A Buddhist Approach to Management

Buddhism in Every Step C2
（英文版）

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A Buddhist Approach to Management

Today, Business Administration is one of the most popular subjects in college curricula worldwide. Buddhism has its own philosophies and practices regarding management that have evolved over centuries. Even during Sakyamuni Buddha's time, the *sangha,* or monastic community, had its own well-developed system of administration. Over time, the system has undergone numerous reforms and evolved sophisticated methods of management and leadership. When speaking about the Triple Gem, the Buddha said in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*: "I take refuge in the sangha, and wish that all sentient beings lead the assembly in harmony without any obstruction." Thus we can see that the Buddhist sangha is best when it can bring everyone together in a way that is organized and harmonious.

I. The Buddha's Approach to Management

After the Buddha's awakening, he taught the Dharma to his former attendants at Deer Park. These five monastics became the first sangha. In time, the community grew to include seven groups of disciples: fully ordained male monastics, fully ordained female monastics, female postulants (*siksamanas*), male novices, females novices, male lay disciples, and female lay disciples. Typically, about 1,250 people from these seven groups were accompanying the Buddha. How was the Buddha able to manage all these people?

1. Equality under the Dharma

The Buddha taught that all sentient beings have Buddha nature and that all humans are inherently equal. His teachings dismantled the societal caste system prevalent in ancient India. He taught that all things arise from causes and conditions and are not created by some sort of god. The Buddha used his teachings on the three Dharma seals and Four Noble Truths to confirm the validity of the Dharma. The Buddha often said, "I myself am just a member of the sangha" and "I do not govern, the Dharma governs."

He did not consider himself the leader of the sangha, but rather that it was the truth itself that governed the community. Because of this, the sangha community was governed by its members' moral conduct. Upon admission, each member had to give up his or her previous social status, wealth, fame, and other privileges. All external classifications and differentiations were discarded. Members differed only by their level of internal cultivation and which category of the sangha they belong to (for example, fully ordained male monastics have a set of precepts, fully ordained female monastics have a different set of precepts, bodhisattvas have another set of precepts, etc.). The only distinctions of privilege between sangha members were distinctions of seniority, though even then the relationships between senior and junior members were founded upon mutual love and respect. When disputes arose, the Buddha implemented "seven rules of reconciliation" to settle the conflict.

2. Decentralized leadership

When the Buddha was in the world, he established precepts for the sangha to abide by. Virtuous monastics would teach the precepts to others. Within each community, a senior monastic was chosen to teach

the Dharma and care for the community. In turn this senior monastic would report back to the Buddha about how the community's practice was developing.

3. Shared support and responsibility

When the first five monastics became the first sangha, the Buddha gave them the "four principles of living" to guide them toward a virtuous way of life: Eat only food from alms, wear only cast-off clothing, live only under trees, and take only discarded medicine. In addition, the monastics were told to discard eight groups of impure possessions that would hinder their practice: they were not allowed to own houses, farms, granaries, servants, animals, jewelry, lavish utensils, or expensive bedding.

As the size of the sangha grew, the rules were modified to accommodate the difficulties posed by the monsoon season and to respond to requests from benefactors, such that the sangha as a whole was allowed to receive donated clothes, food, houses, and land. In this way, the sangha operates on a communal living model, in which most property is held in common. Individual monastics' private possessions are limited to their robes and bowls, while all other supplies, tools, bedding, houses, and land are shared by

the sangha. The responsibility to repair and maintain communal property is distributed among members of the sangha. In each individual sangha community, a senior monastic was chosen to lead the group through periods of work and rest, maintain the code of conduct, and pass on any speech and information given by the Buddha. Though the specifics of the monastic lifestyle have changed over time, the sangha still follows the basic principle of subsisting on alms, as well as operating on a system of shared support and responsibility.

4. Mutual respect and harmony

Guided by the Dharma, the sangha practices the "six points of reverent harmony" in communal living:

- Harmony in view through sharing the same understanding.
- Moral harmony through sharing the same precepts.
- Economic harmony through sharing things equally.
- Mental harmony through shared happiness.
- Verbal harmony through avoiding disputes.
- Physical harmony through living together.

5. Communication and interaction

On the eighth and fourteenth or fifteenth of each month, the Buddha entreated every member of the sangha to gather and recite the precepts. Such gatherings provided an excellent opportunity for interaction between monastics and fostered the values for productive and harmonious living.

6. Democratic governing

The sangha is governed by "formal acts of the sangha" (*sangha karma*) which are democratically enacted during monthly meetings held on the fifteenth of each month. At these meetings, members of a given community reviewed any violations of the precepts that occurred during the month, determined the appropriate discipline for the offender, and decided how it would be carried out. There are two main types of formal acts: (1) those involving disputes or violation of the precepts and (2) those that do not. The former deal with disputes between monastics or violations of precepts, instances where right or wrong need to be determined. The latter deal with the daily life of the monastics, whether or not the affairs of the community abide by the precepts, and ordaining new

members into the sangha. The system of voting upon formal acts of the sangha provides a framework to promote fellowship, harmony, and mutual support of the community. The system allows the community to function as an ideal moral society in which the four means of embracing are practiced: giving, kind words, altruism, and empathy.

II. Management According to Buddhist Sutras

Across the twelve divisions of the Buddhist Canon, there are many texts that discuss management and organization. Two such examples are included below:

Amitabha Sutra

The *Amitabha Sutra* describes Amitabha Buddha as creating the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. The Pure Land itself is an exemplary model of forethought and planning: there are seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, seven rows of trees, pavilions made of the seven treasures, and ponds filled with waters of eight merits. The air vibrates with heavenly music. The streets are paved with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. The trees and flowers exude delicate fragrances and spices. These wondrous structures and beautiful scenery create a

sense of majesty that cannot be found in the human world. In this wonderful land, there are no traffic accidents. Roads direct travelers smoothly and quickly. There are no quarrels or bickering. Everyone is well-behaved. There is no private ownership. Given the perfect economic system, there is no need for possessions. There are no crimes or victims. Everyone is absolutely safe, living in peace and harmony with each other.

Amitabha Buddha is not only an expert in managing the environment, but also in managing people. He guides the spiritual development of sentient beings, teaching them to mindfully recite his name. Those in this Pure Land are guaranteed consistent progress in their practice. In the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, everyone is respectful, compassionate, peaceful, and joyful.

Universal Gate Chapter of the Lotus Sutra

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva would also be an excellent manager. He is able to oversee all sentient beings and relieve them of their suffering, while bestowing upon them wisdom and virtue to satisfy all their needs. To better help all sentient beings, he has the ability to manifest into thirty-two forms.

The "Universal Gate Chapter" says that, depending on what form is able to best liberate some sentient being, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva will manifest that form and teach them the Dharma. With his great compassion, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva relieves people from suffering and brings them joy. In the same way, a modern manager should strive to emulate Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's ability to accommodate the needs of others. He or she has to establish effective measures to solve problems in modern organizations. There is much to learn from Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's vows to respond to whoever is in danger, and liberate sentient beings from the sea of suffering.

III. Management in the Chinese Monastery

In Chinese, the phrase *conglin* (叢林), "forest of trees," is also used to refer to a Buddhist monastery. This expression evokes an image of a place where weeds do not sprout and the trees grow tall and true. It is a lawful, orderly place. As such, Buddhism strongly emphasizes a congenial relationship between an individual and the group. This has led to the creation of rules governing communal interaction, such as the "six points of reverent harmony"

mentioned earlier, and Chan Master Baizhang's *Rules of Purity.*

To maintain an orderly monastery, one must be self-motivated, self-monitoring, and self-disciplined. The goal is to create a harmonious sangha, ensuring that the Dharma can dwell in this world for a long time. A *conglin* monastery is organized around shared responsibility and harmonious group relationships. The system may be summarized by the following four characteristics:

1. Governing by Virtue

A *conglin* monastery is a "public monastery": all property collectively belongs to the community. Moreover, the monastery welcomes and accepts any and all monastics to stay and practice. All monastics choose the abbot of the monastery together. Additionally, the abbot is chosen among virtuous senior monastics from all directions—the abbacy is not decided based on lineage to previous abbots or anyone else.

2. Equality in Labor

Chinese Chan monasteries rely heavily on communal labor. The principle of equal labor is strictly

followed. Everyone, regardless of rank or seniority, must participate in communal labor. Chan Master Baizhang epitomized the model by his famous saying: "A day without work is a day without food."

3. Shared Responsibility

Under the direction of an abbot, a monastery divides its responsibilities and tasks among its members. Everyone has his or her own duties, and everyone supports one another. Some have administrative duties, and others have task-based duties. Some have duties within the monastery, and some have duties outside the monastery. It is the role of the abbot to serve the community by assigning these duties and maintaining the harmony of the monastery. Master Zongyi outlined the purpose of various offices in his *Rules of Purity for a Chan Monastery*:

> The monastery exists for its members. To teach members, there is an elder. To mentor members, there is a head monastic. To uphold members, a director is chosen. To maintain harmony [through discipline], there is a *weinuo*. To make offerings to members, there is a cook. To manage the members'

general affairs, there is an general director. To handle finances and materials, there is a treasurer. To write and keep records for the members, there is a secretary. To safeguard the sacred texts for members, there is a librarian. To welcome guests, there is a receptionist. To deliver the members' correspondence, there is a messenger. To maintain the members' bowls and robes, there is an attendant. To prepare medicine for the members, there is an herbalist. To keep the members clean, there is a bath supervisor and a barber. To keep the members warm, there is a wood collector and a hearth supervisor. To accept donations, there is an alms collector. To plan the labor of the members, there are foremen of gardens, mills, and farms. To keep the monastery toilets clean, there is a janitor. To serve the members, there are pure practitioners.

Well-defined job positions and a complete division of labor are important factors for the success and growth of an organization.

4. Code of Communal Living

In addition to the Buddhist precepts, monasteries have developed a set of rules governing their daily operation. During the Eastern Jin dynasty, Master Daoan established three sets of rules for his followers: (1) rules for walking meditation, sitting meditation, sutra recitation, and Dharma talks, (2) rules for Dharma practice, dining, and chanting for meals, and (3) the rules and methods for repentance. During the Tang dynasty, Chan Master Baizhang, Master Zongyi, and others composed various Rules of Purity texts, providing a written record of discipline at *conglin* monasteries. These various codes of conduct were instrumental in the development of the sangha.

IV. Fo Guang Shan's Approach to Management

I am often asked, "Fo Guang Shan has hundreds of temples and affiliated organizations across the globe. How do you lead and manage an organization of this size?" There are a number of different methods and techniques I use to manage, but the following are the four most fundamental principles:

1. Monastics do not have their own private devotees

Fo Guang Shan devotees do not belong to any individual monastic. All devotees are followers of Buddhism as a whole. Monastics are only distinguished based on the time of their ordination, designated as the first generation of disciples, second generation, third generation, etc. Since devotees do not follow a particular monastic, there are no conflicts or rivalries between monastics for devotees.

2. No private ownership of money or funds

Fo Guang Shan monastics do not possess private property or savings. All donations go to the organization as a whole. Although the monastics do not possess money, it does not mean that they are left unsupported. Fo Guang Shan provides monastics with food, clothing, travel, medicine, study abroad experiences, and opportunities to visit their families. Monastics are even given gifts to present to their families during their visits home. At Fo Guang Shan, all the money belongs to the community, not individuals. All are supported communally by the system.

3. Mandatory rotation of jobs and positions

Akin to the sayings "Pure water comes from a flowing stream," and "A rolling stone gathers no moss," Fo Guang Shan regularly rotates its monastics' jobs and positions. No individual "owns" any branch monastery, temple, or affiliated organization. One year, a given monastic may be an abbot, while next year they may be reassigned to another temple doing entirely different work. There are many benefits to this kind of job rotation: the chance to learn and grow, create connections with new and different people, and gain experience in many fields.

4. Promotion and performance evaluation system

A monastic in Fo Guang Shan begins with the title *jingshi,* "pure practitioner," (one who doesn't have specific duties other than Buddhist practice) and advances through three successive levels: *xueshi,* "learner"; *xiushi*, "advanced practitioner"; and *kaishi,* "instructor." Advancement depends on an individual's effort and performance in scholarship, Dharma practice, and service to the organization.

Thanks to this orderly system, Fo Guang Shan has enjoyed smooth and successful growth. In addition, Fo Guang Shan monastics are trained and assigned to positions based on evaluation and assessment. Members are classified into the following groups according to their talents:

- Abbot / Director: An abbot should have a clear understanding of the principles of Fo Guang Shan. He or she must also show loyalty, resolve, initiative, and commitment. An abbot should be able to deal with both superiors and subordinates in a knowledgeable, virtuous, confident, and presentable manner. He or she should master sutra recitation, ceremonial rites, and teaching the Dharma.
- Guest Receptionst: This person must be calm and authoritative in words and manners. He or she should be familiar with social customs and etiquette. This person should be sociable, empathetic, active, positive, and understand the mission and vision of Fo Guang Shan.
- Educator / Scholar: A scholar is one who slowly and meticulously pursues knowledge. They must be logical, clear, and

thorough in their studies, avoiding the pursuit of fame. As an educator, their thoughts must be pure. They must be capable of motivating their students and elders alike. They must adhere to Buddhist values in their words, avoiding conflict. He or she should be skilled in gathering, using, and spreading knowledge, constantly publishing new works.

- Coordinator: A coordinator should be insightful, innovative, familiar with data analysis, able to keep confidences, and capable of remaining in the background. He or she should know how to integrate Buddhism into mundane society. A coordinator must able be adept in written communication and in providing staff support.

Outside of these "career tracks" there are positions focusing on other talents, such as those with legal expertise, accounting expertise, and administrative expertise.

Shared vision and values are of utmost importance for an organization. Such cohesion of thought requires a great deal of communication and

coordination within the organization. Meetings are essential to establish a convergence of ideas and opinions. For this reason, Fo Guang Shan takes meetings very seriously. It frequently holds meetings in order to achieve consensus and a shared vision.

Proper use of personnel is another challenging aspect in management. Buddhism also has long emphasized the importance of people and managing them to their fullest potential. I've formulated some of my own principles regarding a Buddhist approach to personnel management:

- Consider any effects on the organization as a whole.
- Divide responsibilities with well-defined roles.
- Understand the importance of coordination.
- Plan for all things with care.
- Perform to one's fullest and with determination.
- Report regularly to keep one's supervisors informed.
- Take responsibilities and be accountable for them.
- Evaluate one's performance and follow up.

In addition, it is essential that both superiors and the subordinates be honest in their communication, have mutual respect, be active in their work, self-motivating, sincere in their evaluation, and frequent in their coordination.

Furthermore a modern manager or leader should act in the following manner:

- Put a smile on your face, have praise on your lips, hold criticism inside, and keep anger in your stomach.
- Avoid hasty and harsh actions. Choose your words carefully. Criticism accomplishes nothing, doubt leads to disloyalty.
- Treat others with lenience, but monitor yourself strictly. Give credit to others, but take personal responsibility when something goes wrong.
- Put aside thoughts of personal gain and go forward. Do not be frustrated or obstinate.
- Keep your eyes on the big picture. Work in harmony with others. Let communication flow freely up and down, and strive for consensus.
- Serve others sincerely, live by your words, plan ahead for dangers, and understand yourself and others.

- Be observant, adaptable, and considerate of others. Take advantage of opportunities, and make the most of your life.
- Be good-natured, listen attentively, study carefully, and be respectful of other's opinions.

A leader also needs to know how to develop, cultivate, and nurture a competent staff. He or she should be able to recruit, train, and empower talented employees. A common mistake committed by a leader is criticizing a subordinate, yet failing to offer guidance. In addition, a leader or senior executive should frequently engage in self-assessment and ask subordinates for input. Harmony between a leader and his or her staff is a stabilizing force for any organization.

How should a monastery be run? My answer is that the traditional system of administration and modern management systems should be integrated. The temple should be self-sufficient economically and financially. Enterprises compatible with Buddhism should be permitted. The administrative core of a temple should interact closely with the surrounding community. Effective personnel management

requires division of labor in a cooperative environment. Management should make decisions reaching out in all directions, and considering past, present, and future, giving people faith, joy, hope, and convenience. One must be able to give ground, make something out of nothing, find happiness in emptiness, and think of all people as oneself. Consider the temple, the community, the organization, and Buddhism first. Place others before yourself. Encourage frequently, give generously, and speak kindly. All the above are necessary concepts and philosophies for a modern manager to run a smooth and successful organization. How does one master Buddhist management? I believe that, before one can lead, one must be able to follow.

The administrative system of Buddhist monasteries has evolved over many centuries. With every passing age, it developed unique characteristics. The sangha originally established by the Buddha followed the principle of "respecting the elders while empowering the multitude." It gave authority to formal acts of the sangha, voted upon by the assembled community, which occupies a role similar to a parliament in a democratic society. When it traveled to China, the monastery administrative system came to

emphasize personnel management and division of labor to maximize the productivity of individuals. Both represent excellent models of management. In our search for a new management system, we should enhance both systems by adapting them to the needs of our modern society.

Modern management focuses on organizational interaction and coordination. Strong group dynamics synchronize the steps of upper management and employees, ensuring the consensus and shared values necessary to achieve goals. Buddhism has emphasized group dynamics, as seen in the six points of reverent harmony, codes of communal living, and Chan Master Baizhang's *Rules of Purity*. Buddhist management relies on principles such as self-discipline, self-motivation, self-monitoring, and repentance. The management philosophy of Fo Guang Shan is to give people faith, joy, hope, and convenience.

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