**Faith, *Theoria* and OMT:**

**A Christian and a Buddhist walk into a business school …**

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**Abstract**

Although there is considerable agreement that mainstream organization and management theory (OMT) has been undergirded by religious faith and beliefs, we nevertheless lack a well-developed understanding of how contemporary scholars’ faiths may serve to inform OMT. In this paper we differentiate between faith and belief, describe the idea of Organization and Management *Theoria* (OM*Tia*), and then develop a process model that describes how faith informs OM*Tia* which in turn informs OMT. The paper presents two illustrative first-person accounts of the process model in practice, one from a Buddhist perspective and the other from a Christian perspective. Implications for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Faith, theoria, sustainability, temporality, iron cage, Buddhist, Christian, mindfulness, ethics

The study of how management has been influenced by religious faith and beliefs has a long and well-known history (e.g., Weber, 1958), and interest in this field has been rekindled in the past few decades (e.g., Tracey, 2012). Even so, for a variety of reasons, contemporary management scholars seem reluctant to explicitly examine and describe how their own faith experiences have helped to inform their contributions to organization and management theory (OMT). Our goal in this paper is to develop and present a conceptual framework and model to describe how faith can influence OMT, to draw from our own research to illustrate the model in practice, and to identify benefits and describe ways to overcome dangers associated with developing OMT that builds on faith-based insights.

For over a century scholars have studied how organization and management theory (OMT) has been influenced and underpinned by religious faith and beliefs. Certainly the most influential work comes from Max Weber, widely considered to be the father of organization theory (e.g., Wren & Bedeian, 2009). In the best known of his writings, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Weber (1958, orig. 1903) describes how OMT has been captured in a materialistic-individualistic “iron cage” (Dyck & Schroeder, 2005). Weber argues that this materialistic-individualistic paradigm had initially been grounded in Protestant religious teachings that already had been fully secularized by the time he was writing. The two key characteristics associated with the iron cage are its emphasis on: 1) materialism (consistent with the Protestant ethic idea that the accumulation of wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, not a sign of greed), and 2) individualism (consistent with the Protestant ethic idea of personal salvation, not salvation via the larger church body). There is widespread agreement that mainstream OMT is underpinned by this long-since secularized religious Protestant ethic (e.g., Dyck, 2013; Golembiewski, 1989; Herman, 1997; Jackall, 1988; Naughton & Bausch, 1994; Novak, 1996; Pattison, 1997; Pfeffer, 1982). Even so, these hallmarks of the Protestant ethic are often treated as an objective, uncontestable and morally neutral reality (e.g., Roberts, 2002).

The past decades have seen a renewed and growing interest in the relationship between religious factors and OMT, evident in the formation of the “Management, Spirituality and Religion” group within the Academy of Management (1999), and in the launch of publications such as the *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* (2004), the *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics* (2010), and the *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* (2010). A recent comprehensive review of leading management journals found 86 articles where religious arguments played an important role (Tracey, 2012), and a review of a larger set of secular management journals found 83 articles that had a strong focus on implications for management vis-à-vis the world’s leading 5 religions (Dyck, 2014).

Such developments bode well for management scholars interested in how their faith informs their OMT. One study found that over 80% of professors in the U.S. self-identify as spiritual persons, and that 60% of business professors believe that faculty members’ spiritual dimensions should have a place in their academic work (Astin et al., 2006). Even so, for several understandable reasons, there has been very little research on how the faith of OMT scholars actually informs OMT (Peltonen, 2017; Silfe & Whoolery, 2006). First, such research goes against the idea that OMT scholars are objective social scientists. However, this ideal of objectivity is much-contested, with scholars noting that our knowledge about objectivity reality is subjectively constructed (e.g., Astley, 1985; see also Gergen, 1982), and that our understanding of the objective world is shaped by the socially-constructed ideas and language that we use (Nord, Lawrence, Hardy & Clegg, 2006).

Second, research on how faith informs OMT may be scarce because it can be pretentious and dangerous for people to suggest that they have a message from the divine or sacred. Indeed, the past and present provide ample examples of people who have abused that claim and thereby contributed to great harm. However, there is also danger in deliberately failing to discern the sacred in what we do, in refusing to consider the message of the timeless cosmic truths and relationships that shape us. Moreover, given that a large majority of humankind self-identifies as religious or engages in spiritual practices (Yang, 2016), it seems disingenuous to ignore faith-based insights altogether when developing OMT.

Ironically, by failing to explicitly consider how their faith influences OMT, OMT scholars are implicitly perpetuating the religion-based (but long-since secularized) assumptions that currently underpin mainstream OMT, thereby keeping us trapped in Weber’s iron cage. And this is of some consequence because, as Weber (1958, p. 182) famously foretold over a century ago, even though the materialistic-individualistic assumptions underpinning the mainstream paradigm would contribute to unprecedented financial prosperity, it was not sustainable and would eventually fail due to social and ecological dysfunction: “Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart: this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.”

Although often over-looked, Weber concludes his book by pointing to a possible (faith-based) key for escaping the iron cage. In particular, although himself agnostic, Weber speculates that escape from the iron cage might come via new “prophets,” that is, via people who have a message from the divine (from the Greek word *prophatas*, meaning interpreter, especially as inspired by the gods). We will use the term *theoria* to describe such insights inspired by the sacred. *Theoria* is an ancient idea related to “theory” which can be explicitly inspired by the gods.

Our goal in this paper is both bold and modest. It is bold because we dare to present a conceptual framework that draws from the literature and from our own experience to describe how our faith has shaped our OMT. We do this with considerable trepidation, aware that we may come across as holier-than-thou or that it may be seen to somehow compromise our scholarly integrity. However, once readers are familiar with our framework, it is our hope that not only will these concerns be allayed, but more importantly, that it will help and encourage readers themselves to reflect more deeply and deliberately about how their own faith influences their OMT.

It is modest because we expect that the framework itself will make intuitive sense for most readers. The vast majority of the people in the world consider themselves to be spiritual and at some level engage naturally in the general process model we develop. Our hope is that by explicitly specifying the concepts in the model, and by providing academic rigor and legitimacy, we will be able to enhance people doing what already comes naturally to them.

The paper proceeds in three parts. First, we develop the basic conceptual framework and process model that guides our discussion about how faith can inform OMT. Second, we demonstrate the face validity of our conceptual framework, elaborate on its components, and illustrate its merits for future research by providing two first-person accounts of our framework in practice from two different faith traditions. Finally, we discuss implications of our paper.

**Faith, *theoria*, and OMT**

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework we will use to describe the relationship between faith and OMT. This process model is based on the literature and grounded in our own personal experience as scholars in developing OMT informed by our faiths (in our case, based on Buddhist and Christian heritages), and was developed while working on this paper. Although it is helpful to think of the process model as moving in three phases from the left-hand to the right-hand side—and this is how we will present it—we are quick to point out that each of the components in the model can be seen as connected via two-headed arrows to the other components, thus indicating their inter-relatedness and the complexity of the model.

-- insert Figure 1 about here --

**Phase 1: Faith (versus belief)**

First, in our framework the idea of “faith” focuses on the relationship or sense of interconnectedness people experience with the sacred/others/nature, whereas “beliefs” focus on articulated religious tenets, theologies or teachings. For example, faith places greater attention on our relationship with the divine rather than on doctrinal beliefs about the divine (e.g., Enns, 2016). Most previous research that examines the influence of religion on OMT has had a much greater focus on beliefs (e.g., theology, sacred writing) rather than on faith *per se* (e.g., Dyck, 2014; Tracey, 2012). Such research has shown that religious beliefs have had an enormous impact on OMT (e.g., Dyck, forthcoming; Herman, 1997; Jackall, 1988; Naughton & Bausch, 1994; Novak, 1996; Sørensen, Spoelstra, Höpfl, & Critchley, 2012), though this impact has been inconsistent within and across religions over time (Dyck, 2014; Dyck & Wiebe, 2012).

Within the Christian tradition, the tension between faith and belief is related to how one defines the biblical Greek noun *pistis* and its corresponding verb form *pisteuein.* The noun *pistis* is usually translated as faith, and in its first century context *pistis* described the *relationship* with God and the community (e.g., Horrell, 2016; Morgan, 2015). Because the English noun “faith” does not have a corresponding verb (e.g., we do not talk about “to faith” or “faith-ing”), biblical interpreters have translated the verb *pisteuein* as “to believe” and, over time, (wrongly) given it an emphasis on assenting to specific facts and doctrine (e.g., formal theology). In short, our model is consistent with those who argue that “it is time to retrieve the early Christian usage of faith as comprehensive trust, and Christianity as a way of life not a system of beliefs. At root … faith is a relationship, not an opinion” (Cox, 2017, p. 80). Such a relational understanding of biblical faith is also consistent with its usage and understanding in the Hebrew scriptures.

Faith is also seen in a relational way within the Buddhist tradition, with an emphasis on a troika of trusting relationships expressed in taking refuge in the “three jewels.” The first aspirational commitment is to trust that we can become awakened to the true nature of reality that frees sentient beings from the sufferings of life and death, just as the Buddha did. Second is trust in the truths embedded within sacred scriptures (*Dharma*), and third is trust in the spiritual community (*Sangha*). *Saddha* is the closest term for faith in Buddhism, but its meaning is closer to notions of trust, confidence and conviction (Catherine, 2011). Faith is essential for spiritual awakening, and developing faith is a means to settling and purifying the mind. One develops faith by thoroughly examining and testing the doctrinal teachings and gaining deeper conviction in the practices through first-hand knowledge and experience. In Classical Buddhist teachings faith arises and deepens via experience, intuition and intelligence/reason. In the Kalama Sutta the Buddha emphasizes a “come see for yourself” (*ehipassiko*) pragmatism towards the development of faith (Thera, 1994).

In sum, taken together both co-authors share a relational understanding of faith which, in terms of the larger spirituality and management literature, is in some ways related to Liu and Roberston’s (2011) understanding of spirituality as a sense of inter-connectedness with the divine, others and nature. In the classic sociology literature, our relationship-based understanding of faith is related to what Max Weber (1958, p. 233) refers to as “religious experience,” which he considers to be “of the greatest practical importance.” Weber’s emphasis on its practical importance is striking because he recognizes that religious experience may seem irrational and, in its deepest state, is incommunicable in terms of language and concepts: “every religious experience loses some of its content in the attempt of rational formulation, the further the conceptual formulation goes, the more so.” We agree with Weber regarding the difficulty of expressing faith in words, so in order for us to describe how faith can influence OMT, it is helpful to introduce an intermediate concept called *theoria*.

**Phase 2: *Theoria***

We accept Weber’s argument that it is virtually impossible to translate faith (e.g., on-going relational “religious experience”) directly into theory, but even so we have experienced that it is entirely possible to move from faith to (pre-theoretical) *theoria.* In particular, as depicted in Figure 1, the conceptual framework uses the idea of Organization and Management *Theoria* (OM*Tia*) as a bridging concept between faith and OMT.

Unlike the secular idea of theory, *theoria* has an explicit openness to knowledge that comes via contemplatively participating in the realm of the divine or, in the case of Buddhism, the unknown (Case, Simpson, & French, 2012; Roochnik, 2009, pp. 75 and 81).[[1]](#footnote-1) *Theoria* and theory are related etymologically, with the beginning of both words literally referring to the divine (i.e., *theo*, also related to theology and to Zeus). However this central emphasis on the divine is typically expunged from the contemporary understanding of management theory (e.g., Kim, McCalman, & Fisher, 2012; Neubert, this issue), and replaced with an emphasis on *ratio* (e.g., reason, logic, drawing conclusions based on defining, observing and measuring empirical phenomenon) that has little room for *intellectus* (a more receptive activity where the soul is given time to conceive that which it sees) (Case et al., 2012). In contrast, from antiquity through to the Middle Ages, “knowing” meant combining both *ratio* and *intellectus* (which refers to the capacity to engage in *simplex intuitus*, which has been described as a sense of vision or seeing truth, akin to an eye seeing a landscape; Brient, 2001). Doing away with *theoria* has contributed to losing a sense of “situated connectedness that is beyond words, conception and seeing,” and thereby we have lost our connection to a sense of meaning that is grounded in experiencing the divine (Case et al., 2012).

Aspects of our own experience are eloquently described by Albert Einstein who, though himself agnostic, essentially describes how the mystery associated with what he calls “true religiosity” (akin to what we call “faith”) is the key source of *theoria* and science:

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed. It was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds—it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity; in this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man. … *I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research*” (Einstein, 1982, pp. 11, 39; emphasis added here).

We use the term *theoria* to refer to pre-theoretical insights that arise from faith. These are the glimpses of larger cosmic mysteries and truths that may arise from being in relationship with the sacred, and which may be prompted via participating in spiritual disciplines such as meditation, mindfulness, communal study of sacred scriptures, and various forms of worship. Whereas experiencing such cosmic truths defies complete linguistic articulation (theory), they can be partially expressed via descriptions of, for example, compassion, altruistic love, and a sense of contentment whether in plenty or in want. Such *theoria* can subsequently inform theory-building in a variety of areas, including theology and OMT.

As shown in Figure 1, OM*Tia* refers specifically to pre-theoretical insights arising from faith that may have significant implications for OMT. Moreover, standing on the shoulders of Weber and a host of others (e.g., Dyck & Schroeder, 2005; Dyck & Weber, 2006; Hamel, 2009; MacIntyre, 1981, p. 263; Sørensen et al., 2012, p. 272), we speculate that OM*Tia* has particular potential to facilitate escape from dysfunctional elements associated with conventional OMT’s materialistic-individualistic iron cage. Even so, because of the secularized nature of our field, studies of OM*Tia* are rare.

**Phase 3: Organization and Management Theory**

Etymologically-speaking it should be counter-intuitive to argue that faith is *not* relevant for organization and management theory. However, in practice the idea of “theo” (god) in theo-ry has been largely forgotten, especially since the Enlightenment. The contemporary secularized understanding of theory has explicitly rejected a place for the divine (see Miller, this issue; see also Sandelands, 2003). Instead we might say that the modern scientific method, built on a myth of objectivity and value-neutrality, has become the “god/theo” of our theories (Bauer, 1994).

Mainstream OMT is typically presented as developing via some variation of the process described in the bottom half of Figure 1. The first phase involves people’s experiences in the world, which can range from everyday activities at work to observations in social science experiments. These experiences sometimes lead to the second phase, namely the pre-theoretical “ahas” or insights, many of which get lost and forgotten in the hustle and bustle of life. In the third phase, a subset of these pre-theoretical insights are processed more fully, perhaps by a community of people (e.g., scholars), and some eventually take their place in OMT and in social structures and systems. Finally, the feedback loops in Figure 1 connect OMT back to experience (akin to structuration theory, Giddens, 1979).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Note that, as depicted in Figure 1, the *secular* process of developing OMT (i.e., the bottom part of Figure) by definition does not access the faith-based process (top part of Figure). To us this seems unnecessarily constraining, and we concur with Weber’s contention that religious experience and OM*Tia* can (and should) provide a valuable source of insight for developing OMT, perhaps especially for developing OMT that challenges the iron cage. Our view is consistent with the “theological turn” (e.g., Dyck, 2014; Harrington, 2007; Slife & Whoolery, 2006; Simmons, 2008) taking place in the larger literature which suggests that, even for atheists or agnostics like Weber and Einstein, it makes sense to attend to OM*Tia* not only because it is phenomenologically important to many people and thus worthy of study, but primarily because it may give us access to knowledge about concepts like altruism that have proven challenging to integrate into OMT (e.g., Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005).

Finally, note that the three-phase process model depicted in Figure 1 overlaps considerably with theory in our faith traditions and in the larger OMT literature. First, the three phase process described in Figure 1 is not unlike a three-phase Buddhist understanding that emphasizes the on-going inter-relationship between experience, intuition (*theoria*), and eventually reason (theory). Similarly, the three-phase process in Figure 1 can also be seen to have some overlap with a biblical model where people’s experienced relationships with the sacred/nature/others informs their emerging worldviews (akin to *theoria*) and subsequent structures and systems (akin to theory) (Dyck, 2013). Finally, this process also has striking similarities to the four phase organizational learning process that moves from: 1) tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer (which may capture some of the inexpressible mystery associated with faith-based relationships) to 2) tacit-to-explicit knowledge transfer (akin to *theoria* and the expression of pre-theoretical knowledge) to 3) explicit-to-explicit knowledge transfer (akin to incorporating *theoria* or pre-theoretical knowledge into theory), and then 4) to explicit-to-tacit knowledge transfer (e.g., the feedback loop where OMT and theology influence subsequent religious experience) (e.g., Nonaka, 1995; see also Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999).

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In this section we will use the process model to describe how we have experienced the transition from faith to OM*Tia* to OMT in our own work. In this way we seek to provide a richer understanding of the link between these three elements, and an example of, and face validity for, the framework in practice. Note that our methodological approach, based on critical self-reflection, is entirely consistent with the literature in this area. For example, for Aristotle, *theoria* can be seen as the cognitive understanding that arises from critically reflecting on one’s faith-based experiences (Nielsen, 2016). Methodologically, to study faith requires accepting that at least some knowledge is acquired subjectively in ways that defy a traditional understanding of objectivity, that spiritual insights may defy the ability to be operationalized and observed by the five senses, and that faith-based knowledge may defy existing understandings of reason (*ratio*) (Silfe & Whoolery, 2006; Steingard, 2005; Tackney et al., 2017). However, even though there may be widespread agreement, for example, that objectivity is impossible to achieve (Astley, 1985), and even though the case for the appropriateness of non-traditional methods to study faith have been well articulated (and increasingly well-accepted), studies like ours that examine faith-based knowledge are nevertheless very rare (Peltonen, 2017; Silfe & Whoolery, 2006).

Perhaps Jean Bartunek (2003, 2006, 2007) is the best-known leading management scholar who has reflected on how her faith-based experiences have informed her contributions to OMT. For example, Bartunek (2006, p. 1882), a Catholic sister, describes an experience she had in 1976 while praying about a particular scripture passage. The passage described how “In the beginning” the Word (God) was abstract and distant, but then “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” For her this faith-based experience resulted in what was a career-informing insight (what we might call *theoria*): “There didn't have to be a separation between theory [distant Word] and practice [Word made flesh] even ‘divinely’; they could be part of each other in some way, and my academic life could be integrated with my religious life” (Bartunek, 2006, pp. 1882-1183). She goes on to say that: “My intellectual contributions are integrally bound up with my life practice, with ongoing tensions, dualities and dialectical processes that often have to do with theory and practice, with my academic and religious life” (Bartunek, 2006, p. 1891). Years later, in her keynote address as President of the Academy of Management (Bartunek, 2003), she talked about insights she has gleaned from her dreams: “When I gave the speech, I felt as if I was having a chance to share my religious experience with the Academy of Management, even if only implicitly” (Bartunek, 2006, p. 1891).

**Phase 1: Experiencing faith**

Faith is in many ways a very personal and intimate experience, while at the same time being universal and inclusive. We have found that our most profound faith-based religious experiences are often characterized by a paradoxical simultaneous deep understanding of “self” coupled with a complete letting go of “self.” We feel it is valuable to describe this “religious experience” that we call “faith”—this deep sense of relationship or interconnectedness with the divine/other/nature—in the first-person, but recognize inherent shortcomings of doing so.

**Bruno:** It is impossible to express the depths of one’s faith life in words—never mind in a page or less—but I do want to highlight four personal observations. First, I do not think it is unusual that I have a faith life; my sense is that everyone has a faith life, whether they call it that or not. Everyone has moments where they feel especially connected to others/nature/divine. Sometimes these moments come when they are most expected (e.g., when seeing a particularly beautiful scenic view, or when dealing with a momentous life event), but other times they come totally unexpectedly in the banality of everyday life.

Second, I suspect that almost everyone has a hunger for these sorts of faith experiences, these times of connectedness to something that transcends them. However, there is also a sense of uncertainty that comes with leaving one’s comfort zone of things you can experience with your five senses, of opening yourself up to something “other” that you cannot control.

Third, I think that specific practices and worldviews can facilitate faith. For myself, I grew up in a religious household where the idea of faith was taken for granted and could be talked about relatively openly and effortlessly, and I attended a church where it was assumed that faith should influence everyday life (e.g., faith should influence OMT). As a young adult I read Richard Foster’s (1978) *Celebration of Discipline*—an inter-faith collection of “best practices” of twelve spiritual disciplines—which has shaped and enhanced my faith life ever since. I have experimented with a variety of spiritual disciplines (e.g., meditation, prayer, fasting), and have adapted the ones that I find most effective. At present some of my favorite practices include variations of meditation and prayer, and I often feel most connected to others/nature/divine when I am in nature. Music has also become of increasing importance, as has being attuned to the rhythm of my breathing (especially when I am jogging).

Finally, my faith life has grown along with my understanding of the divine. While I still feel most comfortable with a quasi-anthropocentric understanding of God in my prayer life, I have become increasingly happy to let God out of “boxes” that are defined by unnecessarily limiting dogmatic beliefs—I find joy in discovering that God is much bigger and different than we can ever know. This dimension was informed and enhanced by working on my book *Management and the Gospel* where I use a first-century religious and socio-economic lens to examine implications for OMT embedded in writings about Jesus (Dyck, 2013).

**Ron:** For more than thirty-five years my faith life has been heavily influenced by the writings of Tarthang Tulku (1977; 1987; 1995; 1997; 2016), a Tibetan Nyingma Buddhist teacher. The contemplative exercises from Tulku’s (1977) first book, *Time, Space and Knowledge: A New Vision of Reality* have been formative in altering my sense of embodiment in space and time, and how these fundamental facets of human experience could be challenged philosophically and experientially.

My faith life has matured through both meditation and study. Seeing the profound unity of existence and time is a new vision of reality where every being, object and event, and every moment or duration of time is experienced as a dynamic unity and manifestation of the whole universe. Another major influence on my faith was encountering the seminal writings by Dōgen, an eminent 13th century Japanese Zen master and founder of the Soto Zen school, which practices *zazen*, a rigorous meditative discipline of just sitting (*shikantanza*). I was fortunate to have been a student of a Japanese teacher trained in this lineage at the Cleveland Zen Center. One of the 96 chapters from Dōgen’s famous work, *The Shobogenzo*, “Uji” captured my attention and curiosity for a number of years (Abe, 1991; Luetchford, 2002; Wadell & Abe, 2002). Uji is roughly translated as “being-time,” which for Dōgen signifies that anything that happens *is* time. Time is the nature of existence. In this essay, Dōgen makes such statements as “Time is existence, and existence is time” and “You must see all things in this world as time” (Heine, 1983).

A particularly important aspect of my faith life over the last twenty years has revolved around contemplating and studying Buddhist writings which pertain to the doctrines of emptiness and dependent origination, drawing particularly from the Buddhist philosopher and dialectician Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka school, as well as the earlier Perfection of Wisdom sutras. His book, *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā)*, considered a radical revolutionary movement of Mahayana Buddhism in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, argues that things, subjects, objects, sentient beings, and all phenomena in the universe lack an intrinsic nature and independent existence – all are empty of a “self-nature” or being (Nagarjuna, 1995). This also pertains to such conventional perceptions of causation, movement, change and personal identity. What appears to us as a distinct, solid, permanent and independent entities (including our own sense of self), are conventionally real, but their true ultimate nature is empty—an ever-shifting composite array of interdependent causes and conditions. The fruition of insight from seeing the emptiness of self-nature—what Buddhists have often referred to as the deathless, the unborn, the uncreated, or the unconditioned —is wisdom and compassion. In other words, meditating on the emptiness of self-nature results in experiencing relational interconnectedness of the highest order (e.g., compassion).

**Phase 2: OM*Tia***

Our faith-based experiences have provided us with abundant OM*Tia,* insights and different ways of seeing and thinking about organizations and management. An overarching theme that characterizes our OM*Tia* is that things are more interconnected than mainstream OMT makes them seem to be. In particular, akin to Bartunek’s profound integration of theory and practice, our faiths give rise to OM*Tia* that collapses dualisms that characterize common OMT, such as the basic idea that two organizations are separate entities who compete with each other over scarce resources in order to maximize their profits. From our OM*Tia* perspective, the boundaries that “separate” organizations from each other are much more socially constructed than real, as are the boundaries that separate organizations from the “external” resources they use, as is the idea that money is somehow real and worth having as a primary focus.

Of course, this sense of interconnectedness between people/nature/divine is a hallmark spirituality (e.g., Liu & Roberston, 2011). In contrast, Western thinking has inherited from the Greeks a dualistic understanding that separates the spiritual from the physical, but such a dualism is not consistent with our faith experiences nor heritages. For example, consistent with the Old Testament and with the first-century Mediterranean world in which he lived, it is much more likely that Jesus had a holistic worldview where the spiritual and physical worlds interpenetrated each other. The same is true across the various Buddhist schools where the ultimate truth (emptiness) is realized in the relative world of multiplicity (form). In the famous Prajnaparimita Heart Sutra, this is expressed as “form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Form is no other than emptiness, and emptiness is no other than form.”

On this matter, we think that it is not a coincidence that in many languages and religions the word for “spirit”—which is also at the heart of inspired *theoria*—is the same as the word for “breath” or “wind” (e.g., the biblical word *pneuma,* and *prana* in Sanskrit). Consider this metaphor from the world of science (Suzuki, 2007). In order to stay alive, people breathe in oxygen, and each oxygen molecule in our bloodstream is an integral part of us. But several breaths ago that oxygen molecule may have been a part of our customer or a competitor, and several breaths from now it may be exhaled as carbon dioxide to become part of a tree in our community where it is photosynthesized. In this way that breathed oxygen molecule (“spirit”) connects each of us to the world around us.

Thus it may not come as a surprise that our OM*Tia* often challenges the materialistic-individualistic assumptions that characterize mainstream OMT, an observation that is entirely consistent with the related empirical literature. While we know of no studies that examine the idea of OM*Tia* per se, there is a small but robust body of empirical research that examines the relationship between managers’ level of engagement with faith practices (e.g., prayer, meditation and mindfulness) and their emphasis on materialism and individualism (Dyck, 2014). For example, Kernochan, McCormick, and White (2007, p. 65) provide first-hand accounts describing how practicing three key Buddhist spiritual disciplines—mindfulness, compassion, and insight into no-self—has effected them as management instructors and prompted questions that challenge mainstream OMT, such as: “which is more important, self-interest or the greater good, me or we, short-term gain or concern for future generations.” Similarly, several studies within the Christian tradition that examine MBA students and recent graduates find a correlation between higher levels of practicing spiritual disciplines and lower levels of materialism and individualism (Agle & Van Buren, 1999; Dyck & Weber, 2006; Wong, 2008). Finally, Senger (1970) uses a sample of managers from a variety of religions and found that greater religiosity (e.g., worship) was associated with less emphasis on materialism and individualism, and with higher performance ratings from their superiors.

**Ron:** Early in my career, as an outgrowth of my faith, I began to see clearly how our ways of knowing are correlative to our ways of being embodied in space and time. A more primordial way of knowing—a nondual wisdom—was available that is not predicated on or limited by rigidified dualisms. These insights inspired me to question and challenge Western ways of knowing that are predicated on Cartesian dualism and its concomitant anthropocentric worldview—ways of knowing that enforce a dualism between subject and objects. Meditative practice showed me that such dualisms were rooted in a very restricted human embodiment (Purser, 1997). In other words, I had the insight that the way that we are embodied in space and time reflects the way we know. Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy would consider the view of organizations as autonomous entities that exist apart from (and in some cases, in opposition to) the environment to be delusional and a form of collective ignorance. The “organization”, the “self”, the “environment” –all these terms are but summary abstractions, or reifications, of phenomena and forms which take shape in space and transition through time. These OM*Tia* insights regarding the human-nature dualism influenced my theorizing of the anthropocentric paradigm as it manifested in OMT, as well as the formation of an egocentric orientation (Purser et al., 1995). Moreover, I intuited that the shift from an anthropocentric to a sustainable ecocentric organizational paradigm would also be contingent on deep personal change and collective forms of mindfulness, an idea is now receiving serious consideration among sustainability theorists (Doran, 2009; 2017).

In addition, via meditative exercises and incisive critique, my faith led to OM*Tia* that helps to understand and hints at ways to address the increasing temporal alienation of our modern lives (Purser, 2000). The time compression of postmodernity, especially with the proliferation of new digital technologies, has intensified the phenomenological sense that time is merely a linear succession of impoverished present moments (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1990; Hassan & Purser, 2007). The accelerated temporal momentum of our 24/7 network society has contributed to increased levels of corporate stress and to an epidemic of employee disengagement (Davies, 2015; Hassan & Purser, 2007). My OM*Tia* calls for the development of OMT that emancipates organizational members from temporal alienation, reimagining time as a force for personal and collective liberation.

**Bruno**: When I consider the OM*Tia* my faith life has given rise to, it has not been to help organizations and managers maximize profits or sell more goods or even increase their market share. Rather, when I feel most closely to connected to others/nature/divine, I feel my greatest desire to help OMT escape the instrumental materialistic-individualistic iron cage (Weber, 1958). My OM*Tia* is inclined towards helping organizations and managers to create and provide meaningful work, to find ways that include marginalized people and revel in experiencing the vitality of living in a diverse community, to reinvent socio-economic structures that enable everyone to take care of families and loved ones, and to reduce negative and enhance positive socio-ecological externalities associated with business. I celebrate glimpses of such OM*Tia* in the world around me, and at the same time I am often pained by the culture of consumerism, and by the blind pursuit of profits and GDP, and by how the self-fulfilling prophecies embedded in mainstream OMT often result in people being socialized to become evermore materialistic and individualistic, and less compassionate and caring (e.g., Arieli, Sagiv, & Cohen-Shalen, 2016; Ferraro et al., 2005).

Although some colleagues have told me that insights related to my OM*Tia* are quite unusual in a business school, part of me finds that hard to believe. I think many of us—whether religious or not—realize the hollowness of maximizing profits and of helping organizations to sell more stuff. I think that most of us have an inner longing to help organizations to provide more meaningful jobs, to help the poor and marginalized and differently-abled, and to take better care of the environment. But … But what? Why is such OM*Tia* not more evident in OMT? Have we been so transfixed by the iron cage that we feel helpless to escape? I don’t know the answer. Perhaps people’s likelihood to integrate such OM*Tia* into OMT is partly related to factors such as how much time they spend cultivating an awareness of their interconnectedness with others/nature/divine, the degree to which their faith serves as the lens through which they view the world, how deliberately they reflect upon their OM*Tia*, and whether they are part of a like-minded community seeking to integrate OM*Tia* into OMT. These are questions for future research.

**Phase 3: Organization and Management Theory**

In working on this paper, we were surprised by the common themes evident in our research streams when we compared our OM*Tia* and how we have translated it into contributions to OMT. Here we will focus on three overlapping themes that illustrate how our OM*Tia* has influenced our contributions to OMT: sustainability, time, and the instrumentalization of faith.

**Theme #1: Sustainability and three generic approaches to OMT.** Our first example highlights the parallels between: a) Ron’s earliest major contribution to OMT, an article in *Academy of Management Review* that essentially lays out the foundation for three generic approaches to OMT (Purser, Park, & Montuori, 1995), and b) Bruno’s current major effort to contribute to OMT, a management textbook that basically spells out three generic approaches to management (Dyck, Caza, & Starke, 2017). Ron’s first approach describes the anthropocentric and dualistic human-nature assumptions underpinning business-as-usual, similar to what Bruno and his colleagues call Financial Bottom Line (FBL) management. This approach is consistent with mainstream OMT’s anthropocentric dualistic egocentric worldview, where organizations use social and natural resources (externalities) to create value and maximize profits for humankind.

Ron’s second approach is aligned with the mainstream “greening” of management associated with corporate environmentalism, which adds a concern for the natural environment but otherwise shares the anthropocentric and dualistic assumptions of business-as-usual. This is similar to Bruno’s description of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) management (e.g., Elkington, 1997), which aligns with the argument that reducing negative socio-ecological externalities can enhance profits (e.g., Hart, 1995), and that it pays to be green (e.g., Ambec & Lanoie, 2008).

In Ron’s third approach, informed by his OM*Tia,* mainstream OMT’s anthropocentric dualistic egocentric worldview is replaced by an ecocentric paradigm. This is akin to Bruno’s OM*Tia*-informed idea of Social and Ecological Thought (SET) management, which places primary emphasis on optimizing socio-ecological well-being while maintaining *viable* financial well-being (consistent with the idea that we only need “enough” money, and “enough” consumer goods). To be clear, we are not suggesting that faith-based OM*Tia* will necessarily give rise to this third approach to management, nor that this third approach requires OM*Tia*. We can only say that our faith-based OM*Tia* has inspired us to work on and develop this—what we believe to be valuable—contribution to the OMT (for other recent contributions to the OMT literature related to this this third approach, see Dyck & Greidanus, 2017, and Bell & Dyck, 2011).

**Theme #2: Time and OMT**. Drawing on OM*Tia* from his faith practices—influenced by meditating on Tulku’s (1977) “*Time, Space and Knowledge”* vision and Dōgen’s “Being-Time” essay—Ron has developed OMT that calls into question the mainstream view of organizational change events as flowing through time, where the self as an active and independent agent is in the foreground and time is relegated to the background (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2004; Purser & Petranker, 2005). He likens the traditional view to a “future perfect” understanding, where understanding the future is limited by the events and trajectory of the past, noting that this results in being at the mercy of time’s feverish pace and thus in a constant state of tension and dis-ease (Tulku, 1977, p. 128). In contrast, he likens his OM*Tia-*based OMT to a “future infinitive” understanding of time, where events are not merely flowing through time (as some abstract medium), but they *are* time. If this is the case, the whole linear temporal order may itself be just one possible way of knowing and being in time. In the “future infinitive” approach OMT managers are less reliant on and thus constrained by the past, and therefor more open and flexible in the face of the unknown. Rather than the future being conditioning by past projections, it is invented or improvised in ways that free managers to be more responsive to uncertainties (Purser & Petranker, 2005, p. 15; Tulku, 1995).

In Bruno’s research, the link to time is most clearly evident in his paper on Quantum Sustainable Organizing Theory (QSOT), which spells out implications for OMT based on quantum physics research on “entanglement,” an instantaneous connectedness across space that also questions the forward-moving linearity of time (Dyck & Greidanus, 2017). Somewhat akin to Ron’s ideas about the future infinitive vs. the future perfect, Bruno’s paper discusses ideas related to quantum “collapsible superpositionality,” which also point to embracing the irreducible uncertainty of the future and thereby allowing managers to be more open-minded and proactive. The ideas of entanglement and collapsible positionality lie at the heart of QSOT, a variation of OMT that is qualitatively different than conventional OMT.

**Theme #3: Instrumentalization of faith in OMT.** Perhaps because our faith experiences and our OM*Tia* have prompted us to develop OMT that transcends the materialistic-individualistic iron cage (Weber, 1958; for example, evident in our development of OMT based on ecocentrism and SET management), both of us take note when others draw on similar religious resources that we draw on and apply them in ways that support the mainstream OMT paradigm.

For example, based on his forty years of practice and study, Ron has developed a deep appreciation, gratitude and respect for the holistic understanding inherent in the Buddhist tradition. Thus, he views with some disdain the meteoric rise of the piecemeal secular “mindfulness revolution”—what he calls McMindfulness—which includes the commodification, branding and instrumentalization of mindfulness in the service of the materialistic-individualistic mainstream paradigm (Purser, Forbes, & Burke, 2016). Along with reviewing the ethical shortcomings of existing corporate mindfulness programs (Purser & Milillo, 2015), he takes issue with the popular definitions of mindfulness as merely paying attention to the present moment non-judgmentally as a technique for reducing stress and improving concentration (Purser, 2014), a view that obscures the role mindfulness plays as part of a holistic integrated path. When corporations and the U.S. military began introducing mindfulness programs as a method of performance enhancement (Gelles, 2012; Tan, 2012), Ron felt it was his moral duty to intervene. In 2013, Ron and David Loy published a blog article “Beyond McMindfulness” in the *Huffington Post* that called into question the efficacy, ethics and narrow interests of corporate mindfulness programs (Purser & Loy, 2013). To their surprise, it went viral and they found themselves in the middle of a heated debate over the virtues and vices of this latest corporate fad. In contrast to the popularized co-opted appropriation of mindfulness, a holistic understanding of mindfulness does much more than help to cope in stressful working situations and improve productivity; mindfulness provides a gateway to wisdom that can challenge and reform toxic organizational cultures, inhumane work environments and nefarious corporate practices. It points to OMT*ia* that supports the development of OMT characterized by right speech, right livelihood, right conduct, social harmony and compassion.

Bruno has done somewhat parallel research that describes, for example, how Christian interpretations about the meaning of salvation have changed over the past 2000 years—often in the direction of increasing the instrumental well-being of the powerful—and the effect that these changes have had on OMT over time (Dyck & Wiebe, 2012; see also Dyck, forthcoming). He has also reviewed the scholarly literature on the implications for OMT vis-à-vis the world’s five largest religions (Dyck, 2014), where he found that all eleven empirical studies that examine *faith*-based spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, meditation) challenge mainstream OMT, whereas only about half the 83 studies that focus on religious *beliefs* did so. Finally, in perhaps his most significant study, Bruno examined OMT-related teachings and experiences in the Gospel of Luke through a first century religious and socio-economic lens, and found it consistently supports the development of prophetic OMT where the primary emphasis is on developing goods and services producing organizations that minimize marginalization and optimize benefaction (Dyck, 2013).

**DISCUSSION**

Our paper presents a simple but long overdue conceptual framework and analysis that describes how faith and its OM*Tia* insights can contribute to the development of OMT. In our remaining discussion, we will highlight the importance and potential of explicitly including the role of faith in OMT development, consider ideas regarding how to facilitate the development of OM*Tia*, and offer some thoughts about discerning OM*Tia*. Although our discussion will focus on the faith🡪OM*Tia*🡪 OMT links in the model, we begin by noting that the framework can be also used to explore other linkages in the model, such as how OMT may inform (and may seek to co-opt) faith, or to examine differences in OM*Tia* versus secular pre-theoretical insights. In short, the framework has other linkages that may offer fruitful research opportunities.

**The importance and potential of explicitly including the role of faith in OMT development[[3]](#footnote-3)**

If Weber (1958, p. 233) is correct that faith is “of the greatest practical importance,” then OMT scholars would be wise to think more deeply about how faith influences OMT. Furthermore, if we accept that peoples’ understanding about how things work may be informed by or anchored in their faith—that is, their sense of relatedness to the divine, nature and others, regardless of religion or non-religion—then faith implicitly informs the way people formulate theory. This is made explicit in our model, and illustrated in our first-person accounts. In light of this, if we are to be honest organization scholars, we need to take our faith more seriously and become more explicit about how our faith, and the OM*Tia* it gives rise to, informs our OMT. This is clearly a departure from the scholarly training we have received to seek an objective, faith-agnostic (or perhaps, faith-blind) approach to theorizing. Rather, it requires scholars to reflect more deeply on their own faith and intellectual journey (see also Bartunek, 2007).

We expect that taking one’s faith and OM*Tia* into account will result in more complete theorizing, because being explicit about one’s faith in one’s own theorizing may lead to different assumptions about what makes for a complete theory. For example, it may broaden the scope of OMT via including OM*Tia* such as organizational compassion and altruism, and the interconnectedness among organizations and their members and the natural environment. Moreover, it may facilitate escaping Weber’s iron cage.

In sum, we encourage readers to use our framework and reflect on how their faith and OMT*ia* have influenced their OMT. Our own reflections on how our faith has influenced our OMT pointed to several themes we share in common, related to dualisms, sustainability, time, and the instrumentalization of faith. Future research examining how faith has influenced the OMT of other scholars may identify these and other common themes. In any case, our shared themes may serve as possible guideposts for others and for discovering new avenues of research.

**Facilitating OM*Tia***

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of our process model is the idea of OM*Tia*, which serves as a bridging concept between faith and OMT. In particular, our paper focuses on two relationships depicted in Figure 1: how faith informs OM*Tia*, and how OM*Tia* in turn informs OMT. We believe that OM*Tia* is a valuable source of insight for management scholars and practitioners generally, as well as for the development of OMT specifically, perhaps especially as it relates to escaping Weber’s materialistic-individualistic iron cage and the inherent limitations in OMT associated with the Financial Bottom Line and Triple Bottom Line approaches. In particular, because our model encourages faith to become an important starting point that informs OM*Tia,* it thereby enables management scholars to develop OMT that is in synch with their most fundamental experiences and relationships. This is very different than trying to integrate religious beliefs with (mainstream) OMT. Thus, because our model emphasizes OMT as an outcome, rather than viewing religious beliefs and institutions through the lens of (mainstream) OMT, our model may serve to reduce the temptation and tendency for religion to be coopted by the mainstream OMT paradigm (e.g., Purser & Loy, 2013).

Building on these observations, we are intrigued by possible pedagogical implications of our framework. There is a difference between bringing faith, versus bringing religious beliefs, into the management classroom and larger discourse. Rather than focus on religious beliefs and the contentious issues this can raise (e.g., Cash & Gray, 2000), a focus on faith and OM*Tia* may provide an appropriate and welcome means to address the expressed desires of both professors and students to explore issues that link faith to OMT. In addition to 60% of business professors indicating a desire to integrate their faith in their academic work, 80% of incoming college students have an interest in spirituality, with about half (48%) indicating that they believe it is ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ that their college encourage them to express their spirituality (though 62% of students indicate that professors never encourage such discussion) (Astin et al., 2005).

Finally, we encourage future research to examine how OM*Tia* can be facilitated. For example, researchers may want to examine whether there are particular (generic) faith-based spiritual disciplines that are especially well-suited to giving rise to *theoria* relevant for OMT and practice. Whereas much has been written about how to engage in faith-based spiritual practices written from a general religious perspectives (e.g., Foster, 1978), we call for more research that examines faith-based spiritual practices that are particularly relevant for management practitioners or scholars (perhaps along the lines of Adler & Delbecq, 2017). Related research could examine commonalities and differences in the content or nature of the OM*Tia* developed within different faith traditions and practices.

**Some thoughts regarding discernment**

Based on our experience, we encourage the practice of mutual discernment in the process of bringing faith-based insights into OMT and practice. We do not endorse that our model be used to develop normative or prescriptive OMT. Be especially wary of people who seek to impose OM*Tia* that has not been discussed and affirmed by others. Consistent with this, for example, Foster (1978) talks about the importance of spiritual mentors for practicing each of the twelve spiritual disciplines he describes, four of which are “corporate spiritual disciplines” that are practiced in community and can facilitate corporate organizational learning (Dyck & Wong, 2010).

In particular, both of us have found it helpful to work together with co-authors, some with a faith-based background and others not, when we work at drawing out implications of our OM*Tia* for OMT. Having co-authors from different faith and non-faith perspectives enhances our ability to integrate our OM*Tia* into OMT in several ways. It helps us to better understand our OM*Tia* and to become more aware of things we take for granted that others do not (and vice versa). It also enables us to sharpen our understanding of the contribution our OM*Tia* can make to OMT. Being part of a diverse group of others also helps to better understand the timeliness and value-added of OM*Tia* insights. For a more general discussion of the benefits of inter-faith dialogue, see Miller (this issue).

By way of illustration, working on this paper enabled us to develop the conceptual framework (Figure 1) that encompasses both of our faith traditions and our experiences. This required, for example, being sensitive to developing an understanding of OM*Tia* that includes both a theological and a non-theological faith tradition. We believe that, in so far as this framework has enabled us to better understand and present our own experiences, it may provide a helpful framework to inform future research and the further development of this literature. In this regard we value the collegial process as a variation of the sort of corporate discernment we call for. What our framework contributes to this process is the explicit inclusion of faith-based insights that complement and supplement the unnecessarily limiting “secular-only” sources for developing OMT (i.e., bottom half of Figure 1).

In conclusion, to us the explicit inclusion of faith and *theoria* represents a bold and long overdue contribution to the OMT literature, reflecting not only timeless sacred teachings and practice, but also Weber’s suggestion that faith (“religious experience”) is “of the greatest practical importance,” and others like Einstein who argue that faith (“true religiosity”) helps us become more attuned to “the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.” The inclusion of faith and *theoria* in our framework is also consistent with the “theological turn” in the larger literature, with our own experience and, we suspect, rings true to many people’s lived experience. We hope our model will liberate and encourage readers to embrace their own and others’ faith and OM*Tia* in the development of OMT going forward.

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**Figure 1: A conceptual framework and process model linking faith, *theoria* and OMT**

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1. Buddhism is non-theistic; rather than seeking union with the divine, Buddhism aims for an insight into the emptiness of all phenomena, an ineffable experience, the fruition of which is spiritual awakening. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is true for the bottom half as well as the top half of the Figure: as Weber described, although faith (religious experience) can and does give rise to new-and-different theory, faith is also very much shaped by existing theory and practice [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note that many ideas in this section were inspired by comments from the editor and reviewers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)