

Vedic Leadership Principles for Organizational Success – a Case Study

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Abstract

Vedic Leadership is predicated on the notion of highly developed self-awareness of leaders who transcend surface reality and connect with the broad essential wholeness of the world. The most important Vedic principles for leadership relate to the nature of the Self and Action – i.e. who we are and what should we do. We present key Vedic concepts – of nondual Consciousness, moral duty (*dharmā*), and dispassionate action (*karmā*) to articulate a simple Vedic leadership formula as follows: Authentic leaders are *self-realized* people who do their *work dispassionately* according to their *moral duty*. We also present a simple V-theory of transcendence that enables multiple techniques for leaders to increase their self-awareness. Vedic leadership ideally leads to a sustainably growing organization that engages the wholeness of Being and fullness of knowledge, for mistake-free action on everyone's part. In such an organization, everyone performs their specific assigned role to the best of their natural ability and talent, while keeping the greater good of the whole in mind. We also present a validated professional CEO's account of leading with Vedic principles in a multinational business organization. In seeking the Vedic ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, or 'whole world as one family', this business experienced rapid and sustainable growth for over a decade. There are implications for leadership and transformation in organizations as well as for society for addressing complex challenges.

Keywords: Vedas, Leadership, Consciousness, Transcendence, Nonduality, Inclusivity.

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Introduction

Vedas (Total Knowledge) are an extensive and comprehensive set of ancient knowledge that were cognized by seers in India at least 3000 years ago. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1978) organized all the Vedas into a collection of about 40 branches. These inter-related branches unfold like a lotus flower, from the highly abstract to the more practical knowledge. The first syllable of the first verse of the first Veda, called Rik Veda, is said to contain the essence of the the whole universe in the most abstract form. There are famous mid-level Vedic scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutra that have proved most popular in guiding daily life. There are also domain-centered Vedas on health (AyurVeda), music (Gandharva Veda), architecture (Sthapatya Veda), defense (Dhanur Veda), and so on.

Bhagavad Gita (Lord's Song) is the pre-eminent sacred scripture of 800 verses that is considered to be the essential practical guide for leaders through the ages (Maharishi 1973; Gandhi 2014). In brief in Bhagavad Gita (BG), Lord Krishna reminds Arjuna of his invincible nondual Self; and that he should humbly accept his role in the war (his *dharmā*) and act (*karmā*) without worrying about the consequences. We will develop these key concepts in a later section. Yoga Sutras (Formulae for Divine Union) is a shorter scripture of 156 verses that provides the technique for transcendence to access the nondual Oneness. We will present a V-theory of transcendence, based on Yoga Sutras, in a later section. After presenting these essential concepts, we will relate an organizational case study of how a business leader with a Vedic mindset led a multinational technology organization to organically grow and achieve extraordinary successes, overcoming an unfriendly socio-political environment. We will then present the contributions of this paper, its limitations, and future directions for research.

Nondual Consciousness

The primary axiom of Vedas is nondual Consciousness (Maharishi, 1963; Nader, 2015). There are a few Vedic verses called 'Great Statements' (*mahavakyas*) sprinkled throughout the Vedic literature that emphasize this fact. *Aham brahmasmi* (I am Totality). *Tat tvam Asi* (Thou are That). *Sarva khalvidam Brahma* (Everyone is Totality). They all describe the Self as nondual self-aware Consciousness. This absolute Self is pure silence and pure potential. However, this infinite silence contains within itself infinite diversity and dynamism. Rig Veda (verse 1: 144: 46) says *Ekam Sat Viprāha Bahudhā Vadanti*, which means 'Truth is One; it is expressed in many ways.' Just like the white sunlight contains within itself the various colors of light which manifest themselves when the light is passed through a prism, so also the Absolute Silent Self holds within itself infinite diversity of possibilities for dynamic action. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi says:

“The crucial mistake that has dogged mankind for countless centuries is the loss of understanding of the primary importance of the field of pure consciousness. It is this field alone which is the field of all possibilities and the home of all the laws of nature. Unless thought and action are experienced from this field, life remains incomplete and plagued by ups and downs, plagued by imbalance. Only direct experience can re-establish the importance of pure consciousness as the field that we must contact before we can be successful in whatever interests us.” (1978; pp. 39).

This pure Consciousness is the knower, the known, and the process of knowing (Nader, 2015). Physicists have discovered that Consciousness is also the unified field of all the laws of nature (Hagelin, 1987). By transcending surface reality, one can experience all the laws of nature within one's own Being. Pure

Consciousness “is a blissful state that encompasses elements of serenity, peace and acceptance, but also exhilaration and a sense of possibilities, both for now and for the future,” says Dr. Rosenthal (2008, p.8). Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Aldous Huxley were some prominent transcendentalist philosophers who are reported to have learned about transcendence from the Vedas. Quantum physicists such as Albert Einstein and Erwin Schrödinger were also transcendentalists at some level (Wilber, 2001). Many contemporary physicists (Hagelin, 1987; Goswami, 1993), physiologists (Nader, 2015), and psychologists (Baruss & Mossbridge, 2016) now emphasize that Consciousness is a fundamental reality that precedes material reality and cannot be explained away as an emergent property of materials. Recent affective neuroscience studies have also affirmed these assertions and unearthed the neurobiological underpinnings of transcendence in terms of strong sense of connectedness with others (Yaden et al., 2017). Citing physicists and neuro-scientists, Pavlovich (2019) describes quantum empathy, at the intersection of quantum theory and spirituality, as the consciousness of connectedness: “Quantum empathy is a harmonic frequency of the universe where everything is fluid, indeterminate, entangled and interconnected. At this quantum level, there is no separation between self and other, with the relational-self being both I and We through entanglement. This is a result of non-locality at the sub-atomic field, where waves of information travel through the universe beyond the world of matter. The reshaping of society can potentially occur through realizing the sacredness of this space through contemplative practice” (p 12). Such metaphysical impulses may lead a person to inquire about their place in the natural order and how they may contribute to it. Drawing from quantum physics and biological theories of the brain, they present a science of connectedness to show that consciousness may

exist prior to and outside the human brain (Hameroff & Penrose, 1996). Scharmer & Kaufer (2014) highlight the need for development of consciousness for beneficial collective action: “What is needed is the ability to hold and evolve our collective attention at the same rate at which the reality around us keeps changing (p 72-73).

Dharma and Karma: Principles from Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita (BG) has helped achieved many leaders great successes and happiness over the centuries (Maharishi, 1969; Gandhi, 2017). BG reminds us that the Self is the indestructible soul or pure Consciousness. When Arjuna is confused in war, Lord Krishna reminds him of his true nature. He then asks Arjuna to accept his moral duty and fight the righteous war, without any concern for the outcome. The principle of *Dharma*, which literally means to uphold (rightness in society), has been various translated as moral duty, religion, and destiny. Realizing one’s true *dharma* and fulfilling it to the best of one’s abilities is at the heart of Vedic leadership. *Dharma* is a general principle which has a universal value, such as empathy towards others, and it also has contextual values. *Dharma*-based conduct is said to result in long lasting happiness and fulfilment.

Lord Krishna also reminds Arjuna of the right approach to action. *Karma* means action in the present, and it also means the cumulative storehouse of past actions. Theory of *Karma* agrees with the law of action and reaction: that no one is immune from the effects of their actions. Bhagavad Gita (2:47) says *Karma-nye adbhikaray ma phalesu kadachana*, or ‘To action alone does one have the right, and never to the fruit’. One should not be attached to the fruit of one’s actions. *Karma* thus becomes dispassionate action, without fear of consequences. Actions aligned with one’s *Dharma*, help improve one’s *karmic* storehouse and liberates the self from the bondage of past

karmas. Without awareness of one’s *Dharma*, choosing the right *karma* can be difficult. The essential lesson from BG is that one should transcend surface reality to realize one’s *dharma*, and then do the right *karma* in a specific situation.

Transcendence: Principles from Yoga Sutras

Yoga Sutras (YS) defines the nature and process of Transcendence. YS (1:2) defines *Yoga* (Divine Union) as the ‘cessation of the activities of the (surface) mind’. When the chattering mind becomes still, the transcendent Self, shorn of all thoughts, shines through. YS also provides the methods for transcendence. The eight limbs of YS range from behavioral principles such as Truth and Non-violence, to the physical practices of Asanas (physical postures) and Pranayama (breathing exercises), to the subtle mental practices of *Dhyana* (Meditation) and *Samadhi* (Oneness with Consciousness). Together these limbs help transcend and connect with pure Consciousness. Inspired by YS, we present V-Theory which shows how the universe can be alternately experienced at two different levels: in its dynamic diversity at the top of the V, and its silent unity at the bottom of the V (Figure 1). The upper level is the domain of dynamic action. The bottom level is the level of the Consciousness, the source of pure potential. The path to creatively participating in the continuous transformation of the world at the top of the V is through experiencing the silent unity at the bottom of the V. The first step is to use a suitable technique to transcend surface reality and dive deep to the bottom of the V. It is called the inward stroke. Resting for a certain period at the bottom of the V brings rest and joy to the mind. The second step of the V is to return to the dynamic surface reality at the top of the V. This is called the outward stroke.

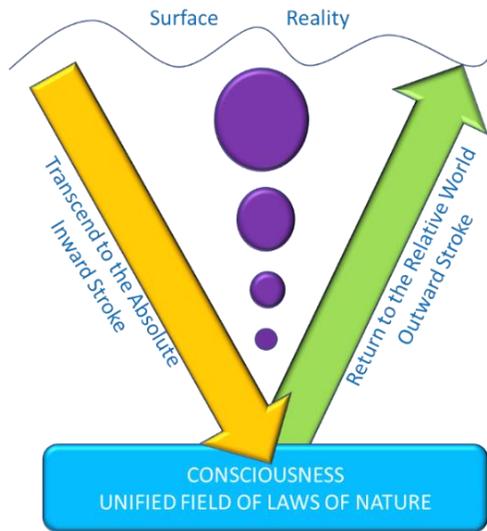


Figure 1: V-Theory: A 2-step model of Transcendence

Multiple practices of transcendence may be considered in the context of a simple 2-step V-model of an inward and outward stroke. Transcendence can be achieved effectively through Transcendental Meditation (TM) (Travis and Shear, 2010). Other approaches from the Eastern and Western traditions such as mindfulness, and visual and performing arts such as singing and dancing, can potentially help transcend, with different levels of efficacy (Shear, 2006; Wilber, 2016; Tsao & Lazslo 2019; Yaden et. al, 2017). When a group of people transcend together, not only do they develop coherence individually, their collective coherence rises to the level of square of the size of the group. Scientific research has conclusively proven this ‘Super-Radiance effect’ (Orme-Johnson & Fergusson, 2018) or ‘societal transcendence’ (Pavlovich, 2019). This effect states that group transcendence by a few people (square root of one percent of the society) practicing TM and TM-Sidhi techniques together can inject a dose of coherence into the collective consciousness to counter all negativity for the whole society. “The Super Radiance data could thereby be viewed as evidence that individual consciousness can access the scale of super-unification, consistent with the proposed identity between pure consciousness and the

unified field” (Hagelin, 1987; pp 68). Figure 2 shows the results from a recent multi-year prospective super-radiance experiment in the USA (Dillbeck & Cavanaugh, 2017). This study shows that crime, drugs, and mortality rates dropped when the meditating group size approached two thousand, the square-root of 1% of US population.

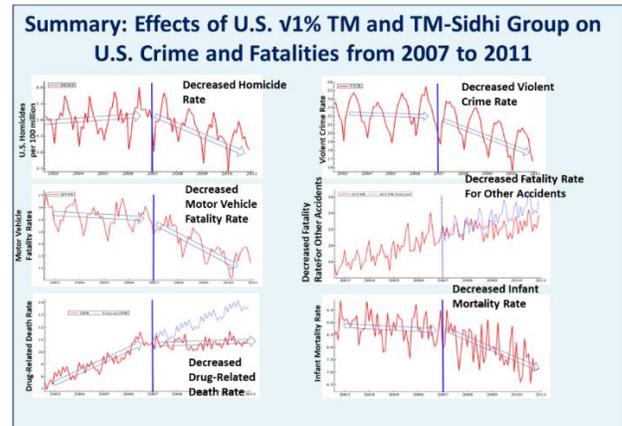


Figure 2: Super-Radiance Effect: Collective Consciousness improves Quality of Life

Evolution of Leadership Theories

Theories of leadership continue to evolve in response to new developments. Many leader-follower relationship theories of the late 20th century relate to the higher consciousness of the leader. Servant Leadership theory states that the leader acts humbly with a sense of trusteeship and with a lesser sense of ego. The Servant Leader works with a ‘natural desire’ to serve and help the resources in his care and help everyone in the community and the planet (Greenleaf, 1973). Spiritual leadership is about meeting the spiritual needs of the followers through ‘transcending the work process and connecting with them in a way to provide feelings of compassion and joy’ (Fry, 2003). Spiritual leadership also begins with a transcendent vision where the leadership experiences a calling and provide the followers a supportive organizational environment. Inclusive Leadership is similarly about care and compassion as it is about “doing things with

people, rather than to people” based on respect, recognition, responsiveness, and responsibility (Hollander, 1978). Transformational Leadership (TL) theory works when leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morality and motivation (Burns, 1977; Bass & Bernard, 1985). TL theory is also predicated on shifts in the leader’s inner perspective. Harung, Heaton & Alexander (1995) present a ‘unified theory of leadership’ which is conceived as the leader(s) operating from higher states of consciousness. By accessing transcendental consciousness as the powerful unified field of all the laws of nature, organizational leadership can be more creative and effective (Harung, Travis, Blank, & Heaton, 2009; Cashman, 2017).

More recent theories of leadership for sustainable businesses demand a broader and holistic view of the world. Conscious Capitalism (Mackey & Sisodia, 2015) takes a humanistic view of business where conscious businesses are motivated by a higher and inclusive sense of purpose to generate wealth for all their stakeholders. Conscious leaders act from a ‘higher state of consciousness’ and are committed to the company’s purpose, to the people the business touches, and to the planet. More recently, leadership theories based on neuroscience and quantum physics have emerged. Tsao & Lazslo (2019) present quantum leadership as a model of enabling the transformation towards care and compassion, using contemplation as the key practice to access ‘Consciousness, the mother of all capital’. They empirically tested the hypothesis with 16 organizations that “Transforming our consciousness is the most effective tool we have for unlocking local and global change” (p 113.) and found that a self-aware leadership is key to this new model, and that a quantum leader is high on the consciousness of connectedness, and is concerned about the wellbeing of the world. Tsao & Lazslo (2019) present a first-person report by the first author on how he, as a business magnate, came to realize the operating principle of ‘world as one

family’. Our Vedic Leadership theory is perfectly compatible with these theories.

Vedic Leadership: Spirit in Action

Vedic Leadership can be described as Spirit (or Consciousness) in Action. It is similar to the unified theory of leadership (Harung, Heaton & Alexander, 1995), and is predicated on the leadership transcending to the broadest awareness of interconnected reality, which guides them of their right duty and action. It includes the notions of a self-realized leader who discovers moral duty (*dharmā*), and acts without worrying about the fruits (*karmā*). In terms of process, Vedic Leadership can be characterized by a repeat sequence of deeper inner self-realizations and self-transformations, which lead to more inclusive and fulfilling actions, which lead to even deeper insights, and the cycle continues. A model of Vedic Leadership (Figure 3) represents the cyclical process of greater development of moral clarity (*dharmā*) and impactful action (*karmā*). The top half represents behavioral concepts and relate to the top of the V-theory. The bottom half represents individual level the bottom of the V-theory.

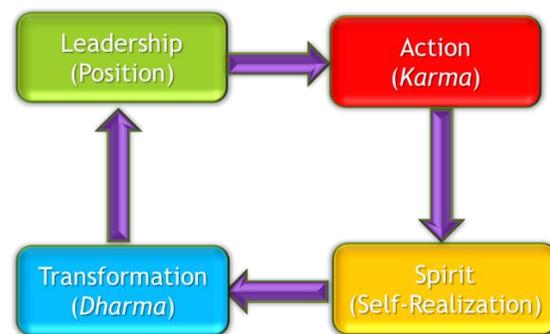


Figure 3: Vedic Leadership (SALT) Model

Vedic leaders realize and appreciate infinite potential in everyone. They transcend to the level of consciousness, experience their *dharmā* at every stage, and act fearlessly from that inner guidance. Leaders should begin with following the highest and holistic value of a situation and

Dimension	Vedic Leadership	Traditional Leadership
Fundamental Metaphor	Spirit in Action	Coordinated movement towards greater success
Guiding principles	Act from authentic Self. Do your moral duty through right dispassionate actions	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, money and power in relative terms
Leadership source	Self-awareness through transcendence as the broad source of leadership potential	Better Skills, experiences, resources, and relationships
Leadership process	Effortlessly gradually transform self spirally through regular transcendence	Multi-stage models range from transactional to transformative to situational and other
Individual vs Collective Leadership	Leadership is exceptional self-realized individuals, acting from higher consciousness	Leadership comes from decisive individuals
Leadership style	Inspiring and leading people to help better themselves	Leadership is about accomplishing goals
Servant Leadership	Vedic leaders are humble servants in the pursuit of their own dharma	Servant Leader as humble person who works to make everyone successful
Role Model	Gandhi	Typical CEO

set the right moral principles (*dharmā*) so that everyone can do their rightful *karma*. Vedic leaders continue to transcend regularly to deepen their self-realization and grow their leadership potential. i.e. the level of self-realization is the true source of their leadership potential. Vedic leaders should feel humble enough to realize that consciousness acts through them for serving a larger cause beyond themselves. Vedic leadership would inspire and encourage all others to also transcend to develop a coherent collective consciousness of authenticity and peace for the benefit of everyone and the organization. Thus, a Vedic leader leads to a natural starburst of new holistic and enlightened leaders who can carry on the work into the future. Vedic leadership would be perceptive and empathic and respectful of diverse views and needs. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, “the whole world is just one family” is a much broader Vedic

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principle that goes far beyond the leader-follower relationships within the organization. Vedic Leadership is different from traditional leadership at many levels (Table 1).

Table 1: Vedic vs Traditional Leadership

Mahatma Gandhi would be the primary modern role model for Vedic leadership. He led with Truth and Non-violence, the main behavioral principles from *Yoga Sutras*. Gandhi continued to change and grow, which are like many iterations of SALT cycles, to become an ever better leader over time. This established Gandhi as a Mahatma (great soul), the supreme leader of the Indian freedom struggle. Time magazine called him the most influential leader of the 20th century. When asked for advice on living well, Gandhi summarily answered in a self-referral manner. He said that “we should be the change that we want to see in the

world.” i.e. we should change ourselves for the better before seeking to implement that change in the world.

Vedic Leadership Case Study

Here we present a case study of the practice of Vedic leadership principles. To summarize, this case study is a story of successive expansion of the CEO’s circle of care, going well beyond what happens in almost any other company. The second author of this paper (a CEO, recently retired) tried to practice Vedic leadership principles to the best of his ability, throughout his career. He had grown up in a Vedic family, and had deeply imbibed the Vedic principles, even as he went on to study engineering and business administration from top institutions. The primary organizing principle used in his story is *Vasudhava Kutumbakam*: that the world is an all-inclusive family. This principle naturally derives from the Vedic principles that he learned as a child at the feet of his father.

In his last corporate assignment, the CEO grew a multinational business from zero to 3000 employees in a decade, in a non-business friendly state of India which had a communist government. More importantly, this was 50 times the original plans for this company. This business was a wholly owned subsidiary of a Europe-based insurance company and provided global back-office IT services to the parent company. This self-realized CEO transcended often and inculcated in the company the belief that the business growth was a natural outcome of doing the right *karma* according to one’s *dharma*. For example, he would often say that what you give is what you get. Employees naturally gravitated to this company because of its nurturing practices, and surprisingly rapid growth.

The story here is organized as an iterative expansion of the scope of the organization to include the broadest sense of stakeholders, in the spirit of *Vasudhava Kutumbakam*. To

validate the CEO’s story, we contacted several members of the company who should be in a position to provide perspective on the CEO’s actions and the organization’s performance. We were positively surprised that about 15 people across gender, leadership level, organizational affiliation, and geography, chose to respond with their impressions and stories and permitted us to use them for this research. In each iteration of expansion, we include validation stories by the colleagues of the CEO. The story is told primarily in CEO’s voice to preserve its flow.

Families of employees enter the circle of care

Very early on during the start of the business, we saw the wisdom of engaging not only the employees but also their families. We 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 the office, had nice interaction with the employee’s friends and colleagues, a nice meal, a photo session with senior management, and then dropped off back home. This small investment of time and expense led to a very strong extended support system for the organization. The employees’ families would discourage the employee from leaving the company, by emphasizing the company’s unique care and even offering to mediate any issues with the company’s senior managers who they believed they knew well. Families also felt safe about the employees, especially women, when they were working at late night shifts. Families talked proudly about their son/daughter working in the company to their friends, relatives and office colleagues. This invariably resulted in a regular stream of job applicants, who were very capable and keen to join, thus reducing the cost of recruitment significantly. 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 program was extended to families that lived out of town. A sustained high performance for one year was as the criterion for a fully sponsored trip for the employee's out-of-town family's visit to the company. The same principle was soon extended to ex-employees also. We invested a small amount of effort and money into developing a virtual network of alumni of the organization. This helped them keep in touch with the company through newsletters and events. Ex-employees would not talk negative about the company. It also resulted in many ex-employees returning to the company. It influenced many others in the new organization to apply for a notified job opening. This all helped reduce our recruitment costs down to almost zero.

Every first-line manager was given a parental role of maintaining a personal touch with 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 members in their team. Their performance reports included metrics on potential high performers on their team with recommended suitable movement plan, and on a plan to retain performing but potentially unhappy employees. These reports were discussed at higher levels and acted upon for 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 normally faced.

Consistent with the mission of the company to grow as a family, the psychological ownership of the company was widely distributed, in the spirit of *Vasudhava Kutumbakam*. Employees understood the moral duty of growing this

company. The employees acted fearlessly using their own discretion, and not blindly following the rules. This was unlike most service businesses which usually operate using a very well-defined and scripted processes, and where employees are required to strictly adhere to an optimized process. When employees understood and owned the role of their work and its impact of quality of service, they went the extra mile to fix the issues at their end. Instead of taking an easy route of transferring the problem to another section, they would themselves solve it in the customer's first call. This avoided repeat calls from customers thus releasing a huge capacity to serve more businesses and generated greater satisfaction for both the customers and employees.

Employee SN reported to us, "We had a very people-focused leadership, which laid the foundation to a very engaged work culture. We were early adopters of diversity. We were encouraged to hire diverse candidates. We had braille visiting cards. We consistently took employee polls and acted on the results."

Employee AN recounted: "There was a semiformal group of extended management members, without involving any of CEO's direct reports which met every month with CEO chairing the sessions. This forum provided enough grease for the organization to work together effectively. Personal connect between the members became better, and people started to think out of silos." This is an example of creating a starburst of leaders.

Employee RV recounted: "The CEO had prompted the handful of women in his organization to pursue networking opportunities for leadership development and women empowerment. He tactfully suggested options like putting together a

women's forum outside the organization, as an independent entity. The CEO had visualized the futuristic role of women empowerment in social inclusion and economic development at this scope and scale. We embarked on the journey without fathoming the huge beneficial impact it would create in the society in a short span. Now we have a solid enterprise driving social change through women empowerment". This helped women to make a difference.

Employee JH recounted a similar women's project. "The CEO supported a proposed initiative for our staff to join with volunteers from other companies to go out and provide a mobile cancer breast screening service for women. It was not considered a proposal too small for discussion or too remote from delivering IT services. Although that particular initiative did not go very far, it set the tone for the staff for how we partnered with competitors and clarified the inclusive and caring values of the company." This shows that many initiatives were encouraged to build coalitions across the community.

Industrial Trade Unions enter the circle of care

The state of Kerala in India is famous for industrial disruption through labor strikes. On any point of dispute with state or central government, trade unions would call for a strike. They would find support from political parties. Such strikes usually lasted for 12 to 24 hours. The geographic scope of the strikes ranged from the city to the state level. During strikes, roads were blocked, and people were discouraged from going to work. Schools and offices usually proactively declared a holiday to avoid any confrontation. The government turned a blind eye to these strikes. There would

usually be a mood of holiday revelry across the city during these bandhs. Kerala is unique in this mode of operation, with as many as 100 such strike days in any given year. This led to a big loss of industrial production and customer support activity. These factors led to manufacturing industry being forced to walk away from Kerala for many years.

Many companies worked around the problem by working on the weekends in lieu of a strike day. While it worked for some businesses, it was generally not an acceptable solution for 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 global company itself. We adapted by changing the mindset and attitude of our employees from a family perspective. We explained to them that the business losses incurred during such strikes were a threat to that entire business. The employees understood the implications and vowed to fight the evil together. We contacted parents and families of local employees to obtain their moral agreement and support. Many employees made efforts to be at office on strike days even if it meant walking a long distance. Some employees would sacrifice their vacation and come to office to support the organization. Everyone behaved as if their organization was their family and their own job and everyone's growth was at risk. Employee support was so high that the attendance was often higher on strike days compared to other normal working days. All teams collaborated actively to improve the process and delivery of services.

A few other businesses in our vicinity liked our approach and they joined hands with us and started similar campaigns with their employees. We took support from police to provide protection to convoys of our office transport vehicles. The CEO made sure of leading from the front, fearlessly. He would bravely face the risk, drive down to office as usual, and take a stroll in the office so that everyone noticed his

presence. He also appreciated their efforts in coming to office. The CEOs of neighboring companies started doing the same. A small step grew into a movement. The employees realized that the fear of strikes was much bigger in their minds than in reality.

Gradually the message began to resonate with the trade unions also. They accepted that this was an essential service and that they will not get any support from employees working in our company. They relented, and any vehicles sporting a sign of our organization would not be blocked and be allowed to pass through. In our stint of more than 10 years, we did not lose a single day of business on account of strike. That raised the confidence of our parent company in United Kingdom in our capabilities. They considered many more functions to transfer to us, and this created more jobs and growth for the company.

Competition and suppliers join extended circle of care

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

Suppliers were welcomed as a part of the family, and they were respected and appreciated for their services. This is in contrast to the usual practices where most businesses try to extract every possible benefit and simultaneously reduce down the payments for services from a supplier. Instead of developing a mindset of distrust and wariness, and a wasteful procedure of multiple checks and controls, we decided to treat some of our core suppliers as partners with very fair and transparent dealings. We treated their employees as part of our own set up. This

resulted in many of their employees preferring to work at our office. Their business grew with ours and both continued to complement each other, a mutually win-win partnership, saving many unproductive steps and costs.

VG, a vendor's employee, shared a mentoring story. "We were a small company. We requested our client CEO to conduct a short workshop for our leadership team on coping with growth challenges. He took the time out from his busy schedule and had an engaging and insightful half day session that made a big difference in our team's journey. He did this *pro bono* based on his intent to help a team of young entrepreneurs grow their business."

Employee AP shared a story about caring for the vendors working onsite. "We had an office boy, who used to stay back even after his working hours, just so he could provide extra touches to the office. He used to stay back late in the evening, and since the office was far away from the city, often had difficulty going back home. Being a very dedicated person himself, even the CEO used to stay back after his employees had left and would see the boy provide more finishing touches. This happened every single day no matter the conditions. One day, the boy was walking to the nearest bus stand to catch a bus for home; when the CEO noted and stopped his car by him and told him to get in. He sat with the CEO, who dropped him to the city, on the way to his own house."

Auditors join the extended circle of care

Audits are generally considered to be an unavoidable pain, and employees are usually scared of auditors. Our company had many kinds of audits, some mandatory and some internal. By taking an extended family

approach, the company decided to make the audit process friendly. Many of the company's own employees were added as virtual members of various audit teams. Employees were trained on the audit procedures and earned a certification for it. All high-performing employees were given an option to become a virtual auditor and join the audit of the business processes that they themselves have worked on in the past. Since they knew the business processes intimately, they thus played a much larger role in reviewing and improving the overall process than merely finding mistakes alone. The employee-auditors were incentivized to identify non-value-add 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.

Employee JJ reports an incident: "We faced some audit and compliance challenges. I was the most junior person in the leadership team at that time. I made some recommendations. The CEO listened to it carefully and took the decision to create a project under my leadership to resolve the above situation with all my fellow leadership team members being part of my team. I was so overwhelmed with the trust and confidence the CEO showed in me and the support he always gave during the project in dealing with some of the senior colleagues in the team."

Extended family becomes dream career destination

The company embarked on a journey from providing a job to a 'Great place to work', to 'Employer of choice' to 'Career destination' and finally to 'My Company'. With a humble beginning to promote the concept of career instead of a mere job, we gradually moved up by adapting a framework of 'Great place to

work'. We further progressed to a framework of 'Employee of choice'. The employees started showing signs of not only developing their careers but began to believe that this company was their dream career destination. They thus gave full dedication to the company. There was very low attrition in the business. Ultimately with large number of employees being highly engaged and determined to build their careers led to campaign of 'My Company'. This was a game changer in behavioral aspects leading to an exponential increase in performance of employees, and thus the organization. It was a rare combination of achieving high efficiency with high effectiveness.

The net result was in customers' choice to prefer to be served by us. The customer service function had its serving capacity distributed both in United Kingdom and India. Instead of the company selecting who would answer a call, the customer was offered a choice. An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) message greeted a waiting customer in the call queue with options to wait for longer in the queue to be served in UK or to get served from an agent in India immediately. Over time, a sustained happy experience from being served by India team led to many customers preferring to be served by India team even before the IVR system provided them the options.

Employee UK stated that "Almost all decisions were taken in an inclusive way. The decision to expand the Board was taken in a more consultative way. Normally, this decision could have been taken at highest level and communicated to all concerned. But when the executive team was consulted and the rationale was explained, the decision of nomination for expanding the board was unanimous."

Employee RK reported a productivity enhancement project and said that quality was imbibed in the organizational culture. He says, "We

were bringing in lot of change in the organizational processes. The CEO wanted the active participation of the Project Managers and Team Leads so that everyone in the organization would be passionate about the quality of products we deliver. Quality became everyone's responsibility".

Employee SJ reported that the "entire set of constructs such as 'Policy Governance' was a great example of how the CEO brought in the members from across the organization to decide how to run very important organizational initiatives. They were received extremely well by the employees."

Bosses loved the Extended Family

This inclusive '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' philosophy broke many myths about the business process industry in India and about the state of Kerala. It was presumed that business process offshoring (BPO) is a cost saving strategy that leads to job losses in parent company and a drop in customer experience. In our case, our business became a significant 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.

The Group CEO of the parent company (the former boss of our CEO) recounted positive experiences related to productivity and culture. "These events were not directed by him (the CEO) but the opportunity was extended to those who had the imagination and drive to deliver. The freedom and scope offered was initially a surprise, but the response achieved was generally so beneficial that it merited support and encouragement rather than constraint. The scale of such productions grew with the Company."

Summary and contributions

In summary, this case study shows how one can use the Vedic mindset of nondual Oneness, and following one's mortal duty, to achieve impossible missions. This also illustrates that empowering the employees has many benefits such as that they willingly engage with any challenges facing the organization. The extended family, coupled with alignment towards a collective objective (or threat), can overcome huge challenges with ease. The CEO, acting as a role model and personally fully involved in fearlessly taking risky but the right actions, earned 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. This story is especially remarkable in the contemporary environment of tribalism and nationalism rising, around the world.

This paper makes two major contributions. First, it shows that ancient Vedic knowledge in the hands can work very well even for western style businesses. In this case, the company operated out of the Vedic principle of *nonduality*, and its practical social corollary of the inclusive concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, to operate as one large extended family. The CEO's full belief in the efficacy of Vedic Principles won the day, helping them to grow to 50 times the planned size, winning them national awards for their superlative achievement. The CEO of Cadilla Laboratories, an Indian pharmaceutical company, spoke at Academy of Management in 2016 as a testimonial of the continued extraordinary success of his company while still working in the Vedic trusteeship mode, under instructions from Mahatma Gandhi more than 70 years ago. Vedic leadership principles are not a set of initiatives to be executed but a set of convictions that influence one's thinking. Vedic principles should be applied with full conviction or else they may not work out as expected. Lord Krishna guides Arjuna in the

Bhagavad Gita to focus on doing his without worrying about the fruit of action. When a situation is complex, ambiguous and risky, it is important to exercise a 'negative capability' of reflective inaction (Simpson et al., 2002). A more relaxed response to an ambiguous situation would help engage and take a broader perspective to determine the right course of action. This is an important principle that should guide management education as well as practice to address the grand challenges of our times.

The second contribution of this paper is two dynamic models. One model is the SALT Model of Vedic Leadership as Spirit in Action. This cyclical model shows how new leadership capabilities develop through successive iterations of this cycle. The other model is the V-theory of Transcendence. This simple 2-step model enables living alternatively in silence and action mode, through the application of multiple techniques and traditions for transcendence.

This paper also opens many potential future fields of inquiry relating to the efficacy of Vedic principles for business and society. First, there are many more Vedic principles that were referred to in this paper, to keep the framework simple. In the future, a more comprehensive and nuanced Vedic Leadership can be developed as more such case studies become available. For example, there are also more specialized concepts in the Vedic branches such as AyurVeda. The principles of those branches could be applied to Vedic leadership principles for organizations in the domains of health, education, arts, architecture, and defense, etc. Secondly, there could also be research to quantitatively compare the practice of these Vedic principles with validated quantitative inventories of leadership potential and practices. The creation of additional leaders by Vedic leadership could be tracked and correlated with financial performance at the individual and the firm level.

In conclusion, this paper presents a simplified Vedic Leadership model, and a case study of the practice of this model. By operating from a self-realized transcendental state of wholeness and broad vision, leadership is assured of the most appropriate guidance to the right action. From that level of consciousness, the natural *dharma* often is to treat the whole world as one family, and to work for the benefit of all.

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