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Fusion leadership: a transcultural interpretation and application

Abstract

This paper introduces a new perspective that challenges well-known leadership styles that have flourished in hitherto stable environments. 'Fusion leadership' integrates Eastern and Western values and mindsets to establish an approach that may more effectively respond to the challenges and dilemmas of leadership and organizational issues in contemporary situations in the context of globalization. Our approach contributes to the literature on leadership by providing skills, techniques and practical wisdom for leaders to consider and develop their leadership values, styles and practices to respond to cross-cultural challenges.

Introduction

Leaders may enjoy fusion cuisine, but they may also benefit in another, perhaps surprising, way. Fusion cuisine has become a movement in dining choices in many cosmopolitan cities by combining and blending diverse ethnic, national and regional spices and ingredients from various eating traditions to bring new tastes, dining styles and innovative culinary to many parts of the world. Fusion cuisine is not a randomly mixed dish with accidentally or oddly assorted ingredients, but a deliberate blend of different ingredients to complement one another in surprising ways for the delight of customers.

The concept and practice of fusion can equally apply to leadership practice and leadership development in organizations. From Kurt Lewin's foundations for leadership in the 1940s (Lewin et al, 1939) and Douglas McGregor's depiction of Theory X and Theory Y in the 1960s (McGregor, 1960), since the 1970s, leadership theory has been bifurcated as, for example, autocratic and democratic (Likert, 1961), contingent (Fiedler, 1964), situational (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969), transformational and transactional (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999), charismatic and bureaucratic (Conger & Kanungo, 1987),

leader-member exchange-based (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and heroic and distributed (Leithwood et al, 2009; Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). More recent trends, such as sustainable leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2005), ethical leadership (Starrat, 2004), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), responsible leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006) and spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) have added spice to such contrasts. Though each leadership style has its own advantages and perspective, and there is no one best way of leading, we use Hersey's and Blanchard's (1969) concept of situational leadership to develop a rationale for introducing fusion leadership. Situational leadership is based on prescriptive principles (Blanchard, 2010) in responding to employees' needs by an appropriate mix of task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviours (Cubero, 2007; Graeff, 1997; Shin et al, 2011; Yukl, 2008; 2011; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). It is therefore shaped through diagnosis, flexibility and partnering (Kaifi et al, 2014), which are important elements for fusion leadership.

Effective leadership is regarded today as more context-specific than simply either exclusively task-oriented or relationship-oriented. "It is a matter of style and preference: a question of choice in how to lead and how to be" (Hargreaves, 2011: 231) in a particular context. Thus the question here is how should leaders make that choice? What personal traits, capabilities, set of skills, and competencies or standards should be involved in that choice? And does this bode ill for fusion leadership and imply the need for 'fission leadership' instead?

Fusion leadership is just like a fusion cuisine, combining leadership characteristics to "unlock powerful forces", "yearn for meaningful work" with "creative potential" and "courage" (Daft & Lengel, 1998: 40). Our article introduces an approach to fusion leadership based on the combination of selected Western and Eastern practices that highlights the appreciation of context in contemporary management and leadership. In exploring studies on Eastern and Western values and virtues in cross-cultural management, especially incorporating these

values and virtues and their merits in leadership, we consulted EBSCO databases, including Business Source Complete, organization studies, philosophy, psychology and religion. We particularly explored philosophical publications on great leaders such as Ashoka, the Buddha, Alexander, and Gandhi among others across Eastern and Western cultures to examine their leadership styles that have stood the test of time.

By East and West, we are referring to the dynamics of values and virtues prevalent in Asian cultures (East) and Western societies guided by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's "Personal Virtues" together with Socrates and Plato and others in establishing Western philosophy on ethical conduct and leading to industrial revolution (Fang et al, 2018). The terms do not refer to explicit geographical regions because cultures are not static and cannot be isolated from one another (Koehn, 2013).

We have chosen to fuse East and West values and ingredients for fusion leadership because knowledge about management and leadership in the East remains colorized through a Western lens in applying Western theories in Asian contexts rather than developing new theories (Barkema et al, 2015). Better knowledge of Eastern culture and its philosophical and intellectual traditions can enhance a more robust and richer understanding the field of management and leadership cross-culturally (Barkema, 2001, 2015; Tsui, 2007). There is also a need to balance cross-national and intra-national diversity (Tung, 2008). We also highlight that, even though East and West are different in terms of institutions, philosophies and cultural values (Barkema et al, 2015; Tung, 2014), we are not focusing on the East-West divide as such or differences between Eastern versus Western thinking such as the differences in cultures operating in terms of individualistic rights-centered morality (e.g. Western) and or a community-centered ethic of virtue (e.g., Eastern) (Wong, 1984). Instead we seek to demonstrate how East and West meet and share values and virtues on a natural basis and

structure (Koehn, 2013) and are important ingredients for fusion leadership in cross-cultural contexts.

What is Fusion Leadership?

Daft and Lengel (1998) introduced the concept of fusion leadership as a departure from traditional management and leadership thinking. Fission is the metaphor they use for the traditional styles of scientific management: division of labour, authority and control; hence the concept of fission leadership mentioned earlier. Fusion, on the other hand, refers to management and leadership practices that emphasize partnerships, connections and joint responsibility and encourage conversations to reduce barriers in the leader-follower relationship. Daft and Lengel borrowed these concepts from physics – the process of creating energy by splitting atomic nuclei (fission) and joining them (fusion): “When fusion occurs it produces five times the energy of fission” (Daft & Lengel, 1998: 15).

Inspired by these concepts, Daft and Lengel (1998: 56) defined fusion leadership as the recognition of “one’s subtle leadership gifts, potentials, and passions, and acting from them to lead organizational change and improvement” and the ability to look into the inner being of oneself and others. They identified personal and organizational concepts and practices such as mindfulness, vision, “heart”, communication, courage, integrity, connections, community, and positive cultures and value systems as the main sources for fusion leadership.

Hargreaves (2011) developed the concept of fusion leadership in his empirical study in a secondary school in northern England. He found that the characteristics of fusion leadership were apparent in courageous, inspiring, creative, distributed and inclusive leadership and in leadership for stability and sustainability. He emphasized that leadership is not a timeless single style. Fusion leadership, he stressed, is a combination of various styles of leadership including but not limited to charismatic and ordinary, autocratic and shared, and top-down

and distributed leadership. Such combination limits the extremes and opposites while enhancing the integration of personal capabilities to serve a common good over a significant time in contemporary contexts.

Fusion leadership creates bridges that connect various disciplines and the explicit and implicit needs of people. We focus in this article on fusion leadership in terms of transcultural connections, in particular across the East and the West. We blend Eastern values, such as compassion, gratitude, humility, trust and cooperation, with Western values of achievement, growth, competition and the fulfilment of individual potential (Bhatta, 2005). In a related way, we combine ‘feminine’ principles like relationships, belonging, interconnectedness, interdependence, and intuitive and introspective leadership with ‘masculine’ principles of rational and modern management thinking (Hazarika, 1997). It is a mixture of both ‘mind’ and ‘heart’ to establish a rational and intuitive context that enhances meaning, direction and coherence in leadership practices (Covey, 1991).

Using this concept of fusion leadership, we contribute to the literature in leadership and organizational studies by exploring how a combination of Eastern and Western ingredients/values from various fields may produce a ‘fusion’ approach that may better respond to the challenges and dilemmas of leadership and organizational issues in contemporary contexts. We explore the ‘fusion’ element on a broader canvas that may facilitate leadership practices with sense of direction and qualities that can stand the test of time. Chakraborty (2003: 30) highlights that “it is not only business leaders who demonstrate the art of leadership, but also great personalities belonging to various other fields, [...] they may be Buddhas or Christs, Ashokas or Alexanders, Gandhis or Churchills”. We introduce a fusion approach to leadership that blends virtues and values across cultures that facilitate reflexive and context-sensitive cross-cultural leadership practices in contemporary contexts.

East meets West: A fusion leadership approach for cultural intelligence

Task-oriented and relations-oriented leadership behaviours have been the root of many leadership theories for more than sixty years (Behrendt et al, 2017; Fleishman, 1953; House, 1971; Yukl, 2012). However, Blanchard and Hersey (1996) argued that there is no one best style of leadership, that leadership attitudes are more important, and that they are those that can make a difference. On the one hand, task-oriented leadership can enhance understanding and motivation and facilitate the process of accomplishing shared objectives. On the other hand, relationship-oriented leadership influences followers to accomplish objectives by fostering coordination, cooperation and activation of resources (Behrendt et al, 2017). Distinguishing leadership styles may not be wise in cross-cultural contexts.

Working in cross-border contexts, leaders need holistic abilities to function in diverse environments (Rockstuhl et al, 2011). To interact appropriately with individuals multiple cultures, leaders are encouraged to develop cultural intelligence reflecting the ability to acquire relevant cultural knowledge, process that knowledge and adapt to apply that knowledge in practice (Early & Ang, 2003). In the contemporary context, it is important that leaders are context/culture-sensitive to the need to alter their leadership styles to fit with followers' and contextual needs (Schermerhorn & Bachrach, 2015). We therefore extend situational leadership by introducing the notion of fusion leadership that blends a number of Eastern and Western values and other ingredients for effective cross-cultural leadership practices.

Harmonizing the external pursuit of materialism and the inner pursuit of happiness

Material and spiritual well-being are not mutually exclusive. Chakraborty explains: "Spiritual advancement should precede the pursuit of material progress... only then the latter could be held in balance and true happiness could be attained" (Chakraborty, 2003: 50). There are many historical examples of great leaders and characters who have found a balance between their inner and outer worlds through spirituality and have avoided being seduced by secular

materialistic pursuits. One is Ashoka, an ancient Indian king. Lessons in leadership from Ashoka, who ruled for 36 years from 270 BC to 234 BC provide a prime example of harmony in leadership. After the Kalinga War in 262 BC, with its horrifying consequences, Ashoka changed from ‘the fierce’ to ‘the righteous’ (Chakraborty, 2003). He was held responsible, and he felt devastated by the destruction and suffering caused by the Kalinga War. This made him abandon his policy of armed conquest. He then tried to compensate and show compassionate benevolence to the people of the neighbouring lands to make up for the adversity he caused (Bhatta, 2000). He showed a generous approach in exercising leadership, which created a change of heart and a turning point for himself, his career and his kingdom (Dharmapal, 1997; Mookerjee, 1975; Sircar, 1976).

If we look back at the corporate scandals that involved the loss of leaders’ goodwill and public credibility (Clarke et al, 2003; Collins, 2009), we discover that such failures occurred as a result of the undisciplined pursuit of profit (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). This is symptomatic of a lack of “leadership beyond the walls” (Drucker, 2008: 225) as leaders and organizations refuse to look beyond their immediate domains to transform their commitments into real practices rather merely showing willingness, but not action, in complying with legal regulations (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). Ashoka’s leadership style, on the other hand, displays the ‘fusion’ element of reflexivity and the willingness to acknowledge shortcomings in his own leadership style and adapt it to suit the needs of other people. Such fusion is essential particularly in cross-cultural contexts, facilitating adaptability and skillful consideration of culture-general and local knowledge and intrinsic and extrinsic interest and self-efficacy to activate leaders’ motivation for context-sensitive cross-cultural leadership practices (Ang et al, 2015; Van Dyne et al, 2012). Therefore, rather than defining a specific style of leadership such as task-oriented or relations-oriented for cross-cultural leadership, leadership should instead aim at a hybrid approach. Below we introduce a fusion approach

for hybrid leadership practices based on the allegory of the hedgehog and the fox, which comes from the 7th Century BC Greek poet Archilochus: ‘A fox knows many things, but a hedgehog one important thing’.¹

Seeking hybridity rather than paradox

The hedgehog reflects an individual who is focused and has a central vision based on a single definite idea without any self-doubt, while the fox characterizes an individual who is more pragmatic, seeing things in relation to experiences and investigating issues based on their complexities and nuances. In a highly acclaimed essay on Tolstoy, Isaiah Berlin (1953, 2013), the Russian-British social and political philosopher and historian, suggests that Tolstoy was a fox who wanted to be a hedgehog. Berlin emphasizes the fundamental distinction between people who are fascinated by the infinite variety of things and draw on a wide variety of experiences and for whom the world cannot be boiled down to a single idea (foxes) and people who view the world through the lens of a single defining idea and relate everything to a central, all-embracing system or belief (hedgehogs). In academic scholarship, this term has been employed in various fields to illustrate dilemmatic approaches in leadership (Grint, 2014; Provizer, 2008) and in education (Newkirk, 1985; Rasmussen & Ludvigsen, 2009; Woods, 2006).

Berlin (2013) used this allegory to illustrate how people who develop a universal or integrated principle based on a well-established idea are hedgehogs and people who are pluralistic, pursuing many ideas and a variety of experiences that are not necessarily sustainable but who can be flexible are foxes. He also used this distinction to explain Tolstoy’s cognitive dissonance in his view of history in his novel *War and Peace* (1865-1869): “Tolstoy’s inner fox could not defeat his desire to be a hedgehog, while his desire to be that

¹ ‘πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἕχῃνος ἓν μέγα.’ Archilochus fragment 201 in M. L. West (ed.), *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1971).

hedgehog could not overcome his fox-like nature” (Provizer, 2008: 456). Rasmussen and Ludvigsen (2009) emphasize that this borrowed concept of contrast should, however, be used more as a tool for thinking and unpacking issues rather than as a typology.

Claudio Véliz (1994) used Berlin's construction to contrast Anglo-American and Spanish patterns of settlement and governance: the former rooted in the European Industrial Revolution starting in Great Britain, driven by diversity and change (the ‘Gothic fox’), and the latter in the Counter-Reformation, based on an imperial ‘cultural tradition shaped like a vast baroque dome’ (the ‘Baroque hedgehog’). While the allegory is essentially a Western-European concept rather than Western-American or Eastern, we see a hint to its relevance and implications for our cross-cultural analysis in the words of de Vogüé: ‘A queer combination of the brain of an English chemist with the soul of an Indian Buddhist’.² And George Crowder (2003) makes the following observation:

The contrast is a metaphor for the crucial distinction at the heart of Berlin’s thought between monist and pluralist accounts of moral value. According to monism, a single value or narrow set of values overrides all others, while on the pluralist view human goods are multiple, conflicting and incommensurable. Monism, Berlin believes, harbours political dangers that pluralism avoids. While the great authoritarian visions of politics have all rested on monist foundations, pluralism is naturally aligned with toleration, moderation and liberalism.

Do pluralist Western leaders tend to be foxes, and monist Eastern leaders tend to be hedgehogs? And is there a case for a hedgehog-fox kind of fusion leadership?

What we can learn from this allegory from Archilochus is that fusion leadership is a hybrid approach rather than a paradoxical one. For example, Abraham Lincoln can be considered a

² E. M. de Vogüé (1886). *Le Roman russe* (Paris), p.282.

hedgehog-fox because “he was the hedgehog who knew how to play the role of the fox without ever becoming one” (Provizer, 2008: 456): focusing on one big thing during the American Civil War, namely the preservation of the Union in terms of the nation’s fundamental principles and territorial integrity (McPherson, 1991). This approach is vital in contemporary contexts when leadership is facing constant contextual changes and challenges. Grint (2014) claims that, when people are unable to explain their actions or what happens in life, especially in romanticizing leadership, it is because they have not been able to situate their actions in a particular context to make sense of their actions or decisions. Leadership is not only about what we ought to be but also about “what we are and what we may become” (Maude, 1975: 213); it is about being responsible for the choices we make and being open to accepting that there are unforeseeable issues beyond one’s control (Fuller, 2000).

The hybrid hedgehog-fox approach therefore offers fusion leadership a practice that enables flexibility but at the same encourages knowledge and wisdom to be able to stay in the right direction and to make the right decisions in the right context. This concept is similar to Kaplan’s (2005) argument that leaders should be both forceful and enabling. In leadership, despite the fact that being forceful (using means as one’s intellect, vision, skills and drive to push others hard to perform) and being enabling (being open to and appreciating employees’ influence) are opposing virtues, they are not necessarily incompatible or mutually exclusive. Both virtues are needed to respond skilfully to contextual challenges. An example of a hybrid leadership approach in an Eastern context can be found in the notion of *Budi* in Malay culture. *Budi* or *budhi*-related principles are unique features of Malay culture, shaping leadership patterns of Malays, reflecting a hybrid combination of people’s rational understanding of reality with their *rasa* (intuitive inner feeling) (Richardson et al, 2016) – an example similar to de Vogüé’s mentioned earlier.

In cross-cultural contexts, local culture and norms are important; however, this does not necessarily mean that good leadership practices from different cultures cannot be introduced. The meaning behind the term cross-cultural is to embrace the beauty and dynamics of various cultures that may benefit from a hybrid approach not just within one culture but across cultures.

Seeking commonality and cooperation

A healthy and flourishing society is one of the most important conditions for organizations to develop their businesses. Such a society provides a skilled and talented workforce, a healthy local and international community, and a robust market for services and goods. It is therefore in the interest of organizations to support a healthy community for the benefit of both the society and the organizations themselves (Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). Ashoka's leadership is a good example in how he committed himself to providing a good public infrastructure to facilitate favourable living condition for his people.

On the roads... I have had banyan-trees planted to give shade to man and beast; groves...of mango trees I have had planted; at every half-kos³ I have had wells dug; rest houses, too, have been erected; and numerous watering-places have been provided by me here and there for the enjoyment of man and beast.

(Smith, 1920 [2002]: 209, PE VII).

Ashoka also showed his effective leadership in a respectful pluralism (Bhatta, 2000, 2005; Alexander & Buckingham, 2011). He created a close relationship with the Buddhist Sangha community, supporting social capital for the merchant guilds, and arranging philanthropic activities, donations and funds (Mitra, 2007). Furthermore, what was appealing in his leadership approach was the respect he gave to the diverse spiritual, religious and cultural

³ Kos is an ancient unit of distance used in the Indian subcontinent for over three thousand years – 1 kos is about 2.25 miles

identity of his people, which is crucial in cross-cultural leadership today. He never imposed his faith in Buddhism on others, but praised other religious sects such as Brahmanism, Jainism and Ajivakas (Bhatta, 2005) in a belief that the welfare of mankind needed to promote the cooperation of all religions to dwell peacefully side by side (Mookerjee, 1975).

This is a practical lesson for our contemporary world: encouraging diversity, but seeking commonality and cooperation where possible and with the overall objective of human welfare and well-being. Ashoka's leadership represents "enabling of conditions that effectively support and sustain adaptive space" (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017, p.14) by involving followers' participation and appreciating their influence and contributions.

Commonality and cooperation can be particularly important to some collective cultures such as the practice of *guanxi* in the Chinese context (Holtbrügge, 2013; Fan, 2002) originating from Confucianism and which has been prevalent in the Chinese society for centuries. *Guanxi* refers to network of connections with members of extended family, personal relations, workplace relations and so on that influence and govern long-term social and personal relationships (Holtbrügge, 2013). Having knowledge about *guanxi*, understanding it and learning to adapt to it is crucial to developing cultural intelligence in leaders because *guanxi* influences local performance (Luo et al, 2012), firms' growth (Park & Lou, 2001), competitive advantage (Tsang, 1998) and organizational trust (Chen et al, 2004).

This concept of network and cooperation can also extend to the notion of paternalism in leadership. For instance, universal paternalism influenced Ashoka's leadership style significantly. Ashoka showed paternalistic leadership by "appointing provincial governors to look after the people, collect revenue and rule the territory in the same way that parents would want a nurse to look after their children" (Bhatta, 2000: 109). He expressed altruistic love and benevolence rather than absolute power, arrogance and authority:

All men are my children. I desire for my children their welfare and happiness both in this world and the next. That I desire for all men.

(Smith, 1920 [2002]: 194, Rock Edict II)

It is, however, important to note that the benevolent aspect of paternalism has been difficult for Western scholars to fully understand because of the “duality between control and care” (Aycan, 2006, p. 453). For instance, benevolent paternalism expresses genuine concern for followers’ welfare while exploitive paternalism may use caring and nurturing to make followers achieve organizational goals (Aycan, 2006). Therefore, Jackson (2016) calls for the need to refine knowledge of paternalistic leadership, especially in cross-cultural management. How can we understand paternalism and the degree of application of benevolence across cultures? Having presented the fusion approach of blending Eastern and Western traditions and ingredients, we present below the skills, means and virtues for leaders to make context/culture-sensitive choices of ‘ingredients’ for their fusion leadership.

The leadership recipe – choice of ingredients

When East meets West, there is a fusion of ‘rich’ leadership practices that embraces context-sensitivity and reflexivity in cross-cultural management. However, leadership practices cannot be isolated from leaders’ virtues and skills or means to be able to judge the response or practice needed to attend to followers’ contexts in an effort to guide or help followers and to understand them (Pasaribu, 2015; Schermerhorn & Bachrach, 2015). Below we present two facilitators drawn from Eastern and Western traditions that can promote skills, practices, and virtues for fusion leadership, guiding leaders in choosing the right fusion cuisine and ingredients for their fusion leadership in a context/culture-sensitive manner. Skillful means and virtue ethics facilitate cultural intelligence for leaders to acquire relevant knowledge and ingredients, be able to process that knowledge, and to adapt that knowledge and the

appropriate choice and mix of ingredients (Early & Ang, 2003) to attend to cross-cultural challenges.

Skillful means

“Skillful means”, drawn from Buddhism, can be considered as “religious language and symbols of all kinds” (Pye, 1990: 19). Skillful means (*Upāya Kausalya*) is a concept reflecting one’s ability to adapt Buddhist teachings to benefit different people. The Buddha himself realized that, even though his teachings reflected the nature of the universe and the truth, it is not necessarily applicable to every individual in a particular context and at a particular moment. Therefore, he responded to his audiences in various ways with a variety of philosophical and religious views that suited the context of his audience (Schroeder, 2004). The Buddha’s intention was to teach the notion of non-attachment through skillful means (Vu & Gill, 2018). Even the effectiveness of a Buddhist principle depends on how it plays itself out in people’s lives (Pye, 2005).

Skillful means encourages sensitivity and flexibility in a skilful way, allowing people to be free to believe or to reject any types or forms of religion based on understanding the universe and the context of the audience (Smart, 1968). For example, skillful means in different religions can be illustrated as follows (Hick, 1991; Teece, 2008): the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Noble Path, qualities of *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion) in Buddhism; the paths of yogas such as *bhakti yoga* (devotion), *raja yoga* (meditation), *karma yoga* (selfless service) and paths of *nam simran* (constantly keeping God in mind) in Hinduism; Jewish religious law *Halakhah* or *Kedusha* – relationship between God and human beings in Judaism; the fruit of the Holy Spirit, parables, similes and signs of Jesus in Christianity; and *Shariah* – obedience to the will of Allah or *Tariqah* – inward spirituality in Islam.

In this article, we use the Buddhist interpretation, application and practice of skillful means to demonstrate what is needed for fusion leadership approaches in contemporary contexts because of its flexible application based on the notion of non-attachment. Skillful means in Buddhism represents a dynamic adaptation to contexts that may respond well to contemporary issues. The Buddha himself showed skillful approaches in his leadership through various means. The Buddha was a skilled, multi-lingual, active and effective leader in the Sangha organization of monks (Case, 2013). Skillful means in Buddhism refers to the different ways in which the Buddha delivered his teachings (the Dharma) to respond to the variety of philosophical and religious views that reflected the context of his audience (Schroeder, 2004). For example, the Buddha provided situational advice to his audience: some received philosophical explanations in response to their enquiries on reality; and on some occasions, the Buddha just kept silent because of the specific contextual needs of the audience: the Buddha's reaction was associated with whether revealing an answer was helpful or would misguide or disturb the audience's determination in, or their process of, learning (Schroeder, 2004). Such an approach represents an appreciation of contexts and audiences.

The assumptions underlying the Buddha's skillful means approach in his leadership are based on compassion and the theory of non-attachment. Compassion in Buddhism is articulated from wisdom and the ability not to be attached to any forms of desire that may lead to suffering. Thus "the Buddha knew all about the ultimate problems, but did not announce them to the multitude who came to him for the fear that he might disturb their minds" (Radhakrishnan, 1927: 273) and with a belief that all knowledge was ideology needed only for certain reasons to contribute to mankind's salvation (Organ, 1954). As such, he was not attached to his own Dharma and knowledge, but encouraged individual development and wisdom articulation to practise his teachings adequately and without corruption.

Buddhist skillful means presents a departure from the theories of attachment in Western psychology. Whereas the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969) places importance on security or safe havens for relationships, careers, wealth, reputation and pursuits for happiness, non-attachment in Buddhism is aimed at “removing the hindrances to genuine security to solidify concepts of self, others and life in general” (Sahdra & Shaver, 2013: 287). This concept incorporates the basic Buddhist principles of impermanence, interconnectedness and non-self. However, such release from mental fixations is not the same as lack of connectedness with others or avoidance in relationships (Sahdra et al, 2010). Release from mental fixations does not necessarily imply reluctance. It is important to notice that there are healthy forms of attachment that can foster personal development. However, there are also excessive forms of attachment, pursuits at any cost, which can lead to suffering. Buddhist principles and practices help practitioners to recognize those states based on understanding of the universe and its impermanent nature to promote letting go of attachment to eradicate both physical and psychological suffering.

There are various ways that fusion leadership can adopt skillful means, and especially non-attachment, to be context-sensitive in leadership practices. To establish a ‘fusion’ state with enhanced connection, non-attachment rejects any forms of egocentric personality or discrimination in relationships. In a way that is similar to the Western concept of distributed or multiple leadership (Gronn, 2002), fusion encourages followers to exercise and share leadership responsibilities in appropriate contexts. Non-attachment stimulates compassionate leadership by enabling flexibility in contextualizing leadership situations and respecting diversity and cultural norms of followers in an organization. Such characteristics would facilitate leadership with a ‘fusion’ approach to respond, for example, to the dynamic multiplicity of cross-cultural contexts, or to increased concerns over contemporary issues of

spiritual diversity and conflicts (Hicks, 2002; Hopkins, 1997; Mitroff & Denton, 1999) in organizations.

The fusion approach facilitated by skillful means further attends to issues concerning the instrumentalization of workplace spirituality (Lips-Wiersma et al, 2009), leadership identity obsession (Foucault, 1994), fantasies in leadership (Sveningsson & Larson, 2006), leadership grandiosity (Maccoby, 2000), leadership narcissism (Steyrer, 2002) and egocentric portrayals of idealistic leadership (Schwarz, 1990). For instance, skilful means generate contextual and multiple leadership identities to fit with a variety of situations rather than being rigidly attached to identity production that places importance on the uniqueness, purpose and volition of the individualistic self (Sampson, 1988). Skilful means promote leadership traits and skills needed for flexible and adaptive leadership styles (Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2010; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), which are crucial leadership characteristics for cross-cultural management and leadership.

Virtue Ethics – Practical Wisdom

Virtue ethics elaborates a journey of quest for a true and ultimate purpose of ‘being’. Therefore, virtue ethics guides the formation of leadership characteristics, skills and practices. It also helps to understand the narratives of how leadership practices are formed and how leaders’ perceptions and characteristics are shaped in specific contexts.

Virtue ethics in the Western tradition has its roots in Ancient Greece, while in the East it has its roots in Confucianism. Western virtue ethics emphasizes “being rather than doing”, where doing refers to the consequences or utility of actions (Hadot, 2002). “Being precedes Truth, and that Truth precedes the Good” (Pieper, 2007: 4). Or, in other words, the ‘right action’ is always in pursuit of the good (Case, French & Simpson, 2011). The core elements of virtue-based Confucianism, on the other hand, are *ren* (compassionate acts, sentiments), *yi* (moral

rightness, right direction in acts, relationships and human matters) and *li* (etiquettes, norms and protocols in both personal and institutional life), altogether representing cardinal virtues, the basic Confucian moral edifice (Ip, 2011). Confucian ethics is humanistic and collectivistic in nature, placing the importance of collective values and interests above individual ones (Ip, 2009, 2011). Ip (2011) identifies and develops *Junzi* leadership as Confucian ethical leadership in the context of China in which *Junzi* leaders respect *li* and *yi*-based norms and rules.

Both Western and Eastern virtue ethics aims at good ends and overlap to some extent, and both present relevance and significance in virtues for leaders to advance fusion leadership.

Based on Plato's belief on the best "philosopher-kings", Case and his colleagues (2011: 248-249) emphasize the contribution, value and balance of both *intellectus* (lived experience and wisdom) and *ratio* (rationality and reason) in considering the nature of imperfect and good leadership. For example, it is probably less difficult to observe imperfect leadership and wrong behaviour and decisions that display imbalance or lack of justice (Price, 2005; Maccoby, 2004; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002).

To address such dilemmas in leadership. Grint (2007) explains how three elements of Aristotle's typology of intellectual virtue – *techne* (know how), *episteme* (intellectual knowledge) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) – can be used. Morrell (2007) and Case and Gosling (2007), on the other hand, state that the overlooked fourth typology of Aristotle – *theoria* (intellectual virtue of something divine within us) – may probably become an important factor to consider, especially as there is a growing interest in workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership (Gill, 2014). Furthermore, the Stoic virtues posited by Zeno in the fourth century B.C. (Hadot, 2002) promote a way of being, a transformation that guides actions for the benefit of others. This creates a way of avoiding evil while living in harmony with nature by building human consciousness, thoughts and actions in line with nature, and

eliminating the conceit of individuality based on understanding from principles of physics, ethics and logic (Case et al, 2011). Stoic virtues show similarities to Buddhist principles of the laws of nature, particularly in the interconnectedness of the universe. Stoic virtues may well be helpful in providing the art of living with a mental attitude, equanimity, concentration and virtuous pursuits for leaders to differentiate between what they may and may not influence in the world, which, according to Case et al. (2011), is significantly lacking in the contemporary world of organizations.

According to John Dewey, the American philosopher and educator, however, virtues are not limited in number: “every natural capacity, every talent or ability, whether of inquiring mind, of gentle affection, or of executive skill, becomes a virtue when it is turned to account in supporting or extending the fabric of social values” (Westbrook, 1991: 161). For example, 43 virtues were identified by Solomon (1999) and 66 by Pincoffs (1986). Particularly in the corporate context, Moore (2005, 676-677) suggests, the four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence (practical wisdom), together with another two virtues suggested by MacIntyre (1999: 317-318) of integrity and constancy, are the most appropriate ones.

Earlier on, we argued that context plays a crucial role in contemporary leadership and that the ingredients that we introduced for fusion leadership are contextual practices. But how can leaders create and customize a skilful recipe with the right ingredients in their given context? Moore (2015) argues that having the right virtues enables a good choice to be made, something that contributes to the pursuit of excellence and success and to the common good over the long term as its overriding purpose. For instance, among the cardinal virtues, leaders may need fortitude (*courage*) in leading or implementing change or even in taking a risk to establish a new vision. Temperance (*self-control*) is also a significant virtue for a leader, to be able to control “passions and appetites in the interest of the larger objectives at stake” and to

temper “the pursuit of profit for its own sake” (Moore, 2015: S106). And justice is another virtue that guides a leader’s ethical behaviour. These virtues share a resemblance to the cardinal virtue of *yi* in Confucianism and particularly to the Buddhist Middle Way – avoiding extremes – and considers equally both ethical principles and practical outcomes, which has become the guiding principle for Buddhist economics in moderating consumption and simplifying and managing desires (Payutto, 1994).

Western virtue ethics highlight context, whereas Confucianism focuses on relationships, moral conduct and the articulation of virtuous practices in line with a system of obligation compliances and exchanges (Ip, 1996, 2000, 2004). Even Junzi leadership today is contextual and critically depends on how leaders address challenges and issues such as familialism, quanxiism, paternalism, authoritarianism and hierarchism (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Ip, 2009; Westwood, 1997).

To select the right ingredients for fusion leadership, the virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis* – prudence) is considered to be the key intellectual virtue to guide a leader and an organization to pursue good purposes (Moore, 2015). It stands out as a ‘skillful means’, “a virtue that sits over the other virtues” (Moore, 2015: S106), “the nurse of all virtues” (Westbrook, 1991: 161) that may “regulate the other virtues by directing them towards their true end and in that sense is the highest of the cardinal virtues” (Porter, 1994: 155). Practical wisdom directs individual activities to the common good of the community (Porter 1994: 164), at the same time governing emotions to achieve good ends by “making use of clever instrumental reasoning [and] excellent non-routinized deliberation” (Kraut, 2006: 7).

Practical wisdom is a context-specific virtue that enables leaders to articulate wisdom and identify the right means to apply in a given context. Their co-existence reflects what is stated in the Buddhist Vimalakīrti Sutra: “wisdom integrated with liberative techniques is liberation and wisdom not integrated with liberative techniques is bondage” (Thurman, 1986: 46).

Whatever skilful, spiritual or hybrid approach a leader may decide to take, virtue ethics, and practical wisdom in particular, elucidate the choice of ingredients needed both for and in enacting an effective and sustainable decision. Along with context-specific and flexible approaches, leaders may respond to their dilemmas in the contemporary business environment by taking into consideration MacIntyre's virtues of constancy and integrity in setting limits to flexibility in their character (MacIntyre, 1999). Different social contexts should not distract or redirect leaders from their moral character and commitment to pursue good ends (MacIntyre, 1999: 318). Thus, virtue ethics yield philosophical, spiritual and practical consciousness for skilful and effective fusion leadership.

Discussion

Having introduced the ingredients and their choice for fusion leadership in this article, we contribute to the literature on leadership practices in providing skills, techniques and practical wisdom for leaders to consider their leadership values, styles and practices in cross-cultural and multi-cultural contexts. These ingredients can be used in various leadership approaches as long as leaders are aware of the need for virtue and practical wisdom in choosing the appropriate ones according to the specific context.

We extend the notion of situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) by introducing holistic fusion approaches for cross-cultural contexts. For instance, in situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), skilful means fosters flexibility between task and relationship orientations without extreme attachment to either. A spiritual approach encourages compassion and meaningfulness in the choice of leadership orientation and its enactment. The hybrid hedgehog-fox approach fosters the mastery of combining both task and relationship orientations when needed. Practical wisdom stimulates the right attitude, skills and leadership characteristics and identities that are needed.

Fusion ingredients provide situational leadership with the right mixture of task and relationship behaviours (Cubero, 2007; Graeff, 1997; Shin et al, 2011; Yukl, 2008; 2011; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Situational contingencies can dictate leadership styles for a particular moment (Lumsden et al, 2010) in both “directive and supportive dimensions and each has to be applied appropriately in a given situation” (Northouse, 2004, p.87). Therefore, a fusion approach to leadership, especially practical wisdom, is empowering and engaging in several ways. It enables social and cultural intelligence to encompass understanding of the context and changing situations (Zaccaro et al, 1991). It also enables emotional intelligence through compassion and wisdom to motivate employees (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1995), self-awareness, self-regulation and balancing emotions to avoid sharp mood swings, and openness to learning new ideas (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

An appropriate fusion approach to leadership is crucial, especially where situational ethics involves cross-cultural dilemmas. Situational ethics addresses situational factors associated with ethical dilemmas that have no clear morally right or wrong or good or bad solution in a plausible decision (Robertson, et al, 2002), influenced by an individual cultural perspective and cultural relativism (Donaldson, 1989).

For instance, skillful means is needed for leaders to fully comprehend the concept of *blat* in Russia and to choose the appropriate fusion approach to respond to it. *Blat*, a term used in the former Soviet Union, refers to informal agreements and connections aimed at obtaining desired results (Puffer et al, 2010). *Blat* may present a cross-cultural dilemma because it can be interpreted as a form of corruption – the abuse of public office to gain private advantage. However, it may also be a legitimate circumvention of inefficient rules – a way of “corrupting the corrupt regime” (Ledeneva, 2009, p 258).

On the other hand, ‘face-saving’ is a cultural norm in many Eastern contexts. Employees may display social and cultural habits associated with face-saving that can easily be misinterpreted

in Western cultures, such as employee silence. Employee silence may be a form of indirection, a face-saving mechanism, or merely part of idle chatter (Agyekum, 2002) that is external_unintentional. However, a typically Western interpretation that it signifies defiance or other form of passive aggressive behavior may have negative impact in organizational discourse (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Piderit & Ashford, 2003; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Likewise, in task-oriented leadership, critical approaches and overt criticism concerning leader-follower relationships intended to foster employee development or task completion may not be well received in Eastern cultures. In relationship-oriented leadership approaches generating close and informal leader-follower relationships may not be effective in high power-distance cultures.

Practical wisdom therefore can guide leaders to choose the right or most skilful and practical approach in either mixing or separating ingredients to respond to high/ or low context cultures. Fusion leadership facilitates leadership capabilities through skilful means to handle paradoxes in situational ethics and combine hard and soft leadership styles to respond to contextual challenges without extreme attachments. Virtue ethics and spirituality foster values-based leadership that does not just aim for short-term benefits but also appreciates and aims for long-term relationships, compassionate attitudes to the paradoxes of cultural differences and diversity, and transformation associated with contextual leadership.

While the fusion approach and ingredients may be different in interpretations through Eastern and Western lenses, they all share a common basis in compassion. Without compassion, the Buddha would not have been able to put aside his own teachings and principles in order to appreciate others' choices of religion or philosophy of living. Likewise, without being compassionate, Ashoka would not have learnt from mistakes and made efforts for his personal transformation for the benefit of his people. And Abraham Lincoln would not have been able stay focused on the common good for the nation during chaotic times. Virtue ethics

in both Eastern or Western cultures demonstrate the articulation of wisdom through the test of time, including the formation of compassion along the way as a characteristic of wisdom.

The ingredients that are the basis for fusion leadership promote compassion and leadership authenticity. However, in practice, of course, it is sometimes easier said than done. In chaotic or challenging times, leaders might use or commodify the ingredients as instruments to pursue their own devious ends, or at least for organizational outcomes that are not in their employees' or followers' interest. Virtue ethics, especially practical wisdom in this case, can guide leaders to determine the appropriate 'means to an end'. Further empirical studies in exploring fusion leadership in various contexts may unpack the above concerns and further contribute to the 'ingredients' – and indeed recipe – that we have introduced.

Conclusion

Fusion leadership encourages the creation of a leadership recipe beyond the well-known leadership styles that have flourished in stable environments (Solow & Szmerkovsky, 2006). The introduction of ingredients and a recipe blending Eastern and Western values and mindsets and guidance from virtue ethics and skillful means aim to help develop fusion-leadership styles that respond effectively to contemporary cross-cultural contexts. The ingredients in themselves may not be new concepts, but their skilful combination and interpretation in a fusion recipe can make a significant contribution to leadership and to leadership development, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Our introduction of fusion leadership in this article serves several purposes: (1) to highlight the importance of context and the combination of paradoxical approaches in leadership; (2) to contribute to the literature on leadership through discussing skilful choice blending Eastern and Western ingredients; and (3) to suggest further research to examine and develop fusion leadership.

The combination of Eastern and Western values in fusion leadership responds to concerns about how a Western scientific mindset and its associated rational theories and research have overshadowed Eastern approaches, particularly those concerning spiritual yearning in organizations (Marques, 2010). In cross-cultural leadership, their combination is crucial because, besides rational leadership approaches (such as task-oriented or relations-oriented leadership), there is a need to cultivate and “put a premium on human relations and social values” (Bedi, 1991, p.4) in appreciating cultural norms and the complexity of contexts. Incorporating Western concepts in Eastern high-context cultures may reveal new leadership and organizational phenomena and give meaning to “fuzzy shades of grey or paradoxes” that are less likely to be apparent in a modern and low-context reality-embedded representation of Western thinking (Lowe et al, 2015, p.309).

A fusion approach therefore provides practical leadership practices that are applicable in both cross-cultural and high and low context cultures. For instance, fusion leadership may respond to Tung’s (2014) call for examining bicultural identity and its impact on cross-cultural understanding and interaction that can influence leadership orientations. It may also help us to revisit the place of paternalistic leadership in mainstream leadership studies (Jackson, 2016) by exploring the adaptability and contextualization of paternalistic leadership in cross-cultural contexts. We hope that further examination of the relational and contextual nature of fusion leadership may add nuance to its conceptualization and elucidate contextual constructs that may challenge its authenticity – or indeed strengthen its validity and utility.

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