

The media is full of stories of the follies of our leaders. Recently, even a folk movement of “Occupy Wall Street” emerged as a protest to the behavior of the US business leaders. The social function of religion is to accumulate wisdom that lies at the core of our behavior. Let us turn to this source in search for a method to pour some light into the phenomenon.

Christian ethics talks about the seven deadly or cardinal sins. They are *wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony*. It is surprising how relevant the list seems when one looks at the deeds of different leaders of industry and other walks of life. Among the leaders, most often we see evidence of pride. Pride makes them live in their own bubble where the leader seizes to understand how ordinary people will judge some of their deeds. Pride makes people create and maintain “networks of good brothers” – many dealings are possible among the brothers while non-members are exempt. In University life we see people stressing how “we are striving for a top university status” or “how we collaborate with top universities” while dealings with Universities of our own station are of no consequence, i.e. people behave as if we have already achieved the desired top university status.

One can ask: what use is pride? Without a Nobel prize there is no cause and with the prize there is no need for it. The opposite of pride is humility. A humble person understands his or her failings and is eager to improve and learn. Surely, this is a great booster of development and progress! Pride blinds you to your failings and makes you underestimate other people. In my experience when humility is combined with determination, great things can be achieved. Humility makes one seek ways of gradual improvement. Determination helps to keep at it.

Another favorite of the media is greed of the leaders of business and industry. The media is full of stories how the leaders’ salaries, bonuses, stock options etc give them compensation for their work that seems astronomical in the eyes of the man from the street. This vice seems to have penetrated the banking industry the worst. In academic culture it is traditional to keep one’s ideas that one has not published to oneself. This may be due to greed or fear of being exploited. The latter would be because of greed of someone else rather than the father of the idea. The opposite in an academic context would be generosity of spirit leading to sharing of ideas and refining them through effective interaction. Knowledge management tries to facilitate sharing of knowledge because it is well known that organizations that are good at it excel. Clearly, achieving a high level of sharing in an academic organization requires a high level of trust among the people.

While the media reports about the greed of the leaders, one could claim that it pampers the envy of people. The opposite of envy would be the feeling of fairness. There is evidence in the Finnish ICT industry of how the lack of fairness in how people are compensated for their efforts leads to loss of motivation. If people feel that they are treated unfairly compared to their efforts and contribution, they will do less than their best in the future. It is a leadership and management challenge to keep envy at bay and maintain fairness in the organization.

When pride combines with (mental) sloth, one tends to analyze the problems of the organization less than thoroughly and go for solutions that have little to do with reality but may fit into some management “ism” or some popular line of thought. We see evidence of this sin of “mental sloth” too often in University life. For example, there may be a directive that each department should be measured in the same way and should use the same methods of getting their job done. Indeed, at first glance this seems fair. However, the nature of the research in those departments varies. So, methods that fit perfectly for one unit may be completely unsuitable for another. Another example is that research develops following a “waterfall” from basic to applied to consultation/engineering or pushing the results to the market. In my particular area of networking technology, it seems that sometimes one must first do some engineering in order to identify the most relevant problems that need basic research or that some projects combine basic research, applied research, consultation, engineering and education – all in the same package and intertwined in curious ways.

From the history we know cases when the leaders start to propagate wrath against some group of people. This has led to the horrors of Nazism, the gulags in the Soviet Union. Fortunately, life looks much nicer today. The opposite of wrath is tolerance or may be the capability to enjoy diversity and debate. Sometimes one can still observe intolerance of other people's views. For example, when an organization recruits new people, it may test the candidates for their "team capability". This tends to favor people who are inclined to say "yes" and look positively even upon the follies of the leader. In the long run, we have an organization without the misfits who speak their mind. When the leaders of such an organization make mistakes, there is no one around to warn them! So, a wise leader will always remember, that people who speak their mind even if their opinion is opposed to the accepted canon, stand between them and their failure.

So, we can see how it is all in the Bible! All we need is be humble, tolerant, enjoy diversity, be generous of spirit, fair with our co-workers and be determined in trying to understand the challenges we face and in getting rid of our failings.