Seek and you *May* Find:
Contemporary Leadership and the Relevance of Ancient Wisdom*

Prof. Colin Coulson-Thomas

Ancient wisdom and the capturing, expression and sharing of information and guidance from the past is available in many forms, from cave paintings and fragments of writings that survive in physical form to parables and sayings that have passed from mouth to mouth. Much of what survives has had to endure natural disasters, accidental and planned destruction and the vagaries of human transcription and translation. A great many unknown scribes, story tellers and custodians are responsible for what is accessible today. Their diligence and tenacity is deserving of respect.

Over the ages certain writings from the past have brought people together, while others have divided families, communities and countries. On occasion, certain of the texts and related views that have endured, especially when endowed with special religious and/or spiritual significance, have had negative rather than benign impacts upon general populations. Particular texts and their interpretations have enlightened some and proved fatal for others. Selected passages have been used by influencers and leaders to inspire both retreat from barbarism and decent into barbarism.

Authorities have been brought together to agree the meaning of certain passages, while the interpretation of others has been disputed. Fundamental divisions have been marked by schisms and the emergence of contending and warring factions. Some people have been inspired to create great works of art. Others have been radicalised and driven to destroy condemned works and behead and blow up unbelievers. Against a background of terrorism and the challenge of fanaticism, are religion, spirituality and belief systems potentially helpful to business leaders or do they complicate their tasks? Are they a growing problem or a potential source of insights into how best to cope?

Surviving texts vary in length, but some are remarkably concise compared with commandments from contemporary Governments (Crews, 2017). From a work such as the Bhagavad Gita one can derive lessons like the importance of personal responsibility and the value of resilience in the face of failure that have resonance today (Zaehner, 1973). Resilience, persistence and a bouncing ball like ability to recover from failure has been identified as an important requirement in the success of many of those who have had a significant impact upon our world (Baker, 1982). Something that a proportion of succeeding generations finds of interest and value can survive and speak to us today.

In many cases one can only speculate upon the motives for creating what has endured and whether those who originated them would be pleased or dismayed by how their creations have been interpreted and used. Particular works may have been designed for local use rather than universal guidance in a different age. However, we still need to interact with each other and those who are in some way different from us. We still face challenges such as the prospect of ill health and eventual death. What should we look for when assessing the contemporary relevance of ancient wisdom?

Faith and Reason

Greater diversity in ways of thinking may be required to confront challenges and generate novel solutions to certain problems Over two generations ago, C P Snow (1959, 1961) warned in an influential Rede Lecture of the implications of what he perceived to be a growing division between science and the humanities and the emergence of two distinct cultures. Is there a growing division between faith and reason and/or those who believe in the existence of a spiritual dimension and those who do not? Can one link such a division with others such as between those who prefer order and standardisation, while others are more tolerant of uncertainty and favour variety and diversity?

How should we assess the contemporary relevance of ancient wisdom for ourselves, our organisations and those for whom we are responsible? Might engagement with it make us better directors or help us to build the qualities that would make us more effective as leaders? How does one judge the significance of ancient writings? Are there particular questions we should ask or certain issues we should confront? How applicable are different forms of ancient wisdom to the current contexts in which we live, learn and work?

This article considers some particular aspects and themes of ancient wisdom associated with religion and Indian spirituality that might trigger questioning and thought in the mind of an independent observer encountering these beliefs for the first time. While some views might appear removed or opposed to what is required to address contemporary challenges, could they on further reflection be helpful in the search for solutions?

A diversity of people occupy leadership roles. Some individuals acquire a belief in a distinction between a spirit or soul and the physical body and world, while for others this is an alien concept. For some a God (or Gods) associated with religious and other beliefs are a metaphor. For Dawkins (2006) they are a delusion, yet others derive great comfort and inspiration from them. What is weird to one person can be wonderful to another. Our concern here is with the contemporary relevance and value of beliefs rather than the circumstances of their origins. One needs to select with care.

Many leaders require positive messages that make people feel good and give them hope that worthwhile and beneficial goals can be achieved in this life and on this earth. Some of what survives from the past is bleak. It reflects a dark and depressing view of mankind and of human activity. Involvement with the natural world and accomplishment can bring joy, wonder and peace rather than grief and sorrow. Should one depress and discourage people by trying to persuade them that what they value and enjoy is empty and meaningless, or instead encourage achievement and contentment? Should one encourage the many to initiate journeys that only a few may complete? Rather than strive to be special one can sniff a flower by day and listen to a cricket by night.

Absolutism and Openness

Exposure to diverse views can stimulate creativity. Where innovation is required to address certain challenges leaders may need to encourage people to open up, explore and question. Absolutism and certainty are the consequences of some belief systems. Their texts are held to originate outside of the human realm and some adherents of certain faiths regard them as absolute and beyond question. Should those who seek to encourage challenge and a wider variety of viewpoints as contributors to innovation be concerned about expressions of blind faith? Is it naïve to think that mutual tolerance and cohesion can be maintained in the presence of contending absolutisms?

Sir Karl Popper (1945) warned of enemies of the open society. Are those who are dogmatic and unquestioning, excessively concerned with standards, slaves to particular management approaches, intolerant of diversity and reluctant to let go and trust others, enemies of the open company, open public bodies and open communities? How does one establish the tolerance, openness and mutual respect that can reconcile the strong beliefs of certain groups with a healthy diversity of views?

Absolutism is dangerous for leaders who have to deal with multiple stakeholders whose views can vary over time and also in terms of what they consider to be right, wrong, appropriate or best in a particular situation and place (Trevino and Brown, 2004). Openness to new ideas and a constant willingness to explore opportunities to develop and improve, including when at the height of success, can be essential for remaining relevant and staying at the cutting edge (Catmull and Wallace, 2014). Certain belief systems have remained frozen. They have not been reviewed,

updated and reinterpreted for contemporary use.

An important and potentially divisive issue for some is the extent to which one should resort to a literal translation of an original text and regard it as valid for all time, or seek an interpretation for a contemporary and/or particular situation or context. A business leader might be more inclined to trust an interpretation that takes account of current sensitivities and implications for both believers and non-believers and the possible need for collective action and a degree of cohesion if people are to live safe, healthy and responsible lives. Language and tone may need to unify rather than divide.

Observance and Challenge

Certain faiths, movements and communities demand and/or expect agreement with certain tenets and observance of certain practices from their members and/or followers. Evidence of conforming can range from regular participation in certain rituals to more profound changes of activity and lifestyle. In a business and corporate context innovation, progress and even survival can depend upon continual engagement with stakeholders, the constant monitoring of developments and possibilities, the challenging of past assumptions and the regular questioning of cherished beliefs and practices (Coulson-Thomas, 2001). In an uncertain and changing world there are dangers in lurking behind prison bars of one's own creation.

While respectful of others and what we can learn from the past, as situations and circumstances change, it can be both natural and appropriate to question and probe. This is especially important in a board context. On occasion, fundamentals and core tenets may need to be challenged? Does searching for and achieving a happy and fulfilled life make one a better leader? Might someone who is unfulfilled be less comfortable and complacent and more restless and relentless in seeking to get an organisation or community to a different and better place? In relation to fulfilment, should the focus of business teams be upon their personal journeys or the fulfilment of stakeholder aspirations?

Might faith, over confidence and strong belief lead to inflexibility, the ignoring of warning signs and counter opinions, and commitment to counter-productive activities, flawed strategies and doomed causes? Marconi was all but destroyed because the chairman and CEO drove a strategy that proved disastrous through the company. In relation to leadership one needs a sense of balance (Coulson-Thomas, 2012 and 2013). It can be particularly important in relation to beliefs. It is possible to recognise the potential value of spiritual leadership while still maintaining that "research on several fronts is necessary to establish the validity of spiritual leadership theory" (Fry, 2016).

Obedience and Freedom

One test for the contemporary relevance of a belief system in dynamic situations is whether it might set people free or further constrain them. Some belief systems, movements and religions encourage obedience amongst followers as well as observance, whether of ritual or a creed. In situations or when facing challenges where continuing as at present may not be sufficient to cope, another issue is the extent to which certain practices facilitate reflection and thought or close down enquiry. Do they inspire and liberate or act as a sedative of the mind and encourage stagnation?

One saying that has been handed down is "birds of feather flock together." When those who share certain beliefs and are deferential to them gather together to the exclusion of others and apart from other organisations, contending views and the spark that might trigger a change, development or innovation may not occur. Pressure to conform and comply, norms and shared assumptions, and common approaches and understanding can drive out the diversity and challenge that can boost creativity when different types of people and organisations who are complementary but compatible are brought together (Bennis and Ward, 1997).

People may need a degree of freedom if they are to challenge, question and be creative (Williams, 2016). Some might welcome the opportunity to experiment with new ways of operating and the space to develop and test their ideas. The author has set out ten essential freedoms for removing organisational constraints and liberating latent talent by allowing people to work, learn and collaborate in ways, and at times and places, and with the support that best allow individuals and teams to give of their best and be creative and productive (Coulson-Thomas, 1997). When conditions are right for the people and relationships involved they can flourish and be fruitful.

Homogeneity and Diversity

Obedience and observance can also lead to homogeneity of practice and thought. Enthusiasts within beliefs, movements, political parties and religions that actively seek to expand their influence, membership and/or income tend to present packages of ideas to their followers. Belief in them and/or adherence to them can be both a requirement for membership and an indication of it. Some people are better able to think for themselves than others. Simply adopting an "ism" and/or the beliefs of friends, family or another group can save time and help one to belong, but Parthasarathy (2014) believes quick and ritualistic adoption of a particular package of ideas can prevent deeper engagement and further progress on a personal journey of spiritual discovery.

From a governance perspective, directors are expected, and in some jurisdictions are required, to exercise independent thought and judgement. Among directors one encounters, whether adherents of a faith or followers of a guru, could be some individuals who have sought comfort by uncritically adopting a relatively standard and common set of beliefs, while others may have arrived at their position by actively exploring a range of alternatives, assessing them and after much thought coming to periodic conclusions while continuing to explore further dimensions of belief. One needs to ensure that conformity and certainty does not prevent future evolution and development.

Throughout history significant breakthroughs in thinking have often been caused by relative outsiders who have challenged complacent orthodoxy (Kuhn, 1962). Inspired and successful leaders are sometimes those who are open to contributions from new sources and directions. They look beyond the "normal suspects" and welcome exposure to new ways of looking at situations, problems and opportunities. They are alert to new voices and are attracted to those who like themselves are curious and restless explorers. Openness, curiosity and non-conformity are associated with the creativity and entrepreneurship many organisations require (Duxbury, 2012).

Detachment and Engagement

Detachment from the things and concerns of this world might be a step towards enlightenment, but success in business is the result of engagement and commitment when caring for customers and acting in the best long-term interests of a company. Detachment might be interpreted as not being engaged or bothered in a context in which concern and caring may need to be displayed (Grandey, 2003). Showing that one cares may be both acceptable and desirable (Hochschild, 1983). A key issue for some leaders is the extent to which they can transmit, transfer and share their passion for a cause, challenge, offering or venture vis-a-vis the people of an organisation (Cardon, 2008).

One does not want a detached operative making a faulty replacement heart value or an aircraft component with a vital piece missing as a result of having his or her mind upon higher things. In certain circumstances where detachment results in a loss of concentration and focus the consequences of a error or omission could be horrific. Being perceived as "in another place" and not engaged and caring can be harmful of relationships. Yet detachment could also help a decision maker to retain a sense of perspective and proportion. Detachment could isolate a person from

emotions and the bias and favouritism that could cloud judgements. However, one needs to remember that organisational leadership and success can require implementation as well as an intellectual solution - achievement as well as aspiration (Roth, 2015).

Commitment and determination can be especially important for innovators. Those who are seeking to bring about change may need to be tough when confronted with indifference, negativity or opposition from vested interests. On occasion they may need to be single minded, tenacious and even ruthless in achieving a desired objective (Pfeffer, 2015). The challenge for some sets of beliefs based upon ancient wisdom is to address the full range of qualities a leader might require to succeed as opposed to helping with the development of a sub-set of them. If one does not expect too much from a certain source one is more likely to be pleasantly surprised by the insights one gains.

Individual and Community

Another concern with some belief systems could be the extent to which an individual's focus upon a personal journey towards enlightenment might appear selfish to others and in conflict with responsibilities towards family, friends and concern for a wider community. Yet people who are more settled and who find themselves and are true to themselves often make make better companions and independent directors. They can be more dispassionate, less demanding of others and more supportive of those around them. Someone who is older, at ease with themselves and content with where they are may also be more interested in "giving back" and less concerned with themselves, the impression they are creating and getting ahead or being somewhere else.

Some personal journeys develop individualism to a greater extent than others. Distinctive individuals and those who excel in particular areas are often easier to select for board, team and other roles than people who flit about, do not stand out on any criteria and generally try to keep in with those around them. Those who run with the crowd and jump upon bandwagons may just take up space and contribute to the groupthink identified by Whyte (1952) and explored by Janis (1972). Secure individuals who bring something new and different to the table that adds to and complements the qualities of others are often better collaborators and contribute more to collective action.

While the confidence that comes from holding a set of beliefs can give one a sense of security, it can be important for organisations that those in leadership positions have the flexibility to cope with uncertainty and a changing situation and context. One may need to ensure that strong adherence to a set of assumptions and beliefs has not resulted in certain individuals loosing confidence in their own creativity (Kelley and Kelley, 2012 & 2013). Do certain belief systems encourage or discourage curiosity, questioning and challenge? Do they help or hinder innovation?

Insiders and Non-believers

As a result of migration and globalisation, many contemporary organisations and communities contain people with a wide variety of beliefs and from a mix of nationalities, races, classes and religions. Inclusiveness and unity are issues for business, community and public leaders who seek cohesion while trying to accommodate aspects of different identities that people wish to retain. Expressions of belief, as opposed to demonstrations of understanding, are sometimes difficult to interpret in an organisational and social context as degrees of commitment can vary significantly and be difficult to determine. For example, those who are most vocal about the prospect and lure of a heaven are often the first to rush to a doctor and do all that they can to remain in this life.

Fanatical belief in a particular set of political and/or religious views can lead to intolerance of outsiders and those who belong to another group. At one extreme a religious text can call for the

heads of unbelievers to be separated from their bodies. Many would question the natural justice of such an extreme step without even exploring the reasons for non-belief, which could include simply being unaware of the belief system concerned as a result of never having been exposed to it. One may need to be alert to any evidence or suggestion that observance of a literal interpretation of a particular text might be leading to behaviour change that could indicate radicalisation and a risk of unacceptable and illegal conduct that may represent a threat to others.

For leaders of many organisations intolerance and the threat of terrorism are major challenges. While it may receive less attention from headline writers than the impact of suicide bombers who believe the slaughter they cause will guarantee them a place in paradise, the risk of favouritism is another consequence of people excluding outsiders and giving preference to those who belong to a sub-group such as ones own gender, race, social grouping, family or faith. When allocating something desirable but in limited supply such as filling a particular vacancy, favouring insiders and discriminating against outsiders, can lead to a less effective and competitive organisation, alienate excluded groups and represent an abuse of trust. One justification of free markets is that in comparison with command economies and centralised decision making they can make systematic discrimination more difficult (Friedman, 1962).

Arrogance and Humility

Some people like to think they are special and the appeal of some sets of beliefs could be that those who hold them are persuaded that they and their fellow travellers are especially enlightened, or in some way on a higher plane. They are not only distinct but better. Members of political parties, religions or movements can also be offered special privileges, real or imagined, ranging from jobs for insiders and benefits for supporting groups to the promise of an after life. Leaders need to be able to distinguish between those setting out to flatter them and exploit their vanities and others who are willing and able to help them and the causes they serve.

Those who think they have an understanding that is both different from and superior to that of others, particularly when their beliefs are in some way absolute or divine, can become arrogant. When this arrogance intrudes upon one's family, community and/or business life, and one fails to listen to others and heed advice and informed counsel the results can be catastrophic. Arrogance and a belief in the primacy of man can lead to indifference to biodiversity and the over exploitation of natural capital. Leaders in particular need to listen (Coulson-Thomas, 2014). This could include listening to an inner voice and another test for some belief systems could be the extent to which they value humility and enable people to find their inner voice.

The UK's First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Philip Jones (2017), has stressed the importance of humility alongside other "time honoured values": excellence, integrity and self-discipline. In a democracy, those wishing to preserve their freedoms need to ensure that while tolerating a diversity of beliefs and faiths, those that require obedience, result in certainty and arrogance, and demand devotion are not harmful to the interests and liberties of others. Those who are arrogant may not accept that their devotion may be to outdated and harmful ideas. Humility can bring greater respect and tolerance of the different views of others. History may judge a lone voice to have been right (Mill, 1859).

Simplification and Distortion

Over the centuries a variety of examples, sayings, stories, parables, re-enactments, images and other portrayals have been used as aids to communication, particularly to share an understanding of views, events, deities and personalities associated with particular belief systems. Tangible objects in this world are used to portray aspects of a different dimension. There are differences in what believers of various faiths feel such forms of communication should take and much of what

survives emanates from places and periods where and when widespread literacy could not be assumed. Intermediaries have assumed various roles as interpreters and communicators, some of them occupying positions of influence, prestige and considerable wealth.

One needs to ensure that consultants and advisers are not parasitic (Coulson-Thomas, 1992). Some people make matters and situations overly complex for a variety of motives, including to justify a specialist role that they might have and encourage dependency upon them (Wooldridge and Micklethwait, 1996). At the same time, over simplification can result in certain considerations being overlooked, so summaries should endeavour to encompass what is relevant and important. On occasion, complexity is a consequence of confusion and a lack of understanding. Hence the value of scepticism and challenge in the boardroom.

An issue for those who are open to learning from ancient wisdom is the extent to which the process of selection and communication has either misunderstood an original meaning or been influenced by biases and particular requirements to the extent of distorting it. Those in a hurry for key points, an executive summary or "the bottom line" may actively seek a quick route to an overview understanding, but what is packaged and popular may only take one so far (Parthasarathy, 2014). Relevance, value and impact may only become apparent with more prolonged study.

Ethics and Values

Ethical and balanced decision business making can establish confidence, engender trust and build a reputation for honest dealing. In the case of decisions that come to the board, directors should aim to set a good example and be individually and collectively accountable for their own conduct. In some circumstances in certain jurisdictions they may become personally liable for their actions.

As well as being directly impacted by board decisions, the behaviour of others may be influenced by the tone set from the top. While directors may have their sense of what is ethical, fair or reasonable in particular circumstances, stakeholders and other parties may form their own and different judgements. These may reflect individual, group or local opinions, views and values.

Ancient texts associated with religion and spirituality are often concerned with ethics, values and influencing conduct. Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders and Paul Wilson (1933) included adherence to an ethical code as a characteristic of a member of a profession, and Palchoudhury (2016) has claimed that "an ethical work environment is highly motivating and bound to increase productivity", while a "highly valued and ethical workforce" is likely to be "highly productive".

While being values-led and endeavouring to do the right thing in terms of what is ethical and moral may seem highly desirable, these aspirations are not always easy to implement. Determining the "right" course of action is not always clear cut (Trevino and Brown, 2004). One's view of a situation and options can depend upon context, position, perspective and preferences. Another question for some belief systems is the extent to which exposure to them can make it easier for leaders to make the right moral calls and more appropriate and fairer ethical decisions.

Corporate Conduct and Decision Making

External views of what is acceptable, and indeed legal, may vary from place to place and from time to time. Directors will be expected by regulatory and legal authorities, ethical investors and other stakeholders to observe legal and regulatory requirements and establish, monitor and enforce certain policies, rules and norms. At the same time, they also need to be sensitive to changing ethical requirements and perspectives, and aware of the possible implications of certain actions. What should a company's values and ethical norms be? How should they be expressed and

communicated? What issues should a company have an ethical position on?

There are certain other questions that directors should also consider (Coulson-Thomas, 2017a). How can a board create a ethical climate within which governance and management activities can occur? How might they ensure it is appropriate for the nature of a company's operations, the applicable legal and regulatory framework, stakeholder requirements and expectations, a prevailing moral climate and the challenges and opportunities that it faces?

In relation to ethics and corporate conduct, should a board be a follower of trends and just do what is legal and allowed, or should it give a lead and endeavour to raise ethical standards? How should it articulate and account for corporate social and ethical values? Are ethical standards, a code of practice and ethical guidelines required? If so, what areas and issues should be covered and in how much detail? Will an ethical helpline and support tools be required? Might ancient wisdom contribute to the construction of guidelines for ethical investment?

In a work context, more than the establishment of ethical standards and monitoring compliance with them may be required (Megan, 2002). When supported by ethical commitment and understanding, strong beliefs and supportive values, ethical standards may be more effective (Stevens, 2008; Tyler et al, 2008). To what extent should these vary according to the belief systems of significant numbers of employees, customers and other stakeholders in each location? Could authorities from these belief systems help in the determination of what might be appropriate and acceptable?

Selfishness and Greed

In many contemporary societies there is great emphasis upon the self and personal appearance. People want to appear presentable and feel good about themselves. The degree of self-interest displayed by many contemporary business leaders has not gone unnoticed. Theresa May (2016) for example has raised the issue of taking wider interests into account and suggested the need for revised governance arrangements. Providing disinterested counsel and service to others appeared in Sidney and Beatrice Webb's (1917) definition of a profession, but directors and senior managers and professionals have been dogged by allegations of greed on account of high levels of executive pay and excessive loss of office compensation.

A key test is whether when the going gets tough people focus upon their own interests rather than that of an employing organisation and its clients and/or their obligations to family and community (Coulson-Thomas, 2015). A search for salvation or enlightenment may not affect everyone in the same way, but for some might it switch the emphasis from external obligations to an inner self. To non-believers, might an interest in an afterlife or re-incarnation be further evidence of human greed, and a tendency to be never satisfied? Maybe the experience of being alive and a current life are not enough. Some people want even more and are promised it could be even better next time around.

Some expressions and interpretations of ancient wisdom can seem more or less relevant according to whether one's concern is internal and for oneself or external and for others. One individual's priority might be personal salvation while another person might be more focused upon collective advance. The opportunity cost of a personal search for enlightenment could be paid by potential beneficiaries of those who have an opportunity to improve the lives of others. It could also take time that might have been used gaining insights into the human condition from great works of literature or biographies of how others have created and used opportunities to have a beneficial impact.

Sustainability presents a variety of challenges for leaders, particularly reconciling the interests of different stakeholders. Galbraith (1958) warned of the dangers of conventional wisdom, want creation and the pursuit of private as opposed to public interests. In order to cope with a growing

population on a finite planet, rather than seek to persuade people to want more, should we encourage them to be content with less and a simpler life? Is it necessary to unsettle people with suggestions that their lives are empty in order to make them less materialistic and reduce greed? A day of life walking in sunlit woods and listening to birdsong can be magical. Is raising the prospect of living for ever as promised by certain religions and belief systems the ultimate in stimulating human greed? On the other hand might a focus upon inner journeys and the next life reduce pressure upon planet earth in this life?

Honesty and Integrity

Honesty and Integrity are qualities that appear much sought after when board chairs are asked what they look for in new board members (Coulson-Thomas, 2007).Yet many boards display a reluctance to be open and transparent, especially in respect of organisational failings, and this has resulted in cynicism and distrust (Coulson-Thomas, 2017b). Some apply their cynicism to religions which like politicians seem to unbelievers to promise much. Can one really be forgiven for all one's sins and have the prospect of everlasting life as a result of a few minutes of confessing one's sins to a priest?

A key finding of the final report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry chaired by Robert Francis (2013) was the importance of candour in relation to failures and problems, so that issues can be brought into the open and addressed if improvements are to occur. Leaders who adopt servant and more supportive approaches should encourage people to learn from their mistakes, be flexible in their reactions and imaginative in ways of recovering trust and overcoming obstacles and barriers (Winston and Patterson, 2006).

Honesty and a willingness to probe, question and reflect is particularly important when distinguishing between fads and fundamentals, surface and substance and reality and illusion, and when striking the right balance between action and reaction, complexity and simplicity, activity and reflection and change and continuity (Coulson-Thomas, 2001). When assessing ancient wisdom, one could explore the extent to which it and its advocates can be trusted, it is relevant to contemporary issues and it is concerned with both conduct and consequences. Also, and particularly where there is a requirement for greater inclusion and cohesion, does it unify or divide?

Belief and Responsibility

Certain values such as integrity, honesty and humility are associated with spiritualism (Reave, 2016). Business leaders who champion such values include some who have an interest and belief in a spiritual dimension and others that do not. Ask a focus group to list the qualities and values that are conducive to cooperation, collaboration and collective action and what they would prefer in others and they are likely to emphasise the importance of trust and a preference for integrity, humility and honesty rather than duplicity, arrogance and lying. Much of what appears in some ancient texts is in this sense unremarkable and many might feel it is common sense.

Trust relates to confidence of delivery in relation to promises and/or expectations. For some people, their own ability to create new lives and give the opportunity of life to others, namely their children, may seem more likely and more alluring than the prospect of themselves being reincarnated as a malaria carrying mosquito or blood sucking vampire bat. Genetic engineering might even enable some people to design aspects of the life they create. There is a lot that is remarkable if not magical that people take for granted. Some people will always believe the grass is greener somewhere else.

One needs to be aware of potential bias blind spots in relation to oneself and others (Pronin et al, 2002). It seems natural for some people to exaggerate the value of what they believe in to attract attention against competing claims and to justify their own roles as interpreters and intermediaries.

One might be critical of those who seek to exploit the gullibility of others and disapproving of attempts to unnecessarily frighten and coerce, but tolerant or even supportive of those who wish to share something they feel might be beneficial to others.

People who are happy, fulfilled and content with themselves and what they have may be able to resist voices they consider irrelevant to their lives, relationships and the opportunities they are pursuing. The risk of both gullibility and potential benefit (if what is offered has positive results) could be higher where people lack self-worth and knowledge and are insecure, uncertain and unsatisfied with their lot. Perhaps the principle of caveat emptor is particularly applicable to the question of who to listen to and follow, particularly when multiple belief systems are clamouring and competing for attention and some are aggressively marketed and slickly presented.

Great responsibility lies with those who interpret ancient wisdom to ensure it is done responsibly and without distortion or exploitation. When and where there is evidence of benefit, forms of what is offered, including counselling and advice, may either be prescribed for those with requirements that can be addressed and/or purchased in the marketplace. In such circumstances, authoritative, balanced, responsible and respectful voices should be welcomed, attract a premium and be recognised and valued by society..

Thinking and Doing

Direction and being an effective director is about making things happen (Harvey-Jones, 1988). This requires both thinking and doing, excelling in each and getting an appropriate balance between the two (Coulson-Thomas, 2007). An acid test is the extent to which exposure to ancient wisdom and its analysis can contribute to this process. Could it encourage reflection and independent thought? Might it enable people to develop a sense of perspective and distinguish between the fundamental and lasting and the merely trivial and transient?

Unless one is living in a theocracy and/or where certain views have been incorporated into legal requirements, one may have a legitimate choice in terms of where to look for what purpose and what to accept or reject as relevant, and one's selection can vary according to circumstances. Some may be satisfied with a pick 'n mix approach while others may prefer to engage in a longer journey of exploration that might help to clear the mind of past assumptions and prejudices and enable them to view matters and events more clearly and objectively.

To cope with challenges ranging from fanatical terrorism to global warming we may need to both better understand what we are up against and change. For progress, innovation and scientific advance to occur we need to be both open minded and sceptical, prepared to challenge past views, reject inherited understanding and explore new possibilities (Kuhn, 1962). For business leaders and professionals, scepticism and avoidance of groupthink can be especially important when assessing certain situations (ACCA, 2017). Some views from the past are more evident than others simply because they attracted more powerful support and were adopted by more successful societies. The most relevant and potentially beneficial ancient wisdom may be more difficult to locate.

Many of our ancestors have also experienced uncertainty and witnessed climate change, revolution, mass exodus, famine, war, natural disasters and other traumatic events. Writings from such times that might give us a sense of proportion, instil courage, humility and tolerance and stress the unity of all humanity and the importance of our relationship with the natural world, rather than breed arrogance, division and exclusion and perpetuate the plundering of scarce resources and loss of biodiversity could be especially valuable. Seek and you *may* find.

References

ACCA (2017), *Banishing Bias? Audit, objectivity and the value of professional scepticism*, London, ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants)

Baker, Jeremy (1982), *Tolstoy's Bicycle, Who did what when?*, Glasgow, Panther Books

Bennis, Warren G. and Ward, Patricia (1997), *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*, Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley

Cardon, Melissa S (2008), Is passion contagious? The nature and experience of entrepreneurial passion, *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), pp 511–32

Carr-Saunders, Sir Alexander M and Wilson, Paul A (1933), *The Professions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

Catmull, Edwin E. "Ed" and Wallace, Amy (2014), *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*, London, Bantam Press

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (1992), *Transforming the Company*, *Bridging the Gap between Management Myth and Corporate Reality*, London, Kogan Page

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (1997), T*he Future of the Organisation, Achieving Excellence through Business Transformation*, London, Kogan Page

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2001), *Shaping Things to Come*, *Strategies for Creating Alternative Enterprises*, Dublin, Blackhall Publishing

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2007), *Developing Directors, A handbook for building a more effective boardroom team*, Peterborough, Policy Publications

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2012), *Transforming Public Services*, *A quicker and more affordable route to high performance public organisations*, Peterborough, Policy Publications

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2013), *Transforming Knowledge Management*, *A quicker and more affordable route to high performance organisations*, Peterborough, Policy Publications

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2014), Listening Leadership, *Effective Executive*, Vol. XVII No. 3, September, pp 11-18

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2015), Professionalism and management services, *Management Services*, Vol. 59 No. 3, Autumn, pp 11-15

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2017a), [Theme Paper for Global Convention on Corporate Ethics and Risk Management] *Corporate Ethics and Risk Management in an Uncertain World*, www.iodglobal.com, [http://www.iodglobal.com/images/risk-mgmt-2017/theme-paper.pdf], 6th January

Coulson-Thomas, Colin (2017b), Corporate Leadership for an Uncertain and Cynical Age, *Effective Executive*, Vol. XX No. 1, March, pp 15-32

Crews, Clyde Wayne Jr (2017), *Ten Thousand Commandments*, *An Annual Snapshot of the Federal Regulatory State*, Washington, DC, Competitive Enterprise Institute

Dawkins, Richard (2006), *The God Delusion*, London, Bantam Press

Duxbury, Tom (2012), Creativity: Linking Theory and Practice for Entrepreneurs, *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 2 (8), August, pp 10-15

Francis, Robert (Chairman) (2013), *The final report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry* (HC947), 6th February, London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO)

Friedman, Milton (1962), *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago, ILL., University of Chicago Press

Fry, Louis W (2016), Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership, *Abhinava Prabandhan*, Vol. 4 Issue 1, pp 109-136

Galbraith, John Kenneth (1958), *The Affluent Society*, Boston, MA. Houghton Mifflin

Grandey, A A (2003), When the show must go on: Surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery, *Academy of Management Journal*, 46 (1), pp 86-96

Harvey-Jones, Sir John (1988), *Making Things Happen*, London, Collins

Hochschild, Airlie (1983), *The Managed Heart*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press

Janis, Irving L. (1972), *Victims of Groupthink*, *A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin

Jones, Admiral Sir Philip (2017), Speech at the Passing-Out Parade at the Commando Training Centre, Royal Marines, Lympstone, 26 May

Kelley, Tom and Kelley, David (2012), Reclaim Your Creative Confidence, *Harvard Business Review*, December, 90 (12), pp 115-8 and 135

Kelley, Tom and Kelley, David (2013), *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, New York, NY, Crown Business

Kuhn, Thomas S. (1962), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press

May, Theresa (2016), *A country that works for everyone*, Speech to 2016 Conservative party conference, Symphony Hall, Manchester, 5th October

Megan, B (2002), Why Ethics & Compliance Programmes Can Fail, *Journal of Business Strategy*, 23 (6), pp 37-41

Mill, John Stuart (1859), *On Liberty*, London, John W Parker and Son

Palchoudhury, Arpita (2016), Productivity and Ethical Conduct: A Correlation, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 21 Issue 1, January pp 93-94

Parthasarathy, Swami (2014), *Vedanta for Modern World*, New Delhi, Sri SIIM Research Press

Popper, Sir Karl (1945), *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Volumes 1 and 2), London, Routledge

Pronin E, Lin DY and Ross L (2002), The Bias Blind Spot: Perceptions of Bias in Self Versus Others, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(3): 369–381

Reave, Laura (2016), Spiritual Values and Practices Related to Leadership Effectiveness, *Abhinava Prabandhan*, Vol. 4 Issue 1, pp 69-100

Roth, Bernard (2015), *The Achievement Habit: Stop Wishing, Start Doing, and Take Command of Your Life*, New York, NY, HarperBusiness

Snow, C P (1959), *The Two Cultures* [Rede Lecture], London, Cambridge University Press

Snow, C P (1961), *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, New York, Cambridge University Press

Stevens, B (2008), Corporate Ethical Codes: Effective Instruments for Informing Behaviour, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78, pp 601-609

Trevino, Linda K and Brown Michael E, (2004), Managing to be Ethical: Debunking Five Business Ethics Myths, *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp 69-81

Tyler, Tom, Dienhart, John and Thomas, Terry (2008), The Ethical Commitment to Compliance: Building Value-Based Cultures, *California Management Review*, 50 (2), pp 31-51

Webb, Sidney and Beatrice (1917), Special Supplement on Professional Associations, *New Statesman*, Vol. 9, April 21st and 28th, No. 211 and 212, p 4

Whyte, William H Jr (1952), Groupthink, *Fortune Magazine*, republished July 22nd, 2012: http://fortune.com/2012/07/22/groupthink-fortune-1952/

Williams, Joanna (2016), *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity, Confronting the Fear of Knowledge*, London, Palgrave MacMillan UK

Winston, B and Patterson, K (2006), An Integrative Definition of Leadership, *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1 (2), pp 6-66

Wooldridge, Adrian and Micklethwait, John (1996), *The Witch Doctors*, *Making Sense of the Management Gurus*, New York, NY., Crown Business

Zaehner, Robert Charles (1973), *The Bhagavad Gita, With a commentary based upon the original sources*, New York, NY, Galaxy Books/Oxford University Press USA

Publication*

Author

Prof (Dr) Colin Coulson-Thomas' academic roles include: Distinguished Professor at the Sri Sharada Institute of Indian Management-Research, Honorary Professor at the Aston-India Centre for Applied Research and Chancellor and Professorial Fellow at the School for the Creative Arts. He has held public appointments at local, regional and national level and professorial appointments in Europe, North and South America, Africa, the Middle East, India and China. In addition to directorships he leads the International Governance Initiative of the Order of St Lazarus, is Director-General, IOD India, UK and Europe, chair of United Learning's Risk and Audit Committee, and a member of the advisory boards of Bridges of Sports and the Arvind Foundation, and ACCA's Governance, Risk and Performance Global Forum. An experienced chairman of award winning companies and vision holder of successful transformation programmes, he is the author of over 60 books and reports. He was educated at the London School of Economics, the London Business School, UNISA and the Universities of Aston, Chicago and Southern California. He is a fellow of seven chartered bodies and obtained first place prizes in the final exams of three professions. Colin can be reached at colin@coulson-thomas.com