



Vedic Leadership: Theory and Practice of Operating from Natural Law

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Abstract

Vedic leadership is an inclusive and holistic approach that engages the wholeness of Being and totality of knowledge for mistake-free action. Ideally, Vedic leadership leads to a more sustainable and joyful world. This can be achieved by complete and total self-knowledge, through development of one's own consciousness, and making wise decisions naturally and effortlessly in accordance with the laws of nature. Ultimately, Vedic leadership flows from the totality of all the laws of nature. These laws of nature, which can be accessed in the consciousness of every being, provide an unchanging framework for a stress-free and sustainable path to perfect leadership. Leading from Natural Law enhances a leader's capacity for integrating diverse stakeholders, perspectives, knowledge, and skills, to achieve a holistic and inclusive vision and effortless success. This chapter presents several key natural law principles along with associated Vedic principles. Vedic principle of *Vasudha-eva-kutumbakam* means whole world is a one big single family; hence we should live with harmony, caring and sharing. We then present a rich real-life case study of Vedic leadership, where a values-driven transformative leader employed creative strategies and holistic techniques to boost performance and accomplish internal change while maintaining respect and dignity of all the people involved in the organization. Practicing Vedic leadership helped him build from scratch an award-winning sustainable and growing organization, under extraordinary challenges. The implications for leadership research and practice are presented.

Keywords

Vedic leadership · Spiritual leadership · Consciousness · Natural Law · Principles · Wholeness

Introduction

Climate change and social inequality are among the greatest challenges of our times. Traditional leadership models have fallen short in addressing these complex gestalts of problems. Addressing and solving these grand challenges requires a great coming together of all people in an ego-transcending manner. This is a call for leaders who are awakened to their deepest universal values and act wholeheartedly for the common good (Dhiman 2017; Marques and Dhiman 2006). Such leadership from within (Cashman 2017; Fairholm 1996; Burns 2003) means that the wise leader acts from the wholeness of oneself, honed through a regular practice of transcendence. Such a leader is deeply attuned to universal values and, in serving from those inner values, serves one's colleagues, the organization, and society. Harung et al. (1995) developed a unified theory of leadership, where regular transcendence helps the leaders grow and attain peak performances and results.

There is a large body of scholarship on spiritual leadership (Fry 2003). Spiritual leadership has been defined as "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that

are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (Fry 2003). Spiritual leaders are said to seek spiritual survival for themselves and then meet the unmet spiritual needs of the followers (Parameshwar 2005). Greenleaf's (2002) Servant Leadership model comes close to spiritual leadership, in that a servant leader would usually serve the spiritual needs of the followers by offering them meaningful work. Thus, the servant leader brings together service and meaning to the organization. Collins (2001) defines Level 5 leadership as similar to a servant leadership stance in which humility of the leader is key to his continued learning and growth. Covey's (1992) model of principle-centered leadership similarly shows how a leader lives in harmony with natural laws and universal principles.

Spiritual survival is however a deficit concept and is driven by a fear of inadequacy. It does not promise total fulfillment and a blissful world. Further, these spiritual models do not adequately characterize the essential nature of the human being and the nature of right action.

There have also been efforts to learn leadership lessons from ancient classics from perennial civilizations such as Greek, Chinese, and Persian (Prastracos et al. 2012). Many leadership models have also been developed based on Bhagvad Gita (Lord Krishna) and Ramayana (Lord Rama). However, no attempt has been made to find leadership lessons from the Vedas as a whole, the most ancient and complete body of knowledge existing. This chapter will present Vedic leadership as an inclusive model for eternal flourishing. This theory is based on Vedas, the ancient and eternal knowledge of the totality of all the laws of nature. We present a detailed case study of Vedic leadership in practice in a mid-sized Indian company. Then we present implications for research and practice.

Vedas: A Primer

The Vedas are the oldest documented spiritual teachings of humanity, with their roots going back over 5000 years in ancient India. They are the best-preserved roots of India's spiritual ancestors and famous ancient sages and seers of many traditions – dwarfing in size the ancient teachings that have managed to survive elsewhere in the world. The Vedas laid down the foundation for the great civilization of India, which dominated Asia spiritually and produced many important religions and spiritual movements. The Vedic tradition has managed to sustain and transform itself over centuries and eras, enduring wars and cultural changes of every variety. This endurance and adaptability comes from its firm foundation in universal truth and its capacity to renew itself in every generation.

It was only after the advent of the "British Raj" that Indians saw a decline and eventually a catastrophic collapse of their wealth, thereby leading to extreme poverty. Living under conquerors, Indians were made to believe that the knowledge and wisdom of their ancestors no longer stood the test of time. However, Vedic culture is not a relic of the past; it is as relevant now as ever. It has so much to offer and covers every angle of existence. It is fast becoming evident that modern

management thinking and concepts are ill-equipped to handle the complex grand challenges in a modern world. Maybe it is time to look at things through a different and deeper lens to find answers and directions that are so needed. The knowledge and understanding of this great Vedic culture may indeed be that which will help us see through the fog of confusion that seems to envelop the whole world.

The word “Veda” is derived from the root word “Vid” meaning knowledge. Vedas thus literally mean total knowledge. Vedas were generated around 2500 to 7000 BC. They were cognized and propagated by ancient sages, or rishis, for spiritual and social benefit of the entire humanity. Vedic messages were communicated through symbols, rituals, and stories. There are four main Vedic texts: Rik Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda. In addition, there are 36 other branches of Vedas. Some of the well-known branches are Bhagvad Gita, Yoga Sutra, Ayurveda, Gandharva Veda, Dhanur Veda, Upanishads, Vedanta, etc. Vedic texts are a starting point for the development of Vedic knowledge, which is a living tradition of spiritual realization and communion with the infinite.

Vedic knowledge is relevant to everyone and exists more as an inner rather than outer reality. For example, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh traditions are not the same but similar in sharing a common orientation toward Dharma, recognition of the law of Karma and rebirth, practices of Yoga, meditation, and mantra as the basis of the spiritual life. It is heartening to note that the appreciation and liking of Vedic concepts have gone global in the modern times, with Vedic teachings and research in various forms occurring around the world. This latest Vedic renaissance is a quite dynamic spiritual movement, flowering in diverse names and forms. It is likely to grow as humanity searches for meaning in life beyond the limitations of both scientific materialism and religious dogma.

Vedic Doctrine

Vedic view of life is a holistic perspective of not only human needs but also the entire universe, as a culture of consciousness. It is designed for a progress with peaceful coexistence and widespread happiness and bliss. The unity of consciousness enables multitude of names and forms, and they are all paths to bliss. The Vedic approach encompasses the entire gamut of human endeavors at the bodily, mental, intellectual, societal, environmental, and spiritual planes. Only actions in accordance with the nature will simultaneously satisfy the interest of the individual, society, and the cosmos. Therefore, Vedas offer a path for peaceful coexistence.

Vedic knowledge sees truth as one and undivided. It also acknowledges that there are infinite ways of expressing it and seeking it. Vedas thus encompass the full range of unity and diversity of the cosmos, from silent potential to dynamic action. Vedic view of life is based on the idea that man is an integral part of the universal family – *Vasudha-eva-kutumbakam*. While he has the right to make his individual choices, he must do it without harming others. The law of Karma (causal action) is a law of the nature, suggesting that every action of an individual leads to a set of consequences. This path of life is called Karma Yoga. While need is accommodated

in this path, greed is defined as a vice. Greed must be shunned since it leads to catastrophic consequences. It is about progress without destroying family and social life, without transforming the earth from heaven into hell.

Vedic approach to management is not the subject of any specific Vedic text, but it reflects values, principles, attitudes, and practices that are part of Vedic philosophy. Vedic sciences, like Yoga and Ayurveda, are a Vedic way of life. Every individual is a custodian of this planet and its resources with the responsibility to preserve, protect, and sustain every creature and ensure the sustenance of the planet as a whole. This objective of “let all be happy (*sarve sukhin bhavantu*)” can be achieved by adhering to six fundamental Vedic doctrines, namely:

- Human Welfare (*Loka sangraha*)
- Profit through ethical means (*Shubhlaabh*)
- Action without greed (*Nishkaama Karma*)
- Entire world as one family (*Vasudha-Eva-Kutumbakam*)
- Avoidance of any extreme (*Ati-hyaastha-varjayet*)
- Devoted Commitment (*Samarpan Bhaav*)

Vedic scriptures envisage sacrifice with compassion, which yields a harmonious living with other humans, animals, and the cosmos.

Vedic Leadership

Vedic leadership is about achieving progress with wholeness, without the destruction of family, society, or the earth itself. Vedic leadership engages the wholeness of Being and the fullness of knowledge, for mistake-free action. Vedic scriptures offer a way of harmonious living with other humans, animals, and the cosmos leading to a scenario of all being happy. Vedic principles are designed for the expansion of happiness. Vedic leadership is not a set of fixed initiatives to be executed but a set of principles that should influence one’s thinking. Vedic principles help achieve complete and total self-awareness and make wise decisions.

The Vedic concept of universal happiness (*sarvesukhinbhavantu*) can be achieved by following two very important complimentary Vedic principles, about the nature of silent Self and about the nature of dynamic action:

1. *Aham Brahmasmi (Vedanta)* (I am Totality). This principle characterizes the fundamental nature of every human being. When read in conjunction with other Vedic phrases, it means that everyone is Totality. It implies that we should see totality in everyone. Everyone in the universe has infinite potential to know and accomplish anything. The Vedic principle of *Vasudha-eva-kutumbakam* (the entire universe is one family), the primary principle of universal inclusion, flows from the main principle. One should consider one’s neighbors to be as fully as part of oneself. Everyone is a custodian of this planet and has the

responsibility to preserve, protect, and sustain every creature and the planet as a whole. It means that the nation-state should exist not just for the welfare of its citizens but for the whole world. The Vedic principle of *Lokasangraha* (human welfare) naturally follows from this primary principle. Human welfare means the rulers should be aware of and be vigilant against hurting any innocent people. Hurting others is hurting oneself, and taking care of others is taking care of oneself.

2. *Yogastha Kuru Karmani* (Bhagvad Gita 2:48) (established in Self, perform action). This Vedic principle provides guidance for proper right action. It means that leaders should operate naturally and effortlessly from their inner total potential. One should rise above personal preferences and act according to the needs of the universe. One should act without being unduly concerned about the fruit of the actions. Leaders should do *karma* in service of their *dharma*. *Dharma* is duty according to one's nature and position. *Karma* is action, in accordance with the needs of the present. The principle of *Nishkaama Karma* (action without greed) means that one should not violate the rights of others while accumulating profits. The principle of *Samarpan Bhaav* (or the feeling of devotion and commitment) relates to honoring the privileges and rights of all creatures on the planet. The principle of *Shubhlaabh* (profit through ethical means) means one should be fair in making profits without hurting others and that a part of the profits should be donated for charitable causes. Finally, the principle of *Ati-hyaastha-varjayet* (avoidance of extremes) balance implies that excess of anything is bad, as one has to balance one's needs with the needs of others in an enlightened way.

According to Vedic principles, leaders should be open and humble and perform their duties to act as per their consciousness. Their actions should inspire their followers to similarly perform their authentic duties. Ideally, Vedic leaders realize that nature acts through them to achieve its own goals. Choosing one's *dharma*, and thus the right *karma*, is not always easy though. The right or wrong choice can be a subjective one and depend on multiple factors including the context, beliefs, personal stake, one's intent and purpose, timing, etc. It includes visualizing not only the direct implications of one's actions but also the numerous, significant, indirect, delayed implications arising out of reactions and reflections from other human beings and nature.

Three Dharmas

The English dictionary defines heaven as a dream destination, with paradise as a synonym. In Vedic mythology there are three such destinations, viz., Swarga, Kailash, and Vaikuntha. Swarga or heaven is where the Lord Indra resides and rules. Vaikuntha is the eternal abode of Lord Vishnu. Kailash is where Lord Shiva resides.

Swarga is the abode of Lord Indra, who is always chasing material success, ignoring the implications of means adapted. Lord Indra is prosperous but is always worried about unknown threats. Indra is always insecure and tries all means to

ensure there is no one else more powerful/resourceful than him. Indra, the king of Swarga, is never at peace with Self. Similarly, to most people, their own hunger comes first. But such an attitude would lead the world to become a battleground, and ultimately it may produce prosperity without peace. This is typical of the modern world. Thus, there are no temples dedicated to Indra and no one reveres him. He is an idea, but there is no common image of him. This is what the modern man is chasing.

In contrast, *Vaikuntha*, where Vishnu abides, is both peaceful and prosperous. It is like a happy playground. Vishnu engages with others – he is participative. Lord Vishnu's idol shows him reclining on a massive serpent and surrounded by affluence and abundances. Prosperity is accomplished with peace. Leaders who take care of other stakeholders, compromising their own, are like Lord Vishnu, who lives a balanced life with peace and prosperity. The hunger of other stakeholders (shareholder, customer, employees, vendors, politicians, regulators, environment, society, etc.) is taken care by a Vishnu-like leader. The ideal business model would therefore be *Vaikuntha* where someone else's hunger matters first. This belief can lead to a playground as opposed to a battleground.

Mount Kailash is abode of Lord Shiva, the most powerful, God of gods. He has everything with him but has given it up all. He sits in icy, snowy, high mountain called Mount Kailash. His wife Goddess Parvati, also known as Annapurna, feeds the world but he has given up his hunger.

Lord Indra believes that his hunger matters first. Lord Vishnu believes that other people's hunger matters first, and that he must take care. That is why there is no temple for Indra in Hindu religion; rather there are temples for Shiva and Vishnu only. In fact, Shiva and Vishnu are considered two sides of the same coin.

Vaikuntha is also known as *Kshir Sagar*. Here Vishnu reclines over *Shesha-naga*, along with his consort Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lord Vishnu symbolizes the role of a CEO in the modern business parlance. He is depicted using two different modes of transport, referred as *Vahana* in Indian mythology, viz., eagle and snake.



Lord Vishnu flying on an eagle



Lord Vishnu on a serpent on bed of water

His posture signifies that a leader should learn to live with snakes around (i.e., his own desires) who may behave like our enemies or friends depending on our behavior toward them and, on top, learn to balance and float on bed of water. Any imbalance will lead to sinking.

In addition, the leader should have a direct view like that of a snake sniffing around to keep risks and danger away; and simultaneously he should have a far sighted, big-picture view like an eagle in the sky, above to know what is coming toward us in the long run.

Dharma and Karma

A clear goal and purpose helps in getting to your dream destination with ease. Otherwise, one is like a boat lost in the sea having no knowledge of destination. Are we behaving like Lord Indra or Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu? Are we seeking happiness or just prosperity? Success to most means one or more of beating the competition, making more money, and gaining a bigger share of the market, name and fame, and such external measures. Very rarely is happiness or peace of mind considered as part of success. Happiness is added to the list as an afterthought, or its exclusion is justified as intrinsic. Unfortunately, happiness as well as peace of mind remains elusive despite achieving external success. Short momentary pleasures are generally confused with happiness. Happiness does not come by default. One needs to wish for it and consciously work to seek it. In the absence of clarity as to what will give them happiness, majority of the people throughout their lives keep chasing money and goodies of materialistic world as a surrogate for happiness. There is a common but incorrect notion that money can buy everything in life including happiness. It is also a myth that winning means the competition must lose or success means lots of money. Happiness means different things to different people. Peace of mind or sustained happiness is possible only when people around us are happy. And a true leader is one who helps the masses achieve success, happiness, and prosperity.

There thus exists a choice of dream destinations. If one wants peace of mind and happiness, then one needs to choose either overcoming one's hunger and desires or a balanced life with focus on helping others. Whose hunger should matter first? Business can be said to be based on three "B"s (belief, behavior, and business), which says as is your belief, so is your behavior and so is your business/outcome. If we believe that our hunger matters first, then business is like a battleground. There may be prosperity but there will not be any peace. If we believe that other people's hunger matters first, then our business is like a playground where there is prosperity with peace. The belief system of the leader determines whether a company becomes a battleground or a playground.

The perception and deep appreciation of these Vedic truths by the leader require a higher level of consciousness. Higher states of consciousness or self-awareness can be achieved through transcendence of the physical sensory nature of everyday living. When one is free from narrow considerations, one can more finely perceive these profound truths. Waking up to one's consciousness is the first and indispensable step to harnessing this knowledge and organizing power. Effective leadership thus originates from a higher state of consciousness and brings a sense of vision, purpose, and order. Leadership practices should be grounded in Totality, or the Vedas, so that leaders and followers can experience sustained happiness (Harung et al. 1995). A Vedic leader's real dharma should be passion and compassion for others.

SALT Model

Transformational leadership comprises of values, attitudes, and behaviors that incorporates four fundamental arenas that define the essence of human existence – the body (physical), mind (logical/rational thought), heart (emotions, feelings), and spirit. Such leaders commit themselves at all levels – thought, feelings, and actions toward that mission. All these four elements can be represented in a cyclical SALT model (Maheshwari 2016). It is an evolutionary spiral of inner and external actions that complement and reinforce each other. It is an episodic and cyclical process. It starts with a self-aware Being with a developed consciousness. Such a person has a very refined perception and naturally conceives of transformative visions. The natural desire to express those transformative visions creates a leadership posture in society. This attracts support and followers. Collection action by the leader and followers leads to fulfilling achievements. The sense of fulfillment nourishes the spirit and enlivens the inner Being of all. The evolutionary cycle goes on. This SALT model (Fig. 1) summarizes this cycle as "Transformational Leadership is Spirit in Action" (Maheshwari 2016).

The left side of Fig. 1 represents the inner dimension, while the right side represents the external dimension. On the left bottom is Spirit, the progenitor of innovative ideas. At the upper left is the inner transformation and mental creation, which represents the imagination of the Leader. On the top right, leadership emerges as a visible stance that attracts attention of followers. At bottom right is observable, manifested action. Leaders become better and grow over multiple iterations of this

Fig. 1 SALT cycle

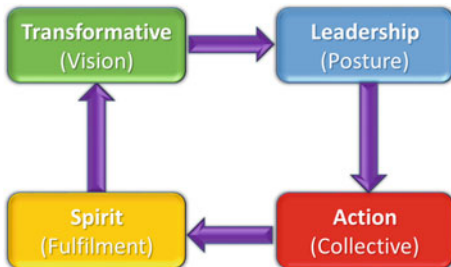
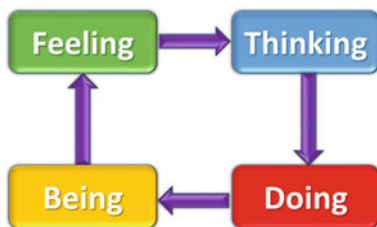


Fig. 2 Four levels of leader’s operation



cycle. New leaders can emerge from among the followers, as they enjoy fulfillment and their consciousness develops.

SALT is a useful metaphor for a Vedic leadership model for many reasons. First, just as salt is an essential ingredient for healthy tasty food, leadership is an essential ingredient for a healthy organization and society. Second, just as salt is abundantly available, so also abundant are leadership situations where potential leaders can prove their mettle. Third, just as salt can have a corrosive effect on materials, so also effective leaders can accelerate the entropy of the status quo and create more wholesome actions as replacement. Fourth, just as salt lowers the freezing point, so also effective leaders operate from deep calmness and inner peace, as they experience profound and transformative possibilities.

Historically, Mahatma Gandhi used salt as the vehicle to mobilize people in 1930, in civil disobedience, on the shores of the Arabian Sea. This mobilization was instrumental in hobbling the immoral British empire, evolutionarily the Indian people to freedom. This event established Gandhi as a Mahatma (great soul) and the supreme leader of the Indian freedom struggle and the most influential leader of the twentieth century. Gandhi experienced many iterations of such cycles and became an ever better leader over time. When asked for his view on living well, Gandhi summarily answered in a self-referral manner, saying that “my life is my message.” Regarding transformative action also, he mentioned in a self-referral manner that “we should be the change that we want to see in the world.”

Vedic leaders operate from all levels, of Being, Feeling, Thinking, and Doing (Fig. 2). These four levels map directly to the elements of the SALT cycle. Being is the ultimate level of Self and relates to spirit. Being leads to Feeling, which leads to Thinking, and which manifests in Doing. At the level of Being, the leader should be

self-aware, purposeful, creative, visionary, bold, and innovative. At the Feeling level, the leader should be authentic, compassionate, listener, learner, persevering, and change-agent. At a Thinking level, the leader should be intelligent, decisive, skilled, logical, and communicator. And at the Action level, the leader should be a fast-mover, hardworking, team-player, excellent performer, and so on.

Vedic leadership can be compared with traditional leader in many dimensions.

| Dimension | Vedic leadership | Traditional leadership |
|--|---|---|
| Fundamental metaphor | Spirit in action | Coordinated movement – from point A to B |
| Guiding principles | Everyone is Totality. Act from authentic Self. Do right karma to support own dharma. World is family | Set vision, communicate goals, attract and empower followers, generate trust and action for achievement |
| Leadership purpose | World as one family in harmony; holistic development and growth | Gain success, growth, and power in relative terms |
| Leadership source | Self-awareness as the source of leadership potential; develop higher consciousness to develop ability | Better traits, skills, experiences, resources, training, and relationships |
| Leadership process | Transform spirally in alignment with Natural Law | Multistage models from transactional to transformative |
| Individual versus collective leadership | Leadership comes from an exceptional individual, who inspires other leaders | Leadership comes from leaders with large number of committed followers |
| Leadership style | Inspiring and leading people to become better themselves | Leadership is about getting the task accomplished effectively |
| Relation to servant leadership | Vedic leaders are humble servants of their followers while pursuing their own dharma or duty | Rare humble person who works to make everyone else successful |
| Role model | Gandhi | Big company CEO |

Natural Law

Natural Law is a timeless set of principles, including scientific laws, that govern the universe (Maharishi 1963). By utilizing Natural Law, one can be a more creative performer and effective leader (Harung et al. 2009). The laws of nature can be accessed in the consciousness of one’s own being (Hagelin 1987). Consciousness is primary and is conscious of itself (Nader 2015). Consciousness is thus the knower, the known, and the process of knowing, all in one. Consciousness is the field of infinite correlations, where everything is connected with everything else. Development of consciousness is the primary way of enlivening Natural Law within every person. Regular transcendence, such as through the natural and effective practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM), can help develop greater self-awareness and

sharpen the perception, and lead to lower stress, and higher creativity (Travis et al. 2009; Harung et al. 2009).

The universal laws of nature have been cognized by thinkers and seers and have stood the test of time. They are reflected across human experience, from ancient Vedic texts to quantum physics theories (Maharishi 1963). When these principles are allowed to work as nature designed, action is catapulted to new heights, just as astronauts use their knowledge of gravitation to slingshot around planets. Everyone should be trained in the knowledge and application of Natural Law to enjoy effortless success and fulfillment in life (Maharishi 1995). Natural Law includes scientific principles – for example, energy is always conserved. It also includes other principles such as the nature of life is to grow.

One can and should learn from the nature. The magic mantra is to seek alignment of large number of small forces. When multiple small forces pull in one common direction, magical things happen; with little effort, one gets larger and sustainable success. Happiness for all comes along as a side effect and bonus, as everyone involved enjoy the journey of togetherness, sharing and caring for each other. There are two keywords in above statement, viz., alignment and large number of small forces; fortunately both move hand in hand. The same key gets us both.

Sustainability is inversely proportional to the degree of effort required to operate and manage the enterprise. The higher the effort required, the lesser the life span; and the lesser the efforts, the longer the life. Many enterprises perish soon because mediating between the competing objectives among the various stakeholders requires a significant effort from the leader and the management team, and this not sustainable in the long run. Hence the key to sustainable growth is in finding that magic formula which minimizes resistance and maximizes support.

We present here a few important Natural Law principles which relate closely with the Vedic principles presented earlier.

Natural Law Principle 1: Knowledge Is Structured in Consciousness

This is arguably the highest principle of Natural Law. Every person is the embodiment of the wholeness of Natural Law (Maharishi 1995). All knowledge ultimately is the knowledge of the Self. The only thorough knowledge is that which comes from direct experience. Knowledge is different in different states of mind. What one sees depends upon one's state of consciousness. For the same person, the same situation could look like a positive or a negative depending upon the perspective taken. When stressed, one is unlikely to experience the totality of the situation. Similarly, in a state of stress, there is a reduced likelihood of generating creative solutions and frameworks. On the other hand, when one is relaxed and self-aware, one will likely recognize and realize many things at different levels. Thus, a leader should aim to purify his consciousness and sharpen his perception. What looks like a crisis to one leader can look like an opportunity to another. When a situation is complex, ambiguous, and risky, it is especially important for a leader to engage

from a settled state of consciousness. It will help in being open to broader perspective and sharp focus, on doing the right thing.

As described earlier, *Dharma* is a core Vedic concept that is popularly translated as “duty.” It is a holistic principle of knowledge and action. *Dharma* literally means that which upholds. Practicing one’s *dharma* according to one’s true nature is at the heart of Vedic leadership. *Dharma* has a universal value, and it also has contextual values. For example, empathy toward others is universal *Dharma*, while the exploitation of the weak for self-gain is the opposite of *Dharma*. *Dharma* is a principle and not a code of conduct. *Dharma*-based actions result in lasting happiness. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata tell the story of the leader-kings becoming aware of their true *dharma* in the midst of confusing choices. Underlying the actions of Ram and Krishna is *Dharma*. To seek long-lasting happiness and success, the leaders should discover and follow their *Dharma*.

Natural Law Principle 2: Truth Is One, It Is Expressed in Many Ways

External reality is a phenomenological entity that is in constant flux and transformation. Even the perceptive powers of the knower change over time. The same sap is expressed in different ways in the root, the trunk, the leaves, the flowers, and the fruit of the tree. Experts from individual domains of knowledge tend to have diverse beliefs, preconceptions, beliefs, expectations, and perspectives, which are all partially true. One should be deeply open to and respectful of multiple manifestations and interpretations of reality. The underlying total reality however is the unified value of all of them. Operating from a settled state of mind, one can experience deeper interconnections and knowledge in the environment.

From a Vedic perspective, everyone tries to do the right karma as per their own perception and judgment. However, the same action and idea may be perceived differently in different contexts. This is so because what human senses can assimilate only a part of the truth, and the shadow sides are generally not visible. By observing all sides, one can develop a more holistic understanding of the situation. Most of the time people act unthinkingly based on their beliefs. We choose many of our own beliefs, but some are uncritically inherited from other sources. Beliefs are personal, and one feels accountable for the accuracy of one’s limited beliefs. Our perception of the world filters the facts to fit our preexisting beliefs. Collectively held beliefs can be a powerful determinant of collective action. Beliefs can and do evolve with a change in perception and experience.

Natural Law Principle 3: Nature Is Found in Layers

As one’s consciousness develops, one becomes aware of many layers of reality. One naturally seeks the highest first, i.e., one should know that by knowing which

everything else is known. External phenomena can be observed at the ordinary level, and they can also be perceived at subtler levels. There is greater power in the subtler levels of knowledge, just like there is greater power going from molecular to nuclear scale. Leaders should start with understanding the highest and integrated value of the situation first.

As an instance, one can differentiate between principles and rules. Principles are a higher-level construct than rules. A principle is a general statement, which enjoys widespread support, and is intended to support truth and guide action. A principle motivates a person to do the things that seem good and right. People implicitly absorb principles from other people and by observing the concrete benefits of those principles. A rule, on the other hand, is a means of establishing a strict mechanism for decision-making. Principles guide while rules restrain. Rules represent specific instructions that leave no doubt about where and how the rule is to be applied. It is not always true that strictly following the rules actually achieves application of the underlying principles. Rules tend to get ossified with the passage of time and appear as anachronisms. Leaders should pay attention to setting the right principles, in accordance with *Dharma*. And then they should trust the employees to do the right thing in the spirit of *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.

Principle 4: The Nature of Life Is to Grow

Everyone naturally wants to grow and realize their full potential. Every seed has the potential to grow into a huge tree. What one pays attention to grows in one's consciousness. Awareness of the flow of one's attention helps accentuate the positive. One should give out what one seeks, as the more one gives, the more one gets. It may return in a different time or manner, but it almost always does. For instance, happiness has that reflexive quality that making others happy makes oneself happier, whereas caring only about one's own happiness does not bring any happiness. One should help others become successful, and thus one's own life becomes more successful and joyful.

As described earlier, according to karma theory, one should not be anxious about the results and be confident that doing the right thing will bring success, joy, and fulfillment. When we are intrinsically motivated, from our own true nature, we experience the support of nature. When the choice of action is made by oneself, according to one's *dharma*, then there is greater sense of responsibility, accountability, and joy for that action. Then one persists despite challenges and often succeeds in the mission.

Principle 5: Water the Root and Enjoy the Fruit

This principle relates closely to the principles 3 and 4 above. Attention must be paid at the right level for future success. One should identify the root cause of the situation and then try to focus on it. For example, tending to the leaves will not improve the health of a tree. Similarly, focusing efforts only on surface-level

indicators will not increase the quality of one's functioning. By acting from a state of wholeness and equanimity, one is assured of the most appropriate path to success. One should be deeply involved in one's work while still retaining a sense of detachment. Leaders need the skills and confidence to identify the root of the problem and address it the right way.

The theory of *Karma* states that every action will have its effect. The effects of one's actions may be experienced soon or it may take many lifetimes. However, no one can escape the effects of one's past *karmas*. This resonates with the popular principle of "As you sow, so shall you reap." For example, by wishing harm upon others, one is guaranteed to receive harm. This also correlates completely with the physical laws of cause and effect or action and reaction. One can do good deeds now and improve one's karmic storehouse.

Vedic Leadership Case Study

Here we present the case study of a CEO/leader who practiced Vedic leadership over the larger part of a career of 35 years. In his last assignment, he grew a company from 0 to 3000 employees over the period of a decade, in a notably nonbusiness friendly state in India. This company was a wholly owned subsidiary of a Europe-based large insurance company and provided back-office services. The leader inculcated the right beliefs among the employees in accordance with Vedic principles from the very beginning, and the business growth was a natural outcome of that. Employees naturally gravitated to this company because of its leadership and growth. Many employees later went on to take on leadership positions in other companies. The core Vedic principle applied here is *Vasudha-eva-kutumbakam*.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The Whole World Is a Family

As described earlier, one of the primary principles of Vedic leadership is to realize that the world is one unified family. Thus the right thing is to extend the family and make the whole universe as one's family. Very early on, the leader saw the wisdom of engaging not only the employees but also their families. He invited family members of high performers to the office every quarter. The family could include parents or local guardian or friends. The family was given a grand tour. They were picked up from home in a company car; given a tour of office, an interaction with friends and colleagues, and a nice meal followed by a photo session with senior management; and then dropped off back home. This small investment of time and expenses led to a very strong extended support system for the organization. The employees' families would discourage the employee to leave the company by emphasizing the unique care that the company provided and even offering to mediate any issues with the senior managers who they believe they knew well. Families talked proudly about their son/daughter and about the company to their friends, relatives, and office colleagues invariably resulting with regular applicants thru

this route, very capable and very keen to join reducing the cost of recruitment significantly. Families also felt safe and were comfortable even when their members, especially women, were working at late-night shifts.

Friends and family members would themselves be keen to apply to join the organization. Upon realizing the enormous benefits of embracing this extended layer of families, the plan was extended to families that lived out of town. A sustained high performance for 1 year was as the criterion for a fully company sponsored trip for an employee's family's paid visit to the company.

The same principle was soon extended to ex-employees also. The company invested a small amount of effort and money into developing a virtual network of alumni of the organization. This helped them with keeping in touch with the company through newsletters and events. This resulted in many ex-employees returning back to the company. It influenced many others in the new organization to apply for a notified vacancy. Ex-employees would not talk negative about the company. This all helped reduce the company's recruitment costs down to almost zero.

Managers and Peers as Family

Every first-line manager was given a parental role of maintaining a personal touch with each of their direct reports. The line manager's performance had formal parameters on proactive measures to reduce attrition and number of high performers produced. The line managers were trained and given tools to keep track of personal challenges and aspiration of each of the team member in their team. Their performance reports included metrics on potential high performers with recommended suitable movement plan and how to retain performing but potentially unhappy employees. These reports were discussed at higher level and acted upon as per recommendations resulting in proactive retention measures and talent identification.

An incentive system was introduced, encouraging employees to attract their family and friends. The proposer was assigned as buddy, to attract the new employee and to help the new employee to settle down. This reduced multiple issues that newcomers in the organization faced, and in fact it made their experience a memorable one.

Psychological Ownership of the Company and Its Work

Consistent with the mission of the company to grow, the psychological ownership of the company was widely distributed. Employees understood the principles for growing the company. The employees were permitted to use their discretion and not blindly follow the rules. This was unlike most service businesses which operate using very well-defined and scripted processes and where employees are required to strictly adhere to the optimized process. When employees understand the role of their process and impact of quality of service, they go the extra mile to fix the issues at their end. Instead of taking an easy route of transferring the problem to another section, they themselves take the pains to solve the problem. This avoids

repeat calls from customers, thus releasing a huge capacity to serve more business, and generating greater satisfaction for both the customers and employees.

Industrial Trade Unions Join the Family

The Indian state of Kerala is infamous for industrial disruption, popularly called “Bandh,” or an industrial strike. On any point of dispute with state or central government, trade unions would call for a strike. They would find support from political parties, including the party in power. Such strikes usually last for 12–24 h and were random in nature. The geographic scope of the strike would range from the city to the state level. During strikes, roads are blocked, and people are discouraged from going to office. Schools and offices would usually proactively declare a holiday to avoid any confrontation. The government would conveniently turn a blind eye to these strikes. There is almost a mood of holiday revelry across the city during these “bandhs.” There are as many as 100 such “bandh” days in any given year. Kerala is unique in this mode of operation, which is a nuisance to business. This comes with a heavy loss of industrial production and customer support activity. These factors led to manufacturing industry being forced to walk away from Kerala for many years.

Most companies found a simple solution of working on the weekends in lieu of a “bandh” day. While it works for some businesses, it is generally not an acceptable solution for the customer support business, where customer calls are based on working hours of European and global business customers. Any unreliability in serving customers would threaten the operations of the company itself.

The company adapted by beginning to change the mind-set and attitude of employees from a family perspective. The company explained to the employees the business losses incurred during such bandhs are a threat to that entire business. The employees understood the implications and vowed to fight the evil together. The company contacted parents and families of local employees to obtain their moral agreement and support. Many employees made efforts to be at office on “bandh” days even if it meant walking long distances. Some employees would sacrifice their vacation and come to office to support the organization. Everyone behaved as their organization was their family and their own job and everyone’s growth were at risk. Employee support was so high that the attendance was as much on bandh days compared to other normal working days. All teams collaborated actively to improve the process and delivery of services.

A few other businesses in the vicinity also joined hands and started similar campaigns with their employees. All companies asked for and took support from police to provide protection to convoys of our office transport vehicles. Slowly the message reached the trade union calling those “bandhs.” They accepted that this was an essential service and that they will not get any support from employee working in the companies. They relented, and any vehicle with a sign of “Technopark” would not be blocked and be allowed to pass through.

The CEO/leader made sure of leading from the front. He would bravely face the risk, drive down to office as usual, and take a stroll of office so that everyone noticed

his presence. He also appreciated their efforts in coming to office. The CEOs of many neighboring companies started doing the same. A small step grew into a movement. They realized that the fear of bandhs was much bigger in their minds than reality. This started early, and in his stint of more than 10 years, they did not lose a single day of business on account of bandh. That raised the confidence of the parent UK company in local company's abilities, and they considered many more functions to transfer to Kerala, and thus there were more jobs and growth for the company.

Competition and Suppliers Join Extended Family

The company shared their policy and procedures to handle such frequent bandhs and trained large number of employees and support staff in other companies. The company's rulebook was adopted by many other companies in the state. We partnered with our competition and giants of the industry. Joint working teams shared each other's facilities and resources, and this helped deliver excellent results to the parent company.

Suppliers were also welcomed as a part of the family, and they were respected and appreciated for their services. This is in contrast to the established practices where most business try to extract every possible benefit and simultaneously cut down the costs of services from a supplier. This develops a mind-set of distrust and wariness and wasteful procedures of multiple checks and controls. The company decided to treat some of their core suppliers as partners with very fair and transparent practices in dealing with them. Treating them and their employees as part and parcel of the company's own setup resulted in many of their employees preferring to work at the company's office. Their business grew with ours, and both continued to complement each other, a mutually win-win partnership, saving many unproductive steps and costs.

Auditors Join the Family

Audits are generally considered to be an avoidable pain, and employees are usually scared of auditors. The company had many kinds of audits, some mandatory and some internal. By taking a family approach, the company decided to make the audit process a friendly affair. Many of the company's own employees were added as virtual members of various audit teams. In particular, all high-performing employees were given an option to become virtual auditors and join the audit of the process that they themselves have worked on in the past. Employees were trained on the audit process, and they earned a certification for it. Since they knew the processes intimately, they thus played a much bigger role in reviewing the overall process than merely finding mistakes alone. The employee-auditors were incentivized to identify non-value-added components of the process to help redesign the process for a higher and better throughput. This was a win-win scenario for both auditor and auditee that benefitted the organization and the customer alike.

Evolution and Growth of the Family

The company embarked on a journey from providing greater brand value and attractiveness as an employer. With a humble beginning of promote the concept of a successful career instead of offering a mere job, the company gradually moved up in branding itself a “Great place to work.” External accreditations further progressed the company becoming an “Employer of choice.” The employee started showing signs of not only developing their career but believing this company is my dream “Career Destination,” thus full bringing their full dedication. There was very low attrition in the business. Ultimately, when a large number of employees being highly engaged and determined to build their careers at the company, the company began a campaign of “My company.” They proved a game changer in behavior aspects leading to exponential increase in performance of employees and thus the organization. It was a rare combination of achieving high efficiency with high effectiveness.

The most beneficial result was in customer preference to be served from Kerala. The customer service process had serving capacity distributed both in the UK and India. Instead of selecting who would answer a call, the customer was offered a choice. An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system message greets a waiting customer in the call queue with options to wait for longer in the queue to be served in the UK or get served from Indian agent immediately. Over the period of time, with a sustained happy experience from being served by India, many customers began to prefer to be served by India team even before the IVR system served them the options.

Discussion

The Vedic leadership model extends other spiritual leadership models in offering total happiness, grounded in eternal Natural Law that is the Vedas. These laws are constantly expanding as new cognitions and discoveries take place. Vedic leadership is based on eternal and total truth that is not owned or specified by any sect or individual.

The overarching inclusive worldview principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is unique to Vedas. Even as other spiritual traditions call for universal brotherhood, the Vedic concept of world-as-a-family goes further in treating all as one, not just as equal or related. The sequential unfoldment of this concept can occur through expanding the circles of inclusion, including potential adversaries in some ways. The case study showed that the inclusive *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* philosophy broke many myths about the “Business Process offshoring industry” in India and about the state of Kerala. One can use the inclusive mind-set to achieve many impossible tasks. The case study also illustrates that empowering the employee as a family member has many side benefits as they stand up to challenges. Inclusiveness, coupled with alignment toward a collective objective (or threat), can overcome huge challenges with ease.

The CEO/leader, operating from a Vishnu-like model of taking care of everyone's hunger, becomes a role model. By personally fully engaged in taking the risks against such threats to business, he earns the trust of employees. Open and transparent communication with the parent company managers helped with additional support in standby mode just in case the solutions did not work.

Business process offshoring is usually a cost saving strategy that leads to job losses in parent company and a drop in customer experience. However, in this case, this business became a revenue generating and value-adding strategic asset in the parent's company's portfolio. Moving an industry's perception from being a liability to an asset is a big game changer, and Vedic leadership is largely responsible for the success.

Summary and Implications

This paper presents a new model of Vedic leadership which is in complete alignment with Natural Law. We presented the two major principles underlying Vedic leadership. The first principle stated that everyone is Totality, with infinite potential. The second principle stated that all action should be based on one's correct sense of duty, without much concern about the results. This paper also brought in important principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* as ways to guide action.

The paper described the leadership process using the SALT cycle. An enlivened Spirit creates inner transformations of perceived reality. Those transformations enable a person to assume a leadership stance and communicate the vision of a better future in a meaningfully specific way. This attracts followers and enables collective action that leads to great achievements, which leads to the fulfillment of those desires and promises. That further encourages and enlivens the spirit, and the SALT cycle continues.

This paper presented a few simple Natural Law principles as an integrative framework for organizational action. The most important principle is that knowledge is structured in consciousness. The value of enlivening Natural Law extends beyond the time in a particular organization and can set a member up for success in her work life in the future. Natural Law principles are applicable across all aspects of life and in all domains. Natural Law can corrode ossified practices and help invent new and vibrant practices that align with the highest principles of nature itself. Enlivening Natural Law leads to the growth of self-awareness. It can be accomplished through regular practice of meditation and other such practices of transcendence. Leaders and followers can thus learn to be more self-aware and be open to more possibilities.

Vedic leadership thrives on accomplishment of *Vasudha-eva-kutumbakam*, or world is one family, through transcendence of surface-level diversity. The Vedic leadership case study showed that the concept of family can unfold at many levels, thus successively bringing large parts of the world family into the fold, and generate a positive outcome for all. These are important principles that should guide management education as well as practice to address the grand challenges of our times. Higher states of consciousness can be achieved more easily with the regular practice

of Transcendental Meditation. More organizations should institute practices of transcendence to enable the feeling of the world as one family.

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