

## Buddhist values, sustainability and leadership.

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### Abstract

Value or principle centered leadership gets more attention when researchers want to explain the effectiveness of management nowadays. In the more western way of looking this means emphasis on authenticity, trustworthiness, character and competencies of the manager. In Buddhism the emphasis lies on taking the right view (mindfulness, wisdom) and doing the right things (ethical behavior). In the sufficiency economy philosophy the main elements are moderation, reasonableness and enhancing the self immune system. The so-called TLS©-model has three layers: society, company and the management level. The three corners of the pyramidal model are called economic, societal and environmental value. On the level of the individual manager they are called: care for me, care for you and me and care for all. The TLS©-model offers the possibility to point out the place of a manager concerning his/her interdependent position in sustainably managing a company. Buddhist values and the sufficiency economy philosophy emphasize the process of thinking and acting. The final results are inherent to the ways chosen to reach the goals but are not the central focus. For Buddhist managers, the way to reach the goals is more important than the result itself. The interdependent, non-Buddhist manager will recognize that the result of a sustainable operation should be a balance between the economic, societal and environmental values of the individual leader, the company and society as a whole.

**Key words :** *value driven leadership, Buddhist values, sustainability, sufficiency economy philosophy*

### Introduction

More and more, the question is being raised whether individual spirituality in the workplace relates to leadership effectiveness. There is a lot of confusion about the definition of workplace spirituality or spiritual leadership. Dent et al. (2005) made the following definition: “*Workplace spirituality is a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy*”. In this article, we will not talk so much about spirituality in the workplace as a set of organizational values but workplace spirituality as a characteristic of the leader(s) in a

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company. And when it comes to leadership effectiveness, we will connect this spirituality exclusively to managing a company (in the hospitality industry) in a sustainable way.

### Value driven leadership

According to Dent et al.(2005), the best definition of spiritual leadership is that by Fleischmann and at the same time by Maddock and Fulton. *“Spiritual leadership is the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership”*. The causal model of Fry (2003) proposes conceptual distinctions between hope/faith, vision/mission and altruistic love. And although the definition includes a vision, Kantabutra (2006) wonders why research into vision-based leadership rarely considers the quality of the vision.

Few researchers connect spiritual leadership with religion. Although spirituality doesn't have to be based on religion, in many cases it is. Religion is just one major theme in value-driven entrepreneurship. However, insight is lacking into whether and how the spiritual or religious beliefs and values of leaders influence actions of managers in the daily operation. 94 % of the Americans believe in a God (or a Universal Spirit), but the challenges managers face to integrate their spirituality with their work remain largely unexamined in academic literature (McCormick, 1994).

Covey (1990) mentions authenticity, trustworthiness, character and competence as the main capabilities of principle centered leadership. A good leader should be an example for his employees in private matters and not only in the way he/she manages the company. By showing personal values, moral behavior and ethics a manager earns trustworthiness for effective interpersonal relationships. These are the foundation for working together within a company and for employees to reach common goals. Covey (1990) mentions eight characteristics of principle centered leaders in order to recognize them:

- a. continually learning: in practice that means the principle centered leader reads (books, magazines), takes classes (to learn), listens to others, is curious and always asks questions; is open for new interests and ideas;
- b. service-oriented: principle centered leaders think about others in their decisions, have the opinion that life is a mission, not a career;
- c. radiate positive energy: principle centered leaders are cheerful, pleasant, happy, positive and optimistic;
- d. believe in other people: they are aware of weaknesses and refuse to stereotype;
- e. lead balanced lives: are socially active, have many friends, many intellectual interests and a healthy sense of humor;

- f. see life as an adventure: are creative, show courage;
- g. synergistic: are change analysts, improve everything, are productive in new and creative ways;
- h. exercise for self-renewal: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

### Buddhist values and leadership

The main values of Buddhism are also known as the Eightfold Path to overcome suffering. Each of the paths can be cultivated separately:

- a. Right, skillful view (right knowledge, understanding mainly your own intentions);
- b. Right, skillful thought (free from ill will, cruelty and untruthfulness);
- c. Right, skillful speech (no lying, no harsh or abusive language, no idle chatter, no gossip or threatening);
- d. Right behavior, skillful actions (no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, and no drinking intoxicants, so self control, not obstructing the law);
- e. Right, skillful livelihood (no selling of weapons, liquor, poison, slaves or livestock, no bribery or fraud; in general earning a living that doesn't create suffering or harm to oneself, others and the environment);
- f. Right, skillful efforts (avoiding and overcoming unwholesome states of mind while developing and maintaining wholesome states of mind; in general no greed, hatred and illusions, not wanting too much, no laziness, no daydreaming);
- g. Right, skillful mindfulness (the unbiased observation of all phenomena in order to perceive them without emotional or intellectual distortions; in general to understand how our mind works);
- h. Right, skillful concentration (complete focus on a single object).

In their book, the Dalai Lama and van den Muyzenberg (2009) focus on two elements for the leader: on taking the right view and doing the right thing. Within 'taking the right view' they discuss the important elements like thinking the right way (the intention of the action has to be right), being able to think the right way (mindfulness), developing wisdom (study, discussion, listening to others) while accepting reality and staying positive. 'Doing the right thing' is mostly about ethical (standards of), moral behavior. They talk about the six perfections: generosity, ethical discipline, patience, enthusiasm, concentration and wisdom.

For leadership we will concentrate more on the 10 principles the Buddha himself highlighted for a leader (Ven. Sobhita Thero, w.y.), called the Rajadhamma 10 or 'the tenfold virtue of a ruler, a king':

- a. Dana: generosity or giving in a beneficial way: things like daily necessities (alms-giving), useful knowledge and advise and forgiveness for the people that deserve it;
- b. Sila: maintaining good conduct, not breaching morals or laws. It also means ethical, moral behavior and moral integrity;
- c. Parricaga: making selfless sacrifice for the greater good, unselfishness, altruism;
- d. Ajjava: loyalty, truthfulness, honesty, integrity;
- e. Maddava: being gentle, kind and open-minded to reasonable advice; avoiding arrogance;
- f. Tapa: means diligence in performing the duties, leading a simple life and not indulging in sexual pleasure, so self-restraint and self-control;
- g. Akkhoda: not showing anger, free from hatred, staying calm in confusing situations, being compassionate;
- h. Avihimsa: not afflicting harm on others, including all living creatures, adhering to peace and tranquility for all, non-violence;
- i. Khanti: being patient, tolerant and persevering against emotions, maintaining calmness and composure in body and speech;
- j. Avirodhana: being steadfast in righteousness, not allowing misdeeds, conformity to the law, being just in correcting those who do wrong and rewarding those who do right; avoiding prejudice.

A good leader should practice all these 10 principles. However, the question remains to what extend the practice is just an ‘outside’ performance or if these principles are internalized, which means are part of the individuality, the personal characteristics of the manager. In that case we could speak of an authentic Buddhist leader.

Just like with the supporters of any other religion or life philosophy, there are devout and less devout Buddhist believers. Covey (1990) recognized a number of characteristics of value driven leaders. The more a leader shows these characteristics, the more value driven he or she is. And, these characteristics are not only professional ones, but some of them refer to the personal or the social life of the leader. We can expect that the more value driven a Buddhist manager is, the more he/she will apply Buddhist principles in her/his personal life (at home, in his family, with friends, in leisure time) and on the job. Buddhist values by themselves are more intrinsic than the characteristics Covey defined for principle centered leaders. Covey is more focused on the externally measurable elements, like service orientation, whereas Buddhism emphasizes the internal mind related aspects. According to Covey, principle centered leaders show a couple of characteristics. For Buddhists, these

characteristics have to become part of a leader's mind. According to Covey again, principle centered leadership is a combination of attitude and behavior. For Buddhists, value driven leadership is an ideal state of mind to strive for and gives direction to the ways to achieve goals.

### Sustainability

We take the definition of sustainability from the Brundtland commission as our base: *“Sustainability is a development that seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”* (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)

### Sufficiency economy philosophy

King Bhumibol of Thailand developed an economic philosophy, which focuses on the development of the less industrialized nations. This philosophy is known as the philosophy of the sufficiency economy. In essence, this philosophy guides the livelihood and behavior of people at four levels: individual, family, community and country. According to the philosophy, the economic problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalist countries are greed, risk, short-run thinking and theft. In the field of natural science (the natural environment), the challenges can be characterized as waste, hunger, destruction, myth and extinction.

*“Within the philosophical framework, choice of balanced development strategies for the nation in line with the forces of globalization is allowed, with the need for adequate protection from internal and external shocks. In particular, after the Asian economic crisis in 1997 in which numerous business organizations in Thailand went bankrupt, His Majesty reiterated the philosophy as the way to recovery that would lead to a more resilient and sustainable economy”* (Kantabutra, 2006, pg 38). This way is – in Buddhist terms - also called the middle way.

Sufficiency contains the three components moderation, reasonableness and requirement for a self-immunity system. The two underlying conditions to reach this sufficiency are knowledge and morality (ethics). Moderation implies that wants and needs of consumers **can** be satisfied in the market place. Moderation implies also a voluntary sacrifice of one's own well-being. Or perhaps better formulated: a sacrifice on an egocentric, egoistic level in favor of well-being based on sharing wealth with others in order to deal with the economic challenges of the local and national society as a whole. Reasonableness does not mean only planning of causes and effects but also being aware of what you are doing and why (knowledge based). Immunization is the process in which – first of all - the basic needs of

every individual in a society are met in a more stable way, and in that way are resistant to unexpected shocks in the economy.

Table 1. The solutions to the challenges of the modern capitalist world

| <i>Natural Science</i> | <i>Economics</i>      | <i>Political Science</i> | <i>Sociology</i> | <i>Religion</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Conservation</i>    | <b>Moderation</b>     | Suffrage                 | Minority Rights  | Moderation      |
| <i>Food Security</i>   | <b>Immunization</b>   | Lenience                 | Tolerance        | Faith           |
| <i>Balance</i>         | <b>Reasonableness</b> | Democracy                | Flexibility      | Tolerance       |
| <i>Science</i>         | <b>Knowledge</b>      | Awareness of rights      | Literacy         | Ecumenism       |
| <i>Conservation</i>    | <b>Ethics</b>         | Liberty                  | Culture          | Acceptance      |

Source: Calkins, 2008

Two conditions should support the sufficiency levels of a society. The first one is the improvement of human capital on an individual level. That means the use and improvement of local wisdom and modern technological knowledge. Every member of a society should know how and why things are done in a certain way. This means education from the start and continuous learning. The second condition is ethics or morality. In this philosophy it means honesty and integrity.

#### **Sustainability and leadership: the TLS© model**

The TLS©-model was developed by Cavagnaro and Curiel (2005). The model consists of three triangles, which fit into each other and represent the three levels of sustainable thinking and acting. According to Cavagnaro (2008), a sustainable society is a society where value is created for the economic, environmental and the social dimension simultaneously. Figure 1 shows the model of a triangle of a sustainable society (the most general level) in which the corner points are called economic, societal and environmental value. This triple-P perspective (with two levels, the societal and the company level) was first developed by Elkington (1997). Societies can be characterized by positioning them within the triangle, with a greater or smaller distance to the three corner points. A society that only takes care of the economic value is positioned on the corner point “economic value”. If the other two values are not taken into account, they deserve a score 0.

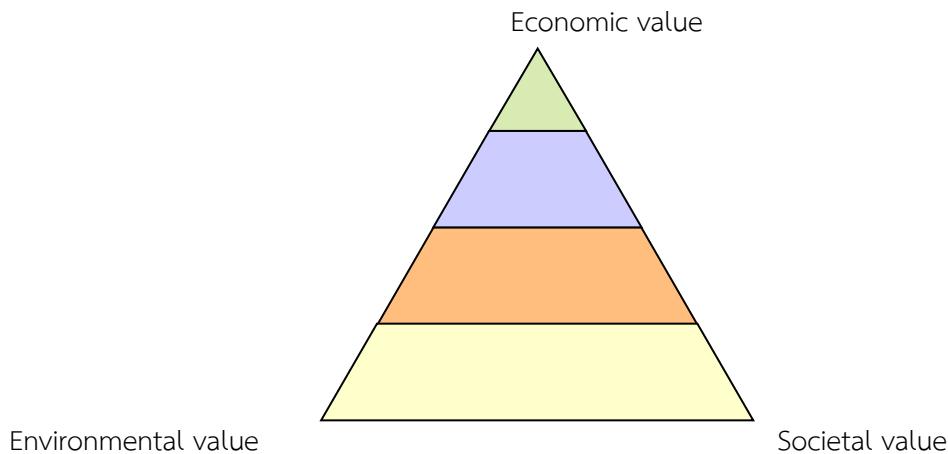
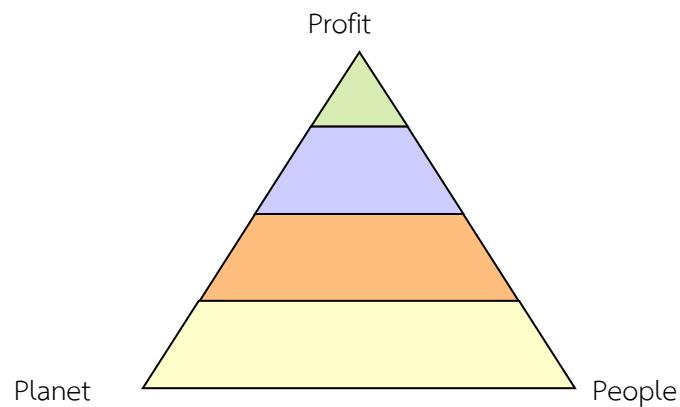
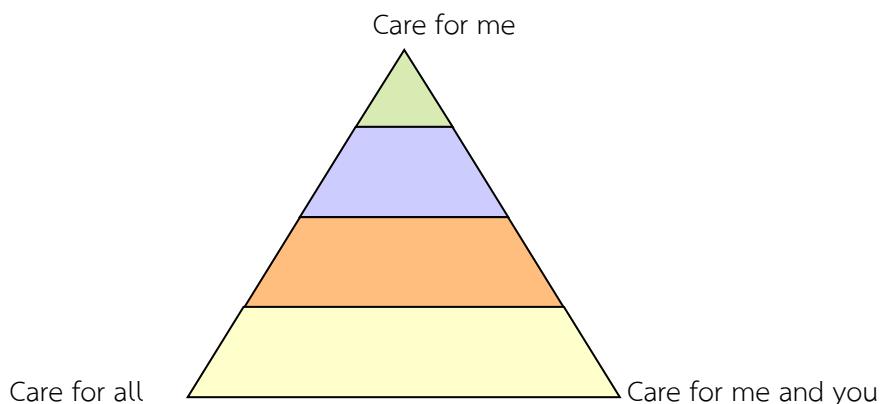
*Figure 1. Sustainable societies*

Figure 2 is a triangle that fits within the first one. It can be considered as the second layer of the model. Here the triangle applies to a company. The corner points are called 'profit' (the economic orientation in a company), 'people' (the social orientation of a company) and 'planet' (the environmental orientation of a company). A company can be characterized by the balance there is (or isn't) between the three corners of the triangle. In a sustainable organization there is not only a discussion with the shareholders or investors but with all stakeholders, like the employees and representatives of the local community where the company is based. For a change in the direction of a sustainable company leadership is needed. This doesn't mean only on a management level (the formal, authorized level of leadership in a company), but every person in the company can be a leader in sustainability. The third level of the model is the individual level, the level of the manager.

*Figure 2. Sustainable companies*

Here (see figure 3) the sustainable leadership within a company is centered in the triangle with the corner points “care for me” (the economic, profit point), “care for all (the environmental, planet point) and “care for you and me” (the social, people point). This sustainable leadership is also called interdependent leadership. Care for me represents the value of the individual human life, the egocentric, autonomous and independent point. The social point (care for me and you) represents the interdependency of the human being from other human beings. Care of all represents the interdependency of the individual from all other living creatures and of the total universe.”...*interdependency at the level of individuals might be defined as the final stage of human development. When an ‘autonomous’ individual recognizes that his or her prosperity (‘care for me’) depends upon the prosperity of others (‘care for me and you’ and ‘care for all’) and acts upon this insight, then that individual is interdependent.*” (Cavagnaro, 2008).

**Figure 3. Sustainable/ interdependent leadership**



Kantabutra (2006) wonders why so few researchers pay attention to the quality of the vision when researching value driven leadership. He relates the attributes of a vision to sustainable business performance (namely brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability and desirability) to the philosophy of the sufficiency economy (with the elements: moderation, reasonableness, the need for self-immunity mechanism, knowledge and morality). These have an indirect effect on the business performance. To realize the vision within a company, the leader should:

1. Formulate strategies and plans;
2. Communicate their vision properly;
3. Align people and supporting systems;
4. Empower the people to act;
5. Motivate the followers.

No word here on the passion of the leader for the vision, his/her personal commitment to the vision and the fact that the leader self has to behave consistently according to the vision (the leader as role model). That is where the personal values, his/her spirituality and behavior according to these spiritual values come into discussion. It is likely that the more the leader – in words and deeds - shows personal commitment to the sustainable vision, the more this vision will be implemented effectively in the company. This, of course, counts for the vision on every subject in the company.

### **Sustainable leadership and Buddhist values**

The TLS©-model offers the possibility to point out the place of a leader concerning his/her interdependent position in sustainable management. It is an analytical tool that shows the result of a way of thinking and performing. Buddhist values and the sufficiency economy philosophy do not point out the result of thinking and acting, but give direction to the process of thinking and acting. They focus on doing the right things and doing things the right way. The final result then will be right, whatever the result is. In terms of the TLS©-model, Buddhist values are more positioned in the societal and the environmental corner of the pyramid. The final results flow from these two corners to the individual, economic corner of the pyramid. For individuals that means enlightenment. In economic terms this means profit and economic value. It is important to notice that the TLS©-model is result-oriented while the Buddhist values are process-oriented. In the practice of the sustainable management of a company this could lead to the hypothesis that Buddhist managers are not that interested in the final results of their management practices but focus more on the processes and procedures. Non-Buddhist managers will probably more focus on the actual (and measurable) results of the company regarding a (more) sustainable operation. The way to get the results is perhaps less important than the result itself although the interdependent manager will recognize that the final results should be a balance between the economic, societal and environmental values of the individual, the company and society as a whole.

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