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NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

## **Negative Capability - Disambiguating The Concept**

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## **Negative Capability - Disambiguating The Concept**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to disambiguate the underexplored concept of Negative Capability, a term that has traveled to management from English literature. Coined by the poet Keats, NC is a way to reach the truth using one's sensations, imagination and intuition as against only reasoning and logic. We provide an understanding of the concept by going back to its roots in English literature. We discuss the elements involved in NC and the necessary conditions for NC. We also bring back the focus on the much neglected aspect of diligent indolence, which is the ground for NC. We discuss how one could develop NC and put forth implications of NC for organizations.

Key words: *Negative capability, Imagination, Truth, Aesthetics*

## NEGATIVE CAPABILITY- DISAMBIGUATING THE CONCEPT

*“Reason speaks in words alone, but love has a song” (Pieper, 1990)*

So deeply entrenched are we in the mechanistic newtonian way of living that our ability to experience beauty and feel the awe has been lost. Bombarded by mediocrity, our “ability to see is on the decline”. “Mired in a habit of solutions” (Wheatly, 1992, p.5) and governed by “concepts such as control, predictability, standardization” we live with the notion that “faster is better” (Senge et al., 2005, p.9). Our singular focus of the mechanical, linear mind has made us “blind” and we have become “obsessive servants of economics (O’Donohue, 2003, p.5), enslaved to the tangible (Chia and Holt, 2009). This in turn has made us formulaic (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013), has led to grandiosity and posturing (Alvesson, 2013) running after signifiers (Chia and Morgan, 1996). There is also a growing fundamentalism and intolerance, filling ourselves with predetermined conceptions and being single minded about it, deriving our identity solely from being able to defend it as “the” truth. Being in a “buzzing worker bee mode” (Whyte, 1994 as cited by Adler and Delbecq, 2017), where there is no sabbath only incessant business”, we no longer are able to perceive the visible reality “ as it is” (Pieper, 1990).

Understanding the need to balance this one sided thinking, scholars have discussed the need to go beyond separating things into parts and seeking more objective ways of perceiving the world (Wheatly, 1992) and to understand the deeper reality, “touching the core”. We have been called upon to “invest in the artistry of humanity” (Adler, 2011, p.208) and “invoke beauty” (O’Donohue, 2003). We have been dared to care and engage with the world (Adler and Hansen, 2012). A fervent plea has been made for feeling the intimacy of beauty and the immense possibilities by bringing back leisure for, it is in leisure that we can feel the beauty and see the possibilities (Thoreau, 1863). The entrance to beauty is through imagination where both empathy and mind can meet (O’Donohue, 2003) and lead us to our “spiritual capacity to perceive the visible reality as is” (Pieper, 1990 p.31) taking us to a human knowing that is “non-active, purely receptive seeing”. But how do we learn to do this? This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

We suggest that the idea of Keatsian negative capability (NC) could show us a way. NC has been described as the ability to stay in a place of doubt and uncertainty, resisting rational arguments, factualism and conceptual closure, and in a state of diligent indolence and passive receptivity move towards a knowing with the power of one’s imagination, sensations and intuition (Saggurthi and Thakur, 2016). NC has been discussed in the context of leadership (French et al., 2009, Simpson and French, 2006, Simpson et al., 2002, French et al., 2001), change management (French, 2001) strategy (Chia and Holt, 2009), economics (Bronk, 2009) and also for the development of philosopher managers (Chia and Morgan, 1996). NC has also been suggested for solving wicked problems (Grint, 2008) and wisdom (Nonaka et al., 2014). However, the different ways in which NC has been conceptualized (ref French, 2001, French and Simpson, 2017, French et al., 2009, Simpson and French, 2006, Chia and Morgan, 1996)

indicates that there is a need for a clear understanding of what NC is because we need a “common language” to “exchange ideas and build knowledge and for “empirical exploration” (Suddaby, 2010: 353) of the phenomenon which is a prerequisite for progress of science in general and organizational research and theory building in particular (Chimezie A. B. Osigweh, 1989).

In this paper we present a comprehensive discussion on NC and discuss its various elements by going back to its roots i.e., English literature because a concept is better defined in its place of origin (Chimezie A. B. Osigweh, 1989). We also take this cue from Stinchcombe who warned us not to forget one’s mothers and fathers as they are a source of the fundamental ideas, and are “touchstones of excellence” (1982) and Sartori’s (1984) recommendation that one begin by going to the historical depths for reconstructing a concept. A concept is grounded in the historical context and the “condition for emergence” because “concepts are words in their sites” which include the institutions (Somers, 1995,p.113). Also “we express what we mean (what we have in mind) by picking from within the ambit of our natural language the "right words"(Sartori, 1984, p.17) . This vocabulary that is used to express our thoughts embodies an overall way of perceiving and conceiving reality. And “if one took seriously the project of philosophical analysis, one would require a history of the words in their sites, in order to comprehend what the concept was.... One conducts analysis of the words in their sites in order to think and understand how we seem obliged to think in certain ways”(Somers, 1995, p.113). Therefore unpacking NC required us to go to its place of origin which is the analysis of Keats letters in English literature.

While presenting our definition and the key elements of NC we assume an analytical approach which is antithetical for a phrase from the romantic world of Keats, seemingly going against its grain. It is conceivable that in the process we have moved away from the mysterious quality and beauty of the curious phrase. But the process of translating beauty into science has its inevitable consequences. So tendering our unconditional apology to Keats for removing the romance and discussing the chemistry and defining it with “consecutive reason” (Bate, 1963, p.238) we still hope to present our readers with the flavor of NC.

### **Negative Capability: The Beginning**

*“I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean **Negative Capability**, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (KLI:193-4 as cited by Ou, 2009)*

Negative Capability a “condensed word” (Bate, 1963, p. 237). and a trope (Milnes, 2010) has been an elusive concept for me for a while. I seem to understand it. But when I go to express

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it I am suddenly caught and I miss my words never being able to explain it to my professor precisely what it means.

Keats said, one can start at any point – and any point would be a fruitful beginning to wander with it, muse upon it reflect on it and bring home to it and dream upon it (as cited by (as cited by Goellnicht, 1976). And so I sat with it (again) making Bate’s (2012) canonical exposition (Ou, 2009) the starting point and wandered around like a spider spinning its web inwards from its own airy citadel (Goellnicht, 1976 p. 20). As we both ( my professor and I) went circuiting and wandering in our spaces, I hoped we’d both greet each other at our journey’s end.

NC has been understood etymologically – where it was said that the root meaning of “capable” comes from the Latin word “capabilis”, which means the ability to hold (Todd, 2008). This root is similar to that of the word capacity, which comes from capax, means “containing” or “spacious”, “able to hold much” (quotes in original). The capacity of a container depends on its empty space (French 1999 as cited by French, 2000). Negative comes from negere, also a Latin word, which means to deny, symbolizing the nothingness i.e., the absence of something which facilitates the “capability” which is the quality of being able to become something or the ability to be affected by something (Gove, 1965, Murray , Bradey, Craigie & Onions, 1933 , Skeat 1935 cited by Stuart, 1996). Hopkins (1984 as cited by Stuart, 1996), who maintained that NC is an embodiment of paradox, explained that NC means capable of being negative, not in the pejorative sense, but rather the capability of being absent, having no identity, and assuming any identity to create something. To be able to allow “everything”, there must first be “nothing” (Castellano, 2010).

*My Professor agreed with this conception of NC. He defines NC as the ability to reach an empty mind.*

However, this was difficult for me to accept because NC in itself is a trope and a condensed phrase – a constellation of stars (Ou, 2009) with many interrelated elements and therefore perhaps not amenable to etymological meaning. It seemed too simple. Bate (1963) mentions that while the accent could be on capability, the word negative that Keats used is inadequate for what Keats wanted to convey. He tried the genealogical route, exploring the works of Keats that I tended to agree with.

So then how has NC been named? At the very beginning of the word/concept is its “naming” (Sartori, 1984, p. 17). According to him, “we express what we mean (what we have in mind) by picking from within the ambit of our natural language the “right words”(Sartori, 1984, p. 17). Why did Keats pick these words and what did he want to communicate?

Keats belonged to the romantic era, which came in as a reaction to the age of reasoning and enlightenment. He said and we quote:

. . . Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture;  
she is given In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine –

(Keats II:229–38 as cited by Ou, 2009, p.130)

Keats was upset that Newton reduced the rainbow to prismatic colours (Goellnicht, 1981, p.3) though it has been established that he is not anti-scientific or anti-intellectual. For Keats “This type of scientific analysis is the opposite of Negative Capability; it destroys the mystery of life and man’s imaginative apprehension of that mystery”, though at a later date he does realize that “ certain types of reason, knowledge, and philosophy are necessary if he is to write great poetry and if he is to serve mankind (Goellnicht, 1976, p. 73).

It was also the time when electricity was discovered with the terms positive and negative pole where the negative pole receives the impulses (Goellnicht, 1976). Having studied for a while to become a doctor, Keats was well versed with Chemistry. So it has been conjectured that because of his knowledge of electricity Keats might have thought of the phrase NC with the negative pole in mind and so could mean passive and receptive like the negative pole in order to apprehend the mystery and not be rational in one’s thinking (Goellnicht, 1981).

In his canonical exposition on NC Bate defined it as “the ability to loose one’s identity in something larger than self – a sympathetic openness to concrete reality without; imaginative identification, relishing it and understanding it” (Ou, 2009 p, 16). He discussed NC’s key elements as disinterestedness, sympathy, impersonality and dramatic poetry (Ou, 2009 p.16 ). He distinguished between logical element of intellect and instinctive and intuitive knowing – mediate knowing and immediate knowing. The only way to truth is through immediate and instinctual knowing – and not through logical deduction. He juxtaposed what a consecutive man’s way of knowing with how one reaches excellence and truth; the truth of imagination, sympathetic nature of a poet and the significance of intensity and the concrete in detail. Towards the end he narrowed NC down to “ acceptance of the particular”, a love of it and a trust in it with all its ‘half-knowledge’, of the ‘sense of Beauty’, of force, of intensity, that lies within that particular and is indeed its identity and its truth (Bate, 2012, p.66). Subsequently he dropped his accent on intuition (Ou, 2009) and defined NC as – “in a life of uncertainties and mysteries where no one formula can explain anything what is needed is an imaginative openness of mind , a heightened receptivity to reality in its full and diverse concreteness”. He qualified it by saying it however involved negating one’s ego (Bate, 1963, p.249). What does stand out is the focus on the imaginative perception of the world and the importance given to sympathetic identification through annulling self (Goellnicht, 1976, p. 3).

Maura defined NC as indolence and receptive passivity (Bate, 2012 p. Viii). This was also agreed by Goellnchit (1976) when he said NC is closely related to diligent indolence – involves a certain kind of passivity (p. 6). In this state, rational intellect is rested while mind and body receive impulses passively from the world around, without explaining them away. It is in this state of “delicious diligent indolence” that imagination can roam all realms of sensation and imaginative thought and dovetails into an insight – a kind of thinking that is considered unconscious or preconscious (Sperry as cited by Goellnchit, 1976, p. 21). Thus NC is the calm repose in which numerous imaginative speculations dovetailed without irritable reaching after fact and reasons. For him this is important for imaginative speculations to dovetail where mind is at rest and body takes over. He feels Bate has erroneously connected NC letter to Keat’s

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subsequent letter of Shakespeare's poetical character and therefore identified the ability to "identify sympathetically through imagination with the object he contemplates as NC" thus making the ability to annul self as NC (Goellnicht, 1976, p.2). NC letter does not make an reference to ideas concerning poet's lack of identity (Goellnicht, 1976).

Ou (2009) in her exposition of NC explains its central concept as - "To be negatively capable is to be open to the actual vastness and complexity of experience, and one cannot possess this openness unless one can abandon the comfortable enclosure of doctrinaire knowledge, safely guarding the self's identity, for a more truthful view of the world which is necessarily more disturbing or even agonizing for the self" (p.8). Over time, organically developing NC has become --- "opening the self to the multifarious otherness of the world and human beings "with the composite key elements of "imaginativeness, experiential and artistic intensity, submission of the self, sympathetic identification, the dramatic quality of the poet, disinterestedness, a neutral intellect tolerating diversity and contradiction, and a tragic vision of human experience, all of which are intricately related to one another" (Ou, 2009, p.8). Towards the end she concludes "Ultimately, negative capability is a way of being, conveying an attitude towards human experience"

As we explored, we realized that the difference in explaining NC has been the connections which each of these literary critics saw between Keats' earlier and subsequent letters and the route they took to explain NC. While Goellincht (1976) focused on the letter subsequent to NC and defined it as diligent indolence and passive receptivity, Bate(2012) focused on the poetical character of Shakespeare and Ou (2009) on King Lear.

Other authors who discussed NC described it as the "ability intuitively to comprehend and embrace the mists of 'half-knowledge' but also to exist in a negative, neutral or receptive state that is capable of projecting itself into the minds, feelings and characters of others (Fermanis, 2009). Complete open mindedness as opposed to being egotistical (White, 2010). According to Milnes, Keats nothingness, half knowledge, indolence, death, sensual immediacy, are all tropes of NC and imagination is the alternative path to empiricism and beauty , a remedy for rational thought (Milnes, 2010).

This confusion got carried into management literature as the term got defined in numerous ways as it came through psychotherapy, Bion who looked at it as suspension of memory and desire (Williams, 2010 p. 25) and called it a special kind of patience taking it close to suspending one's egotistical identity" to reach the absolute essence. Hillman referred to "imagining into the other" (Hillman, 1975). To imagine into the other one would require patience (diligent indolence).

Carrying forward from Bion and taking the etymological route, in management literature, NC became a "peculiar human capacity for containment" so that one can engage with change non-defensively (French, 2001); capacity for reflective inaction (Simpson et al., 2002) ; capable of being without (French and Simpson, 2017) and patience which demands passivity (Simpson and French, 2006). Indolence and imagination and connection to truth do not figure in these conceptualizations of NC.

We also realized that one reason for the confusion is the phrase itself. NC phrase is in itself a trope (Milnes, 2010) a metaphor. A metaphor describes things only partially, depending on



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what is the focus. If NC is itself a metaphor then there could be many angles and the issue is - on what are you focusing ?...if the focus is on egotistic assertion of identity then it would be to annul self ; if the focus is on irritable running after fact and reason – then it would be don't run - be idle - play with imagination; it could be capability to emptying oneself so that one could then become full of the other self ; certainty vs capability to be in a mystery/ half knowledge/ whiff of truth....

*Keats would have been happy that his phrase has been explored without clinging to certitude and closure! At the same time I also doubt if we are feeling into his term as he would have wanted us to do.*

*When I saw the angle of the metaphor I was terribly excited and reached out to my professor. He responded: I agree with all the points. I was just wondering if there is relationship among these or are these components of NC? Or, is there a relationship among the components?*

There are three ways to approach this issue. Going by Sartori (1984) we could perhaps see what the over lapping features are in all these definitions and thus perhaps understand the key elements of NC. Secondly we could perhaps see if the different definitions are only reflecting different dimensions or perceptions of the same phrase. And the third way could be to go with our leap of imagination and from the process of reaching the truth which was Keats keen on derive our definition of NC and then discuss its application to management/managers/organizations.

If we take the definition of Bate (1963), the recent study by Ou (2009) and Goellnicht (1976), the definitions we get are as follows.

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Insert Table 1 About Here  
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The common elements of the definitions of NC appear to be receptivity and acceptance by way of being with a neutral intellect, tolerating diversity which is has been the other word for receiving passively or openly in acceptance. Both Bate (1963) and Ou (2009) speak of imaginativeness , disinterestedness which is a sobering view of human nature, sympathy and submission of self or negation of self so that one can metamorphasize into any character. Dramatic quality referred to is about the poetical genius which can portray any character. Receptivity is a common thread across. This receptivity is “passive: because it does not make conscious choices but allows mind to be a thorough fare of all thoughts and receiving them all passively without categorizing them or analyzing them.

*Well but my mind wouldn't rest in certainty that NC is passive receptivity. It seems incomplete as it is not yet connected to the sense of beauty which overcomes all considerations. How is this passive receptivity antagonistic to consecutive reasoning or the rational intellect? How did Adam wake up from his dream and know it's the truth?*

While we continued to reflect on these questions we noted that while going through what NC is – NC has been called a quality (Bate, 1963) who also said that the accent is on

“capability”. As it developed it was called a philosophy a theory and even a state (Bate, 2012). So we also looked at how it is possible to place NC as a quality, capability or philosophy or state? These facets of NC are perhaps the link between the different ways of conceptualizing NC.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here  
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While the capability and the epistemology and the process of reaching the truth (which we shall describe shortly) go together, the other three (state, quality and philosophy) would go together as something that could form the basis of reaching the truth through the way Keats intended – ie; though the holiness of heart’s affections and the truth of imagination. And it is what imagination seizes is the truth for Keats. The assumption is that an egotistical mind that is in a hurry with predetermined conceptions cannot undertake a genuine voyage of conception with imagination which for Keats was a “cooperating creativity of the mind” which is “on the same ground with nature” (Bate, 1963, p. 238).

*This for me was a way the differences could be reconciled. To continue this dialogue we went back to the original letter and read it with deductive reasoning as “consecutive men”*

If we come back to the famous letter given in the Annexure 1 – the famous paragraph has three parts. The first part is about capable of being “without” irritable reaching after fact and reason. This seems quite straight forward. According to Bates the focus is on “irritable” but not on fact and reason. So it is the inability to stay in doubt without having to rush to understand or analyze it with rational intellect. The second part of the sentence is about “not let go” by a fine verisimilitude caught from the penetralium of mystery (because) of being in capable of half knowledge. Keats is asking us not to throw away the truth that comes to us fleetingly, as an insight, a whiff, as a feeling or even an image because it does not fit into one’s rational mind. Truth that is coming up in a pre-logical manner, is here half knowledge and a mystery. It is also a place of doubt. And here he is asking us to stay with this “half knowledge” and not throw it away as it does not fit into one’s neat intellect. This again subtly changes the meaning of what is doubt and mystery. It indicates that half knowledge is not about staying in not knowing or ignorance. The 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the sentence tells us that excellence of art is in its intensity – because of its close relationship with truth and beauty. It is truthful because it now that the “external reality is met by human recognition, fulfilled and extended by human agreement with reality”. This unity of inner and the outer is felt as beauty (Bate, 1963, p. 243). This also indicates that there is an object of contemplation – whose meaning or life force one is seeking to grasp – the life force which gives it its intensity --- which brings us to the point that NC is about the “particular” – a “concrete manifestation of the ideal” (Bate, 2012, p. 46).

Keats the poet spoke of what one should not do and then leaps to tell us about what excellence is and its close relationship to truth and beauty. He also says that the way to reach truth for him is only through imagination and he does not understand how one might reach truth otherwise. So now, it has been left to imagination and examination to know what lay in between – fathom this mystery of reaching the excellence which Shakespeare epitomized. And it is here in this space that we would like to conceptualize NC.

## **The Process of Reaching Truth as per Keats**

Let us assume here is a subject (let's say the poet/ artist) and an object of contemplation. In a state of "delicious diligent indolence", the subject "wanders with it (the object), muses upon it, reflect from it, bring home to it, dream upon it". Subject roams the realms of sensations, images, thoughts – letting mind be a thorough fare of all thoughts – in passive receptivity (not actively judging them). This sets the imagination in flight. Into this imagination are woven the subtlest threads that a rational, abstracting mind could miss. Imagination conceives reports of all the senses, all qualities and attributes of the object and thus perceives it. This imagination is synthetic in nature and can bring all contraries together and can place itself in the object -- (imaginatively project oneself into the object). All the imaginative speculations fuse into an insight in a momentary identification with the object. This fusion with the object occurs through sympathetic identification. This sympathy is the diviner that penetrates the barrier between the subject and the object. This unity occurs through self-annihilation. Sympathy enters the "emotional existence of the object". In a flash – all the discordant features evaporate, the pulse is felt and the hidden significance of the subject is grasped. The result is "sap for meat and dew for drink" (pure insight). This insight because it is pre-logical and coming from the unconscious and therefore is hazy, lacking clarity and accuracy. It is important to stay with this knowledge that is unclear (half-knowledge) without "irritable running after fact and reason". When the subject does so, like Coleridge, will miss the truth.

In a nutshell, in order to reach the truth one should not approach it by "irritable running". Instead one should in diligent indolence be passive and receptive to all the sensations and thoughts from within and without and allow all of these to coalesce into an insight through imaginative perception (Hillman, 1996 p.125) which is sympathetic in nature.

Thus we surmise that *NC is a way of knowing the truth through imagination, sensations and intuition. The interrelated elements of NC would take one to truth are passive receptivity, imagination and a divining sympathy which identifies with the other. All this can happen only in a state of diligent indolence and disinterestedness.*

## **Description of the Elements of NC**

### **Passive Receptive**

To be passive receptive is to be open and accepting ie; to receive all stimuli ie; ideas, impressions, sensations, bodily intuitions, that come from within and without, non-judgmentally, without analyzing them, discarding them instantly or categorizing them. Passive in this context stands for acceptance (Ou, 2009). Being passive receptive indicates that one is able to embrace human condition in all its pains and pleasure, plunging into human experience fully (Ou, 2009, Goellnicht, 1976); accept diversity of life in all its good and evil, holding them in equal measure being receptive to the opposites of life; and have a neutral mind to hold different ideas , which could be contradictory or paradoxical without bias (Ou, 2009). Passive receptivity is about relishing the dark side as much as the bright side of things (Bate, 2012). And the mind that is accepting becomes capable of suspending its moral judgment and be free of "philosophical certainty (Ou, 2009: 73) with love for both good and evil (Wigod, 1952). One does not carry

opinions but gives every perspective or thought a consideration of its own. Lack of neutrality can lead to a “language of certainty” (Yanow, 2009: 582). The three (embracing human condition, acceptance of diversity of life, and neutral mind) enable one “to stay open and receptive to vastness and complexity of experience”, resisting certainty and closure, allowing mind to be open to experience to its fullest what is coming its way.

### **Imagination**

I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart’s affections and the truth of imagination – what imagination seizes as beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not ..... I have never been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning – and yet it must be. (Keats 1958 cited from Ou, 2009, p.2)

NC has been associated with “primacy of feeling and imagination” (Ou, 2009, p.2), which with their intensity take one to truth that cannot be achieved by fact and reason. Imagination synthesizes, creates, going beyond the obvious, logical elements. It is seen as an efficacious way of arriving at the truth with its receptivity to and active participation in the concrete processes on the outside (Bate, 1963). It is unconscious, without deliberation and choice (Bate, 2012) and does not reason or accept particular attributes but embraces all qualities.

Imagination is non-egotistical and has the agility to move beyond inherited pattern of thoughts, inviting new ideas, perspectives and new connections. It is flexible because of its “disinterested capacity to ‘[ unite] the most opposite extremes’ (v: 53). (Keats as quoted by Ou 2009). It “looks inward, grasping by an effort of sympathy and intuition, the hidden intention of the reality of life” (Bate 2012, p. 9). It identifies itself momentarily with the object of its contemplation; and it has only - as Hazlitt said of Shakespeare – “to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it” (Bate 2012: 13). Doors are opened to the perception - of the sympathetic potentialities of imagination, extending a “greeting of the spirit” (p.241) in a way to an “imaginative intensity of conception” (Bate 1963, p.261).

### **Divining Sympathy ( Sympathetic Identification)**

Sympathetic identification with the experiencing object is about becoming the other, taking part in the existence of the particular and the concrete (Bate 2012). It is akin to what Hillman’s “imagining into the other”. Sympathetic potentialities of imagination are inseparable from all activities of the mind which assimilates what is outside of itself, projects itself out, going into its mind and feelings and unites with the object/subject of contemplation (Bate, 1963, 2012). It helps imagination understand the hidden core and feel the pulse of the experiencing object. The intensity of sympathy is such that it will overcome ego and self-identity (Ou, 2009), removing the barrier between the object/experience, the person and imagination identifies with the object (Bate, 2012). All sensations then fuse into a “concrete unity of a general sensation or conception” (Bate 2012: 18). Everything coalesces into an answer, and intuitively, the truth is known in a way that the analytical mind cannot (Bate, 2012). This process occurs easily when there is no sense of self (Ou, 2009). According to scholars, “scientists describe the work they do

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as beautiful and at its most productive in terms of merging, becoming one, with their field of inquiry” (Bhom, 2004 ; Girod et al., 2003 as cited by Carlsen and Sandelands (2014), p. 9.)

That which is true is what satisfies me after I have struggled with it, interrogated it, and pondered the meanings of its answers in light of my experience, my existence, myself. I become what I study, and when the I and It merge, understanding has been achieved ((Root-Bernstein, 1997,Girod et al., 2003).

Sympathetic identification is inclusive (Bate, 1963). It can be manifest and give insight only if one is passive and receptive in a state of diligent indolence (Bate, 2012). The threads of all past experience are unconsciously woven into the intuition which directs it; and the greater and more vital such experience, the deeper and more understanding is with sympathy (Bate 2012).

### **Necessary Conditions for NC**

#### **Diligent Indolence: Leisure**

I was led into these thoughts my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning, operating on a sense of Idleness - I have not read any Books, the Morning said I was right- I had no idea but of the morning and the thrush said I was right. (Keats as quoted by Wigod, 1952: 390).

These words indicate the place of the sense of idleness in NC so much so that at one point we find Murray introducing NC as diligent indolence (Bate, 2012). It is the power of being “as it were luxuriously lolling, in doubts, mysteries & half solutions, toying with them, & tossing them, in all their complexity into form of beauty” (Mathews, 1971:374 as cited by Ou, 2009). The idea being one should receive an experience or an idea or a text read, or a question or doubt, stay with it, immerse in it – “wander with it, muse upon it, and reflect from it, and dream upon it – until it becomes stale”, leading to a “genuine voyage of conception” (Bate, 1963: 250).

Reflections and musings take place in the state of diligent indolence as reasoning is left aside and imagination and sensation take over (Goellnicht, 1976). Body over powers mind, and one indulges in one’s senses and imagination (Wigod, 1952). One can grasp the essence only in this state (Goellnicht, 1976) as it allows for an empathic communion with the object or the subject. There is an acceptance of the complexities and all speculations come together to present an insight (Goellnicht, 1976). One becomes aware of the core or essence of the mystery.

Thus, if NC is the figure then leisure is its ground and therefore in order to grasp NC one has to look at both the figure and the ground. To put it differently, the ground of leisure is important for the figure of NC to emerge

### **Disinterestedness**

Disinterestedness has been seen as the underlying influence of NC (Bate, 1963). It means having “no mechanical determinism towards self-love” (p.258). It makes one magnanimous and accepting and therefore one can give “sole attention to the object” (Ou, 2009: 7) of experience/or words or whatever one is trying to conceive at the edge of the unknown. A disinterested embrace of diversity of life and the disparate or completely opposite aspects of life will result in "humility and capability of submission" (Bate 1963: 237) to the experience or the mystery or the doubt. A disinterested person has no self-interest either in giving or taking and therefore understands the futility of “brief postures” (p.237) in an uncertain world. It is an ideal which can be developed only from the varied experiences in the world (Bate, 1963).

All these constituent parts tie in together to give the capability of NC. Each element has a space of its own. Together they make its form apparent. And this process applies as much to a scientist, a researcher, a therapist, leader who is presencing the future, as to an artist, or even may be a person/ leader dealing with wicked (intractable) problems.

## **DISCUSSION**

We have attempted to disambiguate a relatively new and underexplored concept of NC. We go back to its roots and give an in depth explanation and a clear conceptual understanding of NC. We discuss NC as a way to “our aesthetic, artistic, fantastic, speculative possibility” (Hillman, 2006). We also describe the elements of NC in detail and give the ingredients that are required to develop NC.

Answering the so what question, we did so because NC brings a couple of important things back into management that would correct the imbalance created by the Newtonian thinking and focus on rational analytical mindset. NC with its relation to beauty and truth brings us to focus on to the subtle, the invisible and the intangible, taking us beyond forms, structures and measurements with its imaginative perception, sensory and emotional capacities. It thus helps see the reality as it is, going beyond the “visual noise” ( Pieper, 1990, p.33), thus giving a more “deeper and receptive vision, a more intense awareness, a sharper and more discerning understanding, a more patient openness for all things inconspicuous and eye for things overlooked” (Pieper, 1990, p.36).

Conceptualizing NC as an imaginative and aesthetic sensibility with beauty and truth as its outcomes connects it with aesthetic leadership and “leading beautifully” (ref Adler,2011; Ladkin, 2008). NC enables a leader to slow down and fully take in the experience to grasp the meaning of the particular in all its peculiarity by bringing into focus what the sensations and body are saying along with the intellect. It thus would bring back into play our sensory and emotional capacities which have been divorced due to the Cartesian mindset. It enables the leader to be totally present with all thoughts and senses - intensely - seeking the particularities of the concrete situation. As it is relational, it builds a relationship between the subject (the leader) and the object (of contemplation) and allows the leader to tune “into” it, and the leader’s imaginative

perception which is sympathetic in nature can enter into its emotional existence. This could lead to an aesthetic leadership with its felt meanings and knowledge created from sensory experiences (p.552) as referred to by Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer (2007).

“For the first time in history, leaders can work backward from their imagination and dreams, rather than simply projecting the future based on the past” (Adler, 2017). We suggest that NC would allow leaders to do this in reality. With NC a leader can “project forward and identify with the future being” (Bate, 1963 p.257). This identification is obliged to turn in a particular direction with a mechanical determinism but transcends the self in something higher than itself (Bate, 1963). No personal feelings, defenses, fear of the danger of loss of self would obtrude creating an imagined future, which is beautiful with its felt inner and outer harmony and working backward with it.

This then takes us to another aspect that NC would connect with – the concept of presencing - “seeing from the deepest source and becoming a vehicle for that source” (Senge et al., 2005, p.88). “It is seeing from within the source from which the future whole is emerging, peering back at the present from the future” (p.90). We posit that this seeing is enabled by NC because this seeing is enabled by the sympathetic nature of imagination which roams all realms of images, thoughts and receives information from impulses both within and without, finally coalescing into an insight. This genuine voyage of conception helps one see the future that is waiting to be presented.

NC takes us to beauty and truth. Beauty is wholesome and true (O’Donohue, 2003, p. 5) as it brings a harmony between the inner and outer. Thus it closely entwined with the notion of integrity. According to Plato beauty pleases intellect along with the senses (Ladkin, 2008) and for Aquinas, goodness, truth and integrity “belonged essentially to beauty” (as cited by O’Donohue, 2003, p.48) and the integrity of beauty is “that inner straining towards goodness and completion (p.47). Thus it develops an ethical point with emotional conviction. It could thus enable the movement from I-it to I to we (Scharmer, 2010, p. 4) bringing about a sense of ethical commitment towards life, and thus to leading.

In the world of the busy business, NC has an important role. In life without principle Throeu (1863) laments “This world is a place of business..... There is no Sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once.” He goes on to say “Does wisdom work in a treadmill? Or, does she teach how to succeed *by her example* ?....Is she merely a miller who grinds the finest logic?”. Leisure is associated with contemplation, connectedness (Pieper, 1998) and immersion. It is a receptive attitude of mind relinquishing the “fantasy of control”(p.354) replacing the “search for efficient” “with “search for truth” (p.356) guided by ethic of leisure and disinterestedness (Case et al., 2012); overcoming the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”(Bate, 1963 p.239). We therefore posit that NC would enable to move into the realms of mystery, beauty and wonder, and thus perhaps to wisdom.

## CONCLUSION

My professor and I continued our discussions and we decided to stay with our differences. Ideal would have been a synthesis. But it would have to come, and knock at our door as we wander with the ideas. We thought we’d end with these lines of Keats that metaphorically speak of NC.

## NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

It has been an old comparison for our urging on – The Beehive; however, it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee- .... Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury-let us know therefore go hurrying about collecting honey, bee like buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be aimed at; but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive – budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit – sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink. I was led into these thoughts, my dear, Reynold, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of idleness – I have not read any books, the morning said I was right – I had no idea but of the morning, and the thrush said I was right (Keats as quoted by Bate, 1963,p. 251 & 252).

As we were concluding, it suddenly came to me... I have been like the Mercury, buzzing impatiently, running after truth, of what we were aiming at. And my professor has been budding patiently .... I have been lead into these thoughts in the silence of the morning... and the silence resonated. At the end I do realize that my Professor and I were not contradicting each other. Rather we were completing each other in a paradoxical way. The way has always been the same. Beginnings were different...? Or as Rumi said we were inside each other all along ... we don't yet know how. I decided to stay with this fine grain of verisimilitude from this penetralium, remaining content with this half knowledge and not run after reason to know how it is so.

*We sincerely hope, we have been able to speak to you of NC in a way that you could understand*

*it.*



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**Table I**

Bate, 1963	Heightened receptivity to reality ; Imaginative openness ; Negation of self key interrelated elements - disinterestedness, sympathy, impersonality and dramatic poetry,
Goellnicht, 1976	Passive receptivity in a state of Diligent Indolence
Ou , 2009	be open to the actual vastness and complexity of experience  Key interrelated elements -imaginativeness, experiential and artistic intensity, submission of the self, sympathetic identification, the dramatic quality of the poet, disinterestedness, a neutral intellect tolerating diversity and contradiction, and a tragic vision of human experience,

**FIGURE 1**

