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Research

Bodhisattva Leadership in the Modern World

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Abstract

This presentation offers a view of leadership based on the teachings of Buddha Gautama who taught that happiness can be achieved by realising the Four Noble Truths and following the Noble Eight-fold Path. However, many centuries after Buddha Gautama’s death, Buddhist principles diversified to include the all-pervasive emptiness, compassion and altruism of Mahayana and the skilful means of Vajrayana for achieving those qualities in all aspects of human life. Central to Mahayana and Vajrayana doctrine is the ideal of Bodhicitta, the selfless aspiration to bring all beings to enlightenment, and its comprehensive enactment through application of Bodhisattva Vow.

Based on the Mahayana Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva, this presentation will elucidate a more encompassing view of what leadership can mean in contemporary society. Bodhisattva leadership, as presented here, is based on the universal Buddha nature and actively promotes these qualities in communities and organisations. The presentation will outline key principles of Bodhisattva Leadership, encompassing concepts of Buddha nature, mindfulness practice, inclusive altruism, the development and application of positive leadership attributes in all areas of social and environmental concern, towards the ultimate fruition of collective human flourishing.

Key words

Bodhisattva leadership, altruism, Buddha-nature, mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness, compassion, happiness

Introduction

Bodhisattva leadership is based on the teachings of the historical Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha, who lived about 2500 years ago. Over the time, Buddhism has branched out into three main branches or *yanas* (vehicles): Śrāvakayāna, Mahayana (greater vehicle) and Vajrayana (diamond or thunderbolt vehicle). They are also called Southern Buddhism, Eastern Buddhism and Northern or Tibetan Buddhism respectively, following their area of predominance (Harvey, 2013; Lopez, 2007). However, despite the difference in time of origin, place of predominance and distinctive features, the line between Mahayana and Vajrayana is thin. While some consider the two branches near similar (Blumenthal, 2013; Duckworth, 2013; Harvey, 2013; Wangchuk, 2014), others view them distinctly different (Lopez, 1995; Ray, 2001).

Over the two-and-a-half millennia, Buddhism has spread and become the main force behind the Oriental culture, especially within the Indus and Hindu Kush to Kyoto and Java (Conze, 1981; Lopez, 1995). It has influenced the cultural life in the Śrāvakayā countries, such as Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka, and Mahayana countries, such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Singapore. Similarly, Vajrayana has influenced the life of people of Tibet (China), Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, North India and a few Republics of Russia such as Buryat, Tuva and Kalmykia (Harvey, 2000, 2013; Keown, 1996).

Besides the geographical locations, the three main branches differ in their leadership principles. While Śrāvakayāna emphasises Arhats (Sanskrit *Pratimoksha*; Tibetan *Sosotharpa*) (divine beings who have gained liberation from the Samsara or realm of suffering through their individual effort and do not intend to be reborn), Mahayana and Vajrayana stress on Bodhisattvas (Tib. *Jangchubsempa*) (Barr, 2004; Ray, 2001). Bodhisattvas are divine persons who have gained enlightenment but have, through their altruistic and compassionate motivations, decided to defer entering Nirvana for the benefit of all other sentient beings (Blumenthal, 2013; Boisseleir, 1994; Powers, 2013; Rinpoche, 2009). However, besides sharing similarities with Mahayana, Vajrayana has distinctive features such as chanting mantras, visualisation, elaborate ritual systems, unbroken teacher-student lineage (esoteric) and inclusion of the fourth refuge of guru, as immediate leader, in addition to buddha, dharma and sangha. This article will consider Mahayana and Vajrayana leadership principle of Bodhisattva leadership that offers elaborate and unique view.

Bodhisattva leadership

While Western leadership emphasises fulfilment of organisational goals, Bodhisattva leadership strives to achieve happiness of the members in the ever-changing world (Das, 1998; Woollard, 2012). This leadership understands its ultimate goal of happiness as a peace of mind and the feeling that it is doing the right thing using all the positive energy in the circumstances that are constantly changing as a result of cause-condition-effect or dependent arising phenomenon (Barr, 2004). There are no chance occurrences, but everything happens due to a cause and produces corresponding effects (Das, 1998). As such, unlike Western culture that holds individuals as discreet and fixed entities, this leadership views individuals as transitory and changing all the time depending upon cause and conditions (Rarick, 2008). Thus, leadership is a process of facilitating the members' happiness through Right View that leads to Right Action in a constantly changing world.

Bodhisattva leadership is viewed at three levels: leadership of the self, leadership of the organisation, and leadership of the interconnected world (Kemavuthanon & Duberley, 2009; van den Muyzenberg, 2011). In the leadership of the self, the Buddha taught that the best way for a ruler to reign over his country is to first rule himself (Rarick, 2008). Leaders need to be clear about who they are and what their goals are. Leaders need to be mindful that their leadership should result in the happiness of the members; therefore, avoid indulging in activities that benefit themselves such as fame, power or material wealth, and avoid unethical and immoral thoughts and actions.

In the leadership of the organisation, unlike in Western leadership which strives to achieve organisational vision through technological and material advancement (Marques, 2012), Bodhisattva leadership attempts to bring happiness in the members and at the workplace. It argues that making profit should not be the sole vision of the organisation; rather, it is a condition of survival of the organisation and not an end in itself. If the organisations' purpose is to make profit, it is comparable to the purpose of life as eating to keep us alive (van den Muyzenberg, 2011). However, it does not see money and material wealth as evil, as long as it is gained through honesty and diligence, that is through Right Livelihood (Tideman, 2011). In fact, financial and material wealth enable meeting basic need for survival in order to do good to others and to practise generosity that results in happiness of others (Tideman, 2011).

In the leadership of the inter-connected world, leaders attempt to bring happiness to everyone affected by their leadership (Kemavuthanon & Duberley, 2009). It emphasises the principle of cause-condition-effect (*Lay jumdrey*) or causality. Leaders attempt to lead in a manner that produces maximum happiness in the society and the world at large, and value the principles of selflessness, compassion and interdependence (Kawanami, 2012). Selflessness in Bodhisattva leadership is the absence of distinction between ourselves and everyone else (Rarick, 2008). While the concept of 'self' is central to the Western culture, this leadership strives for the happiness of others through altruistic thoughts and actions. Selflessness and altruism are exemplified by the Buddha's act of giving up his comfortable princely life, leaving behind his wife, son, parents, kingdom and people and going in search of truth that benefits all the sentient beings.

Theoretical Bodhisattva leadership model

Unlike in Western leadership, there exists very little literature in Buddhism that explicitly deals with leadership despite it being practised over thousands of years (see Tideman, 2012). This article presents a comprehensive theoretical leadership model (see Figure 1) following the understanding of Bodhisattva leadership principle gleaned from limited literature. The model illustrates that the process of Bodhisattva leadership begins with the buddha-nature, it incorporates Bodhisattva leadership approaches and styles (Rinpoche, 2009; Tideman, 2012), and ends with the fulfilment of happiness, which is every single person's goal in living (Ricard, 2007). The theoretical model explains that Bodhisattva leadership has four main components. They include 1. the belief in the presence of the innate leadership potential in every person in the form of the buddha-nature and the mindfulness practices that result in a selfless mind; 2. adoption of three levels of courage or motivation or approaches – described metaphorically as King, Boatman and Shepherd leadership approaches, 3. four leadership styles of Zhiwa

(Pacification), Gyepa (Enrichment), Wang (Magnetisation) and Drakpo (Subjugation), and 4. demonstration of externalised positive behaviours that result in happiness. The whole process of Bodhisattva leadership is aimed at achieving happiness in the members and at the organisation as evident in Figure 1 below:

Internalised leadership qualities	Bodhisattva Leadership motivations/ approaches	Bodhisattva Leadership styles	Externalised leadership behaviours	Goal of leadership
<p>Innate leadership potential</p> <p>□</p> <p>Mindfulness practices</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Compassionate and Altruistic mind</p>	<p>King</p> <p>Boatman</p> <p>Shepard</p>	<p>Pacification</p> <p>Enrichment</p> <p>Magnetisation</p> <p>Subjugation</p>	<p>Kindness</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Sympathetic joy</p> <p>Equanimity</p> <p>Generosity</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Patience</p> <p>Diligence</p> <p>Concentration</p> <p>Wisdom</p>	<p>Happiness</p>

Figure 1: Bodhisattva leadership model.

The model asserts that Bodhisattva leadership begins with the view of the presence of Buddha nature in very sentient being (person in this case) (Berkwitz, 2012; Duckworth, 2013; Rinpoche, 2002; Schmidt-Leukel, 2006). The Buddha nature is a pure and wholesome core that has the fundamental essence or innate potential to gain enlightenment (Berkwitz, 2012; Hayes, 2013; Rinpoche, 2009; Sponberg, 2013). The Buddha nature can be explained better through its Sanskrit name: *Tathagatagarbha* (Tathagata is buddha, and garbha is covering or embryo) and the Tibetan name, *DeSheg Nyingpo* (buddha essence). Though the innate potential to become a buddha exists in every individual, it is covered or hidden by obstacles, such as delusion, defilement, ignorance, anger and greed (Grosnick, 1995; Sponberg, 2013; Tsuchiya, 2003), which are results of unenlightened mind (Harvey, 2013). The Buddha nature is also called *Rigpa* – the innermost essence hidden within our ordinary mind, which is primordial, pure, pristine awareness that is intelligent, cognizant, radiant and always awake, whereas our ordinary mind is dualistic, grasping, unstable, confused, chaotic and undisciplined (Rinpoche, 2002). Unless these obscurations of the ordinary mind are removed, the Buddha nature cannot shine, but remains dormant, comparable to a sleeping buddha (Das, 1998). In terms of leadership, it is understood that unless one realises the presence of leadership potential and make attempts to gain leadership knowledge, hone leadership skills and engage in mindfulness practices, one cannot become an effective leader.

The concept of the Buddha nature is explained through several analogies, such as a kernel covered by a husk, a secret chamber of a house, gold inside a pit of waste, or honey

guarded by angry bees (Grosnick, 1995). Unless the husk is removed, the secret chamber discovered, the waste cleaned, or the bees tackled, the Buddha nature cannot be realised (Grosnick, 1995). Another example of the Buddha nature is Guru Padma Jungney (Lotus-born), a renowned Vajrayana or Tantric master (Khyentse, 2014). Padma Jungney is the Buddha nature or the essence of the historical Buddha himself born out of the lotus flower that grew from the garbha of dirty and stinking marshland/pond. However, despite the filthy conditions of garbha, Padma Jungney does not bear any stain of impurity (Hayes, 2013; Khyentse, 2014; Tsuchiya, 2003). At another level, the Buddha nature is compared to pollen inside a flower bud which is exposed only when the cover or garbha of the flower petals open up (Grosnick, 1995).

The innate Buddha nature is awakened and realised through mindfulness practices, such as meditation. Mindfulness, which is the seventh step in the Noble Eight-fold Path to enlightenment in Buddhism, is a skill of being natural and aware of the present moment without grasping or denying and judging thoughts and emotions or simply noticing the way things are (Das, 1998; Gondalez, 2012). Leaders can employ leadership styles of the *Four Enlightened Activities* that include *Zhiwa* (Pacification), *Gyepa* (Enrichment), *Wang* (Magnetisation) and *Drakpo* (Subjugation) or (*Zhigyewangdrak*, for short) to train one's mind and to enhance leadership skills (Khandro, 2007). However, the Four Enlightened Activities are discussed more explicitly as the Bodhisattva leadership styles in the latter part of the model.

Mindfulness practitioners report that mindfulness meditation enables greater happiness, satisfaction, better social connection and better control of themselves in their personal and professional lives. In this way, mindful leaders can transform themselves, members and the organisation (Gondalez, 2012). However, in strict spiritual sense, mindfulness is more than a way to find temporary peace, calmness or happiness; but it aims to realise the nature of the mind and the ultimate bliss of Nirvana (Khyentse, 2014).

The model explains that mindfulness meditations result in the realisation of the need to help others through a loving, compassionate and selfless mind. Love is wishing others happiness, while compassion is a motivation that others do not suffer, and selflessness is discarding or, at least, minimising the prominence of "I" in the process of leaders' discharge of their leadership roles. Regarding selflessness, the Buddha taught that the leader *as a person* is not important; rather the leader's leadership beliefs and behaviours are important (Harvey, 1991, 2013). Similarly, He taught that it is not important to venerate a person, but the wisdom that person teaches (Khyentse, 2007). Even about his own teaching, the Buddha explicitly reminded that followers should not follow His teaching simply upon hearing; rather, they should reflect and meditate, then follow if they find it meaningful (Khyentse, 2007; Marques, 2012; Rinpoche, 2009). Therefore, leaders' transcendence of 'I' emphasises the welfare of members and others, and the leaders' role-modelling encourages members to become selfless (Tideman, 2012) resulting in a collectivist society where leaders' identity is linked to their association with members (Rarick, 2008). For instance, selflessness is exemplified in the Buddha's teaching that all the great rivers on reaching the ocean lose their former names and identities and are reckoned simply as the ocean (Rarick, 2008).

The second component of the model pertains to the three approaches of leadership, metaphorically represented as the three levels of courage or motivation of King, Boatman and

Shepherd leadership (Rinpoche, 2009; Tideman, 2012). It is indicated that suggests leaders' altruism and compassion is less in the King leadership approach, more is the Boatman leadership approach, and boundless in the Shepherd leadership approach as suggested by the process of arousing Bodhicitta (Tib. *Jangchubsem*) the 'mind of enlightened' or Bodhisattva mind (Rinpoche, 2009, p. 218) in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism (Ray, 2001; Tideman, 2012). Bodhisattva leadership prioritises members' welfare over their own welfare by liberating others before liberating themselves from the samsara (Rinpoche, 2009; Tideman, 2012). However, the King leadership, which prioritises liberation of self, may seem contradictory if not understood correctly. In the King leadership approach, it is the leaders who accomplishes the state of Arahant (Tib. *Drachompa*) and then makes it possible for members to achieve the task. The historical Buddha held a view of "When I am enlightened, all are enlightened" (Das, 1998, p. 17). It is similar to the view that you help others when you help yourself. In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, liberation of self is the first step that enable liberation of others (Das, 1998; Rarick, 2008). For instance, after gaining enlightenment, the Buddha taught and dedicated 45 years of his life working tirelessly for the welfare of all sentient beings.

In the Boatman leadership approach, the leader and the members reach the shore together. As one practises Dharma, s/he also teaches and leads sentient beings to enlightenment (Rinpoche, 2009). The reincarnate lamas (Buddhist priests) are considered to be following the Boatman leadership approach. In a more practical sense, the leader's well-being is accomplished the members and the organisation achieve happiness. In the Shepherd leadership approach, the leader is selfless and focuses on the well-being of the members. It is only after the members' well-being is fulfilled that the leader considers his/her well-being. This approach is summed up in a stanza from *Bodhisattvacharyavavata* (The guide to the Bodhisattva's way of life) by Santideva (Tib. *Zhiwalha*), an eighth century Indian Buddhist monk:

As long as space endures

And as long as sentient beings remain

May I, too, abide

To dispel the miseries of the world (Blumenthal, 2013, p. 87)

Further, the Shepherd leadership approach is exemplified by the story of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. One version of the story says:

Many eons ago, Avalokiteshvara took a vow that he will rest, or in other words, attain enlightenment only after he has liberated all the sentient beings from the realms of suffering. And he took on the task and worked diligently for a long time. At one time, through his buddha eye – the enlightened eye that sees beyond time and distance (Tsuchiya, 2003), – he assessed how many were liberated and how many more were there to be liberated. He saw he had liberated many and, at the same time, there were countless more to be liberated. At this point, he became discouraged and nearly broke his vow. He had also vowed that if he broke it, his body be shattered into a thousand pieces.

So when he got discouraged, his body got shattered into a thousand pieces. However, through the blessing of Amitabhabuddha, his shattered body transformed into eleven heads (to hear more cries of suffering beings), one thousand eyes (to see

more sufferers) and one thousand hands (to aid liberation of multitude sufferers) simultaneously. Thus, he continues to liberate sentient beings (Situpa, 2009).

However, leaders adopting the Shepherd leadership approach need to have the understanding and knowledge of the King and the Boatman leadership approaches as it is built on the essence of the two approaches that act as its foundation (Powers, 2013; Ray, 2001). Moreover, despite the differences in the motivation, all the three leadership approaches aim to attain enlightenment and help others and to achieve organisational goals.

The Bodhisattva leadership model suggests that the three approaches of leadership can be executed through the employment of external behaviours of the Four Enlightened Activities. *Zhiwa* or Pacification is leaders' attempt to pacify or reduce inconveniences and obstacles for peace, success and happiness of members and organisation. It can also mean that leaders remain calm, focussed and steadily mindful of the inherent goodness of the result of actions, such as actively listening and making members feel safe rather than reacting to situations (Khandro, 2007; Lewis, 2012). In the second style of *Gyepa* or Enrichment, leaders, through their selfless motivation and altruistic mind, attempt to help and benefit members through empowering them to provide alternative views, which in turn, transform problematic situations and enables exchange of ideas, thereby enriching everybody's knowledge and experience (Lewis, 2012). Enrichment leadership style facilitates organisations' overall success and prosperity and members' happiness through the achievement of the organisational goals (Odzer, 2011).

The third leadership style, *Wang* or Magnetisation is the leaders' ability to make members feel attracted to the leaders and to the organisation and induce willingness in members to follow the leaders (Wangpo, 2006). In this sense, Magnetisation relates to the Charisma or Idealised Influence in the Transformational leadership model. Charismatic leaders, through their power, have profound and extraordinary effects on their followers (Bass, 1985). Similarly, in Magnetisation, members exhibit sincere respect that has sprung from their pure devotion and dedication to leaders' exhibition of motivation and inspiration. In Magnetisation, leaders need to be aware of various means and tools available to bring maximum benefit in any particular situation (Odzer, 2011). However, Magnetisation is sometimes understood as coercion (Dalton, 2011), and bears some shade of the use of force and paves way to Subjugation style (Khandro, 2007).

The last of the four leadership styles is *Drakpo* or Subjugation. It may sound unbecoming of Bodhisattvas to engage in such kind of activity (Lewis, 2012; Odzer, 2011), yet subjugation and other transgression are accepted in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism (Dalton, 2011; Powers, 2013) if they are motivated by good intention and compassion, and performed through skilful means (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006). There are varying viewpoints on the understanding and employment of Subjugation. Rinpoche (2003) and Khandro (2007) understand subjugating as annihilating confusion and obstacles, while Odzer (2011) points out that it is the subjugation of the evils who, with bad intentions, hinder the functioning and progress of an organisation. Dalton (2011) and Odzer (2011) reminds that subjugating is an option if the other three styles do not work, or when the leaders know that the other three activities will not be effective with the followers.

Intention is key in Subjugation leadership style. In Subjugation, leaders' mind should not be clouded with negative emotions, such as hatred, greed, lust, jealousy or for selfish gain, but must radiate utmost dedication, compassion and wisdom (Dalton, 2011; Tideman, 2012; Wangpo, 2006). Subjugation style is comparable to a mother's compassion and care while spanking her children for their undesirable actions (Rinpoche, 2009). There are numerous stories, such as Marpa's ruthless treatment of Milarapa (Kapstein, 2013; Trungpa, 1995), Tilopa's behaviour with Naropa (Ray, 2001), and Compassionate boatman (Harvey, 2000) in which Subjugation was employed effectively. Another example of Subjugation style of leadership is associated with Guru Padma Sambhava who subjugated many evil beings and demons in north India, Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim and Tibet that were harming the people (Bhutia, n.d.; Odzer, 2011). Examples of this style in Bhutan are Padma Sambhava's subjugation of the devilish snake at Gomphu Kora, the evil spirits at Taktsang, and the spirit Shelging Karpo who harmed king Sindhu Raja in Bumthang. At other times, he varied his style. He used *Zhiwa* (Pacification) and *Gyepa* (Enrichment) to settle the differences between king Sindhu Raja of Bumthang and king Nawoche of Assam (Phuntsho, 2013).

In addition, there are examples where Bodhisattva leaders generally employ *Zhi Gye Wang Drak* in their leadership. They adapt their leadership styles depending on the situation and the type of followers. The Rudra Myth summarises the employment of Subjugation when the other three styles fail to bring the desired effect in the members and the organisation:

Rudra was, in one of his previous lives, a prince named Black Liberator, who, along with his servant Denpak, became disciples of a monk named Invincible Youth. However, the prince and his servant radically differed in their interpretation of the teacher's teaching. Black Liberator became angry and banished his servant. He then went to his teacher, who confirmed that the servant's understanding was correct, upon which he banished his teacher too. Then on he plunged into evil deeds as a result of bad karma and wrong views. He lived in charnel ground and indulged in innumerable hedonistic deeds.

Consequently, he was born and reborn in different hells and suffered for many eons. However, after endless suffering, he was born to a promiscuous woman who died in childbirth. Infant Rudra was kept on his dead mother's breast at the cemetery. However, over time, he grew strong and powerful, became leader of all evil beings, and ultimately overpowered powerful gods, such as Indra, Brahma, Vishnu and Hayagriva (Tib. Tamdrin). He committed all the cruel and sinful deeds imaginable, and was feared by all.

All the Tathagatas or Buddhas gathered to discuss how they could correct Rudra. They ultimately decided to follow the Four Enlightened Activities to overcome him. First, they sent peaceful emanation of Sakyamuni Buddha, but to no avail. Second, they dispatched Hayagriva to use Enrichment/Enhancement, but was threatened and driven away. Third, they sent Vajrakumara (Tib. Dorji Shoenu) to employ Magnetisation/Coercion, who succeeded in purifying Rudra's palace and coercing the demonesses and Rudra's queen in his absence, thus paving way to Subjugation. Last, Heruka, through the empowerment of host of Hayagriva, began taming Rudra in

earnest. Rudra responded by employing his demonic horde and his magical power to combat fierce Heruka, but Heruka surpassed Rudra's power and ultimately defeating him. Heruka plunged his trident into Rudra's chest and swallowed him up. Rudra got purified in Heruka's belly and experienced a momentary bliss of the Buddha field, and at the same time, saw all the sufferings he has caused with his cruel deeds. The next moment, Heruka ejected him out in a manner one ejects faeces.

Rudra pleaded Heruka to liberate him swearing allegiance, and told his entire retinue of the errors and prayed for forgiveness. Heruka taught Rudra about his karma and destroyed him only to reconstitute him in a completely purified form in preparation for initiation. Rudra was given a new name, Black Excellence (Tib. Legden Nakpo) and appointed as the chief protector of dharma (Dalton, 2011).

The last component of the Bodhisattva leadership model pertains to the demonstration of positive behaviours that align with the *Immeasurable* (kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) and with the six paramitas or Transcendental perfections (Powers, 2013; Rinpoche, 2009; Sponberg, 2013). The six paramitas include generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration and wisdom. Cultivation and demonstration of these positive behaviours in the leaders result in the happiness of the members and at the work place as a fruition of the earlier process of the leadership model.

Conclusion

Though Buddhism has been practised for thousands of years, Bodhisattva leadership has remained generally at spiritual level mostly practised by Buddhist adepts and teachers. This article attempted to investigate the Bodhisattva leadership in order to fully understand it and to relate it to the leadership at secular level. The Bodhisattva leadership recognises that it must affect happiness at three levels of the self, the organisation and the society, all of which are in a constant state of change. It also argues that every individual person has the potential to be a leader, which can be realised and internalised through reflective practices. Bodhisattva leadership stresses selflessness of the leaders, and love, altruism and compassion towards the members. The overall vision of Bodhisattva leadership is to enable peace, prosperity and happiness in the members, the organisation and the world.

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