



Full Length Research Paper

Applying Bold Leadership, the Confucian Way

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Abstract

In this paper, being a bold leader is examined through the Confucian visor. Through literature and interview research method surveys, the practitioner-author examines what makes a bold leader, the Confucian way, and the ways, approaches and actions in which a person can be bold *ala* Confucian. These, amongst other things, include standing by one's values, taking actions – making things happen as seen from the Confucian perspectives, and continuously learning, learning and applying, speaking correctly and being trustworthy as well as being hardy and resilient.

Keywords: Bold, Confucian leadership and values, strict disciplined leadership, big-hearted, resilient, high integrity, moral courage, prudence, direct and seemingly blunt.

INTRODUCTION

From the outset, it is worthy to note that the teachings of Confucius, set down 2,500 years ago in a poetic style, may, at first, appear remote or seemingly arcane, difficult to apply to our lives today. However, with some reflection, we seek to unlock the timeless and profound nature of his work. And what this author did was to think about how Confucius' words might have meaning for his interviewees and him in terms of being bold or wanting to be a bold leader. And also to break away from the past imperialistic interpretations which may be done to fulfill their own interests or to perpetuate their own autocratic rule, overall, hindering changes to be made. The Confucian leader can be typically seen as passive, slow to accept or even obstruct changes. The author has revisited and reinterpreted the theory of Confucian leadership in the modern era; and consequently, the author found that it is not what some scholars have perceived, that is, Confucius' ideas and contributions in his times were simply to teach or urge people to be good (including young and old; poor and rich without any discrimination). In fact, his teachings went further or deeper than that as such; he was stressing on the importance of self-cultivation and self-development of individuals into gentlemen and ladies (君子, *jūnzi*) as well as upholding one's integrity and values. By being bold and confident, an individual is empowered (becomes proactive) to live up to his or her aspirations ('desire' and values set) in accordance with *Tao* (道) (Low and Ang, 2012; Low, 2013); he or she also sets the example.

Henceforth, the aims and purpose of this article is to illustrate, share or encourage this bold leadership style with the younger generations of modern scholars, practitioners and proponents of Chinese/ Confucian leadership theories.

Things Chinese such as certain practices or even Chinese proverbs, over the past two thousand years or so, have been closely associated or linked to Confucius or Confucianism. Here, we are looking at the Confucian leader as being bold, and it is the aim and objectives of the paper to examine the various ways and key actions of being a bold or courageous leader through the Confucian lens. There is some ground to say this because in *The Analects*, the Master said, "The wise are free from perplexities; the virtuous from anxiety; and the bold from fear," (Confucius, cited in Wang, 1982: 43).

Literature Review

Who dares lead? "Leaders are good generals"; "they must be bold" (Trout, 2004: 126-7). While Trout is referring to strategy, here, the bold leader stands for his or her values or what the late Konosuke Matsushita called "firm convictions" (Matsushita; 1994: 36), many people even leaders forget that business is about values, and not just economic performance (Daft, 2008: 167). These values that they stand for also give them moral courage, that is, making them committed to moral

principles and being aware of the dangers involved in supporting those principles as well as the willingness to endure the risks (Kidder, 2005).

A high integrity and character is expected of a Confucian leader or a gentle person (*junzi*) (Low, 2013; 2008, 2008a; De Barry, 2004). The Confucian leader is bold; he or she has certain demands or requirements of his or her followers. Besides, the leader is strict enough not only on others [applying McGregor's (2006) Theory X], but also imposes standards and certain prerequisites on him(her)self – and that is how the boldness of the Confucian leader is depicted. We read in *The Analects* of this:

Tzu-lu asked about government. The Master said, 'Encourage the people to work hard by setting an example yourself.' Tzu-lu asked for more. The Master said, 'Do not allow your efforts to slacken.'" (*Confucius – The Analects*, XIII, verse 1) (Lau, 1979: 118).

This is, in a way, an authoritarian or strict disciplined style, mixed with care and kindness which the Confucian leaders lead. Yet the Confucian (leader) is humanistic (Fung, 1948; Lin, 1994; Low, 2013). He or she is simply bold enough to wanting to set the example and be the role model; indeed the Confucian leader is a gentleperson (*junzi*). Determined and having moral courage, the leader holds high that he or she must be the advocate, the torchbearer and the champion of what he or she intends to pursue and attain. He or she wants others to emulate him or her, and in that sense, the leader applies McGregor's (2006) Theory Y. True, bureaucracy is a Confucian tradition (Scarborough, 1998), a top down approach, yet at times they empower or apply Theory Y. It is not all tyrannical or bad. There is kindness, generosity, and forbearing manner in dealing with the people. (18: 2; 11: 24, cited in De Barry, 1996: 20; Low, 2006a)

To explain further, under the supportive style of leadership, the leader seeks emotional and psychological support from his subordinates. As in an all-in-the-family situation, the leader and his followers have a mutual understanding. The followers or employees will work diligently whether the leader (owner/employer/parental figure) is present or not. While being disciplined, the leader shows much care and concern; in most ways, a paternalistic style of leadership is practiced (Low, 2008; 2006; 2006a).

As Scarborough (1998: 25) has explained, "the Chinese mind is accustomed to coping comfortably with dichotomies and accepting both poles as valid. Such bipolar conundrums as effectiveness and efficiency, high quality and low cost, short term and long term, profit and growth, stability and progress, may come easier to the Chinese mind. They intuit a holistic and mutually complementary, dependent, or symbiotic relationship among all things." So, more so to the Westerners,

Chinese leaders may appear quiet or subdued, passive, inactive, restraint or even dare not take risks yet they are bold in their own ways.

Additionally, it is taken that leaders must be bold to lead by example, living the message by example (Low, 2013; 2008; Baldoni, 2003:169; Low and Theyagu, 2003), and this is also expected of them by their followers. In this regard, Matsushita pointed out that "the tail trails the head but the head must help the tail grow by setting a good example and by listening to the tail's side" (PHP Institute, Inc., 1994: 43).

Definition of Bold Leadership

Many scholars have perceived Confucian leadership as passive, conservative and autocratic in theory and practice. Here, in this article, the author presents a different perspective of Confucian leadership which is similar and equal to bold leadership. Bold leadership, in the Confucian way, is defined as individuals who lead by standing firm on their Confucian values and beliefs; they embrace and practice high integrity, moral courage and selflessness for humanity and loving-kindness; their eyes are set on their goals that they dare to change and challenge the status quo; they are also daring to make a difference, and thus, overall, stand tall.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a series of interviews – each time appropriately 45 minutes though some interviews might stretch to an hour plus – conducted with a total of sixty-one Chinese business owners and leaders from the private and government sectors in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. These interviews were done during the period from 16 December 2006 to 31 September 2010.

At the outset, it should be noted that some critics have opined or queried, "What are the specific or special findings of these interviews?" One critic even specifically indicated that, "If the results were only percentages, why not that one just supplies questionnaires to allow these interviewees to give their answers?" To these queries, it is worthy to note that from the beginning of the study, the researcher had some difficulties in making appointments with the Chinese owners and leaders, for most of them would decline the proposed interview(s). They would either say that they were "too busy" with their business meetings/ dealings or they had "very little time for such interviews". Nonetheless, with good networking with the many interviewees through contacts and chairmen/secretaries of the respective area/district's Chinese Commerce Associations, most Chinese owners and leaders accepted the interviews which were also sold to them as chit-chat or "yum char" (Cantonese: tea-drinking) sessions. Hence, it is abundantly clear that

should the questionnaire method were relied upon, this study would have indeed failed miserably, and in fact, not enough response or data would be forthcoming. Interestingly, the whole of idea of the interview sessions was positively turned into an informal friendly chit-chat sessions, hence the success of the chosen research method.

The study thus relies on the qualitative research method. It is heartening to note that similar to Low's (2006, 2006a) studies, being assured of confidentiality and anonymity, the interviewees expressed themselves freely. It is not simply about numbers or percentages. This interview method was simply helpful since it enabled much qualitative data to be collected from the interviewees, especially in getting them to define "bold leadership" as well as the range of the interviewees' answers, meanings and interpretations; and the beauty of it is that they also related much of their experiences. To get more information and data from the various interviewees, open questions were deployed (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001); they were crafted as follows:

What are your views of a bold or courageous leader, the Confucian way?

Is a bold leader – the Confucian way, to you, a good leader?

When and in what situation do you need to be bold?

Why do you think your followers like a bold leader?

Should leaders be bold? Why?

How and in what ways can Confucian leaders be bold?

Pilot-testing was thought necessary and thus scheduled or 'planned' accordingly, as it was not easy to predict how respondents would interpret and react to the questions (Gill and Johnson, 1997). Checking was also done during the pilot testing to ensure that all the questions were understandable (Haworth (ed.), 1996: 47). They were also asked to suggest additional questions and to identify any highly relevant questions. To increase comprehension and improve clarity, this list of questions was then modified based on several respondents' feedback; for example, the above Question 6 was modified from "How can Confucian leaders be bold?" Interestingly, these questions also allowed the researchers to gather more information on the various sources on bold leadership from the interviewees. In this way, the author attempts to find out and understand the interviewees' perceived values of a bold leader.

To clarify further, it should be noted that the researcher conducted this 45 minute-long (at least and at times stretched to an hour plus) in-depth interviews with each of them. He tried to formalize-regularize the process as much as he could. However, he knew before he started that the more he would attempt to control the process, the less real wisdom he would get from the discussions. So the tension between doing "legitimate" (formal) qualitative research and getting the deepest possible responses from his interviewees became one

the most interesting challenges that he confronted. Admittedly, he at times strayed from his format; he then asked probing questions in the interviews where formal methods for generating data collection could easily be sacrificed in response to the richness and spontaneity of the intimate, unhurried conversational inquiry that permitted probes for additional clarification, examples, and so on.

An example of a probing question asked is that of: "For what reasons do you think your followers like you as a bold leader?", after the interviewees were answering this question: "Why do you think your followers like a bold leader?"

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Sixty participants or 98.3 percent of the total number of participants agreed that bold leaders, the Confucian way, normally "stand by their values". They perceived that such leaders "have high integrity." "They have their own values, they stand by these values."; "they do not necessarily insist on things done their way (giving some latitude or freedom, but insist on adherence to certain values)".

Fifty-seven participants or 93.4 percent opined that Confucian leaders, being bold, stressed on "speaking correctly and being trustworthy". "Committed", "they stand up for their followers even when it may be not popular to do so."

Fifty-four participants or 88.5 percent spoke of Confucian leaders as "daring enough to listen". "Bold enough, good leaders and successful managers listen to the grassroots and/or staff and ask for their feedback."

Interestingly, fifty participants or 81.9 percent highlighted that bold Confucian leaders "takes action"; these "Confucian leaders dare to take action."

Forty-six participants or 75.4 percent indicated that bold Confucian leaders "do not display double standards", attempting to be fair. They "deal fairly" and are usually "consistent". "They are fair."

Forty-six interviewees or 75.4 percent expressed that the leaders dare to be bold, "show(ing) that they care, really care." "They express appreciation when the followers (or employees) do a good job." "Magnanimous", they are "brave enough to be big-hearted". "They assist followers with their personal problems." "They (also) ensure that followers are duly rewarded for good work."

Forty-four interviewees or 72.1 percent also expressed that "the Confucian leader is bold; he or she plans." "They have bold ideas of the future." (several interviewees' input).

Forty-two or 68.8 percent intimated to the researcher that being bold, Confucian leaders "keen on learning" and "(they) apply what they learn".

Several interviewees, thirty-seven or 60.6 percent pointed out that Confucian leader "go all out" and "do their best".

Thirty-seven interviewees or 60.6 percent believed that Confucian leaders are “hardy” and “persist in attaining their goals”. Thirty-four interviewees or 55.7 percent believed that they are “open to their people”. Thirty-four interviewees or 55.7 percent of the total number of participants took it that as leaders, they are “being direct and seemingly blunt” “They (also) speak their mind... it’s sincerely telling one’s employees”, and the majority of such leaders hailed from Singapore businesses. Thirty-three or 55 percent of the total number of participants expressed that they are “careful” and “prudent”. Thirty-one interviewees or slightly more than half of the sampling pool expressed that the bold Confucian should “know when to come and when to go (retire or resign/ relax)”.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the above findings, it can be analyzed that the modern Confucian leader can be seen or taken as:

1. Standing by the Values Held

To be bold means one is “not hesitating or fearful in the face of actual or possible danger or rebuff; courageous and daring” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bold>). The Confucian leader is a die-hard where values and integrity is concerned. Allow the author to explain. Courage or boldness exists in each of us if we hold on to our principles or more specifically, our values. All of us can then be what Confucius called gentle-man (lady). This is what the Chinese commonly say, that is, “men of principles have courage”. “We stand up for our values held” (Interviewees’ input; 98.3 percent of the respondents expressed this.) We stand, live or die by their core values or key beliefs and convictions. Matsushita referred this as being steadfast in one’s principles (Takahashi, 1994: 94 - 96) or values (convictions) (Matsushita, 1994: 36). Ethics, in the sense of discerning right and wrong, and embodying underlying values are basic or essential to leadership. This is similar to what Ciulla (2004) has argued, that is, ethics is at the heart of leadership. One can thus say that ethics forms the underlying basis of the pillars or principles of leadership.

Take a leader for example, when his or her values are aligned with that of the company, there is no anomaly or variance, and it certainly becomes much better and easier for the leader to act. When a situation happens and decision has to be made, he or she would normally ask, “Where do we (I) stand?” This would seem to tell us that a leader has responsibility for at least enabling the group that they lead to create its ethical sense, and thus to set up an ethical community of practice. He or she would make decisions based on what core values the company holds but more so, he or she would have peace

of mind or be satisfied if the decisions made while agreeing with the company’s values are also aligned and matched with his or her values (Low, 2011: 12).

Citing Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Lao Tzu, Mohammad or Moses as examples, Low (2011) also speaks of inner leadership in terms of the leaders having an amplifying effect or big influence on others related to their virtuous and values-based behavior. Interestingly, Low (2010: 42) has also argued that the leader commands soft power when he or she stands for his or her values has moral courage and represents what a leader stands for. Now that is what being a bold leader is about. The gentleman (lady) stands tall, and understands what is right and ethical. (*Confucius – The Analects*, IV verse 16). In another verse, *Confucius – The Analects*, XII, verse 4 (Lau, 1979: 113):

Ssu-ma Niu asked about the gentleman.

The Master said, ‘The gentleman is free from worries and fears.’

‘In that case, can a man be said to be a gentleman simply because he is free from worries and fears?’

The Master said, ‘If, on examining himself, a man finds nothing to reproach himself for, what worries and fears can he have?’”

That is to say, a leader who is bold should be courageous because he or she has a clear conscience when making a decision. (S)he stands by his or her integrity. This, it should be noted, as not only as a characteristic of a Confucian leader but also, as the hallmark of true leadership, really standing for one’s values, moral courage and what one stands for. Here it matches with what Low and Theyagu (2003: 14) have highlighted, that is, “by the leader’s values, moral courage and what he stands for, (the) people know if he is committed”. One should not be caught in a situation where one is seen less than honest and candid. If one is caught in a compromising situation, one misplaces the people’s or the followers’ trust. Basically, it boils down to who one is and what one stands for. People usually admire who one is and what one stands for. And “in the Confucian sense, one needs to be a gentleman (lady) (*junzi*), and be kind and benevolent to one’s people. When the people trust the leader’s values, they are likely to follow the leader.” (Interviewees’ input; mentioned several times).

2. Speaking Correctly and Being Trustworthy

Bold leaders, according to 57 interviewees or 93.4 percent of those surveyed, are “committed”; and “speak correctly while taking actions”. What more, “they stand up for their followers even when it may be not popular to do so.” “I have good memory...remembering what I have promised to my customers, I deliver what I promise.”

To Confucius, one needs to be “sparing of speech but trustworthy in what (one)...says” (*Confucius – The Analects*, I verse 6) (Lau, 1979: 59). In terms of relation-

Table 1. shows some key responses verbalized by the interviewees.

Table 1: The Interviewees' Responses on Bold Leaders		
Responses	Number of Interviewees	Percentage (%) of Interviewees
Standing by the values held "Confucian leaders have high integrity." "We stand up for our values held"; "we have our own values, they stand by these values."; "we do not necessarily insist on things done our way (giving some latitude or freedom, but insist on adherence to certain values)".	60	98.3
Speaking correctly and being trustworthy "We are committed", "speak correctly while taking actions" and "we stand up for our followers even when it may be not popular to do so." "I have good memory ...remembering what I have promised to my customers, I deliver what I promise."	57	93.4
Daring enough to listen "Bold enough and patient", "good leaders and successful managers listen to the grassroots and/or staff and ask for their feedback"; "we are close to or in touch with the grassroots"	54	88.5
Taking action "The Confucian leader dares to take action." "These leaders make things happened."; "the opposite is passivity, nothing happens."	50	81.9
Being decisive or having no double standards "Have no double standards", "deal fairly"; "we are consistent". "We are fair."	46	75.4
Being brave enough to be big-hearted "We show that we care, really care.", "we express appreciation when the followers (or employees) do a good job." "We assist followers with our personal problems." and "we ensure that (our) people are duly rewarded for good work."	46	75.4
Being a good planner "The Confucian leader is bold; (he or she) plans." "To boldly plan is to cut down uncertainties, and this helps in leading well."	44	72.1
Learning and applying "Keen on learning." "Such leaders learn well".	42	68.8
Doing one's best "We go all out, we give our best." The leaders "do their best." "(We) have to be strict", "put my best and get my people to put in their best"	37	60.6
Forging on, being hardy and resilient "Bold leaders work hard", "work long hours". "We are hardy"; we "persist." "We are bold enough to face problems or mistakes." "Not only as a leader but as a person, he should and will not be <i>cheak liow bee</i> (Hokkien: useless or of no use to the society), but he must be <i>kut lat</i> (Hokkien: work hard) or <i>pak buay see</i> (Hokkien: die-hard)".	37	60.6
Being open to one's employees and people "We are open to our people", "be very clear to one's people" and "clear communications assured."	34	55.7
Being direct and seemingly blunt "Such leaders are direct." "We speak our mind... it's sincerely telling one's employees."	34	55.7
Being careful and prudent "Not extravagant" and "cautious when comes to spending"; "I follow the procedures..." "(to) get work done to upkeep the standards."	33	54
Knowing when to retreat, relax or retire (and when to advance) "Smart and strategic", "the bold leader knows when to come and when to go."	31	50.8

ships and by manner of speech when talking to each other, the Chinese community would habitually use or address persons by their prefix such as teacher Lim/ “*lao-shi* Lim” or Headman Tan, their position or status is attached to their name; hence, they need to fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities. This is related to Confucius’ Rectification of Names (Low, 2012; Sun, 2008; Fung, 1948). One’s position and status is respected and he or she can be seen as trusted by the position held; he or she acts according to the position/status.

Then again, indeed we should not just talk; talk is cheap. Just to talk is being patsy; instead there is a need to “make it... (one’s) guiding principle to do (one’s) best for others and to be trustworthy in what (one) say(s).” (*Confucius – The Analects*, IX, verse 25) (Lau, 1979: 99).

3. Daring Enough to Listen

“These leaders’ ears are on the ground”; “patient”, “they are close to or in touch with the grassroots” and “they listen well.” (54 interviewees’ input; mentioned 67 times). Yes, tough leaders do not yell obscenities, they listen (*World’s Executive Digest*, 1995: 32) gentlemanly (being lady-like) (Fung, 1948; Zhou, 2005). They listen to the people, their followers (Matsushita, cited in PHP Institute Inc., 1994: 43), “listening to the tail’s side” (Matsushita, 1994: 43).

‘Bold enough, good leaders and successful managers listen to the grassroots and/or staff and ask for their feedback.’ (several interviewees’ input). Let us see these quotes from *The Analects*:

“Tzu-kung asked, ‘Why was K’ung Wen Tzu called “wen”!’

The Master said, ‘He was quick and eager to learn: he was not ashamed to seek the advice of those who were beneath him in station. That is why he was called “wen”’ (*Confucius – The Analects*, Chapter V verse 15) (Lau, 1979: 78).

It is worthy to note that at most times, most of us dare not ask questions for fear that we cannot handle the answers. Good grassroots leaders, having the common people touch, are bold enough to ask questions and to listen to their answers. Questions elicit answers, and leaders are brave to listen to get feedback so that they can indeed learn and cater to the needs of the people. They then make effort, if need be, to change their communicating or even leading ways and (re)connect to the people. In this respect, Pye (1985) spoke of Asian leaders are expected to be sensitive or responsive to the feelings of their employees, for everyone should be understanding of the needs of others.

“We all want to be valued.” (Donadio, 2012: 13). When leaders listen, they show they care (Low, 2001) and are being empathetic (Low, 2011a). Such leaders, with good communication ways, listen without being pretentious and/or interrupting (Achua and Lussier, 2010), and

indeed this is very spirited. Besides, listening can be therapeutic, and the brave leader simply listens, allowing the employee to express, voicing out his or her feelings or dissatisfaction, serving as a catharsis.

Bold leaders dare to listen, think or reflect and act. And this brings to mind that the Confucian leaders are also bold through...

4. Taking Action

This is making things happen (“*kin chew*” “*kin kah*” – Hokkien: fast hand, fast leg; Low, 2009), and viewing it from the Confucian perspective. Firstly, it is better to do before talking about it or giving publicity about what is to be done. “The Master said, ‘The gentleman desires to be halting in speech but quick in action.’” (*Confucius – The Analects*, IV verse 24) (Lau, 1979: 75; bold, author’s emphasis).

Secondly, it is better to take action, facing the issue(s) squarely. Some people, managers and even leaders choose the easy way out by avoiding the issue, sweeping it under the carpet. This is like passing the buck and it could come back to haunt the person one day.

Thirdly, “taking action means making things happen” and “the opposite is passivity, nothing happens” (50 interviewees’ input/comments; 81.9 percent). Boldness lies in taking action. All of us must take action, resolving problems. If we are to act, then we act; and determinedly pursue it and get it done. Being bold means the leader approached the issue or problem in an objective, even-handed fashion; being bold seems to be hardnosed in driving ourselves or even our people to deliver results and outputs.

5. Being Decisive or Clearly, Having no Double Standards

“One holds one’s core values and standards high”; and “(one is) brave enough to stand upright.” “We are consistent” (46 interviewees’ input; mentioned 57 times).

One also needs to be decisive to be a bold leader, and no double standards should be practiced. He or she knows for sure what is right and what is wrong. Here, Confucius said, “The man of wisdom is never in two minds about right and wrong; the man of benevolence never worries about the future; the man of courage is never afraid.” (*Confucius – The Analects*, IX verse 29) (Lau, 1979: 100).

6. Being Brave Enough to be Big-hearted

Good leaders also dare to be “magnanimous” – they are “big-hearted” (寬容之心; *Hanyu Pinyin: kuān róng zhī xīn*) (46 interviewees’ input/comments), showing much love, kindness and compassion to their fellow peers, followers

and to the people around them. This coincides with Goto's (1994: 91) account of the late Matsushita Konosuke; he showed much care and consideration to his employees and others. And for Matsushita, being caring, it was always "people before product" (PHP Institute, Inc., 1994: 54).

To be bold is also to be "beyond the usual limits of conventional thought or action; imaginative" (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bold>). In the organizational work world, goal-directed or task-orientated, it is ordinarily bureaucratic and impersonal, if not cold. And there is a need to inject feminine feelings of being soft, nice and empathetic, be daring enough to practice and extend out that feminine feeling; basically, it is about being human or at least having that personal touch. "The bold leader is supportive as well as empathetic" (Several interviewees' input). For Confucius "no man is a machine. He should not behave heartlessly like one, or as if others were machines" (Chew, 2000: 5). "A gentleman is (*also*) conscious only in the knowledge of others' comfort; the mean is conscious only of his own comfort" (Chew, 2000: 2, *italics mine*) (Low, 2008: 34).

7. Being a Good Planner

The drain pipes need to be cleaned out when the weather is good. Leaders need to plan.

This certainly makes good sense since good leaders have vision, and they are often good planners. Planning is developing a goal and choosing and carrying out a method to attain it. Plans encourage or support managers and employees to direct their persistent efforts *toward* activities that help achieve their goals and *away* from activities that do not (Williams, 2009: 157). It not only persuades or eggs on people to work hard for extended periods and to engage in behaviors directly related to goal accomplishment; it also encourages them to improvise or think of better ways to do their jobs.

Planning also assists in organizing, choosing and selecting the right resources and method(s) to attain the goals. The Confucian practitioner Matsushita spoke of "continued progress... (made) possible with the right approach... by employing what he called dam management"; such planning action is a crucial form of insurance for growth and stable development (PHP Institute Inc., 1994: 53). For Confucius, "A man who does not think and plan long ahead will find trouble right by his door." (Lin, 1994: 181). A tough leader is also a good planner, (s)he leaves nothing to chances. "To boldly plan is to cut down uncertainties, and this helps to lead well in business." (Interviewees' input).

Bold leaders often attempt to minimize or reduce uncertainties; they plan or build dams. Unlike externals who see themselves as mere pawns in the game of life, leaders, being internals with high locus of control, would

normally want to be in control of things and their environment.

8. Learning and Applying

Learning and applying has impact in the workplace, and the leaders' (including followers' or employees') willingness to involve themselves in learning behaviors that lead to advancement is locus of control. Some people believe that they are the determiners of their own fate (Burns, 2000: 214). "The Master said, 'Learn as though the time were short, like one that fears to lose.'" (Lyll, 2010: 109).

Even in the old times, Confucius said, "In making a mound, the job is not finished until the last basketful of earth is in place; in filling in a hole, even if you've only poured in one basketful of earth, the job can surely be finished so long as you persist." Here, Confucius cleverly applied the metaphor to encourage his disciples to be determined, resilient, consistent; persistent and to strive to improve themselves constantly and not to give up mid-way. (*Analects of Confucius*, IX, verse 19; Sinolingua, 1994). There is a Russian wise saying that has the same positive meaning as Confucius' metaphor and it goes like this, "little drops of water wear down big stones." Thus, by the same token, each of us needs to learn to be bold and tough. Bit by bit, we learn, we move and we become stronger.

"A gentleman is always eager to learn" (*Confucius – The Analects*, I verse 14) (Lau, 1979: 61). One learns and continuously learns. All of us should learn from the mistakes made by others and ourselves.

For Confucius, when he walks along with two others, they may serve me as his teachers. Like Confucius, we should select their good qualities and follow them, and as for their bad qualities, we should avoid them.

9. Doing One's Best

This is all about achieving, and getting the best. One should move forward, forge ahead, "do one's best and achieve" (based on the perceptions and inputs of 37 interviewees). One should "not allow... (one's) efforts to slacken." (Lau, 1979: 118). Confucius urged his disciples to do their best and be trustworthy in what they say. (*Confucius – The Analects*, VII verse 15) (Lau, 1979: 89). They must be ethically correct at all times. Chinese business leaders can also be said to be "strict" when it comes to setting the standards. For them, "(they) have to be strict", "put (their) best and get (their) people to put in their best". "Quality cannot be compromised" (Several interviewees' input).

And again interestingly, in *Confucius – The Analects*, V11 verse 4, we learn that even "during his leisure

moments, the Master remained correct though relaxed” (Lau, 1979: 86).

In doing their best, it becomes obvious that bold leaders also keep...

10. Forging On, Being Hardy and Resilient

From Confucius comes the emphasis on positive and harmonious relationships as well as the value of learning that bring many benefits including good talent management. Positive-minded, the good Confucian leader is disciplined, hard-working and resilient. (Low and Ang, 2011). For Matsushita, he was positive, and the late corporate leader maintained that there was no such thing as failure; this only shows his resilience (Matsushita, 1994: 115-117).

One business leader intimated to this researcher that, “Not only as a leader but as a person, he should and will not be *cheak liow bee* (Hokkien: useless or of no use to the society), but he must be *kut lat* (Hokkien: work hard) or *pak buay see* (Hokkien: die-hard)”. Self-motivated, a bold Confucian is a fighter and (s)he persists and this gives the leader “the necessary fighting power” (Low, 2007: 146). The Chinese leader continues to work hard, “works long hours” and in fact, one works hard without complaining or keeps one’s broken arm inside one’s sleeve. A “resolute climber, Y. H. Tan (cited in Khoo (2001: 42, 45) strive to achieve his goals and “look for ways to do better”.

In terms of relationships, bold leaders, the Confucian way, “solve problems”, “dare to resolve conflicts”, “collaborate”, “build teamwork” (several interviewees’ input) and promote trust among their team members. Employees look to the leader to provide stability. Being able to count on that person being on an even keel increases their level of trust. It can be taken that such leaders are really competent while being consistent in their actions, and this promotes reliability and trust (Shearouse, 2011: 125-6).

“They are bold enough to face problems or mistakes” (several interviewees’ input). For bold leaders, there is no shame or embarrassment in getting knocked down or making mistakes [Citing a common Chinese saying, one interviewee aptly spoke of “everyone has a black pig in his house”]; they would get up, move on and think about what to do next. “I believe in getting into hot water or troubles... they keep us clean” (several interviewees’ input). Here, Goto (1994: 93) speaks of the late Matsushita Konosuke as saying: “If you fall over, you have to get up on your feet again. You never see a baby staying down for long after a fall. Even children get up pretty quick. So we’ll do the same, won’t we.”

This is similar to the Singapore’s Teochew businessman, the late C. K. Tang. He started as a door-to-door salesperson and later his business grow into owning a hotel and shopping center complex. It was not so smooth sailing for C. K. Tang after opening of his shop

at Orchard Road in Singapore; in 1960, it was closed due to problems with trade unions but reopened the following year

(<http://timesofmylife.wordpress.com/2008/08/14/cktang-%E8%A9%A9%E5%AE%B6%E8%91%A3/>). Most of the Chinese business people would accept such is the life in the organization or business with its ups and downs. This indeed requires being hardy, an ability to face and deal with adversity, falling and picking up as well as keep on trying and persist when the going gets tough.

Being determined, such a leader, in the Confucian sense, is patient (*The Analects*, I verse 6) (Lau, 1979: 59); bold and hardy. The leader also learns from mistakes and corrects him(her)self. “If I fall seven times, I stand up eight.” (Interviewees’ input; mentioned several times).

Leaders would normally see difficulties and problems more as challenges. And this is akin to what Low and Theyagu (2003: 57 - 58) has highlighted, “leaders are moulded their ability to take charge of the situation and turning them around. When the going gets tough, the leaders get going. They show that they can take on challenges and attain the ultimate goal. As a leader, you can achieve this if you have a clear vision of what you seek and the purpose for it.”

The event or hardship is also seen in the right context. After the event or a misfortune, one nurtures and develops one’s restored energy to make it even greater, more indestructible and incorruptible. One’s strength is boosted after a problem, crisis or a hardship. And overall, “bold leaders work hard”, “work long hours” and “(work) harder still to resolve problems and difficulties” (37 interviewees’ input/ 60.6 percent). Here, Chinese Bruneians, being permanent residents, in particular, can be said to be more resilient since most of them work extremely hard as they have fewer benefits than the Chinese Bruneian citizens. They, for example, have to pay for their children’s education and medical services while Chinese Bruneian citizens are given free education and free medical services. Chinese Bruneian citizens can save money and own houses and lands while Chinese Bruneian permanent residents are not permitted to buy houses or lands, and they continue to stay in rented houses. Some Chinese Bruneian permanent residents hold a stateless status in their passports, and travelling to Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other countries are not easy or convenient because they have to apply for visas/entry permits before travelling out of Brunei.

Overall, it can thus be seen that Confucians (Confucian leaders) are practical and enduring (De Barry, 2004).

11. Being Open to One’s Employees and People

Perhaps this may, to most people, sound un-Asian or even non-Confucian, but the leader needs to be open,

sincerely frank (this is really stressed by Confucius) and candid or be bold about it, and there's no need to beat about the bush. The modern Confucian leaders insisted on "not being vague about it, be very clear to one's people; no lies are then committed" with "clear communications assured" (Several interviewees' input).

If we look at and apply the teachings of Confucius, it is said that there is a need to be bold, and this is better than to act in hypocritical way. We see, for example, "Tseng-tzu said, 'The knight had need be strong and bold; for his burden is heavy, the way is far. His burden is love, is it not a heavy one? No halt before death, is that not far?'" (*The Analects*, VIII, verse 7) (Lyll, 2010: 106). Wrongdoings should not be left not clarified, unattended and/or avoided; our conscious dictates that we need to let the follower(s) know or at least that they are aware of such things and avoid repeating these errors.

There is a potent need to avoid the "just do the avoiding or withdrawing" situation or the ostrich-burying-its-head-in-the-sand approach; things will not move or be resolved by itself. True, it is treading where angels fear to tread. Ultimately, though difficult it maybe and it makes sense, there's a need to talk. One needs to pluck one's courage, be tactful, retaining or saving the employee's face, self-esteem or ego by starting with hints or by being indirect and then talking to one's boss(es) about the issue. Overall, it is often good to clarify, summarizing and clearing the air to make for a good working relationship between the leader and the follower(s).

12. Being Direct and Seemingly Blunt

It is critical that one should not go about in life with play-acting or pretense. "Say yes when you really know. Say no when you don't. This is the way to become a wise person." (Zhou, 2005: 18).

It can be taken that to be bold is to be direct and as said above, sincerely frank, and indeed seemingly blunt.

Several interviewees, in fact, expressed that, "leaders who are direct and even to the point of being blunt; I think it is better than pretending to be good to the followers", "having a sharp knife is neater in cutting and it gives a neat or clean cut; (there's) no need to dilly-dally; it is better than killing me softly"; and "perhaps, such a way is Confucian tempered with present-day younger generation of leaders' touch. Confucian because they may learn it from their fathers, especially in Chinese family-run businesses". They also spoke of: "the leaders as open; speaking direct; at times, appear blunt. Tough leaders don't sugar-coat their words." Interestingly, all these coincide with Channel News Asia's (CNA, 2011) *The Maverick*, Episode 5 which featured 3rd generation Glenn Tan, his "reputation for being a tyrant that precedes him." Glenn Tan is the Executive Director of Tan Chong, a Singapore's public-listed family-run company, and for him, in Asia, if one talks to one's employees politely or

softly; it can be seen as a suggestion. And it is better for one to be direct – not be misinterpreted or misunderstood; and let them see clearly as an instruction. Bold, yes, and there is no waste of time or beating about the bush. Besides, in business, time is money. Glenn had accordingly retrenched employees when they were not up to the mark.

13. Being Careful and Prudent

Being prudent in some ways is often good, being careful in terms of money and procedures; the leaders would not be extravagant or reckless. In the Confucian sense, this is being bold. Confucian leaders are prudent (Low, 2009, 2008; 2008a). "I would like to impress and in fact, I do it this way – if I want to get or buy something, then I will work hard, work overtime, to get it; I will ensure that my business expands or have the necessary monies before spending." expressed one Chinese Bruneian interviewee. Majority of the interviewees, coming from all three countries – Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore spoke, "I follow the procedures..." "(to) get work done to upkeep the standards", "maintain(ing) the quality".

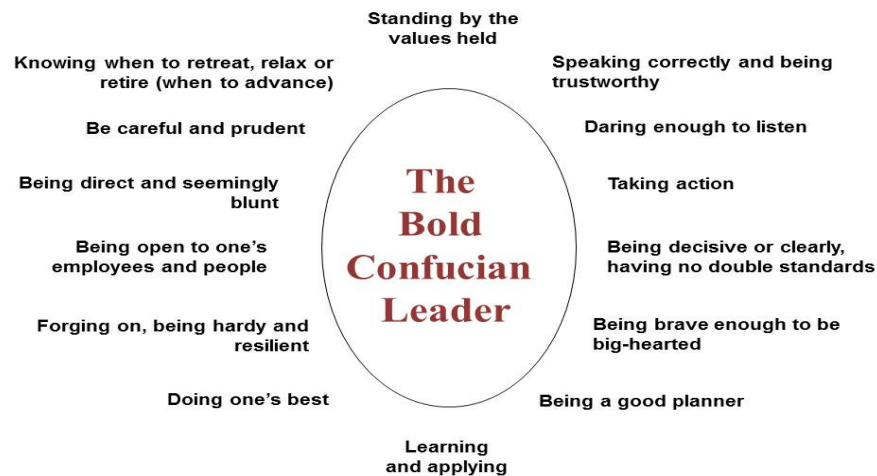
In *Confucian Heritage Singapore* (Low, 2006a; 2009), the personality profile of the Singapore leader suggests a tendency to be more prudent than his or her global counterparts. And this implies that the leaders "tend to be organized, dependable, and thorough; or they are leaders who follow rules well" (Busine, Till and Dy-Liacco, 2011: 25). One can say that the Singapore leaders are bold (though critics may simply say that they are compliant, just 'follow the law': Singapore colloquialism to indicate being *kiasu* or *kiasi*; afraid to lose or die) in that they maintain the integrity of the system, ensuring good governance and smooth management of the organizations. On the other hand, in some ways, it only shows that Singapore leaders, compared to their global counterparts, are more compliant or rule-bold.

14. Knowing When to Retreat, Relax or Retire (When to Advance)

Leadership is about strategy; strategy is also about leadership (Trout, 2004). To be bold is also to be strategic, it is to cleverly know when to strike quickly or advance and when to retreat, and when to apply pressure and indeed when to relax or not to be around. One should not overstay.

In 497 BC, at the age of fifty-four years old, Confucius was at the height of his political career. But when he realized that his advice to the government was not being listened to, and that all his hard work was not being appreciated, he "resigned from office and took to the road with no prospects and with very little cash" (Chin, 2008). Take the case of President Ferdinand Marcos who

Figure 1. The Profile of a Bold Leader, Confucian-style



refused to resign and was in fact toppled when people power, led by Mrs. Corazon Aquino, swept the Philippines in 1986 (Burton, 1999: 96). Though a non-Confucian or Chinese example, the point here is that as most Confucians take it like nature that as leaders, if we need to retire, then we do so; time and timing is critical; and like a river in its stages in life, one goes with the flow and slower still at a more mature age.

A summary of the qualities of a bold leader, the Confucian way is seen in Figure 1:

Benefits and Limitations of the Study

Admittedly, the sample size was relatively small; there were sixty-one interviewees. Nonetheless, this research study attempts to find out and to document bold leadership aka the Confucian way of Chinese business leaders in the Southeast Asian context. In most ways, some interesting key insights are gained, one includes “being direct and seemingly blunt” appears to be gaining ground among young Chinese business leaders though it on the surface appears to be going against the traditional Confucian grain. The other interesting insight includes the fact that bold Confucian leadership points to the leaders being hardy and resilient which is good when doing business, especially in sales prospecting and calling, meeting and overcoming customers’ objections as well as gaining new customers.

CONCLUSION

Bold leadership can thus be, overall, interpreted as passionate leaders who are not concerned about what people think about them. They usually have a cause or the heart that they are concerned – or almost obsessed –

with. These people and leaders definitely seek to further that cause or goals daily, and they do not spend time thinking whether they look good or how will they look to their followers or in front of others. This is not the case for the (true) Confucian business leaders.

Indeed when Confucian business leaders generally stand by their core values, they become role models. And they also become firm, fearless and bold yet they can be open and express their sincerity and put their values or apply them into action. Ever learning and on a continuous improvement path, they stand tall, and are hardy and resilient. And when it is time to retire or leave, they should or would also do so; they simply oblige.

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