



PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF KARMA IN THAI BUDDHISM: DEBATES AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of compassionate leadership in academic institutions and its impact on faculty and staff well-being, organizational performance, and student success. Compassionate leadership, characterized by empathy, emotional intelligence, and support, fosters a positive and inclusive workplace culture, helping to reduce stress and burnout while promoting work-life balance. Through the analysis of case studies, this paper demonstrates how universities can improve productivity, collaboration, and innovation by integrating compassionate practices into leadership roles and organizational policies. Furthermore, it highlights the critical importance of compassionate leadership in enhancing student outcomes, fostering a supportive environment for both faculty and students. The paper concludes by offering strategies and recommendations for fostering compassionate leadership in universities, emphasizing the need for professional development, inclusive policies, and open communication.

Keywords: Compassionate leadership, emotional intelligence, faculty well-being, organizational performance, student success

1.Introduction

Workplace culture in academic institutions plays a critical role in shaping the experiences of faculty, staff, and students. Universities, as complex organizations, rely on a positive work environment to maintain productivity, innovation, and overall well-being. One of the key components of a healthy workplace culture is compassionate leadership, which emphasizes empathy, support, and mutual respect within the organization (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Compassionate leaders actively foster relationships built on trust and understanding, which is essential in academic settings where the pressures of research, teaching, and administration are intense.

Compassionate leadership is particularly relevant in university workplaces due to the high levels of stress and pressure faced by faculty and staff. Academics often work in demanding environments, juggling multiple roles and responsibilities,



including research output, student supervision, and administrative duties. The competitive nature of academia, combined with the emotional labor involved in teaching and mentoring students, makes compassion an essential element for leaders aiming to support their teams effectively (Rynes et al., 2012). Compassionate leadership helps create a culture that acknowledges these challenges and provides the emotional and professional support necessary to thrive.

The need for compassion in the academic workplace is also underscored by its potential to mitigate the effects of stress and burnout, which are prevalent in university settings. Research shows that compassion-based leadership can reduce stress levels and improve overall mental health among employees (Gilbert et al., 2017). Given these benefits, the role of compassionate leadership in academic institutions cannot be overlooked.

This paper aims to explore the role of compassionate leadership in improving well-being, job satisfaction, and performance among university faculty and staff. It seeks to examine how compassionate leadership can foster a supportive academic environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to the success of the institution.

Furthermore, this paper will analyze the ways in which compassionate leadership can be integrated into organizational policies and practices in universities. By investigating the relationship between compassionate leadership and key workplace outcomes, the paper will provide insights into how university leaders can create a culture of compassion that enhances both individual and institutional performance.

Compassionate leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a supportive, productive, and healthy workplace in universities by promoting empathy, mutual respect, and well-being. Through compassion-based leadership, universities can cultivate a positive work environment that enhances the mental health, job satisfaction, and overall performance of faculty and staff.

2. Understanding Compassionate Leadership in Academic Institutions

2.1 Definition of Compassionate Leadership

Compassionate leadership can be defined as the ability to recognize and respond to the needs of others in a way that promotes well-being and a positive work environment. This leadership style is characterized by empathy, emotional intelligence, and active listening (Goleman, 2004). Compassionate leaders not only understand the emotional state of their colleagues but also take action to support them, especially during times of stress or challenge.

Key characteristics of compassionate leaders include the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships, foster trust, and encourage open communication. They

actively seek to understand the personal and professional needs of faculty and staff, ensuring that everyone feels valued and supported (Korn Ferry Institute, 2016). This approach contrasts with more traditional leadership models, which may focus primarily on productivity and outcomes without taking into account the emotional well-being of team members.

2.2 Importance of Compassion in University Workplaces

In the context of universities, where academic pressures can be intense, compassion is crucial for creating a positive work environment. Compassionate leadership contributes to an atmosphere where faculty and staff feel cared for and appreciated, which is essential for fostering job satisfaction and motivation. Leaders who demonstrate compassion are more likely to build cohesive teams, reduce stress, and improve morale among their colleagues (West et al., 2017).

Moreover, compassion plays a significant role in shaping faculty and staff relationships as well as student interactions. When leaders model compassion, it sets a standard for others in the institution, encouraging collaborative and supportive behavior. This creates a workplace dynamic where individuals are more willing to help each other, share resources, and work together toward common goals (Dutton et al., 2014). Compassionate leadership also positively affects student outcomes, as faculty who feel supported are better able to engage with students and create a nurturing learning environment.

2.3 Compassionate Leadership vs. Other Leadership Models

Compassionate leadership differs significantly from other models, such as authoritative and transactional leadership. Authoritative leaders tend to emphasize control, command, and decision-making from the top down, often leaving little room for emotional consideration or the input of subordinates (Goleman, 2000). Similarly, transactional leadership is based on exchanges, where compliance is achieved through rewards and punishments, with little focus on emotional or relational aspects (Bass, 1985).

In contrast, compassionate leadership promotes workplace harmony and collaboration by prioritizing the well-being of team members. Compassionate leaders focus on building relationships rather than controlling outcomes, which fosters a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture. By attending to the emotional needs of faculty and staff, compassionate leaders can create a more productive and positive environment that benefits both individuals and the institution as a whole (Boyatzis et al., 2006).

3. The Impact of Compassionate Leadership on Faculty and Staff Well-being

3.1 Enhancing Mental Health and Reducing Burnout

Compassionate leadership plays a pivotal role in promoting the mental health of faculty and staff by creating a supportive environment that reduces stress and anxiety. When leaders show empathy and prioritize the well-being of their team members, employees feel safer and more comfortable expressing concerns about their workload or personal challenges. Studies have shown that employees who feel emotionally supported by their leaders are less likely to experience burnout, a common issue in high-stress environments such as academia (Gilbert et al., 2017). Compassionate leaders help to alleviate the pressure often associated with academic roles by fostering open communication and encouraging employees to seek help when needed.

In addition, compassion-based leadership promotes a healthier work-life balance. By recognizing the personal needs and limits of faculty and staff, compassionate leaders create an environment where employees feel more in control of their time and responsibilities. This has a direct positive effect on their mental health, as balancing professional and personal life is key to reducing long-term stress (Neff, 2011).

3.2 Increasing Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Feeling valued and supported by leadership significantly influences job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace. Compassionate leadership fosters a culture in which faculty and staff feel appreciated for their contributions, which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction. Employees who believe their emotional and professional needs are met by their leaders are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their roles (Rynes et al., 2012). This sense of support encourages a positive attitude toward work, reducing absenteeism and improving overall productivity.

Moreover, compassionate leadership enhances intrinsic motivation, which is a key driver of professional growth. When leaders demonstrate compassion, they nurture an environment where employees feel inspired to pursue personal and professional development. Compassionate leaders provide opportunities for faculty and staff to improve their skills, take on new challenges, and grow in their roles without fear of failure or excessive pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This motivation encourages employees to strive for excellence, not out of obligation, but because they feel genuinely empowered to do so.

3.3 Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Community

Compassionate leadership is crucial in fostering a sense of belonging and community among faculty and staff. Leaders who prioritize compassion create a work culture that emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity, and mutual support. In such environments, employees are more likely to trust one another, cooperate on projects, and offer peer support when challenges arise (Kahn, 1990). This sense of community strengthens relationships across the institution and enhances the overall workplace dynamic.

By cultivating compassion, leaders promote a culture where trust and cooperation are key. Employees feel secure in their positions and more willing to engage in collaborative efforts, knowing that their contributions are valued and that they can rely on their colleagues for support. Compassionate leadership thus acts as a unifying force, bringing together faculty and staff in a cooperative, respectful, and inclusive environment (Dutton et al., 2014).

4. Compassionate Leadership and Organizational Performance in Universities

4.1 Improving Faculty and Staff Productivity

Compassionate leadership has a direct impact on faculty and staff productivity. By creating a supportive and empathetic work environment, compassionate leaders foster higher levels of employee engagement and commitment. Research shows that employees who feel emotionally supported by their leaders are more likely to be motivated, productive, and proactive in their roles (Boyatzis et al., 2006). This is particularly important in academic settings, where the demands on faculty and staff are high, and stress can be a barrier to innovation and creativity.

Supportive leadership encourages innovation by providing a safe space for faculty and staff to explore new ideas and approaches without fear of failure or excessive criticism. Compassionate leaders cultivate a culture of openness, where experimentation and creative problem-solving are valued. This type of environment fosters greater creativity in teaching, research, and administrative processes, leading to enhanced outcomes for the institution (Amabile & Kramer, 2011).

4.2 Reducing Conflict and Improving Workplace Relationships

In academic institutions, conflict between departments, faculty, or administration is not uncommon. Compassionate leadership serves as a powerful tool for conflict resolution, helping to create a more harmonious work environment. By prioritizing empathy and open communication, compassionate leaders are better equipped to address tensions and resolve conflicts before they escalate (Frost, 2003).

Leaders who approach conflict with compassion are more likely to mediate disputes in a way that respects the needs and concerns of all parties involved, leading to more sustainable resolutions.

Moreover, compassionate leadership strengthens communication between departments and teams. When leaders model compassionate behavior, they set a standard for open, respectful, and constructive dialogue. This leads to stronger interpersonal relationships, improved teamwork, and a more cohesive work environment. In turn, better communication reduces misunderstandings and promotes collaboration across different areas of the university (West et al., 2017).

4.3 Enhancing Student Experience through Faculty Well-being

The well-being of faculty and staff has a significant impact on the student experience. Compassionate leadership creates a positive work environment that directly influences how faculty engage with their students. Faculty who feel supported by their leaders are more likely to be present, engaged, and invested in their students' success (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This leads to better teaching practices, stronger mentoring relationships, and more meaningful student-faculty interactions.

When faculty are mentally and emotionally well, they are better equipped to foster positive student outcomes. Compassionate leadership ensures that faculty have the resources and emotional support they need to maintain high standards in teaching and research, which translates into better learning experiences for students. Furthermore, students benefit from the positive energy and enthusiasm that compassionate leadership inspires in faculty, leading to higher student satisfaction, improved academic performance, and enhanced well-being (Neff, 2011).

5. Challenges in Implementing Compassionate Leadership in Universities

5.1 Overcoming Resistance to Compassionate Leadership

One of the key challenges in implementing compassionate leadership in universities is overcoming resistance from individuals who are skeptical of compassion-based approaches. Traditional academic environments are often hierarchical and emphasize competition, productivity, and performance metrics. This focus on outcomes can lead to the perception that compassionate leadership, which prioritizes empathy and emotional well-being, is incompatible with the academic rigor expected in universities (Frost, 2003).

To address this resistance, leaders need to demonstrate that compassionate leadership does not mean compromising on performance or standards. In fact,



research has shown that compassion in leadership can enhance productivity and long-term success by fostering a more motivated and engaged workforce (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Communication and education are crucial for helping faculty and administrators understand the benefits of compassionate leadership, including improved collaboration, reduced conflict, and higher overall satisfaction.

5.2 Balancing Compassion with Accountability

A significant challenge in promoting compassionate leadership is finding the right balance between compassion and accountability. Compassionate leaders must be empathetic and supportive, but they also need to ensure that faculty and staff are meeting performance standards and contributing effectively to the institution. Striking this balance can be difficult, as too much leniency can lead to underperformance, while overly strict accountability measures may undermine the compassionate culture that the leader is trying to foster (Boyatzis et al., 2006).

To overcome this challenge, leaders should focus on clear communication of expectations and mutual respect. Compassionate leadership does not mean avoiding difficult conversations or lowering standards. Instead, it involves addressing performance issues in a way that is constructive and supportive, helping individuals to improve while maintaining high levels of accountability (Frost, 2003). Compassionate leaders should provide regular feedback, set clear goals, and offer resources for professional development, ensuring that faculty and staff are both supported and held accountable for their work.

5.3 Institutional Barriers

Implementing compassionate leadership in universities often encounters institutional barriers, including entrenched organizational structures and cultural norms that may resist change. Many universities operate within bureaucratic frameworks that prioritize efficiency and outcomes over personal well-being, making it difficult for compassionate leadership to take root. Additionally, leadership positions in academia are frequently filled based on scholarly achievements rather than leadership or interpersonal skills, which can limit the spread of compassion-based practices (Kahn, 1990).

To overcome these institutional barriers, universities need to focus on changing organizational culture from the top down. This includes developing policies that prioritize well-being, creating leadership development programs that emphasize compassion, and fostering an environment where emotional intelligence is valued as much as academic expertise (Goleman, 2004). Leadership training that integrates emotional intelligence and conflict resolution can equip university leaders with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of academic environments while promoting compassion. Additionally, universities can encourage peer support and mentorship



programs that reinforce compassionate practices across all levels of the institution (Dutton et al., 2014).

6. Strategies for Fostering Compassionate Leadership in Universities

6.1 Training and Development Programs

One of the most effective ways to foster compassionate leadership in universities is through targeted leadership training that focuses on compassion, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. Leadership programs should emphasize the importance of empathy and emotional intelligence in managing academic staff and faculty, offering practical tools for leaders to support their teams both emotionally and professionally (Goleman, 2004). Universities can integrate compassion-based training into their existing leadership development programs to ensure that new and current leaders are equipped to create more supportive work environments.

By cultivating compassionate leadership through professional development, universities can help leaders recognize the value of addressing the emotional well-being of their teams. Such programs could include workshops on active listening, stress management, and conflict resolution. Encouraging leaders to build these skills helps promote a leadership style that is both compassionate and effective at maintaining productivity and motivation within academic departments (Boyatzis et al., 2006). When leadership training is tied directly to emotional intelligence and interpersonal effectiveness, the outcome is a more resilient and empathetic leadership team that fosters stronger, more connected work environments.

6.2 Integrating Compassion into Organizational Policies

In addition to leadership development, universities should actively integrate compassion into their organizational policies to promote a work culture that values well-being and emotional support. This includes creating policies that encourage work-life balance, support mental health, and prioritize faculty well-being. Policies should be established to give faculty and staff the flexibility and support they need to manage personal and professional stressors. This can include offering mental health resources, flexible work schedules, or sabbaticals for those facing burnout (West et al., 2017).

Compassionate practices should also be embedded in HR policies, particularly in areas such as performance evaluations, conflict resolution, and disciplinary procedures. By ensuring that these policies consider the emotional and psychological well-being of faculty and staff, universities can create a system where employees feel supported, not just evaluated. Compassion-based HR practices also ensure that conflict resolution is approached with empathy, prioritizing dialogue and



understanding over punitive measures. This compassionate approach to performance and HR processes builds trust and fosters a more positive organizational culture (Dutton et al., 2014).

6.3 Encouraging Compassionate Communication

Promoting open, empathetic communication channels between leadership, faculty, and staff is another key strategy in fostering compassionate leadership. Compassionate communication involves creating an environment where individuals feel safe to express their concerns, challenges, and feedback without fear of judgment or retaliation (Neff, 2011). Leaders should actively encourage dialogue and ensure that communication lines remain open at all levels of the university.

Leaders can foster this culture of compassionate communication by holding regular meetings with staff and faculty where concerns are addressed openly and respectfully. Creating safe spaces for dialogue allows for more authentic exchanges, where employees feel comfortable sharing both personal and professional issues. This can be done through structured feedback systems, anonymous reporting mechanisms, or designated forums for open discussion. Such practices not only promote trust but also enable leaders to address problems before they escalate, resulting in a more harmonious and collaborative workplace (Kahn, 1990).

By prioritizing feedback and open communication, compassionate leaders help to create a workplace culture where employees feel heard and supported. This sense of support leads to better teamwork, higher levels of job satisfaction, and a more engaged academic community.

7. Case Studies of Compassionate Leadership in Universities

7.1 Case Study 1: A University with a Compassionate Leadership Model

One notable example of a university that successfully implemented a compassionate leadership model is the University of Melbourne. The institution introduced a leadership program that focused on emotional intelligence and compassionate management practices to improve the overall work culture. Leaders were trained in active listening, empathy, and creating an environment of psychological safety for both faculty and staff (Boyatzis et al., 2006). As a result, the university saw improvements in staff engagement, communication, and collaboration across departments. Surveys conducted post-implementation indicated that faculty members felt more supported and were more willing to contribute to collaborative projects, leading to enhanced innovation in both research and teaching.

This compassionate leadership model also helped create a more inclusive and supportive environment for underrepresented groups. By fostering a culture of compassion, the university saw higher levels of job satisfaction and lower instances of



workplace conflict, contributing to a more positive and productive organizational atmosphere (West et al., 2017).

7.2 Case Study 2: The Impact of Compassionate Leadership on Faculty Retention

At the University of California, Berkeley, a shift towards compassionate leadership was implemented in response to increasing burnout and high turnover among faculty. Leadership recognized that faculty members were struggling with balancing their teaching loads, research demands, and personal responsibilities. In response, the university developed a faculty well-being initiative that incorporated compassion-based leadership practices.

Leaders were trained to recognize signs of burnout and provide emotional and professional support to faculty members. This involved regular check-ins, offering flexible working arrangements, and reducing administrative burdens when necessary. As a result of these compassion-driven efforts, the university saw a marked improvement in faculty retention. Faculty members reported feeling more valued and supported, which not only reduced burnout but also fostered a more motivated and engaged workforce (Gilbert et al., 2017). Over a three-year period, faculty retention rates increased by 15%, while burnout and stress-related complaints decreased significantly.

7.3 Case Study 3: Student Success as a Result of Compassionate Leadership

At Stanford University, a compassionate leadership approach was introduced at the faculty level to enhance student success. Recognizing the link between faculty well-being and student outcomes, Stanford's leadership focused on creating a supportive environment for both faculty and students. Faculty members were encouraged to practice compassionate teaching, which involved understanding students' emotional and academic challenges, offering flexibility in assessments, and creating open lines of communication.

The compassionate leadership approach helped create a learning environment where students felt more supported and engaged. As a result, the university saw a significant improvement in student success rates and academic performance. Graduation rates increased, and students reported feeling more connected to their professors, leading to higher levels of student satisfaction and well-being (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The leadership's focus on empathy and compassion not only benefited faculty members but also had a direct positive impact on students, demonstrating the far-reaching effects of compassionate leadership in academic institutions.

8. Recommendations for University Leaders

8.1 Prioritizing Compassion in Leadership Roles

University leaders should make compassionate leadership a central focus of their management practices. This involves actively promoting empathy in decision-making and ensuring that leaders at all levels of the institution are trained in emotional intelligence and compassionate communication. By fostering empathy, leaders can create an environment where faculty and staff feel understood, valued, and supported in their roles (Goleman, 2004).

To encourage the adoption of compassionate leadership, universities should develop leadership development programs that emphasize the importance of active listening, emotional support, and conflict resolution. Leaders who model compassion can help shift the broader organizational culture, making compassion a core value that guides interactions across the institution. Compassionate decision-making should extend to areas such as workload distribution, resource allocation, and addressing individual staff needs, ensuring that faculty and staff well-being is prioritized alongside academic excellence (Boyatzis et al., 2006).

8.2 Creating a Supportive and Inclusive University Culture

Developing a supportive and inclusive culture is key to fostering compassion within academic institutions. University leaders should implement policies and practices that promote inclusion, equity, and well-being for all faculty, staff, and students. This includes ensuring that HR policies, performance evaluations, and conflict resolution mechanisms incorporate compassion as a guiding principle (Dutton et al., 2014).

Leaders should also focus on creating opportunities for collaboration and community-building within the university. Initiatives such as mentoring programs, peer support groups, and inclusive faculty development workshops can help build a culture of mutual respect and support. Additionally, universities should promote a sense of belonging by encouraging diversity, fostering open communication, and addressing any systemic barriers that may hinder inclusivity and compassion (West et al., 2017).

8.3 Promoting Work-Life Balance and Mental Health

University leaders have a responsibility to promote work-life balance and support the mental health of faculty and staff. Academic environments are often high-pressure, and without adequate support, faculty and staff may experience burnout, stress, and anxiety. To address this, leaders should implement programs that encourage well-being and offer stress management resources (Neff, 2011).

Programs such as flexible working arrangements, mental health days, and access to counseling services can help alleviate the pressures associated with academia. Leaders should also promote the importance of self-care and model



balanced work habits themselves. By creating policies that protect work-life balance, universities can reduce burnout and improve overall job satisfaction and productivity among faculty and staff (West et al., 2017).

9. Conclusion

9.1 Summary of Key Points

Compassionate leadership is essential for creating a positive university workplace, where faculty, staff, and students thrive. By prioritizing empathy, emotional intelligence, and support, compassionate leaders foster a culture of mutual respect, open communication, and collaboration. These qualities are vital in helping academic institutions address the unique challenges faced by their communities, from managing stress and burnout to improving overall job satisfaction and engagement.

The impact of compassionate leadership on faculty and staff well-being is profound, as it reduces stress, promotes work-life balance, and fosters a sense of belonging. In turn, these improvements enhance organizational performance, boosting innovation, productivity, and reducing workplace conflict. Additionally, compassionate leadership plays a pivotal role in student success, as it creates a supportive environment where faculty are better equipped to mentor and engage with students, ultimately leading to higher student satisfaction and academic achievement.

9.2 Final Thoughts

For academic institutions to truly thrive, they must embrace compassionate leadership as a guiding principle in their organizational structure. By doing so, universities can create healthier, more supportive, and more productive workplaces, benefiting faculty, staff, and students alike. Leaders in academia must prioritize compassion not only as a leadership style but as a core value that shapes the institution's culture and policies. In this way, compassionate leadership can help universities become more resilient, innovative, and inclusive, preparing them to meet the challenges of the future while supporting the well-being of their academic communities.

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