. The ‘followers’ take on the leaders’ vision and learn “the jargon”, follow their leaders’ examples, imitating them and even start to punish non-believers (danger of cults and spirituality). Furthermore, if people think that they do it all freely, their commitment (and fanaticism) may well be even higher.

**Modern Malaises**

Charles Taylor (1989, 2003) has challenged modernity from within. What makes him very interesting is that he sees both the dangers and the possibilities of modernity and especially of authenticity. In general, instead of fighting over the value of authenticity, Taylor finds a discussion about the meaning of authenticity more fruitful (La Lotta Continua - "the struggle goes on"). Following him, we can think about the meaning and development of authenticity.

Taylor was very aware of the modern, popular desire of ‘misunderstood’ authenticity, and he talks about the modern malaises, which manifest themselves in an egoistic centring of the self:

- **Individualism** is the belief in the sovereignty and priority of the individual in society (a loss of meaning (in life), a lack of passion, people don’t have a broader vision, don’t care about others, nature),
- **Instrumental reason** (*Negative consequences*: the eclipse of ends),
- **Soft despotism** (the loss of freedom).

The ideal of authenticity condemns ego-centred and not (self-)responsible variants of authenticity, which only value their own self-fulfilment.

If people make no value judgments about each other or about differing concepts at of life, then authenticity takes the form of a soft relativism and there is no moral appeal or moral horizon, because everything is always subjective. It is important to recognize that things take on meaning only against a horizon of significance. We need a "background of intelligibility" against which our desires and opinions make sense.

Moral subjectivism means that morality is not ground in reason. Morality, ethics or values, are then only dependent upon the preferences of individuals. Soft relativism rejects anything that transcends the self (e.g. the past, nature, the environment, religion or spirituality…); relationships are only important if they support one’s own self-fulfilment, so that loyalty and helping others is very limited. For Charles Taylor this is fully inauthentic and the ideal of authenticity is completely misunderstood in this way.

Our contemporaries can choose from a huge list of opportunities: which feel like their own discoveries and choices, but they are not. For Taylor, one has to con-
nect with oneself and to one’s true human nature to discover one’s own unique identity. This is not easy and requires effort.

The “Brave New World” (Huxley, 1955) is fascinating and absorbing with all the technology, virtual simulating media, and possibilities, but the ‘unlimited’ self-determination and the generation of one’s own reality needs to be in harmony with oneself, and directed to human potentiality and not merely to technical potentiality.

Taylor thinks that human beings are endowed with an inner, intuitive moral sense (drawn from Plato, Saint Augustine and Rousseau). Concerning authenticity, it is fundamentally important that people can decide for themselves what is right or wrong, instead of just following external influences. People have to learn to listen to the moral voice within them, and to make their own judgments. Tourish and Pinnington (2002), on the contrary, ask how we can discriminate between good and bad. Who sets the moral standards and who validates them (the ‘danger of the Hitler Problem’)?

As an extreme example, the Hitler problem illustrates that: One person’s delusion can become the delusion of many. If the leader is very powerful and able to adjust the mindset of others (followers), s/he can use people for his or her own goals. The question arises: How can we say Hitler was not an authentic leader? How can we differentiate him from leaders such as Gandhi? Who defines the ethical values and who authenticates them?

Tourish and Pinnington (2002) have emphasized the danger that arises when leaders change the goals of followers, or in the case of cults produce devoted members. It can be questioned if the newly formulated common goals are really in the interest of all concerned, or if they just serve the self-interest of the leader. If the leader, through his/her vision, erases all dissent, all diversity and all self-reflection, leadership comes very close to producing totalitarianism.

Selflessness

Selflessness and (selfless) service are central concepts in the interviews and directly opposite to narcissism. As already discussed, the interviewees do a lot of constructional work to introduce the concept of selflessness into the business field. The people from the network, construct ASL as selfless service. Authenticity and spirituality are closely related to reducing the ego as well as to selflessness. Selflessness is a traditional virtue in many cultures and religions. Selflessness is often closely related to altruism and ethics. Socrates, Plato and other western philosophers have espoused altruism and selflessness as doing good: not for the benefits one might derive, but simply for the sake of doing good. In western philosophies, selflessness is hardly questioned and can produce fakeness, impossible demands, suppression of Other, or egoism, as pointed to in the
critical article of Tourish and Pinnington (2002). In eastern traditions and in the view of the interviewees, selflessness is a high spiritual value, which needs to be integrated into business for the greater good.

**Selfish selflessness?**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1882/2000) discussed and criticised selflessness in respect of what society expects and demands from the individual. He said that the behaviour and virtues of a person are usually called ‘good’ when they are beneficial for others and for society. This is not selfless; it is much more an egoistic definition for those in control of the norm(s). If the person harms him/herself while doing something ‘good’ it is not so important, rather it seems all the more selfless and sacrificing when one gives even one’s health or life for the benefit of society. Society uses people like tools, and they are supposedly good if they function well. Room for personal development is not present, only maybe if it increases productivity for society. The virtue of acting for the benefit of others, suppresses one’s own development. Nietzsche names, for example, diligence as a virtue, which is highly valued and supported by others and society. We start early to facilitate diligence, and then it becomes a drive by itself, and the person can lose his/herself joy of life in diligence. S/he is busy with diligently making more and more money, but s/he has no idea what to do with the money. S/he forgets about her/himself. Society gains, the person is destroyed.

The appreciation for such virtues is grounded in egoism and not in selflessness; otherwise one would reject the self-destroying selflessness of others.

François de La Rochefoucauld (1986) said that we are mainly motivated by self-love (narcissism). Egotism (egoism) has many facets and plays many different roles. One role is even the role of ‘selflessness’. Society calls egotism ‘bad’ and selflessness ‘good’, so that the question is: “Does egotism, as the wolf, cover itself with the sheep clothes of selflessness or is there something like real selflessness?”

Selflessness can be based on self-delusion and self-delusion is the source of many problems. Oscar Wilde saw selflessness as pure egotism. For him selflessness was when you allow others to live their lives without interfering (Wilde, 1970).

Selflessness is understood here as putting the interests of others above yourself, and while doing this, you lose yourself along the way. Giving up one’s own self for egoistic/selfish others is defined as selflessness.

It can be suggested that selfless acts and altruism are motivated by a desire to make oneself feel better, feel needed and worthy. Via altruism we gain positive emotions, like gratification. However, these benefits don’t have to be the original cause of the selfless actions. The question is, “Can a person be driven by
non-egoistic motives or is everything we do ultimately egoistical?” Biologists call it reciprocal altruism if the action seems to be selfless on the surface, but underlying is an expectation of a reward to follow. Today, biologists also research ‘real’ selfless actions, or pure altruism in the behaviour of animals. For a long time, altruism was seen as a differentiation criterion between animals and humans. Like many other criteria, this criterion has now been criticised on the basis of further research (Cavalieri and Singer, 2000). Researchers, for example from the German Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, have found that chimps help others selflessly and without the expectation of rewards. Reciprocal altruism has been experimentally excluded. The chimps did not only help other chimps, they also helped humans. From this finding, one can deduce that altruism seems to be deep-rooted in us (Wandtner, 2007).

There are also rational considerations about selflessness and altruism. The western, rational approaches examine the consequences of selfless behaviour. In this sense, the already mentioned reciprocal altruism is a rational altruism, because the individual can expect a reward in exchange for his/her selfless behaviour. In economics, altruism is also possible on the basis of the Pareto criterion, which allows for exchange when already one individual benefits and nobody else gets worse off.

It can be further criticised that selflessness and altruism means that others benefit from our actions, but that these others are not clearly defined. It is a decision of the person him/herself. If personal interests are not allowed into selfless actions, what about personal values? Do ethics and morality have a place and a meaning, in selfless actions, or are they irrelevant? Is there a difference between helping a murderer, an animal, and/or a child? Is it ethical to make such distinctions?

There are different ways of understanding altruism and selfless behaviour. One way entails an ethical understanding. Let’s say an ethical altruism. The selfless behaviour supposedly is driven by ethical values, conscience, or in the words of Kant by ‘a categorical imperative’. Intrinsic values guide behaviour. Altruism can also be driven by spiritual or religious values (and may be developed intrinsically or not). And there is normative altruism, or an altruism which is not coming from the person. Society and religion expect altruism and it is socially desirable, so some selfless behaviour is merely a reaction to normative requirements.

Obviously the selflessness of ASL is difficult to define, to ground philosophically or to explain via social science research. ‘Selflessness’ is such a contentious and contested term that I can only conclude that ASL’s appeal to it creates vagueness and a lack of clarity. ASL rhetoric of ‘selflessness’ has to be accepted
intuitively and on the basis of shared assumptions, or it disappears in elusiveness.

**Responses of ‘ASL talk’**

The critical discourse describes authentic spiritual leaders as narcissistic and egoistic. If we consider now the discourse of the people from our network, authentic spiritual leaders there supposedly ‘have to’ embody the opposite attributes. They have to be, by definition, authentic, humble, selfless and empathic. In ‘ASL talk’ leaders have to listen to others and to be open against dissonant information. The exploration of the interviews revealed that a humble self-presentation is not always easy and that even if the interviewees warn against it, they appear sometimes as overconfident and arrogant themselves.

As illustrated, the criticisms warn against the danger of ‘one truth’ or ‘one correct way of doing things’. Some fundamental aspects, such as an ethical self, are constructed in ‘ASL talk’ as ‘the truth’ and ASL is framed as the correct ‘right’ way of doing things. Nevertheless, the interviewees admit also that there are difficulties, and facets of reality that make ASL very complicated or even impossible. These discursive moves work on the one hand to substantiate ASL (there is a truth behind it), and on the other hand to make it more realistic – problems and dilemmas are part of our reality.

Narcissism is ‘answered’ with authenticity and selflessness. The critical discourse constructs for example egoistic forms of authenticity. That there can be egoistic understandings of authenticity is reflected in ‘ASL talk’ through the dilemma between individual and collective authenticity (see chapter 4.). One interviewee calls self-centred authenticity ‘hero-authenticity’. The interviewees criticize an egoistic authenticity and construct authenticity in terms of being ‘towards others’ and including spiritual understanding. ASL supposedly is not egoistic self-fulfilment; it is always in service of others.

Criticism points to faked authenticity. The interviewees themselves criticise fake and faked leaders, whom they call ‘pushed leaders’, but they don’t discuss in any detail, faked authenticity or faked ASL. For them, this is just inauthenticity. Inauthenticity is the other side of the coin. Their reflections on authenticity often concern more practical issues. They construct authenticity as a process, which allows moments of inauthenticity. This discursive move disburdens their definition of authenticity, because it eludes the ‘either or pitfall’. Furthermore, authentic spiritual leaders supposedly are not working for their own gratitude or materialistic objectives. In very rare cases, organizational or business interests are mentioned in ‘ASL talk’. Benefits are always constructed on a broad ethical
scale, and materialistic aims seem not to suit the idea(l) of ASL. This discursive game protects the definition of authenticity and the ASL stance, but it is also a difficult discursive ploy. Materialistic profits disturb the idealistic image of ASL, but are probably needed to convince people from the business field that the so-called leaders really are leaders.

The interviewees claim that ‘real’ authenticity comes from inside. (Self-)irony, self-reflection and discussions are important in ‘ASL talk’ to convey the insight that personal reflection is always important. Further irony and reflexivity support a likeable image of the interviewees.

Self-reflection about the fact that authenticity in leadership is socially desirable and that one is often required to appear authentic is seldom developed. In society faked authenticity is encouraged, but this is only indirectly mentioned in ‘ASL talk’. The interviewee’s discourses seem to not want to alienate leaders. Socially desirable false answers do not fit into the questions ‘ASL talk’ poses. The critical discourses however illustrate that such awareness would be helpful for the further development of ASL.

The second main critique of authenticity comes from Postmodern Philosophy. In contrast to the interviewees, postmodern critics come to the conclusion that an authentic self is a delusion often constructed with the purpose of control and exclusion. Authenticity is seen as an impulse towards closure and suppression of the inner heterogeneity of desires and wishes.

The authentic self is described by the interviewees as true human nature, which is interconnected, inclusive, divine, and open. It can be experienced (for example through meditation); it is ‘real’ for them. Levels of experience may differ and also the forms of expression may differ, but there is supposedly this ‘core thing’ for everyone, which is by definition a positive, ethical force. Spirituality and authenticity have the aim of reaching the authentic self. The function of such fundamental definitions has already been discussed. It demonstrates that at a basic level it is impossible for the critical discourse and the interviewee’s discourse to meet, as they are in such totally different registers.

The critical discourses warn that the ability to receive criticism is essential, if ASL is not to be misused to preserve the domination and power structures already in organizations. Hierarchies have to be defended and leadership has to be more and more justified. ASL can be misused, as an all-round cure --- i.e. as “the jargon” making the leaders immune to critique. ASL has an “aura” around itself. It can be used to ‘sell’ meaning to employees as in the case of Adorno’s jargon which guides the bourgeois (Spießbürger) to a positive attitude to life, even if it is difficult to endure that life. Or in the words of Tourish and Pinnington, it lets followers perceive their work as a mission or as important for spiritual growth, even if the work contains only meaningless tasks (danger of exploitation, danger of cults and spirituality). The interviewees emphasize that
they are open for critique, and that ASL is characterized by development and change, and that authentic spiritual leaders have to reflect and question themselves. It is claimed that there must always be a possibility of falsification through own experience (especially expressed in the spiritual discourses). The ASL understanding of authenticity and spirituality supposedly is very practical, open and non-sectarian, but the ASL language can give the impression of mystification. Furthermore, ASL is constructed all too tightly and if one doesn’t think that personal experiences are a good way of falsification or that there is nothing like an authentic self, ASL doesn’t work. It always depends on that basic ‘spiritual’ level of reflection and definition.

The issues of meaningless work or horrible life conditions, which are mentioned in the critical discourses, appear in ‘ASL talk’ as circumstances, which have to be improved (‘helping the poor’). The concept of a leader in ‘ASL talk’ is not the concept of a leader in an exploiting, meaningless organization. This would not suit the nice image of ASL. But obviously it does suit many concrete situations.

Quite to the contrary of ‘ASL talk’, Adorno pointed out that the phrase that ‘human beings are good’, is false. This is not surprising, when one considers for instance the history of Second World War. Within this context, “the jargon” spoken and written in Germany became horrible for Adorno. He criticized the ideology of German existentialism (e.g. Heidegger 1927/2006, 1962/2005), because he thought that, after The Second World War, it had become merely an ideological mystification of human domination.

Concerning mass redundancies, the poverty and the global environmental problems, ASL as a jargon may also be very destructive. In this sense, it is important that, once again, that ASL is open for change and analysis –, that it really fights dehumanization and ignorance, and that it doesn’t mystify itself.

According to Adorno, philosophers (like Heidegger) developed the concept of authenticity to avoid falling back into religious doctrines. As a result, the language of authenticity is not Christian in content, but it encourages Christian values. The interviewees seem to use the concept of authenticity also to avoid being perceived as falling back into religious/spiritual doctrines. They freely use spiritual repertoires, but for bridging them with business, they often use authenticity or ASL. Interestingly, the construction of ASL encourages spiritual values, but they are based on a ‘new’ spirituality. Traditional spirituality is described as alien, even disturbing to business. Contemporary leadership concepts seem to enclose more and more spiritual ideas, but for conventional business it seems to trigger a ‘red alert’. So by wrapping spirituality up in the more conventional, unadventurous cover of ‘authenticity’, it becomes possible to ‘sell’ it. Authenticity is an interesting and also popular concept, with a long history, but which is
sometimes shrouded in an “aura”. It is quite differently used in different contexts and by different persons, and so it still has the capacity to be filled in with ‘new’ meaning in ‘ASL talk’.

The third main criticism was called ‘Modern Malaises’. Similar to Charles Taylor, ‘ASL talk’ defines egoistic centring on the self, as inauthentic. Morals, ethics or values have a deeper meaning in ‘ASL talk’ and do not depend upon the preferences of individuals. The interviewees and Taylor claim that human beings are endowed with an inner, intuitive moral sense. Concerning ‘ASL talk’, it is fundamentally important that people can decide for themselves what is right or wrong, instead of just following external influences ---- i.e. ASL includes the embrace of ethical inner judgement. The external answers in ‘ASL talk’ are dictated by instrumental reason, which values efficiency and cost-benefit ratios above all other goods. Such instrumentally guided answers and decisions have brought us, in the view of the interviewees, to the edge of global disaster, where economic growth, inequality in the world, and pollution are rampant.

According to Taylor, people should respond with political and social activity. But actually, there seems to be a lot of political apathy and a lack of social ethical interest. Facing the current global problems, Taylor and the interviewees claim that ‘real’ authenticity is the only opportunity for human and ecological survival. ‘ASL talk’ seems to push the crisis to the extreme to avoid being questioned if ASL is right or wrong.

Tourish and Pinnington (2002) critically ask here how one can discriminate between good and bad, who shall set the moral standards and who can validate them (‘danger of the Hitler Problem’)?

People obviously believe in different things. What is good for one may be extremely bad for somebody else. The interviewees emphasize their belief in an ethical authentic self. This self has to be discovered through layers of delusion, but if one is able to connect to this ‘true’ self, one is also able to discriminate between good and bad. Ethical values can be developed from inside, through personal experience of oneness, impermanence and selfless love. Most important for ASL is intention. Intention has to be full of respect for life, goodwill, love and benevolence. Following this construction of the interviewees, Hitler, Lenin or other totalitarian leaders never could be called authentic, spiritual leaders. ‘ASL talk’ tries to fundamentally protect itself from the ‘Hitler Problem’, which illustrates at least some awareness of the problem.

In comparison to authenticity, selflessness hardly is criticised, as putting the interests of others above yourself is intuitively often accepted as ‘good’. Only the (post-)Nietzsche criticism of the loss of self to conformity and the destruction of joy (jouissance) to outside norms forms an exception. Selflessness in such criti-
cal discourses is described as giving up one’s own self for egoistic/selfish others.

The basics and the context of these criticisms is a suppressing, egoistic society, which is orientated mostly to (economical) growth. This seems also the basis for Tourish and Pinnington criticism of the misuse of spirituality in a profit orientated society (danger of cults and of profiteering spirituality). The individual has to fight for his/her own freedom and for his/her own development in hypercapitalism. The single human being is separated from the whole. The person works for society, but gets nothing reciprocally back. Society’s growth seems to be at the cost of personal growth. Underlying egotism pervades everything. Egoism functions as the bottom-line of everything. The self is understood in its nature as egoistic and self-interested. A selfless self seems to a hypercapitalist to be absurd and a contradiction. Again the critical discourse and ‘ASL talk’ show very different basic assumptions.

The interviewees argue for an ‘ethic of love’, which facilitates life itself. They try to include all creatures and nature. They emphasize the greater whole and the interrelatedness of all things by promoting the underlying spiritual assumption that all beings are interrelated; i.e. we all belong to a bigger whole. This is an opposite view to the one above, where the individual is perceived as separate. Through the discursively expressed belief in the interconnectedness of everything, altruism actually comes to benefit the individual in the end. A paradoxical construction, which seems to negate itself, but which still works in ‘ASL talk’.

Selflessness it seems can be motivated by benevolence and goodwill or by duty and guilt. In ‘ASL talk’ the differentiation between compassion (Mitgefühl) and commiseration (Mitleid) in spirituality is emphasized. Commiseration is based on arrogance, on feelings of: ‘I do it better than the others, and so I help them, give them money, whatever’. Or one feels duty and guilt. It is thought of very negatively. Compassion, instead, means to feel happy with others. Empathy, understanding and equality supposedly characterize compassion. It is based on the spiritual insight that all creatures should have the same possibility to develop in a spiritual sense, and this is crucial. It doesn’t matter if one is rich or poor, life challenges one in different ways according to one’s personality (or according to karma in Indian philosophies). The most important help one can offer is to support other people’s development. The interviewees reveal that they are motivated by benevolence and compassion. Furthermore, they explain that one shouldn’t become arrogant while helping others. The knowledge of the Other has to be respected and listened to. The sort of motivation is a very important aspect and determines if selfless actions are beneficial for one’s own development or not. Only if selflessness emerges from inside and is full of love and giving, can it reduce the ego and support one’s own spiritual development.
The interviewees supposedly argue from a spiritual viewpoint: reducing the ego and increasing selfless service, are claimed to be essential aspects of spiritual development. One’s own development means supporting others. As awareness increases and spiritual development progresses, behaviour supposedly becomes naturally more and more selfless.

No corrective Feedback and Cults vs. Appreciation of Diversity

In the view of Tourish and Pinnington authentic spiritual leaders ignore critical feedback. Their own feedback is the most important, they don’t listen to others and resistance is not useful for them. This leads to the ‘danger of one truth’. Tourish and Pinnington (2002, p. 154-155) pointed out that

“Organizational problems are inevitable when leaders develop a monomaniacal conviction that there is the one right way of doing things, and believe that they possess an almost divine insight into reality.”

Thus, for them, an authentic, spiritual leader enhances one dominant culture in the organization; there will be an accumulation of power and a loss of diversity. Suppression or elimination of dissent and diversity leads to negative consequences for decision-making. The leaders narcissism and his/her lack of corrective feedback make decision-making inadequate and ineffective. Also the limited capacity of perceiving facets of reality will decrease the acting abilities of the leader and thus of the organization. Tourish and Pinnington (2002) illustrated in their article that it is very difficult for leaders (with higher status) to get accurate feedback from followers (with lower status). This has not only negative influence on decision-making; it also lets the leader overestimate their contribution to business success while diminishing that of the followers. The authors suggested that it would be helpful if the line between leadership and followership gets frequently crossed and decision-making is not only committed to the leaders at the top.

The authors further described that leaders feel easily attacked and that they suppress dissent. This suppression seems to be a result of their leadership. They as authentic, charismatic, transformational leaders have the right to be extravagant, but their followers are more lined up than in other organizations (see also the next point).

Tourish and Pinnington intensely warned that spirituality combined with leadership even brings organizations closer to cultic systems. They argued (p.157) that

“the core defining traits of TL have the potential to move organizations further along the cult continuum than is desirable, and that this tendency becomes particularly marked
when TL ideas are fused with the drive towards promoting spirituality in the workplace.”

Furthermore they (2002, p. 30) pointed out:

“Promoting spirituality in the workplace is to declare that those who dissent from the ideology no longer belong. It is an attempt to reengineer the thought processes of employees. Ironically, this effort is often driven by very non-spiritual concerns – the desire to increase profits.”

Spirituality is often misused to get the employees in line, to produce a kind of (religious) devotion to the company. The workers shall not only do a good job, they shall also give their heart, soul and mind to the company (Hopfl, 1992). Routine work gets spiritualized, so that it is not an ordinary job anymore, but rather a higher mission. Those employees, who insist that ‘A Burger is still just a Burger’, will maybe soon have to leave the coherent organization.

For combining leadership with authenticity moral values are needed. Tourish and Pinnington (2002) saw spirituality as perfectly fulfilling this job. The employees can be given a spiritual vision; their work serves now their spiritual growth and deepens their connection to others. They shall work for the good of others, of society, of the whole planet, beyond self-interest and with high ambition. This all will support their spiritual development, even if their tasks are inherently meaningless. If they doubt their ‘important contribution to society’, their belief is probably not strong enough. The Leader can then try to strengthen the belief or the employee gets like in a cult punished by other members. At the end a monoculture of believers will remain, which reinforce each other’s belief more and more.

Tourish and Pinnington defined five core components of transformational leadership and associated the destructive manifestation of these traits in cults.

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<tr>
<th>Traits of TL</th>
<th>Traits of cults</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Charismatic leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Charismatic leadership:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leader viewed in semi-divine light by followers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Leader sole source of key ideas</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Power increasingly concentrated in leader’s hands</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Leader has privileges far in excess of other group members</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A compelling vision</strong></td>
<td><strong>A compelling vision:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Vision ‘totalistic’ in its implications</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Agreement with vision vital for group membership</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vision communicated uni-directionally from top to bottom</strong></td>
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**Intellectual stimulation**

**Intellectual stimulation:**
The vision presented as an intellectual key, unlocking secrets that others cannot comprehend

The vision monopolizes the time, thoughts and physical energies of members

**Individual consideration**

**Individual consideration:**
Members rewarded for compliance, and penalized for dissent

Leaders maintain that the vision is tailor-made to meet the deepest needs of the member

Members encouraged to believe that the leader has a personal vested interest in their welfare

**Promotion of a common culture**

**Common culture:**
Members begin to copy each other’s speech mannerisms, dress codes and non-verbal gestures

Dissent from common culture punished by withdrawal of valued social rewards

Common culture seen as essential precondition for the group’s ultimate success

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Table 1: Key ingredients of transformational leadership and of cults (Tourish and Pinnington, 2002, p. 162)

In cults dissent is extremely suppressed, it gets even demonized. Reality is clearly divided into good and bad and the vision has totalistic implications. The leaders have high power positions and get extremely adored.

The authors emphasized that it is important to criticize cults on the basis of what they do rather than what they believe in. In their article they quoted a standard definition of cults:

“A group or movement exhibiting great or excessive devotion to some person, idea or thing, and employing unethical manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control… designed to advance the goals of the group’s leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families or the community.” (American Family Foundation, 1986, p.119-120, as quoted in Tourish and Pinnington, 2002, p. 16).

Members of a cult show in general high commitment, they easily replace their perceptions, beliefs and values with those of the group (or of the leader) and they work hard for the goals of the cult. This reminds one of some theories, which teach that leaders need to increase the commitment of the followers, ad-
just their values to the common good of the organization and inspire them to work as good as possible.

**Responses of ‘ASL talk’**

The kind of leader who is described in the critical discourses is not listening and not able to have a dialogue with others. The only truth is his/her vision or mission and to protect it s/he creates an aura around it. Through spirituality and sacredness the basics of the mission and the leadership seem to be sheltered also broadly in ‘ASL talk’.

As mentioned above Tourish and Pinnington (2002) warned in their article that there is only unidirectional influence, that it is very difficult for leaders to get accurate feedback from followers and that it would be helpful if the line between leadership and followership gets frequently crossed. The interviewees don’t draw a clear line between leader- and followership. They emphasize that others (the employees or the followers) need to be empowered, they need to get responsibilities and freedom for own decisions.

This may or may not happen in the organizations in which the interviewees work. However, in the discourse of ASL, dialogue is presented as important. The interviewees emphasize communications and meetings and its spiritual level. Spirituality, they claim, gives them a deeper meaning and allows people to connect on a ‘soul level’. Spiritual development and authenticity means to reduce the ego and to open up to others. The interviewees argue that real dialogs and really listening to others needs the ability to stop the inner voice of judgement (not to be mistaken with their concept of ‘inner judgement’). They claim that this stops our prejudices and we are able to really understand (maybe for the first time) the different perceptions of reality. Without spiritual development one only can hear other voices through the prism of his/her reality construction. In the view of the interviewees precisely authenticity and spirituality help the leader to be able to perceive dissonant information and to respect the view of others.

The interviewees claim to respect and value diversity. They see resistance as learning possibilities and diversity as the source of creativity, or as one interviewee express it, as ‘the answer to complexity’. They emphasize the importance of different cultures, even if one interviewee tells that people naturally left his company who had “no such feeling towards spiritualism or good governance or corporate governance”. This reminds us of Tourish and Pinnington critique that these organizations can turn into monocultures or cults (‘the danger of cults and spirituality’).
Considering the above discussed critical arguments, ASL entails the risk of suppressing dissent and diversity. The authentic spiritual leader can clearly also be perceived as quite similar to a cult leader. The interviewees even draw upon the model of a spiritual leader to define ASL, but they also claim distance from adored Gurus. Furthermore the here researched network has, in a traditional view, aspects of a cult and cults are ‘evil’ as we saw in the work of Tourish and Pinnington: we have (appreciated) Swamis (and Masters), charismatic leaders, we get spirituality, a strong connection between the members of the network and the uniting idea of ASL.

However, whether the network is a cult is a question of definition and not the research topic here. The discussion concentrates on what this network does with the terms authenticity, spirituality and leadership. Taking the ‘Traits of cults’ (table 1) into account ‘ASL talk’ seems to avoid a definition of ASL which is too close to cultic leadership. Of course the members of the network are presumably aware of the dangers and do not want ASL to be perceived as an authoritarian, manipulating, exploitative and unethically controlling technique.

Nevertheless they describe often the risk that others think they are ‘strange’ or even ‘holy’, which implies that other ‘could’ view them in ‘semi-divine light’. They say that they want to be seen as ‘one of them’ and repeatedly emphasize the danger of overconfidence, but exactly these framings let them appear as ‘above’ others. In the context of ‘ASL talk’ this has also a function, because they need to present themselves as models and experts. It is a difficult balancing act in ‘ASL talk’, which probably explains the reemphasizing of humbleness, humility and selflessness. Consequently the leader in ‘ASL talk’ is not ‘sole source of key ideas’ and has no ‘privileges far in excess of other group members’. The interviewees often mention indirectly or more directly their power, which strengthens their images as powerful and influential leaders. Although they don’t talk about that power is ‘increasingly concentrated in leader’s hands’. Instead they mention networking and communities. ‘ASL talk’ talks often about leadership by not talking about leadership. It seems to be more fashionable to pronounce networking. But still ‘ASL talk’ also tries to address the powerful leader. It is a very challenging conversational effort. The interviewees further don’t say that people are ‘rewarded for compliance, and penalized for dissent’. The interviewees express their awareness of the danger of monocultures or equalising everything. They warn for example that globalisation encloses such risks. Furthermore one interviewee warns that organizations take diverse people and then stamp them until they are all the same. Women for example are welcomed in such organization, but then they get turned into men.

The interviewees describe diversity as the one side of the coin and unity on the other side. It is like light (unity), which gets broken up into its constituent spectral colours (diversity). With the understanding of unity people can enjoy di-
versity. But where are the borders? Or are there none? Here the Hitler Problem comes up again. Do we really want such diversity? ASL is constructed here as facilitating others, as respecting diversity and as empowering others, but there is still a ‘leash’ (Tourish and Pinnington, p.163). The network here sets as a limitation basic values, which are common in all religious and spiritual traditions such as love, respect, helping others and not killing. That is mainly the ‘leash’ here. Nevertheless there are also examples in ‘ASL talk’, which illustrate that diversity is sometimes limited by the organization. (e.g. that people who don’t agree soon move on – thus diversity of opinion does not fit so easily) It would be interesting how practically diversity is lived in the here researched network. As obvious they allow different backgrounds, but uniting is the idea of ASL. The criticism from Tourish and Pinnington is very interesting here: ASL can decrease diversity – the question is: on which level?

Dissent is not presented as something intrinsically ‘bad’ in ‘ASL talk’. Instead, it is a learning possibility. There are only different voices and listening to diverse expressions helps to understand the archetype behind. The interviewees claim that authentic spiritual leaders support the growth of others, instead of keeping others small to keep competition small. That is one aspect of the interviewees understanding of sustainability. They say that many leaders are afraid to lose their power. In ‘ASL talk’ authentic spiritual leaders see their power in the interest of the mission, not in their personal interest; hence they facilitate others without the fear of losing power. The people from the network express a very Taoistic view of leadership, which means that the leader steps back in success, so that the employees get empowered and honoured. Only in difficult situations the leader stands protective in front. ‘ASL talk’ encourages very much the ‘believe that the leader has a personal vested interest’ in follower’s welfare. How much this requires a common culture is quite left open in ‘ASL talk’. At least sometimes it is mentioned that people should have an interest in combining authenticity, spirituality and business. This is particularly true for members of the researched network. How far this applies to employees is unclear in ‘ASL talk’. The traits of cults, which refer to the vision, are discussed in the next chapter where the vision is compared with the ‘ASL talk’ definition of a mission.

Even if ‘ASL talk’ allows and values diversity, dissent and corrective feedback in relation to ASL, it also shows many constructional moves which reduce the possibility of being questioned or corrected itself. It also would be very difficult to justify in ‘ASL talk’ that ASL is not open for diversity and corrective feedback, because this would contradict (post)modern values.
The Vision vs. the Mission

In the view of Tourish and Pinnington (2002) the vision helps to manipulate followers, to create one culture (cult) and to enhance emotional attachment to the leader. The members of the network talk in this relation about a mission. As shown they use the term mission a lot and emphasize the importance of it. Also Tourish and Pinnington used the term ‘mission’. They described that if spirituality is combined with leadership the vision becomes the mission. They saw the mission as even more dangerous than the vision, because it tries to influence the employees on a broader scale.

They claim that the mission can even manipulate the private identity of the workers. The vision or mission creates a common mindset, common goals and values. Through that it creates also an in-group of ‘believers’ and an out-group of ‘non-believers’. The vision unifies the in-group followers and decreases dissent and diversity. The others will lose more and more their voices and new members will try to align with the opinion of the strong leader.

The authors suggested that it is better for the employees when it is recognized that leaders and followers have different goals, instead of one shared vision. The employee should keep a private identity and a private purpose beyond their work. Further multiple visions should be allowed and discussed freely in the organization.

Tourish and Pinnington (2002) further pointed out that the combination of authenticity, spirituality and leadership can encourage authoritarian forms of organizations, hierarchies, over-conformity, and the growth of cultic forms of organizations. ASL embodies for them the ‘danger of exploitation’, because it can harm the self-identity and protection of followers. They may feel appreciated, but the motivation behind is often just simply to increase profit. The authentic transformational leader increases the intrinsic motivation of the followers to perform beyond their duties. S/he forms the followers believe in a higher purpose beyond that of self-interest. The worker shall perceive their work as their (spiritual) mission and not just as an ordinary job. Tourish and Pinnington (2002, p. 165) emphasized the misuse of spirituality here as a tool for devotion:

“Spiritual growth is intended to heighten devotion to the corporate ideal, by imbuing routine organizational life with a heightened sense of the mystical.”

Spirituality in combination with leadership becomes just another way of manipulating people. It helps to increase their commitment and their performance. As Boje (2008, p 160) described it
“spirituality (and religion) is too often used instrumentally as a way to motivate employees to higher levels of identification and commitment to so-called spiritual leaders, and so-called spiritual business to boost performance, lower resistance (e.g. obedience), promoting submissiveness, and manipulate servility (e.g. serving the customer and considering him or her as sovereign king).”

Responses of ‘ASL talk’

Contrastingly to the above illustrated opinion that the vision/mission is a tool to manipulate followers, the interviewees describe the mission mainly on a personal level. They construct the mission as something individual, private and spiritual. Discovering the personal mission in life is a spiritual task for them and gives meaning to work and life. It is not formulated in relation to ASL as something leaders have to communicate to their followers to improve their ‘work ethic’. Hence they suggest that the agreement with the mission (vision) is not vital for ‘group membership’ and dissent from it is not penalised (see traits of cults, table 1). The authentic spiritual leader in ‘ASL talk’ maybe tries to help employees to find their own mission, but there can be a diversity of missions. If the leader would formulate his/her personal mission as a compelling vision it probably would create something like a common mindset, common goals and values. In this case the mission (vision) would be ‘communicated unidirectionally from top to bottom’ as Tourish and Pinnington warned. Then the leader would have to be careful not to suppress diversity beyond the borders of basic values (as already discussed).

Another trait of cults in table 1 is that the mission (vision) is ‘presented as an intellectual key, unlocking secrets that others cannot comprehend’. Looking at ‘ASL talk’ often gives the impression that the interviewees are revealing ‘secrets’ here. Secrets of spiritual insides, which everybody can gain, but as long as you haven’t experienced them, you cannot ‘comprehend’. This way of framing includes the risk of creating an aura and also creates something like an in-group – out-group phenomenon, which can be dangerous on an organizational level. For ‘ASL talk’ it has the function to motivate people to make these experiences, to become an insider. A secret has something fascinating and being ‘initiated’ enhances the own status.

Tourish and Pinnington further say that ‘the vision monopolizes the time, thoughts and physical energies of members’ in cults. As emphasized in ‘ASL talk’ the interviewees ‘subordinate’ their time, thoughts and energies to their mission. It is not said here that employees should do that too. Again at this juncture, what seems to ‘save’ ‘ASL talk’ is the personal focus of the mission. Although this construction implies also then a personal threat, which is issued by the interviewees as ‘not becoming too fanatic’ as balancing professional and private life.
What Tourish and Pinnington express is the danger of misusing a mission (vision) for organizational interests. In ‘ASL talk’ the idea of a mission is helping others, serving others and doing something ‘good’ for the world. At this point again it can be criticized that what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is simply in the eye of the beholder. As illustrated above the interviewees ‘answer’ this critique with formulating their belief that everybody has an ethical inner judgement, which has to be explored, to make the ‘right’ decisions.

The members of the network here strongly underline that combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership leads to ethical and responsible behaviour. It seems to be all a question of definition. The article from Tourish and Pinnington and other criticism warned against serious problems, which arise when authenticity and spirituality are used to increase leadership power and profit making. These dangers are important to realize and helpful for a further development of ASL. The constructed idea(l) of ASL in ‘ASL talk’ deals with some of these dangers, but not all. In general ‘ASL talk’ at the moment concentrates more on the leader and not so much on the followers. This will be probably a future task for ‘ASL talk’ and the here mentioned critique might provide interesting inputs.

Rather, the criticisms of Tourish and Pinnington are difficult, if not impossible to confound within the realms of discourse itself. However, the participants seem aware of the risks and ASL talk does appear to construct a definition that counters many of the key critiques. Whether, in practice, other employees experience ASL as cultish is interesting, but beyond the scope of this study.
Ch 7.

ASL Talk: ‘What is it good for?’

Whether ASL is a force for good or not is seemingly determined by the intentions behind it. Considering the discourses of the people from the researched network, ASL can only be used for the common good. How far these definitions are practicable in the business world is questionable, but the way they combine authenticity, spirituality and leadership is very appealing. It requires the belief in an ethical self, which is able to discriminate between good and bad and a belief in (“holy”) people, who are willing to develop ASL. It is certainly a powerful rhetorical construction.

Authenticity and spirituality combined with leadership maybe would change the system or it would force the leader to leave. Anyway in ‘ASL talk’ such personal development changes the person profoundly and requires a lifelong learning process. ASL is a ‘journey’, which remains, in its last consequence, an ideal because thought through to its conclusion it indicates and constitutes a holy enlightenment. But this is not the point of the interviewed people here, they describe ASL as ‘holy’ for the world, because it gives life and business an ethical meaning and transforms the way we treat ourselves, each other and the world.

‘ASL talk’ describes a sense of global interdependence and responsibility. It claims that it is possible to enjoy diversity in the light of unity, to find personal freedom while serving others, and to do business in a sustainable way. It brings ethics back to business and leadership and makes them inseparable. The separation of business and ethics in recent years apparently led us to crisis and many global problems; their (re)union may bring us out of this critical moment in the view of the interviewees.

It is called a ‘reunion’ because in some leadership theories authenticity; ethics and spirituality were already related to leadership. In other theories such relationships are excluded fully or appeared only implicitly. The concept of leadership is one of the oldest concerns of humanity in eastern and western philosophy. In western philosophy the early Greek ideas of leadership can be related to Homer’s Iliad. Bass and Stogdill (1990) described it as inspirational leadership, with its emphasis on law and order. The later Greek philosophers like Plato were concerned with the question, ‘What constitutes an ideal leader?’ As with the early Greeks, order and reason seem to be central here for leading. But Plato also described in ‘Politeia’ the characteristics of successful leaders as a combination of: thirst for knowledge, love of truth/wisdom, moderation and absence of lucre, absence of meanness and baseness. A successful leader is: fair, humane, teachable and has a good memory. Aristotle then added a component of virtue. He described personal, character virtues and rational virtues. In the times
of Plato and Aristotle, leadership seemed to be connected with ethical aspects and even with a spiritual sense. Later Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), following the ideas of Aristotle, also criticized usury and extortion. Other theologians like Luther (1483 – 1546) or Calvin (1509-1564) continued to relate business to ethical considerations (Kern, 2002). The Bible builds here the foundation for the moral judgements of business and leadership behaviour.

But not only Christian theologians and their predecessors discussed ethics and business. Philosophers like John Locke (1632-1704) and Adam Smith (1723-1790) also thought about this relationship. Locke’s work (1690/1997) was often criticised for his defence of property as a natural right. Smith later developed Locke's notion of labour into a labour theory of value. In his ‘Theory of Moral Sentiments,’ (Smith, 1759/1982) he described a theory of sympathy. Locke and Smith both were interested in the self and mentioned aspects of authenticity, but Smith, in contrasting to Locke, had perhaps a more ethical understanding of business. Later on Karl Marx (1818-1883) became probably the most famous example of one who criticised unethical business and capitalism in western philosophy.

In eastern philosophies already Confucius (The Great Learning (Daxue) (Moritz, 2003)) wanted the leader to set moral examples and to teach what is right and good (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). “What you don’t want that somebody to do to you that also you don’t do to somebody else” was the bottom line of his ethics. He further related leadership to authenticity and described that what a leader seeks is in himself and not outside or in others. Confucius believed that leader’s moral integrity can then enrich the social order.

Besides Philosophy, eastern and western religious traditions also give direct or indirect advice and suggestions for leadership. Furthermore, they form the underlying belief system for many people in the world (and for the interviewees here); hence their definitions are very revealing. Interesting is the relationship between authenticity, ethics, spirituality and leadership in these religious traditions. Related to the interviewees, four religious traditions are taken into account here: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism (see table 2). Important in regard to the current work is that all traditions see leadership as not separated from issues like authenticity, ethics and spirituality. All four traditions formulate the bases of ethical leadership and offer exemplars and teachings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader as:</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Buddhism</th>
<th>Hinduism</th>
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<tr>
<td>Role model</td>
<td>Servant of God and His creations Mohammed Embodying the 99 names of God Belief</td>
<td>Teacher and role model The Buddha Being an example Meditation &amp; investigation of awareness</td>
<td>Role model of the “gods” Rama/Krishna Example and stories Awareness &amp; perception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exemplars:</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Love &amp; peace</td>
<td>The Buddha</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>through:</td>
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<td>Validity</td>
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<td>Primarily:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core vision:</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Surrendering to God</td>
<td>Wisdom &amp; compassion</td>
<td>Liberation from duality</td>
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<td>Revelation</td>
<td>Example &amp; life of Jesus</td>
<td>The Qur’an through God’s messenger, Mohammed</td>
<td>Direct experience</td>
<td>Self-inquiry and practice</td>
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<td>through:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core statement:</td>
<td>The Lord’s prayer</td>
<td>“There is no God, but God”</td>
<td>Taking refuge in the Buddha, Investigation of inner self; Pali Canon &amp; Abhidharma Direct awareness</td>
<td>“Thou art that” Upanashads &amp; Bhagavad Gita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source of wisdom</td>
<td>The Old and New Testaments</td>
<td>The Qur’an</td>
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<td>for leaders:</td>
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<td>Manifestation of the divine or spirit via:</td>
<td>The Trinity</td>
<td>The 99 Attributes or Names of God Shari’ah (the Law) adab ; remembrance</td>
<td>Direct awareness</td>
<td>Divine play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basis for moral</td>
<td>Moral virtues</td>
<td></td>
<td>sila; the 10 precepts; mindfulness</td>
<td>4 goals of life: meditation, pleasure, worldly success, liberation from rebirth</td>
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<td>leadership:</td>
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Table 2: Worldviews. Based on Kriger & Seng (2005, p. 774)

As illustrated in the introduction as the (con-)text of ASL in some modern leadership theories, like trait (e.g. Bass and Stogdill, 1990; McGregor, 1960; McCel- land, 1987), behavioural (e.g. Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939; Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958; Fiedler, 1967) and situational leadership (e.g. Hersey and Blanchard, 2000; Vroom and Yetton, 1976; House, 1971), the aspect of an ethical, humanistic understanding of the follower often influences the leadership constructions. Relationships became here more participative and democratic over the time; the needs of the employees were taken into account and decisions became based on agreements. However, this apparent more ethical valuing of the follower often has very practical (monetary) reasons. Traditional leadership studies have focused on the personal qualities and characteristics of leaders --- i.e. so-called ‘traits’; or on so-called ‘contingency factors’ --- i.e. the circumstances wherein leadership occurs and ‘succeeds’. These approaches to leadership focused on what was thought necessary to achieve business or organizational success. The foundation on an ethical understanding is very debatable here and differs from author to author and time to time.
The interviewees apparently perceive that service, spirituality and authenticity had for many years now a negative connotation and people seemed to avoid these terms. They also seemed to be incompatible with leadership or business ideas. Hence a (re)union in ‘ASL talk’ needs a foundation and the interviewees construct ASL as such a foundation. But as already discussed ‘ASL talk’ must take care not to create an ‘aura’ around it or to turn into cultic forms. It’s openness and individuality is important, especially in the understanding of spirituality. Very basic values can build the leash; the rest should be open for change and diversity.

Important here is that ASL is constructed mainly as a personal quest, rather than a way of manipulating followers. It claims to support and facilitate the growth of others, not to exploit them in the interest of the company. ASL ‘should be’ a way of humanization in and outside of the organization. How the ‘the others’ (e.g. employees) perceive ASL from their view would be another interesting research question.

Ethical Profit and CSR in the light of ‘ASL talk’

The already mentioned question if ASL is applicable in business cannot of course be answered here, but the interviewees anyway accentuate that it is time for a fundamental change in the business world. To underline this they address two interesting topics: ‘ethical profit’ and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Ethical Profit?

Many leadership theories, if not all, are oriented on success, performance and effectiveness. Often ethical behaviour is just a means of increasing productivity; like treating employees with respect, being people-oriented and formulating a vision instrumentally to increase commitment and so performance (e.g. Tourish and Pinnington, 2002). Also, charismatic, transformational, authentic, servant and spiritual leaders are often evaluated and measured by the profit they can enhance. The question is what the ethics are based on and what is their purpose?

If economical thinking reduces everything to the measure of profits, the term itself can be challenged as one of the interviewees illustrated. Profit and so the final aim of leadership can be defined also in a more ethical way. Profit can mean ‘for the benefit of all’. It can be an ethical, sustainable value, which includes all levels of being and all beings.
The interviewees in general didn’t question leadership itself. Their construction supports the idea of leadership. The leader is still a hero in a way. Maybe it’s from the perspective of the employees the same old wolf with just a new sheep dress? The motivation and inspiration of the subordinates is still in the interest of the organization. It is still an effort to progress and increase profit. As one interviewee said, ‘Profit needs to be redefined too.’ Profit can also be defined as beneficial for human beings and the environment in his view. A financial definition only of profit is a short-term thinking and has nothing to do with sustainability. High leaders are sometimes putting the goal of profit maximizing over everything else, over the welfare of: employees, other people, health, their own family, and nature. All these people and areas are measured by the surplus they are able to generate. They start to connect their own value to it and they are rewarded with bonus and recognition. A new definition of profit could perhaps free these leaders in the view of the interviewees. Furthermore, it can also be in the interest of employees to increase the profit of the whole organization. It is not only one sided. It depends on the organization and its structure.

The interviewees talk about how they respect, serve and facilitate their employees and colleagues. They keep the concept of leadership, but they try to construct it in a new way. They leave the power position to the leader, but subordinate him/her to the benefit of others, to the mission. Leadership becomes selfless service – to sell this idea the interviewees do here a lot of construction work.

In ‘ASL talk’ it seems to be possible, even for a globally acting company, to make such changes. An only self-interested definition of profit and success will destroy its own basics from this viewpoint. A company, which only thinks of microeconomics and not macro- or global economics won’t be able to survive in the long run because it damages its own markets. ‘ASL talk’ follows the concepts of, for example, spiral dynamics (Beck and Cowan, 1996/2003) and emphasizes that new challenges require new ways of handling them. As illustrated in ‘ASL talk’ we face many new challenges in the world, and we will need to change our values and behaviours. Besides terms like profit and success, terms like growth and leadership also have to be deliberated in the view of the interviewees. What is growth? Is it always bigger, faster, higher, more efficient, more money etc.? Can it not be sometimes smaller, deeper, slower etc.? And leadership – does it need to mean hierarchies, order, suppressing people, money orientation etc.? Or can leadership mean service, helping others, fulfilling a mission, partnerships etc.?

‘ASL talk’ raises questions here. It does not try to provide all the answers, but asking questions is rhetorically anyway more interesting. Their claim is: changing values can change definitions and changed definitions can change the world.
There are always ‘the others’ who define and value things differently and so change the/their world. An interesting example is Bhutan, which prefers to use an index of happiness instead of the index of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is normally used (Crins, 2008).

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

Under the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) the question, if organizations and leaders really can act ethically and responsibly, was raised in the introduction. Furthermore the question of whether CSR is a general movement or a temporary marketing strategy also arose. With the background of the interview outcomes it now becomes apparent that CSR is in ‘ASL talk’ an inherent aspect of future leadership, if future leadership is authentic and spiritual. Because ASL is constructed as a new leadership for a new world, based on authenticity and spirituality, the attractiveness or even essentialness of CSR goes far beyond commercial reasons. A profound change in values could turn CSR into real responsibility and ethical behaviour in the view of the interviewees. The foundation of these ethics comes from spirituality and the insights into the interrelatedness of all things in ‘ASL talk’. CSR performed by an authentic spiritual leader can’t be used for ‘Greenwashing’ – it has to be authentic and therefore ethical by definition.

Is CSR now a general movement or a momentary trend?

1999 was the first year the Dow Jones Sustainability World Indexes (DJSI) was published. The DJSI wants “to track the performance of companies that lead the field in terms of corporate sustainability.” (p. 5)\(^\text{16}\)

The importance of CSR and issues like sustainability obviously increases in public perception but CSR is still seen in many places as about shareholder values. Sustainability is about profitability in finance literature and ethics and ethical reasoning are not mentioned in the ‘Guide to the Dow Jones Sustainability World Indexes’. Ethical consumerism forces organizations to demonstrate CSR, but often it seems that they only want to distract the public view from their debatable core activities. Just think of companies like Shell, KFC or McDonalds, or think of automobile, nuclear power, pharmaceutical and food industries. The authenticity of their CSR efforts is very disputable and apparently ASL in the sense of ‘ASL talk’ would be paradoxical in such context. Referring to the headline question, such a movement seems to be at the risk to be a momentary trend because if investors and consumers change their minds CSR would lose its an-

traction for the companies and so probably vanish quickly from the business agenda.

A different view can be developed on the basis of the interviews. In contrast to the understanding above, here authenticity, ethics and spirituality are not separated from leadership and business issues. These terms can appear and be treated separately, but then business is not sustainable and CSR is not based on ethics in the view of the interviewed network.

The interviewees argue that there is an opportunity for a new movement; a new level of development. After technological and informational revolutions, now a revolution from within, a spiritual revolution, could emerge. ASL means for the interviewees bridging the gap between spirituality and business, and as one interviewee expressed it, spiritual business will be normal in a few years. They argue that current global situation makes such development required and CSR based on such development from within will be a sustainable movement. Every decision is a new decision and every decision can be made for the benefit of others or for egoistic reasons. It is always a new chance and a new responsibility.

Brinkbäumer and Fichtner (2007) see the public ‘romantic’ movement of do-gooder as taken over today by leaders like Bill Gates, George Soros, Richard Branson, Warren Buffett or Bill Clinton. These leaders have the advantages of being known, having connections worldwide, having money at their disposal and skills in organizing money. With their entrepreneurial spirit they try to ‘save the world’. This movement seems to have something spiritual. There is the belief that globalization can reach a new (higher, better) level and that world citizenship can unite the people for a sustainable world. Brinkbäumer and Fichtner (2007) describe the same underlying perception the interviewees formulate; that everything is connected to everything and that the great and the small are just facets of the same thing. There is no ‘far away’ anymore in this globalized world. The interviewees express the belief that the current financial crisis will increase this realization and through that also the understanding that ethical business is not only an abstract ideal, rather it is a basic necessity. Sustainability is for the interviewees a spiritual responsibility. Authenticity and spirituality are the underlying sources of sustainability and ethics in ‘ASL talk’. At the heart of spirituality lies the understanding that by progressing on such a schooling path one develops the insight that everything is interrelated and that helping and supporting others is the only way to personal growth. Spirituality leads a person to see the reality as it is and not as it should be. Hence an authentic spiritual leader perceives that the world is in a critical condition with many environmental, political, financial and economical problems but s/he also can perceive the transformational potential of such a crisis, in the view of the interviewees.
Brinkbäumer and Fichtner (2007) think that companies like Chevron, BP, Total, Renault, Microsoft or Canon try to get a social or environmentally friendly image. The Sustainability Yearbook or social rankings become more and more known and important. Business makes alliances with new partners (e.g. NGOs, governments) and with society. On the other side, social projects are listed on the ‘Social Stock Exchange’ and poor people get microcredits to become entrepreneurs. Companies can become more social and social projects can be more entrepreneurial.

The world still seems to stand at the crossroads, and the alternatives seem to be transformation or destruction in ‘ASL talk’. The ethical business efforts could burst like a bubble for sceptics. Leaders and companies may just pay indulgences today. They gained their money at the expense of people and the environment and now they try to show that they are generous. They improve their images, play PR games and use CSR just to increase their business profit. There is a widespread disquiet with contemporary capitalism and ‘ASL talk’ seems to resolve at least some of the problems on a discourse level.

ASL can become visible through CSR, but to decide if CSR is motivated by ethical values or marketing advantages is very difficult. We need to look then at the leaders themselves. Are they authentic in the way ‘ASL talk’ suggests or not? This is like the final test.

‘ASL talk’ creates a positive, optimistic image here and tries to mirror the zeitgeist. On the one hand it often lacks scepticism and criticism, which weakens its seriousness, but on the other hand it seems to meet current socio-cultural movements. This shall be further explored in more detail in the next chapter.

**ASL Talk in Association to Socio-Cultural Movements**

Again ASL is resonant with contemporary concerns: three socio-cultural ‘turns’ (compare with Cullen, 2009) seem to support the discourse of ‘ASL talk’:

“the postmodern condition; the emergence of soft capitalism (a powerful, emergent managerial discourse of ‘knowledgeable’ capitalism encouraging the development of an expressive managerial selfhood that can accommodate, and rapidly respond to, economic uncertainty); and the subjective turn (the concern with the self as a central cultural tenet of modernity).” (Cullen, 2009, p. 1242)

The postmodern assumptions that reality is (at least partly) constructed and is an interpretation (constructivism) suit the construction of ASL with its (mainly eastern) spiritual worldview. Further also postmodernity confronts the individual with itself (van Quekelberghhe, 2006). It opens, in this sense, the way towards authenticity and spirituality as required in ASL, even if it remains very critical.
against authenticity in our postmodern societies. Anyway this criticism can be seen as very helpful for ‘ASL talk’ which is always in danger of creating an ‘aura’ around itself and being perceived as too positivistic. The criticism can keep the struggle about the meaning of ASL going on in the sense of Taylor: ‘La Lotta Continua’. The way future ‘ASL talk’ responds to criticism and dissent also will define its way as becoming a cultic or a liberating concept.

In postmodern conditions assumptions of a stable continuous identity construction came radically under question. There are no objective definitions of who and what the human beings are and therefore there is nothing like a true human nature. The so-called ‘authentic’ self can never be more than an effect of the play of signifiers in which the self is always already situated. The self is here regarded as inescapably determined in a phenomenologically opaque structure of signs; hence the authentic self in a postmodern view is a delusion with the purpose of control and exclusion. ‘ASL talk’ reverses this and explains that the ego is an illusion, but the authentic self is the true human nature, which is interconnected, inclusive, divine and open. Everybody can experience it (for example through meditation). In times of so rapid and massive changes ‘ASL talk’ provides a certain security and therefore satisfies maybe, even if its premises are dubious from a postmodern perspective, a postmodern desire. ‘ASL talk’ offers the postmodern view to deconstruct the ego and to declare it as a delusion, similar to the Buddhist view, but declares alongside a deeper reality.

The second movement of soft capitalism (Cullen, 2009) absorbed in its discourses the critiques of capitalism and adapted the knowledge and terms of academia. Soft capitalism can be seen as the response to the in the 1960s and 1970s supposed ‘problem of work’ (Heelas, 2002). What was needed was the development of meaning, values and intrinsic motivation.

Soft capitalism doesn’t mean that there is more softness, less pressure or more individual freedom. Instead the system seems to demand of the self to be more than ever involved in work and in the organization. ‘ASL talk’ in a way contributes to the soft capitalism discourse through constructing a self-aware and intrinsically motivated self, which is able to act innovatively and creatively in a global fast changing world. ‘ASL talk’ emphasizes a spiritual dimension, which transforms work into a vehicle for personal development – or in the words of Heelas (2002, p. 89) for ‘self-sacralization’. Heelas concluded that such spirituality then could be used to enhance productivity at work and hence supports the economic system.

In soft capitalism the problems of work and other (environmental) problems still exist, they are just not as much in the focus of discourses anymore. If efficiency and financial profit remain the central drives of economy, ASL will be doomed to failure. In the perspective of ‘ASL talk’ an authentic, spiritual
leader, who leads a company, which produces weapons, makes animal testing or pollutes the environment would be a contradiction in itself. The working field seems to be quite limited for ASL today. ‘ASL talk’ ignores this aspect in most instances. It expounds the problems of capitalism and proclaims that ASL can change the system, but it doesn’t really explain how ASL can get into problematic working fields, where it probably would be needed most.

The third movement, which influences ‘ASL talk’, is the subjective turn of modernity. Across several cultural spheres the western consciousness turned more and more away from institutions and external authority (God). Instead the Self became the focus of interest (see above the discussion of ‘Modern Malaises’). Taylor (2003, p. 26) described the

"massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths."

Taylor warned that the subjective turn and the search for authenticity could end up in egoism and that the connection to the whole could be lost. But he also emphasized that:

“this idea that the source is within doesn’t exclude our being related to God or the Ideas; it can be considered our proper way to them.”

Similar ‘ASL talk’ emphasizes that the source is within (the authentic self), but that this is connected with everything (God). The dialectical dynamic of power and powerlessness in ‘ASL talk’ illustrates this complex understanding. ‘ASL talk’ suits the subjective turn with its self-reflexive and personal development vocabulary, but it also turns the inward movement back to society (see ‘Individual-Collective Dilemma’).

The three discussed movements can be seen as the

“bases for the episteme, or the ground rules that govern what may be thought at a particular time.” (Cullen, 2009, p. 1242)

At our particular time terms such as authenticity and spirituality get more and more attention and hence ‘ASL talk’ response to this episteme. Further the global problems (see Introduction) and insecurities produce a desire for new promises of salvation. ‘ASL talk’ offers here optimism for change and for an ethical movement.
ASL Talk – A complex dialectical Discourse

ASL was explored here as a discourse, as ‘ASL talk’. It was shown that ‘ASL talk’ turned out to be a very paradoxical or dialectical construction. This is especially obvious in the dilemmas of ASL. The construction of the term authenticity has to be supported for example by claiming (a proportion or a period of) inauthenticity. Defining a concept needs its contrary; hence the interviewees admit their inauthentic moments. They explain that they are not always authentic. It is not a simply authoritarian position of ‘I am always authentic and good’. ASL seems to be dynamic system of authenticity and inauthenticity, power and powerlessness, individuality and collectivity, goodness and badness and so on. The interviewees do not claim just their ‘goodness’, they explain their up and downs, their transformation, their journeys. It is obvious how difficult it is for its proponents to construct themselves as authentic. The dilemma between authenticity and inauthenticity is handled by the interviewees through presenting themselves as open and honest (admitting inauthentic behaviour) and by saying that they are only on a path to becoming more authentic. They needed a lot of stories, footing and metaphors to perform the job of ‘authentic’ self-presentation. They needed to appear as humble, selfless and spiritual on the one hand (required by their definition of ASL). On the other hand, at the same time, they needed to present themselves as efficient, successful, well-experienced leaders. For that they had to use both spiritual and business repertoires to create their images.

The interviewees used further professional or personal experiences to demonstrate their knowledge and qualifications for talking about combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership. In their personal stories they often admitted defeat and failure (e.g. The Horse Story), but it always produced personal learning at the end. Accounts of their professional experiences were mostly stories of success (e.g. The Skyscrapers Story). These stories also helped them to demonstrate the benefits of spirituality in the workplace.

Many concepts in ‘ASL talk’ have a tense relationship and still need to be handled under the topic of ASL. One dilemma arises between self-centred (hero), individual and collective, supporting authenticity. Authenticity is, according to most of the interviewees, closely connected with spirituality and both concepts have a positive connotation. They both are constructed as implying outgoing service. For authenticity personal development is needed, but then for leadership a social component becomes relevant. This way of construction supports participants’ understanding of ASL. ASL needs such a collective, social sense, besides the individual part.

The third dilemma is a very central one here, the dilemma between spirituality and business. The interviewees do a lot of constructional work to overcome this dilemma. Through their constructions it becomes clear that it is their experience that spirituality is odd and strange to business. They don’t perceive it as
integrated on a broad scale. They perceive prejudices and hindrances in other leaders, so that they carefully try to build a connection here. There is a big movement toward an integration of spirituality and business, but the interviewees seem to experience that this hasn’t reached the mainstream business world yet. They demonstrate their belief in an evolution of ASL, but they also emphasize that leadership trainings, seminars etc. are required. They also construct their discourses in a way that inspiration and (authentic) models seem to be very important. They try to inspire the listener/reader through personal experiences; through modern philosophies, through directly addressing them (you-perspective) and through vivid metaphors and stories. They also present themselves in a way that the listener/reader can identify with them and/or see them as a role model.

The interviewees also often make three moves to make the integration of spirituality more coherent. They start in the business world, construct an image, with which the recipient can identify, and present a problem, which is related to business and work. Then they introduce spiritual issues, deliver the solution out of it and at the end they turn back to the business context and relate the positive outcomes to business and work.

The interviewees use a lot of metaphors and stories here. It has to do with their spiritual background, because stories and metaphors are the preferred method of teaching in spiritual traditions. But also stories are used on seminar and leadership conferences. Thus they are used to stories and know their positive effects. As demonstrated, the interviewees try to inspire other leaders here, therefore they use stories to inspire, to ‘sell’ their version of ASL, to motivate other leaders and to convince. They use them, furthermore, to overcome problematic situations, which were for example related to the three main dilemmas. Metaphors and stories are very valuable in ‘ASL talk’, because of their inherent ambiguity. The interviewees cannot be held accountable for misinterpretation.

The interviewees try to bridge spirituality and business through using the concept of ASL. Also other concepts like mission or serving are used to link both fields closer together. Often the interviewees try to reinvent one world through the other.

To interpret work as service is an example of how the interviewees reinvent the business world to bring it closer to spirituality. As already mentioned the understanding of work as a mission does the same job. When we looked at spirituality/spiritual practices and how the interviewees constructed them, we saw that they integrated them into daily business (when and how they practice and the benefits - spirituality as a practical philosophy supporting leadership). Here the interviewees reinterpreted spirituality to integrate it better into business.

The interviewees seem to use two ways to bring spirituality and business closer together. They come from the business side and construct it in the light of spirituality (e.g. through defining work as service or as a mission) or they take
spirituality (e.g. spiritual practices or qualities) and place it in the business context (practical usefulness of spirituality). If redefining grows problematic, they use metaphors or stories to make it more fluid. In addition to bringing these two worlds closer together, they finally use ASL to build the unifying bridge.

It is very interesting how ‘ASL talk’ works the interplay of power and powerlessness. The power position is very unstably constructed here. The interviewees construct themselves in very powerful positions, demonstrating their broad influence and their expertise. Even on a more existential level, they describe themselves as architects of their lives, as responsible for themselves, others and the ‘whole world’. They see themselves as being able to create their environment, to influence the situation and to bring about change (in nearly any dimension). In the same ‘ASL talk’ the interviewees construct themselves as being a tool (for God), as just fulfilling the mission, as being led by a spiritual teacher, who makes the decisions for them and so on. It is amazing how easily they combine these two contrary positions.

Another appealing example is their construction of unity and diversity. The interviewees see diversity as the one side of the coin and unity on the other side. It is like light (unity), which gets broken up into its constituent spectral colours (diversity). With this understanding of unity one can enjoy diversity.

This way of understanding gives us maybe a hint why the interviewees so easily combine paradoxical concepts. ASL is beyond simple categories; it encompasses often both dimensions. ASL is therefore dialectic, dynamic and complex. Interestingly we can find good examples of dialectical thinking in spiritual traditions, such as the Tao-Te-Ching or the Yin-Yang symbols. Also one interviewee points to the ‘unity of opposite thinking’ as a spiritual practice. Behind that lays the assumption that things are not as we perceive them, they are not something solid and immutable in their nature. Things are always changing (through oppositions). This reminds one again of modern physics (e.g. Capra, 1997). Opposites are interdependent, interpenetrating each other (there is no either-or), and they are the same in the sense that if we take one side in its extreme it turns into its own opposite.

The construction of ASL is beyond ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as simple categories; it encompasses both opposites. But if we look at the ‘ASL talk’ this dynamic ends up always on a ‘positive’, ‘ethical’ side. And therein lies a further paradox: ASL is a dynamic and complex process, but nonetheless the direction appears assured. How can this be if everything keeps on changing, if the separation of good and bad is only an illusion?

Behind the impermanent nature of things is another opposite: the permanent, the enduring, the eternal. In ‘ASL talk’ it is the authentic self. Behind all the dynamic change is a state of being beyond the ego, the ‘I’: a divine reality
Authentic Spiritual Leadership (God), a universal consciousness. Out of this ‘human nature’ our network here sits as limitation to the dynamism and diversity of basic values, which are common in all religious and spiritual traditions such as love, respect, helping others and not killing. That is the ‘leash’ the interviewees formulate here, which presents ASL at the end as ethical and ‘good’.

‘ASL talk’ as analysed here utilizes an array of scientific, management, leadership, psychological, philosophical, spiritual, religious and artistic discourses, alongside accounts of personal experience, stories, anecdotes, quotes from movies and famous figures. It tries to evoke a sympathy and companionship in the recipient, shows that business without spirituality and authenticity lacks ethics and ‘fun’, that leaders who are not into ASL don’t use their capacities and miss their real sense of work and life (their mission). Even further if one ignores his/her responsibilities and potentials, s/he disregards his/her real nature: the authentic ethical self, which is characterized by oneness and non-duality. After all dilemmas, dialectics and paradoxes the release comes through the experience of this natural law, this universal truth. If only the dynamic character of ‘ASL talk’ is considered it can take the form of a soft relativism, but then the strong inherent moral appeal comes in and tries to build the horizon of significance (Taylor, 2003).

**ASL Talk – The Source of Leadership**

Other discourse based research on Authentic Leadership analysed for example the identity work of the leaders through interviews (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2009), the meaning leaders give to life events to lead their employees through ‘life stories’ (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), or the ‘authentic self’ through ‘narratives’ (Sparrowe, 2005). Also spirituality was investigated through interviews (e.g. Strack et al., 2002). The findings of these and other studies (Gardner et al., 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Kernis, 2003) mainly concentrate on the content perspective. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2009) further describe the struggle the leaders have in their identity processes. Their standpoint is discussed above in relation to ASL. Their study gives a first idea of the dilemmas the leaders face, but it did not get to the subtleness of the texts. As the empirical part above showed ASL is in its whole nature a complex dialectical discourse, full of dilemmas, instabilities and tensions. And this is exactly why it is so appealing, effective and rhetorically powerful. This dynamic and paradoxical structure illustrates the complexity of ASL and how difficult it is to handle it only with the first two perspectives of research: content and process.
There are three perspectives research can take:
1. Content: what leaders do
2. Process: how they do it
3. Source: from which source they operate

These three perspectives are related to Heidegger’s (1962) three different ways of understanding the experience of being (Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2009). The first perspective on leadership is a descriptive consideration, which produces broad definitions and categorizations of different types of leaders and leadership. The second approach studies what leaders really do. Here often a discrepancy to the first perspective becomes obvious.

The third perspective seems to be the most important for ASL. There are many books, theories and lectures about the first two points. The third perspective was ignored in research for a long time (Scharmer, 2009). Social sciences orientated on natural sciences and tried to exclude the self. Today modern physics are very aware of the influence of the self (of the observer) and social sciences also partly change their paradigms. Certain forms of qualitative research, for example, allow and encourage inclusion of the self and self-reflection. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2009) describe this third perspective as characterized by leaders who are concerned with doing leadership. Interestingly this understanding can be found in the Authentic Leadership literature (e.g. Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). Here the awareness of the meaning of leadership is a central aspect. Self-awareness and self-regulation are essential qualities for authentic leaders. The self is seen as a continuous process of social construction and sense making. Nyberg and Sveningsson (2009) describe leaders struggle against their authentic selves, which seemed to be the reason to become a leader in the first place. The authors say (p. 17):

“The troubling paradox becomes evident: they are chosen to be leaders because who they really are, but they have to fight against their authentic self in order to be a “good” leader.”

The authentic self here means natural personal tendencies, characteristics and attributes, such as talking a lot, being in the centre, being tough etcetera. These ‘qualities’ are perceived as the reason why they have been chosen for the job, but also as hindering ‘good’ leadership. Being true to yourself here means being true to others. This leaves no room for a spiritual understanding of an essential authentic self, such as the people of the here researched network pronounce. As we saw, their understanding of the authentic self goes beyond personal characteristics. Hence the authentic self does not hinder ‘good’ leadership; the authentic self is foundation of ‘good’ leadership.
ASL in the view of the interviewees is about realizing the inner source: the authentic self. From this ethical and spiritual source real leadership originates. What you do and how you do it is all determined by the inner condition of the leader. Understanding what the authentic self is (understanding the source of leadership) is a personal quest for the interviewees as we saw.

A new perspective on leadership, which explores the source of leadership and emphasizes the personal quest of leadership can maybe help leaders to develop their own ASL. It goes beyond classifying and categorizing of leadership types and bypasses the lasting struggle for the right leadership definition. Leadership theories are often far away from the experiences of the leaders. The often use deductive approaches ignore the diversity of organizational realities and personal experiences of the members. Most ignored seemed to be for many decades the self, but if we take modern physics serious, we cannot maintain this blind spot. So what happens if we include the self into leadership studies? Don’t we have to talk about the source of leadership then?

Kriger and Seng (2005) noted that leadership theories could be related on five ontological levels (levels of being):

1. non-dual
2. spirit
3. soul
4. creative imagination and images
5. the sensible world

The authors stated that there is no non-dual leadership in the literature at present. Most of the present theories seem to be on level five (the sensible world), because they are based on behaviour in the observable world (behavioural leadership theories). ‘ASL talk’ at least tries to relate to all five ontological levels, even if it means a lot of discursive work. The discursive difficulties seem to increase from level five to level one, because the non-dual is characterised by the nonverbal experience.

At a broader scale ‘ASL talk’ illustrates how difficult it is to distinguish between ASL and an instrumental, pragmatic and self-interested utilization of spirituality in the use of organizational profit interests. This is similar to the difficulties to distinguish between espoused CSR and real ethical behaviour of a company. Underlying intentions and values will decide in a long time view if spirituality is able to support freedom and sustainability or if it is just becomes another tool to keep up the existing systems.
Concluding remarks

The current thesis is the first examination of the combination of authenticity, spirituality and leadership looking at the specifics of the text in use (‘ASL talk’). Analyzing ASL on a discourse level illustrated what it consists of and how it is put together to make it work. It provides a deeper understanding of the functions of ‘ASL talk’ and its inherent dangers. Further the thesis explores the (con-)text of ASL (socio-cultural movements, CSR, 'ethical profit', stages of leadership) and how the interviewees argue for ASL (global crisis, natural development/evolution, need for spirituality).

As illustrated 'ASL talk' turned out to be a very dialectical construction, which lacks of concreteness, especially in the business context. The interviewees tend to use general expressions. They talk about general global problems and general business dilemmas, but they seem to avoid meeting concrete current dilemmas. Specific business practices and financial issues do not seem to be part of ‘ASL talk’. As shown ASL can be criticized qua the 'real-world' effects, but it also can be criticized as a hermetic text, enclosed upon itself with no clear referent outside its own spiritual/ethical textual accounts. ASL is constructed on its own fundamental principles. In this way it is a self-confirming closed circle of texts amongst a network of people who offer one another strong confirmation on an attitude basis. The interviewees exchange a very self-satisfied rhetoric with one another, but what they really do in their organizations is not critically exchanged or examined in ‘ASL talk’. In these terms, ‘ASL talk’ is quite ideological.

‘ASL talk’ centers on "the good", hence the messiness of every day business does not fit in very well. Thinking of all the ethical misconduct in organizations ASL could be criticized ultimately as hyper-real.

Central to this investigation of ‘ASL talk’ was not the question of what is ‘really’ real, it was not the aim to validate the ‘real’ attitudes or behaviour of the interviewees, neither to judge the accuracy of their descriptions of ASL. This is not what GT and DA are good at. The methods focused on meaning in use and revealed ‘ASL talk’ as purposeful and as a very interesting rhetorical construction, which is associated to current socio-cultural movements.
Final Reflections: ‘Something’ got lost

At the end of the research process remains the feeling that through scientific exploration not everything can be captured. There is ‘something’ missing; ‘something’ got lost in the data analysis.

I would argue that these outcomes could be attributed to the applied theories and methods. If I had not used GT and DA, the paradoxical construction of the ‘ASL talk’ would not have emerged so clearly. DA further helped me to keep distance from the data and to take a critical stance. This was very fruitful to explore the material in greater depth. It revealed the constructional work the interviewees did to make ‘ASL talk’ work and unfolded their dilemmas and difficulties. The thesis exposed also some dangers, such as exploitation, suppression, creating an aura or declining into cultic forms. Also spirituality faces some threats, when it gets combined with leadership. Modern ‘western’ leadership theories show a trend of using more and more eastern (spiritual) ideas but this is always limited and often just implicit. This way of integration doesn’t seem to make the frame bigger; it just adapts the new spiritual terms. Through adjusting the spiritual ideas they often lose their essence of what is called ‘purity’ in spiritual discourses. Here lies, besides many benefits, also a risk. ‘ASL talk’ tries to illustrate how the business side could benefit from spirituality, but spirituality enters a ‘dangerous’ field. A field of market requirements, where things are changed according to consumer or shareholder wishes. The authenticity is often threatened; this is one reason why it seems to be necessary to make authenticity an explicit value in the business field. If the authenticity of spirituality gets lost in such processes, the pure essence will get lost. One of the dangers I see is that spiritual ideas become both superficial and an intellectual game. The main point of gaining wisdom through personal experiences could get soon ignored in sales oriented leadership trainings. The Pali term ‘bhavana-maya panna’ describes exactly such a kind of experiential wisdom. Spirituality requires a personal approach in order to not remain on a superficial level and to be most beneficial. This is also emphasized in ‘ASL talk’. Another threat to the genuineness of spirituality is the problem of adaptation or it being changed in the aim of attaining positive outcomes for the business world, it can lose the meaning of enlightenment or its divine aspects. Constructing it only for practical use may eliminate the spiritual aims. Spirituality shouldn’t be superficially consumed or misused for profit interests. It has its benefits and practical advantages, but it also embodies a deeper sense. The awareness of these dangers could be very useful for further efforts in this field.

Anyway, what the analysis couldn’t really show is the inspiration, the inner motivation and the passion the people from the network embodied. Their enthusiasm sometimes glimpsed through their discourses, mirrored by their amount of
accounts to warrant their claim that combining authenticity, spirituality and leadership actually is practical and beneficial and is not, say, a tool of manipulation. Nevertheless, the ethical aspiration of the interviewees to some extent got lost in the data analysis in my discretion. Further research is always in a way theoretical. It may focus on ‘practices’ (such as the construction of discourses) and it is a practice of research (e.g. analysing the data), but it is not the researched practice itself. That scientific research cannot capture ‘everything’ is not only bad news. I think being aware of such shortcomings can lead to greater awareness of ethics in science – something that is definitely needed in the eight period (the future) (see chapter 2.; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) of qualitative research.

What the analysis of ‘ASL talk’ revealed and what my reflection on the whole thesis also exposed on a broader scale is that there is a difference between theory and practice. In the thesis this issue appears in many different ways. To bring it to an end I want to use a little, amusing story which illustrates very practically the importance of personally experiencing and practicing (Hart, 2004):

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**Swimology**

Once a young professor was making a sea voyage. He was a highly educated man with a long tail of letters after his name, but he had little experience of life. In the crew of the ship on which he was travelling was an illiterate old sailor. Every evening the sailor would visit the cabin of the young professor to listen to him hold forth on many different subjects. He was very impressed with the learning of the young man.

One evening as the sailor was about to leave the cabin after several hours of conversation, the professor asked, "Old man, have you studied geology?"

"What is that, sir?"

"The science of the earth"

"No sir, I have never been to any school or college. I have never studied anything"

"Old man, you have wasted a quarter of your life". With a long face the old sailor went away. "If such a learned person says so, certainly it must be true" he thought. "I have wasted a quarter of my life!"

Next evening again as the sailor was about to leave the cabin, the professor asked him, "Old man, have you studied oceanography?"

"What is that, sir?"

"The science of the sea"

"No sir, I have never studied anything"

"Old man, you have wasted half your life". With a still longer face the sailor went away. "I have wasted half my life; this learned man says so"

Next evening once again the young professor questioned the old sailor: "Old man, have you studied meteorology?"

"What is that, sir? I have never even heard of it"

"Why, the science of the wind, the rain, the weather"

"No sir. As I told you, I have never been to any school, I have never studied anything"

"You have not studied the science of the earth on which you live; you have not studied the science of the sea on which you earn your livelihood; you have not studied the sci-
ence of the weather which you encounter every day? Old man, you have wasted three quarters of your life"
The old sailor was very unhappy: "This learned man says that I have wasted three quarters of my life! Certainty I must have wasted three quarters of my life"
The next day it was the turn of the old sailor. He came running to the cabin of the young man and cried, "Professor sir, have you studied swimology?"
"Swimology? What do you mean?"
"Can you swim, sir?"
"No, I don't know how to swim"
"Professor sir, you have wasted all your life! The ship has struck a rock and is sinking. Those who can swim may reach the nearby shore, but those who cannot swim will drown. I am so sorry, professor sir, you have surely lost your life"
You may study all the "ologies" of the world, but if you do not learn swimology, all your studies are useless. You may read and write books on swimming, you may debate on its subtle theoretical aspects, but how will that help you if you refuse to enter the water yourself? You must learn how to swim.

Following the story we can study ASL and debate it, but if its not getting practiced it is useless. Maybe it is like a glorious failure at the end. Maybe the interviewee’s idea(l) of ASL cannot work in the current business world, but their striving already seems valuable. Because the enthusiasm and inspiration could not be captured in the analysis, I would like to close the thesis with a quote, which appeared to me several times in the context of the here researched network. It at least touched me and maybe it can transfer the lost soft qualities better than scientific examinations.

I asked God, “How much time do I have before I die?”
God replied, “Enough to make a difference.”

17 By an unknown author
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Authentic Spiritual Leadership

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loquium - “Passion for creativity and innovation - Energizing the study of organizations and organizing”, ESADE Business School, Barcelona, Spain, 4th July 2009.


Samenvatting (Nederlands/Dutch)

Dit onderzoek brengt in kaart hoe een groep over de wereld verspreide mensen een idee(aal) van leiderschap construeert door de begrippen authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap samen te brengen. Dit idee of concept is bekend onder de naam ‘Authentiek Spiritueel Leiderschap’ (ASL). Dit onderzoek geeft een uniek blik op de sociale constructie van ‘ASL’.

Omdat dit concept de afgelopen tijd sterk bekritiseerd is het interessant om te onderzoeken hoe leden van een ‘ASL’ gemeenschap hierop hebben gereageerd.

Het onderzoek is uitgevoerd vanuit een ‘insiders’ perspectief (hetgeen zo- wel voor- als nadelen met zich meebrengt) en onderzoekt het discours van de ASL gemeenschap door middel van diepe interviews. Het op ASL gebaseerde netwerk bestaat uit +/- 200 leden waarvan ik negen kernleden heb studeerde. Om de sleutelbegrippen authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap in kaart te brengen werd gebruik gemaakt van Grounded Theory (GT) en Discourse Analysis (DA).

Het doel van het onderzoek was niet om ASL te analyseren als een religieus discours maar om het te bestuderen als een discours gedeeld door leden van een specifiek ASL-netwerk. Deze inductieve studie naar het concepten van ASL die de groepsleden verbindt. De betekenis van ASL voor de geïnterviewden zelf stond daarom centraal (Blumer, 1969/1986), in het bijzonder de betekenis van de begrippen en de wijze waarop zij werden gebruikt, en daarmee de waarheidsclaim voor de betrokkenen wordt gevormd. Met andere woorden: conversaties (discoursen) zijn actiegericht, situationeel en geconstrueerd (Potter, 2004). Conversaties zijn de sleutel tot het begrip van de sociale wereld, hier toegepast op ‘ASL spraak’ (‘ASL talk’).

De Interviews zijn geanalyseerd op twee niveaus, het niveau van de inhoud en het niveau van het discours.

1. Het niveau van de inhoud
Geïnspireerd op de GT-methode werden de drie van binnenuit ontwikkelende basisbegrippen (de drie ‘hubs’) authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap onderzocht. Een onderliggende onderzoeksvraag daarbij was: Hoe beschrijven de geïnterviewde ASL en op wat voor wijze verbinden zij de genoemde basistermen? Deze focus op het weer verbinden van de drie termen bleek van belang, zoals ook aan het eind van het onderzoek duidelijk werd, omdat in sommige leiderschapstheorieën het begrip leiderschap de termen spiritualiteit, ethiek en authenticiteit al opnemen. In andere theorieën, vooral van het laatste decennium, worden dergelijke relaties tussen deze begrippen uitgesloten of hoogstens impliciet
aanwezig geacht. Daarnaast bleek dat in ‘ASL spraak’ werd gesproken over de (re-)constructie en samenhang van de drie termen.

Het eerste begrip van de hub was ‘authenticiteit’ dat door de ondervraagden werd gedefinieerd als het realiseren van een ‘authentiek Zelf’, als authentiek zijn, op weg zijn naar de belichaming van altruïstische kwaliteiten. Spiritualiteit was het tweede hub-begrip. Het werd ingevuld als een praktische, non-sektaire en bevrijdende filosofie. Het stond voor een sociale en begripvolle praktijk en een heilzame, nooit voltooide weg. Het derde hub-begrip was leiderschap. Dit kreeg in de gesprekken als invulling: een authentiek en spiritueel ontwikkelingsproces, een zorgende en zorgzame missie, een ondersteunende respect- en betekenisvolle praktijk.

Het focus lag in deze fase bij de constructie en het gebruik van de termen in ‘ASL spraak’. In deze eerste analyses kwamen drie interessante dilemma’s naar voren die bij nadere analyse andere discursieve niveaus in ‘ASL spraak’ naar boven brachten. Bovendien bleek dat de geïnterviewden verhalen gebruikten die deden denken aan spirituele tradities. De functie van deze verhalen in ‘ASL spraak’ werden aan de hand van enkele voorbeelden uitgelegd.

2. Het niveau van het discours
Het doel was hier om een ander perspectief op de interviews te verkrijgen. Daarvoor werd de methode van Discourse Analysis (DA) toegepast met de bedoeling om een analyse te maken van de manier waarop de gesprekken waren opgebouwd. ASL is, zoals al gezegd, omstreden. De waarden van authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en ethiek verwijzen doorgaans naar onderscheiden aspecten van business en leiderschap. Daarom valt te veronderstellen dat het niet eenvoudig kan zijn om ze samen te brengen. Er is een bepaalde constructie nodig om dat waar te maken. De volgende stap in de analyse was daarom gericht op de kwestie: hoe overbruggen de ondervraagden mogelijke spanningen en hoe hanteren zij de daaraan gerelateerde dilemma’s die overigens meestal ook onderkend of erkend werden door de ondervraagden zelf.

Het eerste dilemma werd zichtbaar als het spanningsveld tussen authenticiteit en in-authenticiteit. De ondervraagden hanteerden dit door zich te presenteren als open en eerlijk (wat ook inhield dat ze hun eigen in-authentiek gedrag erkenden), door te zeggen dat zij ‘nog maar op weg zijn’ naar een meer authentiek leiderschap (hetgeen ook momenten van in-authentiek gedrag toelaat). Verder gebruikten zij verhalen, ‘ooting’ (Goffman, 1979) en metaforen om aan te geven welke uitdagingen zij ondervonden in hun ‘ASL spraak’. De essentiële uitdaging bleek te zijn om zich aan de ene kant te presenteren als nederig, onbaatzuchtig en spiritueel (nodig binnen hun eigen definitie van ASL) en aan de andere kant als efficiënt, succesvol en ervaren om daarmee als modelleider gezien te kunnen worden. Zij moesten zichzelf associëren met de categorie succesvolle leider en tegelijkertijd zich onderscheiden van in-authentieke leiders. Om
dit te bereiken gebruikten zij zowel het spirituele als het business repertoire voor hun functionele ‘ASL spraak’.

Om hun professionele of persoonlijke ervaringen te verwoorden maakten de ondervraagden regelmatig gebruik van ondersteunende verhalen. Daarin kwam hun verslagenheid of hun mislukken dikwijls ter sprake (The Horse Story) maar dit falen werd altijd verbonden met een persoonlijke groei- of leer-curve. De rapportages van hun professionele ervaringen waren niettemin meestal succes-stories (Skyscrapers Story). Uit deze verhalen bleek hun kennis en competentie om te kunnen praten over de samenhang tussen authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap.

Over het algemeen waren de metaforen en verhalen ondersteunend voor hun ‘ASL spraak’. Net als bij de meeste spirituele tradities die vol zijn van verhalen en metaforen, is de luisteraar zelf (mede-)verantwoordelijk voor de interpretatie.

Het tweede dilemma betrof het spanningsveld tussen iemand-willen-zijn (een held zijn) en authenticiteit als betrokkenheid op anderen. Authenticiteit is voor de meeste ondervraagden nauw verbonden met spiritualiteit en beide hebben een positieve connotatie. Ze zijn beide geconstrueerd als naar buiten gerichte service. Persoonlijke ontwikkeling is noodzakelijk maar daarbij is steeds wel een sociale component nodig. Deze constructie ondersteunde hun beeld van ASL. Het bleek dat ‘ASL spraak’ pas werkt als het sociaal collectieve aanwezig is.

Uit de analyse van de data komt duidelijk naar voren dat de ondervraagden probeerden de lezers of luisteraars te inspireren met hun persoonlijke ervaringen. Dit deden zij door kritische zelfreflectie, gebruik makend van filosofische noties, door de toeschouwer direct aan te spreken en door profijtelijk gebruik te maken van levendige metaforen en verhalen. Zij stelden hun publiek in staat zich met hen te identificeren als rolmodel. ‘ASL spraak’ heeft overduidelijk ook tot doel om het ide(e)(aal) van ASL te promoten. De ondervraagden gebruikten vele uitdrukkingen die een wij-gevoel tot uitdrukking brengen en een gedeelde kijk representeren die diversiteit uitsluit. Door gebruik te maken van kwalificaties als ‘soms’ en dergelijke werd weliswaar ruimte geboden voor verschil in interpretatie, maar het gebruik van begrippen als ‘altijd’ of ‘alles’ suggereren universele inzetbaarheid van ASL. Ook het afwisselen van spreken in ik- en u-termen onderstreept dat argumenten niet alleen geldig geacht werden voor de spreker zelf, maar ook voor de toehoorders. De ondervraagden deden het soms voorkomen alsof een keuze voor ASL niet complex hoeft te zijn en spraken over het ‘simpel’ toepassen van ASL.

In ‘ASL spraak’ bestaat de diverse concepten naast elkaar: aanvullen en bevestigen. Zoals eerder opgemerkt is de combinatie van authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap zoals samengebracht in ASL omstreden. In literatuur over ‘positief leiderschap’ worden veel eigenschappen benoemd die, al dan niet in combinatie, positieve kwaliteiten aanduiden in een leider. Ook worden vaak allerlei positieve resultaten benoemd. Het blijft echter moeilijk om deze eenduidig te definiëren, te differentiëren of ze praktisch toe te passen. ‘ASL spraak’ lijkt een samenspel te zijn van verschillende van die positieve waarden, houdingen, gedragingen en uitkomsten. Het groeiende veld van leiderschapstheorieën kan echter ook bekritiseerd worden. Leiderschap wordt er soms gezien als slechts een methode om heersende machtsstructuren, hiërarchieën en systemen op hun plaats te houden en als een poging om de rol van de leider te rechtvaardigen, al achten sommige auteurs de idee van leiderschap in business management zelf gedateerd en stellen zij dat in de plaats daarvan gekeken moet worden naar netwerken. Vanuit een kritisch perspectief zijn leiderschapstheorieën een laatste poging om rechtvaardiging van leiderschap te zien als de oplossing voor een wereld van veranderende waarden en behoeften.

De leden van het ASL netwerk twijfelde over het algemeen niet aan de zinvolheid van de leiderschapsrol. Hun kader ondersteunde het idee van leiderschap. Bij hen was de leider nog steeds een ‘held’. Als ze in netwerk- of gemeenschapstermen spraken, gaven ze daarmee aan hoe zij respect toonden of de gemeenschap dienden en hun werknemers en collega’s faciliteerden. ‘ASL spraak’ handhaaft dus het concept van leiderschap en probeert dat om te bouwen naar huidige eisen. Het laat de machtspositie bij de leider, maar maakt tegelijkertijd
de leider ondergeschikt aan het belang van anderen en de missie van de organisatie. Leiderschap wordt een ‘onzelfzuchtige service’.

Maar zou zo’n leider voor de werknemers niet toch nog steeds kunnen lijken op een wolf in schaapskleren? Een voorbeeld van dergelijke kritiek kwam van Tourish en Pinnington (2002). Zij schreven een artikel over transformationeel leiderschap, corporate ‘cultisme’ en spiritualiteit en vroegen zich af of deze drie-eenheid ‘onheilig’ was voor de werkvloer. In de context van dit onderzoek is dit artikel gebruikt om aan te geven hoe een antithetische positie ten opzichte van ASL mogelijk is. Het belang lag niet bij het transformationele leiderschap zelf maar in een algemene kritiek op de drie-eenheid van authenticiteit, spiritualiteit en leiderschap. Volgens bovenstaand artikel zouden deze begrippen niet samengebracht moeten worden bij leiderschap, het effect zou een vorm van narcissme zijn. Daarnaast zou dit het gevaar van één waarheid in zich dragen, van exploitatie, van kunstmatigheid, het ‘Hitler’ probleem en het gevaar van cults en spiritualiteit. ‘ASL spraak’ reageert op het verwijt van narcisme met de verbinding van authenticiteit en onbaatzuchtigheid (zelf twee controversiële concepten die hier besproken worden) en het concept van spiritualiteit en de waardering van diversiteit en de persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid van de leider. De zeer uiteenlopende veronderstellingen van de kritische vertogen over leiderschap en van ‘ASL spraak’ maken het moeilijk, misschien zelfs gedeeltelijk onmogelijk, om over een rechtstreekse controverse tussen beide te spreken.

Met inachtneming van de argumenten van de mensen van het onderzoeksnetwork, kan ASL gebruikt worden ter verdediging van het algemeen belang. In hoeverre de definities praktisch zijn in het zakenleven blijft wel een vraag maar het streven dat er in verwoord wordt lijkt waardevol. Zoals gebruikt in ‘ASL spraak’ is ASL een reis die in laatste instantie een ideaal weergeeft dat, wel doordacht tot haar uiterste consequentie, een ‘heilig’ geestelijk inzicht vertegenwoordigt al is dit niet het punt dat de ondervraagden zelf probeerden te maken. Zij beschreven ASL als ‘heilig’ voor de wereld, omdat het leven en de zakelijke omgeving een ethische dimensie geeft door de transformatie van de wijze waarop mensen elkaar gaan behandelen. De gehanteerde analyse illustreert dat ‘ASL spraak’ een zeer complexe dialectische constructie is. De concepten van ASL lijken verder te reiken dan categorieën van ‘goed’ of ‘fout’. Ze overstijgen deze oppositie op een dynamische wijze. De paradox van deze dialectische beweging bij ‘ASL spraak’ is dat deze steeds lijkt uit te komen aan de ethisch positieve kant. Hoe dit mogelijk is, wordt tenslotte onderzocht. ‘ASL spraak’ verwijderde zich van het dominante leiderschapsonderzoek en van de daar bekende thema’s (Wat doen leiders?) en processen (Hoe doen leiders het?). Het opende een derde perspectief door de aandacht te richten op de bron van leiderschap en door de kwestie van de authenticiteit en ‘het authentieke ik’ bij de
leider centraal te stellen. De vraag wordt geopperd of er mogelijk iets niet aan de orde is gekomen tijdens het analyseproces.

De gehanteerde analyse lijkt bij nader inzien onvoldoende in staat gebleken om stem te geven aan de inspiratie stem die de ondervraagden dreef en tekort te schieten bij de interpretatie van de innerlijke motivatie en passie voor mensen, zoals die bij de onderzochten werd bespeurd. Een glimp van hun enthousiasme kon soms opgevangen worden, maar de ondervraagden onderstrepten dat ASL wezenlijk praktijkgericht is en de waarde pas daar blijkt. Veel van de zachtere kwaliteiten van de ondervraagden lijken goeddeels verloren te gaan in de gehanteerde data-analyse. Daarnaast moest worden vastgesteld dat onderzoek in zekere zin altijd theoretisch blijft. Het mag dan bepaalde ‘praktijken’ (zoals de constructie van gesprekken etc.) tot object hebben, en ook al is onderzoek doen zelf een praktijk, het is niet de praktijk van de onderzochten. De ‘ASL spraak’ kunnen we bestuderen en bediscussiëren maar de relatie tussen ‘ASL talk’ en business praktijk blijft onduidelijk.