The Interplay of Leadership, Power and Spirituality

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Abstract

Leadership and power are linked. Both leadership and power have different dimensions attached to it which affect each other. The dyadic relationship could be complex for the person who is in leadership position or is in the process towards leadership. Spirituality which is no doubt an independent variable from the individual angle could have significant effect on the dyadic relationship of leadership and power. If understood properly the interplay of leadership, power, and spirituality many concepts related to ethical or unethical leadership could be cleared. This paper is an effort to study this triadic interaction to understand the reasons for leaders to be bad, good, great, or legendary. The stance taken in this paper is that it is the cultivation and demonstration of spiritual values that makes the difference. Some of the philosophical concepts from ancient Indian wisdom are also used in this paper to bring more relevance.

Introduction

To study nature and human behaviour has always generated interest among the researchers. Lot of success has been achieved in predicting the nature. Scientists in the field of Physics, Chemistry, and Biology etc. around the world have done a commendable job in unfolding lot of mysteries related to nature. Probably, because of the characteristics of nature which is somewhat predictable. But when it comes to study the human behaviour still lot is desired. We have not been able to come to some concrete solutions probably because of the unpredictable nature of human beings. One reason can be that human beings have the ability to be a beast at one moment and divine at some other moment. So, the scale is huge between which the man shows his behaviour. Take for example the case of Adolf Hitler. Drinking, smoking, eating non-vegetarian food, and adultery are socially acceptable vices. Adolf Hitler never had these vices. He never drank, never smoked, never ate non-vegetarian food, and was committed to one woman. In modern times a person possessing these qualities could be related to a saint. But on the other hand Hitler got fixated at conquering the world and ultimately did many things which are a scar on the human race. Ravana (son of a sage), the king of Lanka was born in a Brahmin family, learned scriptures, a notable expert of Vedas and Puranas, a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva and possessor of many boons from the God suddenly succumbed to lust and one point fixation of getting Lord Rama's wife Sita. Ramalingam Raju could well be equated with any good technocrat, entrepreneur, or

innovator. After going through so many ordeals and establishing a world class organization like Satyam suddenly allowed himself to indulge in petty activity of account fudging. The question arises that what are the reasons behind this difference. This paper focuses on one aspect of human behaviour and that is leadership behaviour. Why some leaders behave ethically and others do not? What is the role of power in that? Is it the dominance or absence of spiritual values that makes the difference? These are some of the questions that have formed the theme of this paper.

Leadership

Researchers have always found leadership phenomenon a complex one. Leadership exists in different contexts, situations, and forms. People have tried to explain leadership on the basis of traits of traits, behaviour, situations, vision, ethics, and spirituality and so on but with little success. Leadership does not only depend upon leaders but also on the expectations of others from the leadership. As Enderle (1987) says that leaders are expected to save the people from oppression and misery like Moses and Mao, they are expected to restore dignity, identity and independence to the people like Mahatama Gandhi and they are supposed to build up a better world like John F. Kennedy. Moreover, people demand sacrifice from leaders. In organizational leadership say for in business organizations, leaders are expected to achieve sometimes the conflicting objectives such as cutting the costs and also increasing the salaries of the employees. They are expected to increase the profits of the organization as well as they are expected to take care of the interest of all the stakeholders. It is desired from them that they follow the rule book but break all the book records of the performance. Point here is that sometimes or most often it is the expectations of others that make leadership position complex. That may be the reason that many researchers have proposed the theory of shared vision where the objectives of the leader, organization, and stakeholders are aligned in one direction creating synergy in action and thoughts.

Peters and Waterman (1982) said that leaders who exhibit excellence create a culture of values that lead to quality, innovation, stakeholder approach. In a sense such leaders are driven by both ideology and required skills. According to McDermott (1987), leaders are required to create a culture that support excellence and that is possible only when there is a shared vision and collaboration. Barbour et al. (1984) have also emphasized on co-vision and trust as a necessity for effective leadership.

Today, corporations are expected to give high performance. This may lead the leader in three directions; Ethical path, Unethical path, or a Marginal path. To extrapolate we could say that this applies to leadership in all walks of professional and social life.

A leader may follow an ethical path and in the sacrificial mode use all his potential and

energy in positive direction to achieve the corporate goals without compromising on values. When leaders follow this path and achieve high performance breaking records, extending boundaries, achieving new levels of performance and efficiency, challenging beliefs, and doing things differently then society label such leaders as excellent leaders. The divine and ethical side of human behaviour is exhibited by exceptional leaders.

The second direction which a leader may follow is the unethical path where he develops a bunker mentality ignoring values, denying mistakes, breaking the rules and the laws for the sake of organizational and/or personal achievement. In this case a leader acts destructively. The pressure of high performance totally deviate the leader and the ability to discriminate between what is right and what is wrong is completely lost. In case of such type of leaders many times the resources available to the leader to achieve high performance are grossly misused for either the self interest or for some other myopic purpose. Baucus (1994) says that illegal corporate behavior could be influenced by pressure to achieve results, and this expectation of high performance basically acts as a predisposition to act unethically and it provide opportunity to misbehave. According to Mumford and Connelly (1991), leadership takes place in ill-defined and uncertain situations. Leaders who follow unethical path are unable to understand the true purpose of leadership and ambiguity of leadership situation leads them to further darkness.

The third direction which is the marginal path lies between the two extremes of completely ethical and completely unethical. In this case leaders sometimes cross the boundary of ethics but remains within the law. A leader who follows this path for achieving organizational goals may resort to unethical activities such as employee exploitation, environment degradation, high CEO compensation etc. but remains within the periphery of the law. Gross (1978, 1980) argues that corporate organizations are criminogenic – hospitable to and tending toward criminal behavior. The high performance pressure and competition often lead the leaders to cross the boundary of ethics and make them to adopt a political role where they state that everything is fair if it is within the law. Such types of leaders are prone to extend themselves towards the unethical path in some specific situation or context.

Reality is that a leader may follow any single path mentioned above throughout his leadership life span or any mix of the three directions.

Now let us come to power which is associated with leadership.

Power

Power could be considered as a necessity to perform the leadership tasks. But side by side it could also become troublesome as incentive to abuse power is huge. Use, misuse or abuse of

power could play an important role in leadership. The three directions mentioned above which a leader may follow in leadership position also depends upon how power is perceived by the leader.

Let us take a brief look at what has been written about power in literature.

Power could be defined as the ability to get things done the way one wants them to be done (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977). French and Raven (1968) have tried to explain the different types of power and come to the conclusion that there are five types of power as given below:

- Coercive power (fear based)
- Reward power (money based)
- Legitimate power and its synonym authority (law or rule based)
- Expert power (skill based)
- Referent power (based on identification with a person who had resources or favors to bestow, and the influence of a strong and attractive personality)

Nietzsche believed that the connection between master/slave moralities is the "will to power" and the psychology of human behaviour depends a lot on this (Kaufman, 1974, p. 183). Lord Acton (1979) had suggested that power tends to corrupt.

Power in organizations is deficient of clear-cut boundaries but still play a very important role. Individuals in organizations possess incentives to abuse power because of its importance in affecting action and acquiring rewards, its status as a valued resource, and its provision of autonomy. Power represents the currency in organizations that allows individuals and groups to gratify needs and attain goals. In addition institutionalized forms of power constitute a primary source of privilege and prestige in a democratic society (Vredenburgh and Brender, 1998).

Kipnis (1972) has demarcated the enticements power-holders face to influence the less powerful. Due to hierarchical authority, resource control, and network centrality According to Astley and Sachdeva (1984), managers possess authority, they control the resources, and due to centralization of network there is a considerable opportunity to abuse power.

The rationale of power in organizations lies in functional effects for job performance (Allen and Porter, 1983). Power exists in organizations to facilitate proficient, coordinated task performance, and this power and performance relationship is often realized through rewards. Power in organizations is context specific according to Pfeffer (1981), and organizations are contexts of manifest and latent conflicts. Lukes (1986) has asserted that power-holders' desires and beliefs affect others' wellbeing. In addition to using power directly for task accomplishment, power-holders often possess personal motives to exercise

power (Miner, 1978). Motives for the interpersonal abuse of power include greater control (Manz and Gioia, 1983; Mechanic, 1962). As Mechanic (1962) indicated, organizational members seek greater control by manipulating the organization's structure. The motivation for abuse of power include desire for personal services, personal and/or organizational goal attainment (Kipnis, 1984), expressions of loyalty and obedience, and punishment/ favoritism toward select individuals.

Power may lead leadership in organizational setting towards abusing power because of its relational nature and its possible irrational use. In formal organizations people are linked with hierarchical relationships and there are dependencies which mean subordinates depend on superiors for important rewards without recourse to other sources (Emerson, 1962) and this may lead to environment of sycophancy and ultimately leader could use the power in a partial manner for the benefit of selected subordinates.

Ciulla (1998) notes that organizations use bogus empowerment as "a therapeutic fiction to make people feel better about themselves, eliminate conflict, and satisfy their desire to belong (niceness); so that they will freely choose to work towards the goals of the organization (control of individualism), and be productive (instrumentalism). Leaders who offer bogus empowerment are unauthentic, insincere and disrespectful of others" (p. 68).

Interplay of Power and Leadership

The literature indicates that power though necessary for performing leadership tasks also carry incentives to abuse it. The perception of leader towards power, process through which power is used, and the purpose with which power is exercised makes the difference between great, good, so and so, and bad leadership.

The leaders who follow the ethical path do not consider power as simply a mean to control of the herd but believe that the fundamental use of power is the freedom that allows individuals to be creative, to fulfill their potentiality, to become their own master, and achieving bigger things instead of self-interests. They focus more on responsibilities side and always make attempts to enhance their power in relation to perform the responsibility in best possible way. They generate power outside of which is there and inherent with the leadership position. They believe more in collective power instead of centralized one. Their locus of control is within their soul. They trust their inner power or potential which is immense and with the help of "invisible hand" (not of Adam Smith) they are able to perform the tasks exceeding the common man's expectations. The collective power which they believe in creates a synergy or a sort of chain reaction where the combined abilities exceed many times as compared to the sum total of individual abilities. For them real power is people, great

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ideas, collective functioning, societal well-being, inner strength, a belief in unity, and selfless service. The formal power which is there is secondary for them but is treated as important because that provides the formal authority to them to pursue great things. The positive results which are achieved are dedicated to people and the higher power which is above all of human-beings. Such leaders value actions that transcend personal self-interests.

Unethical leaders on the other hand treat power as a mean to push forward the self-interests. They believe that as it is their responsibility to do the task so the power should also be concentrated to them only. All the followers, subordinates, and others are just instruments to be used for pursuing the task. As the power lies with me the leader think that all the people are bound to follow the orders without any resistance. Bullish methods are used when resistance occurs. Punishment, favoritism, bullying, crossing the ethical boundaries, personal service, financial irregularities, exploitation of employees, etc. are common features of such type of leaders. In a sense, power blinds them. Coleman's (1994) and Rosoff et al.'s (1998) in their study of white collar crimes have given a wide range of examples of unethical acts by leaders. Balch and Armstrong (2010) have also given some other examples of grossly unethical acts by leaders which include the act of Charles Keating (S&L fraud of the 1980s), Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky (insider trading and racketeering in the 1980s), Paul Mozer and John Gutfreund (Salomon bond trading scandal of the 1990s), Jeffrey Skilling and Andrew Fastow (Enron scandal of 2001), Bernard Ebbers (Worldcom scandal of 2002), Dennis Koslowski (Tyco scandal of 2002), and Bernard Madoff (investment fraud of 2008). Hamilton and Sanders (1999) argued that destructive corporate outcomes are usually traceable to a leadership decision that reflected short-term personal goals. When leaders use the power for self-interest and put their self-interest ahead of higher goals then they often moves toward unethical and destructive behavior (e.g., Howell and Avolio, 1992; Hogan et al., 1990; Conger, 1990). Personalized and inauthentic leaders use their power and influence for personal advantage whereas socialized and authentic leaders are other-oriented and work to empower followers in an effort to achieve collective goals (Howell and Shamir, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003).

Then there are leaders who follow a mixed approach towards power. In certain situations they use the power for right purpose but in certain cases they use it for self-gratification. They vacillate between right and wrong. A hypothetical example can be that a CEO hires employees purely on merit basis but slightly bend the rules to accommodate his relative in the organization. We can say that such types of leaders are sensitive to unethical practices but not purely destructive. They may allow unethicality to creep in the organization which might take a bigger proposition later on. They could neither be bracketed with divine nor with beast. They are marginal cases. The way these leaders use power depends highly on

situation and context.

Spirituality

Now let us find the spiritual basis for the difference between the three types of leadership mentioned above. Today we find very few leaders who could really be called as truly ethical leaders. The other two categories contain the majority. From the above discussions one common phenomenon that emerges is that of fixation to certain short-term or unworthy objective which is mostly towards the self-interest is the major cause for leaders to fall in the unethical trap. The power in such cases is then treated by the leader as an important tool to be used to carry forward the actions based on the fixation. We could say that majority of leaders are suffering from the phenomenon called 'teleopathy' of which fixation is the most important component. According to Goodpaster (1994) the principal symptoms of teleopathy can be described under three headings: fixation, rationalization, and detachment.

Fixation

Goodpaster says that people, organizations, and society applaud virtues like determination, courage, perseverance, and tenacity but not the addiction, dependency, or fixation - which lies in

1. The intensity of a narrow goal focus rather than a broad one;

2. The urgency of the pursuit of short-term goals rather than long-term ones; and

3. The thoughtlessness or even recklessness of seeking objectives whose full implications are underexamined.

In determination person owns the goal but in fixation the goal owns the person.

Goodpaster (1994) says:

"The difference between management by objectives and being managed by one's objectives is all the difference when it comes to leadership. Investment in goals beyond our capacity for critical appraisal and judgement indicates, in the language of Kant, that the self has become a means, not an end. The unworthy somehow becomes a master, as history reminds us in accounts of slavery and idolatry. Examples of the "harvest" of fixation are plentiful - at the level of the person when urgent, reckless careerism drives a Martin Siegel to cooperate with Ivan Boesky in insider trading; at the level of the organization when NASA overrides a safety recommendation against launching the Challenger, leading to fatal results, or when corporate scandals reach some of the most well-known and admired firms in the U. S. (General Electric, E. E Hutton, Dow Coming, Sears Roebuck)."

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Rationalization

Once the leaders are fixated to some myopic objective then they try to justify it. The two dominant form of rationalization used are loyalty and legality. Loyalty rationalization means justifying the unethical decisions in name of profitability, increasing shareholders worth, or achieving some organizational goal etc. Legality appeals to the permissibility of a behavior or policy within the constraints of the law. Each provides a justifying lens of leadership actions.

Detachment

Detachment here means that getting fixated to something and then justifying it again an again detaches the leader from his inner voice, the inner power, the inner consciousness. We can call it a separation of head from heart. Competitiveness and goal seeking eventually drive out compassion and generosity, making more serious compromises easier as time goes on. A kind of isolation from moral responsiveness sets in, dignified by metaphors like "jungle", "toughness", and "real world". The detached leader loses the ability to connect its behavior to the larger human picture.

Goodpaster (1994) summarizes teleopathy as:

"teleopathy is a moral condition of a leader in which the unbalanced pursuit of purpose makes itself manifest through three symptoms: fixation, rationalization, and detachment. Teleopathy leads to alienation, stress, unreasonable demands on work time, loss of creativity, and loss of community and is salient in the context of spirituality in the workplace."

This fixation could be more elaborately explained through Indian spiritual tradition. In Indian spiritual tradition fixation to anything for self-interest leads human-beings to destruction.

Swami Rama (1980) in his book, *Living with the Himalyan Masters*, has suggested that attachment or fixation for non-essential encumberances or incessant desire for the self is the mother of all misery. It is a waste of time and energy. He further suggests that this ignorance cannot be dispelled by going to the temple, worshipping in the church, listening to sermons or performing rituals. To attain the ultimate reality it is necessary to free oneself from this fixation for non-essential things.

In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita lord Krishna tells Arjuna that a person continuously thinking of worldly objects gets attached to them, this attachment leads to desire, non fulfillment of the desires causes anger, and this anger brings confusion that leads

to loss of memory. The loss of memory spoils discretion and loss of discretion destroys a person himself. Contrary to this if a person gets rid of attachment and jealousy, his mind becomes pure and happy, all his sorrows are lost.

"They whose thoughts are of sensual objects are attached to them, attachment gives rise to desires, and anger is born when these desires are obstructed." (2.62)

Further, Lord Krishna says
"Delusion is born from anger, by which memory is confused; confusion of memory undermines the faculty of discrimination and, when discrimination is lost, the seeker deviates from the means of absolution." (2.63)

According to Bhagavad Gita fixation for worldly objects such as power, wealth and glory, is the root cause of unethical behavior. This fixation binds one's mind with the worldly objects and compels him to always think of that and try to have it by any means. Mind gets polluted. This fixation leads to various types of selfish desires. Desires leads to delusion and bondage. In Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

"It is the selfish desire arising from the state of passion which threatens a person in this life. Just as fire is covered by smoke and a mirror is obscured by dust, just as an embryo is developed in the womb, knowledge is hidden in selfish desire. Arjuna, this unquenchable fire for self-satisfaction is the inveterate enemy of the wise. Selfish desire is found in the senses, mind and intellect misleading them and burying wisdom in delusion."

When desires are not achieved it leads to anger. Due to anger the mind gets confounded. One's vision gets blurred. Confusion signifies that person is not in control of his mind and the potential to discriminate has been lost. This state leads to loss of memory. In this state a person is unable to recollect what is right and what is wrong. A person loses the capability to understand how he has to behave and how he should not behave. He losses the sight of where he is headed for in his life. In summary, it can be said that loss of memory makes the person incapable of finding the true answers for what, why, when, where, how, and who related to him and the environment in which he is living. The purpose of his existence is forgotten including his duties, responsibilities, and obligations towards himself and the society. The loss of memory leads to loss of discretion. Due to loss of memory a person's ability of judgment is lost. Loss of memory leads to the loss of intellect and he becomes destined to indulge in wrong and unethical practices and ultimately when he gets indulged in wrong and unethical practices his reputation, respect, honour and personality gets destroyed.

Indian spiritual tradition has quite elaborately explained the connection between fixation (attachment) and the destruction. Further, the onus has always been put on a person who commits unethical things. Situation is not given importance. A person who is driven by

spiritual values never gets fluttered with the situation. Spirituality keeps the person well aligned with the bigger picture and helps him in avoiding fixation to non-essential or worldly things.

Shankara the great Indian philosopher has said that every individual is a subject-object complex. Its subject element is Pure Consciousness (soul) and its object element is the internal organ (body) which is physical. The source of the internal organ is Avidya (ignorance) which causes individuality. In perception, when the internal organ through senses comes into the contact with an object, it assumes the form of that object. It is the vritti (deformation). This Avidya or illusion is positive wrong knowledge. It is superimposition. A shell is mistaken for silver. The shell is the ground on which the silver is superimposed. When right knowledge arises this error vanishes. The relation between the shell and the silver is neither that of identity nor of difference nor of both. It is unique and is known as non-difference. Similarly Pure Consciousness is the ground on which the world appears through Maya. When right knowledge dawns and the essential unity of the individual with the Pure Consciousness is realized, Maya or Avidya vanishes (Sharma, 1970).

We could interpret this in a way that fixation to non-essential things is ignorance. This ignorance leads people to do unethical things. This fixation which is a negative thing and is the cause of the person's action then it is natural that effect would also be negative. The effect, says, Shankara, can never exist independently and outside of the cause either before or after its manifestation. Therefore it cannot be said that the effect does not pre-exist in the cause. The effect is only an appearance of the cause. Though the effect and the cause are non-different, yet it is the effect which exists and depends upon the cause and not vice-versa. We see that milk produces curd, clay produces pots and gold produces ornaments. Curd cannot be produced from clay nor can pots be produced from milk (Sharma, 1970).

Spirituality is pure consciousness, a state where a person is in control of the senses and mind and has a universal approach to life and profession instead of individualistic and selfish approach. It is this spirituality that makes leaders believe in shared belief, worldview, connectedness, and universalism. Leaders driven by spirituality consider the power as a means to do something good for the organizations, country, society, or communities. Their fixation is to others or to selfless purpose. On the contrary, leaders devoid of spirituality are fixated to narrow objectives or to selfish purpose. These leaders see power as an opportunity to pursue self-interest or they limit their use of power to only narrow objectives.

Interplay of Leadership, Power, and Spirituality

In short now the interplay of leadership, power, and spirituality could be presented in the form of equations.

Leadership + Power - Spirituality → Unethical Leadership
Leadership + Power + Spirituality → Ethical Leadership
Leadership + Power + Dwindling Spirituality → Marginal Leadership

Use or abuse of power is directly dependent on spirituality and so is the leadership phenomenon. Today the world is facing crisis of ethical leadership simply because the missing element is spirituality.

Conclusion

The crux of the above discussions is that spirituality unites and fixation divides. Fixation on goals that are narrow, urgent, etc., is the cause for leaders entering into ethical trap. Ethical leaders avoid fixation on such goals. Unethical leaders become victim of this fixation. Marginal cases momentarily enter into the trap but do not remain there for a longer period of time. It is suggested that fixation should be avoided by the leaders. Instead of rationalization of fixation, an attitude of impartiality and immunity beyond conventional norms should be adopted. Further, instead of detachment of head from heart, an assimilation of the two should be practiced. This assimilation is spirituality. The tension between the two horses pulling the moral chariot- fixation and spirituality - must be managed so that the leader can remain whole on the journey.

Philosopher Norman (1983) wrote that:

"The sacrificing of one's own interests need not be a sacrificing of oneself to something external. My commitment to my friends or my children, to a person whom I love or a social movement in which I believe, may be a part of my own deepest being, so that when I devote myself to them, my overriding experience is not of sacrificing myself but of fulfilling myself."

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