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# Enhancing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for Effective Leadership

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Since ancient times, leaders have been viewed as superior to the masses in terms of intellect, power, wealth, and position in society. Maslow saw leaders as enlightened and self-actualized beings, far superior than the masses they lead. Yet, during the past three decades, the leaders of global corporations are being viewed negatively due to their perceived focus on self and excessive greed. Therefore, there is a need for compassionate ethical leadership to help enhance the potentials of individuals, organizations, and nations. The ancient India's chakra system can probably augment Maslow's hierarchy of needs toward that end.*

Keywords: Leadership, Chakra System, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Compassionate ethical leadership

## INTRODUCTION

The literature and popular culture in leadership and administration have been glorifying greed for quite some time now. Prominent TV shows (e.g., Donald Trump's TV serial: *The Apprentice*) and movies (e.g., *Wall Street*) promote the emerging hire and fire corporate culture, which has even trickled down to non-profit government funded organizations; those higher up in the administration are generally motivated by bonuses and other business perks. Therefore, marginalized groups across the world have been protesting, giving rise to all levels of social and global crisis (DeCosse, 2008), and the elites often continue to capitalize upon these conditions by triggering and starting wars which make their financial, defense, and construction companies richer by the day (Jusasz, 2013).

National security has become the war cry during the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which has led to all kinds of covert and overt oppression and suppression such as prevalence of recording phone messages of their citizens, even in the nations who championed and continue to champion democracy all over the world (Trethewey & Goodall, 2007). In these challenging times, we need leaders in all spheres of business and society who can shape and guide the humanity for a better tomorrow. The leaders of tomorrow will have to not just empower the followers but do so with the understanding of human diversity, the planet, and the environment. They will have to work from the heart and not just their minds.

The next section of this article presents a brief literature review of leadership, which is followed by a discussion on how leadership has moved back and forth between the "bright" to the "dark" side over the years. Thereafter, the ancient Indian chakra system is briefly introduced. In the subsequent section, the authors briefly discuss how the chakra system can enhance Maslow's hierarchy of needs for producing better leadership. The last section presents brief conclusions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When we think of leadership, in general, we get a mental image of a glorified person in history, such as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and other such great statesmen in the field of politics who had great charisma, apart from other empowering and some disempowering formidable leadership qualities. Such leaders, no matter how famous or infamous they may have been, whether in the field of politics or economics, are seen to have imposed their

vision on their followers. Such has been the case in history until World War II (Rejai & Phillips, 2004). However, are leaders only in the public arena or do we find leaders in everyday life too? Are parents, teachers, preachers, coaches, and peers also leaders? Thereafter, we need to examine the context and the concept of leadership in more depth.

Leadership has been defined in many different ways in popular literature and in scholarly literature. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines leadership as “the power or the ability to lead other people.” Business Dictionary.com adds to the above definition by defining it as the ability to have a clear vision, sharing that vision with others who would follow willingly, and coordinating conflicting interests of all members and stakeholders of an organization. In addition, a leader comes forward in times of crisis and is able to think and act creatively to resolve problems. Probably, these are the leaders who are remembered the most, like George Washington, as mentioned earlier.

Therefore, as Hackman and Wageman (2007) rightly question, “Not do leadership make a difference, but under what conditions does leadership matter?” They distinguish conditions under which leaders actions have major consequences from those where they barely make any difference. However, should success or failure define leaders when often they have to face constraints within or outside their organizations that restrict their abilities to lead? (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

In scholarly literature, leadership has been defined in several other ways. Rejai and Phillips (2004) see leadership as emerging due to life experiences and life chances, which gives a leader his/her vision and goals. Leaders then use their skills to express their vision and goals in a way to attract followers, whom they try to understand, organize, and motivate to achieve those mutually benefitting goals. Northouse (2013) distinguishes emergent leadership, which has referent and expert personal power (gained from willing cooperation of followers), from assigned leadership. The latter is based on formal legitimate posts leaders have in an organization, which often give them position power to reward or punish their followers. Therefore, what makes a good and effective leader is a question which most people and organizations are interested in, especially to survive and thrive in the current highly competitive global market economy.

With time and changing context in history, the concept of leadership has evolved significantly. As Rejai and Phillips (2004) correctly state, the varying concepts of leadership depend on the changing concepts of the nature of human beings. In the past, the basic assumption of scholars about human nature has been negative and in need of guidance from higher authority – from the time of Plato, the foremost philosopher of ancient Greece to Freud, the father of psychoanalysis in modern times. Therefore, the noted scholars of the past saw leaders as being elitists, being superior to the masses in terms of intellect, power, wealth, and position in society.

According to Rejai and Phillips (2004), Plato saw the leader as the Philosopher-King who alone could bring justice to society, since man by nature was seen as a combination of the human and the beast, reason and passion - in need of control and regulation. In case of Christianity, as expounded by Augustine, leadership was seen as supernatural and authoritarian to help humans overcome their sinful and evil nature using fear of damnation as a means for salvation (Rejai & Phillips, 2004)

As Rejai and Phillips (2004) further clarify, during the early renaissance age, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of leadership saw some expansion with Machiavelli’s inclusion of the masses by the otherwise, amoral, opportunist, and manipulative leader “the Prince,” who seeks their interaction for the political stability of the city state. Machiavelli is today considered as the Father of modern political theory. As his predecessors, he continued to view human nature as evil, greedy, and selfish. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English philosopher Hobbes continued this trend of looking upon humans as needing protection from their own selfishness, seeking social contract by uniting to form political societies, and having common rules and regulations for mutual protection (Rejai & Phillips, 2004).

Views regarding charismatic leadership have been given by Carlyle. Who relates it to the Great Man and Nietzsche’s Superman, but without leaders sharing their vision with their followers (Rejai & Phillips, 2004). Similar assumptions were made by the psychoanalysts and psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including Maslow who glorified the leaders and saw them as enlightened and self-actualized beings, better than those they led (Trethewey & Goodall, 2007). Maslow’s vision was that of an elitist utopian democratic society where humans can triumph only by being freed from totalitarian or fascist states, as experienced in the modern communist nations of the world.

Finally, it is only in the last few decades, with the spread of universal education and democracy across continents, that behaviorists and political theorists have come up with the concept of shared vision between leaders and followers who are engaged in meaningful interaction. Therefore, it took centuries before the masses were considered good enough, smart

enough, and important enough to be included in the decision-making process in leadership. Thus, a more functional definition of leadership sees it as a process where leaders seek to influence groups of people to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2013).

### **From The Dark to the Bright Side of Leadership**

In 1978, Pulitzer Prize winning historian and political scientist, James MacGregor Burns, in his classic work, *Leadership*, documented the use and abuse of power by leaders down the ages. He further identified two forms of leadership: transactional leadership involving mutually benefitting interactions between leaders and followers, and transforming leadership leading to higher motivation and moral upliftment of all involved (Rejai & Phillips, 2004).

However, this “bright side” of leadership theories in the post-Cold War soon got perverted during the post 9/11 era - a time of crisis caused by terrorist attacks and global collapse of the stock market in a growing competitive global economy (Trethewey & Goodall, 2007). Excessive consumerism, self-centered entitled leadership, especially among global corporations, glorified by scholars such as Maslow, got richer and greedier and lost focus of the have-nots who worked hard at low wages all across the globe or lost jobs due to fast growing technology replacing human workers. According to the *Huffington Post*, the average CEO compensation of S&P 500 corporations now stands at 335 times the median worker salary, as compared to the ratio being 20 in 1965 (Huffingtonpost.com). The article also quotes Slavkin Corzo of AFL-CIO: “Corporate CEOs have rewritten the rules of our economy to allow themselves to continue to amass wealth and power, while the rest of us are left to the scraps.” In addition, with fundamentalism on the rise in the fields of religion, politics, corporations, and administration across the globe, the “dark side” of leadership has once again become prominent. In this current era, leaders do not facilitate communication with their followers and expect them to obey out of faith (Trethewey & Goodall, 2007).

As rightly pointed out by Trethewey and Goodall (2007), we humans have therefore regressed and reverted back in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs due to excessive surveillance of the populace at the work place and even in department stores, such as Target. This has been made possible by the mindboggling growth in technology. Our security needs along with the need for food, clothing, and shelter have once again gained prominence, especially for the masses in some nations who have been sucked out of their resources by the glorified corporations, the World Bank, and their threatened or corrupted politicians, as in some nations in South America (Perkins, 2004).

As a way out of this dilemma created by the “dark side” of leadership, Trethewey and Goodall (2007) suggest that proper communication has to be re-established between leaders and followers who not only empower others, but also care for the environment they live in. There is a need for compassionate ethical leadership to help enhance the potentials in individuals, organizations, and in nations. Based on the principles of democracy, they offer leaders a pragmatic complexity model of communication based on the diversity seen in human nature and global environment we live in today.

## **THE CHAKRA SYSTEM: STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Interestingly, the above mentioned measures required to bring humanity back on the path of the “bright side” of leadership, very much correspond to ancient India’s yogic chakra system states of consciousness. The chakra system coincidentally correlates and even goes beyond Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory. To understand this further, we go back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In spite of some obvious short-comings in Maslow’s theory of motivation, he was a pioneer in the field of psychology. According to O’Connor and Yballe (2007), in addition to being the champion of the “third force” in psychology known as the humanistic movement, Maslow also helped bring in the “fourth force” of transcendence of self and spirituality in psychology, where the true self is seen to be a part of a greater whole.

Guest (2014) states that Maslow himself spent much of his later years clarifying the question of what motivates the self-actualized person, that is those who have achieved or who are striving to achieve their full-potential. This resulted in Maslow identifying the sixth level of motivation, which is based on intrinsic values, such as, truth, goodness, beauty, desire to know, understanding, purposefulness, perfection, and excellence. These intrinsic values transcend the personal self-interest of the individual, leading to the formation of transpersonal psychology, which deals with transcendental States of Consciousness related to human experience. Therefore, some of the criticisms and the gaps in Maslow’s theory can probably be answered

better by investing into the yogic “Chakra System” States of Consciousness, which is a by-product of research done in eastern philosophy by the champions of transpersonal psychologist, such as William James, Carl Jung, and Piaget, as mentioned by Best (2010).

According to the chakra system, there are seven states of consciousness. The first state of consciousness is represented by the Muladhara chakra, which corresponds with the first two levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, namely physiological and safety/security needs. The second chakra, called the Swadhisthan chakra, focusing on relations and emotions, corresponds with the third level of Maslow’s hierarchy—love and belongingness. Manipura chakra, the third from the bottom, represents the ego state, which corresponds with the self-esteem and self-actualization needs on the Maslow’s hierarchy. The fourth chakra, called the Anahata or the heart chakra, represents love and compassion for others. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding level present in the Maslow’s hierarchy for this chakra. Perhaps, the reason for the absence of a hierarchy level corresponding to the heart chakra is that Maslow developed his model based on the elitist leaders who often lacked compassion and consideration for others. The elitist leaders were probably similar to the heroes of Ayn Rand’s popular books—*The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. The fifth chakra, the Vishuddha or the throat chakra, can be seen to correspond with the 6<sup>th</sup> level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that Maslow was developing during his later years. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chakras, Ajna and Sahasrara chakras, correspond to third eye (intuition) and enlightenment, respectively. Maslow does not even include those in his hierarchy.

Therefore, when comparing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs with the yogic chakra system, as stated earlier, Maslow failed to identify a hierarchy of need corresponding to the heart chakra for his self-actualized leaders in society. The heart chakra state of consciousness is reached by moving beyond the confines of personal ego; opening the self to universal love, empathy, compassion, and the motivation to do service for the benefit of all. These qualities are very similar to those identified by Trethewey and Goodall (2007) to help us recover the bright side of leadership, which leaders at all levels of society need to develop. This includes compassion and understanding for all, including the underprivileged and marginalized groups in society across the globe, and concerns for developing and maintaining a sustainable ecosystem and natural environment as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

As seen in our discussion above, the concept of leadership has changed over the centuries and continues to evolve with the changing times and contexts. New models and theories are presented constantly to solve the mystery of how to be an effective and good leader who not only helps us to survive, but also to thrive. Therefore, till today, there is no general agreement on a multidisciplinary unified grand theory of leadership (Wren, 2006). If we want to have a free, fair, and prosperous society, it is time that the business leaders focus on the “heart chakra” as well. The culture of extreme cut-throat competition, rampant greed, and self-centeredness is not sustainable for our civilization in the long run.

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