

SPIRITUALITY AS CHAPERONE: OVERCOMING LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES POST COVID

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Abstract

The Covid 19 crisis and the economic havoc it has wrought are harbingers of the extraordinary challenges that organizations will face. The social and economic landscape has dramatically reshaped itself in the backdrop of huge migration flows, climate change and technological advances which led to disruption of industries, economies and the nations. Post COVID, the need for blended ethical decision making based on the philosophical tenet of Utilitarianism (Bentham,1781) and business-oriented pragmatism became an imperative. In order to maximize value creation for society, cognitive limitations (Kahneman, 2011) should be confronted. A parallel two system view of ethical decision making: intuitive and deliberative (Greene, 2015) enables comparisons creating more value. Business leaders need to shape the environment of ethical behaviour. Effective nudging in behavioural research has been studied deeply. It can make the world a better workplace as people follow the behaviour of others, especially those who are in positions of power and prestige. Caring for others and society at large tilts decision-making in favour of creating values for all stakeholders. As new ethical challenges have been emerging in post covid times, building a new ecology which is purpose driven is the pathfinder through the haze of uncertainty. Focus on ESG concerns and SDGs require a compelling mission at the heart of every company's efforts to enhance its positive impact on the environment and the society. Taking an intergenerational perspective that extends beyond the tenure

of any management team requires moving from intention to results. The global society is facing enormous challenges and those who outperform others in this new era will survive. Spirituality refers to the “healing power” (Marx, 1987) that awakens a human being from his “indifference” toward others and makes him responsive in all of her/his manifestations. This paper posits that in post Covid times, organizations who follow System 2 (Kahneman, 2011) of deliberative thinking, which is slower, conscious, effortful, and logical will come much closer to rationality leading to more ethical behaviours. Spirituality-based management seeking balance between the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations will help check unfettered strategic rationality promoting spiritual engagement in dealing with indispensable moments of management.

Keywords: Spirituality, Leadership Challenges, Covid 19 Pandemic, System 1 and System 2 Thinking, Chaperone.

“There are decades where nothing happens and there are weeks where decades happen.” (Vladimir Lenin)

1. The Covid Crisis

Lenin’s words have never held more meaning than in the current times. The Covid 19 crisis and the economic havoc it wrought are harbingers of the extraordinary challenges that organizations will face. The social and economic landscape has dramatically reshaped itself in the backdrop of huge migration flows, climate change and technological advances which has led to disruption of industries, economies and the nations. The Covid 19 Pandemic brutally exposed the fragility of our existence. The robustness of economies, businesses, and communities is being sorely tested by the Pandemic even today. No other event since World War II has had worldwide fallouts of such great magnitude as this crisis, bringing even the biggest economies and most powerful nations to their knees. Its ability to affect the masses in a non-discretionary manner makes it even more pernicious. The business and economic scenario has altered permanently. As organizations restructure and improvise themselves to sail through this crisis, prescribed formulas and materialistic solutions will not be the total answer to organizational problems.

The expostulations for the business world in the aftermath of Covid 19 pandemic are multifaceted. Huge migration flows, supply chain disruptions, continuing adverse impact of long countrywide lockdowns, purchasing power reduction and shift in demand patterns in societies, are the socio-economic dilemmas being experienced across the board. As corporations have a supererogatory work force and mulled over

layoffs, it not only hurted individuals but societies at large with growth and innovation taking a back seat.

Contrary situations and ethical dilemmas are grappling decision makers where they are confronted with one of the most challenging exigencies in recent times having economic, social, emotional and ethical overtones. How they have responded to the situation, shall be reminisced by the coming generations. Organizations are faced with a need to reorient their whole business purpose. With current businesses losing their anchorage with changing business environments, some are using some portmanteau to stay onboard, not only to sustain through the crisis but also contribute constructively to help society sustain the crisis. As new economic and ethical challenges continue to emerge in post covid times, building a new ecology which is purpose driven will be the pathfinder through the haze of uncertainty.

2. Post Covid Business direction

The kind of leadership proficiencies that are required today are not to be found in the leadership playbooks which were originally designed for authority and control. Leadership model that fits this age of disruption cannot be bereft of new forms of pedagogy which are personal, intimate and experiential too. The situation needs to be reviewed from multiple vantage points. Humans have an inherent capacity to reinvent themselves post any crisis. Clearly the leadership has to draw from the watchwords of human history: We Rebuild, We Heal, We Grow and We Learn. Leaders have to act as Chaperones helping their communities to rebuild, heal, grow and learn as best as they can, managing moment by moment, day by day. A Chaperone must possess qualities like flexibility, maturity, being sacrificial, teachable and prepared (Small, 2019) in keeping the journey moving in a positive direction. Chaperoning through this crisis requires leaders who have understood that Deliberate Calm and Bounded Optimism (Mckinsey Insights, Reimagining the way businesses operate, 2020) will be the keys to cope with uncertainty making organisation and leadership resilient and resourceful. Our paper also indicates that blended ethical decision making, based on the philosophical tenet of Utilitarianism and business oriented pragmatism must be woven into the culture of the organisations. We understand that Utilitarianism has faced its own criticism, hence adeptness at improvisations and heuristics, will require

moral thinking in conflicting situations by weighing the pros and cons of each alternative and thinking critically.

Post Covid, as a bruised, grieving, anxious, stressed workforce returned to workplaces the need to heal and rebuild was even greater. Old school management principles, rooted into capitalistic thought and behaviour needed to be blended with the obscure teachings of the sacred to infuse spirituality in the corporate culture making way for corporate convalescence from the multifaceted crisis and also encourage employees to delve into their personal growth in a broader perspective. Most people are completely oblivious of the belongingness and connection to the one Universe. The Employees must be encouraged to bring moral concerns into the business conversation (Bowles, 2020). John Hope (John Hope, 2010) argues that love not only has a place in business but also is absolutely central to sustainable success. Wisdom of love, justice, dignity and respect are not just traditional spiritual ideas, they are also New Management Virtues needed in the contemporary workplace (Marcic, 1997)

3. Trends observed in Covid and post Covid times

The organisational culture and behaviours are expected to experience some foreseeable trends that are likely to emerge in the coming years for businesses to thrive. The areas that are drawing the attention of organisational leadership are vast. As researchers we attempt to list the most prominent ones:

- a) **Wellbeing:** Remote work increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, and managers of virtual teams made an all-out effort to combat that by fostering connection and belonging (Pitstick, 2020). Online reduced informal communication channels and at times team cohesiveness. Workforce, especially those who worked from home, were more vulnerable to encroachment of personal space. Continuous working from remote locations gradually reduced informal communication channels and at times team cohesiveness.
- b) **Sense of belongingness among employees:** Employees have a greater sense of belonging to a team where they are respected (De Cremer & R. Tyler., 2005), heard, receive fair procedural treatment (De Cremer & Blader, 2006) and feel connected to

the larger goals of the organization. They feel that their skill sets and strong points can contribute to the larger purpose of the organization. The coming time belongs to the cross-border organisations functioning in a world that is divided by geographical, political, ethnic, economic and social differences and binding the workforce cohesively is a major task for management. The feeling of belongingness to the team and organization makes people cross their distinctive socio-cultural-mindset templates to fulfill their commitment towards the greater goals, this in fact, can be an asset to a culturally diverse organisation. Approbation of contribution towards the organisation can help cultivate a sense of belongingness in a highly diverse and even polarized world (Volini, et al., 2020).

- c) **Humanity's precedence over technology:** Even before the pandemic, there was shifting propensity towards greater automation and digitalization of work, Advances in information technology and changes in social and economic relationships have led individual workers and organizations to explore various types of distributed work arrangements (Venkatesh & Vitalari, 1992). Covid-19 just accelerated the trends. Digitalization of work is rendering even the most skilled workforce obsolete with technological advancements taking place at a phantom pace and the only way to thrive is to build a workforce with a learning mindset which is open to renew and upgrade its skills and is keen on innovating. The advancements in technology led to the development of Tele-Health which was predicted to replace humans (Korzep, 2010). However, it must be understood that technology can amplify and supplement work but can't be a replacement for human intellect and commitment. The humane side exhibited by the healthcare workers during the pandemic is awe inspiring and showed that Technology shall be seen as an augmentative and synergistic tool to amplify human efforts rather than substitute for it.
- d) **Stakeholder capitalism:** The capitalistic theory propounded by Adam Smith no longer holds ground. Balance between economic interest and greater good is the only way to thrive in the long

run. Leaders need to recalibrate organisational and personal goals towards stakeholders, building trust between organisation and its various stakeholders. However, a bounded oculism towards direct stakeholders only will no longer serve the purpose. The pandemic and its aftermath has paved way to a more capacious perspective towards stakeholders than the current philosophies of being responsible towards stakeholders through CSR and sustainable business practices.

- e) **Building trust** - Reliable behaviour, good communication, sincerity, competence, integrity and goal congruence (Karlsen, Græe, & Massaoud, 2008) are the cornerstones of building trust between the organisation and the pool of stakeholders. A clear and truthful communication can lay the foundation stone for trust building as it creates an environment for sincere mutual codependency. Growing skepticism towards organisations makes leadership, communications, trust, corporate performance and reputation inextricably linked (Beslin & Reddin, 2004).

4. Spirituality: A Chaperone post Covid crisis

“ *Great leadership begins with being a whole human being* ” (Tony Schwartz).

What are we looking for in the Leader in such tumultuous times! Who is and who can be a whole human being?

Successful leaders are more fluid in their approach towards decision making. They conjugate their teams through common goals instead of flow of authority in a top-down approach. Such an approach gives the team members autonomy to deliberate over situations and provide input and take decisions instead of following a chain of command. Studies have suggested the qualities that are expected of leaders in times of crisis and how they should operate to bring their people together and sail through the crisis as a team (Popovics, 2022) (Banerjee, 2014) (Datskovska, 2020). Much less has been said about how a leader should equip himself to cope with the pressures that may emerge with uncertainties and surprises that essentially define any crisis. The recent crisis has made everyone realize that those who do not have spiritual moorings may lose their way buckling under pressure as their patience runs out and frustration sets in. As Covid continued to lash out at all

economic activities and no activity could be undertaken, big or small without accommodating this factor into account, there seems to be no immediate end to this crisis. It takes a great deal of consciousness from leaders in the midst of crisis and upheaval to maintain a balance that is neither too negative nor overly optimistic (Mckinsey Insights, May 2020). Amid the storm, there needs to be an anchor to hold and this role has to be played by the leader in the organisation. This role is not only to take balanced decisions, but also inculcate a culture where the leader takes the clan forward towards a balanced approach amid crisis.

There is extant literature which has looked at theories of spiritual leadership. Spirituality, which has been long neglected particularly because of capitalist pursuits of the organizations and the leaders. Fry (2003) was first to incorporate spirituality into leadership theories, thus propagating the concept of spiritual leadership, the essence of which emphasizes motivating oneself intrinsically and also the others. The leader's values, attitudes, and behaviors are its three components (see figure 1).

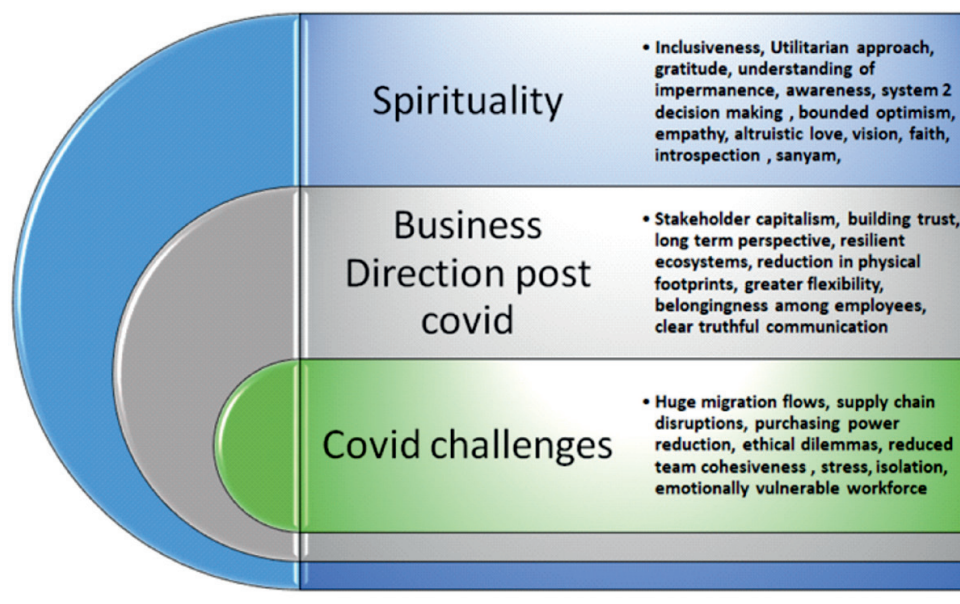


Figure 1: Spirituality as Chaperone

In complex situations, where there is time to do so, we must try to rise to the more reflective and deliberative critical level and ask what action we should endorse. What really is the right answer? Hare argues that in such situations we should employ utilitarianism (Hare, 1981).

Behavioural economist and psychologist Daniel Kahneman has done extensive research on how people think and make decisions. He construed that people use one of two systems for decision making depending upon the speed of taking decisions (see figure 2). **System 1** is the fast-thinking process, often done unconsciously and effortlessly. Human thinking process is affected by cognitive thinking and heuristics, in routine and easy tasks mostly decisions are taken instinctively, quickly based on past experiences, resemblances and rule of thumb. Emotion may play a pivotal role in these decisions. System 1 thinking is generally applied and useful where the situation warrants quick decisions and decision stakes may be low. However, it may not be the best way of handling difficult or novel situations (Kahneman, 2011). **System 2** thinking in contrast is a conscious thinking which gets triggered when awakened. This awakening would occur when we have to deal with problems that are not mundane and require deliberations. When more informed choices have to be made the need to usher in factors that will support these choices kick in. These factors require analysis and controlled slow paced focus and penetration. Thus it is often said that System 2 thinking is lazy and entails costs as it will not awaken naturally. Managers face constant dilemmas and their choices would be based on how swiftly and competently they are able to awaken System 2 thinking. (Rzeczynski, 2014)

| | System 1 | System 2 |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Characteristics | Fast Effortless Unconscious Triggers emotions Associative Looks for causation Looks for patterns Creates stories to explain events | Slow Effortful Conscious Logical Deliberative Can handle abstract concepts |
| Advantages | Speed of response in a crisis Creativity through associations, so good for expansive thinking Easy completion of routine or repetitive tasks | Allows reflection and consideration of the "bigger picture", options, pros and cons, consequences Can handle logic, maths, statistics Good for reductive thinking |
| Disadvantages | Jumps to conclusions Unhelpful emotional responses Can make errors that are not detected and corrected, such as wrong assumptions, poor judgements, false causal links | Slow, so requires time Requires effort and energy, which can lead to decision fatigue |

Figure 2: Kahneman’s System 1 and System 2 Decision making model

Source: (Rzeczynski, 2014)

Translated to any crisis situation, System 2 thinking will essentially require people to suppress their instincts, question their assumptions and think deeply about the situation. This System 2 thinking, as mentioned

earlier is unfortunately more time consuming and more demanding than making a rapid evaluation and following the rules. And in the pressure of the moment people default to their intuitive thinking mode (Kaplan et al., 2020).

How does one trigger this effortful, conscious, logical and deliberative System 2 thinking?

System 2 thinking can be inculcated through tapping into mindfulness and spirituality. Imbibing the spiritual dimension of mindfulness into management treats organizations as a value-based system, maintaining constant interaction with the environment. The journey of personal growth through self-development and self-transcendence needing deeper commitment to existential realities can build a foundation stone for system 2 thinking at individual level. System 2 thinking can't be imposed by any outside means, it's more of a self-inculcated way of functioning. It is this aspect where spirituality can play a very important role as it has shown in several studies that a spiritual quest and deep understanding of spirituality leads to individual transformation of human beings. (Pruzan, 2011). Spirituality is neither religion nor rituals, philosophy or dogma, it is rather an internal experience and a process of walking towards self-transformation. Conceptually, vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love can be the three components of spiritual leadership translated in the form of a leader's values, attitudes, and behaviors, respectively. Vision refers to a future with a meaning lending intrinsic self-value and life purpose to the employees. Hope/faith is built upon the confidence of the leader in his ability to achieve the said vision. High levels of a leader's confidence can push the subordinates to attain the organizational mission. Altruistic love arises out of a series of leader behaviors which pegs itself on mutual care and respect and produces a heightened feeling of being understood and appreciated by organizational members, thus forging a favorable organizational culture. In this spiritual leadership model, Vision gives intrinsic purpose to the existence (Chen & Yang, 2012) and is spiritually rooted when employees have a sense of hope/faith that the common vision will inspire them to achieve future goals (Wang et al., 2019, Fry & Cohen, 2009). In its purest form, this feeling becomes the intrinsic reward for employees to create firm beliefs and encourage the pursuit of a meaningful organizational vision (Chen & Yang, 2012, Wang et al., 2019). Here, authors would like to state that workplace spirituality can come through its leadership as they are the

biggest actors who can shape the culture of the organisation. Hence our paper postulates that the cascading effect of Spiritual leadership is vast and multifold spreading over to the workplace, employees and in all activities of the organisation.

Spirituality is concerned with the matters of spirit. Spirituality originates from the Latin word *spiritus* which means “breath of life”. Spirituality refers to a search for meaning that transcends material well-being. It is a focus on basic, deep-rooted human values, and a relationship with a universal source, power, or divinity (Pruzan, 2011). Mindful and deliberate thinking for a long time has a tendency to transcend beyond the object and process, and capture a bigger picture for greater long term good. A sense of detachment in the thinking process helps in keeping the egoistic thinking at bay and hence decisions can be in harmony with common good. Patanjali’s Yoga sutras bring forth the concept of *sanyam* whereby one can use a combination of simultaneous practice of *Dhāraṇā* (concentration), *Dhyāna* (meditation) & *Samādhi* (union) to get to the root of thought process transcending the object and process, giving a complete knowledge of the subject to the thinker. A thinking and decision making approach on these precepts is expected to be more deliberative. *Sanyam* as per yoga sutras works at sensory, mental and spiritual level and gives a deeper understanding of the object (Indradevi, 2020) (Rajvanshi, 2020)

Another aspect that spirituality imbibes into human beings is compassion and inclusiveness. A widely used term *वसुधैकुटुम्बकम् (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam)* is a Sanskrit phrase that means that the whole world is one single family. This idea is widely accepted in Hindu philosophy, this itself is a path to inclusiveness when you consider all a family, the differences reduce and acceptance increases. Another aspect is Faith and fearlessness. These are also the cornerstones that are developed by imbibing a spiritual outlook. The belief that faith brings fearlessness and hence ability to focus on issues at hand, fearlessness is a common trait amongst great leaders. Faith in oneself or in some higher identity acts like a pillar of psychological support and hence fearlessness. The common concept of *Leap of Faith* gives a sense of feeling that whatever happens is for the greater good and hence releases from the pressure of expectations based on numbers fueled with gains maximization and hence greed. Faith helps us adopt the strategy followed by mother Nature which focuses on giving rather than accumulation. Reduction

in greed and stress will lead to sustainable living and happiness. (Rajvanshi, 2020)

योगःकर्मसुकौशलम् - Yog Sutra advocates that spirituality should be a way of life whether in professional sphere or private. Spirituality is more of a process than an end. Long term recovery of the organisations no doubt is a long haul and may need accommodating and nurturing what they have constantly skirted. The organizations will do well to consider what truly nourishes them along the way. A new order of the organizations which hails an integrative worldview is a harbinger of the space meant to harbour the aspiration of oneness. Organizational leadership that promotes self management will unleash individual energies as people set higher inner standards which need to be met and constantly upgraded through continuous learning. The development of the self of the decision makers forms the prerequisite for creation of such organizations. A state of consciousness which is embedded in everyday activity will reinforce oneness in the organizations. The Spirituality in management perspective extends traditional reflections on corporate purpose and focuses on a self-referential organizational-existential search for meaning, identity and success (Mitroff, 1998). The foundation of better organizational decisions lies in the development of decision makers who are more inclusive and have a peaceful consciousness. The broader the concept of self, the more the decision maker moves towards being an empathetic and all-encompassing manager. Spirituality can serve as a vehicle to reach such states by managerial decision makers, building a strong foundation for the organizations, economies, ecosystems and world in general. Ending on the note that lessons taught by Covid crisis should not be forgotten and should remind us that together we can surmount all challenges. The organizations must root its leadership into spirituality to remain sustainable. Such leaders will truly act as chaperones navigating its people successfully through turbulent times.

Conclusion and Implications for the Post Covid period

The scenario that we are witnessing today is far more challenging in every aspect compared to the pre covid era. The workforce behaviour and needs as well as expectations from employers have been reset. The pre-covid business scenario aiming at growth and profits based on Kahneman's System 1 approach to leadership supported by systematic, fast, unconscious pattern-based leader responses has to give way for a

more subtle System 2 approach being more slow, effortful, conscious and deliberative decision making the leadership handle abstract situations in the post covid era. The solutions are not readily available as the ability to have deep insights into the minds of the employees, workers and fellow colleagues post covid is relatively untested. This paper tries to invoke System 2 thinking by inculcating spiritual leadership traits. Spirituality can be a means to achieve the conscious system 2 leadership that can be the chaperone post covid crisis by triggering in the leaders of the organization who are mainly seen as the vanguards of maintaining the workplace. Various dimensions of spirituality across different cultures project toward altruistic love, inclusiveness, utilitarian approach, vision, faith, impermanence of all things and emotions, introspection, and bounded optimism. Adoption of these spiritual accouterments by the leaders can serve to be the tools for a more conscious organization which can be better equipped to handle unprecedented crises like the covid situation which is still raking the world to find solutions for a better future.

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