



THE SUTRA OF UNMANAGEMENT

(or what management is not ...)

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WEN BO AND THE ART OF MANAGEMENT

Once I have heard the great leader Wen Bo, having established an empire of great wealth with thousands of employees, dozens of subsidiaries in even more countries, set out to write a book on the art of management. So he gathered his most brilliant people around him and had them compile the best proven strategies they could find. Each an established expert in their fields.

Thus his Chief of Organization raised his voice and spoke: „There is the theory of systems and the practice of organizing projects and companies.“

Wen Bo nodded in appreciation and asked: „Very well. But please tell me, where do I find management?“

The chief of organization shrugged and said: „I don't have an answer to your question, this is all I can say. I cannot show you management.“

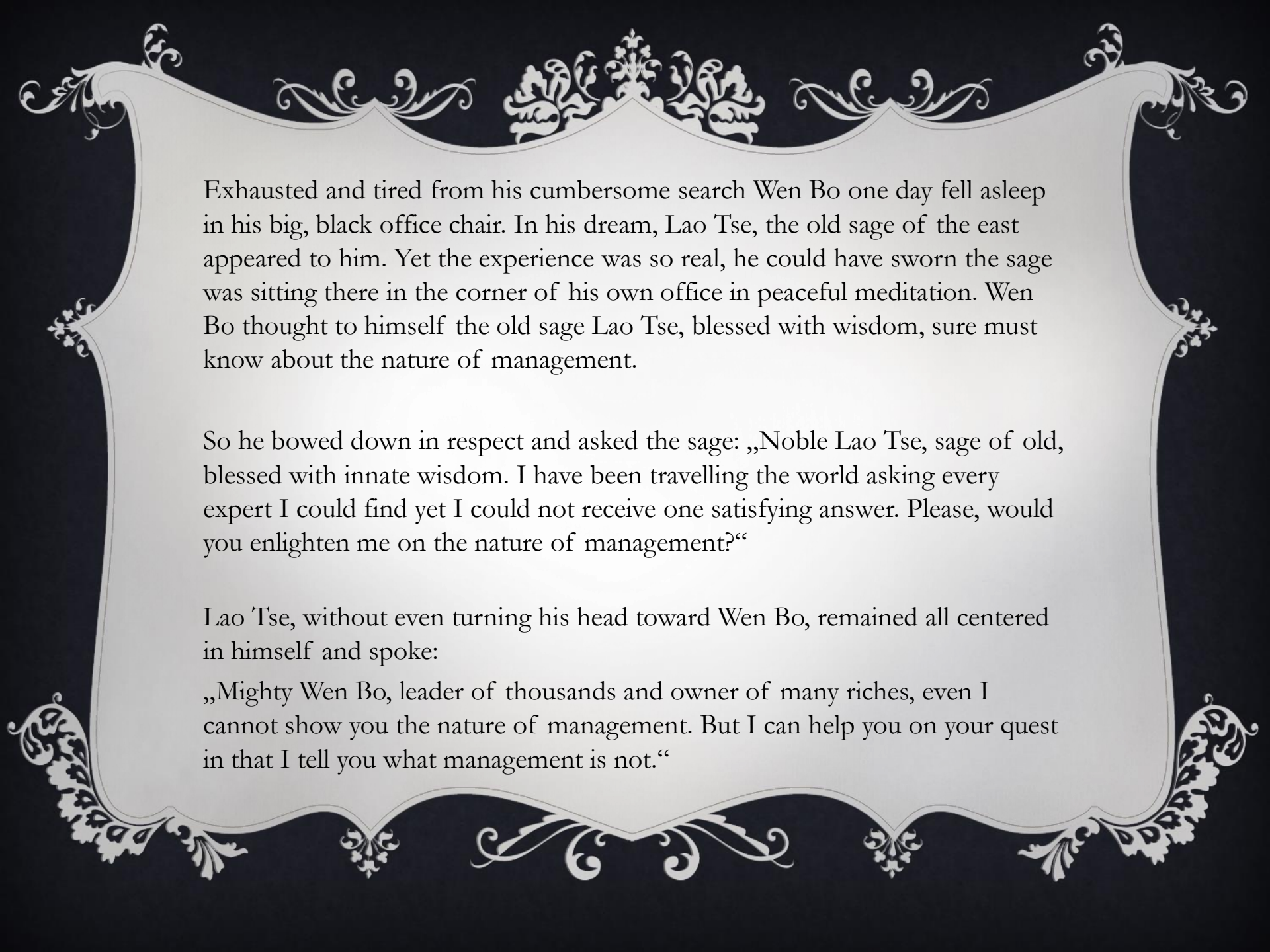
Then his Chief of Finance stood up and spoke: „There are the principles of orderly book keeping, the international financial reporting standards, the laws, and principles of governance.“

Wen Bo nodded in appreciation and asked: „Very well. But please tell me, where do I find management?“

The Chief of Finance shrugged and said: „I don´t have an answer to your question, this is all I can say. I cannot show you management.“

In just the same way the Chief of Quality offered the practice of Six Sigma and TQM, the Operations Chief offered the practice of standardization, just in time processing and using COTS software, the Development Chief offered the practice of Design Patterns, the Chief Architect offered the practice of UML modelling, and the IT Chief offered even principles of Best Practice. They all contributed their practices, but nobody could show Wen Bo management.

Thus Wen Bo, displeased by these answers, because nobody could show him management, set out to meet the best renowned consultants of modern organization. One by one they laid out their theories and practices before him, and each had his own definition of what management could be or should be. But nobody could show him management.



Exhausted and tired from his cumbersome search Wen Bo one day fell asleep in his big, black office chair. In his dream, Lao Tse, the old sage of the east appeared to him. Yet the experience was so real, he could have sworn the sage was sitting there in the corner of his own office in peaceful meditation. Wen Bo thought to himself the old sage Lao Tse, blessed with wisdom, sure must know about the nature of management.

So he bowed down in respect and asked the sage: „Noble Lao Tse, sage of old, blessed with innate wisdom. I have been travelling the world asking every expert I could find yet I could not receive one satisfying answer. Please, would you enlighten me on the nature of management?“

Lao Tse, without even turning his head toward Wen Bo, remained all centered in himself and spoke:

„Mighty Wen Bo, leader of thousands and owner of many riches, even I cannot show you the nature of management. But I can help you on your quest in that I tell you what management is not.“



WHAT MANAGEMENT IS NOT

NOT CONTROL

Lao Tse spoke:

„Management is not control.

Control only exists in finite systems.

Organizations contain people.

People are complex beings.

Organizations operate in complex environments.

Neither complex beings nor complex environments are finite.

Thus management cannot be control, if it involves complex beings or a complex environment. Thus control is an illusion.

You could, of course, try not to leave them alone when they feel lost.“

NOT MOTIVATION

Lao Tse spoke: „Management is not motivation.

Attempts at motivation condition behavior. People start to like being motivated. They start to like being motivated so much that they feel fear and pain in the absence of motivation. But when in fear and pain, their deeds cannot bear fruit. Thus all their energies go into the search for being motivated.

And even if you try to constantly renew that motivation, you will have to renew it for those who motivate them, and for those who motivate them, so all your energy will be caught in the process of motivating, and as soon as it is absent, pain will re-emerge.

Thus management cannot be motivation if the deeds of the people shall bear fruit. Thus motivating is an illusion.

You can, of course, try to act in a way that does not deliberately demotivate people.“

NOT PLANNING

Lao Tse spoke: „Management is not planning.

Like control, plans also only exist in finite systems.

If you draft a plan, you create a vision of the future.

Once there is a plan people will start arguing about the options of future. There are as many opinions as people involved. Then all effort of your organization will go into these arguments and the deeds of the people cannot bear fruit.

But the future has not even happened yet.

The behavior of the complex environment in which your organization exists, and the people who carry out its business is not deterministic, and thus not predictable.

Thus management cannot be planning if the future has not happened yet. Thus planning is an illusion.

You can, of course, try to point toward a direction and be there to establish a mutual understanding of what you call progress.

NOT ORGANIZING

Lao Tse spoke: „Management is not organizing.

Somebody performing an art always knows best how to perform it. You wouldn't tell the concert pianist how to play piano if you're not a piano teacher. If they don't know their art, they need to see a master of the art, not be organized.

Also a group of people always knows best how to deal with their current situation, because they have the best knowledge of their mutual skills. No need to be organized.

Groups of groups of people know best how to communicate with their environment in what needs to be addressed and how to react. Nobody told the cells of the kidneys how to interact with the cells of the blood stream.

So management cannot be organizing when there cannot be anybody found who needs to be organized. Thus organizing is an illusion.

You can of course be there to help and solve needs of people that arise from your mutual enterprise.

NOT LEADERSHIP

Lao Tse spoke: „Management is not leadership.

If there is one, who leads, there are some, who follow. But there will also be some who do not follow. So there will be arguments between those who follow and those who do not follow. So their deeds cannot bear fruit since their energies are bound by those arguments.

Even if there are only people who follow (or you decide to dispose the precious potential of those who do not follow), there will be fear of not following. That fear will ruin the fruits of their deeds just as bad conscience ruins the happiness of people.

Even if there are only people who follow happily, they will only copy the behaviour of the one they follow. Thus their own potential is wasted and their deeds will not bear fruit.

So management cannot be leadership, if the potential of people shall not be wasted. Thus leadership is an illusion.

You can of course be there and assist people in developing their full potential so their deeds will bear fruit.



Having spoken that, the spirit of Lao Tse dissolved.

Sitting in his office now wide awake Wen Bo felt great enlightenment, not having to deal with control, planning, motivation, organizing and leadership anymore.



This is the story as told by Gwenn Dana.

THE END