

## The S/spirit in our Leadership

### International Conference on Theology and Leadership

#### Lucerne, Switzerland, June 19-21, 2024

Traditionally, models of leadership were built on a command-and-control framework, which then developed into more relational models. However, there is a wide-spread sense that these frames of leadership no longer function very well in a postmodern, digital age. Currently, the field of leadership studies suffers “from theory proliferation, ‘theorria;’” (Antonakis et al. 2023). It produces an “overabundance of weak and untested theories” (Cronin, Stouten & van Knippenberg 2021), resulting from ever more fragmented “hyper-empiricism” (Ant 2021). Moreover, leadership theories turn out to have significant dark sides (Tourish 2013, Langberg 2020).

The search is on for a different narrative of leadership. Leadership theories need better theoretical, epistemological and empirical grounding (Alvesson et al. 2017). A fundamental question for more fruitful grounding is, “**What is the S/spirit of our leadership?**” This question queries the underlying motivations and powers that drive and structure our leadership. It is the question of the conference.

The topic is both religious (“Spirit”), and more general since the spirit of the age marks, even permeates our organizations and their leadership. Hence, “The S/spirit of Our Leadership” addresses a significant leadership dynamic that is intuitively sensed and implicitly influences many of today’s organizations.

This conference is proposed in the spirit of inclusion and reflection, deliberately questioning the spirit of growth, globalism, and power that often manifests itself in our leadership. So, what is the S/spirit of our leadership? How can we contribute to a wholesome S/spirit that infuses our leadership towards human flourishing and creative environmental care? This conference is designed for:

1. Understanding the S/spirit of the current theory and practice of leadership.
2. Exploring old and new approaches to S/spirit-filled leadership.
3. Discovering dimensions and qualities of S/spirit-filled leadership.
4. Experimenting with old and new practices of S/spirit-filled leadership

#### A Narrative of Spirit

The lakeshore of Luzern is dominated by the magnificent KKL, Kultur- und Kongresszentrum in Luzern. The expansive, black building sits at the lakeshore, next to the international railway station and the University of Luzern. French architect Jean Nouvel designed the building with “inclusion” and “reflection.” Inclusion because lake waters come into the building in two channels, while the wide flat roof embraces trains & buses, harbor & boats, park & nearby schools. Reflection is evident in the aluminum roofing which reflects the waves and the square’s swarming people, giving the building the appearance of lightness in spite of its massive size. It radiates a spirit of hospitality, creative experience, and world class ambitions.

The reflective ambitions of the KKL are the primary focus of the conference: to reflect on the S/spirit of our leadership. Leadership in the 1990s appears to have been in the grips of the romance of leadership. A period of political and economic optimism seemed to suggest that leaders were the key drivers of growth, the central agents for change. The technologies of production, with the narratives of command and control, were increasingly applied to various fields, leading to significant performances – but sometimes also with high risks associated with the darker sides of leadership (Tourish 2013).

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While older generations often approached technology and scientific management with an attitude of expectation, building lives and identities around work and the company as family, some of the younger generations are quickly disillusioned and connect only minimally, fearing the spirit of leadership in many of today's corporations. Still, many other of the younger generations carve out their own path, with the expectation of building a different world with a different spirit of leadership, such as the trend of "unbossing" our organizations (Resch 2019).

Yet, there is as yet no clear view as to what processes and practices of leadership are emerging. The leadership literature is replete with observations about the risks and changes in leadership, and with proposals to fix whatever problem is envisioned with yet another model of leadership (Antonakis et. al. 2023). Hence, there is a clear search for alternative conceptions of leadership besides the frameworks focusing on command and control, and even those offering a relational perspective.

## Conference Partners

Within the radiance of the KKL building (see textbox "narrative of spirit"), we are pleased to host an international, interdisciplinary conference on the S/spirit of our leadership.

"We" includes the Faculty of Theology of the University of Lucerne, and the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE) of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium).

As partners, we include interests from the domains of leadership studies, economics, and theology (of various confessions).

"We" will also include contributors and participants from various countries, disciplines, religious traditions, and fields of practice (business, education, church, etc.) – exhibiting the inclusion of the KKL.

## Submissions and Procedures

Scholars and practitioners are invited to submit an abstract for a paper, containing original research or a relevant case study. Abstracts should not exceed the limit of 500 words, and include a description of the research question, the research method, and expected results.

Deadline for submission is extended to **February 29, 2024**. You can expect to receive a response between end of February 2024 **and end of March 2024** at the latest. Abstracts can be submitted for review as PDF using [EasyChair-ICTL2024](#). Authors of accepted abstracts are kindly invited to submit a full paper after the conference. Submitted papers will undergo a double-blind peer review process. Planned deadline for full submissions is August 31, 2024.

## Accommodation

The city of Lucerne offers a beautiful conference venue, located directly at the clear blue waters of Lake Lucerne, embedded in the scenic surroundings of the Swiss alps. We kindly advise conference participants to book a hotel room early. The following hotels have offered rooms and rates (as long as stock lasts) for conference participants. Promo codes will be made available upon conference registration:

Hotel Alpha ([www.hotelalpha.ch](http://www.hotelalpha.ch)), Hotel Continental Park ([www.continental.ch](http://www.continental.ch)), Hotel Waldstätterhof ([www.hotel-waldstaetterhof.ch](http://www.hotel-waldstaetterhof.ch)), Hotel Wilden Mann ([www.wilden-mann.ch](http://www.wilden-mann.ch)), Hotel Cascada ([www.cascada.ch](http://www.cascada.ch)).

Other hotels of various categories and more information regarding your stay can be found on the official website of the city of Lucerne ([www.luzern.com](http://www.luzern.com)). Please plan to be on location by 4pm on June 19, 2024, for the early parts of the program that evening. The conference will finish by 5pm on June 21, 2024.

Please also visit the official conference and conference partner websites for contact information, updates and further information ([www.unilu.ch/ICTL2024](http://www.unilu.ch/ICTL2024) and [www.etf-ilse.org/event/conference-the-s-spirit-in-our-leadership/](http://www.etf-ilse.org/event/conference-the-s-spirit-in-our-leadership/)).

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